



**STUDYDADDY**

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Now don't get me wrong. I mean, I want you to understand from the beginning that I'm not really so dumb. I know what a girl should do and what she shouldn't. I get around. I read. I listen to the radio. And I have two older sisters. So you see I know what's what. I know it's smart to wear tweed skirts and tight fitting sweaters and ballerina shoes. And I know that your hair should be short with that look of careful carelessness, and the peasant hankie should be draped cleverly around your neck, fastened with a ring. Now, me, I never wear a hankie, it makes my face seem too wide. I'm not exactly too small-town either. I read the Broadway columns. You get to know what New York boy is crazy about what Hollywood actress on the West Coast and what starlet is currently the prettiest and who eventually, will play Joan of Arc. It gives you that worldly feeling. I know that it is absolutely forbidden to wear coloured ankle-socks with high-heeled shoes or use Evening in Paris perfume with a tweed suit. But this isn't what I wanted to tell you. I just wanted to give you the general idea that I'm not so dumb. It is important that you understand that.

You See, it was funny how I met him. It was winter night like any other night. And I didn't have my chemistry done either. But the way the moon silvered the twigs and the snow-drifts, I just could not stay inside. The skating rink isn't far from our house—you can make it in five minutes if the side walks aren't slippery, so I went skating. I remember it took me a long time to get ready that night because I had to darn my skating socks first. I don't know why they are always wear out so fast—just in the toes, too. And then I brushed my hair hard, so hard it clung to my hand and stood up around my head.

My skates were hanging by the back door all nice and shiny, for I'd just gotten them for Christmas and they smelled so queer. My dog walked with me as far as the corner. She panted along beside me and her hot breath made a frosty little balloon on the end of her nose. The night was breathlessly quiet and the stars winked down like a million flirting eyes. It was all so lovely.

It was all so lovely; I ran most of the way and it was lucky the sidewalks had ashes on them or I would have slipped.

I had to cut across someone's back garden to get to the rink, and I was out of breath when I got to the shanty—out of breath with running and with the loveliness of the night. Shanties are always such friendly places. There was a delicious smell from the iron stove. Girls burst through the door laughing with snow on their hair. A boy grabbed the hat from a blonde and stuffed it into an empty shoe.

It didn't take me long to get my own skates on and I put my shoes under the bench—far back where they wouldn't get knocked around and would be easy to find when I wanted to go home. I walked out on my toes into the night air.

It was snowing a little outside—quick, eager little flakes that melted as soon as they touched your hand. I don't know where the snow came from for there were stars out. Or maybe the stars were in my eyes and I just kept seeing them every time I looked up into the darkness. I waited a moment. You know, to start to skate at a crowded rink is like jumping on a moving merry-go-round. Once in, I went all right. At least, after I found out exactly where the rough ice was. It was "round, round, jump the rut, round, round, jump the rut, round, round—."

And then he came. All of sudden his arm was around my waist so warm and tight and he said, "Mind if I skate with you?" and then he took my other hand. That's all there was to it. Just that and then we were skating. It wasn't that I had never skated with a boy before. Don't be silly. I told you before I get around. But this was different. He was smooth! He was a big shot up at school and the best dancer in town. Don't you see? This was different.

At first I can't remember what we talked about, I can't even remember if we talked at all. We just skated and skated and laughed every time we came to that rough spot and pretty soon we were laughing all the time at nothing at all. It was all so lovely.

Then we sat on the big snow bank at the edge of the rink and just watched. It was cold at first, even with my skating pants on, sitting on that hard heap of snow, but pretty soon I got warm all over. He threw a handful of snow at me and it fell in a little white shower on my hair and he leaned over to brush it off. I held my breath. The night stood still.

Then he sat up straight and said, "We'd better start home." Not "shall I take you home?" or "Do you live far?" but "We'd better start home." See, that's how I knew he wanted to take me home. Not because he had to but because he wanted to. He went to the shanty to get my shoes. "Black ones", I told him. "Same size as Garbo's." And laughed again. He was still smiling when he came back and took off my skates and tied the wet skate strings in a knot and put them over his shoulder. Then he held out his hand and helped me up from the snow bank. I brushed off the seat of my pants and we were ready.

It was snowing harder now. Big, quiet flakes that clung to us lovingly. It was all so lovely that I was sorry I lived only a few blocks away. He talked softly as we walked as if every little word was a secret. "Did I like swing and did I plan to go to college next year and had I a cousin who knew his brother?" A very respectable sort of conversation and then finally—"How nice I looked with snow in my hair and had I ever seen the moon—so close?" and then we were home.

The porch light was on. My mother always puts the porch light on when I go away at night. And we stood there a moment by the front steps and the snow turned pinkish in the light and a few feathery flakes settled on my hair. Then he took my skates and put them over my shoulder and very very close to my cheek softly said, "Good night now. I'll call you," he said.

I went inside then and in a moment he was gone. I watched him from my window as he went down the street. I could hear him whistling softly and I couldn't tell if it was he or my heart whistling out there in the night. And then he was gone, completely gone.

I shivered. Somehow the darkness seemed changed. The stars were hard little lights up in the sky and the moon had a sharp yellow glare. The air was suddenly cold and the wind wiped out his footsteps. Everything was quiet.

But he'd said, "I'll call you." That's what he said, "I'll call you." I couldn't sleep all night.

And that was last Thursday. Tonight is Tuesday. Tonight is Tuesday and my homework is done and I darned some stocking that really didn't need it, and I worked a cross-word puzzle and I listened to the radio and now I'm just sitting. I'm just sitting because I can't think of anything else to do. I can't think of anything, anything but snowflakes and ice skates and a yellow moon and Thursday night. The telephone is sitting on the corner table with its old black face turned to the wall. I don't even jump when it rings any more. My heart still prays but my mind just laughs. Outside the night is still—so still I think I'll go crazy. And so I'm sitting here and I'm not feeling anything. I'm not even sad because all of a sudden I know. I can sit here now and forever and laugh and laugh while the tears run salty in the corners of my mouth. For all of a sudden, I know, I know what the stars knew all the time—he will never, never call—never.



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