

## The Zamboni

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It was Rita's last night at the rink, and the jukebox was taken. "Boys," Lou said, glaring over her shoulder at them as they laughed raucously and queued up rap songs, one of them kneeling by the coin slot with a fistful of quarters. Rita looked over and touched my arm. "Liz, it's really okay," she said softly. "We can play it during the car ride home."

I stood cross-armed, watching the boys. Then I sighed. "Twenty more minutes," I said, and Rita and Lou nodded. "Then we'll talk to 'em." Lots of beginner skaters that night. They clung to the dasher boards, trembling slightly. An older ice patroller was offering advice to a group of them when we came in. "You gotta keep your knees bent," he was telling them, pantomiming skating, "or you'll look like a lolloping giraffe." I took Rita's hands in mine and began to skate backwards, pulling her steadily across the ice. Lou, a longtime figure skater, kicked off to the center of the rink, managing a pirouette in the center. Rita watched her, then looked off wistfully to the dasher boards, her legs wobbling. "You'll never swim if you're barely in the water!" I said, and her grip on my hands tightened. She cast a glance at me and then rolled her eyes in that half-playful way of hers.

"I don't know why you insist on pulling me around like this. It can't be much fun for you!" she said, and looked up at me, her gray eyes iridescent in the pale light of the rink. Her hands warm in mine. *You know I love it*, I almost told her, but instead I said, "Well, they probably do a lot of ice skating in Minnesota. I've gotta make sure you're prepared!" And I smiled at her to seem optimistic, hoping her face wouldn't change, but it did. The light faded from her

expression and she looked away, out across the ice. When her eyes came back to mine, there was a strange sort of intensity in them. Like there was something she wanted to say.

She stopped us and intertwined my fingers with hers. She was just about to speak when Lou skidded over, spraying our jeans with shaved ice.

“They’re gone!” she exclaimed, and we looked toward the entrance, where the boys from earlier were flooding in.

“Oh, guys, it really doesn’t matter that much...” Rita began, but I interrupted her.

“It’s the last time we’ll get to play it together, Ri,” I said, looking at her.

“Yeah! Like... *ever!*” Lou added, but Rita was still gazing at me, and I hoped the flush in my cheeks looked like it was from the cold. We bounded inside to find the jukebox deserted. I fished a dollar bill from my pocket and handed it to Rita, and she typed in the song name. But the rink was closing when we went back out. “Zamboni break,” Lou complained as our song started to play, and the last of the skaters stumbled off the ice. *You’re picture-perfect blue... sunbathing on the moon.* The Zamboni glided out onto the ice. I looked at Rita, whose eyes were fixed on the looming blue shape of it. *First kiss just like a drug... under your influence.* “Always some kind of Zamboni,” I said, my voice so soft she couldn’t have heard it. She mouthed along with our song: *This must be love.*