Happy Blades

1 Everyone else in my sixth grade class whooped and cheered, and there I was, a dot of gloom in the midst of high spirits. Our teacher, Mr. Dearborn, had just announced that our class won the best-attendance prize for the fall semester and that our reward would be ice skating at Happy Blades next Wednesday afternoon. Amanda looked proud. Her father, the manager at Happy Blades, must have arranged it.

2 “Wow! Thanks, Amanda!” Tom yelled.

3 “When the third grade class won last spring,” Kirsten told me, “all they got was ice cream. We’ll have so much fun!”

4 I’d been in this school for only two months, just long enough to fit in, and I’d made friends with Amanda and Kirsten. Now everything would be ruined! I’d never skated–not ever! There was no rink where I used to live, and unfortunately I knew that Kirsten had been taking figure skating lessons forever. I’d fall all over the ice and make a complete fool of myself. Janie Mason, female clown, is what I would be labeled! Everyone else would skate by confidently, laughing at me, and the cool image that I’d developed so consciously for two months would be gone forever. I might even break my legs and suffer the embarrassment of being carted off in an ambulance!

5 I dreaded Wednesday; it was all I could do to prevent having to face the day. I knew Mom would make me go to school on Wednesday morning, and then, if I didn’t go skating that afternoon, everyone would know I didn’t want to. Amanda would be insulted.

6 “It’ll be so great, Janie! My dad set everything up,” Amanda said. “He’ll have the refreshment stand open, and we’ll have hot dogs and . . .”

7 “I don’t have skates,” I mumbled.

8 “You can rent them,” Amanda said. “We’ll have the rink just for our class!”

9 I was obligated to act enthusiastically, so I pasted my lips into a seriously phony smile. Happy Blades was an outdoor rink. I reasoned with myself that my last hope was for rain or a major blizzard on Wednesday. I kept fantasizing and praying for a major downpour or snowstorm. To my disappointment, Wednesday turned out to be the perfect January day for skating: sunny and crisp. And to my dissatisfaction, I was at Happy Blades.

10 I stood numbly at the entrance to the ice while everyone else rushed on. Kirsten was doing twirls and spins, or spirals as they might be called in the professional skating world, in the center of the rink. Tom and Johnny whooshed by, the sound of their blades victoriously grating across the ice. I stepped on the ice cautiously, but my feet slid from under me. I clung to the railing as my knuckles turned almost purple from hanging on so hard.

11 Amanda glanced at me. “I like to skate fast,” she said, “so is it okay if I go ahead?” Amanda darted on her blades at top speed ahead of me. I was relieved and thought that maybe she wouldn’t realize that I was such a disaster. I clutched the railing and, hand over hand, forced myself forward, desperately. Who in their right mind would choose to walk on such a cruelly cold and slippery surface? Better yet, who would walk on such a surface with only the edge of a blade to balance herself? Maybe I could hide in the girls’ locker room for the rest of the afternoon. Interrupting my thoughts was a sound and vision ahead of me. Someone was in my way–Tracy Donaldson! She was clutching the rail, too. She grinned at me sheepishly. “I thought everyone would be an Olympic champion.”

12 That’s when Mr. Dearborn skidded in front of us with a spray of ice. “You’ll never learn that way, girls.” Tracy and I shrank back like wallflowers, but he pulled each of us by the hand. “Come on, I’ve got you.” Like it or not, we were out on the ice! “Stroke,” Mr. Dearborn instructed. “Stroke. Slide.”

13 I concentrated on hanging on to Mr. Dearborn’s hand while simply hearing, not following, his calm training technique. And then something horribly expected happened. Maybe it was me or maybe it was Tracy, but the next thing I knew, all three of us were smack down on that unforgiving ice! I gasped between muffled laughter; Mr. Dearborn chuckled, and so did Tracy. Mr. Dearborn attempted to help us up, but we kept flopping over. It was hilarious; I couldn’t help laughing uncontrollably. When we were finally standing and reasonably stable, Mr. Dearborn said, “Everyone falls; it’s no big deal.”

14 I watched Kirsten in the center of the rink. She tried some kind of fancy, intricate move, and then she was down on the ice, just as Mr. Dearborn had said. She scrambled to her feet, looked around for witnesses, tried again, and this time she succeeded, doing an amazing jump and a spin. I’d like to ask her how she did that! But I thought I would wait until I could at least stand up on both feet and glide along the ice for a minute.

15 “Are you okay, girls?” Mr. Dearborn asked us. “I ought to give Robbie a hand.” We nodded; we knew we were ready for some independence. Too busy worrying about myself, I hadn’t noticed Robbie struggling. He was by himself, bravely far from the railing, but his feet splayed out to the sides while his arms revolved frantically to keep his balance.

16 Tracy and I continued shakily on our own, holding hands–as if we could actually help each other! We fell, got up, managed to go forward for a while, and fell again. This routine continued for quite some time. Tom hooted at us as he sped by, but it wasn’t that humiliating after all. It was true that almost everyone in the class was a good skater. It was also true, I thought, that if I wouldn’t risk failing to learn something new in sixth grade, when would I?

17 “This is kind of fun,” Tracy said. “I mean, it could be.”

18 I responded, “I think it takes a lot of practice.”

19 “But it’s not impossible,” Tracy said, “if we practice enough and keep our heads up and our feet solidly on this ice, Janie. Want to go skating?

20 “Let’s!” I smiled–and this one was a genuine smile.

1. How do you know this is written in first person point of view?

A. the narrator is a character in the story

B. the narrator is not a character in the story

C. the narrator uses the pronouns “he,” “she,” and “they”

D. we know every character’s thoughts

2. How could the story change if it were told from third person point of view?

A. Janie would not be a character in the story

B. Janie and Kirsten would help Robbie

C. We would know what Amanda, Tom, and Johnny think of Janie’s skating

D. Janie would never have gone skating

3. Which sentence from the passage shows the narrator’s initial point of view about ice skating?

A. “I watched Kirsten in the center of the rink.”

B. “I was a dot of gloom in the midst of high spirits.”

C. “I’d been in this school for only two months.”

D. “I was obligated to act enthusiastically.”

4. What does this quotation tell you about how the narrator’s point of view changes in the story? “‘Let’s!’ I smiled-and this one was a genuine smile.”

A. She was happy to ice skate with her teacher.

B. She was no longer worried about being embarrassed.

C. She was relieved because she had no injuries.

D. She was not willing to risk being laughed at by her friends.

5. Explain how paragraph 4 supports Janie’s point of view about ice skating.

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6. How do you think Janie feels about ice skating at the end of paragraph 13?

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Extended Response Question: In the narrative, Janie is very upset about going ice skating with her class. As the plot moves forward, Janie starts to have fun.

Using evidence from the text, explain why Janie changes her point of view about ice skating.

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