

This Is Not My Cat

W.M. Akers

She sat in front of the window, curled into a ball, feverishly licking herself. She was brown, black, grey and orange—all the colors a cat can be swirled into a crazy patchwork. She looked like she had been the sole witness in the explosion of a paint store.

“You are a very lovely cat,” Aggie said. “I wish I knew what you were doing here.”

The cat looked up and meowed, as if to say she was asking herself just the same question.

Aggie had come home from school that day, same as always. She had fixed herself a plate of graham crackers and peanut butter, same as always. She had sat down on the couch to watch afternoon TV with the cat, same as always. Only one thing was different: this was the wrong cat. Aggie’s beloved cat Princess was jet black and on the heavy side. This interloper had an air of the jungle about her. She was muscular, smaller than Princess, and apparently much more fit.

“What did you do to my cat?!” asked Aggie, her mouth full of graham crackers. “How did you get in here? We don’t have a cat door. We didn’t leave any windows open. Did you teleport in through the glass? Or have you always been living in the house, and you just now decided to show yourself. Do you have an evil plan?!”

Although it appeared to consider her words carefully, the cat said nothing. Aggie turned off the TV in disgust. She was going to have to deal with this herself.

Taking the cat in the crook of her arm, she carried it outside. The cat wriggled in her arms, but Aggie held her tightly. “I’ve already lost one cat today. I’m not losing another one.”

She peered under bushes, behind the garbage cans, and in the secret corners inside the garage. Princess was nowhere to be seen. As she grew desperate, she even looked in the mailbox. The longer the search went on fruitlessly, the more the strange cat twisted in her arms. Finally, she started to hiss and claw.

“Fine! You want to come down, you come down.” Aggie set the cat down carefully. It did not run away. “That’s right. You stay close.”

As Aggie walked, the cat walked beside her, showing no inclination to run. A few times it crept off silently to nose into a patch of overgrown grass or bushes, apparently helping in the search for Princess. They found no sign of the vanished kitty.

“I guess I should try to figure out who owns you,” Aggie said. She knocked on her neighbor’s door, and Mrs. Munson opened it. She was a crag-faced woman whose constant scowling made her look older than she really was.

“What do you want?” asked Mrs. Munson, suspicious as always.

“My cat Princess is missing, and—”

“Do you think I’m stupid? You have a cat right there.”

“I know, but this isn’t my cat. You see—”

“So now you want *two* cats? That seems awfully greedy.”

“Actually, I wanted to ask if this was your cat.”

“I hate cats!”

“Do you know who she belongs to? Or have you seen any other cats wandering the—”

“No! Unlike you, I have more important things to do than think about cats. Good bye!”

When Mrs. Munson slammed the door in Aggie’s face, the strange cat rubbed her head against Aggie’s ankle in sympathy. The next neighbors were less angry, but no more helpful. No one had seen Princess, and they had no idea who this new cat was. And even though nobody was quite as mean as Mrs. Munson, they all gave the distinct impression they did not care about Aggie’s problem.

“You lose a cat, you find a cat,” said Mr. Tanner. “You break even. What’s the problem?”

“But...I want my cat!”

Mr. Tanner shrugged and closed his door. Aggie and the strange cat padded to the edge of his front lawn to sit on the curb and sulk. It was getting dark now, and Aggie’s parents would be home soon. She had two mysteries on her hands—where this cat came from and where her cat went—and felt in her bones that if she let the sun go down without solving them, she never would. Beside her, the strange cat crouched and began to purr. There was something in the bushes.

“Princess?” Aggie called. The bushes rustled louder.

The strange cat lowered her stomach to the ground and pulled herself through the grass like a soldier might. Without meaning to, Aggie mimicked her, crouching as low as she could

without falling over. They crept forward together as the bushes rustled louder and louder.

Aggie leaned forward, one palm in the dirt, and tore the bushes open. The cat pounced, startling the shadowy creature hiding inside.

