Name: _____ Date: _____

The Door in the Storm

Reading level 11 (7th grade) · 1363 words

The blizzard arrived on Friday afternoon, and by Friday night the Alder Peak Inn was completely cut off from the world. Ari's family had driven up the mountain for a quiet weekend, and now the road was buried under four feet of snow. Wind howled around the old wooden building, while down in the lobby the innkeeper, a brisk woman named Miss Calloway, lit the fireplace and promised hot chocolate for everyone. Ari pressed his forehead against the frosted window and watched the white world swirl.

At nine o'clock, the power went out. The lamps flickered, the refrigerator hummed to a stop, and the whole inn fell into a soft, thick darkness lit only by the fire. Miss Calloway handed out flashlights and candles, and she explained that this happened every winter. "It will probably be back by morning," she said cheerfully. Ari's parents settled comfortably onto the sofa with a complicated board game. Ari, who was restless, asked if he could explore the upstairs hallway with his flashlight. His mother nodded, as long as he stayed on that floor.

The upstairs hall was long and narrow, with creaky floorboards and faded wallpaper covered in tiny blue flowers. Ari's flashlight beam slid over the rows of numbered doors. He counted them as he walked, because counting made the shadows seem less strange. Room six, then room seven, then room eight, each one silent and mysterious. At the very end of the hall, where there had always been a plain wall with a framed painting of a mountain, he stopped abruptly, because in the middle of that wall there was suddenly a door.

It was a remarkably small door, painted a pale shade of green, with a brass handle worn smooth by many hands. A thin line of yellow light glowed beneath it, flickering the way candlelight does. Ari was absolutely certain that it had not been there that afternoon, because he had walked past that wall at least twice and remembered the painting clearly. The silence in the hallway seemed to be holding its breath. He stood perfectly still for a long moment, listening to his own heartbeat, and then, very gently, he knocked. Far below, he could hear his father laughing at something, and the sound made him feel brave.

"Come in," said a small voice. Ari turned the handle and pushed the door open. Inside was a narrow bedroom with a patchwork quilt, a wooden chair, and a table holding an oil lamp. At the window sat a boy about eight years old, wearing a wool sweater and an old-fashioned cap. He had been staring out at the storm with his chin resting on his arms, but he looked up and smiled with enormous relief. "Are you here to tell me it is over?" he asked.

Ari's voice came out as a squeak. "The storm?" he said. "It is still going." The boy's face fell, and he whispered, "It has been going for such an unbelievably long time." "My father told me to wait here until the snow stopped, and then he promised to come and take me safely down

the mountain. I have waited and waited, and the wind never gets any quieter." He glanced at the lamp. "I am afraid that if I leave before it stops, he will not know where I went."

Ari felt a chill ripple across his shoulders, but it was not exactly fear. Everything about the room felt gentle, patient and utterly unreal. The boy's room was warm in a strange, faded way, as though the heat were a memory. When Ari glanced back at the doorway, the hall behind him looked misty and far away. He understood with a jolt that the door was only there when the electricity was off, and that the boy had been stuck inside this one night, like a clock that had stopped.

"What is your name?" asked Ari. "Tobias," said the boy. "Tobias Calloway. My mother runs the inn." Ari blinked in astonishment, because Miss Calloway downstairs had the very same last name, although he decided not to mention it. Instead he sat on the wooden chair, trying to think. Tobias had been told to wait until the storm ended, but the storm in this room never ended, because in this room it was always the same stormy night. Somehow, Ari had to somehow convince him that the real one had finally stopped.

"Tobias," said Ari slowly. "Can you hear the wind right now?" The boy tilted his head. "Yes. It is howling." "I can hear it too," admitted Ari. And that was the trouble, because Ari could hear the wind, so Tobias would naturally think the storm was still going. But Ari remembered something his father had once said about old buildings. They keep sounds in their walls, the way a seashell keeps the ocean. Perhaps this wind was only an echo, a faint old sound left behind in the timber.

Ari walked carefully to the window and looked out. The glass was frosted over, and beyond it he could see only swirling white. "It does look like a blizzard," he admitted. But then he noticed something peculiar: the snowflakes in the lamplight were not falling quite right. They moved in tidy, repeating loops, like a film that had been played over and over, and a real storm would never repeat itself. This was only a memory of a storm, a stuck picture of that long-ago night.

Ari made a sudden decision. He took out his flashlight and pointed it toward the window. "Tobias, I want to show you something," he said. "Put your hand flat on the glass, right here, and wipe away the frost." The boy hesitated, then pressed his small hand against the pane and rubbed a clear circle. Through it, the swirling white was gone. Instead there was a deep, black sky, brilliant with more stars than Ari had ever seen in his life.

Tobias gasped. For a long moment, he said nothing, and it was the most peaceful scene either of them had ever witnessed. Outside the clear circle, the night was perfectly still. The snow lay in smooth silver drifts across the valley, glittering under a high, bright moon. The wind had stopped completely. "It is over," Tobias said at last, in a voice thick with wonder. "It has been over all this time, and I never thought to look." He turned to Ari, and his eyes were shining. "Thank you for telling me."

The little oil lamp began to fade, as gently as a candle at the end of a long evening. Tobias stood up, straightened his cap, and walked to the open door. "My father will be on the road by now," he said happily. "I should go and meet him." He gave Ari a small, solemn nod, the way one gentleman greets another, and he looked entirely unafraid. Then he stepped through the doorway, into the darkness of the hall, and the light of his lamp went out.

Ari stood alone in the hall, and the flashlight beam fell on a plain wall with a framed painting of a mountain. The door had vanished, and the air in the hallway was warm and perfectly normal again. At that exact moment, the electric lights buzzed back to life all along the corridor, and from downstairs came the cheerful sound of Miss Calloway announcing that the power was back. Ari found he was grinning in a way he could not quite explain, because it was extraordinary how ordinary everything suddenly seemed.

In the morning, the snowplow cleared the road, and the sunshine made the whole mountain glitter magnificently. Ari asked Miss Calloway whether there was an old photograph of the inn. She showed him one hanging in the lobby: a family standing on the front steps, long ago, with a small boy in a wool sweater and an old-fashioned cap, smiling at the camera. Ari smiled back at him. "He found his father," he said quietly, and Miss Calloway, without knowing why, smiled too. Ari told his parents the whole story over breakfast, and they listened to every word.

Questions

1. Why is the inn cut off?

A. A bridge broke
B. A blizzard buried the road
C. The car broke down

2. When does the green door appear?

A. At noon
B. Only on Sundays
C. When the power is out

3. What is Tobias waiting for?

A. The storm to end so his father can come
B. Dinner
C. A letter

4. How does Ari show Tobias the storm is over?

A. He turns on a light
B. He wipes the frost from the window to show the stars
C. He calls Mrs. Calloway

5. What does solemn mean here?

A. Silly and loud

B. Hungry and tired

C. Serious and quiet

Words to know

blizzard: a heavy snowstorm

innkeeper: a person who runs an inn

echo: a sound that repeats

solemn: serious and quiet

Answer key: The Door in the Storm

1. B. A blizzard buried the road
2. C. When the power is out
3. A. The storm to end so his father can come
4. B. He wipes the frost from the window to show the stars
5. C. Serious and quiet