

## Natalie's Magic Skates

As Natalie skated to the center of the ice, she gritted her teeth. It was the first time she skated in a competition. The competition was sponsored by the skating club in town, and it was a good place for skaters to begin. Everyone kept telling her not to worry, to just go out and have fun with her skating program. But Natalie wanted to do well. She wanted to be as good as the skaters she had seen on TV. Scoring high would show that she was making progress. She had practiced hard. When she studied her schoolwork, she did well on the tests, so she expected to do well here too.

As the music started, Natalie began her routine. She could not do the double and triple jumps and complicated spins the advanced skaters did. However, in practice, she did her moves better than other children in her class. But this was different. Doing a whole program was much more difficult than just doing the single jumps and spins. Getting into the right position to do the moves at the right time left little room for mistakes. There was just one chance to get it right.

Concentrating as hard as she could was not enough to prevent a slight slip when she went into the first turn. Suddenly she felt very awkward. Her whole program began to fall apart. At times, she felt like it was her first time on the ice. Then she fell. She knew she would not win. However, she was not a quitter and finished the routine. Although her first competition had been a disaster, she did not fret. As she left the ice, she was more determined than ever to get it right.

What led up to this tough start in competition skating began a couple years earlier. Natalie was about five years old when she first learned about ice skating. One evening, as she walked by the television, she noticed the screen brightened by an ice skating program. She could not take her eyes off the TV as the skaters glided across the ice. The music, the colorful outfits, and the flashing bright lights made it all seem like a magic world. It was something Natalie could not forget.

Sometime later, Natalie was looking through the window at the snow sparkling in the sunlight. It reminded her of the skating shows on TV. She smiled as she remembered how the skates flashed in the lights. Then she turned and saw her mother, who was passing nearby. Natalie looked up at her mother and asked, "Mom, can I go ice skating sometime?"

"I did not know you were interested," her mother replied. "Why do you want to go ice skating? We have never even been to a skating rink."

"I watched it on TV. It is really fun. I want to do what the skaters do. I know I can do it," Natalie explained.

"Well, I think we can take you," her mother replied. "I know where there is a skating rink, and we can rent some skates. It might be fun. If your father does not have something planned, maybe we can go this weekend."

"Yes, let's go," Natalie pleaded.

"Just remember, it is harder than it looks. I have not had skates on for years. I hope I am able to at least stand up," her mother warned.

"I can do it," Natalie said.

It was a fun afternoon at the skating rink. Of course, everyone was quite sore. By the time they quit, they were all very good at getting up off the ice. Natalie did not complain. It was her first time on skates, but she ended by making a big circle around her mother and father. On the way home, Natalie had to ask if she could go skating again.

Her mother and father looked at one another. "If we recover," answered her mother.

That was the first of many trips to the rink that Natalie made that winter. She amazed everyone, and got some lessons from an instructor. Her parents even bought her some skates of her own. When spring came, however, the skating rink closed. As Natalie put away her skates in her closet, she felt sad. It was the same way she felt when her best friend April moved away. At that time, no one, not even Natalie, ever thought she would be skating in competitions. But as you already know, there was more skating in her future.

Summer came and went, but hardly a day went by that Natalie did not think about skating. Sometimes in her bedroom she would pretend she was on the ice and go through all the twists and turns she had learned. She was all excited when she learned the ice skating rink was going to open early in the fall. She was almost the first one on the ice when the skating began. Her mother and father understood how much she loved to skate. They did all they could to help her follow her dream. She began getting regular lessons at the skating rink. Everyone marveled at the progress she was making.

By the time the season ended, the instructors and older skaters were all watching and talking about her. As she came off the ice for the last time on what seemed like a very short season, Ms. Amy, one of the instructors was waiting with her father, who came to pick her up.

"Natalie," she began, "I have been telling your father how well you have done. I think it would be great if you would start skating in some of our club competitions next year. Your progress has been amazing and I think your skating is something special."

