

CHAPTER ONE

I'm still going over yesterday's bargain about work and grades at 6:30 in the morning. But I need to focus on the ice now. I pass a sprinkling of other skaters looping their figure 8s, tracing lines that look like the Möbius strips we learned about in math last year. Maybe the goal is to create a perfect symbol of infinity, which explains why we ice geeks get up at the crack of dawn to go round and round and round but never get anywhere. No, not nowhere—as the medals and ribbons that line my wall attest. And this year, Winnie (yes, that's my coach's real name) has talked my parents into letting me compete nationally. I'm gearing up for the Regionals here in town and the Provincials in January (in Alberta for once!), with smaller Wild Rose and Silver Ice competitions in between, then the Nationals in April. Winnie has mentioned the World Championships, depending on how I do in the Nationals, which does make me sweat a bit, even on the ice.

I shiver again, then scrape a small X with the heel of my skate and begin to etch out my first figure 8. I'd rather leap right into the leaps and jumps, but practicing balance and precision makes sense first thing in the morning, especially since I've been away for four weeks. Makes a lot of sense, especially with a body as ungainly off the ice as mine can be: I'm tall and thin, but with thick leg muscles. And now I'm thinking about my bi-quest all over again: I'm itching to lust after someone who lusts after tall and thin, but strong. You'd think lusting after all kinds of bodies would generate a little action.

You'd be wrong. Except for one exceptional lip-lock in August, I am still pretty much a virginal cliché.

I like boys; I like girls. There were about seventeen girls and three boys in my last school that I would have liked to kiss. About twenty more of each that I was willing to kiss. But none of them would kiss me back. Well, maybe "back" isn't exactly the right word. In order to kiss me back, I would first have had to actually tried to kiss one of them ... maybe at a junior high dance, when the chaperones were out sneaking smokes, or at a drunken party where the parents had retreated upstairs and the lights had pretty much disappeared. Never happened. In fact, I have yet to snog a single schoolmate, male or female. Why? Um, because I'm a second-rate homo and a first-rate coward? Because, at some point, I'd have to *explain* myself?

Of course, I wouldn't *have* to explain anything. I could let Sita match me up with a boy and go on merrily (what, you want me to say "gaily"?) dating him until we broke up for some dumb reason, like he forgot our second-month anniversary (by the way "anni" means year—you cannot have a monthly-yearly—I googled it during Life Skills class) or because I didn't like his friends always dragging him off to play World4War when we should've been kissing. Simple—no mention of girls, no mention of how my body is, like, *conflicted*, and could he just be patient while I worked the whole thing out.

Again and again, I trace the number 8 with my feet. Circle, cross, circle, cross: an even number and a mirror of itself. Or, I could kiss a girl. I really wanna kiss a girl. Yeah, yeah, you're thinking, this chick's just a big fat lez who doesn't want to come out, so she's invented the bisexual story to cover up her true lust and hide, just a little, be-

hind “normal.” Sigh. Your reaction is almost entirely exactly why I don’t tell anyone, not even the gay kids at school (*especially* not the gay kids), that I am a by-sex-you-all. Even after a month up in the boonies at my summer job (more on that later), skating practice feels like the most normal thing I do. After I’m done with my figures, I practice spins and toe loops and a Lutz. But not an Axel jump yet; I’ll need way more time on the ice before I’m totally up to speed.

Yes, I would like to kiss a girl, maybe get a girlfriend. But I would, after said kiss, have a lot of explaining to do. More so than with a boy, cuz judging from my limited experience, boys don’t really want to talk and analyze and describe and examine and then talk some more. I’m thinking that if you’re a fifteen-year-old girl and so together that you’ve figured out you’re a lesbian *and* come out at school *and* found another girl to kiss, well, you don’t want your girlfriend going on and on about how she still likes boys, right?

I spent most of the last two years staring at girls’ chests and boys’ shoulders. Come summer in Alberta, girls wear really low-cut tops and boys usually go shirtless. And I find myself drinking it all in. Secretly, of course—at least the boobs. But even staring at boys can get a het-girl in trouble. Girls are supposed to be sexy and tuned in to whatever guys have in mind, but we’re also supposed to be cute about it, following the guy’s lead, like this isn’t the twenty-first century. As girls, though, we lust quite lustily through our teen years as much as boys do.

Sita’s been bugging me to release myself from the skating squad and join the dating squad instead, but I’ve been dragging my ice picks, so to speak. Sita has never been a big fan of my skating life,

especially when it intrudes on after-school hang-out times. But—finally!—I have news for Sita about this summer, news she'll want to hear, but I still don't know how to tell her—*that's* how mixed up I am. That's the problem with being bisexual—you have to kiss either boys or girls all the time, or everyone thinks you're just a poser. Am I a poser? Does needing to prepare myself for a chat with my best friend prove it?

