

# BY ROBERT MACLEAN



illustrated by Mac Haynes

our planet bodies. Pretending it's a gas at first but hollow cold pervading freezing stillborn whatever I have to say. Or her if. Grandpa and grandma must have practised a lot! I feel like a penguin trying to fly. We're slow as molasses in January. Where did you learn that Jennifer? What? Slow as molasses in January. O I don't know I just know it. Feeling ludicrous now as if I've beguiled her into an unexplored cave and now can't find the way out. What if we can't extricate this incredible combination of linked hands arms legs and have to die like moose locked by antlers? Maybe that's why grandma and grandpa married. O well it's warmer this way. Isn't it? The woods flashing by. The Sun blinking through the trees. Did you skate here before Jennifer? Mmmmm. We drove the stationwagon out on the lake-and the whole family-skated Saturday nights to waltzes. Except mother she made hot chocolate. Do you like Mozart Jennifer? O yes he's gently sad. Puffing now unable to articulate reduced to monosyllables and then nothing but the sky dusky now sombre. In and out of latticed shadows. In and out of the dappled pellucid sunlight. Where we had been before disappeared around the bend with the red pill-box school. Alone. Are you tired? Let's sit down anyway ok. Under a spruce the smell of Christmas lying there, per lungs labouring beneath her parks and mysterious layers of god knows what esoteric buttoned laced zippered frilly diaphonous clothing. The delicate blue vein in her right temple pulsing like a tuning-fork. Her cheeks glazed red unreal a doll's. A constellation of snowflakes glistening in her dark hair where it falls out of her toque to press her cheek like a ravenswing. Silence coming out of the hills the bare etched stark branches the sky a cowl of quiet. Sifting from branch to branch the slow syllables of snowflakes. Jennifer? Mmmmm. It's different with girls isn't it? What? Everything. Being alone I mean. But nobody's every really alone your parents love you don't they? I don't mean that I mean do you ever feel you are deserted by everybody even yourself as if you left yourself propped up somewhere like cardboard which nobody guesses isn't really you and then you skated away into the woods or somewhere and never came back. Silent. Maybe she's sleeping. Now the wind blowing the coarse-

grained film of snow down over our halfexposed bodies. The evening with the city's lights floating with infinite composure like frozen water-lilies. Thin against the snow and starved trees. The streetlamps on the bridge flickering on shining motionless like great faceted moth eyes. Time trickling beneath the ice lightyears distant. And feeling her near me close the warm fluid depth of her girl body her pale triangular foxface staring dreamily up at the sky the tip of her tongue poised on her wet lowerlip her brown eyes stirring in their deep sockets it suddenly hits me with electricshock that she is real tangible that she owns lungs and skin and teeth that she exists apart from my dream a breathing entity. Wanting to reach out and touch her and say o Jennifer o Jennifer o. But too afraid. Stirring beside me: It's dark now we'd better go home. It's ok the Moon's sleeping with the ice. She laughs bells tinkling: They must be cold! No remember how it is when you fall from a toboggan you want to lie there forever why don't we do that Jennifer? Silly! She sways like a reed in the wind of her

laughter. Looking at me sideways her eyes glinting. I pull her up so light she makes me strong. We start to skate back. If you fall I'll fall on purpose. Then they'll find our bones in spring wouldn't that be sad! Like the hunchback of Notre Dame and the poor dancing girl. Back together easier now closer her hand warm through her mitten familiar as my own and her hair thrown back frostgilded and the small pale pinched blur of her face bent concentrating on her strokes and her eyes coiled by her blue toque's shadow: and then suddenly unseparate faster unfooted grandma and grandpa's magical combination suddenly clicking into place as we whirl and float unhurttable sssssssssss of our single blade hissing faster gulls flung loose in a fabric of wind carrying the city with us flowing effortlessly the world swirling past like water-froth behind a boat shut so it seems we are in a great lost luminous book only reading with our whole body following the gentle flowing indelible words the stroked ice whispering our

blood together faster the white hushed forest and the stars beginning now to blaze and the dark night flowing within and without faster together faster. Flying flying flying.