That caught Natalie's attention.

"Can I do it?" Natalie pleaded, looking at her father with a big grin.

"Hey, Ms. Amy says you are ready. I am pretty sure your mother will approve, so it is your decision. You are the one who will be doing the skating."

"Then I will do it, Ms. Amy," she said excitedly.

That summer seemed to go so much faster. Ms. Amy showed her some exercises she could do to improve her coordination. She practiced jumping on the lawn to strengthen her legs. She danced, she jumped rope, and she practiced walking down a narrow board her father put by the porch to improve her balance. From time to time, she and Ms. Amy talked about what kind of programs she could try and what kind of music would fit in with her routines. Natalie had seen both club competitions and a big regional qualifying competition, but she did not realize how much work there was. Fortunately, for her, it seemed more like fun than work. Finally, the rink at Lakeside Arena opened, and Natalie was ready to go.

That was how Natalie got started in the competitions, and the result she never expected on her first trial. As you know, she was determined to succeed, and worked harder than ever. That is why she never thought her second competition would be nearly as bad as the first. Although she did not have a hard fall, she lost her balance several times and had to catch herself. When she realized that she had forgotten one jump, it was almost too much. Again, she left the ice without the big smile she had at the start.

Ms. Amy and others all tried to help her understand that she was going through the same experience as all beginners. They pointed to the more advanced skaters who sometimes fell or missed a jump. But Natalie continued to be concerned. She did not want to be just another beginner. In her heart, she felt that she was a real skater like the ones she watched on television. Beginners were the little children whose parents had to tie their skates.

Again, Natalie worked and worked on the jumps and spins and footwork. There were times when she did not want to leave the rink to go home. You can imagine how she felt when she had another hard fall during her next competition.

Natalie scrambled to get up from the ice to finish out the last half minute of her routine. A tear was already running down her cheek. She just could not hold the tears back anymore. This was her third competition and it was a disaster like the other two. She struggled to finish the routine, which was now anything but dazzling. She left the ice to the polite applause of the audience. She knew that

in their hearts, they all felt sorry for her. This was not the way it was supposed to be.

As she entered the skaters' gate in the rink wall, her mother and father swept her up in their arms.

"You did really great until your skate slipped," said her mother.

Her father also tried to reassure her. "Yes, you were so graceful out there."

The words were not much help to Natalie. "This is not fun. I do not want to compete anymore." By now, her face was covered with a sea of tears. "Please, let's go home," she pleaded.

Her mother and father took her by the hands and they walked to the locker room where Natalie quickly changed clothes and put on her coat. They did not stay to hear the scores. Natalie knew she would not be near the top.

Natalie did not go to practice all week. Saturday morning came. This was the day for a long practice. She usually was ready to go a half hour before it was time to leave. This time, she remained sitting at the breakfast table after the dishes had been put into the dishwasher.

Finally, her mother asked, "Natalie, are you going skate today? You have not practiced all week."

Natalie looked up, showing no sign of her smile. "Mom, can I go if I do not go to competitions any more?" she asked.

"Of course," she replied. "It will be good for you to get on the ice and just have some fun. I know how you must feel."

"I think I would rather stay home today," said Natalie. "Maybe I will go some other time."

It was about two weeks later when the doorbell rang, and Natalie's mother went to the door. As she looked out, the package delivery truck drove off. She looked down and there she saw a package. As she picked it up, she looked at the label. It was for Natalie. Curious, her mother looked at the label again to see whom it was from. In the "sent by" space, there was just a number. "That is strange," she thought.

It was not long before Natalie arrived home from school. She closed the front door behind her and pulled off her coat as she headed for the kitchen. She needed a snack real bad.

As she worked on the peanut butter, her mother came into the kitchen. She pointed to the counter where she had placed the package. "Natalie, that package came for you today. Were you expecting something?"

