Year 6/7
Short Stories
Collection

Part 1

CONTENTS

Jim Wolf and the Cats

From THE AUTOBIOGRAHY OF MARK TWAIN

By Mark Twain

IT was back in those far-distant days—1848 or ’49—that Jim Wolf came to us. He was from a hamlet thirty or forty miles back in the country, and he brought all his native sweetnesses and gentlenesses and simplicities with him. He was approaching seventeen, a grave and slender lad, trustful, honest, honorable, a creature to love and cling to. And he was incredibly bashful. He was with us a good while, but he could never conquer that peculiarity; he could not be at ease in the presence of any woman, not even in my good and gentle mother’s; and as to speaking to any girl, it was wholly impossible. He sat perfectly still, one day—there were ladies chatting in the room—while a wasp up his leg stabbed him cruelly a dozen times; and all the sign he gave was a slight wince for each stab and the tear of torture in his eye. He was too bashful to move.

It is to this kind that untoward things happen. My sister gave a “candy-pull” on a winter’s night. I was too young to be of the company, and Jim was too diffident. I was sent up to bed early, and Jim followed of his own motion. His room was in the new part of the house and his window looked out on the roof of the L annex. That roof was six inches deep in snow, and the snow had an ice crust upon it which was as slick as glass. Out of the comb of

the roof projected a short chimney, a common resort for sentimental cats on light nights—and this was a moonlight night. Down at the eaves, below the chimney, a canopy of dead vines spread away to some posts, making a cozy shelter, and after an hour or two the rollicking crowd of young ladies and gentlemen grouped themselves in its shade, with their saucers of liquid and piping-hot candy disposed about them on the frozen ground to cool. There was joyous chaffing and joking and laughter—peal upon peal of it.

About this time a couple of old, disreputable tomcats got up on the chimney and started a heated argument about something; also about this time I gave up trying to get to sleep and went visiting to Jim's room. He was awake and fuming about the cats and their intolerable yowling. I asked him, mockingly, why he didn't climb out and drive them away. He was nettled, and said overboldly that for two cents he would.

It was a rash remark and was probably repented of before it was fairly out of his mouth. But it was too late—he was committed. I knew him; and I knew he would rather break his neck than back down, if I egged him on judiciously.

"Oh, of course you would! Who's doubting it?"

It galled him, and he burst out, with sharp irritation, "Maybe you doubt it!"

“I? Oh no! I shouldn’t think of such a thing. You are always doing wonderful things, with your mouth.”

He was in a passion now. He snatched on his yarn
socks and began to raise the window, saying in a voice quivering with anger: “You think I dasn’t—you do! Think what you blame please. I don’t care what you think. I’ll show you!”

The window made him rage; it wouldn’t stay up.

I said, “Never mind, I’ll hold it.”

Indeed, I would have done anything to help. I was only a boy and was already in a radiant heaven of anticipation. He climbed carefully out, clung to the window sill until his feet were safely placed, then began to pick his perilous way on all-fours along the glassy comb, a foot and a hand on each side of it. I believe I enjoy it now as much as I did then; yet it is nearly fifty years ago. The frosty breeze flapped his short shirt about his lean legs; the crystal roof shone like polished marble in the intense glory of the moon; the unconscious cats sat erect upon the chimney, alertly watching each other, lashing their tails and pouring out their hollow grievances; and slowly and cautiously Jim crept on, flapping as he went, the gay and frolicsome young creatures under the vine canopy unaware, and outraging these solemnities with their misplaced laughter. Every time Jim slipped I had a hope; but always on he crept and disappointed it. At last he was

within reaching distance. He paused, raised himself carefully up, measured his distance deliberately, then made a frantic grab at the nearest cat—and missed it. Of course he lost his balance. His heels flew up, he struck on his back, and like a rocket he darted down the roof feet first, crashed through the dead vines, and landed in a sitting position in fourteen saucers of red-hot candy, in the midst of all that party—and dressed as he was—this lad who could not look a girl in the face with his clothes on. There was a wild scramble and a storm of shrieks, and Jim fled up the stairs, dripping broken crockery all the way.

The Golden Touch

By Nathaniel Hawthorne

I

Once upon a time, there lived a very rich man, and a king besides, whose name was Midas; and he had a little daughter, whom nobody but myself ever heard of, and whose name I either never knew, or have entirely forgotten. So, because I love odd names for little girls, I choose to call her Marygold.

This King Midas was fonder of gold than of anything else in the world. He valued his royal crown chiefly because it was composed of that precious metal. If he loved anything better, or half so well, it was the one little maiden who played so merrily around her father's footstool. But the more Midas loved his daughter, the more did he desire and seek for wealth. He thought, foolish man! that the best thing he could possibly do for this dear child would be to bequeath her the largest pile of glistening coin that had ever been heaped together since the world was made.
Thus he gave all his thoughts and all his time to this one purpose. If ever he happened to gaze for an instant at the gold-tinted clouds of sunset, he wished that they were real gold, and that they could be squeezed safely into his strong box. When little Marygold ran to meet him, with a bunch of buttercups and dandelions, he used to say, "Pooh, pooh, child! If these flowers were as golden as they look, they would be worth the plucking!"

At length (as people always grow more and more foolish, unless they take care to grow wiser and wiser) Midas had got to be so exceedingly unreasonable, that he could scarcely bear to see or touch any object that was not gold. He made it his custom, therefore, to pass a large portion of every day in a dark and dreary apartment, under ground, at the basement of his palace. It was here that he kept his wealth. To this dismal hole—for it was little better than a dungeon—Midas betook himself, whenever he wanted to be particularly happy.

