

## Chapter 1

### Dreaming

Gale reached behind her neck to lift her heavy hair and shifted uncomfortably inside her blouse. The evening air hung over Bakersfield like a hot, stuffy blanket, alive with electricity. The driver of the Ice Capades bus shifted down and lurched to a stop at a red light. Gale stared out the window with unseeing eyes, her mind abuzz with the skating routines and costume changes she would soon be doing. A thrill shot through her. This was opening night, September 3, 1981. Could it be? Was this really happening to her? After hours of exhausting practice, little sleep, and frustrating roadblocks, it was hard to believe that she was actually a professional skater, yet the printed program said so. And in the dressing room backstage at the coliseum were a dressing table and several costumes for her!

The bus rattled to a stop in front of the coliseum and trembled as the skaters gathered their bags and made their way down the center aisle. Gale picked up her tote bag as though in a dream. Usually heavy from the combined weight of her skates, bathrobe, and makeup, tonight it seemed practically weightless in her hand as she stepped lightly out into the sunlit evening. The searing heat of the pavement rose to meet her. That ice would sure feel good!

A few onlookers clustered on the sidewalk. "Hey, Ice Capades girl!" someone called. Gale ignored them and hurried to keep up with the others who sauntered toward the coliseum, laughing and joking among themselves. Heather, Gale's roommate, paused to look back for her. "Come on!" she said.

The coliseum was cool and dark in contrast to the outside, and above the din of the band's warm-up, Gale heard the muted bustling and chatter of some early-comers finding their seats. She pushed past a few of them in the lobby, unable to wipe the grin off her face as she hurried backstage to dress for the show.

In the girls' changing room, Gale slung her tote bag to the floor and reached out to finger the soft petals of the roses someone had sent to one of the other skaters in honor of opening night. Then she slipped into her black bathrobe and fumbled through her tote bag for her makeup bag. Claspng it to her, she hurried to the mirrors to find the assigned stool she had been using for three weeks as her little space to

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“make up”: a little foundation, lots of rouge, powder, eyeliner and shadow, false eyelashes. Up close, her face looked rather overdone, she thought, but the director had said the makeup must be heavy to show up under the lights. Those lights did all sorts of things to makeup, he said, like turning pink lipstick to purple and things like that. So they were to wear any color of lipstick but pink! Gale chose a strawberry red.

“Fifteen minutes!” Cheryl, the director called, striding through the room.

Gale slipped off her robe and stepped carefully into the shimmering, sequin-covered, hot-pink costume the dresser lady held out to her. She had nearly fasted for three days, existing on only instant breakfast blended with ice chips just so her costume would fit well! She bent her head for the tall, ostrich-feather headpiece and pulled it down over her head. “Oh, wait! I’ve got to hide my hair!” she said, removing the headpiece and handing it back to the dresser. She twisted her blond ponytail into a bun at the top of her head and pulled the headpiece back into place. “Now I need that arched canopy,” she said, and the dresser fitted it onto her shoulders. She was one of ten skaters who would carry the canopies around the rink at the start of the show.

At last, Gale slipped her feet into her skates and laughed excitedly as she bent to lace them up.

“Hope I don’t forget anything or fall,” Gale chattered to Heather as they took their places behind the curtain.

Heather smiled reassuringly and squeezed her hand. “You’ll do fine,” she said. “Just smile and enjoy yourself.”

That wouldn’t be hard to do. Gale loved to skate! Ever since she had seen Peggy Fleming skate in an ice show years before, Gale had dreamed of being a professional skater. She and her sister Lori had started taking skating lessons when they were eight years old, but Lori had given it up after about two years. Gale had kept up with it and had steadily progressed to more advanced levels of competence. But then, when she was a junior in high school, she, too, tired of the daily grind of practice and lessons, which grew more and more expensive and demanding with each level. So she had abandoned skating for awhile too.

During that time, a lot of changes were taking place in Gale’s family. Lori had started attending church on Saturday, taking their mother with her.

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Gale remembered years before that her mother used to take all of them to Sabbath School and church. But she had been so little then, she didn't remember much of it; just that her father never went with them because he was a Catholic, though he never minded her mother going. But in time, Mother gave up church attendance. Gale guessed it probably had been hard for Mother, all by herself at church, to keep track of two little girls and then the little sister and brother who joined the family. Slowly, over the past ten years, Saturday had turned into a day for skating lessons or family outings or anything else that turned up. And now Mother was going back to church, tying up Saturdays with services! Gale couldn't understand it. She had started thinking seriously again about being a professional skater. She didn't want to start going to church on Saturday because that would mess up her plans. Skaters had shows on Friday nights and Saturdays. Until Gale made it as a professional she had to practice on Saturdays, not sit idly in services. So she resisted going to church every chance she could. After all, she was eighteen.

