Fire and Ice

by Frangipanidownunder

Summary

A Canadian Ice Dance Au set in the late 80s. Inspired by Virtue and Moir during the Winter Olympics.
Chapter 1

She walked the passageways, skates hanging around her shoulders. There were few familiar faces but she smiled at everyone anyway. Her mother used to tell her that a smile watered the seeds of confidence. But her skates felt heavy on her feet as she stood at the edge of the rink. Her knees trembled. Her mind raced. She berated herself, smiled, straightened her hair and took a deep breath before stepping onto the ice. The scrape of her blades covered her ragged breaths. She kept her chin up, her eyes on his back, muscles flexing as he hunched over the rail on the other side. She could hear him muttering.

“Fox Mulder?” she said, her voice shrill in the chamber of the rink. He half-turned and she saw the wire rims of his glasses and the way his bangs flopped over his face. “I’m Dana Scully. I’ve been partnered with you.”

Facing her fully, he took the hand she extended and pulled himself out on to the ice, whirling her around 360 degrees. “Well, isn’t it nice to be suddenly so highly regarded? Who did you tick off to get stuck with this detail, Scully?”

She tried to lean away from him as they turned, but his hold was firm. “Actually, I’m looking forward to dancing with you. I’ve heard a lot about you.”

“Oh really? I was under the impression you’d been sent to straighten me out.”

She tugged her hands free, slapping them against her hips as they faced each other. “If you have any doubt about my experience…”

He turned his back and skated to the rail again, flicking through a file, before returning. “You’re a medical student, you and your partner, Jacques, won the Junior Grand Prix in 1991. You’ve been mentored by Jayne Torvill and you look really good in red.” He held up a photo, a close up of her hanging off Jacque’s side, hair falling across her face, the sequins on her deep crimson velvet suit glittering in the lights.

She folded her arms and let out a slow, burning breath. He skated past her, the black warm-up pants clinging to his thighs. His loose shirt fluttered as he picked up speed, skating around the outside of the rink. Grace, agility, speed and control. She was mesmerised by his fluidity, his sheer strength and had to swallow the nagging taste of self-doubt that coated the back of her throat. Fox Mulder had a reputation for bratty displays of temperament, fiery bouts with the coaches, his talent-over-technique approach and the number of ex-partners prowling the corridors of the club waiting for him to ask them to dance again.

He slowed to a stop in front of her, a red sheen across his face. He flicked his hair away from his face. “I’ve got something to show you.”

She followed him to the side where he picked another sheet out of his folder. “Maybe I can get your professional opinion on this?”

The paper showed a crude diagram of a couple. The male figure was upright holding the female’s lower back as her legs straddled his shoulders and her hands gripped the back of his head.

She licked her lips, hoped she wasn’t blushing too much. “Is it a fantasy of yours, something you’ve seen in Mandy does Montreal maybe?” She heard him chuckle but carried on, emboldened now by his game. “Is it some secret new move from the Russians?”
He shrugged then loomed forward, grinning. “Do you think it can be done?”

She studied the drawing, twisting it to and fro. “Logically, I’d have to say no. The hold is risqué, too sexual. I’m not sure the governing body would see it as dance.”

He plucked the paper back from her. “Conventional wisdom. You know, you’re the fourth potential partner who’s turned her nose up at the move. Are you willing to look to the fantastic as a plausible way to win the Olympic gold medal, Scully?”

Her skin prickled. She wasn’t cold, though. The burn on her cheeks intensified and she hugged her arms around her. “The Olympic gold? You dream big, Fox.”

“Mulder. I even make my parents call me Mulder.” He collected his folder, a jacket and her breath away as he skated to the exit.

She darted after him and he looked at her, playfulness on his lips but expectation in his eyes. “I’ll see you tomorrow, Scully, bright and early. We start training for our very plausible Olympic gold medal at 8am.”
Chapter 2

She knew the training regime would be hard. But she relished the thought. Her brain got a work-out with her studies and her body needed the same. She was sure Mulder’s passion would inspire her but Skinner, the new coach, was just a mysterious presence at the side of the rink. His inscrutable gaze followed them as they ran them through the drills and exercise program.

Mulder was masterful in his movements and she dug deep to follow his lead, to keep up. When the session was over he stopped her on the ice. “That was pretty good, Scully.”

“Better than you expected or better than you hoped?”

Mulder grinned down at her as they skated to the side but Skinner said nothing, merely folded his papers together and left the rink. Scully pulled a woollen sweater over her head and stooped to untie her skates.

“What are you doing later?” Mulder asked, sitting on the chair next to her.

Her thigh muscles twitched and she could practically smell the apple scent of her bubble bath. “I’ve got a paper due this week.”

“When we’re in training for the Olympics you might have to reconsider your career choices, Scully.”

They walked outside. Thin blades of icy sleet jabbed at her and she dug her hands into her coat pockets. Although he didn’t talk about it much, she knew Mulder was studying psychology. It made her shudder to think what was really running through his mind when they were dancing together. It was supposed to be an act, of course, their tenderness, their close embraces, but she’d noticed how his expression changed when they skated. His eyes sparkled, his jaw softened, his shoulders relaxed. His touch was soft yet assertive, almost like a lover’s. As the music resonated around the rink, their bodies moulded and she slipped into a fugue state until the routine was over. She wondered if he did the same. She suspected as much, but she didn’t feel ready to ask how he felt about their partnership.

They reached her car and she took her hands out of her pockets to find her keys. “Have you ever considered what you’ll do if you don’t make it?”

His cheeks were flushed and his breathing was still heavy. Sleet dotted his dark hair. A faint smile pulled at his lips. He laid a hand on her arm. “That’s not an option, Scully.”

“So you truly believe you’ll…we’ll…become Olympic champions?”

“Don’t you believe, Scully? Can’t you feel it? This thing we have?” His hands gripped her fingers and sent bolts of electricity up to her shoulders. His passion was infectious, he was brimming with it, jiggling on the spot. She felt herself jumping from foot to foot, along with him. Their bags bounced on their backs, shuffling their kit around, and providing a rhythm for their mad dance.

His face was bright in a full-blown grin now. “We can do this. We really can. You just have to believe, Scully.” He threw his head back and howled. His bag crunched to the floor and he twisted on the spot, arms out, spinning like a child.

