Name: _____ Date: _____

Old Moss

Reading level 8 (4th grade) · 560 words

Everyone at Camp Willow Lake had a story about Old Moss. The big kids said he was a huge green monster with a long neck. The little kids said he only came out when you were alone. Nobody had ever seen him, but everybody knew his name.

One rainy afternoon, three campers sat in the craft hut: Jonah, Priya and Sam. “I do not believe in Old Moss,” said Priya. “But I do believe in cameras,” said Jonah. He had a trail camera from his uncle that clicked whenever something moved.

They asked their counselor, Dani, if they could set it up by the dock. Dani grinned. “Good science,” she said. “But I am coming with you, and the camera stays strapped to the post so it cannot fall in.” Everyone agreed it was a fine plan.

They fastened the camera to a post at the end of the dock and aimed it at the water. Jonah checked the little red light. “It takes a picture every time something moves,” he said. “By morning, we will know the truth.”

That night, nobody slept well in the cabin. Priya kept thinking about long green necks. Sam kept thinking about the lake, black as ink, just beyond the porch. Every little splash sounded much bigger than it was. Outside, the crickets sang on.

At sunrise, the three campers hurried down the dock with Dani. Jonah unclipped the camera and held it up. The screen was full of tiny pictures. “Forty-one,” he said. “Something was out there all night.” Their hands were shaking a little.

The first pictures showed only ripples. Then came a long dark shape drifting on the water. Sam squinted. “It is long, and it is floating, and there is a lump on one end.” “That is his head,” whispered Priya. Nobody breathed.

Jonah tapped to the next picture and groaned. “It is a log,” he said. It was a mossy old log, drifting past the dock. Then the log wiggled, and out popped a sleek brown head with whiskers. Everyone leaned in closer.

“An otter!” laughed Dani. “She is using the log as a raft.” In picture after picture, the otter slid onto the log, groomed her fur, and tumbled off with a splash. The campers cheered. Old Moss was a log and a very busy otter.

“So that is the monster,” said Sam, and he laughed until he hiccupped. Priya shook her head. “I almost feel sorry for him,” she said. “He is just a log with an otter on it.” Dani laughed too. They all grinned at the screen.

“Wait,” said Jonah quietly. “There is one more.” He tapped the very last picture, taken just

before sunrise. The otter and the log were gone. The lake was smooth and gray. But in the middle, a ripple was spreading. The room went very quiet.

The ripple was wide as a rowboat. The campers stared at it. It was far too big to be an otter. Dani looked at it for a long moment. Then she shrugged and said, “Lakes are deep. And some fish are very big.”

They never did find out what made it. But that night, when the story was told around the fire, Priya added a new line. “Old Moss is a log and an otter,” she said. “And maybe something a little bigger, too.”

Questions

1. What do the campers use to look for Old Moss?

A. A boat
B. A camera
C. A net

2. What is on the log in the pictures?

A. A frog
B. A bird
C. An otter

3. Who comes with the campers to the dock?

A. Dani, the counselor
B. Nobody
C. A neighbor

4. Why does the last picture make the story more mysterious?

A. The picture is blurry
B. The ripple is too big for an otter
C. The camera breaks

5. What does ripple mean?

A. A big rock
B. A loud noise
C. A small wave

Words to know

counselor: a camp leader
fastened: attached firmly
ripple: a small wave
groomed: cleaned and brushed

Answer key: Old Moss

1. B. A camera
2. C. An otter
3. A. Dani, the counselor
4. B. The ripple is too big for an otter
5. C. A small wave