Gale remembered the many Saturday mornings Lori's alarm had gone off at 7:00 a.m. She had pried her eyes open reluctantly to look at the clock, then sighed heavily as she rolled over and buried her head under her pillow.

"Don't you want to go with us?" Lori asked gently.

"Are you kidding? I'm too tired! It's too early for anyone to be up on a Saturday!"

"You're sure?"

"Yeah. Go on. I've got to get back to sleep!" Gale pounded her pillow into shape and sighed heavily again as she closed her eyes and tried to return to sleep. But, as usual, she just dozed awhile, then got up and pattered around before getting dressed for the day.

Every now and then Gale relented and dressed reluctantly to attend church with her mother and Lori. But the more she went, the more out of place she felt. Church bored her. What kind of dead people were these, to settle for such a straight life? Didn't they know how much was out there waiting for them to enjoy? Gale certainly planned to discover how much. She didn't want to end up with this sort of boring life. She was too young to waste her life in services! But her mother and Lori never gave up asking her to go with them.

At last, Gale decided she had to move out of the house in order to be "free." But it might be difficult to explain to Mother if she said she wanted an apartment of her own. And actually, Gale didn't want to live

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alone. She just wanted to be more independent. More grown-up. More of a professional—a professional skater. That was it! That was her easy out. If she became a professional skater she would enjoy independence without hurting her mother’s feelings, and she would get paid to tour America. What an idea! But how does one get into an ice show? she wondered.

Pondering that question silently for a few days, she suddenly remembered a conversation she had had years before with Mariel Benson, a skating teacher at the rink, who had said, “If you ever want to get into the Ice Capades, just let me know and I’ll set up an audition for you.” Mariel was a paid talent scout for the Ice Capades, so Gale figured her comment was more than casual.

One Friday Gale lifted the heavy telephone book to her lap and flipped through the pages to find Mariel’s skating rink number. She dialed the number and then, her heart pounding in her throat, she listened to the distant pulsating buzz as the phone rang on the other end of the line.

“Hello.” It was Mariel.

“Mariel! Hi! It’s Gale Brawand!”

“Oh, hi, Gale. Haven’t seen you for a while.”

“I know. I’ve been so busy with finding a job and stuff.”

“And were you successful?”

“Yeah. I’m working for an insurance company as a secretary. It’s OK, but I’d kind of like something different for a career, you know.”

“Yes?”

“Well, I was thinking, do you remember that time you said something about if I ever wanted an audition with the Ice Capades you could set one up for me?”

“As a matter of fact, I do.” Mariel said. “But before you have that audition, you probably need to polish up quite a bit. There’s an awful lot of competition to get in, and you have to be good.”

Mariel emphasized “good” so strongly that Gale thought for a minute maybe she wasn’t ice skater material. Good. How many other skaters were already “good” and more? Could she beat them out for a job?

Mariel was still talking. “So how does tomorrow morning sound? Say, around nine o’clock?”

Gale gulped. “Tomorrow morning? Sure! Why not! How much time do we have till the audition?”

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“The show is coming to Portland in November, so we have about five months to get you ready.”

“Do you think we can do it?” Gale asked timidly.

“Do you?” Mariel returned her question.

“It’s worth a try. I’ll see you at nine o’clock tomorrow morning!” Gale hung up the phone and let out an excited yelp. At last! She would be in charge of herself. Once she got into the show she would have such an exciting life compared to what it was now.

“Once I get into the show?” she asked herself suddenly. “I haven’t even tried out yet!” But it occurred to her that the way she must approach this endeavor was with confident, positive thoughts. It was a no-lose venture, after all.

The insistent buzzing of the alarm clock at seven o’clock the next morning forced Gale out of bed, though it didn’t waken her. She was already awake. She had awakened frequently through the night to check the clock to make sure she didn’t oversleep.

Lori lay in bed a few minutes longer than she usually did on a Saturday morning to allow Gale all the time she needed in the bathroom. Then she prepared for church.