Here, after carefully locking the door, he would take a bag of gold coin, or a gold cup as big as a washbowl, or a heavy golden bar, or a peck measure of gold dust, and bring them from the obscure corners of the room into the one bright and narrow sunbeam that fell from the dungeonlike window. He valued the sunbeam for no other reason but that his treasure would not shine without its help.

And then would he reckon over the coins in the bag; toss up the bar, and catch it as it came down; sift the gold dust through his fingers;` look at the funny image of his own face, as reflected in the burnished circumference of the cup; and whisper to himself, "O Midas, rich King Midas, what a happy man art thou!"

II

Midas was enjoying himself in his treasure room, one day, as usual, when he perceived a shadow fall over the heaps of gold;

and, looking up, he beheld the figure of a stranger, standing in the bright and narrow sunbeam! It was a young man, with a cheerful and ruddy face.

Whether it was that the imagination of King Midas threw a yellow tinge over everything, or whatever the cause might be, he could not help fancying that the smile with which the stranger regarded him had a kind of golden brightness in it. Certainly, there was now a brighter gleam upon all the piled-up treasures than before. Even the remotest corners had their share of it, and were lighted up, when the stranger smiled, as with tips of flame and sparkles of fire.

As Midas knew that he had carefully turned the key in the lock, and that no mortal strength could possibly break into his treasure room, he, of course, concluded that his visitor must be something more than mortal.

Midas had met such beings before now, and was not sorry to meet one of them again. The stranger's aspect, indeed, was so good-humored and kindly, if not beneficent, that it would have been unreasonable to suspect him of intending any mischief. It was far more probable that he came to do Midas a favor. And what could that favor be, unless to multiply his heaps of treasure?

The stranger gazed about the room; and, when his lustrous smile had glistened upon all the golden objects that were there, he

turned again to Midas.

“You are a wealthy man, friend Midas!” he observed.

“I doubt whether any other four walls on earth contain so much gold as you have contrived to pile up in this room.”

“I have done pretty well,—pretty well,” answered Midas, in a discontented tone. “But, after all, it is but a trifle, when you consider that it has taken me my whole lifetime to get it together. If one could live a thousand years, he might have time to grow rich!”

“What!” exclaimed the stranger. “Then you are not satisfied?”

Midas shook his head.

“And pray, what would satisfy you?” asked the stranger. “Merely for the curiosity of the thing, I should be glad to know.”

Why did the stranger ask this question? Did he have it in his power to gratify the king’s wishes? It was an odd question, to say the least.

III

Midas paused and meditated. He felt sure that this stranger, with such a golden luster in his good-humored smile, had come hither

with both the power and the purpose of gratifying his utmost wishes. Now, therefore, was the fortunate moment, when he had but to speak, and obtain whatever possible, or seemingly impossible thing, it might come into his head to ask. So he thought, and thought, and thought, and heaped up one golden mountain upon another, in his imagination, without being able to imagine them big enough.

At last a bright idea occurred to King Midas.

Raising his head, he looked the lustrous stranger in the face.

“Well, Midas,” observed his visitor, “I see that you have at length hit upon something that will satisfy you. Tell me your wish.”

“It is only this,” replied Midas. “I am weary of collecting my treasures with so much trouble, and beholding the heap so diminutive, after I have done my best. I wish everything that I touch to be changed to gold!”

The stranger’s smile grew so bright and radiant, that it seemed to fill the room like an outburst of the sun, gleaming into a shadowy dell, where the yellow autumnal leaves—for so looked the lumps and particles of gold—lie strewn in the glow of light.

“The Golden Touch!” exclaimed he. “You certainly deserve credit, friend Midas, for striking out so brilliant a fancy. But are you

quite sure that this will satisfy you?"

"How could it fail?" said Midas.

"And will you never regret the possession of it?"

"What could induce me?" asked Midas. "I ask nothing else, to render me perfectly happy."

"Be it as you wish, then," replied the stranger, waving his hand in token of farewell. "To-morrow, at sunrise, you will find yourself gifted with the Golden Touch."

The figure of the stranger then became exceedingly bright, and Midas involuntarily closed his eyes. On opening them again, he beheld only one yellow sunbeam in the room, and, all around him, the glistening of the precious metal which he had spent his life in hoarding up.

IV

Whether Midas slept as usual that night, the story does not say. But when the earliest sunbeam shone through the window, and gilded the ceiling over his head, it seemed to him that this bright yellow sunbeam was reflected in rather a singular way on the white coverimg of the bed. Looking more closely, what was his astonishment and delight, when he found that this linen fabric had been transmuted to what seemed a woven texture of the

purest and brightest gold! The Golden Touch had come to him with the first sunbeam!

Midas started up, in a kind of joyful frenzy, and ran about the room, grasping at everything that happened to be in his way. He seized one of the bedposts, and it became immediately a fluted golden pillar. He pulled aside a window curtain in order to admit a clear spectacle of the wonders which he was performing, and the tassel grew heavy in his hand, a mass of gold. He took up a book from the table; at his first touch, it assumed the appearance of such a splendidly bound and gilt-edged volume as one often meets with nowadays; but on running his fingers through the leaves, behold! it was a bundle of thin golden plates, in which all the wisdom of the book had grown illegible.

