

She Should Have Gone To Nagano

It all seemed so incredibly ironic and the local media in Portland was having a field day with it. Here the local hero, who had brought home the glory of Olympic gold from Tokyo in 1964, now had two daughters who probably would share the same spotlight after they returned from Japan 34 years later. It was all too good to be true.

Portland didn't have too many athletic giants to brag about... Terry Baker and his Heisman trophy had been lost in a short and very unremarkable career in the NFL. Mel Renfro went on to years of "all pro" status with the Dallas Cowboys but had been retired for a long, long time. Damon Stoudamire still had a lot to prove, Rick Wise had a short career with the Red Sox, and Keith Lampard never quite made it.

But the Olympics create different heroes. A gold medal carries an aura forever.

Many of the old timers remembered the excitement of those days and the black and white telecasts from Tokyo. Two local boys were making incredible waves on the international sports scene. Don Schollander was the golden boy of the Tokyo Olympics but his childhood friend and college teammate, Larry Garrison, was almost as brilliant with his three silvers and the gold for the 4 X 100 relay. To anyone who lived in the region that published image in *The Oregonian* of those two local lads embracing on the medal stand in front of the flag was etched forever in memory.

Now, more than 30 years later, one of them was surely going to taste that moment again. Larry Garrison's girls were destined to compete for the top prize in the figure skating competition in Nagano and all of the Northwest was going to be feeling the execution of their every move.

It wasn't that Larry had set out to create Olympic champions, it's just that his two little girls really had the bloodline. After Tokyo Larry returned to Oregon to begin a graduate program in engineering. He met and wed a pretty young volleyball player and figure skater from what was then Portland State College, Evie Trainor. One day, soon after their honeymoon, Evie and Larry were skiing up at Timberline on Mt. Hood and she fell on a mogul, wrenching her knee and damaging ligaments. That little mishap ended any serious athletic activity for the lady but she didn't seem to mind for she was a young bride with a handsome, famous husband and she was ready to settle down in the role of wife and mother.

Within three years Providence Hospital gave them two precious young daughters, Kelsey and Kami, and life could not have been better for the small family. Larry's construction business was really growing rapidly in the exploding economy of Portland's era of massive growth and influx. Everyone wanted to do business with (and rub shoulders with!) an Olympic hero.

But, Shakespeare said that into every life, no matter how golden, some rain must fall. He was not wrong in the case of the Garrisons. One day, when the girls were still very small, Evie was on her way home up the rain slicked pavement of Belmont street up to the side of Mount Tabor. Suddenly a bakery truck swerved to miss a car pulling out of the parking lot of the gas station at the corner of 60th and hit Evie's station wagon head on. Though the entry way to the hospital was only a matter of a few hundred yards away there was nothing that Dr. Gardner's emergency staff of the Portland Sanitarium could do. The pretty mother of two was dead before they could remove her from the car.

Four days later two little girls stood in their best little dresses in the drizzle of Mount Scott, not understanding why Mommy was not standing beside Daddy and why Daddy said Mommy was not going to be able to come home anymore.

As the little children grew their favorite image was the 11X14 picture at the foot of the staircase that showed their beautiful Mommy forever young and frozen in a tight spiral as the blades of her skates glistened against the ice. Kelsey and Kami wanted to be just like Mommy.

And so it was that Larry Garrison never had to push his two young girls to any athletic activities. From the time they were very young they both had a vision of recapturing

the joy of their childhood by gracefully recreating the beauty of their mother on ice. The father never forced or threatened or coerced the girls to practice, it seemed that they both cherished the fulfillment of a disciplined life and they both had a burning desire to excel in skating. He had no agenda about imposing the memories of his accomplishments on the children, they yearned for the experience themselves.

After Evie's death Larry invested himself into his girls. His business had become sufficiently prosperous and self-perpetuating that he was able to trust his staff for extended periods of time to carry the work on. He remained as active in his profession as he could but his girls were, without question, his highest priority.

Kelsey and Kami loved to go to anything related to skating. It didn't matter if the Ice Follies, the Holiday on Ice, the World on Ice, or even any minor local competition was available, Larry Garrison's kids were ready to go. They'd sit enraptured as they observed the skills of the various competitors and performers. An amazed father would see them prancing about the house, emulating the moves of the graceful ladies in the skates and he knew that he had to help them pursue their dreams.