Gale dressed quickly, flung her skates over her shoulder, and hurried downstairs for a quick breakfast before leaving for the rink.

The ice was as smooth as polished glass. Mariel said how good it was to see her and then got right down to the business of grooming Gale to be a professional. There was a lot to do in their half hour of lesson time. After some warm-ups, Mariel put on a tape of fast, jazzy music. The music bounced off the rink’s walls, and Gale felt her heartbeat quicken.

“Feel the beat?” Mariel asked, nodding her head with the rhythm.

Gale nodded.

“OK. We’ll take just a couple of moves and practice them till you get them down; then in a couple of months we’ll have our choreographer put them together for you for a nice routine.

“Let’s start with Illusion. Remember, you’ll be skating around the rink. As you skate backward, kick one leg straight up toward your face; then bring it down and around to the back, kicking it up into the air behind you as your head goes down toward the ice. Your body should look like a teeter-totter as you do it.”

Gale went over it in her mind and nodded hesitantly. Lucky the rink wasn’t full.

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Mariel sensed her hesitance. "I'll help you," she said. She skated beside Gale as they practiced the move. "Arms out! Bring that foot right up toward your face! Good! Now swing it down and back. Put your head down. Kick your leg up... up... up. Good! Now do it again!"

After several Illusions, Mariel turned off the tape. Another lesson had started in the far corner of the rink by this time, and that skater's music played on.

Mariel explained the next move she wanted Gale to practice. "You remember the Charlotte, where you move in a line down the ice with your head at your ankle and one leg straight up in the air? You want to practice holding that position steady without wavering, and if you can come out of it and fall into the splits, it will really impress the director of the show. Not everyone can do splits, so you'll really stand out."

"OK, let's try it," Gale said.

Mariel turned the music back on. Again she skated beside Gale, calling out directions and offering encouragement. "OK, now do an Illusion, a Charlotte, and fall into the splits!"

Gale groaned inwardly. She picked up speed, started her backward spin for the Illusion, and then went into the Charlotte. The rink seemed to spin around her as she fell onto the cold ice, now cut up into sharp ridges with crystal needles.

Mariel hurried to her side. "You OK?"

"I think I scraped my knee a little. That Illusion makes me so dizzy!"

"OK, maybe we should space the Illusion and the Charlotte with some jumps. At least then you'll have your head up for a while to get your balance. But we want to end with the splits on the ice. OK? How does that sound?"

"A little better. Let's try it and see."

"Remember, you don't need much speed for the Illusion. Just take your time. Let's go!"

It was much better. At the end of the lesson Gale was exhilarated. Her legs were numb and tender from falling into the splits so many times, but she felt it was worth it. She didn't even ask Mariel what she thought of the lesson. Gale was only thinking positively. "I'm on my way to the Ice Capades," she told herself.

"We'll practice tomorrow at the same time if it's OK with you," Mariel said. "And then every morning before you go to work we need to practice too. Let's say we meet here at 6:30 each morning?"

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“OK,” Gale agreed with a tired smile. Her priorities were in the process of change. But she would get up at 5:30 every morning now, meet with Mariel at the rink, then work at the insurance company until 5:00 p.m. Long days were just one of those things you had to do for your career, she decided.

For the entire next week, Gale and Mariel worked at perfecting the Charlotte and the Illusion and the many jumps in her routine: double lutz, double loops, and flips. Some days Gale thought she would never make it, but Mariel encouraged her and kept her dream in front of her the whole time. “I wouldn’t have agreed to work with you if I didn’t think you could make it,” she said.

The following week, Mariel added a double toe loop, two-revolution jump into their practice. When Gale had that down, she added an axel, or one-half-revolution jump, and a layback spin, in which Gale circled her arms in the air over her chest gracefully as she arched her back so that her head was upside down, bent one leg at the knee, and spun on one skate.

“Beautiful!” Mariel exclaimed.

Many days Gale went to work exhausted, but her sleep each night was the sweet, heavy sleep of a person who has worked hard.

One morning, near the end of October, all the long hours of hard work and perseverance came together. By this time the choreographer had selected the music from the show “Fame” for Gale’s routine and had put an impressive routine together for her. As the introduction started on tape, Gale skated to the middle of the rink and held her hands out at her sides like a ballerina until the right cue. Then she started skimming the ice like a swan, gracefully turning and spinning and jumping. She lifted her leg for the Illusion. Then she went into her split jump, then the Charlotte, and as the music ended, she fell into the splits on the ice.