“Princess?!” asked Aggie, as the animal turned and ran away. She was about to go after it when a glimmer of light from a passing car illuminated it briefly. “Unless Princess was dressed up for Halloween, that was a raccoon. That’s my mom’s car. Let’s go home and see whether or not we can explain this mess.”

Aggie hefted the cat and trudged home. She opened the door and cried a forlorn, “Hey, Mom.”

“Hey, Sweetheart,” said Mom. “What’s going on?”

“I’ve got some news about the cat.” Aggie walked into the living room, making eye contact with her mother and preparing to deliver the bad news, but her mouth couldn’t form words. There was Princess sitting right beside Mom on the couch, same as always.

“The cat, Sweetheart?”

“We, uh...” the strange cat entered from outside. “We have two of them now.”

Mom looked as surprised to see the new cat as Aggie was to see the old. As the two cats met each other, Aggie stared at Princess dying to know where she had been. Princess looked at her, black eyes shining and yawned, as if to say that she would never tell.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What is the name of the missing cat in the story?

- A Aggie
- B Princess
- C Mrs. Munson
- D Mr. Tanner

2. The problem in the story is that Aggie's cat is missing. How is this problem solved?

- A Mrs. Munson slams her door in Aggie's face.
- B Mr. Tanner tells Aggie that she has broken even.
- C Aggie discovers a raccoon hiding in some bushes in her neighborhood.
- D The cat reappears after Aggie goes out to look for it.

3. Read these sentences from the story: "I've got some news about the cat." Aggie walked into the living room, making eye contact with her mother and preparing to deliver the bad news, but her mouth couldn't form words. There was Princess sitting right beside Mom on the couch, same as always."

What can be concluded from these sentences?

- A Aggie has lost her ability to speak because of a toothache.
- B Aggie thinks her mom will be able to help her find Princess.
- C Aggie is surprised to see Princess.
- D Aggie is surprised to see her mom.

4. What is the opinion that Aggie's neighbors have about her problem?

- A They think her problem is extremely important.
- B They do not think her problem is very important.
- C They do not think her problem will ever be solved.
- D They think her problem will resolve itself on its own.

5. What is a theme of the story?

- A how mysterious cats can be
- B how sneaky raccoons can be
- C how delicious graham crackers are
- D how helpful neighbors are

6. Read these sentences: "She was brown, black, grey, and orange—all the colors a cat can be swirled into a crazy patchwork. **She looked like she had been the sole witness in the explosion of a paint store.**"

Why does the author write that the cat "**looked like she had been the sole witness in the explosion of a paint store**"?

- A to help the reader picture what the cat looked like by making a comparison
- B to help the reader understand where the new cat came from by mentioning a paint store
- C to encourage the reader to pay more attention to the colors of cats and other animals
- D to warn the reader about the danger of explosions in public places, such as paint stores

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

At the beginning of the story, Princess has disappeared; _____, she reappears.

- A particularly
- B as a result
- C for example
- D ultimately

8. What does Aggie find in some bushes in her neighborhood?

9. Describe what Aggie normally does when she comes home from school, including what she does with Princess.

10. Is Princess likely to disappear again? Explain why or why not, using evidence from the passage.

Teacher Guide & Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 660

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8. What does Aggie find in some bushes in her neighborhood?

Suggested answer: Aggie finds a raccoon.

9. Describe what Aggie normally does when she comes home from school, including what she does with Princess.

Suggested answer: Aggie fixes herself a plate of graham crackers and peanut butter, and she sits down on the couch to watch afternoon TV with Princess.

10. Is Princess likely to disappear again? Explain why or why not, using evidence from the passage.

Suggested answer: Answers may vary, as long as they are supported by the passage. For example, students may respond that Princess is likely to disappear again because she has already done so once. Conversely, students may respond that Princess is not likely to disappear again. She is "always" there when Aggie comes home from school and watches TV, so her strange disappearance was probably a one-time-thing.