Larry Garrison knew swimming. He didn't know much about figure skating at all. But, he put his well focused attention into learning all he could for his girls. He read books, purchased teaching videos, and talked to skating coaches from all over the world. He was determined that he was going to give his two daughters the best opportunity to fulfill their dreams that he could. Skating was alien to him but he was going to master the discipline for his girls.

Fairly early on in the process it was evident that both of his children had inherited the best of the mind-body coordination from both mother and father. Each of the girls exhibited, nearly from the beginning, a real grace and sense of presentation that was far beyond their early maturity. Everyone remarked that they saw incredible promise in the Garrison girls.

Finally, when Kelsey was nearly nine and Kami had just turned eight Larry acceded and entered them into a Portland area competition. That day Kelsey took home her first blue ribbon and Kami came in second. It was the beginning of many 1-2 finishes for the Garrison sisters. Sometimes Kami would come out on top and sometimes it would be Kelsey. Sometimes they would each win their bracket if there was an age

division that separated them. Rarely would any other competitor even be close to the level of scoring of Evie's girls.

After years of progressing up through the ranks of various state level competitions and nationals the national media was beginning to take notice of "Portland's Golden Girls". When they were still early teenagers Sports Illustrated ran a major article on the phenomenon of two daughters of an Olympic hero who were destined for their own glory, perhaps in the same country as their father had attained his so many years before.

Portland was certainly providing enough opportunities for the girls to skate. The original rink at the Lloyd Center was multiplied by occasional access to the ice at the Memorial Coliseum, a new facility out on 82nd Street and Larry even put his considerable local influence toward adding a rink into the new Clackamas Towne Center while it was on the drawing board. He coveted having a practice site for his girls somewhat nearer their southeast suburban home and was tired of the continual lessening of available ice time for skaters as hockey leagues continued to abound and expand.

Larry understood the economic ramifications for the rink owners. A hockey league guarantees that management will have about 40 players paying for an hour and then they can immediately turn it over to another 40. Hockey players are ready to go almost 24 hours a day. Kelsey and Kami were too advanced to just go practice at a "general skate time" when the public could use the ice. Their routines required the full space of the rink. At times it seemed prohibitive for Larry to keep trying to make arrangements for ice time at all hours of the day and night just so his girls could keep their skills sharp.

Not only was he able to sway the mall planners to include the new rink into the facility plans, he was also able to get the management to adopt a policy that hockey was to be a secondary priority for the ice at the Towne Center. When that statement was adopted Larry really rejoiced. He did, after all, not just find hockey to be a time competitor with his girls but he generally found the whole mentality and world of hockey to be barbaric. Larry's attitude toward the players and the game could be summed up pretty easily, "Hockey is a sweaty sport that seems to bring out the brute in people."

His perception of hockey was that it was a smelly, violent sport played by men who seemed to relish being vulgar in a group. To the figure skating coach there was no more profane place on the face of the earth than a hockey locker room.

Wouldn't you know it? Life changed for the Garrison family because of a young hockey player.

One evening, very late, just as Kami was coming off the ice from her ritual and practice a ruggedly handsome young player, Brett Bevary, jumped over the boards to try to beat a teammate who had just thrown a puck onto the ice. In his haste he collided with the lithe young skater and sent her sprawling.

Kami was unhurt and Brett looked down at the pretty young thing as she began to get up. He gave her his best gentlemanly impression as he reached out to help her up. "Hey, sweetheart, sorry about that. You o.k.?"

"Yes," the demure young skater replied as she looked up at the handsome young devil. "I'm really all right." He had the bluest eyes she'd ever seen and his shiny black hair fell out in waves from under his helmet just like his hero, Jaromir Jagr. She'd never seen anyone with such an animal magnetism. She knew right away that this 17 year old was a little wild and probably not the kind of young man that her dad would approve of but she found him incredibly intriguing.

"Hey, you're one of those Garrison girls, aren't you? I've seen you on the news and stuff."

"Yes, I'm Kami," she responded.

"Well, I'm Brett, Brett Bevary and someday you're going to see me on the news too 'cause I'm going to play for the Detroit Red Wings," he bragged. "They don't know it yet, but someday I'm going to wear that red uniform and make all the bucks and get any girl in town that I want!"

"Any girl?", she feigned shock to him.

"You've got that right, sweetheart... any girl! And that includes a pretty figure skater like you!", and with that brash statement he raced off across the ice to a loose puck and let go of a slap shot that nearly shattered the plexiglas above the boards at the blue line.

"Remember me!", he shouted. "Someday you'll hear of me again!"