All the other skaters at the rink this morning except one are girls, and we're covered neck to ankles. No fancy competition regalia so early in fall, just jackets light enough to let us move, dense enough to hug us warm during frigid practices. Still, under all those layers are sports bras and one jock strap and maybe even frilly panties. Picturing underwear and bare skin in this frosty space multiplies my chills. I shake my arms and legs and then glide around a small area to practice my camel spins. I lean my body forward, trying to stay parallel, with one leg straight out behind me. Not usually difficult for me, but I'm out of shape, and my balance is off.

"Go ahead," Winnie had said, when I told her about my plan to miss a month of skate practice.

"I'll do stretches every morning," I promised. "And as many jump-squats as you assign!"

"No, I mean it: go ahead," she repeated, and this time I couldn't hear sarcasm in her voice. "Sometimes a break allows the body to remember in different ways." She raised one eyebrow, which is her way of winking. "You wanna go hiking and camping, I'm not gonna stand in your way, and it could actually help in the long run, s'long as you practice jumps and squat exercises every day." She paused,

considering adding some sit-spins to my summer mornings, then concluded, “I recommend a two-week break, but a superstar like you can manage twice that.” She raised the other eyebrow. Maybe a little sarcasm? “Not like you’re off chasing after boys.”

Allow me a short tangent, cuz I need to rant: You’re a teen and beginning to work out that, well, you get turned on a lot. Easy for boys—everyone expects them to be turned on, by everyone and everything. Once I was watching a *Kids in the Hall* rerun (the ’90s really crack me up) and in the skit, Scott Thompson was doing his recurring character of “Buddy,” queen icon extraordinaire. (Yeah, a gay guy playing a gay guy—how’s that for layered?) Anyway, I don’t remember the plot, but Buddy was going on and on about how he’d been sexed up by a fancy chair, turned on by its exquisite lines and sensual stance. Hilarious—because he’s gay, and all gay people think about is sex? Or because he’s a guy, and all guys think about is sex?

But girls are supposed to fend off the hordes of boys trampling each other to get us into bed. Where *are* these hordes? Oh, I admit that more guys are out there pressuring girls into the sack than the other way around, but the story absolutely everyone still believes is that girls don’t need sex. Except for nymphos. Girls supposedly wait for the boy train to make a stop at their station. Really fair, huh? About as fair as being gay in a straight world. Think about it: how many kids have to gather their parents into a sports-like huddle and “confess” that they’re attracted to the opposite sex? “Mom, Dad, hear me out, I’m straight. I know you’re disappointed, but ...” Yeah, like when has *that* conversation ever taken place?

Okay, end of rant.

My leggings are coated with ice from the rink, but my muscles are so warm my knees tingle. Except for the past few weeks of summer, I do skate practice at 6:30 every morning, five days a week. For me, there's no, *Let's just play this sport for fun once a month or so*. You're either serious about heading for every skating competition within affordable range, or you're only lacing up the figure skates every December for the holidays. No middle ground in ice skating, no in-between. Which, as I step out of the rink and head away from the one place in the world I feel comfortable in my body, brings me back to my personal quest of trying to survive high school along with my aberrant "in-between" lust.

My stomach bounces around, not sure whether to be more nervous about the first day of high school, my body's bifurcated longings (bi-forking, get it?), or finally having that big talk with Sita. A quick three-turn, and I speed backward around the rink, looking behind me over my shoulder. Done in, I collapse onto the benches, my stiff fingers fumbling to undo my skates. The laces seem fused together and my gloves are drenched with ice crystals clinging to the finger tips. My heart's beating a tune along with the terrible music crackling through the speakers. I'm totally starving, with only minutes to get home, scarf down breakfast, and rush off to pick up Sita on our way to senior high. Gulp, first day of high school. Did I mention my idea for everyone wearing nametags to proclaim our sexual orientation? I'd wither into a stalk of thirty-week-old celery if I had to wear a nametag announcing *anything* about my sexuality at school. Or anywhere. I don't want to shout out loud and proud, I want to hide away, hushed and shushed. The nametag idea is—I am almost too

wretched to even admit this—for *me*. Because *I* don't know what I want. Who I want. Who I want to be when I'm wanting.

LESBO ALERT: SHE NEVER TOUCHES A CURLING IRON.

HET-GIRL ALERT: SHE LACES HER CANVAS SNEAKERS WITH GAUDY RIBBONS.