“What’s in it for me?”
“You said you were a writer, didn’t you or rather a ‘would-be’
writer? Well, I supply the material and you write.”
“Care for a drink, Chris?”
“Manhattan, lova.”
“Hey, George! One Manhattan and one Scotch and Soda, please.”
“You say ‘please’ to a nigger?”
“I learned that you always say please when you ask someone
for something.”
“How quaint! Oh me, I am getting tired. Been in town long,
Joe?”
“Only about six weeks. The Gafneys were the first people I
met here. Really fine people, I’d say.”
“Well, Pete’s O.K. in my book, but that Helen . . . ”
“Now, let’s don’t get into any of this small town gossip. I hap-
pen to like Helen.”
“You would!”
“Now, what was that supposed to mean?”
“You’re male, aren’t you? I have yet to see a male who didn’t
like that cold-fish. She absolutely snows them with her that Southen
chawm of hers. I wouldn’t doubt she’d ‘chawm’ ’em right into the
bedroom if it weren’t for her watch-dog husband.”
“Sweetheart, you’re a typical five-letter woman. I can find lots
of those around. Unfortunately, they’re not all quite as obvious
about it. Good-luck, doll. You’ll need it.”

With that, the tall, thin stranger lifted his gaunt frame from the
overstuffed chair and headed toward the door.

“W ell, wonder what’s eating him? ’
I thought he looked
likely!”

**Skating**

*Priscilla Thomas*

**W**ith spring better days came. They had bluer skies, and the
sun used to shine on trees and drip from the branches when
they were still wet. And in the spring, everyone skated. Of
course, I skated alone more than with the other children, because I
only knew two of them on my block, and besides, I could go faster
and do more of what I wanted when I skated alone. Skating was
my first love, except that I used to like to bounce a ball . . . thud,
thud . . . against a sunny and yet dark red brick chimney. The
lot was very narrow there, and that stopped me from making long
throws against the side of the house, but I still loved playing with
that rubber ball.

But when the afternoons were nice and when the sidewalks were
not too wet, I would often skate for an hour or so after school. The
sidewalk was long and stretched for three blocks. Parts of it were
pebbly and parts smooth and I could never miss all the cracks, and when I’d hit one, I’d always think—I wonder if it’s true; I wonder if Mother’s back will break—but of course, it never did and after awhile I learned to forget all about the silly little poem. In fact, I liked jumping on cracks.

Some of the blocks in the sidewalk were hollow and made funny sounds when I jumped on them. Others were solid and I got so used to going along and hearing a regular song that I would feel the beat of it in my bed at night before I would fall asleep—hollow, solid, grind, rurr . . . rurr . . . grind, hollow, solid, bump, hollow, bump, grind, grind, rurr . . . rurr . . . . I could be anything I wanted to be when I skated . . . a princess, the wife of the President of the United States, an actress, a singer. I made up so many make-believe stories, and some were about pretend people, but most were about me. They were all make-believe.

Mother used to yell a little when I skated, because she thought I wasted so much time doing it. But I made good grades and picked up my underthings, and she couldn’t say much. A lot of the time she was gone, and Ophelia, our skinny, pale-brown maid (the only good maid, mother would say, that we ever had), didn’t really care what I did as long as I stayed out of the living room with my shoes on and praised her housework and told her how well she had polished the ugly fireplace. And so some days, I would skate for hours and hours.

I didn’t even think about anything sometimes when I skated—I simply knew that I loved it. I loved the feel of the sidewalk rolling past underneath me; I loved the feel of balancing weight from left to right and left to right; I loved the feel of stopping and reaching out my leg without even thinking about it to turn myself into my own sidewalk which ran to the mud-spattered yet clean-looking white front porch. I loved all that. I liked pretending . . . I always had made up stories . . . but on skates everything else passed me and as the houses and the grass skated by me and I stood there hanging between cement tops and sky bottoms, I could make up the best stories!

One day, one of my best friends at school (I was in the sixth grade) told me about a roller-skating rink, and it all seemed like some television program to me. They played music there, she told me, and the girls all went on Friday nights, and if you had a short skirt you wore it and if not you wore what you had and you learned to roller-skate and sometimes the junior high boys came up and skated with you and put their arms around your waist, and it was most fun, and I wanted to go so much.

I laughed myself all the way home that day and I missed all the cracks, and I ran panting into the kitchen and told Mother, and she said “No.” Daddy said “No” too, but he told me why . . . something about the fact that people who go to roller-skating rinks are not always nice and that I could certainly not go there with other
sixth grade girls on Friday nights.

I didn’t cry, because I had learned long ago that crying was a waste of salt water, and so I just walked out to the garage and took down the dull silver skates from the hook in the wall and sat on the sun-warmed cement driveway that made my bones ache with cold after I stood up, and I put on my skates. Up and down, back and forth, I went, until Mother called me in for dinner. My tears hurt in my chest, but I knew there was no reason for crying.

Daddy loved me very much, though, and he did not forget my question about the skating rink. One morning he woke me up early and told me that I could get up and get dressed if I wanted to have some fun. Daddy had been working on a church building—"roughing it in" he called it—so that the church members could save money and send more to the missionaries sooner. And he said that if I wanted to take my skates and be very good that I could skate inside the church which was not at all finished, and use it for my own rink. I wanted to go, so I dressed and took my skates and put the dusty skate key on its twine around my neck and went with Daddy and Mother in the car several miles away.

When we got to the church, I noticed that from the outside it was very ugly and looked square and gray and that the grass around was beaten down. The sidewalks were lovely, but a little too rippled to make for smooth stops and turn-abouts. I told my father about the ugly outside of the church, and he told me to be quiet and reverent and that someday, when it was all finished, it would be very beautiful.