"No Mom," Natalie replied as she headed for the package. She picked it up and gave it a little shake. Nothing. She then took it to the kitchen table and proceeded to unwrap it with her mother standing at her side. Finally, with the help of her mother's scissors, Natalie got the box open.

"Look! Skates! Look at these." She pulled one from the box. Her eyes grew big.

What skates they were. The blades sparkled in the light as if they were covered with diamonds. And the leather. The skates were brand new but the leather was so soft it felt like fur. Natalie put it against her cheek and felt the smoothness.

Her mother lifted the other skate from the box and stared at it for a few moments. "Natalie, these are the most beautiful skates I have ever seen. I wonder where they came from." At that moment, something in the box caught her eye. She reached in and lifted an envelope out. Then she handed it to Natalie to open. "Maybe this will tell who sent them."

Natalie carefully opened the envelope and removed a rather plain looking card. Inside was a neatly typed message, which she read out loud.

"Dear Natalie,  
These skates are a special gift for you. As you can see, they are not ordinary skates. The blades have been smitten with magic, which is what makes them sparkle. When you wear these skates, you will be able to skate to the stars. You will sparkle with them."

But there was no name at the end. Natalie turned the card over to see if anything was written on the back. It was blank.

"How mysterious," her mother said, "I wonder who could have sent them?"

Natalie sat on a chair and slipped off her shoes. After carefully putting on the skates, she straightened her legs. "Mom, they fit perfect. I have to try them," she shouted gleefully.

"Tomorrow is Saturday so you can give them a good try," her mother replied.

When her father arrived home sometime later, Natalie was waiting at the door with her new skates. She blurted out the story while her father examined one of the skates.

"So you do not know who sent them?" he asked.

"There was only a number on the label," Natalie replied.

"Well, I have to say, I never saw any skates quite like these. Everything seems special. I could probably do some fancy skating with these if they were my size."

"They fit me perfectly," Natalie said. She looked down at his feet. "Your feet are much bigger than mine." She spoke sternly, trying to be sure he would not attempt to try them on.

She went to bed a little earlier than usual that night, hoping to speed up the arrival of Saturday. She put the skates on the small table beside her bed. When she pulled the covers up, she turned on her side so she could look at them in the dim light. Finally, she fell asleep and dreamed of skating among the twinkling stars.

In the morning, she was the first one at the breakfast table. She was ready to head for the ice long before it was time to leave. As her mother and father put on their coats, she took a quick peek in the skate bag and pulled up the zipper.

"Let's go," her father directed. "And don't forget the skates, kid,"

She knew he was teasing. He always called her "kid" when he did that.

When they got to the rink, Natalie led the way to the lockers where she left her coat, shoes, and skate bag. She quickly sat on one of the benches and slipped into the skates. Next, she tightened laces and tied them, making sure the bows were perfect. Last, she made sure the skate guards were on the blades firmly. They were too precious to risk damaging them.

Her mother took her hand as they walked to the ice. Already there were several people on the ice, and there was chattering all around. Finally, Natalie reached down and carefully slipped the guard off each blade, as if they were made of glass. She handed the guards to her father, who was standing at her side.

"Be careful now," he said. "You need to get used to those new skates. And you have not been on the ice for a while."

With that, she glided out a few feet, and broke into a big smile. "They feel great," she yelled back as she headed down the ice.

She made a couple of trips around the rink, going faster and faster. She felt like a feather drifting in the wind. A few times, she glanced down at the skates and her eyes caught the magic sparkle of the blades. Then she slowed and moved toward the middle of the ice and began doing some of the jumps and spins that she learned for the competition program. She had always done them very well in practice. It was the competitions that troubled her. But even here, she felt different. Never before had she landed so lightly and never before were her spins so crisp. She went on and on until she was out of breath. She headed toward her parents, who were still standing where she had left them.

