

The Circus Comes to Town

by ReadWorks



Donald Seastrunk never feared the jugglers until they upgraded from bean bags to bowling pins. By the movie theater, after a movie let out, excited crowds gathered around the most skilled jugglers, whose silk vests were as blue as the sky. Winking and smiling, the jugglers performed astonishing feats: dozens of balls in the air at once; nifty, behind-the-back and through-the-legs tricks; even juggling blindfolded. Word of mouth spread to neighboring towns. People from far away came to see the street performers. All seemed well and good, but with the jugglers' popularity came copycats. And so many of them!

On the side streets and quiet walkways, juggling copycats blundered through their simple routines. A ball or two rolling into the street was the worst of it, at first. But when the very best jugglers switched to bowling pins to freshen up their act, the bad jugglers copied this, too. For Donald Seastrunk, the juggling problem came to a head one May morning, as he hurried from his car up the path to the library. Just as he thought he was safe, a stray bowling pin spiraled through the air and whomped him on the head.

The next day it was crazy at Town Hall, too. Mayor Marjorie Arnold sighed at her desk. She had just read Donald Seastrunk's angry email, which Donald had sent to dozens of friends, the town council, and the mayor's office. This wasn't the first complaint the mayor had

received about the jugglers. But what could she do? Some people were mad, but others loved the jugglers. After all, the town was practically famous now, and people were proud to be from a famous town. The biggest newspaper in the state capital had even written an article about the jugglers. And think of all the money the crowds spent at local stores! The mayor chewed her pen. She tapped her foot furiously. She sighed so strongly that important documents blew off her desk, and this made her sigh again.

Whenever she found herself in trouble, Mayor Arnold liked to hold imaginary conversations with the golden cat statue on her desk. With another heavy sigh, she asked it for advice.

"Why not pass a law banning juggling in public?" it seemed to say.

"The mayor can't just pass whatever laws she wants," said Mayor Arnold. "Laws are passed by the town council." With a groan, the mayor rose from her leather chair and stood at the window, looking at the trees in full bloom on the town green. One tree had a bowling pin caught in the branches.

The mayor imagined the cat's voice dropping to a whisper. "Why not order the police to fine the jugglers for disturbing the peace?"

"That's no good," the mayor said. She rested her forehead on the cool window and closed her eyes. "What if the jugglers sue us? Then the case would go to court, and the town could lose a lot of money!"

The golden cat statue made no reply. The mayor was by herself. She heard what sounded like the distant rumble of thunder. Thunder? There wasn't a cloud in the sky! Without taking her forehead off the window, Mayor Arnold opened her eyes. What she saw next made her jump up with a squeak. A crowd of people were marching up the long street that led to Town Hall, and at the crowd's front was Donald Seastrunk himself. They pumped their fists in the air and waved signs. An anti-juggler protest! Mayor Arnold sighed. It was going to be a long day.

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Donald had never been afraid of the jugglers. That changed when they switched from little bean bags to bowling pins.

The best jugglers did their tricks outside of the movie theater. Excited crowds formed around them. The jugglers wore smooth vests that were as blue as the sky. Winking and smiling, they performed amazing tricks. They kept over twenty balls in the air at once. They tossed balls behind their backs and through their legs. They even tied cloth over their eyes and juggled blind.

Soon, people from nearby towns began to hear about the jugglers. People from far away came to see them. Everything seemed great, but with the jugglers' popularity came people who wanted to copy them. Many people showed up, trying to copy the jugglers!

On quiet side streets, the new jugglers tried to do their simple tricks. But they weren't very good, and most of them messed up. At first, their mistakes would send just a ball or two rolling into the street, and that was as bad as it got. But then, the best jugglers switched to bowling pins, and the bad jugglers copied them.

One day, Donald was walking up the path to the library. Just as he thought he was safe, a

bowling pin flew through the air and hit him on the head. Donald decided he'd had enough of the jugglers, so he wrote the mayor an email.

