

Skating in the Woods

The laughs and shrieks of girls rang through the chilly air. It was midwinter at Girl Scout camp. The little skating pond on the edge of the woods was filled with girls of all ages, some flying across the smooth surface, others flailing to keep upright. I had just reached the opposite edge of the pond, near the forest. Two other girls I knew well were standing at the edge of the woods as well. A small path covered in snow led through the woods. There were a few marks in the snow, the shapes of skate blades showing that the path was made of ice. We skated forward a few more feet on to the path. The ice felt solid. I glanced back to where our troop leaders were watching the other girls skate. The path curved around through the trees and out of sight. With one last glance back, we started forward. Our icy road took a curve off the one side. We had to dodge the trees. As we went deeper into the woods, we could barely see or hear the other girls anymore, just our own breathing and the rustle of leaves in the cold wind. An old rotting log had fallen across the path. We slowed our skating so we could step over it. Everything was so pristine out here. No footprints or snow angels on the ground. Even the tracks we had been following had stopped a long time ago. We were so deep in the woods now, that we could no longer hear anything but each other and the sounds of the forest. There is something special about being the first to make a mark in clean snow. You don't want to ruin its perfect surface, but you also want the pleasure of ruining its perfection to be all yours. Everything was so bright white out here, except for the dark trunks of trees. I heard the fluttering of wings behind me, a blue jay. It added a splash of color to the landscape. The trail seemed to be nearing its end, a large upright tree stood in the center of the path. It had a large hollow hole directly through the center so you could see to the other side. When we reached the tree, we stopped to gaze through. I wondered out loud if I could fit through the hole. My ice skate slid through hole to the other side, and I ducked the rest of myself through the hole. My snow pants kept me from being scratched by the bark. I stood on the other side, waiting for my friends to follow. I looked down at my skates and my heart sank faster than my skates in the mud I saw below my feet. We had reached the end of our icy path. The silence of the forest was broken by a

shout from someone back at the pond. One of the other girls calling us back. I scrambled back through the hollow tree and we flew back as fast we could with muddy skates. Our rush startled some cardinals sitting on a branch, their noisy calls filled the air. Red fluttering wings rose above us as we tore out of the woods. Behind us, the perfect white snow had been filled with the marks of our skates. The other girls from our troop grabbed our hands to bring us out into the open again. Everyone else had left. We glided across the pond to take off our muddy skates. The other girls scolded us for running off so far without telling anyone. We reached the opposite shore and I glanced back to the little path. One of the cardinals was flying back in, restoring the peace we had disturbed. It wouldn't be long before any trace of us was erased. But for a few short minutes it had been ours. Our own private wonderland.