He hurriedly put on his clothes, and was enraptured to see himself in a magnificent suit of gold cloth, which retained its flexibility and softness,although it burdened him a little with its weight. He drew out his handkerchief, which little Marygold had hemmed for him; that was likewise gold, with the dear child's neat and pretty stitches running all along the border, in gold thread!

Somehow or other, this last transformation did not quite please King Midas. He would rather that his little daughter's handiwork should have remained just the same as when she climbed his knee and put it into his hand.

But it was not worth while to vex himself about a trifle. Midas took his spectacles from his pocket, and put them on his nose, in order that he might see more distinctly what he was about. In those days, spectacles for common people had not been invented, but were already worn by kings; else, how could Midas have had any? To his great perplexity; however, excellent as the glasses were, he discovered that he could not possibly see through them. But this was the most natural thing in the world; for, on taking them off, the transparent crystals turned out to be plates of yellow metal, and, of course, were worthless as spectacles, though valuable as gold. It struck Midas as rather inconvenient, that, with all his wealth, he could never again be rich enough to own a pair of serviceable spectacles.

"It is no great matter, nevertheless," said he to himself, very philosophically. "We cannot expect any great good, without its being accompanied with some small inconvenience. The Golden Touch is worth the sacrifice of a pair of spectacles at least, if not of one's very eyesight. My own eyes will serve for ordinary purposes, and little Marygold will soon be old enough to read to me."

V

Wise King Midas was so exalted by his good fortune, that the palace seemed not sufficiently spacious to contain him. He therefore went downstairs, and smiled on observing that the balustrade of the staircase became a bar of burnished gold, as his

hand passed over it, in his descent. He lifted the door-latch (it was brass only a moment ago, but golden when his fingers quitted it), and emerged into the garden. Here, as it happened, he found a great number of beautiful roses in full bloom, and others in all the stages of lovely bud and blossom. Very delicious was their fragrance in the morning breeze. Their delicate blush was one of the fairest sights in the world; so gentle, so modest, and so full of sweet soothing, did these roses seem to be.

But Midas knew a way to make them far more precious, according to his way of thinking, than roses had ever been before. So he took great pains in going from bush to bush, and exercised his magic touch most untiringly; until every individual flower and bud, and even the worms at the heart of some of them, were changed to gold. By the time this good work was completed, King Midas was summoned to breakfast; and as the morning air had given him an excellent
appetite, he made haste back to the palace.

What was usually a king's breakfast in the days of Midas, I really do not know, and cannot stop now to investigate. To the best of my knowledge, however, on this particular morning, the breakfast consisted of hot cakes, some nice little brook trout, roasted potatoes, fresh boiled eggs, and coffee for King Midas himself, and a bowl of bread and milk for his daughter Marygold.

Little Marygold had not yet made her appearance. Her father

ordered her to be called, and seating himself at table, awaited the child's coming, in order to begin his own breakfast. To do Midas justice, he really loved his daughter, and loved her so much the more this morning, on account of the good fortune which had befallen him. It was not a great while before he heard her coming along the passage, crying bitterly. This circumstance surprised him, because Marygold was one of the most cheerful little people whom you would see in a summer's day, and hardly shed a tear in a twelvemonth.

When Midas heard her sobs, he determined to put little Marygold into better spirits by an agreeable surprise; so, leaning across the table, he touched his danghter's bowl (which was a china one, with pretty figures all around it), and changed it into gleaming gold.

Meanwhile, Marygold slowly and sadly opened the door, and showed herself with her apron at her eyes, still sobbing as if her heart would break.

"How now, my little lady!" cried Midas. "Pray, what is the matter with you, this bright morning?"

Marygold, without taking the apron from her eyes, held out her hand, in which was one of the roses which Midas had so recently changed into gold.

“Beautiful!” exclaimed her father. “And what is there in this magnificent golden rose to make you cry?”

“Ah, dear father!” answered the child, between her sobs, “it is not beautiful, but the ugliest flower that ever grew! As soon as I was dressed, I ran into the garden to gather some roses for you; because I know you like them, and like them the better when gathered by your little daughter. But oh, dear, dear me! What do you think has happened? Such a sad thing! All the beautiful roses, that smelled so sweetly, and had so many lovely blushes, are blighted and spoilt! They are grown quite yellow, as you see this one, and have no longer any fragrance! What can have been the matter with them?”

“Pooh, my dear little girl,—pray don’t cry about it!” said Midas, who was ashamed to confess that he himself had wrought the change which so greatly afflicted her. “Sit down, and eat your bread and milk. You will find it easy enough to exchange a golden rose like that (which will last hundreds of years), for an ordinary one which would wither in a day.”

“I don’t care for such roses as this!” cried Marygold, tossing it contemptuously away. “It has no smell, and the hard petals prick my nose!”

The child now sat down to table, but was so occupied with her grief for blighted roses that she did not even notice the wonderful

change in her china bowl. Perhaps this was all the better; for Marygold was accustomed to take pleasure in looking at the queer figures and strange trees and houses that were painted on the outside of the bowl; and those ornaments were now entirely lost in the yellow hue of the metal.

The Golden Touch Continued

VI

Midas, meanwhile, had poured out a cup of coffee; and, as a matter of course, the coffeepot, whatever metal it may have been when he took it up, was gold when he set it down. He thought to himself that it was rather an extravagant style of splendor, in a king of his simple habits, to breakfast off a service of gold, and began to be puzzled with the difficulty of keeping his treasures safe. The cupboard and the kitchen would no longer be a secure place of deposit for articles so valuable as golden bowls and golden coffeepots.