The next day, it was crazy at Town Hall. Mayor Arnold sighed at her desk. She had just read Donald's angry email. In it, he complained about the jugglers. This wasn't the first time someone had complained about the jugglers. But what could she do? Some people were mad, but others loved them. After all, the town was practically famous now, and people were proud to be from a famous town. The biggest newspaper in the state had even written about the jugglers. Plus, the crowds spent lots of money in the town's stores! The mayor chewed her pen as she thought about the problem. She tapped her foot. She sighed so strongly that important papers blew off her desk. This made her sigh again.

Whenever she found herself in trouble, Mayor Arnold liked to pretend to talk with the cat statue on her desk. With another big sigh, she asked it for advice.

"Why don't you pass a law banning juggling in public? Make it against the law to juggle out in the open," the cat seemed to say.

"I can't just pass whatever laws I want," said Mayor Arnold. "The town government passes the laws." She stood up and went to look out the window. Outside, the trees were full of flowers. One tree had a bowling pin caught in its branches.

The mayor imagined the cat's voice getting very quiet. "The jugglers are making too much noise. Why don't you tell the police to make them pay money for bothering everyone with the noise?"

"That's no good," the mayor said. She rested her head on the cool window and closed her eyes. "What if the jugglers sue us? The town could lose a lot of money!"

The cat statue did not answer. The mayor was by herself. She heard what sounded like thunder from far away. *Thunder?* she thought. *There isn't a cloud in the sky!* Without taking her head off the window, Mayor Arnold opened her eyes. What she saw next made her jump up with a shout. A crowd of people were coming up the long street that led to Town Hall. At the front of the crowd was Donald himself. People punched their fists in the air. Some of them waved signs. It was a protest against the jugglers! Mayor Arnold sighed. It was going to be a long day.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What is the town in the passage famous for?

- A. tightrope walkers
- B. jugglers
- C. bowling pins
- D. circus elephants

2. What main problem does Mayor Arnold face?

- A. People are complaining about the jugglers, and she doesn't know what to do.
- B. Donald Seastrunk is hit in the head by a juggler's stray bowling pin.
- C. She holds imaginary conversations with the golden cat statue in her office.
- D. The jugglers might sue the city if they were fined for disturbing the peace.

3. While many people are happy to live in a famous town, not everyone is happy about the jugglers. What evidence from the passage supports this conclusion?

- A. The biggest newspaper in the state capital writes an article about the jugglers.
- B. Excited crowds gather around the skilled jugglers outside the movie theater.
- C. Donald Seastrunk leads a crowd in an anti-juggler protest.
- D. Donald Seastrunk is hit in the head by a bowling pin.

4. Read the following sentences: "The mayor chewed her pen. She tapped her foot furiously. She sighed so strongly that important documents blew off her desk, and this made her sigh again."

Based on this description, how is Mayor Arnold most likely feeling?

- A. inspired
- B. upbeat
- C. lonely
- D. frustrated

5. What is this story mostly about?

- A. how Mayor Arnold makes decisions
- B. problems caused by jugglers in a town
- C. the dangers of increased numbers of copycat jugglers
- D. the routines performed by skilled jugglers

6. Read the following sentence: "Winking and smiling, the jugglers performed **astonishing** feats: dozens of balls in the air at once; nifty, behind-the-back and through-the-legs tricks; even juggling blindfolded."

What does the word "**astonishing**" mean as used in this sentence?

- A. unsurprising
- B. realistic
- C. colorful
- D. amazing

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

The jugglers bring tourists and money to the town; _____, the jugglers disturb the peace and annoy some citizens.

- A. on the other hand
- B. initially
- C. above all
- D. as a result

8. Why does Donald Seastrunk send an email to the mayor's office?

9. Why can't the mayor order the police to fine the jugglers for disturbing the peace?

10. Explain why the issue of the jugglers is so difficult for Mayor Arnold. Support your answer using information from the passage.
