

E.C.E.C.

Juan F. Aranguren 3701
(1407) Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires
Tel/fax 4674-0322 / 6062-6048



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MRS. BIXBY AND THE COLONEL'S COAT

ABOUT THE STORY...

Author: Roald Dahl

Came out for the first time in: 1959

Watch it

Read the short story and answer the questions.

**Mrs Bixby
and the
Colonel's Coat**

Roald Dahl

"The absolute master
of the twist in the tale."
—Garrison

1) What did Mr. Bixby do for a living?

**2) Mrs. Bixby told her husband she was going to visit her aunt, but that was a lie.
Where was she actually going?**

3) What's her reaction to the Colonel's gift? What did the card he left her along with the gift say?

4) What does Mrs. Bixby do with "the present"?

5) What happens to "the present" in the end?

6) Did Mrs. Bixby deserve what she got?

7) Write two differences between the text and the video.

MRS. BIXBY AND THE COLONEL'S COAT

Roald Dahl

Mr. and Mrs. Bixby lived in a small apartment in New York City. Mr. Bixby was a dentist, who earned an average amount of money. Mrs. Bixby was a woman who was full of life...

Once a month she would get on a train and travel to Baltimore to visit her old Aunt Maude. At least that was what she told her husband. What she really did was see a gentleman known as the Colonel and spend all her time in Baltimore in his company.

The Colonel was wealthy and lived in a charming house just outside of town. He had no wife and no family, only a few loyal servants, and in Mrs. Bixby's absence he amused himself by riding horses and hunting. Year after year the pleasant friendship between Mrs. Bixby and the Colonel continued without a problem, and never once did Mrs. Bixby's dentist husband suspect the truth.

Then, after one visit just before Christmas, Mrs. Bixby was standing at the station in Baltimore, waiting for the train to take her back to New York. It had been a thoroughly enjoyable visit and Mrs. Bixby was thinking how different it all was from her dull husband at home, when suddenly one of the Colonel's servants appeared through the crowd and presented her with a large cardboard box.

Mrs. Bixby: "Good heavens! What's he brought? What a big box! Was there a message?"

There had been no message, and as soon as she was on the train, Mrs. Bixby found a place where she could open the box in private.

Mrs. Bixby: "How exciting! A Christmas present from the Colonel... I think it's a dress. It might even be two dresses. Or it might be a lot of beautiful underclothes. I won't look. I'll just feel around and try to guess what it is. I'll try to guess the color as well, and exactly what it looks like. Also how much it cost... Good heavens! It can't be true."

What the Colonel had given her was the most magnificent mink coat she had ever seen. The fur was almost pure black, with a touch of blue in it, as well, as deep rich blue. But what had it cost? She hardly dared to think. Then she saw there was a letter in the box, as well... a farewell note from the Colonel! He had heard her say once how fond she was of mink and asked her to accept it as a farewell gift. For his own personal reasons he would not be able to see her anymore.

Mrs. Bixby: "Well! Imagine that! Well, I've lost one thing, but gained another. Wait... there's something written on the other side: 'Just tell them that nice generous aunt of yours gave it to you for Christmas'." "The man must be mad! Aunt Maude doesn't have that sort of money... she couldn't possibly give me this... but if Aunt Maude didn't, then who did?"

In the excitement of finding the coat and trying it on, she had completely forgotten the most important detail. In a couple of hours she would be in New York, and even a man like her husband Cyril would start asking questions if his wife suddenly walked in from a weekend wearing a fabulous new mink coat.

Mrs. Bixby thought to herself: "I think he's done this on purpose just to annoy me. He knew perfectly well I wouldn't be able to keep it. But I must have this coat! I must! Very well, my dear. You shall have the coat, my dear. But don't be afraid. Sit still and keep calm and start thinking. You've fooled him before. The man has never been able to understand very much apart from his business. So sit absolutely still and think."

Some time later Mrs. Bixby stepped off the train in New York and walked quickly to the exit. She was wearing her old red coat again, and was carrying the box in her arms. She signaled for a taxi.

Mrs. Bixby: "Driver, do you know of a pawnbroker that is still open around here? Stop at the first one you see, will you please?"

At the pawnbroker's Mrs. Bixby told the driver to wait for her. Inside she made up a story about losing her purse and all her money, and left the fur coat with the pawnbroker in exchange for fifty dollars in cash and a pawn-ticket which she insisted have no name or address on it, but simply the word 'ARTICLE.' The important thing was not to lose that ticket. Anyone finding it could go there and claim the coat. But Mrs. Bixby was not about to let that happen. She would tell her husband that she'd found the ticket in the back seat of the taxi and could hardly wait to claim whatever it was on the following Monday morning. A most ingenious plan... if it hadn't been for her husband.

