

# The age-old twirl of boy and girl

Around and around they go, smooth and jerky, some serious, but most smiling and laughing. At the far end, high on a wall overlooking the outdoor rink in downtown Providence, hangs a big metal heart glowing with red light bulbs.

There is girl in black tights wearing white figure skates and white stretchy-gloves, holding her arms out to her sides as she delicately carves the ice. Her dark hair is pulled back in a ponytail.

There is a boy about the same age, 12 or so, in rented hockey skates. He is skating awkwardly, but with great energy around the rink, swinging his arms, his cheeks red. On his head is a woolly blue Patriots hat. He's wearing bluejeans and an old, quilted parka. It's cold, but he doesn't have any gloves on.

The girl in the figure skates is as graceful as the boy is herky-jerky, but they are both having a sublime time. You can see it in their faces. He is like a Siberian Husky on the first cold day, running around with his tongue hanging out, and she is all concentration and grace.

And then he notices her. He hangs onto the boards, taking weight off his aching feet and watches her, mesmerized.

When he pushes off the boards he tries to skate better, fighting his inexperience and the lousy rental skates.

Each time he comes around the rink he gets a little closer to her, but she doesn't notice him.

He throws himself down.

She skates backwards around him, flicking up one blade with each stroke, literally skating circles around him.

He pulls himself up. If only he could do — something!

She glides over to the boards and he sees his chance. He lurches over to her in splayed strokes, his arms shooting out at all angles. He hangs over the boards next to her, turns to her and says, "You skate beautiful."

She looks at him, smiles a little smile.

"Thanks," she says, and pushes off, turning extending her arms sideways and strokes the entire circumference of the rink, a swan's wings outstretched, an angel.

Leaning back against the boards beneath the metal heart with its glowing red bulbs, the boy watches the angel, figuring.



After a couple more turns around the rink, she stops in front of him.

"Why are you watching me?" she asks bluntly.

He's taken off guard.

"Because ... I don't know," he stammers.

She pushes off on the front teeth of one blade and returns to carving circles. She spins. She spins again. He pushes off from the boards and skates down to the far end of the rink. He skates back. She's skating toward the door in the boards, she opens it and steps outside the rink on the tip-toes of her skates.

There's a man there, surely her father. He's well-dressed, wearing a tan trench coat and a fedora. He's watching her take off her skates. The boy is losing her, he's panicking, yet all he can do is stand there. The man looks up and sees him. He waits until the girl puts her shoes on and he touches the girl on her shoulder and points to the boy.

The boy smiles at her.

"Will you be here tomorrow?" she asks him.

How can he? He nods his head. "Yes," he says.

She smiles. "Happy Valentine's Day."

"Happy Valentine's Day," he says back.

When the man and the girl turn to leave, the man places his hand upon the crown of the girl's head. The boy feels like it's his own hand.

Perhaps tomorrow, I will go ice skating myself. But for today, watching was enough. It lightened my heart and made me feel hopeful again.

— Charles Pinning, an occasional contributor, lives in Providence.