

An Unexpected Trip



Sarah wasn't quite sure what was going on. She had been sitting in the back of the car for hours as it rumbled up the highway's six spotless lanes. There were not many other cars. When they turned off the main highway, Sarah wasn't very worried. This was the way to the house her parents had far, far out in the country. She'd been before, for summers. Sometimes she got to bring her friend, Sam. Going to the house by itself did not worry Sarah. The chains rattling around the back seat next to her, though, were a different story.

Sarah's mom and dad had said not to worry and that everything was fine. If everything was fine, though, why had they gotten so upset when the phone had rung last night? This time of month, Sarah usually spent the night with her grandmother, watching old movies and eating popcorn that Grandma made on the stove in a pot (not in the microwave). It was delicious. She couldn't quite make out what her mom had been saying into the phone. Something like, "What do you mean, you can't come, Mom? I need you. No, you don't understand; it has to be tomorrow night!" Later, her mom and dad told her that Grandma wasn't coming, and that she'd have to come on a little car ride with them.

“Can I still have popcorn the way Grandma makes it?” Sarah had asked. Her parents had seemed nervous before, but when she asked this, they’d looked at each other and had a nice, loud laugh, collapsing into a hug.

“We’ll see what we can do, ladyface,” her dad said, giving her a kiss on the cheek.

Today her parents had woken her up very early in the morning. They’d told her they’d only be gone for a night but let her pack as many toys and movies as she wanted. Sarah was a little confused—normally one night meant two toys and two movies. Her mother was very strict about this, and Sarah had often gotten a stern talking-to when her mother found an extra game or stuffed animal packed in-between her sweaters.

Today, however, there weren’t any toy restrictions. There were no restrictions on soda, junk food or TV watching. Her parents didn’t seem to be paying much attention to her. They weren’t doing much of anything, actually, except staring out the windows as the flat countryside rolled past.

When they made it to the cottage, it seemed strange. It was fall, and what looked beautiful in the summertime seemed odd and spooky now. The friendly green trees had lost their leaves, and now had sharp-looking branches pointing in every direction. In summer, Sarah loved playing in the little barn-shaped garage. Today Sarah couldn’t tell what was hiding in its shadows. She hurried out as soon as the car engine shut off.

True to their word, Sarah’s parents made her popcorn as soon as they got to the house in the late afternoon. Her mom put one of her favorite movies on the TV, covered her in a blanket and sat in the kitchen. Her father brought things into the house, and then disappeared into the garage for a long time. She heard banging. She could not imagine what was going on. Eventually, she fell asleep.

When she woke up, the sun was setting. Her mom sat in a chair across the room, looking her in the face. It was not usual for Sarah’s mom to be there when she woke up, lovingly looking into her eyes. Tonight she seemed nervous.

“Where’s Dad?” Sarah asked, rubbing her eyes.

Her mom looked down, and twisted her fingers together. “Your dad . . . he has some things he has to do. Alone. We’ll see him in the morning.” Suddenly, she stood up. “Sarah, it’s time for bed.”

“Mom! It’s not even dark out!”

“Sarah.”

“And I’m not tired! I just woke up!”

“Don’t argue with me!” Sarah’s mom yelled. She hardly ever yelled. Sarah was a little scared. Mom let out a deep sigh. “Sarah, honey, we should go to bed. It’s been a long day. I’ll lie down with you.”

They went to her room, and read books together. Sarah was not tired. They talked and read for a long time. Eventually, Sarah’s mom fell asleep. Sarah tossed and turned, burrowing her head into her mom or rolling far across the bed. She decided she needed to walk around a bit. Her legs were crampy. Plus, she *had* had an awful lot of soda to drink. She got up to walk to the bathroom.

The bedroom door opened with a long, low creaking sound. All the lights in the house were off. Sarah could only see because of the big full moon shining through the windows. She put her hands on the wall, feeling her way forward, bumping into tables and tripping on shoes. Just as she got near the bathroom, she realized she could hear a sound. It was like a wailing, crying sound. It was like a dog that was hurt, but also somehow . . . different. Mixed in with the howls and yelps were the sounds of the chains rattling. Sarah remembered that sound—the one the chains next to her in the car made every time it hit a bump in the road. What was going on?

