Name: _____ Date: _____

Mavis and the Greedy Mayor

Reading level 9 (5th grade) · 1072 words

Mavis the magpie could not walk past a shiny thing. A spoon? Hers. A button? Hers. A bottle top, a thimble, the gleam on the belly of a fish? Hers, hers, hers and hers. She knew this was a flaw, and she had a nest full of proof. But she did not expect to be blamed, on one gray Monday, for every missing spoon in Pebbleton.

It was Mayor Bellweather who said so, in a speech from the top of a barrel. Spoons were vanishing, he said, and bells and birthday candles too, and everybody knew who took things that shone. Therefore, by Law Number Nine, every shiny thing in town must be handed in to the Mayor's tower, to keep it safe from magpies.

By Friday, the town was dull as a dishcloth. People ate soup with their fingers. Nobody could light a birthday candle, because the candles were locked up, and the noon bell did not ring, because the bell was locked up too. The tower had one door and one key. The Mayor wore the key on a chain round his neck, even in the bath.

Mavis flew over the tower to look. Through the top window she could see the shine, a heap of it, like a hundred small suns piled up in a box. Her feet itched. "I want it all back," she said, "and I want it back by Saturday." Then she added, because she was honest, "I mostly want it for them."

The first person she visited was Tobin the hedgehog, who lived under a cabbage. Tobin was the strongest animal in Pebbleton. He could lift a cart with one paw. He was also the sleepiest, and he could fall asleep in the middle of a word. "I need your arms," said Mavis. "Mmm," said Tobin. "After a nap." The nap lasted until teatime.

The second visit was to the Chimes family, nine frogs who lived by the pond. They had rung the town's noon bell for forty years, and without it, they had nothing to do but sit on a log and be cross. "A plan?" said Grandfather Chimes. "Do we get to be loud?" "You get to be very loud," said Mavis, "at exactly the right time."

Then she borrowed two tall mirrors from the barber, who missed his scissors. She took a third thing from her nest, the only gold coin she owned, which had belonged to her grandmother. She did not look at it for long. If she did, she would never let it go. "What do two mirrors do," she asked the frogs, "if they face each other?"

Nobody knew. So at a quarter to noon, in the middle of the square, she showed them. Tobin held the mirrors upright, one on each side, facing each other. Mavis set the coin on the ground between them, right in the gap. Then she stepped back, and all nine frogs gasped at the same time.

There was not one coin in the mirrors. There were a thousand, a long shining street of gold going away and away, getting smaller and smaller, as far as anybody could see. "It is only the same coin, over and over," whispered Mavis. "But I am a magpie, and I know exactly what a person cannot stop looking at."

At noon, the Mayor came out of the tower, as he did every day, to eat his lunch at the Rusty Spoon. He took four steps and stopped. His mouth fell open. "GOLD," he said, in a thin, quiet voice, and then he ran. He ran straight into the mirror, with a bonk, and bounced. "It is behind that one!" he cried, and he ran round the back.

Of course, it was not behind that one. It was in the mirror. The Mayor went round and round, patting the glass, kneeling and squinting, and a long line of gold went on gleaming at him, just out of reach. Then Tobin's eyelids began to droop. The mirror tilted. The thousand coins swayed like boats, and the Mayor shouted, "Why is it moving?"

That was when the nine frogs let loose. They chimed. They sang like bells, all nine at once, ding and dong and ding-a-ling, as loud as the old noon bell. Tobin jerked awake so fast that he nearly sat on the mirror. The coins settled. The Mayor sighed happily and put his nose against the glass. He had not looked away once.

Now Mavis went to work. She came down behind the Mayor without a sound, because she had never in nine years been caught. His chain was thin, and the clasp was small, and she undid it in two clicks, as neatly as picking a blackberry. The key was heavy and cold and fit exactly into her beak. Nobody noticed. The Mayor was counting.

The tower door swung open with a groan, and the whole heap of shine came pouring out like a river. Spoons, ladles, birthday candles, door knobs, bicycle bells, a trumpet, and a very small gold trombone. By then, half of Pebbleton had come running to see what the noise was, and they were all talking at once.

Everyone took back their own things. The barber took back his scissors. A girl took back her candle and lit it with a match, right there, to prove it still could be lit. The frogs climbed all the way up the tower stairs, hauled out the noon bell, and rang it at ten past twelve, ten minutes late, and the whole town cheered anyway.

The Mayor did not notice any of it. He stayed in the square on his knees, counting the coins in the mirrors. "Nine hundred and... no, seven hundred..." The town agreed, without a vote, to leave the mirrors right where they were. Somebody brought him a cushion. Somebody else brought him his lunch. He counted until the mirrors went dark at bedtime, and the next morning he started again. Nobody minded.

That evening Mavis stood on the frame of the barber's mirror and looked down. Her grandmother's coin was still lying between the two glasses, and it was going away in both directions, farther than she could see. "You gave it to him," said Tobin, waking up for a

moment. "I gave him a thousand of it," said Mavis. "I kept the real one." Tobin was asleep again before she finished.

Questions

1. Why did Mayor Bellweather say he was locking up all the shiny things?

A. To sell them at a fair
B. To melt them into a bell
C. To protect them from magpies

2. What was the real reason the Mayor wanted the shiny things?

A. The town had asked him to
B. He wanted them for himself
C. He wanted to give them away

3. What is the best meaning of gleam in this story?

A. A loud noise
B. A small hole
C. A bright shine

4. What did the two mirrors facing each other make?

A. A hidden door
B. A long street of gold coins
C. A very bright light

5. What made Tobin wake up when the mirror tilted?

A. The nine frogs chiming
B. A cold wind
C. The Mayor shouting

6. Why did Mavis know what the Mayor could not stop looking at?

A. She had read it in a book
B. She had seen it in the pond
C. She cannot resist shiny things herself

Words to know

flaw: weak spot
clasp: little catch
gleam: bright shine
squinting: peering hard
chimed: rang like bells

Answer key: Mavis and the Greedy Mayor

1. C. To protect them from magpies
2. B. He wanted them for himself
3. C. A bright shine
4. B. A long street of gold coins
5. A. The nine frogs chiming
6. C. She cannot resist shiny things herself