Name: _____ Date: _____

Priya Moves Away

Reading level 8 (4th grade) · 839 words

Rrrrip! The boxes came on Monday, flat as pancakes, and Priya's dad taped their bottoms with a sound like a giant zipper. By Wednesday her whole room was a room of boxes. BOOKS, said one. SOCKS, said another. Her bed was the only thing in there that was still a bed. And Leila, next door, had not said one word about it.

That evening Leila was sitting on the fence between their yards, and Priya climbed up beside her. The fence had one loose board that wobbled like a tooth, and they had sat on it every evening since they were five. When the streetlights came on, they counted the lit windows on Maple Street, and Leila always said the number first.

On the last night, even the beds were gone, and Priya's sleeping bag lay on the floor of her empty room. After dinner she went out the back door. Leila was already on the fence with two clementines and a flashlight, and she did not turn the flashlight on.

They peeled the clementines without talking. Leila tried to get her peel off in one long curl, the way she always did, but it broke, so she tried again. Down the street a dog barked and a screen door banged, and then a window came on, yellow and small.

Nobody counted it. "You go first," said Leila. "No, you," said Priya. So nobody went first, and the windows came on by themselves, one and then two and then too many to count. "It won't be the same windows," said Leila. "I know," said Priya.

When it was too dark to see the peel, Leila pushed the flashlight into Priya's hands. "For counting," she said. "In case it's too dark there." It was the good flashlight, the one with the red button. "Leila, this is yours." "I know," said Leila, and she jumped down before Priya could give it back.

The truck was loud, and the new town was a long way off. The new house smelled like paint and somebody else's soup, and Priya's room was a box with a window in it. Her dad had stuck a piece of tape on the door that said PRIYA'S ROOM, as if she might forget which one it was.

On Monday a teacher showed her a desk by the window. Everyone else knew where to sit and where to line up and which door stuck. At lunch Priya found the end of a table and ate half her sandwich. The other half she wrapped back up, because her throat felt too small for it.

That night she called Leila, and Leila picked up on the first ring. They said hi. Then they said hi again. Leila said, "So, um," and Priya said, "Yeah." It was the longest phone call with the least in it that Priya had ever had. When it ended, she held the phone for a while.

The new yard had a fence too, and it was gray and tall and leaned to the left. Priya looked at it for a long time. Then she put one foot on the lowest rail, and then the other, and pulled herself

up, the way she had a thousand times. The top was narrow, and it did not wobble at all.

From up there she could see the backs of eight houses, and the sky was going from orange to blue. A window came on, yellow and small, and then another. Priya opened her mouth to say the number, but there was no one to say it to, so she closed it again. A third window came on.

Something scraped on the other side of the fence. Two hands gripped the top, and then a head with a lot of black curls popped up. A girl pulled herself onto the rail and sat a little way down from Priya. She had a bag of pretzels. "Oh," she said. "Nobody ever sits there. The old people didn't climb."

"I'm Dev," she said. "It's Devika, but nobody has time for that. Don't fall. It's higher on my side." She held out the bag, and Priya took a pretzel that was salty and very loud in her mouth. They both looked at the windows, and for a while neither of them said anything at all.

Then Dev said, "Are you counting something?" Priya looked at the windows. There were eleven lit, and more coming. A twelfth came on. "Twelve," said Priya, and her voice came out small and a little rusty, like a door that has not been opened in a while. "Thirteen," said Dev. "By the tree." Priya looked. She had missed that one.

That night Priya called Leila again, and this time she did not say hi twice. "Thirteen," she said. Leila did not even ask thirteen what. "Nine here," she said. "The Parks went to bed early." Then they both laughed, and Priya pressed the red button on the flashlight and shone it out her window, just once, toward Maple Street.

Questions

1. What did Priya and Leila do every evening on the fence?

A. Counted the lit windows
B. Read their library books
C. Fed the neighbor's cat

2. Why did nobody go first on the last night?

A. They were both hungry
B. They did not want it to be the last time
C. They had forgotten the game

3. Why do you think Leila gave Priya her good flashlight?

A. It was broken
B. She wanted Priya to keep counting in the new town
C. Priya had asked for it

4. What was different about the new fence?

A. It was painted red
B. It was too far from the house

C. It did not wobble like the old one

5. In this story, the word rusty describes a voice that is

A. very loud
B. stiff from not being used
C. full of laughter

6. How was the last phone call different from the first one?

A. They had something to share, and they laughed
B. Leila did not pick up
C. Priya hung up quickly

Words to know

wobble: rock side-to-side
clementine: small orange
rail: fence bar
rusty: stiff, unused
lit: turned on

Answer key: Priya Moves Away

1. A. Counted the lit windows
2. B. They did not want it to be the last time
3. B. She wanted Priya to keep counting in the new town
4. C. It did not wobble like the old one
5. B. stiff from not being used
6. A. They had something to share, and they laughed