She realized the sound was coming from the garage, which connected to the house via a small door. As Sarah crept towards the door, the howling stopped. What was in there? It sounded hurt and afraid. Maybe Sarah could help it?

She eased open the door, which made its own low creak, like a very old ghost waking up in the morning. At first, Sarah saw nothing. Then out of the darkness, a huge shape lunged at her. It was covered in wild, dark fur. It had a huge snout full of long, sharp teeth that snapped and trailed froth. It made the loudest sound Sarah had ever heard as it came at her. Then at the last minute, she heard the sound of chains, and the animal seemed to snap backwards. Sarah screamed as loud as she could. The thing came at her again and snapped back towards the wall a second time. Then a lot of things happened at once: Sarah heard her mom yell her name. She fell to the floor. Things started to go dark. Just before they did, Sarah noticed something very odd. The thing was wearing a torn up pair of red pants. "Just like my dad's," she thought as she drifted off.

The next morning, Sarah was in bed. Birds chirped. Sun streamed in the window. Had it all been a dream? Sarah stood up and went into the house. Everything looked normal. She smelled bacon and heard it sizzle and pop in the pan. She made her way to the kitchen where her mom was happily frying up eggs and bacon. The waffle maker was out too, sending steam up towards the ceiling. Her dad sat at the table sipping coffee. When he saw her come into the room, he put down the paper he was reading. He motioned for her to come over.

Sarah hesitated a little, and went over and sat. Her dad looked at her kindly. "Hey, ladyface," he said. "Do you know what a werewolf is?"

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Where do Sarah and her parents go?

- A a movie theater
- B a store that has stuffed animals
- C a house in the country
- D the house where Sarah's grandmother lives

2. What is the climax of the action in the story?

- A Sarah's parents make her popcorn.
- B Sarah falls asleep after her mom puts one of her favorite movies on the TV.
- C Sarah's parents let her pack as many toys as she wants.
- D A huge animal leaps at Sarah in the garage.

3. Read the following sentences: "Sarah's mom and dad had said not to worry and that everything was fine. If everything was fine, though, why had they gotten so upset when the phone had rung last night?"

What can be concluded from these sentences?

- A Something may be wrong, but Sarah's parents do not want to talk about it.
- B Last night a stranger called Sarah's home to give her mom and dad some good news.
- C Sarah's mom and dad are cheerful people who never worry about anything.
- D Sarah's mom and dad are worried about how much it will cost to go on a family trip.

4. How does Sarah feel on the trip she takes with her parents?

- A confident and happy
- B confused and scared
- C angry and upset
- D eager and hopeful

5. What is this story mainly about?

- A making popcorn on the stove instead of in the microwave
- B the car in which Sarah and her parents drive to a house in the country
- C the special nights that a girl spends with her grandmother
- D two parents who try to keep a secret from their daughter

6. Read the following sentences: "Going to the house by itself did not worry Sarah. **The chains rattling around the back seat next to her, though, were a different story.**"

What does the author mean by calling the chains in the back seat a different story?

- A The author means that another story has already been written about the chains in the back seat.
- B The author means that the chains worried Sarah.
- C The author means that Sarah worries too much.
- D The author means that Sarah is used to visiting the house in the country.

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Sarah is spending the night with her parents _____ she usually spends it with her grandmother at this time of the month.

- A as a result
- B before
- C although
- D such as

8. What happens after Sarah opens the door to the garage?

9. What does Sarah’s dad ask her at the end of the story?

10. Why does Sarah’s dad ask her whether she knows what a werewolf is? Support your answer with evidence from the story.

Teacher Guide & Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 690

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8. What happens after Sarah opens the door to the garage?

Suggested answer: Answers may vary in degree of detail. At minimum, students should respond that a large animal leaps toward Sarah.

9. What does Sarah's dad ask her at the end of the story?

Suggested answer: Sarah's dad asks her whether she knows what a werewolf is.

10. Why does Sarah's dad ask her whether she knows what a werewolf is? Support your answer with evidence from the story.

Suggested answer: Answers may vary, as long as they are supported by the passage. Ideally, students will recognize that Sarah's dad asks her this question because he is a werewolf. Evidence for this conclusion includes the red pants the animal in the garage was wearing (identical to the pants worn by Sarah's dad) and the absence of Sarah's dad from the house during the night.