Amid these thoughts, he lifted a spoonful of coffee to his lips, and, sipping it, was astonished to perceive that the instant his lips touched the liquid it became molten gold, and the next moment, hardened into a lump!

“Ha!” exclaimed Midas, rather aghast.

“What is the matter, father?” asked little Marygold, gazing at him, with the tears still standing in her eyes.

“Nothing, child, nothing!” said Midas. “Take your milk before it gets quite cold.”

He took one of the nice little trouts on his plate, and touched its tail with his finger. To his horror, it was immediately changed from a brook trout into a gold fish, and looked as if it had been very cunningly made by the nicest goldsmith in the world. Its little bones were now golden wires; its fins and tail were thin plates of gold; and there were the marks of the fork in it, and all the delicate, frothy appearance of a nicely fried fish, exactly imitated in metal.

“I don’t quite see,” thought he to himself, “how I am to get any breakfast!”

He took one of the smoking-hot cakes, and had scarcely broken it, when, to his cruel mortification, though a moment before, it had been of the whitest wheat, it assumed the yellow hue of Indian meal. Its solidity and increased weight made him too bitterly sensible that it was gold. Almost in despair, he helped himself to a boiled egg, which immediately underwent a change similar to that of the trout and the cake.

“Well, this is terrible!” thought he, leaning back in his chair, and looking quite enviously at little Marygold, who was now eating her bread and milk with great satisfaction. “Such a costly breakfast before me, and nothing that can be eaten!”

VII

Hoping that, by dint of great dispatch, he might avoid what he

now felt to be a considerable inconvenience, King Midas next snatched a hot potato, and attempted to cram it into his mouth, and swallow it in a hurry. But the Golden Touch was too nimble for him. He found his mouth full, not of mealy potato, but of solid metal, which so burnt his tongue that he roared aloud, and, jumping up from the table, began to dance and stamp about the room, both with pain and affright.

“Father, dear father!” cried little Marygold, who was a very affectionate child, “pray what is the matter? Have you burnt your mouth?”

“Ah, dear child,” groaned Midas, dolefully, “I don’t know what is to become of your poor father!”

And, truly, did you ever hear of such a pitiable case, in all your lives? Here was literally the richest breakfast that could be set before a king, and its very richness made it absolutely good for nothing. The poorest laborer, sitting down to his crust of bread and cup of water, was far better off than King Midas, whose delicate food was really worth its weight in gold.

And what was to be done? Already, at breakfast, Midas was excessively hungry. Would he be less so by dinner time? And how ravenous would be his appetite for supper, which must undoubtedly consist of the same sort of indigestible dishes as those now before him! How many days, think you, would he

survive a continuance of this rich fare?

These reflections so troubled wise King Midas, that he began to doubt whether, after all, riches are the one desirable thing in the world, or even the most desirable. But this was only a passing thought. So fascinated was Midas with the glitter of the yellow metal, that he would still have refused to give up the Golden Touch for so paltry a consideration as a breakfast. Just imagine what a price for one meal's victuals! It would have been the same as paying millions and millions of money for some fried trout, an egg, a potato, a hot cake, and a cup of coffee!

"It would be much too dear," thought Midas.

Nevertheless, so great was his hunger, and the perplexity of his situation, that he again groaned aloud, and very grievously too. Our pretty Marygold could endure it no longer. She sat a moment gazing at her father, and trying, with all the might of her little wits, to find out what was the matter with him. Then, with a sweet and sorrowful impulse to comfort him, she started from her chair, and, running to Midas, threw her arms affectionately about his knees. He bent down and kissed her. He felt that his little daughter's love was worth a thousand times more than he had gained by the Golden Touch.

"My precious, precious Marygold!" cried he.
But Marygold made no answer.

VIII

Alas, what had King Midas done? How fatal was the gift which the stranger had bestowed! The moment the lips of Midas touched Marygold's forehead, a change had taken place. Her sweet, rosy face, so full of affection as it had been, assumed a glittering yellow color, with yellow tear-drops congealing on her cheeks. Her beautiful brown ringlets took the same tint. Her soft and tender little form grew hard and inflexible within her father's encircling arms. O terrible misfortune! The victim of his insatiable desire for wealth, little Marygold was a human child no longer, but a golden statue!

Yes, there she was, with the questioning look of love, grief, and pity, hardened into her face. It was the prettiest and most woeful sight that ever mortal saw. All the features and tokens of Marygold were there; even the beloved little dimple remained in her golden chin. But, the more perfect was the resemblance, the greater was the father's agony at beholding this golden image, which was all that was left him of a daughter.

It had been a favorite phrase of Midas, whenever he felt particularly fond of the child, to say that she was worth her weight in gold. And now the phrase had become literally true. And, now, at last, when it was too late, he felt how infinitely a warm and tender heart, that loved him, exceeded in value all the wealth that could be piled up betwixt the earth and sky!

It would be too sad a story, if I were to tell you how Midas, in the fullness of all his gratified desires, began to wring his hands and bemoan himself; and how he could neither bear to look at Marygold, nor yet to look away from her. Except when his eyes were fixed on the image, he could not possibly believe that she was changed to gold. But, stealing another glance, there was the precious little figure, with a yellow tear-drop on its yellow cheek, and a look so piteous and tender, that it seemed as if that very expression must needs soften the gold, and make it flesh again. This, however, could not be. So Midas had only to wring his hands, and to wish that he were the poorest man in the wide world, if the loss of all his wealth might bring back the faintest rose-color to his dear child's face.

