Name: _____ Date: _____

The Letter for the Moon

Reading level 8 (4th grade) · 893 words

The strangest letter Ana ever sorted came on a windy night in March. The Night Post Office opened when the sun went down and closed when it came up, and Ana's grandmother ran it. Everyone called her Oma Rue. Ana carried the bags, and Pip-Pip, the owl, slept on the sorting shelf and woke up only for seed cake.

Two rules were painted over the door of the post office. The post never sleeps, and every letter gets answered. Ana had read them a thousand times, and she had never seen a letter that broke them. Then, at midnight, something small and crumpled slid through the slot and landed on the mat.

Oma Rue held it up to the lantern. The writing was in pencil, and it wobbled all over the page. It said, To the Moon, Up There. There was no street on the front and no number. The only other thing was a stamp in the corner, with one tiny star on it.

At the Night Post Office, every stamp meant something, and a star stamp meant, I am hoping. Oma Rue sighed. "In forty years the Moon has never written back to anyone," she said. Ana looked at the rules over the door. "Every letter gets answered," she said. "It says so right there."

Oma Rue did not argue. She only handed Ana the lantern and the leather bag, and she said, "Take the owl, if he will come." Pip-Pip opened one round eye and looked at the cold night, and then he closed the eye again. So Ana tucked him inside her scarf like a loaf of warm bread, and she set off.

The tallest hill in town was Needle Hill, and the path went up it in one long, thin line. Frost crunched under Ana's boots, and her lantern swung and made the shadows swing too. Above the top of the hill sat the Moon, big and low and round, like a hen sitting on an egg.

Ana climbed for a long time, counting the fence posts as she went. There were forty-one. Pip-Pip snored in her scarf, one small snore for every step, and at last the path ran out and so did the hill. Ana stood at the very top with her breath puffing white, and the whole town twinkled far below her.

"Good evening," she said, because Oma Rue said manners arrive first. She took out the letter and read it aloud. "Dear Moon. You come with us in the car. When we stop, you stop. How do you do it? Please write back. Your friend, Teo, age six." Under his name, in smudged ink, was one more line. Plum Street, Number Nine.

Nothing happened. The wind blew, and a cloud slid by and slid away again. Ana waited a minute, and then another, and then she waited until her toes hurt. The Moon did not say a

word, and no letter fell from the sky. Pip-Pip put his head out of the scarf and gave her a look that said, What did you expect?

Ana sat down on a rock and took the little stamp out of her bag. She pressed it on the letter, and it said DELIVERED in round black ink. That was true, but delivered was not the same as answered, and the rule did not say delivered. She put her chin on her knees and felt very small.

Pip-Pip hopped up onto the rock. He turned his head to the Moon, then to Ana, then down the hill. Ana looked where he looked. She stood up, walked ten steps down the hill, and looked back over her shoulder.

The Moon was there. It had not moved at all, and yet it was right behind her, as if it had stepped down the hill too. She ran, and it ran. She stopped so fast that Pip-Pip squawked, and the Moon stopped. She hid behind a bush and peeked out, and the Moon was peeking back.

All the way down Needle Hill the Moon came with her. It rode over her left shoulder, round and calm, the way a big dog stays beside a small child. It followed her along Lantern Lane. It followed her past the post office window, where Oma Rue looked up from her desk and put down her pen with a clack.

Ana did not stop at the post office. She turned onto Plum Street and walked to Number Nine, where a light was on upstairs. A small face was pressed against the glass, with a cold nose as flat as a button. The Moon sat right above the chimney, as if it lived there.

Ana held up the letter, and Teo's window creaked open. "Did the Moon say anything?" he whispered. "Not in words," said Ana. "But I asked it how it does it, and then I walked home. Go to the corner, and then come back." Teo did, and the Moon went with him, and then it came back too.

Teo laughed so hard that he woke his cat. Ana walked back to the post office with Pip-Pip asleep again in her scarf, and Oma Rue was waiting with the big book open. Next to Teo's name she wrote ANSWERED. Then, after a moment, she added three more words in her best pen. Followed us home.

Questions

1. What did the stamp on the letter show?

A. A little moon
B. One tiny star
C. A hen on an egg

2. Why did Ana carry the letter up Needle Hill herself?

A. Every letter gets answered, and no one else would
B. Oma Rue told her to hide it
C. She wanted to see the owl fly

3. What does crumpled mean in this story?

A. Scrunched up
B. Very old
C. Wet with rain

4. What happened when Ana stopped walking on the hill?

A. The Moon went behind a cloud
B. The Moon stopped too
C. The Moon spoke to her

5. Where did Ana take the letter in the end?

A. Back to the sorting shelf
B. To the top of the post office
C. To Teo's window on Plum Street

6. What was the Moon's answer to Teo?

A. It showed him by following Ana
B. It wrote him a long letter
C. It said nothing at all and left

Words to know

sorting: putting in order
crumpled: scrunched up
delivered: brought there
frost: icy white coat
manners: polite ways

Answer key: The Letter for the Moon

1. B. One tiny star
2. A. Every letter gets answered, and no one else would
3. A. Scrunched up
4. B. The Moon stopped too
5. C. To Teo's window on Plum Street
6. A. It showed him by following Ana