The giggle ripped from her lungs. “You’re crazy, Mulder!”
He stopped suddenly, ran his hands through his hair, picked up his bag and said, “See you in the morning, Scully.” He bent and pecked her cheek.

She touched the warm spot there and smiled as he walked back to his car. On the ground, where his bag had fallen, was a photo. She picked it up. The little girl had long dark braids piled on her head and she was elegant in a navy costume, studded with diamantes. She was caught mid-spin, arms high, holding the blade of her left skate, back arched – the perfect Biellmann spin. She couldn’t have been more than ten years old. On the back, the words read: Samantha Mulder, junior club champion, 1973. She stared at the photo again before a spark caught her attention. Standing under the dark clump of trees at the far end of the car park, she noticed Skinner talking with a tall, dark-haired woman and another, older man, the glowing tip of his cigarette bright through the ever increasing snow.
Chapter 3

She circled the dates of the national championships in her calendar. Just three short months’ away. Her mother and father had promised to fly up to watch. Her sister teased her about not being able to wait to meet her new cute partner.

“He’s not that cute,” she told Melissa, but she was looking at a photo of them in mid-Finnstep, with his hair pushed back from his forehead, looking down at her, chests together, eyes locked. Mulder’s profile was strong but there was a softness to his expression. He was a handsome man. But mysterious, aloof and infuriating too. Skinner and Mulder had gone head-to-head just last night, arguing over the steps in their new routine.

“You can’t do it that way, Mulder. Dana won’t be able to keep the pace. You’ve got to listen to the music, use the beat.”

“But everyone does it that way. If we use double-time here, that could be our point of difference. We can win this, Skinner. I feel it.”

She stood there, arms folded, watching them score points like she was at a tennis match. They postured and clashed horns and stamped their feet along the ground, snorting through their bullish noses.

“Meanwhile, I’ve quit my job and become a spokesperson for the AbRoller,” she said, swinging her bag over her shoulder and walking away.

She’d reached her car before Mulder came running after her. “Scully, where did you go?”

“You and Skinner were deciding what I could and couldn’t do. I figured you’d let me know at some point. Now, I’ve got study to do. See you tomorrow.”

She shut the door and drove away, nerves tingling. And later, he called her. It had become a pattern over their time together. His trust in her had slowly developed. It wasn’t the he just seemed to like to talk to her, but that he needed to talk to her, at the end of the day. And in a short space of time, she realised that the feeling was mutual. She needed him to talk to her. She need this…this intimacy. He had held her at arms’ length for a while but that length was ever decreasing.

She nestled into her thick robe and twisted the phone cord in her hands, intrigued by the gentleness in his voice.

“I’m sorry, Scully. It was wrong to ignore you. I just get so…”

“Passionate, I know Mulder. I get it. And I wouldn’t put everything on the line like this for anyone else.”

She heard him take a sharp breath. Like he was hurt. But then he spoke, softer still. “Thank you, Scully.” He sounded like a little boy. Grateful and in awe. As though nobody had said anything like that to him before. She thought of the photo of his sister. They’d never really talked about what happened but she’d learned that Samantha had disappeared years earlier, just vanished. Her throat dried as she tried to imagine how lonely he must have been, despite his talent, his triumphs.

“I’m always here for you, Mulder.”

The line crackled. “Hang on, Scully. There’s someone at my door.”
She looked at her watch, past 11pm. She listened as he greeted his visitor. A woman from the sound of it. Static blasted her ears as he picked up the receiver. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

And then he cut the line.

The smoking man and tall woman sat in the mid row of seats at the rink. Smoke curled in the frigid air. She was wearing training clothes and a pair of expensive skates sat on the floor behind her. Skinner was running them through drills and Scully’s heart pounded. Mulder’s gaze wandered to their audience once too often and he mistimed a step, causing her to trip and fall. Her knees scuffed across the ice and a couple of nails ripped from her fingers as she fought to stop. Mulder raced behind her, bending to his knees and lifting her hands up to inspect her hands.

“Are you all right?” Genuine concern thinned his voice.

“I’m fine,” she said, pulling herself up and skating away.

Skinner was waiting at the edge, hands on hips, barely contained fury on his face. “You lost concentration, Mulder. That’s unacceptable.”

“It’s okay,” Scully said. “No damage done.”

“Have you lost your edge, Fox?” The woman stood behind Skinner, a flicker of a smile on her lips. “Or does your new partner not have the ability to keep up with you? You always were one step ahead.”

“Miss Fowley, I’d appreciate it if you left me with my skaters for a moment.” Skinner loomed over the woman. She glared at him for a beat then walked towards the smoking man who smiled at her and nodded to Skinner and Mulder.

“Who are they?” Scully asked, watching Mulder fume as he packed his bag.

“Diana Fowley used to dance with Mulder. And that’s her new coach, Spender.” Skinner took off his glasses and rubbed his forehead. “She’s been partnered with a new skater. A former Russian, Alex Krycek. I suspect they’re here checking you out.”

Mulder slouched past. “Diana and I were good together. We would have won the Nationals.” He stalked away through the plume of cigarette smoke.

Scully picked up her own bag. “So what went wrong?”

Skinner sighed heavily and put his glasses back on. “My advice? Don’t ask.”

The weeks ticked by and Scully found the new routines easier and more empowering by the day. They had found a groove so deep and moving that when the music faded, she had to work hard to pull away from his embrace. Their bodies and their minds were so in unison it often felt otherworldly. She knew he knew it too. His expression said it all.

“That was amazing, Scully.” He held her waist as they skated back to Skinner, who was wearing a rare smile.

“That was the best free dance you’ve done. All the training is paying off. You guys look great out there.”

Scully felt the blush burn from her chest up. Mulder pulled her in closer and she tried to keep her composure, but her grin flourished and she basked in the moment of ecstasy. They were good
together. She thought back to the days of Jacques, when she believed that partnership would never be bettered, but knew she wouldn’t be able to find the words to describe how much more in synch with Mulder she was. Soulmates. That’s the only word that might fit. But she didn’t believe in that stuff. Fate and destiny. You made your own choices in life. And you stuck with the decisions. And while Mulder had his spooky ways, even he would dismiss that descriptor.

“Scully has been working extra hard on the quicker steps and the weight training has paid off too. She’s fit and strong and,” he paused to smile down at her, causing her heart to speed up even more, “there seems to be something almost supernatural at work with us, Skinner. I mean I can only think that we’ve danced together in a previous life. It’s like we were meant to be partners.” His chest rose and fell as he talked. “It’s like fate brought us together.”