IX

While he was in this tumult of despair, he suddenly beheld a stranger, standing near the door. Midas bent down his head, without speaking; for he recognized the same figure which had appeared to him the day before in the treasure room, and had bestowed on him this disastrous power of the Golden Touch. The

stranger's countenance still wore a smile, which seemed to shed a yellow luster all about the room, and gleamed on little Marygold's image, and on the other objects that had been transmuted by the touch of Midas.

"Well, friend Midas," said the stranger, "pray, how do you succeed with the Golden Touch?"

Midas shook his head.

"I am very miserable," said he.

"Very miserable! indeed!" exclaimed the stranger; "and how happens that? Have I not faithfully kept my promise with you? Have you not everything that your heart desired?"

"Gold is not everything," answered Midas. "And I have lost all that my heart really cared for."
"Ah! So you have made a discovery, since yesterday?" observed the stranger. "Let us see, then. Which of these two things do you think is really worth the most,—the gift of the Golden Touch, or one cup of clear cold water?"

"O blessed water!" exclaimed Midas. "It will never moisten my parched throat again!"

"The Golden Touch," continued the stranger, "or a crust of

bread?”

“A piece of bread,” answered Midas, “is worth all the gold on earth!”

“The Golden Touch,” asked the stranger, “or your own little Marygold, warm, soft, and loving, as she was an hour ago?”

“O my child, my dear child!” cried poor King Midas, wringing his hands. “I would not have given that one small dimple in her chin for the power of changing this whole big earth into a solid lump of gold!”

“You are wiser than you were, King Midas?” said the stranger, looking seriously at him. “Your own heart, I perceive, has not been entirely changed from flesh to gold. Were it so, your case would indeed be desperate. But you appear to be still capable of understanding that the commonest things, such as lie within everybody’s grasp, are more valuable than the riches which so many mortals sigh and struggle after. Tell me, now, do you sincerely desire to rid yourself of this Golden Touch?”

“It is hateful to me!” replied Midas.

A fly settled on his nose, but immediately fell to the floor; for it, too, had become gold. Midas shuddered.

“Go, then,” said the stranger, “and plunge into the river that glides past the bottom of your garden. Take likewise a vase of the same water, and sprinkle it over any object that you may desire to change back again from gold into its former substance. If you do this in earnestness and sincerity, it may possibly repair the mischief which your avarice has occasioned.”

King Midas bowed low; and when he lifted his head, the lustrous stranger had vanished.

X

You will easily believe that Midas lost no time in snatching up a great earthen pitcher (but, alas me! it was no longer earthen after he touched it), and in hastening to the riverside. As he ran along, and forced his way through the shrubbery, it was positively marvelous to see how the foliage turned yellow behind him, as if the autumn had been there, and nowhere else. On reaching the river’s brink, he plunged headlong in, without waiting so much as to pull off his shoes.

“Poof! poof! poof!” gasped King Midas, as his head emerged out of the water. “Well; this is really a refreshing bath, and I think it must have quite washed away the Golden Touch. And now for filling my
pitcher!”

As he dipped the pitcher into the water, it gladdened his very

heart to see it change from gold into the same good, honest, earthen vessel which it had been before he touched it. He was conscious, also, of a change within himself. A cold, hard, and heavy weight seemed to have gone out of his bosom. No doubt his heart had been gradually losing its human substance, and been changing into insensible metal, but had now been softened back again into flesh. Perceiving a violet, that grew on the bank of the river, Midas touched it with his finger, and was overjoyed to find that the delicate flower retained its purple hue, instead of undergoing a yellow blight. The curse of the Golden Touch had, therefore, really been removed from him.

XI

King Midas hastened back to the palace; and, I suppose, the servants knew not what to make of it when they saw their royal master so carefully bringing home an earthen pitcher of water. But that water, which was to undo all the mischief that his folly had wrought, was more precious to Midas than an ocean of molten gold could have been. The first thing he did, as you need hardly be told, was to sprinkle it by handfuls over the golden figure of little Marygold.

No sooner did it fall on her than you would have laughed to see how the rosy color came back to the dear child's cheek!—and how astonished she was to find herself dripping wet, and her father still throwing more water over her!

“Pray do not, dear father!” cried she. “See how you have wet my nice frock, which I put on only this morning!”

For Marygold did not know that she had been a little golden statue; nor could she remember anything that had happened since the moment when she ran with outstretched arms to comfort her father.

Her father did not think it necessary to tell his beloved child how very foolish he had been, but contented himself with showing how much wiser he had now grown. For this purpose, he led little Marygold into the garden, where he sprinkled all the remainder of the water over the rosebushes, and with such good effect that above five thousand roses recovered their beautiful bloom. There were two circumstances, however, which, as long as he lived, used to remind King Midas of the Golden Touch. One was, that the sands of the river in which he had bathed, sparkled like gold; the other, that little Marygold’s hair had now a golden tinge, which he had never observed in it before she had been changed by the effect of his kiss. This change of hue was really an improvement, and made Marygold’s hair richer than in her babyhood.

When King Midas had grown quite an old man, and used to take Marygold’s children on his knee, he was fond of telling them this marvelous story. And then would he stroke their glossy ringlets,

and tell them that their hair, likewise, had a rich shade of gold, which they had inherited from their mother.