It was prophetic. No one could have known at that moment that Kami Garrison was beginning a downward spiral that would destroy her dreams forever for it was soon after that Brett found out her number and called her at home. (Kami never knew that he broke into the office of the rink to look it up on the manager's Rolodex file.) She found herself talking to him on the phone for more than an hour. He seemed entrancing and wild and a bit forbidden.

The 15 year old soon began to make excuses to her father for why she wanted to go to the mall or to stay after practices later than usual. Larry Garrison began to notice that Kami's concentration was obviously slipping. The intensity of her desire of perfection in her routines was becoming fractured and she began to be a bit insolent when he'd make suggestions or question her mental focus. "I'm o.k. You don't have to watch over me like a child!", she'd shout.

In a matter of months Kami learned that Brett had a real taste for alcohol and drugs and she was introduced into a world that had never touched the lovely home on Clarkston Lane. Through all of this Kelsey and Kami became more distant. The older daughter sensed the growing tension and she threw herself into her practices with all the more fire and intensity. She didn't understand it but part of it was an unspoken need for more of her father's attention for it was evident that the squeaky wheel was getting all the grease.

After three years it all blew up. One August night there was a terrible fight in the entryway of the house. It was very late but Kami was determined that she was going out once again. Her father was clear that he'd had enough. "This relationship has ended!", he announced and then young woman screamed back at her dad.

"No! I won't let you do this to me. I'm 18 and I can do what I _____ like and there's not a _____ thing you can do about it!"

"And what about your dream, young lady?", the father was desperately grasping at straws. "What about all the hopes you've invested into your skating?"

"_____ that! I don't need to be treated like a child and I will do what I _____ please and you can just _____ all this. If I want to go to the Olympics I don't need you and I don't need your help!"

The young girl grabbed her purse, quickly turned, and slammed the door so hard that it nearly broke the beveled glass out of the frame. She ran down the steps and found Brett waiting in his pickup. He had a plan and she decided it was time she started living her own life. Brett squealed his tires down the driveway and raced out onto Clarkston with the radio pounding the rivets loose on the truck's bed. Kami was free. They could go to Detroit and follow Brett's dream and no one could stop them.

They'd been discussing it for weeks. Brett knew that he'd never be seen by the scouts of the Red Wings in the amateur leagues in Portland. He figured his only chance to impress them was to walk right up and knock their sock off at their training camp in Port Huron.

One time Kami had asked why it was so important that he play for Detroit, after all, Jaromir Jagr played for Pittsburgh. "Hey, that's easy. The Red Wings are the 'Motor City Murderers'. Nobody plays as tough as they do. They intimidate their opponents into submission." The young man got a wild, almost frightening look as he continued, "With the Red Wings it's not enough to just win, you have to punish them as you're beating them on the scoreboard," he let out a sinister laugh, "and even if the enemy happens to win the Red Wings make them hurt so much they probably don't care what the score was at the end of the game!"

Kami found it all a bit frightening, but also, in an odd way, intriguing.

The next morning they were on their way, heading east to freedom and Detroit. Brett was sure that they partied the whole way and Kami was glad that no Montana or North Dakota state troopers decided to stop them. At Minnesota they turned south to go through Chicago. As they skirted the city Brett bragged that someday he'd come to the United Center and he'd embarrass the Black Hawks in front of their fans.

On the east side of Lake Michigan they caught I-94 and continued east. "You know what?", he asked without waiting for a reply. "I heard from some guys that Detroit is one party kind of town."

"Sounds great," Kami responded, and she actually sort of meant it.

Throughout their whole journey Brett had been really pretty insistent that he needed to save his money so they might as well take advantage of "the old man's credit cards". "After all," he rationalized, "think of all those hours of slave labor he owes you for when he made you practice."

"He didn't really make me," she interjected. "I wanted to become somebody just like you do!"

"What? By spinning around on the ice? Hah!", he laughed sarcastically. "A rink is good for only one thing and that's a bruising game where you can get away with assault and the law can't touch you." Kami was a bit frightened as he continued, "Have you ever realized that a stick can really be a deadly weapon? You know, sometimes I dream of hitting a slap shot so hard that the puck would ring the goalie's mask so hard that the guy just keels over dead out. Wouldn't that be something?"

Kami tensed up a bit and suddenly felt a little trapped.

"Don't worry, pretty girl, I won't hit you... in fact, I know just the thing to loosen you up a bit," and he produced another joint from his jacket pocket.

