A close reading of 'Lazienki Park' by Anne Boileau

Lazienki Park

You can't remember this. But you were told
the story so many times you see it.
Aged two, you totter out onto the frozen pond
in front of the skaters. Ice solid, silver blue,
as if nothing could crack it. They're shouting
at you to get out of the way
when he glides
to your side. *Leave her alone*, he calls,
so you know there was a time he loved you.
He loved you, did love you, loved you once.

Maria Jastrzehska

A simple story told in ten lines, unrhymed, with the seventh line foreshortened, this poem implies much more than it tells. The opening line *You can't remember this* can awaken in the reader's head the tune of the famous song from Casablanca, *You must remember this*. Already we sense this poem is about love. But in this case, the love shown in this small gesture on the frozen pond, where the ice *is solid, silver blue/ as if nothing could crack it* has gained special significance in the telling and retelling of the story. We do not know who the person who stood up for the child was, except that he was an important part of her life: brother, father, uncle?

On one level, it's a story about a frozen pond and skaters and a small child. But read it again and it raises a great many questions. Why did such a small event take on such significance for this person who was that child? Why does she hang onto this memory she does not have? Because it was so rare for this person to show love or tenderness towards her. He stood up for her at that time, when she was small and vulnerable. It may have taken some courage to do so. But he did not follow through as their lives unfolded. In some way, he failed her, and she is in pain because of that. The ice did ultimately crack.

The last two lines read like a grammar lesson in the past tense.

So you know there was a time he loved you.
He loved you, did love you, loved you once.

It has become a mantra, a prayer of consolation, perhaps even an expression of forgiveness.