Je suis comme je suis:

It was a short phone call. The shortest she had ever received. Vanessa knew who it was. She didn't have to ask, she just knew. After all, how could she forget that wonderful accent? The sweet hoarse sound itself sparked a familiar reaction within her. It was short because Vanessa thought she had forgotten about *her*.

She blew out a soft sigh.

Who was she kidding? Vanessa *didn't want to forget her*. She *couldn't forget her*, no matter how hard she tried to. She just couldn't.

Vanessa bubbled with excitement as she grabbed her car keys from the table top and dashed outside.

She unlocked her car and slammed the door as she started the engine. As Vanessa raced down the road, in a hurry to see her, old memories began to cloud her thoughts.

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 It all happened before summer.

The sudden courage erupting inside, urging Vanessa to tell *them*. She tried to avoid it, deeming it was impossible to confide in *them*. It tore her heart when she saw that they were bursting with joy as the time neared to summer. The devilish children who flocked about the apartment rooms, squealed gleefully about events that were to take place, brooding teenagers conversed with strong vigour as smirks stretched across their hooded faces and the lifeless elderly beamed toothless smiles.

This odd exhilaration brought over a piercing wave of nostalgia that chilled Vanessa to the bone.

She didn't want to be the one to ruin the forgotten happiness.

"Vanessa, are you okay?" Rachel's' soft voice called out, features contorted with slight unease.

Said person grinned and nodded slightly, golden locks swaying. "I'm fine, Auntie."

Rachel seemed satisfied with that and headed over to the other adolescents, laughing at the joke that was shared.

Vanessa sighed softly, shook her head and snaked her way through the small crowd of children, towards Rachel.

She cleared her throat and had the latter's' attention. "I'm going to head out."

"How comes?"

Vanessa offered her a small smile from underneath her tawny hair, "Just need some air."

Rachel bit her lip and thought for a moment, "It's getting dark now. Will you be alright, or do you want me to come with you?"

"No, I can go on my own." Vanessa mumbled, getting ready to take off.

Rachel mouthed an 'okay' and gave her a quick hug before shooing her off.

Vanessa ran through the rotting grey walls of the narrow hallway, grabbed her old, battered ankle boots from the rickety wooden shelf and headed out of the buzzing apartment.

As she fled down the flight of worn stone stairs, footsteps faintly echoing with each step, her heart thumped loudly in her chest. The fear of loneliness began creeping in when she flung open the flats' bright, blue security gates. Vanessa felt the blazing sensation of guilt, shame and anger well up in the middle of her chest.

She let her legs guide her way through the empty, desolate streets of London, silhouettes of lampposts and tree formed slowly as the warm amber sunset disappeared behind the various shades of blue.

By the time those feelings dissipated, Vanessa found herself knocking on a brown oak door, the metallic numbers 21 illuminous in the dark.

She bit her lip, contemplating whether she should walk away or stay.

When Vanessa chose the former, back facing towards the house, a soft creaking stopped her in her tracks and the door was open.

Vanessa could feel Hana's soft brown eyes on her, boring holes into her skull and waiting for her to enter. Vanessa whipped backwards and threw herself at Hana, a low groan squeaked as the pair crashed onto the laminated floorboards with a gentle thud.

"Ow." Hana moaned, almost inaudible.

Vanessa didn't move, instead she stayed still and listened to the calming breaths of the latter. After a moment, Vanessa felt the toned arms snaking around her waist and heard a quiet chuckle.

"You know, I don't mind cuddling you like this, but I'd prefer to be inside rather than in my porch, Vanessa."

Vanessa hummed, picking herself up and strutted inside the house, leaving Hana on her own.

Hana grinned at this, running slim fingers through the shaven side of her hair and dusted herself off as she lurched over to close the porch door. She then switched off the sparkling spotlights and slammed the main door. As Hana trekked down the wide, lengthy corridor, she called out, "Did you have dinner yet."

"No, not hungry."

Hana shrugged her shoulders and proceeded to the kitchen. Knowing Vanessa for 4 years, Hana could tell that Vanessa was lying and prepared a sandwich for her. Once she finished, Hana found Vanessa spread across the black leather sofas in the spacious living room, watching a cartoon.

Hana didn't say a word and passed on the sandwich, sitting on the arm of the sofa.

"Thanks."

Hana nodded, "Do you need anything else?"

Vanessa shook her head, sat up and pulled Hana closer to her. Hana loosely wrapped her arms around Vanessa, slowly stroking her hair and breathing in her scent. Hana felt the slight tremors vibrating against her chest and hugged Vanessa tightly, "What's wrong?" She whispered tenderly through Vanessa's hair.

Vanessa pulled away slightly, head hung low as tears threatened to spill. "I couldn't them." She sobbed quietly.