"Brett, you know I don't like it when you get high while you're driving."

"Now don't you go and get righteous on me now little girl," he snapped, "after all, we're almost to the big time!" He cranked the music up a little louder and Kami looked out at the countryside near Ann Arbor.

For several days they stayed in a nice motel in the Detroit area. It certainly didn't take long for the handsome, gregarious young man to find out where the action was and soon they were fully involved in the circle of one party after another. Brett bragged to all of their new friends that in two weeks he was going to show up at the training camp

and they'd all better take a good look at him now 'cause the next time they saw him it would be racing down the ice for Scotty Bowman and the Red Wings.

Late one morning, after they'd tried to sleep off another night of partying they stopped by the desk of the motel. The manager was demanding that they start paying in cash because the access to Kami's credit cards had apparently been cut off. Brett became abusive and shouted that they didn't need to "stay in a dump like this anymore!" and stormed out of the office. When they got back up to the room he swore at Kami when she said she was out of cash.

Just then there was a knock at the door and one of their new acquaintances, Amber, was at the door. She thought they all ought to go get Kevin and get something to eat so they hurriedly threw their things in the back of the pickup and took off toward Pontiac. On the ride Brett began to again degrade Kami for running out of money and she finally protested, "Brett, stop! This isn't fair. We've been living off of my resources ever since we left Portland. Don't you think it's about time you start contributing here?"

"Me?", he shouted. "And who do you think you are? Hey, you owe me girl. I'm the one who delivered you from your dad and I don't owe you one cursed thing."

"But Brett," she pleaded, "it's just not fair..."

Brett slammed on the breaks and shouted, "Fair? I'll show you fair! You know what? You're beginning to get on my nerves. Get out of my _____ truck!" And with that he slapped her and shoved her away. Amber opened the door and stood there while Kami slid across the seat to retreat from her enraged lover. "C'mon back in, Amber, let's show this _____ that we don't need her!" And with that Amber insolently wrinkled her nose up toward Kami and then jumped in. Through her tears Kami saw Brett reach out and pull Amber over as he shot gravel toward her from the road side.

There was a gas station just off of the highway on the frontage road so Kami turned away from the traffic and went down the slope toward the pay phone. She fumbled for some coins and a wrinkled piece of paper from her pocket. The little sheet had a phone number of one of the girls that they'd met a few days ago at a party. She picked up the receiver and dialed.

"Chrissie? Hey, this is Kami Garrison... you know, Brett and I were at your place a couple of nights ago?... Yeah, hi... Hey, I have a favor to ask of you. Brett just dumped me off and I don't have anywhere to go. I wonder if I could come stay with you for a couple of days until I can figure out what to do... Really?... Oh, that's great!... Yeah, I'm at the Mobil station just off the south end of Westland mall... Yeah, I'll wait for you here... Thanks a lot!"

Soon Chrissie pulled up in her sleek 3000 GTS and let Kami in the passenger side. "You know, girl," Chrissie said as she looked back over her shoulder to see if it was safe to enter the road, "I don't run a charity house. You're going to have to pay your way somehow, and I'm not going to give up a lot of my space for very long now."

"Oh, I know that. I really appreciate you helping me out in a jam," Kami answered. "I'll go out this afternoon and see what I can find about getting a job right away. You don't have a paper for me to look in the classifieds or anything, do you?"

"Yeah, I do, but how are you going to get to a job? There's no way I'm going to loan you my car!", Chrissie was adamant.

"I'll find some way. I'm sure that Detroit runs some city buses or something..."

"Don't count on that, girl. Even if you could depend on them running on time in a couple of weeks this weather is going to change and you could freeze waiting for a ride."

"Well," the young newcomer said, "perhaps I'll find something right away that will pay enough for me to get an old car and a place of my own."

Chrissie looked a bit exasperated. "Not in this economy," she shook her head, "I wouldn't count on much of anything if I was you."

And Chrissie was right. Several days of searching and calling and tracking down leads didn't produce one opportunity above the convenience store minimum wage. Kami recognized that those jobs would barely cover the expenses that it took to keep them, let alone give her a way to build a life.

A few times Kami thought that she'd found something really promising only to discover that Wanted: Bright, intelligent, attractive ladies for high paying job. All indoor work. Must be vivacious, outgoing, and very people oriented. Call 555-2865 for interview only served as a teaser for massage parlors or escort services. She was getting desperate and Chrissie was getting impatient.

