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Opening extract from

Skate School: On Thin Ice

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“Hey, Frankie!” called Dylan. “What are you waiting for? The next ice age?”

Frankie Wills stared apprehensively down the snowy slope to the figures in the distance. She gulped. This was supposed to be a fun way to spend the afternoon off from Skate School, but she was terrified. No way had it looked this steep from the bottom. Right now, her scant experience of skiing – just a couple of hours at a dry ski slope – didn’t seem like anywhere near enough for her to tackle the dizzying drop. But she didn’t want to look an idiot in front of Dylan, Alesha and the others. If only she’d told them that she was just a beginner… She took a deep breath and swept strands of wavy brown hair out of her green eyes. Perhaps, if she went v-e-r-y slowly, she might get to the bottom in one piece. She shuffled forward a few millimetres in the uncomfortable ski boots and wobbled dangerously. Perhaps not.

Swoosh! A pink-clad figure came to an abrupt halt beside her, sending a whole heap of snow up into the air. The icy spray glittered in the pale winter sunlight as it tumbled all over Frankie. She shivered as melting flakes trickled down her neck, and wiped her sunglasses to see the person who’d dumped snow on her. It was Scarlett Jones, of course. So, not only was Scarlett one of the best figure skaters at Skate School, it looked as if she was an expert skier too.

Brilliant… thought Frankie.

Last term, Scarlett had done her best to make Frankie quit her new life as a figure skater training for Team GB. As far as Scarlett was concerned, she was number one at Skate School and she didn’t want the new girl spoiling things. But Frankie had refused to be bullied and she’d stuck it out. At the British Junior Championships in London, they’d finally had the chance to skate against each other competitively. Scarlett had snatched the gold, but Frankie was thrilled to have won silver after only a few weeks of training.

“What’s up?” said Scarlett, her words neatly interrupting Frankie’s thoughts. “Scared, are you?”

Frankie was terrified, but there was no way she was going to admit that to Scarlett. “Of course not,” she said quickly. “I’m just taking a breather.”

The other girl gave a tinkling laugh. “It’s only a nursery slope,” she said, flicking back the blonde hair that flowed from beneath her helmet. “You’re not exactly going to get out of breath. Unless…” A slight sneer lifted one corner of her perfectly glossed lips. “*Unless* you don’t know how to ski,” she finished delightedly. “You don’t, do you?”

Frankie said nothing. She didn’t need to. She risked another peek down the slope and saw that it was still as steep as the last time she’d looked. Oh dear. With a sigh, she braced herself for a stinging attack from her fiercest skating rival.

But abruptly Scarlett’s manner changed. “Oh, it’s not so difficult,” she said lightly. “It’s just like skating, but with bigger, fatter blades. Just point your skis downhill and go for it. I wouldn’t bother making any turns though – you can learn how to do those later.”

Scarlett made it sound so easy that Frankie immediately felt more positive. She *could* do it. It was only a nursery slope, after all. And if she could just get to the bottom, then she could take off these lead-weight boots and never go near a ski slope again. She would stick to figure skating in future. She thought wistfully of spinning and jumping, her blades gliding gracefully across the ice, transporting her into a world so magical that it glittered…

“Come on!” sang Scarlett. “Follow me!” She angled her skis downhill, pushed off on her poles and whooshed away.

Fearful that if she didn’t go now, she would still be standing here at Easter, Frankie did as she was told. She followed Scarlett. And, for a few glorious seconds, she began to grasp why every other skier apart from her seemed to be having such a wonderful time.

“*Wheee!*” she squealed, sailing forward and awarding herself a silent round of applause. She looked up and caught a glimpse of Scarlett, who was zigzagging with effortless ease, tapping her poles on the snow at each turn.

But Frankie was zooming faster now and, all at once, she realized that she didn’t know how to stop. What should she *do*? Then it came to her. *The snowplough stop!* It was the most basic stop in figure skating, but Frankie knew that when she pointed her

toes together on the ice, she *would* stop. And it just might work now. Quickly, she angled her toes inwards…and watched in horror as her ski tips crossed, instantly tripping her and flinging her up and over in an ungainly somersault. *Crash!* She sprawled in the snow and slid to a halt on her stomach, aware only of a searing pain in her left knee. While her right ski had been torn off in the crash, her left ski had remained clipped on to her ski boot and she'd twisted her knee in the fall. Frankie was unable to prevent the involuntary "Owww!" that escaped her.

Scarlett had appeared from nowhere and loomed above, as cool and unflustered as ever. Blinking back tears of pain, Frankie could have sworn that the girl was smiling.

"Excellent face-plant!" Scarlett said. "Hey, it's a good thing you don't skate as badly as you ski," she added. "Team GB would really be in trouble." She threw back her head and laughed. "Get up, then," she added, once she'd finished chortling.

"I can't…" said Frankie. She began to sob in earnest, not even caring that it was in front of Scarlett, who was bound to tell everyone how much of a cry baby she'd been. And she really couldn't get up. It wasn't an act. Whenever she moved, the pain in her knee was so bad that fresh tears trickled down her cheeks. While she wept, one huge question nagged at her: *how was she going to skate now?*