“You said that to me once, Fox. You said we were soulmates.” Diana Fowley stood behind them, wearing a black fitted body suit and bright red lipstick. A man, with green eyes and a pretty face, held her elbow. “Before you bedded me and promised me Olympic gold.”

The man, whom Scully presumed was Alex Krycek, grinned and led Diana past their group. “Let’s show them how it’s really done.” Krycek held Mulder’s gaze and Skinner stepped forward, sloting himself between the two of them.

“We’re finished here anyway. You go ahead,” Skinner said, nodding towards the ice. “Come on you two. Let’s get out of here.”

Scully turned to follow Skinner, but Mulder grabbed her arm. “Stay and watch, Scully.”

“Why? So they can laud it up over us? They’re just here to upset us, Mulder. To get under our skin.”

The music started and Fowley and Krycek began to skate. Their bodies dipped and glided, turned together. They looked serene, as one. Scully’s heart hammered and her throat choked up. They were good. Really good. She looked at Mulder and he knew it too. She picked up her bag and left the rink.

The snow was grey slush at the kerbside. Her car was parked at the back of the car park. She smelled the smoke before she saw it. Spender was leaning on the hood.

“You should have stayed for the whole performance, Ms Scully. You might have learned a thing or two about grace and poise and winning.” His eyes ran over her body and she shuddered under her coat.

“Diana and Alex dance beautifully. The Nationals will be a challenge for all of us. Mulder and I are looking forward to the competition.” She fished out her keys to open the door, but he stepped in her way, puffing smoke into her face. She held her breath, rolled her lips together.

“You might want to reconsider your position, Miss Scully.”

The key dug into her palm. “What does that mean?”

He laughed. “It means whatever you want it to mean.” He dropped his cigarette butt and it fizzed on the cold ground. He stepped away from her car and lit another.

She watched him walk away. “Samantha Mulder was a prodigious talent. She beat Diana at every competition. She would have been World and Olympic champion. Without a doubt. Her disappearance left a hole not only in the Mulder’s lives but in the skating fraternity.”
His voice chilled her more than the snow that started to pelt down on her. She couldn’t drive home fast enough. And that night, Mulder didn’t call.
Chapter 4

The coffee was sour and not hot enough. The pastry tasted of guilt. She hadn’t eaten for comfort since she’d split with Jacques. She pushed the plate aside and slumped her chin onto her fist. She hadn’t slept. Images of Diana and Krycek and Samantha Mulder flashed around her mind. She’d shot up in bed after two in the morning when she thought she smelled cigarette smoke. She fumbled for her phone, ready to call Mulder. But dropped the receiver back into the cradle straightaway. She got up but just stared at the shimmering suit hanging against her closet door for hours, wondering why she was bothering.

She drove to the rink as a grey dawn seeped across the sky. Mulder’s car was there already. And when she walked through the passageway to the change rooms, she heard murmurings. She saw Diana Fowley leaning up against Mulder, arms on his shoulders, mouth moving upwards. She didn’t need to wait to see what was about to unfold. What she couldn’t fathom was why she cared so much. Mulder could surely kiss whomever he wanted. His private life was his own.

The warmth inside her car allowed her to reassemble her thoughts. The screen misted. Her chest hurt. She let the tears drip. She’d made that mistake with Jacques. Let emotion entwine itself around her determination to be the best until her drive had been suffocated by what she thought was love. She saw this new chance with Mulder as a way to break from the past, to finally rediscover that need to win. He wanted success, victory even more than she did. So why was she so upset about his former partner showing up? Why had she let a vague threat from an old creep lodge itself in her mind until she actually thought that disappearing was the best for everyone? Her sensible, logical self told her to quit overthinking, to go back into the rink and skate. She opened the door, felt the cold rush of air, saw Diana Fowley leaving, her clothes dishevelled and she was running a hand through a tangle in the back of her hair. She slammed the door shut and drove away.

Dana hadn’t finished her paper. She hadn’t done her morning exercise routine. She lay in bed the next night, covered in her favourite soft fleece, rolling the satin edge between her fingers. She should have at least let Skinner know she wouldn’t be training, let him know she was sick. And that much was true. She felt sick to the stomach. She should have called Mulder too, but chickened out and now, an hour past the start of their training session, she felt like a coward and a fool. The cryptic message that the smoking man delivered was doing exactly as he intended. Divide and conquer. The oldest trick in the book. So why did she feel like the traitor?

She got up and padded to the kitchen, flicking on the kettle. Her sister always told her that a cup of chamomile tea could soothe even the devil’s soul. And at the moment, she felt like the devil. Skinner and Mulder would have every right to drag her over the coals when they next spoke. If they spoke...it was so tempting to just stay, to be. The view from the window calmed her, took her back to a life more settled. Trees and shrubs, a bird table, a love seat with a trailing climber wrapped around its frame, a small table and chairs waiting for better weather. Her childhood home represented the stability she craved, where a skating future with Fox Mulder currently loomed like a nightmarish, never-ending rollercoaster of change.

Curls of comforting steam rose from the cup. She sipped and waited, hearing Melissa’s voice in her head. “You said he was getting better at communicating, Danes. And that’s great. But communication is two-way. You’ve got to open up to him. Not just on the ice. That’s a given. But if you can communicate off the ice, you’ll set the world on fire.”

Her mother padded into the kitchen and sat opposite her, hands steepled. That pose meant talking,
baring her soul. It struck her that she had come home to avoid talking yet she knew, simultaneously, that her mother would make her talk, coax her troubles out of her.

“You look too thin, Dana. Are you not eating?”

“I’m eating well, mom. There’s a diet we follow, the training schedule is pretty hectic, though.” Acid filled her stomach again.

“I thought you’d be training every morning and evening…leading up to the Nationals.” Her mother’s soft tone was hypnotic, drawing her in.

“I am, was…should be.” The skin on her forehead felt warm and dry. She blew across the top of her cup. “I…mom…I’m not sure I can go back.” Despite herself, a tear tracked down her cheek. Saying the words out loud made her feel even more sick.

“Why not?”

“I thought I knew him. I thought we had something more than a strong partnership. We seemed to fit. And now I realise that it was all in my head. It was a fantasy. Winning medals at all costs is what drives Mulder. And I just don’t feel that way. I need it to be something more meaningful, I guess.”

