Read this story about a girl whose family is moving from a city to a small town. Then answer the questions. You may look back at the story as often as you like.

**A Story with a Surprise Ending**

by Leslie Hall

*Once upon a time, there was a family who lived happily in a city far, far away...*

When we, my brother and I, were little, our parents used to tell us bedtime stories every night. The bedtime stories my mom and dad used to tell always started with *Once upon a time* and ended with *happily ever after*. Right now I don't care so much about the *Once upon a time*, but I would like to see some *happily ever after*.

After the *Once upon a time* would come the unsuspecting main character, who might be a prince, a princess, or even just a normal person. The main character was always a good person who suddenly got stuck with a big problem: a dragon, the hardhearted old king, a moat as deep as the ocean, or a wall as tall as the sky. The main character would undergo a series of troubles, which the character eventually overcame, and then would face the big problem with courage, compassion, or ingenuity. With the help of a wise old lady, a special word, or the knowledge he had learned from triumphing over the troubles, the main character would climb the wall, swim the moat, or otherwise overcome the big and final problem, and the story would end happily ever after.

In this story, the big problem is not a dragon or a hardhearted old king. In this story, the big problem will not be solved by saying a special word.

In this story, the problem is how pizza boxes are manufactured in a small town far, far away, across the river, over the mountains, and beyond the plains. There is a factory in that small town, a factory that makes boxes. In the factory are many boxes, boxes of every size and shape.

Someone at the factory decided it would be cheaper or faster to make pizza boxes a different way. There was nothing wrong with the old pizza boxes. There was, however, something wrong with the new pizza boxes. It may have been cheaper or faster to make the pizza boxes the new way, but it wasn't smarter. People who bought the pizzas packed in the new pizza boxes were unhappily surprised to discover that, by the time they got their pizzas home (or by the time their pizzas were delivered), the pizza boxes fell apart. After containing hot pizzas for more than a few minutes, the boxes became soggy and floppy and fell apart. The pizzas got cold, and the people who bought the pizzas became angry.

This is where we come in. To show us the problem, our dad reads us letters from angry customers who ended up with cold pizzas.

Our father works for the company that bought the factory that makes the boxes that fall apart. Our father is a packaging engineer. He can fold paper into beautiful designs; he can take a piece of the newspaper and make something so beautiful you'd hang it on the wall. Our father's company wants him to go to the factory in the small town and figure out what's wrong with the new pizza boxes.

"Tell them to do it how they used to," says my brother. He is two years younger than I am, but he is pretty smart.

"What?" asks our dad, who is probably thinking more about telling us the bad news than about what my brother is saying.
"The factory used to make pizza boxes that worked. Tell them to make boxes how they used to," my brother said.

"That's a good idea," says our dad, "but the company wants me to go and investigate and write a report and come up with solutions and costs and a plan."

No one says anything.

"I'm sorry," our dad says, and he looks at all of us. "I know you don't want to leave." Even though he is sad that we are sad, we can tell that he is happy, too. There is nothing our dad likes more than a big problem to figure out.

In this story, the mother, the girl, and the boy have to leave their beloved home in the city and travel to a small town far, far away, across the river, over the mountains, and beyond the plains so that the father can watch how pizza boxes are made and figure out how to make them better. The mother is not happy to leave her job, but she makes the best of it. Our mother tends to be optimistic.

"I always wanted to live in a small town," she says. "And the raise will be nice."

I have never wanted to live in a small town, but I don't want to make my dad feel worse, so I don't say anything.

In this story, the father tells the girl and the boy all of the facts he has learned about the small town that is far, far away, across the river, over the mountains, and beyond the plains. The small town is close to a mountain range where there are caves to explore. There is a river nearby where they can go rafting. The high school in the small town has an Olympic-sized swimming pool. In the winter, there is usually snow, which means sledding and skiing and snow days.

In this story, the mother finds a new job in the small town that she thinks she will like even better than her old job. "Time for something new," our mom says.

In this story, the parents take the girl and the boy on a journey, and they leave the city and travel to the small town that is far, far away, across the river, over the mountains, and beyond the plains. The girl is charmed by the horses to ride and the farms to visit and the people who live in the town, who are kind and cheerful even if they are not good at making pizza boxes. The boy is pleased by the mountains to climb and the new house with a large basement that will become his room. The mother is eager to start a new job and is happy that she will be able to walk to and from work instead of sitting in the car and stewing in traffic for an hour each way.

The father is looking forward to solving the problem of the pizza boxes that fall apart. A thorough examination of the boxes leads him to suspect that the culprit may be low-quality glue or the thin cardboard, but he can't be sure until he investigates further.

I guess "happily ever after" is as good an ending as any. If you can think of a better one, let me know.

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A Story with a Surprise Ending

1. Which of these proverbs best describes the theme of the story?
   a. He who hesitates is lost.
   b. Every cloud has a silver lining.
   c. A rolling stone gathers no moss.
   d. A penny saved is a penny earned.

2. Which of these sentences supports the narrator’s idea that her mother is optimistic?
   a. The mother dislikes being delayed by traffic.
   b. The mother prefers walking to work to driving.
   c. The mother is reluctant to leave their old home.
   d. The mother is looking forward to trying a new job.

3. How does the father in the story feel about his transfer?
   a. overjoyed, because he will receive a salary increase
   b. eager, because he thinks it will make his wife happy
   c. calm, because he knows the new town has good schools
   d. pleased, because he loves having a new problem to solve

4. What is the “surprise ending” of this story?
   a. The mother easily obtains a new job.
   b. The brother learns to climb mountains.
   c. The narrator realizes that she actually likes the new town.
   d. The father discovers a new packaging method for pizza.

5. Read this sentence from the story.
   "The main character would undergo a series of troubles, which the character eventually overcame, and then would face the big problem with courage, compassion, or ingenuity."
   In this sentence, “ingenuity” is closest in meaning to
   a. insistence.
   b. persistence.
   c. eagerness.
   d. inventiveness.

6. Write one way “A Story with a Surprise Ending” is similar to a fairy tale and one way the story is different from a fairy tale.
Key
1. B
2. D
3. D
4. C
5. D

6. One way the story and a fairy tale are alike is that they both have happy endings. The way that they are different is that the story does not incorporate magic while fairy tales usually do.