Then a strange thing happened. First, she heard something that sounded like a handclap. Suddenly, there was clapping all around her. Startled, Natalie looked up and around. Everyone on the ice, as well as those scattered in the stands were looking at her. They were clapping for her. She could feel her face turning red as she realized what was happening. She almost flew through the gate and into her mother's outstretched arms.

"You wowed them, kid," was all her father could say.

Natalie sat down on one of the nearby bleacher seats and began placing the guards back on her skates. As she looked up, she saw a familiar skater glide up to the rink wall. It was Amy Neilsen, her instructor and a skater who had made it all the way to the national championship one year. Ms. Amy stopped at the edge of the ice and gave a friendly "hello" to everyone.

"Natalie, you were stunning out there today. Everybody had their eyes on you. I have not seen you for...well, it must have been a couple of weeks. Have you been practicing somewhere else?"

Natalie grinned. "No, it's my magic skates." She extended her legs so Ms. Amy could get a good look.

"Those are beautiful skates," she replied. "I have never seen any quite like them. The sparkle from the blades really catches your eye. I do not know about magic, but you have something in those skates." She then went on to tell them all about the last club competition for the season. It was to be held right there in four weeks.

When hearing the word "competition," the smile left Natalie's face.

Ms. Amy continued. "It is going to be really special. We have very good judges coming. They will meet with the skaters after the competition and give some tips. Some of the money from the tickets will be used for prizes like free

lessons and free ice time at some of the rinks in the area. There are even going to be "Ice Princess" trophies for the young ladies' events. After seeing you today, I think one can be yours."

Natalie looked up, but did not say a word.

"You will come?" Ms. Amy asked. "You still have a week to enter."

Natalie's mother saw the look on her face. "We will talk about it," she told Ms. Amy.

"Great. Natalie, you know I will be around to help you get ready. I think we can make your program a little stronger. Get in as much practice as you can. I have to go now. Other students are waiting."

They waved goodbye as she skated off.

Natalie went out on the ice again. This time, she just glided from end to end. She was deep in thought.

It was a quiet trip home. What a wonderful morning it had been for all. But now they were all thinking about Natalie's last competition, and it made them all tired. Not another word was mentioned about the events of the day until the following evening when they sat down for supper.

"Mom, dad," Natalie said in a quiet voice, "will it be alright if I enter the competition?"

Natalie sounded confused. She loved to skate, but she kept thinking about how badly the competitions had gone. Now she had her magic skates. Would they make a difference? Her mind was swimming. Her mother and father told her that she had to make the decision. They would understand if she decided either way. They reminded her that she had until the following Saturday to decide.

Natalie thought and thought about what she should do. Later that week, she was pulling her covers up at bedtime and glanced at her magic skates in the corner of her room. They seemed to be whispering to her. After a moment, in a flash, she made her decision. She would go for it.

In the morning, she gave her mother and father the news. They both gave her a hug, knowing how difficult a decision it was. Quickly the excitement faded as they all realized how much work was ahead. And work she did. Extra practices, meetings, and phone calls to Ms. Amy, and picking out a new skating outfit were just a few of things that filled her days.

The rink was where Natalie spent most of her time left over from schoolwork. She worked on her routines harder than ever before, making small changes right up until the week before the competition. The last week was spent going over and over the program, making sure she remembered every little move and got them just perfect. Everyone at the rink admired her determination and skill. Finally, on Friday, she had a short practice, skating through her program only once. She was ready. Her magic skates had lifted her spirits to a new level. Skating was fun again.

Natalie thought Saturday evening would never come. She tried reading, she cleaned up her room, and she watched the birds at the feeder, but the clock seemed to be moving so slow. Finally, they sat down to a light supper before leaving.

They arrived at the arena at six o'clock just as the schedule called for. The skaters signed in and went to the locker rooms to change into their skating outfits. At six-thirty, they were to go to the judges' area where they would be given the order of their skate. Then they could warm up. They were to clear the ice at seven o'clock and the competitions would begin at seven-fifteen. The groupings were beginners, intermediate, and advanced ladies divisions. Natalie would be the last skater in the middle competition.