"I'm not running a charity, you know. I told you that you were going to have to pay your own way" was a phrase that, after nearly a week Kami knew was coming about six times a day. Finally Chrissie began to lay down ultimatums. "Look, sister, I took you in out of the goodness of my heart. I know you can't go back to Brett 'cause you don't have a clue as to where he is or who he's with now. But, something's got to give."

Kami felt like she was going to cry when Chrissie finally said the unspoken truth. "You aren't a privileged little girl of a famous man anymore. You're going to have to swallow your pride and get on with life. I have a way for you to earn some money but you're going to have to get used to the idea."

"Oh Chrissie," Kami said, "there are just certain things that I can't do."

"Well, then you're going to have to start to make other living arrangements 'cause I'm not running any charity here. I've told you that from the beginning. I'll give you until tomorrow to either decide to face reality or you find your way on your own."

Chrissie knew she didn't need a night to think about anything. She really felt as though she'd run out of options. In the morning Chrissie made a call to a Stan Valente. Kami only heard Chrissie's side of the conversation. "I tell you Stan, this girl is really pretty and athletic to boot. I know you'll be impressed... yeah, and then you'll owe me one, huh?... Sure, I'll have her there by lunch time and you can check her out for yourself... Hey, don't worry about it, I've never steered you wrong yet, have I?... O.K., then it's a plan. And hey, I know you'll find some way to make it up to me, right?... I knew I could count on you, babe! We'll see you later."

Two hours later Chrissie's Mitsubishi pulled into the parking lot on the side of "Stan's Stables" on Eight Mile Road. The gaudy neon encircled a sign that flashed, "Dozens of fast, thoroughbred ladies on four big stages".

Kami took a deep breath as they stepped into the smoky interior of the place. Music pounded the walls as men of every description sat lingering over their drinks and staring at the women on the stages. Once in a while there'd be a whistle or a profane taunt and it appeared that most of the entertainers knew just how to respond to the attention. Kami knew that she had to make a decision. She was exceedingly pretty and very blithe and alluring, her years of competition on the rinks had given her unique talents. But she was also exceedingly inhibited with what would be demanded of her in a place like that.

She watched as Stan and Chrissie embraced and laughed in a knowing manner. The both glanced toward Kami and Stan was evidently pleased. "You're right, Chrissie," she heard him exclaim, "you've got a real live one here."

She realized that working for Stan was the only option that she felt she had available. Unless she came up with some serious income soon Chrissie was going to drop her out on the street just as Brett had. Kami felt like a caged, wounded animal and so she agreed that she'd join Stan's stable of women. It seemed like her only opportunity for survival in Detroit, but that was all it would be- sheer survival.

That first evening was the most excruciating and humiliating experience of her life. As she went through the motions her graceful abilities barely overshadowed the hatred that she felt for herself and for the patrons who leered at her. A few times Kami wondered if any of the men recognized her from the cover of Sports Illustrated. If they did no one seemed to let on. It appeared, to her, that the men in that dismal place had no desire to recognize her as a person. To them she was only a commodity. (Some actually seemed to be intrigued by the tattoo of the Red Wings logo- her only remaining visible sign that one, a certain Brett Bevary, had passed through her life and left scars in his wake.)

When the long night was over she went back to Chrissie's and took a long, hot shower. In the morning Chrissie asked how she did with the tips and Kami had to admit that it seemed that the other girls got much more lucrative responses on the other stages than she did. "Oh, sister," Chrissie said in a condescending manner, "you're just going to have to loosen up. Remember, I'm not running a charity here and you're going to have to pay your own way."

As the weeks progressed Chrissie thought that the experience would become less painful but all she found was a lingering numbness settling into her soul. Chrissie pressed her for more money and Stan began to degrade her for her inability to really loosen up and provide the style of entertainment that his customers were accustomed to seeing and experiencing. Finally the day came when Chrissie gave the ultimatum, "You're going to have to leave. I'm tired of carrying you," and Kami felt she, again, had nowhere to turn.

She told Stan of her plight and he said, "Look, kid, you're a really pretty girl and I hate to see you hurt so I tell you what I'll do. There's an old storage room over the stage at the back of the building. It's not much but you can use it for a few days until you get a place of your own." She started to thank him when he cut her off, "Hey, I'm a good guy but don't get the wrong idea. You're going to have to earn it. Starting tonight I expect to see a little more generosity in your performance if you get what I mean."

