3 SADAKO'S SECRET

It was the beginning of autumn when Sadako rushed home with the good news. She kicked off her shoes and threw open the door with a bang. "I'm home!" she called.

Her mother was fixing supper in the kitchen.

"The most wonderful thing has happened!" Sadako said breathlessly. "Guess what!"

"Many wonderful things happen to you, Sadako chan. I can't even guess."

"The big race on Field Day!" Sadako said. "I've been chosen from the bamboo class to be on the relay team." She danced around the room, gaily swinging her school bag. "Just think. If we win, I'll be sure to get on the team in junior high school next year." That was what Sadako wanted more than anything else.

At supper Mr. Sasaki made a long speech about family honor and pride. Even Masahiro was impressed. Sadako was too excited to eat. She just sat there, grinning happily.

From then on Sadako thought of only one thing --- the relay race. She practiced every day at school and often ran all the way home. When Masahiro timed her with Mr. Sasaki's big watch, Sadako's speed surprised everyone. Maybe, she dreamed, I will be the best runner in the whole school.

At last the big day arrived. A crowd of parents, relatives, and friends gathered at the school to watch the sports events. Sadako was so nervous she was afraid her legs wouldn't work at all. Members of the other team suddenly looked taller and stronger than her teammates.

When Sadako told her mother how she felt, Mrs. Sasaki said, "Sadako chan, it is natural to be a little bit afraid. But don't worry. When you get out there, you will run as fast as you can."

Then it was time for the relay race.

"Just do your best," Mr. Sasaki said, giving Sadako's hand a squeeze. "Well, be proud of you."

The kind words from her parents made the knot in Sadako's stomach loosen. They love me, no matter what, she thought.

At the signal to start, Sadako forgot everything but the race. When it was her turn, she ran with all the strength she had. Sadako's heart was still thumping painfully against her ribs when the race was over.

It was then that she first felt strange and dizzy. She scarcely heard someone cry, "Your team won!" The bamboo class surrounded Sadako, cheering and shouting. She shook her head a few times and the dizziness went away.

All winter Sadako tried to improve her running speed. To qualify for the racing team in junior high she would have to practice every day. Sometimes after a long run the dizziness returned. Sadako decided not to tell her family about it.

She tried to convince herself that it meant nothing, that the dizziness would go away. But it didn't. It got worse. Frightened, Sadako carried the secret inside of her. She didn't even tell Chizuko, her best friend.

On New Year's Eve Sadako hoped she could magically wish away the dizzy spells. How perfect everything would be if she didn't have this secret! At midnight she was in her cozy bed quilts when the temple bells began to chime. They were ringing out all the evils of the old year so that the new one would have a fine beginning. With each ring Sadako drowsily made her special wish.

The next morning the Sasaki family joined crowds of people as they visited their shrines. Mrs. Sasaki looked beautiful in her best flowered silk kimono.

"As soon as we can afford it, I'll buy a kimono for you," she promised Sadako. "A girl your age should have one."

Sadako thanked her mother politely, but she didn't care about a kimono. She only cared about racing with the team in junior high.

Amidst throngs of happy people Sadako forgot her secret for a while. She let the bright joy of the season wash her worries away. At the end of the day she raced Masahiro home and won easily. Above the door were the good luck symbols Mrs. Sasaki had put there to protect them during the new year.

With a beginning like this, how could anything bad happen?

Comprehension Check 3

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1. Sadako was very happy to get on the team in junior high school. ( )

2. Masahiro timed Sadako's speed with his big watch. ( )

3. Sadako first felt strange and dizzy when the race was over. ( )

4. Though the dizziness sometimes returned, Sadako didn't tell her family about it. ( )