Mrs. Bixby: "Wouldn't it be wonderful if it were a real treasure?"

Mr. Bixby: "We can't know what it is yet, my dear. We shall just have to wait and see."

Mrs. Bixby: "I think it's absolutely wonderful! Give me the ticket and I'll go over immediately on Monday morning and find out!"

Mr. Bixby: "I think I'd better do that. I'll pick it up on my way to work."

Mrs. Bixby: "But it's my ticket! Please let me do it. Why should you have all that fun?"

Mr. Bixby: "I'd rather you didn't handle it if you don't mind."

Mrs. Bixby: "But I found it. It's mine. Whatever it is, it's mine, isn't that right?"

Mr. Bixby: "I suppose you haven't thought that it might be something for a man, a pocket watch, for example."

Mrs. Bixby: "In that case, I'll give it to you for Christmas. But if it's a woman's thing, I want it myself. Is that agreed?"

Mr. Bixby: "That sounds fair. Why don't you come with me when I pick it up?"

She was about to say yes to this, but stopped herself just in time. She had no wish to be greeted like an old customer by the pawnbroker in her husband's presence.

Mrs. Bixby: "Uhh... no, I don't think I will. You see, it'll be more exciting if I stay here and wait"

Monday morning came at last, and as Mr. Bixby was about to leave for the pawnbroker's on his way to work, his wife made him promise to telephone her if it turned out to be something really nice. About an hour later, when the phone rang, Mrs. Bixby rushed to answer it before the first ring had finished.

Mr. Bixby (on the telephone): "I've got it!"

Mrs. Bixby: "You have? Oh, Cyril, what is it? Was it something good?"

Mr. Bixby: "Good? It's wonderful. You wait till you see this. You'll faint."

Mrs. Bixby: "Darling, what is it? Tell me quickly."

Mr. Bixby: "You're a lucky girl, that's what you are."

Mrs. Bixby: "It's for me then?"

Mr. Bixby: "Of course it's for you, though I can't understand how it was pawned for fifty dollars. You'll go crazy when you see it."

Mrs. Bixby: "What is it?"

Mr. Bixby: "Try to guess."

But Mrs. Bixby couldn't guess. Instead she insisted on going down to her husband's office herself to get it, even though it might disorganize his day. Later when she rang his bell, her husband in his white dentist's coat opened the door himself.

Mrs. Bixby: "Oh, I'm so excited."

Mr. Bixby: "So you should be. You're a lucky girl, did you know that? We're through for now. Go and have your lunch, Miss Pulteney. You can finish that when you get back."

This last was directed to his assistant, who was busy putting his instruments away. He waited until the girl had gone, then walked over to a cupboard that he used for hanging up his clothes and stood in front of it, pointing with his finger.

Mr. Bixby: "It's in there. Now shut your eyes for a moment... all right now. You can look!"

Mrs. Bixby: "I don't dare to."

Mr. Bixby: "Go on, have a look... mink! Real mink!"

At the sound of the magic word she opened her eyes quickly, and at the same time she started forward to grab the coat in her arms. But there was no coat. There was only a stupid little fur neckpiece in her husband's hand. Mrs. Bixby put a hand up to her mouth and started to back away. She was sure she was going to scream.

Mr. Bixby: "What's the matter, my dear" Don't you like it?"

Mrs. Bixby: Why, yes... I... I think it's very nice... beautiful..."

Mr. Bixby: "It quite took your breath away for a moment, didn't it?"

Mrs. Bixby: "Yes, it did."

Mr. Bixby: Very good quality. Fine color, too. Here. Try it on... it's perfect. It really suits you. It isn't everyone who has a mink, my dear."

Mrs. Bixby: "No, it isn't."

Mr. Bixby: "I'm afraid you mustn't expect anything else for Christmas. Fifty dollars was rather more than I was going to spend, anyway. Go and buy yourself a nice lunch, my dear."

Mrs. Bixby moved towards the door. She was going to go over to that pawnbroker's and throw that miserable neckpiece right into his face and if he refused to give her back her coat, she would kill him.

Mr. Bixby: "Did I tell you that I was going to be late tonight? It'll probably be at least 8:30, it may even be 9:00"

Mrs. Bixby: "Yes, all right. Good-bye."

Mrs. Bixby went out closing the door loudly behind her. At that exact moment, Miss Pulteney, her husband's assistant, came sailing past her on her way to lunch and greeted Mrs. Bixby, smiling brightly.

She walked in a very proud and confident way, and she looked like a queen, exactly like a queen in the beautiful black mink coat that the Colonel had given to Mrs. Bixby.

Source: Pearson Education