Name: _____ Date: _____

Eye Patch Year

Reading level 10 (6th grade) · 976 words

DAY ONE. Dr. Vickery covered my good eye with a paddle, and the whole world turned into soup. "That is your weak eye," she said. "It has been coasting for twelve years, and we are going to put it to work." The plan was a patch over the good one, six hours a day for nine months, so the lazy one would learn the job. The patches came in the shade of a Band-Aid, which no human being has ever been. "Nine months," I said. "Nine months," said Mamá, and she squeezed my hand a little too hard.

WEEK ONE. The first-day stare lasts for exactly one hallway. Two hundred people look at the patch, and then they look at the floor, and then they look at the patch again, as if it might have moved. A boy in the stairwell said, "Whoa, pirate!" and a girl said, "Does it hurt?" and I said, "Only my pride," which got a laugh. I decided right there that I would get to the jokes before anybody else did, because it is easier to be funny about your own face if you start first.

WEEK TWO. On the second Monday, Delia Marsh showed up at my locker with a black patch drawn over her own left eye in marker. She had done it carefully, with a curved line for the strap. "Solidarity," she said. We have been best friends since we were six, and she has never once pretended to understand something when she did not. "Now there are two of us," she said, "and we are twice as scary." For two whole days half the sixth grade drew patches on their faces. Then the marker wore off, and only mine was still there.

MONTH ONE. Here are some things you cannot do with one working eye while the other one is learning. You cannot pour juice into a glass, and I got the table. You cannot judge the last step of a staircase, and I got the floor. You cannot catch a ball, and I got the ball. The world has no depth, like a poster of a world. My brother Lalo, who is seven, thought this was the best thing that had ever happened to our family. He covered my patches in stickers of sharks and cheeseburgers, and I wore the cheeseburgers.

MONTH FOUR. At the clinic, a lab tech named Bernadette, with a purple streak in her hair, tested my eyes with letters on a screen while she hummed. "Everybody thinks the patch is hardest in the first week," she said. "It is not. It is month four, when the newness is gone and the end is nowhere close, and you are just tired of it." I said that this was the most useful thing an adult had told me all year. "I know," she said. "Nobody says it. Now try this line." The letters on it looked like gray static.

MONTH FIVE. Delia joined the volleyball team. I would like to say that I was happy for her, and I was, a little, in the part of me that was not busy being furious. She asked me to come to practice, and I went, and a ball came at my face. I swung at where I thought it was and hit nothing. Delia ran over to help, and I heard myself say, "Go be graceful somewhere else." It

was a good line, and I knew it, and it was the worst thing I had ever said to her.

She did not say anything back, and she stood there for a second, and then she picked up her water bottle and went back to her side of the gym. I walked home along the edge of the sidewalk, because the curb looked like a painting. At home I drew Captain Patch, a superhero with a cheeseburger on her eye and no sense of distance, who fell into every puddle in town. Lalo laughed so hard that he got the hiccups. I did not tell him that the captain was crying on page four.

MONTH SEVEN. Nobody tells you that the patch gets quiet. By the middle of the year, I was used to the stares and the stickers and the way the world went flat, and I started to notice what was actually under the flatness. I could see the grain of the wooden desk and the veins on a leaf, and the exact blue of Delia's volleyball jacket, which I could see across the cafeteria, at a table with other people. She looked over, and I looked down, and neither of us waved, because it was a very long cafeteria.

MONTH NINE. On the last morning, Dr. Vickery covered my good eye and pointed at the chart. I read the big E, and then the next line, and the next. The fourth line was no longer gray static, and the fifth was a row of tiny, shy letters that I could just barely name. "It is not perfect," said Dr. Vickery, "and it may never be, but that eye is doing a job it never knew how to do, and you are the one who taught it." I did not know I was crying until Mamá handed me a tissue.

On Monday, I took off the patch for good, and the world came back in all its depth, so deep that I had to hold on to the stair rail. I did not mind, because every step was exactly where it said it was. Outside the cafeteria, somebody had taped a black marker patch on my locker, a crooked one, with a strap. I looked at it for a long time, and then I took a pen out of my backpack and wrote under it, in my best handwriting, I owe you a better line.

Questions

1. Why does Dr. Vickery put the patch over the good eye?

A. To make the weak eye do the work and learn
B. To keep the good eye clean
C. To hide it from other kids

2. Why does Noemi say she gets to the jokes before anyone else?

A. She was a professional comedian
B. It is easier to be funny about your own face if you start first
C. She did not like the other kids

3. What did Delia do on the second Monday?

A. She sat with a different group
B. She gave Noemi a sticker
C. She drew a patch on her own eye in marker

4. What did Bernadette say was the hardest month?

A. Month one
B. Month four
C. Month nine

5. Why was "Go be graceful somewhere else" the worst thing Noemi said?

A. It was said in a whisper
B. It was unfair to a friend who was trying to help
C. It was said during a test

6. In this story, the word static describes letters that look like

A. bright colors
B. perfect black lines
C. blurry gray noise

Words to know

solidarity: standing with you
patch: eye cover
judge: guess a distance
static: blurry noise
grain: wood lines

Answer key: Eye Patch Year

1. A. To make the weak eye do the work and learn
2. B. It is easier to be funny about your own face if you start first
3. C. She drew a patch on her own eye in marker
4. B. Month four
5. B. It was unfair to a friend who was trying to help
6. C. blurry gray noise