Chrissie was afraid she did, but it just wasn't in her. Try as she might she just couldn't be as spontaneous and uninhibited as the other women. When she was finally able to settle down on the musty mattress above the stage she could feel the dank, smoky air coming up through the cracks in the floor and the vibration of the pounding woofers providing the beat for the continued decadence downstairs.

In early February Kami broke. There didn't seem to be one ounce of feeling in her soul any more. It was Saturday afternoon and she was tired of the music and the leering faces in the shadows and the smell of sin. Suddenly, in the middle of a number she stepped down off of the stage and fought past groping hands to get to the pay phone. She picked up the receiver and dialed "0".

"Yes, hello operator?... No, I'm sorry, I can't turn the music down... Yes, I'd like to place a collect call to Mrs. Lucinda Garrison of Tigard, Oregon... Yes, the number is area code 503-254-4324..."

Over the din of the Stables she heard the operator speak, "Yes, is this Mrs. Lucinda Garrison? This is the operator in Detroit, Michigan and I have a collect call from Kami Garrison, will you accept the charge?"

Aunt Lucinda's voice sounded so very far away as she responded excitedly, "Yes, of course operator, please put her on... Kami, sweetheart, is that you?"

"Aunt Lucinda, it's me. I'm so sorry but I just had to talk to someone."

"Oh, that's perfectly o.k. child. How are you Kami?"

Kami paused for a long moment and then spoke over the din, "Auntie, I'm in real trouble. I don't know where to turn. I don't know what to do."

"Well," her aunt reassured without hesitation, "you've called the right place, my girl. The whole family has been aching to hear from you."

"Aunt Lucinda, can you tell me how dad is, and Kelsey?"

Her loving aunt sounded amazed, "Kami, sweetheart, don't you know? Haven't you been keeping track of things at all? They're both in Detroit right now! Have you forgotten that tonight is the U.S. Amateur Championships? Girl, you were going to skate in them too! We were just getting ready to settle in to watch them on ESPN."

Kami had completely forgotten. The U.S. Amateurs were being held at the Palace at Auburn Hills. It was the last big event before the Olympic trials. This was the one thing that she had aimed for throughout her whole life until that fateful moment when her world collided with Brett's.

Kami's mind raced. She quickly hung up the phone and stared at the dismal, raucous place where she'd shamed herself so terribly. She felt she had to escape. She ran past the tables and up the stairs by the back stage. As she was grabbing whatever few possessions she could she ripped some old sweat clothes on and turned to leave. Stan was standing at the doorway, heavy and menacing. "And where exactly do you think you are going?", he demanded.

"I can't take it anymore. I don't belong here and I have to leave so please just pay me for this week and I'll be gone," Kami pleaded.

"Pay you?", Stan roared, "Pay you? Why you're lucky I don't charge you for all that I've done for you. I don't owe you a _____ dime! In fact, if you don't get out of here right now I'll probably forget that I'm a Christian and I'll make you pay for leaving this apartment in a wreck!" He screamed as she cowered toward the stairs and

then he slammed his fist into the door and pointed down the stairs, "Get out of my place you little _____!"

Kami stepped out into the bitter chill of the twilight. A biting wind was coming down off of Lake Superior and the snap of one approaching snowstorm was in the air. She began to walk east on Eight Mile Road, knowing that eventually she would come to Auburn Hills. A number of cars stopped so that men might offer her a ride but she knew they were offering more than that so she kept walking. Randomly one of the working girls of the stretch would degrade her and shout at her to find her own territory.

After several miles her face felt frozen from the tears and the wind and she'd nearly lost all feeling in her hands and feet when an older station wagon pulled up along side her. An elderly lady rolled down the window and called out, "Child, are you lost? What are you doing out on a night like this in a flimsy outfit like that? Now you get in this car right now!"

Kami sensed that this gentle soul only intended good for her and so she fell into the front seat. "Thank you so much, I'm so very cold and tired and I don't know what I'd have done if you'd not come along."

"Where are you going, child? Don't you have a home?", the old lady pleaded.

"I need to get to Auburn Hills. I have to get to the place where they play basketball over there."

"Oh," the grandmother said in a knowing manner, "the Palace. You want to go to the Palace." She shook her head and continued, "Don't you worry now, child, because I'm going to be heading right past there 'cause I'm going to my daughter's place out toward Stirling Heights." The old lady pulled back into the traffic and said, "You just sit back and warm yourself and I'll drop you off at the Palace in no time."