"And, to tell you the truth, my precious little folks," said King Midas, "ever since that morning, I have hated the very sight of all other gold, save this!"

—From "A Wonder Book for Boys and Girls."

https://epbookspot.wordpress.com/fifth-level/the-new-mcguffey-fourth-reader/the-golden-touch/

The Time Shop – Part 1

By John Kendrick Bangs

OF course it was an extraordinary thing for a clock to do, especially a parlor clock, which one would expect to be particularly dignified and well-behaved, but there was no denying the fact that the Clock did it. With his own eyes, Bobby saw it wink, and beckon to him with its hands. To be sure, he had never noticed before that the Clock had eyes, or that it had any fingers on its hands to beckon with, but the thing happened in spite of all that, and as a result Bobby became curious. He was stretched along the rug in front of the great open fireplace, where he had been drowsily gazing at the blazing log for a half hour or more, and looking curiously up at the Clock's now smiling face, he whispered to it.

"Are you beckoning to me?" he asked, rising up on his hands and knees.

"Of course I am," replied the Clock in a soft, silvery tone, just like a bell, in fact. "You didn't think I was beckoning to the piano, did you?"

"I didn't know," said Bobby.

"Not that I wouldn't like to have the piano come over and call

upon me some day," the Clock went on, "which I most certainly would, considering him, as I do, the most polished four-footed creature I have ever seen, and all of his family have been either grand, square, or upright, and if properly handled, full of sweet music. Fact is, Bobby, I'd rather have a piano playing about me than a kitten or a puppy dog, as long as it didn't jump into my lap. It would be awkward to have a piano get frisky and jump into your lap, now, wouldn't it?"

Bobby had to confess that it would; "But what did you want with me?" he asked, now that the piano was disposed of.

"Well," replied the Clock, "I am beginning to feel a trifle run down, Bobby, and I thought I'd go over to the shop, and get in a little more time to keep me going.

Christmas is coming along, and everybody is so impatient for its arrival that I don't want to slow down at this season of the year, and have all the children blame me because it is so long on the way."

"What shop are you going to?" asked Bobby, interested at once, for he was very fond of shops and shopping.

"Why, the Time Shop, of course," said the Clock. "It's a shop that my father keeps, and we clocks have to get our supply of time from him, you know, or we couldn't keep on going. If he didn't

give it to us, why, we couldn't give it to you. It isn't right to give away what you haven't got."

"I don't think I understand," said Bobby, with a puzzled look on his face.

"What is a Time Shop, and what do they sell there?"
"Oh, anything from a bunch of bananas or a barrel of sawdust up to an automobile," returned the Clock.

"Really, I couldn't tell you what they don't sell there if you were to ask me. I know of a fellow who went in there once to buy a great name for himself, and the floor-walker sent him up to the third floor, where they had fame, and prosperity, and greatness for sale, and ready to give anybody who was willing and able to pay for them, and he chose happiness instead, not because it was less expensive than the others, but because it was more worth having. What they've got in the Time Shop depends entirely upon what you want. If they haven't got it in stock, they will take your order for it, and will send it to you, but always C.O.D., which means you must pay when you receive the goods. Sometimes you can buy fame on the instalment plan, but that is only in special cases. As a rule, there is no charging things in the Time Shop. You've got to pay for what you get, and it is up to you to see that the quality is good.

Did you ever hear of a man named George Washington?

“Hoh!” cried Bobby, with a scornful grin. “Did I ever hear of George Washington! What a question! Was there anybody ever who hasn’t heard of George Washington?”

“Well, yes,” said the Clock. “There was Julius Czsar. He was a pretty brainy sort of a chap, and he never heard of him. And old Father Adam never heard of him, and Mr. Methusaleh never heard of him, and I rather guess that Christopher Columbus, who was very much interested in American history, never heard of him.”

“All right, Clocky,” said Bobby, with a smile. “Go on. What about George Washington?”

“He got all that he ever won at the Time Shop; a regular customer, he was,” said the Clock; “and he paid for what he got with the best years of his life, man or boy. He rarely wasted a minute. Now I thought that having nothing to do for a little while but look at those flames trying to learn to dance, you might like to go over with me and visit the old shop. They’ll all be glad to see you and maybe you can spend a little time there whilst I am laying in a fresh supply to keep me on the move.”

“I’d love to go,” said Bobby, starting up eagerly.

“Very well, then,” returned the Clock. “Close your eyes, count seventeen backward, then open your eyes again, and you’ll see what you will see.”

Bobby's eyes shut; I was almost going to say with a snap. He counted from seventeen back to one with a rapidity that would have surprised even his school-teacher, opened his eyes again and looked around, and what he sawwell, that was more extraordinary than ever! Instead of standing on the parlor rug before the fireplace, he found himself in the broad aisle of the ground floor of a huge department store, infinitely larger than any store he had ever seen in his life before, and oh, dear me, how dreadfully crowded it was!

The crowd of Christmas shoppers that Bobby remembered to have seen last year when he had gone out to buy a lead-pencil to put into his father's stocking was as nothing to that which thronged this wonderful place. Ah me, how dreadfully hurried some of the poor shoppers appeared to be, and how wistfully some of them gazed at the fine bargains to be seen on the counters and shelves, which either because they had not saved it, or had wasted it, they had not time to buy!

The Time Shop – Part 2

"Well, young gentleman," said a kindly floor-walker, pausing in his majestic march up and down the aisle, as the Clock, bidding Bobby to use his time well, made off to the supply shop, "what can we do for you to-day?" .