Inside, there was just one large space with doors leading in four directions. It must have been as big as the downstairs of our house without walls and there was a cement floor smoother than any sidewalks that I had ever seen and it ran down to a sort of stage at the front. The walls were all cement, and there was cement dust on everything and smells like insulation before it’s nailed up and paint before it’s brushed on and stale smoke. Daddy opened two windows and then told me to be careful and not hit anything but to have fun. I sat down on a large paint can—the lid was not on tight, because it hissed underneath me—but it was a seat, and I fastened on my skates and then stood up.

It seemed very funny, because I went around and around and I didn’t have to go just back and forth and up and down. I could go sideways and back, sideways and forward, sideways and around, to a window, away from a window, and then I would go crashing down the floor into the stage. Daddy would yell at me, but he wasn’t really mad, because he knew as well as I did that this was the most beautiful private roller-skating rink in the world.

That building always felt good inside, because it was not hot and not cold and spring would push itself through the windows like a soft blanket. So many spring Saturday mornings I would go there with my Daddy! He and a close friend—I called him “Uncle Dale”
—would work outside, and I would talk to them only to get dimes to take down to the drugstore on the corner and buy ice cream cones. And then I would go back and skate.

I was a housewife—here was my living room along the wall between these two windows, there was the dining room in the middle, the kitchen was on the other side, between the two white paint cans and the short boards without nails, and the bedrooms ran across the front next to the stage and between more stained windows. Or maybe I was a ballerina—behind me was a stage full of young men in costumes of green velvet and gold braiding, and to my left was the Queen of England and Prince Philip. In front were the persons who came to see me, but my parents were high in a box seat crying a little. Music began in my head and I hummed and I danced... not very well, of course, for I had never taken lessons, but on roller-skates you can pretend you are dancing anyway with smooth cement underneath and a white ceiling above me.

After a while, they did something to the walls and made them pale green, and added a pale brown altar. And of course, these things meant that I must be more careful. I couldn't bump into the walls and when I skated down the floor, I had to reach my hands far out ahead of my stomach and grab the altar and jump up on my toes before my skates bumped into it. My shoes got scuffed, but I only smiled when Mother would scream at me, for my home-room teacher had told me something about responsibility and why it always went along with privilege, and I thought that it was my responsibility to dodge cans, and boxes, and cement bags, and pale green walls, and altars for the privilege of skating in that very beautiful rink.

Then one Saturday morning, Daddy didn't come into my bedroom, but I heard him moving around, and I slid into the kitchen pulling a dress over my shoulders. When I came through the door, I saw him there with his green trousers and his hat on, and I knew he was going to work at the church, because he never went around in those clothes on other days. I said “Daddy, aren't we going to church today?” And he said, “No... dear... not today. They are going to put in the flooring today and next week the pews and that means there won't be anyplace to skate. You just won't be able to waste your time there!” Then he laughed and patted me on the behind, and told me to go out and try the sidewalks for a while.

I never cried, because I had learned long ago that crying is a waste of salt water, and so I just went outside and picked up my rubber ball lying by the back door and bounced it—thud, thud,—against the side of the house. Just as I had started making up a beautiful story about me and the home-room teacher (I loved him then), my Daddy came out. He must have heard the thuds, because Mother said it always echoed in the house and sounded like someone was trying to knock it down. Daddy took two steps around the corner and said “... that ball—we could use that ball on top of the
steeple—we could paint it, cut it to fit . . .” He looked at it and let his fat fingers run over the blue and red smoothness of it. Then he said “. . . honey, could Daddy use this? I would buy you a new one next week, you know.” And of course, I could never refuse my Daddy anything and so I said “Yea.” And he took the ball and I walked with him out to the pick-up truck and waved good-by.

Then I dragged back to the house and there was nothing to do, because I had no ball to throw against the chimney and roller-skating on the pebbly, cracked, noisy, string sidewalk after my beautiful church-rink was like drinking milk after you had tasted Coca-Cola.

Later, Daddy took me by the church, and my ball on the steeple was beautiful and it did add to the whole church—Daddy said all colonial churches need balls on their steeples. We went there on Sundays for a while, and I used to sit in the auditorium, near where my kitchen had been. Daddy would remind me to be quiet and bow my head and pray and listen to the scripture and the sermon.

And that was not very hard for me to do, because I would day-dream . . . I had nothing against churches, but I could never stop thinking about what a beautiful roller-skating rink that building could have been.

Three Time Loser
Margaret Hiles

The sidewalk ended at the alley where last night’s rain had turned the hard-packed earth into slime. This made walking difficult because I wanted to keep my new shoes shiny. I picked my way along, trying to find something solid to step on. I raised my eyes only long enough to look at the house numbers. Finally, across the street, I saw it. The number was the same as the one on the slip of paper in my pocket. I stopped a minute and stared at the house. It was a small white bungalow, now situated in a sea of mud. Two decaying planks led from the street to the steps. The porch was wooden and high with two cement blocks on each of the four corners holding it up. Around the porch was a narrow board railing. At the side a large square addition gave the house a peculiar shape. I started on, crossed the street, walked up onto the porch, put down my suitcase and pulled at my clothes. From the inside of the house I could hear voices but the minute I knocked they ceased abruptly. I heard steps and the door opened with a squeak. A tall, gaunt man with a bony, sallow-complexioned face stood before me.

“Yes?” Then he saw my suitcase. “If you’re selling something, we don’t want any.” He began to close the door.

“Sir, I’m—my name is Will Glaze. Warden Bean sent me here. He said—”

The man looked at me. “Yes, I know. I forgot you were coming today. Come in.”

I stepped into a dark room, overcrowded with furniture. At