The old lady's conversation was very caring and gentle. She continued to express surprise that Kami thought she could walk all that way. "Why didn't you just call a taxi, child?"

"I don't have enough money to waste any on a taxi," the young girl responded as she held her hands over the vents of the heater.

After about twenty five minutes the old station wagon pulled off in front of a massive structure that was lit up all around. "This is it, child, the Palace at Auburn Hills. Now you go ahead and get out and promise me that you're going to take care of yourself, now you hear?"

Kami instinctively reached over and gave the woman a warm, appreciative hug. "You're my angel," Kami said as she stepped up on to the curb.

"Oh my," the woman responded, "why that's just the sweetest thing!", and then she drove off into the night.

Kami turned and saw the three foot letters lit up for all to see, "U.S. Amateur Figure Skating Championships Tonight". She walked under the illumination of the sign to the ticket windows while hundreds of people hurried on by up to the entry of the facility. When she came to the window she asked the young man through the grating, "How much is the cheapest ticket you have?"

"Well," he responded in a rather disinterested manner, "the stuff up in the nosebleed section is \$6.50 but you can't hardly see anything from that far away."

Kami fumbled in her pocket and pulled out a few wadded bills and some coins. She finally counted out the \$6.50 and realized that if the ticket was 37 cents more she wouldn't have had enough. The young man took the stack of money and handed her the ticket in a rather irritated manner. Now he was going to have to sort through the pile and put each coin in it's rightful little slot in the cash drawer.

Kami entered the coliseum and immediately headed toward the ramp ways that let up away from the expensive seating to the only section of the arena that she could afford. When she came to the sign that said "Section 227" she entered and went up to row "S", the last one, and over to seat number 11. There wasn't another person for 15 rows. Kami had a feeling that the young man at the ticket counter gave her this last seat out of spite but she actually was thankful that she wasn't sitting near anyone else. This whole event was going to be painful enough as it was, she didn't need anyone near her... especially someone who might recognize her.

For a moment she was transfixed with the impact of the moment. This was it, the U.S. Amateurs and the last big hurdle before the Olympic trials. As she looked down at the various competitors warming up she recognized every one of them, knew each of them by name, and was intimately aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Through hot tears she took in the scene and ached for what might have been.

Then, at the far end of the ice she saw Kelsey and Daddy walking through the corridor leading to the rink. She saw Kelsey embrace her father, look up at the stands to acknowledge the cheers of the crowd who recognized the favorite of the competition, and stepped onto ice to begin the ritual that they both had perfected since they were tiny. Kami knew every nuance of the warm-up. She could close her eyes and feel exactly what her sister felt with every move.

After a few minutes the P.A. announcer welcomed the audience and announced the order of the competition. Kelsey was to be third from the end. Kami knew that Kelsey would be disappointed at the timing but it probably wouldn't make a difference because she was a Garrison girl and Garrison girls were supposed to have a mental toughness that eradicated all negative challenges.

During the initial performances Kami watched intently. She saw what very few of the crowd would have recognized. Years of practice and studying videos revealed to her the little flaws that were completely lost on the average observer- the knee that was just slightly bent, the incomplete arm extension, the arch of the back at the wrong moment- she saw them all just as the judges did.

Kami knew that Isabella Mariuchin and Heather Rosart were going to be Kelsey's stiffest competition. Heather skated early in the event and made several uncharacteristic slips in her normally technically perfect, if sometimes artistically uninspired, routine. Isabella would have the luck of going last. That meant that she would know exactly what she had to do to beat Kelsey Garrison.

Skater after skater went through their planned routine and several of the girls performed as well as Kami had ever seen them. Finally, there was a growing electricity in the crowd and the announcer said, "Next up, from Portland, Oregon, Kelsey Garrison." Whereas the other skaters had received warm applause and a few calls of encouragement, Kelsey came to the edge of the ice to a large and explosive cheer. She

kissed their father and stepped out into the center of the ring of light, poised and ready for the greatest moment of her life.

Kami crossed her fingers when the timpani began to roll as Kelsey set herself to skate to a Grieg symphony. High in section 227 there was a girl who understood what no one else around her understood. She felt the sweep of the strings and her skater's heart longed to be expressing itself in strength and grace over the white surface. But, she knew that it was not to be and everything inside of her pulled for her sister.