"Nothing that I know of, thank you, sir," said Bobby. "I have just come in to look around."

"Ahl" said the floor-walker with a look of dis-appointment on his face. ''I'm afraid I shall have to take you to the Waste-Time Bureau, where they will find out what you want without undue loss of precious moments. I should think, however, that a nice-looking boy like you would be able to decide what he really wanted and go directly to the proper department and get it."

"Got any bicycles?" asked Bobby, seizing upon the first thing that entered his mind.

"Fine ones-best there are," smiled the pleasant floor-walker, very much relieved to find that Bobby did not need to be taken to the bureau. "Step this way, please. Mr. Promptness, will you be so good as to show this young gentleman our line of bicycles ?"

Then turning to Bobby, he added: "You look like a rather nice

young gentleman, my boy. Perhaps never having been here before, you do not know our ways, and have not provided yourself with anything to spend. To encourage business we see that new comers have a chance to avail themselves of the opportunities of the shop, so here are a few time-checks with which you can buy what you want."

The kindly floor-walker handed Bobby twenty round golden checks, twenty silver checks, and twenty copper ones. Each check was about the size of a fivecent piece, and all were as bright and fresh as if they had just been minted.

"What are these?" asked Bobby, as he jingled the coins in his hand.

"The golden checks, my boy, are days," said the floor-walker. "The silver ones are hours, and the coppers are minutes. I hope you will use them wisely, and find your visit to our shop so profitable that you will become a regular customer."

With this and with a pleasant bow the floor-walker moved along to direct a gray-haired old gentleman with a great store of years in his possession to the place where he could make his last payment on a stock of wisdom which he had been buying, and Bobby was left with Mr. Wiggins, the salesman, who immediately showed him all the bicycles they had in stock.

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“This is a pretty good wheel for a boy of your age,” said Mr. Promptness, pulling out a bright-looking little machine that was so splendidly under control that when he gave it a push it ran smoothly along the top of the mahogany counter, pirouetted a couple of times on its hind wheel, and then gracefully turning rolled back to Mr. Promptness again.

“How much is that?” asked Bobby, without much hope, however, of ever being able to buy it.

“Sixteen hours and forty-five minutes,” said Mr. Promptness, looking at the pricetag, and reading off the figures. “It used to be a twenty-five-hour wheel, but we have marked everything down this season.

Everybody is so rushed these days that very few people have any spare time to spend, and we want to get rid of our stock.”

“What do you mean by sixteen hours and forty-five minutes?” asked Bobby.

“How much is that in dollars?”

Mr. Promptness smiled more broadly than ever at the boy’s question.

“We don’t do business in dollars here, my lad,” said he.

“This is a Time Shop, and what you buy you buy with time: days, hours, minutes, and seconds.”

“Got anything that costs as much as a year?” asked Bobby.

“We have things that cost a lifetime, my boy,” said the salesman; “but those things, our rarest and richest treasures; we keep upstairs.”

“I should think that you would rather do business for money,” said Bobby.

“ Nay, nay, my son,” said Mr. Promptness. “Time is a far better possession than money, and it often happens that it will buy things that money couldn’t possibly purchase.”

“Then I must be rich,” said Bobby.

The salesman looked at the little fellow gravely.

“Rich?” he said.

“Yes,” said Bobby, delightedly. “I’ve got no end of time. Seems to me sometimes that I’ve got all the time there is.”

“Well,” said Mr. Promptness, “you must remember that its value depends entirely upon how you use it. Time thrown away or wasted is of no value at all.
Past time or future time are of little value compared to present time, so when you say that you are rich you may be misleading yourself. What do you do with yours?”

“Why—anything I happen to want to do,” said Bobby.

“And where do you get your clothes, your bread and
butter, your playthings?” asked the salesman.

“Oh, my father gets all those things for me,” returned Bobby.

“Well, he has to pay for them,” said Mr. Promptness, “and he has to pay for them in time, too, while you use
yours for what?”

Bobby hung his head.

“Do you spend it well?” asked the salesman.

“Sometimes,” said Bobby, “and sometimes I just waste it,” he went on.

“You see, Mr. Promptness, I didn’t know there was a Time Shop where you could buy such beautiful things with it, but now that I do know you will find me here oftener spending what I have on things worth having.”

“I hope so,” said Mr. Promptness, patting Bobby affectionately on the shoulder. “How much have you got with you now?”

“Only these,” said Bobby, jingling his time-checks in his pocket. “Of course next week when my Christmas holiday begins I shall have a lot—three whole weeks—that’s twenty-one days, you know.”

“Well, you can only count on what you have in hand, but from the sounds in your pocket I fancy you can have the bicycle if you want it,” said Mr. Promptness.

“At the price I think I can,” said Bobby, “and several other things besides.”

The Time Shop – Part 3

“How would you like this set of books about wild animals?” asked Mr. Promptness.

“How much?” said Bobby.

“Two days and a half, or sixty hours,” said Mr. Promptness, inspecting the price-tag.

“Send them along with the rest,” said Bobby. “How much is that electric railroad over there?”

“That’s rather expensive,” Mr. Promptness replied. “It will cost you two weeks, three days, ten minutes, and thirty seconds.”

“Humph,” said Bobby. “I guess that’s a little too much for me. Got any marbles?”

“Yes,” laughed Mr. Promptness. “We have china alleys, two for a minute, or plain miggles at ten for a second.”