The warm weight of her mother’s arm across her shoulders took her back to her childhood when she craved the attention, fought off her brothers and sister for a chance to sit with Maggie, to embrace. “You give too much of yourself, Dana. You need time for you.”

“I should be there. I should be training, but I can’t…I don’t feel like I belong. I feel like he’s just testing me, waiting for me to fall so he can move on to the next one. The one that will take him where he wants to go.”

“You care for this man,” her mother said. “I can see that in your eyes, in the fight that’s happening behind them. You don’t want to, but you do. You just need to find a way to work with that, Dana. You need to get past your fear.”

“He doesn’t care for me,” she said, absently stirring the sugar crystals in the rose china bowl.

Maggie chuffed a soft sigh. “I’m sure that’s not true, Dana. I’m sure Fox cares deeply. But maybe he’s just as scared as you.”

Her mother was always able to touch the rawest nerve. Outside, a scurry of birds flew past, squawking. She sobbed until she was dry.

A day turned into two. She couldn’t move. She lay in bed letting the world spin without her. She wasn’t even sure whether it was day or night when her mother pushed open her door and crept in. Behind her, stood Fox Mulder.
The door closed behind him, shutting out the sanctuary of the rest of her home. He stood in the darkness, looking slightly past her. Perhaps he could see the garden through the slight gap in the curtains above her head. She bunched the blanket in her fist and he put his hands on his hips, eyes lowering to a spot on the floor beside her bed. There was a dark knot in the honey of her floorboards. It often caught her eye – it looked like a cat curled up, comfortable. He cleared his throat, wiped the underside of his nose, ran his hand through his bangs. His fringe flopped down again and she tucked her lower lip under her teeth to fight back the small laugh that bubbled in her chest.

“Where have you been?” he asked. The crack in his voice jolted through her. He was genuinely upset.

“Here,” she said. “Just here.”

“I thought…when you didn’t…I thought you’d…” He stepped out of the shadow and she saw the redness in his eyes, the dark smudges. Dirty stubble framed his face. “I was worried.”

The bed sunk under his weight and he reached for a loose thread on the blanket, pulling at it. She pulled the sheet higher under her arms. “I just needed a break.”

His gaze wandered from her face to the window again. “It’s snowing.” His smile grew wider, reminding her of how a child would watch the magical white flurries as they whipped around on the increasing wind. “Looks prettier here than the city. Like when I was younger.”

She could hear her mother downstairs, fussing around no doubt, finding a suitable mug for a coffee for Fox, a plate for a slice of cake for Fox, dusting down the chair so Fox could sit down. Her stomach fizzed with a mixture of pride and embarrassment. Part of her knew she’d come home to be looked after. Yet, that very care was now making her feel immature. She could see he could hear it too.

“Your mother seems sweet,” he said.

Nodding, she realised she knew little about his parents, his upbringing, other than the bare bones of the mystery of his sister. “What was your house like?”

“Bigger than this,” he said, without any arrogance. He looked at her then. “Big and empty. My sister, she…” Scully held her breath watching his brows furrow and his jaw tighten. “She just disappeared. One day she was winning awards all over the district. The next, she wasn’t there. She was eight.” His whole body sighed. “My parents gave up.”

“They never found a body?” she asked, her voice quiet as the snow outside.

He shook his head. “So there’s always hope, and that’s the real nightmare.” It must have been torture, she thought. And she knew then what drove him. “She would have been Olympic champion, Scully. Her talent was otherworldly.”

“I’m sorry, Fox,” she whispered, running a hand along his arm. He lifted his eyebrows in surprise at the use of his name but let it go. “You need to win for her, for Samantha.” The cruel face of Spender flashed in her mind. She gulped back the feeling of guilt that she should say something to Mulder about their unsettling meeting in the car park the other night. Open up.
He turned away. “I need to win for me, Scully. I’ve spent years in the shadow of a girl who will never lose, who will never let anyone down, who will always be the shining star. I loved her. She was a sweet girl, she was my sister, but my parents…” He stopped, looked directly at her. “They closed themselves off. I don’t think they could feel anything after, any emotion. I spent years doing anything to please them. I played ice hockey before, but after Samantha disappeared, I switched to figure skating, then discovered I had a talent for ice dancing. The skating fraternity is small. We all just danced with whomever our parents decided. They knew Spender. They knew the Fowleys. I was desperate for their attention. I can see that now.”

She squeezed his hand. “I think that was the normal response to what happened, Mulder. You were a child. You needed your parents’ support, their guidance, their love.”

“I was a horrible teenager. I even ran away for a few days. Gave my parents a heart attack. It was a dumb move.”

The flush of guilt coursed through her, hot and prickly. “I’m sorry, Mulder. I should have let you know I was coming here. I shouldn’t have run away.”

He stood up and pulled back the curtain behind her. She stepped out of bed too, wrapping her robe around her. The snow was furious, greying out the garden. “It’s okay. I understand, Scully. Sometimes I want to just walk away too. The pressure of school and skating, sometimes, it feels so overwhelming, doesn’t it?” His eyes softened as he smiled down at her. “I think I should get going soon.”

Disappointment caught in her throat. “You can’t come all this way and not enjoy some of my mother’s hospitality, Mulder. She’s probably baked a dozen varieties of cookies. She always tries to fatten me up when I get here.”

“You’ve got a great body, Scully.” His gaze wandered over her and her cheeks burned. “You’re fit and strong.”

She snuggled her chin into the collar of her robe and moved to the door. “I’ll just get dressed. You go downstairs.”

He nodded and padded to the door. “You are the best partner I’ve had Scully. We dance like we’ve always been together and I don’t want to do anything to jeopardise that. If you need a break, I understand. I know how intense I can get. But I think you feel the same way. We can do this, Scully. We can win the Nationals and we can go further and higher. But you have to commit.”

The wind blasted the window pane and snow stuck to the glass.

He politely refused the third slice of orange and poppyseed cake and offered to do the washing up, stacking the plates by the sink.

Scully smothered the giggle that threatened as her mother shooed him away. The smile died when Maggie added, “go and spend time with Dana. You drove all this way to see her, not me.”

His grin was crooked with embarrassment as Scully led him to the lounge at the back of the house. He stood in the middle of the room, fingers twisting round each other.