Hana was silent as the sounds of Vanessa's faint whimpers filled the air. After it died down, Hana smiled at her as if assuring Vanessa that everything was alright. "You'll be able to tell them someday."

Vanessa frowned at this, "What if I can't? Then what?"

"They're your family. I'm sure they'll understand, besides it's summer now. Isn't it a perfect time to tell them?"

Vanessa rolled her eyes and shook her head, "It's because it's summer that I can't tell them. Everyone's excited, I can't just dump the fact that I like girls on them. They'll be crushed."

Hana chewed on her lip, unsure of what to say before Vanessa gasped and flung herself in Hana's lap. "Hey, can I stay over this summer? It'll be fun!"

"I'm sorry, you can't. Unless you want to stay on your own?"

"Wait, what?" Vanessa rose a brow, waiting for a reply that never came. "Well?" She asked.

"The thing is, I'm going back to France for a bit and I'm not sure how long it will be for."

"Why are you only telling this now?" Hurt washing over her features.

Hana shrugged her shoulders, "I was afraid."

Vanessa wrapped her arms around Hana's neck and leaned forward, pushing their foreheads close together. "When do you leave?"

"Next week-" Vanessa crashed their lips together, cutting Hana off and shoved her against the black leather. Hana responded roughly, trailing a hand down and violently stripping off their clothes.

It was a heated night. Low, soft moans filled the room as the pair burnt with a blazing desire, a thin layer of sweat covering their bodies whilst they engaged in sensual activities.

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"I'll call you." Hana said as she enveloped Vanessa.

"You better or I'll hunt you down in Paris." Vanessa joked, though they could hear the threatening tone.

Hana pecked Vanessa on the forehead and headed off to the queue. Vanessa stared at Hana's back as the sudden realisation settled in. Vanessa said it rarely, in fact she tried her upmost best to avoid saying it but watching Hana leave gave Vanessa the courage to do it.

Vanessa ran towards the line, slipping through the sea of people before snatching Hana's hand and sent them in a staggering stance as she kissed Hana desperately. Once Hana processed it, she replied enthusiastically. They were both panting heavily when they broke it off, tenderly holding each other. Vanessa smiled brightly and whispered into Hana's ear, "Je t'aime." Her voice was barely audible as she said it, yet Hana somehow heard the three simple but meaningful words.

"I love you too, Vanessa." Hana pecked her for the last time and watched Vanessa leave her sight with a small smile.

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The dining room was quiet when Vanessa finished. She sat down as the atmosphere thickened with suspense. The stifling silence embraced them, and all was tense.

"What is a lesbian?" A child asked, breaking the stillness of the room as old exploded with laughter. Some claiming it wasn't a big deal.

"I've known it since you were nine!" Rachel giggled, shaking her head slightly, "I didn't want to upset you by getting the wrong idea."

Vanessa was shocked, to say the least, even frightened of the bustling joy that settled in the air. She thought name-calling would follow, maybe some form of abuse but not this reaction. Definitely not her father engulfing her into a hug as the elderly followed suit.

It was possible that Vanessa let it go to her head, but she couldn't help it. She read many reliable sources of coming out and they had all ended tragically. Vanessa had it far too easy, there had to be something missing.

"I'm not okay with it." Right, she forgot the misery guts. "I don't to sleep next to *that*. What if she attacks me?"

"She wouldn't go for trash like you." Another adolescent chirped in. "But if I were Auntie Rachel, I'd be worried. Hey! Maybe you should sleep with one eye open?"

"Yeah! Have you seen the way she clings onto you? It's so gross!" This earned a wave of fake retches.

"I know right! She isn't normal."

After the snide comments, Vanessa had enough and stormed off into the shared rooms, slamming the door with brute force.

The next couple of months trudged on ever so slowly, however that didn't tether her high spirit for long. Vanessa had better things to do with her life, instead of worrying about irrelevant opinions, she focused on herself.

Even if Hana wasn't available, Vanessa would find some sort of activity to engage in whilst she waited for her.

Vanessa was happy with who she was and that was all that mattered. It was her life and she would live it the way she wanted. She was free to express herself and ignored those who tried to give her their two sense remarks.

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The airport was as boisterous as ever. People shrieking with delight, others saying their farewells and the staff announcements reverting from above. Vanessa stood at the entrance as she waited with a sign she had scrambled up at the very last minute. She looked left, right, left, right and left, yet nothing. She repeated this action every few minutes, hoping to get this over with so that she could give Hana a proper reunion.

Vanessa gasped as two familiar arms encircled her figure, a face burying itself in the crook of her neck and the warmth spreading all over her back like wild fire. Vanessa leaned into the embrace and barely felt the light kisses Hana left on her shoulder. Hana trailed the phantom touches up to Vanessa's ear and gently blew a breath, smirking when she felt Vanessa shiver slightly. "I'm home." She murmured.

Vanessa grinned, "Welcome home, Hana."

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