When she saw the skate order, Natalie was disappointed. She did not like to wait. Besides, she had been waiting all morning and afternoon. However, as soon as she was on the ice warming up, her thoughts returned to her program. She felt calm and confident, and the marks in the ice seemed to blur under her skates.

Natalie did not notice that her parents were no longer in the waiting area. They had been summoned to the judges table. Upon arriving, they saw that the judges looked very serious. One of the judges introduced the others and explained that concerns had been raised about Natalie's skates.

"Decorating the blades is very unusual," the judge began. "In fact, none of us have seen decorations on blades before. We believe that it is in violation of SSR 19.00 in the rulebook."

"What is that?" asked Natalie's mother, whose face had turned pale.

The judge continued. "It is a rule about competition clothing. It states that excessive decoration should be avoided. There are a couple of reasons. First, skaters are to be judged for their skating and not as fashion models. Also, there are safety reasons. Beads, sequins and other attachments might fall off and pose a danger to skaters."

One of the other judges went on. "We feel that the skates are decorated in a manner that makes them a detraction. Also, there are some sort of sparkles on the blades that could easily be scraped off on the ice and pose a danger to skaters. Since she is the last skater in her group, that will not be so much of an issue for others, but might be a danger to her."

The first judge took over again. "We can see that your daughter is a good skater. But we will have to make deductions for such a rules violation. We are telling you now so that maybe she can change skates and not be penalized. Ordinarily, we would not explain these things until after the judging, but since this is not an official qualifying competition, we have decided to be more flexible. This is such an unusual situation, and sometimes the rules are complicated even for us."

Natalie's parents looked at one another, trying not to believe what they heard. Finally, her mother tried to protest. "But these are her special skates. She will be crushed if she cannot use them."

"Competitions are not easy," said the judge. "Everyone who has ever skated in competitions encounters problems that they must overcome from time to time. And she does have a choice. She can use the skates and take the deductions or she can skate with undecorated skates and possibly score higher."

Again, Natalie's mother and father looked at one another. They realized they had no choice but to give Natalie the bad news. Natalie's father thanked the judges, and they headed back to the area where she would leave the ice.

A buzzer sounded and a voice came over the loudspeaker informing the skaters that the warm-up time was over. The skaters headed for the gates, falling into a line as they left the ice. They headed to the waiting area where they would remain until their turn to skate came. First the short programs, and then the longer ones.

When Natalie came off the ice, she immediately went to her parents, wearing a big smile. Her practice had been perfect. It was not smiling faces that greeted her.

"Natalie, we need to talk. Let's go to the locker room," said her father in an unusually quiet voice.

"Is something wrong?" Natalie asked.

"I am afraid there is a problem," her mother replied.

As soon as Natalie placed the guards on her skates, they all quickly headed for the locker room. They sat down on a bench. As her parents

explained what the judges had told them about her skates, Natalie's face became serious.

"What are we going to do?" asked Natalie, "I need my magic skates. And besides, my old skates are at home."

Her mother and father looked at one another again. They had not thought about that.

"I guess you will have to take the deductions," her father concluded.

A tear began to creep out of one of Natalie's eyes.

Just then, an elderly man came around the corner. Natalie recognized Mr. Greely, who was one of the caretakers at the skating rink, but she was too upset to speak.

"Well hello, Ms. Natalie." Sensing trouble, he continued. "Is there a problem that I can help with?"

Her parents shook their head, signaling an uncertain "no."

"You know, I have been watching several of the skaters who practice here for sometime now. I do not think any were doing as well as Ms. Natalie." Looking at Natalie, Mr. Greely went on, trying to draw a smile from her. "I just know you are going to skate up a storm tonight."

That was the wrong thing to say, and Natalie could not hold back the tears. "I do not think I will skate," she uttered. Her head hung down and she stared at her skates.