“Your mother makes lovely cakes, Scully.”

“She is a good cook,” she agreed, “Mulder, I’ll be back tomorrow. I’m sorry again. I flipped out.”

He nodded. “I get it. I just needed to hear you tell me one way or the other.” His hands knotted and
released.

She was mesmerised by the rhythm of his discomfort and hadn’t noticed his proximity to her. When she lifted her eyes, he was towering over her. His expression was strange, expectant almost.

“Tell you what?”

“How you really feel.”

She knew from her studies how the body reacts to outside forces, leaves evidence that could be examined and processed. Her breathing caught in her throat and her shoulders bunched up. She blushed. She dug her nails into her palms. Words seemed impossibly out of reach.

“Dana,” he said, lifting her chin with a gentle finger. “I’m not good with this sort of thing, after Diana…I…”

The name sent shockwaves through Scully. She shook his finger away, remembering what she’d seen at the rink. That was the reason she’d run in the first place. To distance herself from him, from these…feelings. Feelings she couldn’t control, that she didn’t even want.

“Why did you come here, Mulder? To hedge your bets?”

He stepped back, face darkening. “I came here because you disappeared. I looked for you because our partnership is the most important thing to have happened to me in years. I thought…”

“You thought I would fall into your arms and you could play both of us?”

“What?” His hand ran through his hair, fringe staying back momentarily. “Who? Diana? You think I’m involved with her?”

“I saw you together.” Her voice wobbled but she managed to look him in the eye. “At the rink.”

Flames washed his cheeks and he walked past her, knocking her arm. He ripped open the door and she could see her mother, drying dishes, mouth dropping open.

As he stepped through the threshold into the wintry blast, he turned to look at her. “Don’t come back, Scully. You were right to run away.” He strode out into the thickening snow. She followed him to the end of the driveway, cold seeping through her thin slippers. He unlocked his car and as he slid in he gave her a last look and said, “I’m not worth it.”

The tail lights painted a red trail of misery through the whiteness and she shivered despite the hot tears flowing down her face.
Snowfall is a strange and quiet thing. Filling in the world with white silence. And that meant the buzzing in her brain sounded as loud as a siren. She couldn’t shake the feeling that her life was about to change again. When Mulder drove away it felt like he was taking all that she held dear and comfortable with him. He took her pride, her courage, her drive and at that moment when the tail lights disappeared around the corner, her entire life faded into a white silence.

Her mother had shuffled her back into the house, drawn a bath for her and sat with her while she ate steaming minestrone soup. But despite the herbs and spices, the piquant tomato base, it seemed bland, perfunctory.

Now she was trying to sleep and the world was still and soft and shapeless. Her mind churned over the events and her stomach churned with it. She’d been a fool, an emotional fool. She stuffed the pillow over her midriff and huffed out a painful sigh. The door creaked open and her mother walked in, chewing her lip. Scully checked the time. It was two in the morning.

“What’s wrong, Mom?”

“It’s Fox.”

Mulder was pale against the starched sheets. Abrasions marred his chin, left cheek and forehead. His left eye was half-closed under a red bruise. A drip fed into his arm and his left ankle was strapped, but much to her relief, not in a cast.

“Hey,” she said softly, sitting on the chair next to his bed.

His head turned slightly to her voice and he tried to smile. His lips were flaky and the sound of them popping open had her reaching for the plastic cup to pour him water. She put her hand under his head and lifted it so he could drink. He spluttered out a thank you and winced as she helped his head back down to the pillow.

“How you feeling now?” she asked.

“You’re going to be a better nurse than the night shift one,” he croaked.

She hid her trembling hands under the hem of sweater. “I’m going to be a doctor, Mulder, not a nurse. And you’re probably the worst patient they’ve had.”

He tapped the bed with his fingers and coughed. “They keep making me swallow nasty medicine and jabbing me with needles. It’s a brutal regime here.”

“And you think you can win Olympic gold,” she said, giving out a wry laugh.

His gaze shifted away. “I’m sorry, Scully.” Defeat laced his words.

“What happened?” she said, leaning forward to balance her hands on the side of his bed.

“I don’t remember.”

“It was snowing pretty heavily when you left. The conditions were bad, Mulder. You must have lost control.”

He pushed himself up on his elbows and shook his head. “I got home, Scully. I wasn’t in a car
wreck.”

Her heart pounded. “What? What do you mean? How did this happen?” Her mind refused to supply any scenarios other than a car crash.

“I woke up at the bottom of the stairs in my apartment block.”

“You fell?” It still didn’t make any sense. He was always sharp, always aware. How could he have fallen down stairs?

He shrugged and winced. “I guess so. I don’t remember anything. The throbbing in my ankle woke me and I was face down on the floor. I had to yell out to the neighbours on the ground floor,” he looked up at her and his face fell. “I was so cold.”

His hand twitched on the bed. She lifted her arm higher, wanting to take it in hers, warm it. The door opened and the nurse walked in. Mulder turned away from her.

“Time for your meds, Mr Mulder.”

“My doctor here is looking after me. She said I don’t need the meds,” he pushed the sheet back and sat up. “In fact, she said I could go home.”

“Mulder!”

He limped past her and grabbed his clothes, pulling on his pants and affording her a glimpse of his boxers – grey alien faces on black silk – and the broad expanse of his back.

“Mr Mulder, you haven’t been discharged. Get back into bed.” The nurse pulled back the sheet and tapped the mattress.

“I’m discharging myself under my doctor’s orders.”

He opened the door and Scully followed in his wake.

She sat at the rink and listened to Skinner outlining plans for a restricted fitness and training routine for Mulder and her. From the depths of the passageway she caught sight of Diana Fowley, dark hair pulled back in a high ponytail. Slightly behind her and smirking was Alex Krycek. As they both walked past where Skinner was sitting their smiles grew wider, eyes gleaming. Diana stopped next to Mulder, put her hand on his face. He winced away.

“Fox, what happened?”

Scully heard the note of faux-concern in the woman’s voice and stepped forward. Skinner stood up.

“He’s fine,” Scully said. “He’s strong.” Her fingers squeezed Mulder’s shoulder and he glanced up at her. His hand found hers and her breathing sped up.

Diana dipped her head at Scully but kept her eyes on Mulder. “Oh, I know that.”

