Name: _____ Date: _____

Two Toothbrushes

Reading level 9 (5th grade) · 748 words

Maya had two toothbrushes. The purple one lived at Mom's house, in a cup shaped like a frog, and the blue one lived at Dad's house, in a cup with a crack down its side. She also had two keys, one on a red string and one on a green string, which at first had been hard to tell apart and sometimes still were.

Most things came in twos now. She had two bedrooms with two beds, and two separate families of stuffed animals that she liked to keep sorted. At Mom's, bedtime was at eight o'clock, followed by a story about a clever fox. At Dad's, bedtime was at half past eight, and there were always three songs before the light went out.

On Sunday afternoons, Maya packed her backpack and got ready to switch houses, and on Sunday afternoons she always forgot something. One week it was her swim goggles, the next week it was her reading book, and the week after that it was the only pair of socks that did not itch. That one was the worst of all.

On this particular Sunday, she discovered that she had left her library book at Mom's, and it was due back on Monday. She stood in Dad's kitchen with her backpack half unpacked, feeling a hot, tight feeling climb up her throat. "I wish there were just one house!" she said. "Then I would never forget anything!"

Dad did not hurry to fix anything, and he did not say a single word about it being silly. He knelt down so that his face was level with hers, and he listened to every word until she was done. "It is a lot to keep track of," he said quietly. "I forget things sometimes too, you know. Last week, I completely forgot to buy milk."

Maya sniffed and wiped her nose on her sleeve. "But you only have one house," she said. Dad nodded slowly. "That is true," he said. "But you are the only one who goes back and forth, and that is hard work. Would it help if we made a list of what goes in your bag, so you do not have to remember it all in your head?"

They found a piece of paper and Maya's best pen, the one with the smooth gel tip. Dad wrote the title across the top, and Maya drew a border around it with tiny stars. Then she began to add things, one by one: goggles, library book, pajamas, and her special stuffed rabbit, who she did not want to be lonely.

"What about your toothbrush?" asked Dad. Maya frowned. "I do not need to pack it," she said. "I have one here and one at Mom's." Dad grinned. "Then that is the first thing you do not have to remember," he said. "That is one less thing for your list, and it is one less thing to carry."

Maya laughed in spite of herself, and she added another line at the bottom of the page. It

said, THINGS THAT STAY HOME. Under it, she wrote the blue toothbrush, the cup with the crack, and the green key on its string. Dad hung the whole list on the refrigerator with a magnet shaped like a pear. Then he called Mom, and Mom said she would bring the library book to school in the morning.

Two Sundays later, at Mom's house, Maya was packing again. She looked at the empty wall beside her door, and then at the paper in her hand. She had made a second copy at school, and she had drawn all the stars again, very carefully. "Mom," she said, "may I put this up? It is a list for my bag."

Mom read it slowly, from the top to the bottom, and then she smiled. "This is wonderful," she said. "Is there room for one more thing?" She thought for a moment. Then she picked up the pen and wrote one more line at the bottom, in small and careful letters: Maya's book light, because every bedtime, in every house, needs one.

That night, in the dark, Maya lay in bed with the list taped above her pillow. It was still strange sometimes, having two of so many things. But as she drifted off to sleep, she counted what stayed the same: the rabbit, the book light, the sound of her own breathing, and her. Just Maya, the same Maya, in both of her rooms.

Questions

1. What colors are Maya's two toothbrushes?

A. Red and green
B. Pink and yellow
C. Purple and blue

2. What does Maya keep forgetting?

A. Her house address
B. Things for her bag
C. Her homework only

3. What do Maya and Dad make?

A. A list for her bag
B. A cake
C. A new bedroom

4. What did Mom write at the bottom of the list?

A. The milk
B. The book light
C. A new rule

5. Why does Maya say, "I wish there were just one house"?

A. She does not like Dad

B. She wants a pet

C. Switching houses is hard to keep track of

6. In this story, what does "level with hers" mean?

A. At the same height

B. In the same room

C. As tall as a door

Words to know

toothbrush: tool for teeth

refrigerator: a cold box

border: edge pattern

itch: make you scratch

drifted: floated softly

Answer key: Two Toothbrushes

1. C. Purple and blue
2. B. Things for her bag
3. A. A list for her bag
4. B. The book light
5. C. Switching houses is hard to keep track of
6. A. At the same height