At that point, Natalie's mother and father began speaking. They explained to Mr. Greely about her magic skates and what the judges had told them. He said nothing and appeared to be deep in thought. No one had anything to else to say,

Finally, Mr. Greely rubbed his chin and then broke the silence. "I have a plan. There is a way."

"What is it?" asked Natalie's father, almost whispering. It was clear he was not very hopeful.

"I raised children and now I have grand children," he said smiling. "I think all were touched by magic some time in their life. So I know something about magic."

"Really?" questioned Natalie, who was now looking at him.

"Yes," he said without hesitating. "I know it is not the skates that are magic, as nice as they are. The magic is in the paint. That is why it glistens."

"I still do not understand," said Natalie's father. "What difference does that make?"

"Oh, it makes a lot of difference. The paint does not need to be on the skates for the magic to work. I believe I can remove the paint in my workshop and save it so Ms. Natalie can take it with her when she skates. That way, the judges will have nothing to complain about and Ms. Natalie will have the magic."

Natalie's mother smiled. "That just might work. What do you think, Natalie? If we do not find a way, so many people will be disappointed."

Until then, all Natalie had been thinking about was herself. She had forgotten that many of her friends, classmates, and teachers were there, not to mention her grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, all waiting to see her skate. She looked at Mr. Greely, and then she looked at the clock on the wall. There probably was little more than a half hour before she would be summoned to the ice. She quickly slipped off the skates and handed them to Mr. Greely.

"There is not much time. Please hurry," she pleaded.

Mr. Greely took the skates and reassured her. "I have exactly the right tools in my shop. It will take only a few minutes."

Natalie's mother began fixing her makeup and hair, which had started coming down. Her father began to straighten some of the creases in her dress. There was no time to lose. When they were done, Natalie sat down, closed her eyes, and skated through her short program in her head as she always did.

As promised, Mr. Greely returned in just a few minutes. In one hand he carried her skates, and in the other, a small envelope. Natalie took the skates and looked them over. The blades no longer sparkled, but they were quite shiny.

"You did a great job," Natalie's father offered. "I do not know how to thank you."

"I have good tools. I was able to buff them, but was careful to not damage the edges of the blades. I know how important sharp edges are to the skaters. As far as thanking me, it will be enough for me to watch Ms. Natalie do her remarkable skating."

At that point, he handed the envelope to Natalie's mother. "I am sure you can fix this to her outfit. I brought a safety pin that might help."

Natalie's mother began looking back and forth between her skating outfit and the envelope in her hand. "We are in luck. Those pockets at her waist are real. It is good to have a place to store an extra pair of shoestrings in case one breaks, as well as a tissue. I can pin it shut so the envelope does not fall out."

"That is a good idea. I made certain that the envelope is sealed tight so nothing falls out. We would not want that, would we?" Clearly, Mr. Greely understood how important the envelope was.

As soon as her pocket was pinned shut, Natalie put the guards on her skates.

"We better go. There is not much time," urged Natalie as she took a deep breath.

They were off to the waiting area where Natalie remained until her name was called. By the time she got to the ice, her smile was back. She gave her pocket one last rub as she stepped onto the ice.

She started carefully and it was only a few moments until she was gliding backward into her first jump, a simple toe loop. As she bounded upward, a strange, warm feeling swept through her body. Suddenly she felt like a party balloon that was let go and buffeted by a breeze. She floated around the rink effortlessly, with each jump becoming higher and each spin faster. Finally, she turned into her back spin and whirled like a top. As she extended her hand ending her routine, she heard the applause. It pleased her but at the same time, she always felt a little embarrassed. Just as she was about to leave the ice, she glanced upward. Standing alone at the very top of the bleachers was Mr. Greely, smiling and clapping. She gave him a wave. Such a smart man, she thought.