Mulder tapped her hand and Scully stepped back. He stood, began to hobble away. Krycek folded his arms over his chest, stood in the way. Mulder held on to the rail along the sides of the seat.

“You look sore, my friend,” Krycek said. “Tumbling down stairwells is not great preparation for the Nationals. Let’s hope you recover in time. Diana and I are looking forward to winning, but only if the competition is…” he looked over at Scully. “Fit.”
Mulder made to step past him. Alex raised his hands and twisted out of the way. Scully watched him closely as he grinned at Diana. She stretched out her hand and took Krycek’s. On each of his knuckles were red grazes.

Scully ran after Mulder and found him outside in the white silence.
Chapter 7

Skinner stood with his hands on his hips and a frown a mile deep. His scowl had steadily increased as the lesson progressed. Mulder had insisted on trying to skate but he winced every time they turned, gripped her hands harder than usual and dipped out of the jump sequences.

“This is pointless, Mulder,” she said. “You’re in so much pain, there’s no way you should be out on the ice. Your ankle needs time to recover. The Nationals are four weeks’ away and we’ll have no chance if you don’t rest it.”

“No, Scully!” he said, dropping her hands and skating back to their starting point. “We’ve got to train. My foot’s okay.” He turned his head but she could see the way he bit his lip and squeezed his eyes shut.

“Mulder,” Skinner barked.

Scully held out her hand and Mulder sighed, taking it and she skated them both slowly back to the boss.

“I’m fine, Walter.” But his shoulders stooped and his jaw was taut.

Skinner shook his head. “In ‘Nam, there was a young soldier, took a bullet in the shoulder, pulled it out himself. Patched it up himself. Carried on like nothing had happened. Kept saying he was fine. One night, during a tropical storm, he was despatched to carry an injured soldier back to camp. His shoulder gave out and the other guys had to carry two dead weights back.”

“What happened to him?” Scully asked, looking up at Mulder, who was still chewing on his bottom lip.

“The exercise took twice as long and his wound never healed properly.” Skinner said, pulling down his sweater to reveal a bullet scar on his right shoulder. “Pride is a foolish thing, Mulder. Get off the ice, get some rest, do some weights and come back when you’re ready to train.” He smiled and Scully nearly choked in surprise. “And then we train, and we train good.”

Inside the car was stuffy. Not just because it was cold outside but because Mulder was sulking. His chin was cupped in his palm, elbow propped on the window sill. Every so often he would sigh and shift in his seat. She pulled up outside his block and hesitated before turning off the engine.

“Mulder,” she said, trying to quell the nerves in her belly. She hated being so controlled by her emotions but this was how she always felt around him. There was just something there…a fire that stoked everything.

“I’ll see you tomorrow, Scully. At the gym?” There was defeat in his tone.

“That move, the one you want to include,” she said, looking at him and measuring each breath before speaking. He nodded, sat up straighter. “I’ve been sort of practising it at home, you know?”

He went to laugh and she looked back at the steering wheel.

“How do you mean? Practising, Scully?” Instead of mocking her, he seemed genuinely interested.

“I know it sounds stupid, but I’ve been getting into the position and really trying to work my abs so that I can sustain the shape. I’ve just been trying to ‘feel’ it. Does that make sense?”
His nod was so enthusiastic, he looked like an eager puppy. She let out a soft laugh, more from embarrassment. “I get it, Scully. I see the shape of things in my dreams, I feel the moves, I spend more time thinking about ice dancing than I do about my studies. I’m going to be the worst psychologist in the world. If I ever graduate. Hey,” he said, grinning. “Wanna come up? We can practise the shape.”

Astonished at his change of mood, she found herself opening the car door before she’d even said yes. His apartment was compact but filled with an eclectic mix of old and new furniture, Art Deco prints on the walls and a bookcase of hardcovers that Scully scanned as he set about making coffee. The green glow from his fish tank warmed the room and she felt herself relaxing as she listened to him banging and clattering around the tiny kitchen.

“Here,” he said. “This should warm you up.” There was a gleam in his eye. One that she recognised. The spark of ambition, the Mulder who wanted nothing but to win, to prove that he was more than just a boy whose sister had disappeared. “Then we can start.”

She took a sip. “This is so bizarre. Oh,” she said. The Irish cream was smooth and thick and coated her mouth and tongue. It had been a while since she’d consumed alcohol and she let the warm buzz settle. “This is good.”

A thin line of milky coffee sat above his lip and before she knew it she had wiped it away.

“Thanks,” he said, softer than she was expecting. “I like to watch the heat build, the way it changes as the flame licks underneath it. I love the way it moves and rolls, then the sensation of the warmth in my hands,” he paused and sipped more. “I love its taste. The sweetness that belies its true depths.”

He loomed over her, bigger and bolder than ever, mouth popping open so that she could smell the whiskey. She knew she was holding her breath. She didn’t trust herself not to squeak. His face had darkened, his hair flopped over his forehead, his eyes gleamed in the dim light from the fish tank. He was cupping his glass and the creamy liquid sloshed slightly, folding and rolling. She licked her lips then realised what she’d done. And then he just seemed to snap out of this sensual mood and turned abruptly to put the glass down. She held hers, grateful for something to stop her hands from trembling.

“Let’s do it, Scully. You might need to take off your coat and boots.” He sat on the leather couch and untied his laces, pulling off his boots. He removed his sweater and patted the seat next to him.

“Don’t be shy,” he said, grinning.

His fingers were gentle under her arms, warm. He lifted her so that her belly skimmed his chest. She looked up at his ceiling, watching the strange play of lights there. He dropped her back down and she stepped back.

“How does that feel?” she asked. “Your foot?”

“It’s fine. Much better to do this here and not on the ice. Muscle memory, Scully. Our bodies will remember the move and just do it naturally.”

She shook away the smile that pulled at her lips. The few sips of Irish cream had set her hormones raging. Either that, or she’d returned to a giggly teenage state where innuendo laced every word.

“Come closer,” he said. “This time when I lift, wrap your legs over my shoulders, and I’ll transfer my hold to your backside.”
This time she couldn’t hold back the well of laughter. She folded at the waist and let it all out. When she stood up he was staring at her, arms folded, lips rolled together.

“Finished?” he asked, but it held a curious note, like he couldn’t work out what had just happened.

She rubbed her eyes and nodded. “I’m sorry. It’s the whiskey.”

