

## Ice Skates

I glided across the frozen pond, arms stretched gracefully out, head up, and one leg held up a foot or two behind me. Nothing daring. The other leg was slightly bent at the knee and springing gently to absorb the shock of the bumpy surface. The blades are sharpened concave, which grips the ice and is especially important on the bumpy frozen pond that I had to myself this winter evening. I was wearing my heavy wool Greatcoat that I bought in a second hand store. It was an oversized, solid dark blue herringbone weave and heavy as the dickens, but I felt padded. Six feet tall in skates, mostly legs, and over 50, I do fear falling. It's a long way down. I envy the little kids who look like marshmallow people, padded in puffy clothes that they can hardly move in, arms sticking straight out, waddling in their tiny skates like windup toys, skating almost on their ankles. But when they fall they appear to bounce right back up.

I practiced falling. I skated up to a good speed, and then let myself relax, collapsing cautiously and strategically into a sprawling slide. It became fun; falling on purpose diminished my fear of falling by accident. I took more risks rather than hold back in fear of what *could* happen. I got a lot more confident; I pretended I was Peggy Fleming.

I get excited watching videos of the great skaters. I feel their emotion, I somehow *become* them, sharing the joy and great energy that they emit even over TV. And when they fall, I hide my face in my hands and peak out between my fingers willing them to smile and be ok. It can happen so easily: One moment skating with mastery and confidence, then bam! – into a spinning slide for a seeming eternity before coming to a humiliating stop. I hold my breath. They must get up, and God help them, try to smile and continue their dance to its finish, sometimes brokenhearted, sometimes so bravely it inspires us. “Ah, the ups and downs of life! - such is life for us all,” I thought as I glided around the pond.

That afternoon I skated past sunset. The ice expands at the drop in temperature, and it's safer to get off the bumpy pond anyway when it gets dark. My intuition said, “Get off.” My inner kid said, “Ah lets just go around one more

time.” The curtain was closing on a perfect winter day. The sky was tinted with the deep blue colors of twilight, the tall Pines and Cottonwoods stood out in darkening shadow against the rosy alpenglow on the mountains behind them. Besides all that, I had gone to a lot of trouble to dress in warm layers and securely lace myself up “just so,” in my beat up old skates. I ignored the discomfort in my solar plexus and skated tentatively on anyway; the endorphins were flowing.

I was half way across the pond when I heard the ominous crack that reverberated like a shock wave, the vibration traveled up through my skates. I skidded to a stop and held my breath. The soft twilight around me now took on shades of a spooky movie. Gone were my Peggy Fleming fantasies, and lofty philosophizing. I moved slowly forward, eyes bulging. The mere thought of the ice cracking open and my falling through its jaws into the freezing water and sinking to the bottom was terrifying; the cold dark depths beneath the ice representing unspeakable fears. “How thick is that ice?” I worried as I looked down. “How deep is the water underneath?” Last summer poling the pond on a raft I measured ten feet in the center.

And then I saw it. A crack spanned the entire width of the pond only a few feet ahead of me. My stopping skills are sloppy - I skidded around flapping for balance. It didn't occur to me to just step over it. But Fate had a lesson for me I guess, because my skate met that crack. I had just enough time to get a glimpse of black water beneath as I tripped and flew over the crack, then went into a spinning sprawl for several yards on the other side. Ow, not fun; all that falling practice kaput.

I laid flat for a few seconds, then came slowly to my knees and up into a crouch, willing myself to be weightless. I skated slowly away from the crack, to the edge of the pond where my skates stopped abruptly. Arms flapping again, I pivoted around and fell on the solid snowy ground, panting, and smiled at the sky. I took a deep breath and watched my steamy exhale. Then I sat up and looked around. The pond was mysterious and still as the light was diminishing

fast now. I unlaced my old skates, and thought about a hot drink - maybe sweet milky tea.

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I have read that when you go to heaven you can do what ever you wish - just think it and it will be. One of the first things I will do is think up a gorgeous transparent pink skating rink lit magically from beneath, surrounded by snow-covered pines that reflect the rosy tones. I will be wearing a shimmering chiffon skating costume the color of strawberry swirl ice cream that Peggy Fleming would envy. I will skate and spin and glide with unmatched grace, doing moves never done before, and I will not know falling or error.

Naaa, on second thought, I'm not done with cold twilight trips around the bumps and cracks, and the slips and slides of life - some of them pretty funny! I'm not done yet with this adventure. So I smiled and got slowly and achingly back up on my feet and continued my dance... home.