The short program had gone smoothly, but Natalie was startled by a smattering of applause as she skated into position for the long program. She began to feel a bit uneasy, just like in her last two competitions. "Oh no, here we go again," she thought. Then she remembered the magic paint in her pocket. She gave it a firm rub just as the opening notes of her music flowed out from the loudspeakers. The opening song was "Somewhere Over the Rainbow," which Ms. Amy had helped her pick. It was Natalie's favorite, and the music helped her to relax and start with a slow, smooth routine. In a few moments she felt as if she was soaring over a real rainbow and among the clouds, on her way to the stars.

Not once did the earlier disasters pop into her head. Her footwork to the "Elephant Walk" was flawless and delighted the crowd. That was where her last

disaster happened when she accidentally kicked a blade with her other skate. Before she finished the final move, a layback spin, the audience had already begun to applaud. She had nailed it. She gave a little bow as she glided toward the gate where her parents were waiting. Everyone was smiling now.

Needless to say, Natalie finished first and was presented the Princess Trophy for her group. And not only did she receive the highest marks from the judges, but they encouraged her to move on to the official qualifying competitions in the fall. It was a magic night.

After all the congratulations and excitement, Natalie was exhausted. She did not bother to change from her skating outfit, just wrapping herself in her coat as they left the rink. On the trip home, Natalie remembered the envelope in her pocket. She told her parents that Mr. Greely had been watching and that she had waved to him.

"He really rescued the night," said Natalie's mother.

Before Natalie got into bed, she rubbed the envelope one more time as she carefully placed it on her dresser. She knew it would help her reach the stars.

Natalie continued to skate, and the following year, they moved to a new city where she could skate all year round. Her skating got better and better as she mastered the more difficult spins and jumps. Just as important, she was regularly placing at the top in the qualifying competitions.

It was about four years later that Natalie had moved up in the rankings and had one more competition to win to qualify for the nationals. As she packed her things, she reached for her envelope, which she always carried during the competitions. Soon after she had gotten the magic skates she had realized how lucky she had been when Mr. Greely thought to remove the paint. By the fall of that year, her feet had outgrown the boots, and she had to get new skates. Since then, she has had several pairs of skates. With the paint in the envelope, she was able to carry it with her all those years. The old skates were now neatly hung on the wall in her room.

This time she noticed that the envelope had become yellowed from age. It also looked like it was about to tear where it had been folded. "I better put this in a new envelope before the paint spills out," she thought. She went to the small desk near the corner of her room and pulled out an envelope that was about the same size. She prepared the envelope and sat down so she could pour the magic paint from the old one without spilling it. Very carefully she pulled open the top of the yellowed envelope. As she pulled the sides apart, a strange look came on Natalie's face. As she peered in, she saw that there was a folded piece of paper, which she pulled out. Looking into the envelope, she did not see the

paint with its sparkles. She swallowed hard. "What happened?" She lifted the paper to see if the paint was wrapped in it. When she opened it, there was not a single sparkle. She noticed that there was handwriting on the paper and read it.

*Dear Ms. Natalie,*

*As soon as I started removing the paint from your skates, there was a problem. The wire brush I had to use made the paint fly all over and I could not gather it up. Then I remembered that when people really believe in the magic, it resides within them. A magic wand, or dust in your case, just brings that magic to life, and it helps the recipients to believe in themselves. When I remembered how you were skating in your practices, I knew that had happened to you. You already had been touched by the magic. It had done its job. Now that you believe in yourself, you will always do your best.*

*Sincerely,*

*John Greely, Custodian  
Lakeside Arena*

*P.S. Thank you for all the joy you have given to me and others who have seen your wonderful skating.*

Natalie was stunned for a few moments. Then she realized that she had been skating the whole time without the magic paint. She smiled. "what a wise man Mr. Greely was," she thought. She carefully folded the note and put it in the new envelope. She would be taking in with her to her first national competition.

Then she paused again, deep in thought. "But where did the magic skates come from?" she wondered.

The End