He chuckled. “You’re a cheap date, Dana Scully. You only drank two mouthfuls.”

“Is this a date, Fox Mulder?” She raised her arms and felt her top slip out of her jeans.

He lifted her and she engaged her abdominal muscles to bring her legs up and over, bending them down his back and holding his head. His hands slid from her upper back to her ass and she hung backwards, digging her heels between his shoulder blades. Her hair fell and she saw its red waves as Mulder turned them slowly. His breath was hot on her thighs and she felt the rise and fall of his chest under her backside and thighs. The move was daring, sensual, dizzying. And felt so good.

The solid weight of the ground stilled her breathing. His hands were still clasped around her waist, hers around his shoulders. His eyes opened slowly and his smile broadened. They stood like that for what seemed like eternity before he dipped his head and kissed her. Kissed her gently at first, testing, teasing, then harder. She pulled at his neck, urging him on. He turned her and they fell to the couch. He was everywhere at once, touching, brushing, stroking, humming into her mouth.

She knew they should stop. But she knew she couldn’t, they wouldn’t.
Chapter 8

She snuck out, leaving Mulder coiled around his own sheets. He’d loved her with the same passion he devoted to the ice, passion fuelled by his loss, his drive to be the best at everything. Her body throbbed with the memories and where usually by the morning after she might have spent too much time being embarrassed at the things she said, the way she moved, the sounds and smells and general chaos of lovemaking, this time she felt like she’d been a part of something so special, so magical that she wanted to closet it away just for her own keeping.

The cool blast of air from the door alerted her to the presence of someone else. Diana Fowley stood in front of her, framed by the watery sunlight behind her. There was a slow smile spreading over her lips.

“Couldn’t you keep him warm all night, Dana?”

“I had to leave, Diana. It was so fucking hot up there.” She stepped past and the cold air tempered her flaming skin so she could pass off her trembling hands as shivering. She heard Diana swing round and felt the glare in the back of her head. Scully turned back and took a deep breath. “If you go up there now, you’re gonna get burned.” She held the door open for Fowley, who slunk past, hair swinging with each step.

Mulder arrived at training wearing a smile that made Scully’s insides melt. Her cheeks flushed and she was sure Skinner knew what was going on.

“You can’t skate, Mulder,” she said, pulling off her sweat top.

“I just want to watch you,” he said in a low, breathy voice that had her heart hammering. Skinner looked away, his jaw set. He knew. Fuck.

“Run through the routine, Dana,” Skinner said, still looking away from the ice. “Mulder, you need to visualise your positions, holds, lifts.”

Mulder grinned at Scully. “I think I can do that. My mind’s eye is pretty adept at visualising our positions.”

The rush of air past her cheeks cooled her burning embarrassment as her blades scraped across the ice. The warmth of his hands, the urgency of his fingers, the strained ‘Dana’ he’d uttered into her ear as he came, flooded her body with adrenaline and when the music began, she let all their combined passion push her to the limits. She danced like a lover. And it showed.

The coffee shop was heaving, throngs of students lining up for cappuccino and Angelo’s famous bagels. She grabbed two salmon and cream cheeses and dropped the bag in front of Mulder, before putting his drink in front of him.

“Is it real cream cheese?” he asked, taking a bite.

“It’d better be,” she said. “None of that fake light stuff.” The smooth bread was still warm and the cream cheese oozed over her mouth. Mulder picked up a serviette and dabbed it away. She looked down.

“I love that you eat well, Scully. It’s a huge turn on.”
She kicked his feet under the table. “Mulder.”

“What? I find everything you do sexy,” he said, stirring his coffee. “And your performances over the past weeks have been out of this world.”

“I admit it has felt like there’s been something extra happening, something outside of my control. Even without you, the connection to the music just seems…stronger. Unbreakable, almost.”

“Spooky,” he said, his hand covering hers. Grains of sugar dug into the side of her palm. He leaned forward, close enough that she could smell the coffee on his breath. “We are unbreakable now, Scully.”

A bitter draught from the open door left the skin on the back of her neck sprinkled with goosebumps. Before she could lift her gaze from Mulder’s, Krycek had scraped out a chair and was sitting astride it, his arms resting on the back, his grin intrusive.

“Woo, look at you two lovebirds. How touching. And look at you, Little Red Riding Hood, with your flaming red cheeks and your chilly demeanour. You really are fire and ice, aren’t you?”

“Surely you should be at the rink, Krycek. You need all the practise you can get,” Mulder said, still squeezing Scully’s hand in his. “If you don’t give your all for Diana, she’ll castrate you. By hand.”

Krycek picked up Mulder’s half-eaten bagel and stuffed it in his mouth. “We know our routine, we know each other. We have the move,” he said, wiping his lips and smiling, “yes, that move, and when we do it, it’s all fire. No ice. Because we’re smoking hot and you two are going to be left walking in our ashes.”

He ruffled Mulder’s hair and winked at Scully before leaving. Scully watched him prowl across the parking lot to waiting arms of Diana Fowley. She saw Mulder’s jaw flexing. “I think he hurt you, Mulder. I think he did it deliberately. Did you see his knuckles?”

His sigh contained everything she felt. Frustration, anger, the knowledge that nothing would change. “What if he did? Does that change anything from now on?”

“No, but…”

“So drop it.”

“But the police…”

“What? The police? Forget it, Scully.” He strode outside and she had to run to keep up. Fowley and Krycek were leaning against her car. She waved and blew Mulder a kiss. Mulder shrugged his hands deeper into his pockets and walked faster.

“Mulder! Wait up.”

“I’m going to the rink. Are you coming?”

“You ankle is still healing.”

“So you’re not interested in extra training?” He opened the door of his car and got in.

She fixed her eyes on the interior light, faint in the gloom of the afternoon. “I didn’t say that. But Mulder, one moment you’re telling me we’re an unbreakable team and the next you’re shutting me
He started the car. “I’m not shutting you out, Scully. I’m asking you to come with me to the rink. I need to skate. I’ve been off the ice for too long. We have a week before the Nationals. We need to practise together. We need to do the move on the ice. We need to prove to them,” he jabbed his finger towards the others, still watching, “that we are unbreakable.”

She leaned forward and whispered to him. “We don’t need to prove anything to anybody other than ourselves, Mulder. I’ll meet you at the rink.”