For four miraculous minutes Kelsey was magical. She skated flawlessly and, it seemed, without any effort at all. Rarely has the skating community seen such a display of grace and control. Kelsey hit every jump, defined every breath of beauty, and seemed to be the living harmony line to Grieg's lyrical vision of the fjords of Norway.

With a dazzling spiral Kelsey ended the routine in perfect timing with the concluding cymbals and The Palace at Auburn Hills erupted into ecstatic joy. The ovation was long and rapturous and thunderous. Bundles of roses flew onto the ice from every corner of the arena. Kelsey absorbed the outpouring of love and adoration with a joy of innocence and a radiance that could be felt all the way up to section 227, row S, seat 11.

Larry Garrison engulfed his daughter as she stepped off the ice and they held each other as they waited for the judges verdicts. The crowd chanted "Kelsey, Kelsey, Kelsey" and then erupted again as the scores were posted. For both technical merit and artistic presentation there were 6's, nearly across the board.

Yes, there were two skaters yet to compete but even if Isabella Mariuchin skated the routine of her life it was nothing less than impossible to catch Kelsey Garrison. 17,000 people in Auburn Hills and millions watching on T.V. across the nation knew that they had just seen a champion crowned.

For a moment Kami sat transfixed, and then rose and began to descend the steps down past section 227. She knew she either had to completely leave the building or go to congratulate Kelsey. She wavered at the exit and then slowly turned to head toward the bowels of the Palace to congratulate her sister. When she came to the staircase that

led down to the dressing room areas a security guard stopped her and inquired, "And exactly where do you think that you're going?"

"I need to see Kelsey Garrison," Kami quietly answered.

"Right", the guard laughed. "as if I'm going to just let you waltz down there!"

"Please, sir," she pleaded, "I'm her sister."

The guard frowned and looked her up and down and finally said, "Well, you're pretty scrawny, but there does seem to be a resemblance." For a moment he looked around and then said softly, "O.K., I'll let you pass but don't you dare tell anyone that I'm the one who let you go by or it will be my hide."

"Thanks, so much," she said as she slipped down the staircase.

At the bottom of the stairs she looked down the hallway. It was easy to see where all the commotion and excitement was. In the tunnel area leading to the arena there were lights and cameras and photographers all circled around Larry Garrison and his champion daughter. Reporters from NBC, CNN, ESPN, and a host of other media outlets were firing questions at the two of them as they stood arm in arm. "How does it feel?... Did you know that you'd hit it when you landed that last jump?... Have you ever skated better in your life?... Larry, how does this compare to standing on the medal stand at Tokyo?... Do you ever dream that your daughter might be able to win gold in Japan just as you did?..."

"It's just unbelievable, isn't it?", the radiant father responded with his arm around his pretty champion. "I don't know if anyone can understand this but this is so much better than winning the gold yourself... I see this princess and it's as though everything I've ever hoped for and what I know her mother would have longed for is now coming to pass for Kelsey."

"Larry, Larry," a local sports reporter called out, "could anything possibly make this night any better?"

"Well," the father said a bit tentatively, "only one little miracle could make this moment more magical for us..." Suddenly Larry looked over the reporter's shoulder and saw a

lonely figure leaning against a pillar down in the darkness of the corridor. He stopped answering the reporter's question, brushed aside ESPN's lead skating analyst, and started pushing through the crowd to head into the darkness.

All eyes and cameras were on a father transfixed as he headed toward the solitary figure down the hallway. "Kami... baby, is that you?"

"Yes, it's me Daddy," she softly replied. "I just had to come to congratulate Kels."

"Oh, my sweet girl," the father asked, "are you ready to come home?"

Kami bit her lip and then started to cry. There was a moment of desperation and fear as she wanted, so desperately, to run to embrace her father. Out of pain the girl finally responded, "I can't Daddy. You'd don't know what I've done."

Cameras from around the world witnessed the moment when Larry Garrison responded. "Oh Kami, that's not important. All that counts is that I know *who* you are!"

Suddenly, Kelsey Garrison began to cry. "Oh Daddy, how could you?", she spit out. "Here, this night was supposed to be mine for I've worked so hard for this!"

Larry Garrison turned toward his young champion and quietly said, "Kels, I could never be more proud of you. But you have no scars." With that the gentle father reached out with one hand from embracing his prodigal daughter and reached toward the honored champion. "Oh Kelsey, can't you see? It's Kami, Sweetheart. It's Kami, she's hurting and she's coming home!"

*It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad:
for this, thy brother was dead, and is alive again;
and was lost, and is found.*

-Luke 15:32