Name: _____ Date: _____

# Marit and the Storm Pony

Reading level 8 (4th grade) · 947 words

This is a story about a girl and three things. The girl was Marit. She was seven, and practical, which means she packed string. The things were a ball of kite string, a bar of soap and a bag of fourteen peppermints. Keep count. It matters. The valley had no rain for forty days, and Marit's bean patch was the color of burnt toast.

Every single night, thunder came rumbling down from the old weather tower on Tarn Hill. Every morning, not one drop fell. At the market, Mr. Hobb, who kept the tower, sold the thunder in jars. "Genuine thunder! One coin! Open at parties!" People bought jars of it and opened them at parties, and they went BOOM, and nobody had any beans.

On the fortieth morning, Marit climbed Tarn Hill, humming. She always hummed when she was scared. At the top, beside the tower, stood a small gray cloud shaped like a pony. His mane was mist. His hooves were drizzle. A rope was fastened around his neck, and it was not made of hemp. It was made of rain, and it glittered.

The pony sighed, and blue sparks jumped off his back and fizzled in the grass. A tag on the rope read MIZZLE. "Oh," said Marit. "You are the one who has been sad." That was all she said, because she was not sure what else a person says to a storm. But she took one step toward the tower.

The gate was guarded by a goat. He had yellow eyes and a bell on a rotten bit of rope, and a number painted on his side: ELEVEN. This was how many hats he had eaten. He took one slow, dangerous step toward Marit with his head lowered. Marit held up the peppermints, and the goat stopped immediately.

Eleven ate peppermints the way other goats eat hay, which is all at once and with tremendous feeling. Marit gave him half the bag, because she did not want to be rude. He crunched them and he sighed, and then he held the gate open with his nose. She had three things still, but one of them was half empty.

The tower had a ladder up the outside, a hundred rungs high. The bottom twenty had rotted away. Marit looked at the gap. Then she looked at her ball of string. She tied a loop for each missing rung, one after another, starting at the iron hook where the ladder began. She hummed the whole time, all the way to the first good rung.

Climbing a string ladder is like climbing a very thin swing. Halfway up, the wind pushed her, and she looked down, and wished she had not. She hummed louder. A long gray face looked over the edge. Mizzle had heard the humming. He had been lonely for a very long time, and a hum is a small, friendly kind of thunder.

At the top, in a deck chair, sat Mr. Hobb. He was an enormous, round man in a flannel nightcap, and a jar of thunder bulged in every pocket. He yawned, and it took about a minute. "What do you want?" he said. "Thunder? Jars on the left, coins on the right." "I want the pony," said Marit.

Mr. Hobb laughed so hard that his nightcap slipped. "The pony is the best thing I own," he said. "He makes thunder when he is sad, and he is sad all day, so I sell it by the jar." Marit held out the bag politely. "I will buy him," she said. "And then I am going to let him go. I thought you should know."

Mr. Hobb counted the peppermints twice, carefully, with one finger. There were exactly seven. He put one in his mouth, and his eyes went soft and sleepy. "Done," he said, and yawned. "Let him go, then. Nobody can untie a rope of rain." He closed his eyes. The rest of the peppermints stayed in his lap, and he began, very gently, to snore.

Marit looked hard at the rope. It was only water, a long line of raindrops holding hands. She knew exactly how to make water let go of itself. She took the soap out of her pocket and rubbed it along the rope until it frothed and fizzed.

The drops slid apart like children let out of school. The rope drooped, and slipped from Mizzle's neck, and spilled across the floor in a hundred small bubbles. Mizzle shook his mane, once and looked at Marit as if he could not quite believe it. Then he began to grow, slowly at first, and then not slowly at all.

He grew as tall as the tower and as wide as the hill. A happy rumble ran through him, the kind of thunder that is not sad at all. Then he opened, and it rained. It rained on Marit. It rained on the goat. It rained on Mr. Hobb, who woke with a peppermint on his tongue and a drop on his nose.

The rain fell steadily for three days. Marit's beans drank every drop and stood up straight. Mr. Hobb sat in his deck chair with his mouth open and did not yawn once. His jars of thunder sat silent on the shelf. He had not felt rain on his face in all his years in the tower.

Then the wind took his nightcap, rolled it down the hill, and dropped it into the waiting mouth of a goat. It was a very fine nightcap, and it was still warm. "Twelve," said Marit. For the rest of that afternoon, the goat would answer to nothing less.

## Questions

**1. Why did the valley have no rain for forty days?**

A. The pony was tied up and could not rain

B. The beans needed more sun

C. The market was closed

**2. What did Marit give the goat?**

A. Soap
B. Half of her peppermints
C. Her string

**3. What does "fizzled" mean in "sparks fizzled in the grass"?**

A. Grew louder
B. Burned the grass
C. Faded away

**4. What did Marit use the kite string for?**

A. To make a ladder
B. To tie up the goat
C. To fly a kite

**5. How did Marit make the rain rope let go?**

A. She cut it
B. She rubbed soap on it
C. She asked Mr. Hobb

**6. Why was Marit's humming useful?**

A. It woke Mr. Hobb
B. It scared the goat
C. It made Mizzle feel less lonely

## Words to know

practical: sensible
hemp: rope plant
fizzled: faded out
rotted: fell apart
frothed: made bubbles

# Answer key: Marit and the Storm Pony

1. A. The pony was tied up and could not rain
2. B. Half of her peppermints
3. C. Faded away
4. A. To make a ladder
5. B. She rubbed soap on it
6. C. It made Mizzle feel less lonely