She left him rubbing the spot where she kissed his cheek. And with a smile on his face.
Chapter 9

There was a desperate drive in Mulder that allowed him to function at a higher level than most people. Scully had found this side of him to be both the best and the worst of his personality. He was passionate beyond belief but he was sometimes overbearing. He would go to the ends of the earth for you, but he would also ditch you and do it alone if needs be. He was focused on what he wanted but that focus could also be myopic.

However, with that depth of commitment and with just a day to go before the competition started, Mulder had found a superhuman strength that allowed him to complete the move on his still sore leg. Grimacing, and with his breath held, he lifted her. She executed her part, feeling the power of his shoulders under her thighs, trusting him as she lay back and they turned. There were not many moments in her life that she could say had been euphoric, but touching her blades back on the ice and seeing his face in full smile, was one.

Skinner applauded. “You two have something else when it comes to chemistry. If you can pull this off, the judges won’t know what they’ve seen.”

“Diana and Krycek are doing the same move,” Scully said, feeling the first heavy pang of nerves in her limbs. She pulled on her hoody and shivered. Mulder’s comforting arm in the small of her back, steadied her breathing for a bit and she tried not to smile too widely.

“It’ll be like watching rhinos kiss – awkward as hell with all those horns and thick skin, but with you two it’s like watching swans entwining their necks and floating gracefully down the river. There’s a beauty in your movements – even without that move – that I’ve never seen before.” He stopped, cleared his throat.

Scully wasn’t sure who was blushing deeper – her or Skinner. Mulder kicked the edge of the seat with his skate and chuffed out an embarrassed laugh too.

“Get some sleep you two and I’ll see you in the morning.”

They watched Skinner leave, and Scully packed her bag. Mulder stood in front of her, his hair mussed and cheeks ruddy still. He slipped his glasses on and they misted up. She smiled.

“Scully, whatever happens over the next few days I want you to know that our partnership, on the ice and off, is the best thing that’s ever happened to me. I’m…not great at this stuff, but I had to say something.”

His hand squeezed hers. Tears fizzed at the corners of her eyes. “Mulder, I know. You don’t have to say it. But thank you anyway.”

Their lips were dry from the exertion of training but she held hers to his for as long as possible. He laughed into her mouth and said he had to leave but she swallowed his words and bunched his shirt up in her hands. They only stopped when Fowley and Krycek interrupted them with a few choice words and a low catcall.

“I always though professional athletes laid off that kind of thing, Mulder.” Krycek raked his eyes over Scully. “Wasting your energy on things that aren’t important.”

A rumble erupted inside Mulder that reverberated through her and she gripped his arms, holding him back. “Mulder. It’s okay. Let it go. Save your breath,” she said. He dragged his eyes from Krycek and Fowley back to her and she smiled. “Save it for me.” She said it loud enough for the
other two to hear and watched their fake smiles stay glued to their lips.

There was the stale odour of cigarettes in the female changing rooms. Scully walked cautiously past the shower block and saw him, leaning against the back wall next to her locker. She stopped, looked back over her shoulder and saw Fowley behind her.

“What do you want?”

“What do you think we want?” Fowley said, almost with a purr.

Scully could smell the bitter scent of perfume when she turned to see her rival closing the gap between them. “Whatever it is, it stinks and I won’t be a part of it. Now I suggest you leave.”

The smoking man smiled. “Such spite. I hoped Fox would have found somebody more level-headed as a partner. He needs that, he’s always been such a hot-head. It’s always been his downfall, really, that passion of his. That impulsiveness. His sister was the one who had it all. Such a waste, such a pity.”

“What do you know about his sister? Why are you here? If you’re trying to stop us from competing it won’t work. We’re a strong team, a true partnership. Nothing you say or do will stop us from doing our best and even if we don’t win, we’ll know that we’ll have competed with fairness and truth on our side.”

The laughed and took a long drag on his cigarette. Scully grabbed her bag and turned to leave. Fowley stood in her way.

“You won’t win, Dana. He doesn’t have it in him. His injury is not what holds him back. It’s the memory of his sister. If he wins, it means he’s achieved more than she did and that won’t sit easily for him. Fox is the sort of man that needs the drama, he needs to be the underdog. He needs the pain.”

Scully crushed her hands into balls. “Mulder is focused on one thing only – and that is to skate to his best ability. Technically, he’s the best skater in the country. Krycek doesn’t come close. You’re good, Diana. You’re very good. You skate well together. But you don’t have what we have. You never will.” She bumped past Fowley and walked out of the room.

“The judges will decide,” Fowley called after her. “And then we’ll know who has what.”

Scully stopped, turned. “We already know what we have, Fowley. And that’s the difference between us and you.”

There was a hush in the arena when Fowley and Krycek’s took to the ice. After the compulsories and the original dance the scores were tied. It was all about the free dances and while Mulder paced behind her, Scully closed her eyes and prayed. She hadn’t offered her thoughts to God for years and she wasn’t praying for the win, rather for the inspiration to reach a higher plane, to soar and to help Mulder realise that his sister would only ever want him to do the best he could.

Fowley and Krycek performed the move and the crowd cheered and roared. Their scores were near perfect.

“This is it,” Mulder said, bending close enough that his lips brushed her cheek. “Let’s do this, Scully.”

She squeezed his hand. “Let’s do this for Samantha,” she said.
His slow blink and deep breath revealed the depth of his feelings. Everything he wanted was caught up in that expression. His past, his present, his future was all tied up in his complicated relationship with his dead sister and this was the turning point.

Electricity ran through their joint hands and she leant up to kiss him as their names were announced. “Let’s do this for us.”

They had never been so in tune, so in touch with each other, so harmonious. They were like one body, one soul dancing across the ice. Scully hardly remembered seeing or hearing the audience. But the eruption of their collective voices when they performed the move all but ripped the roof off the venue. That noise would live in her memory forever. When her skates touched the ice and she opened her eyes, she saw such emotion on her partner’s face, such pure and unadorned love, not just for her but for his sister. It was everything. Their final spin, their final embrace and the sound of the fading music rushed through her and she turned her face to his, kissing him on the last note.

As they skated off to await their scores, Scully knew they’d achieved what they needed to, win or not. Mulder raised his hand to the cheering crowd one last time and as he sat next to her, he pulled her in and whispered, “You’re my constant, my touchstone, Scully.”

She smiled as the scores were revealed. “And you are mine.”

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