Mariel rushed out to her. “Beautiful! You did just beautifully,” she gushed. “I knew you’d get it together. Of course, you always were a good skater!”

“Oh, you say that to everybody,” Gale retorted with a laugh.

“No, I mean it! You look really good, Gale. I think we’ve got a good routine put together for you, and now you just have to live it and eat it and sleep it, until it becomes a reflex with you.”

Gale nodded, well aware of all the work that still lay ahead of her.

“Shall I do it again now?” she asked hesitantly, pulling herself slowly up, off the needle-sharp ice.

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“Catch your breath, and then we’ll go back to it,” Mariel said.

“Over and over again,” Gale droned, a smile on her face.

“You know it!” Mariel said. “But you’re going to get in that ice show, Gale, if it’s the last thing you do!”

“Oh, I sure hope so,” Gale said. “But there are a lot of other skaters out there who are just as good or better than I am.

“Well, some people are excellent skaters, but they don’t get a contract for any number of reasons. Some of them don’t do well under pressure or their routine doesn’t have enough flair or they don’t smile enough, and someone else who might not have as much practice in skating wins the audition because she has all those little extras.

“How you look is important too,” she said. Mariel stood back and eyed Gale up and down a moment. “With your blond hair, a shimmery black costume and white skates would really be stunning. Some black sequined barrettes in your hair would look great, too, to match the sequins on your costume. I’ll see if I can find something like that for you to wear, and you can look around too.”

“OK.”

“Now.” Mariel brought their thoughts back to the present. “We’ve got some more skating to do.”

November finally arrived, and the Ice Capades came to Portland. Gale winced inwardly when Mariel explained that auditions were held Friday night after the show. “You mean ten thirty or eleven at night?” she asked incredulously. “I’ve got to be in bed by then!”

“Professional skaters are night people,” Mariel explained. “Their day begins in the early evening, and they don’t go to bed until six or so in the morning.”

“When I get up, they go to bed!” Gale groaned.

“Well, you won’t have to get up so early on Friday. Just to be sure you come to the audition rested, we won’t have a lesson Friday morning. Sleep in a little if you can.”

“I’ve still got to be at work at eight,” Gale said. “That doesn’t give me much time to sleep in. I’ll be exhausted by eleven o’clock!”

“Don’t underestimate the power of adrenalin,” Mariel said gently. “Think positively. You can do it. I’ll meet you at the coliseum around ten thirty, and we can do this together.”

Gale nodded, a slow sense of panic rising from somewhere deep inside.

A cold, gray rain spat on the windshield as Gale drove herself to the coliseum on Friday night. She parked the car and dashed into the

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lobby. She felt the adrenalin rush that Mariel had spoken of as she pushed through the milling throng of people toward the prearranged meeting place.

Mariel greeted her with a reassuring smile, and Gale followed her carefully down the cement stairs to the rink side. She made no effort to erase the smile from her face as she watched the auditions begin and waited for her turn to come. She felt nervous, yet somehow not too worried.

At last, Gale's name was called. She felt another adrenalin rush as she laid her coat carefully on the seat and made her way to the ice, skating out to the center of the rink. She noted, with a touch of worry, that the ice hadn't been smoothed since the show. It was rough and very cut up by all the skates that had sliced through it. The ridges had the potential of slowing Gale's routine or making her fall.

She shook her blond, cascading waves, felt the barrettes to make sure they were in place, and held her hands at her sides in the starting position that Mariel had suggested. The sequins on the black costume they had found sprayed rainbows of light on the ice. Gale stole a nervous glance at Mariel, who returned it with a smile.

And then the coliseum was alive with the music from "Fame." Gale took a big breath and began.

"I'm gonna live forever, I'm gonna learn how to fly." The words of the song played over in Gale's mind as she jumped and danced automatically, and spun over the ice in the routine that was, by now, second nature to her. Was she dreaming, she wondered, or was this really happening to her? The exhilaration was wonderful!

Finally, Gale came out of the Charlotte and fell into the splits onto the icy needles. She smiled, anyway, holding her arms out gracefully for a few moments to savor the dream. Then she skated toward Mariel and the director at rink side.

"Good job, Gale," the director said. "We'll let you know by February whether or not we need you for next year's season."

"Thank you!" Gale said with a smile.

Mariel winked at her.

To herself, Gale wondered how she could wait till February to know.