The Mark on the Doorframe

Name: _____ Date: _____

By noon, the house had become an arrangement of rectangles: pale patches where pictures had hung, clean spaces beneath lifted rugs, sunlight squared on the bare floor. Mara carried the final box toward the front door. Her father stood beside the kitchen frame with a paintbrush in one hand. Along the wood ran a crooked ladder of pencil marks, each labeled with her age. The lowest mark was nearly hidden by the skirting board.

“The agent said to leave everything fresh,” he said. He dipped the brush, then wiped it against the rim of the tin. Mara set down the box. At thirteen, she had insisted on measuring herself every month, certain that enough attention would persuade her to grow. At sixteen, she had rolled her eyes when her father called her over. Now she stood level with a scratch he had made long before she could remember.

She took out her phone. “We can keep a picture.” Her father stepped aside, but the screen caught a bright reflection from the empty window. She changed the angle. The numbers appeared; the small dents where the pencil had pressed too hard did not. Behind her, the moving van sounded its horn. She photographed the frame anyway and put the phone away without checking the result.

Her father raised the brush. Mara reached for the box, then stopped. In the open drawer beside the sink lay a stub of pencil that had escaped the packing. She picked it up and handed it to him. “One more?” she asked. He placed the brush on the newspaper. Mara stood against the wood while he rested a book on her head. Neither mentioned that she had not grown since the previous summer.

When she stepped away, the new line sat directly on top of the old one, darker but no higher. Her father wrote the date beside it. Mara lifted the box again. At the door she turned back, expecting him to be looking at the frame, but he was watching her. “Ready?” he asked. She nodded. He left the brush on the newspaper and followed her out. Behind them, the kitchen window held its square of light.

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Read closely. Find the evidence.

1. How does the final pencil mark add meaning beyond recording Mara’s height?

A. It proves that Mara has grown since summer.
B. It turns an unchanged measurement into a chosen act of connection before leaving.
C. It shows that Mara plans to remain in the house.
D. It corrects an earlier measurement that her father recorded badly.

2. What does the photograph’s failure to capture the pencil dents contribute to the scene?

A. It proves that the phone is broken.
B. It explains why the moving van is late.
C. It establishes that the family has no other pictures.
D. It suggests that an image preserves appearance without fully preserving the physical history of the marks.

3. How does the contrast between the father’s opening task and closing action develop the conflict?

A. He moves from preparing to paint over the marks to leaving the brush behind after sharing the ritual.
B. He moves from refusing to leave to deciding to buy a new house.
C. He moves from measuring Mara carefully to forgetting her age.
D. He moves from wanting a photograph to deleting it.

4. How does the restrained final exchange affect the passage’s tone?

A. It makes the departure comic by treating the marks as a joke.
B. It makes the ending threatening by hiding the father’s plan.
C. It conveys affection and acceptance through a glance, a short question, and a nod instead of an explicit speech.
D. It proves that Mara and her father no longer care about the house.

> **Talk it through:** Explain how the final mark can mean something different from the earlier marks even though it is at the same height. Connect the image to a character’s choice.

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