“Put me down for two hours’ worth of china alleys, and about a half an hour’s worth of miggles,” said Bobby.

“Very good, sir,” said Mr. Promptness, with a twinkling eye.

“Now can you think of anything else?”

“Well, yes,” said Bobby, a sudden idea Bashing across his mind.

“There is one thing I want very much, Mr. Promptness, and I guess maybe perhaps you can help me out. I’d like to buy a Christmas present for my mother, if I can get a nice one with the time I’ve got. I was afraid I couldn’t get her much of anything with what little money I had saved. But if I can pay for it in time, Mr. Promptness—why, what couldn’t I buy for her with those three whole weeks coming to me!”

“About how much would you like to spend on it?” asked Mr. Promptness, with a soft light in his eye.
“Oh, I’d like to spend four or five years on it,” said Bobby, “but, of course—”

“That’s very nice of you,” said the salesman, putting his hand gently on Bobby’s head, and stroking his hair.” But I wouldn’t be extravagant, and once in a while we have special bargains here for kiddies like you. Why, I have known boys to give their mothers presents bought at this shop that were worth years, and years, and years, but which haven’t cost them more than two or three hours because they have made up the difference in love. With love you can buy the best treasures of this shop with a very little expenditure in time. Now what do you think of this for your mother?”

Mr. Promptness reached up to a long shelf back of the counter and brought down a little card, framed in gold, and printed in beautiful colored letters, and illustrated with a lovely picture that seemed to Bobby to be the prettiest thing he had ever seen.

“This is a little thing that was written long ago,” said Mr. Promptness, “by a man who spent much time in this shop buying things that were worth while, and in the end getting from our frame department a wonderful name which was not only a splendid possession for himself, but for the people among whom he lived. Thousands and thousands of people have been made happier, and wiser, by the way he spent his hours, and he is still mentioned among the great men of time. He was a fine, greathearted fellow, and he put a tremendous lot of love into all that he did. His name was Thackeray. Can you read, Bobby?”

“A little,” said Bobby.

“Then read this and tell me what you think of it,” said Mr. Promptness.

He handed Bobby the beautiful card, and the little fellow, taking it in his hand, read the sentence: MOTHER IS THE NAME OF GOD IN THE LIPS AND HEARTS OF LITTLE CHILDREN.

“You see, my dear little boy,” said the kindly salesman, “that is worth—oh, I don’t know how many years, and your mother, I am

sure, would rather know that that is what you think, and how you feel about her, than have you give her the finest jewels that we have to sell. And how much do you think we charge you for it?"

"Forty years!" gasped Bobby.

"No," replied Mr. Promptness. "Five minutes. Shall we put it aside for you?"

"Yes, indeed," cried Bobby, delighted to have so beautiful a Christmas gift for his mother.

So Mr. Promptness put the little card aside with the bicycle, and the wild animal books, and the marbles, putting down the price of each of the things Bobby had purchased on his sales slip.

They walked down the aisles of the great shop together, looking at the many things that time well expended would buy, and Bobby paused for a moment and spent two minutes on a glass of soda water, and purchased a quarter of an hour's worth of peanuts to give to Mr. Promptness. They came soon to a number of large rooms at one end of the shop, and in one of these Bobby saw quite a gathering of youngsters somewhat older than himself, who seemed to be very busy poring over huge books, and studying maps, and writing things down in little note-books, not one of them wasting even an instant.

The Time Shop – Part 4

“These boys are buying an education with their time,” said Mr. Promptness, as they looked in at the door. “For the most part they haven’t any fathers and mothers to help them, so they come here and spend what they have on the things that we have in our library. It is an interesting fact that what is bought in this room can never be stolen from you, and it happens more often than not that when they have spent hundreds of hours in here they win more time to spend on the other things that we have on sale. But there are others, I am sorry to say, who stop on their way here in the morning and fritter their loose change away in the Shop of Idleness across the way—a minute here, and a hall hour there, sometimes perhaps a whole hour will be squandered over there, and when they arrive here they haven’t got enough left to buy anything.”

“What can you buy at the Shop of Idleness?” asked Bobby, going to the street door, and looking across the way at the shop in question, which seemed, indeed, to be doing a considerable business, if one could judge from the crowds within.

“Oh, a little fun,” said Mr. Promptness. “But not the real, genuine kind, my boy. It is a sort of imitation fun that looks like the real thing, but it rings hollow when you test it, and on close inspection turns out to be nothing but frivolity.”

“And what is that great gilded affair further up the street?” asked Bobby, pointing to a place with an arched entrance gilded all over and shining in the sunlight like a huge house of brass.

“That is a cake shop,” said Mr. Promptness, “and it is run by an old witch named Folly. When you first look at her you think she is young and beautiful, but when you come to know her better you realize that she is old, and wrinkled, and selfish. She gives you things and tells you that you needn’t pay until to-morrow and this goes on until some day to-morrow comes, and you find she has not only used up all the good time you had, but that you owe her even more, and when you can’t pay she pursues you with all sorts of trouble.

That’s all anybody ever got at Folly’s shop, Bobby —just trouble, trouble, trouble.”

“There seem to be a good many people there now,” said Bobby, looking up the highway at Folly’s gorgeous place.

“Oh, yes,” sighed Mr. Promptness. “A great many—poor things! They don’t know any better, and what is worse they won’t listen to those who do.”

“Who is that pleasant-looking gentleman outside the Shop of Idleness?” asked Bobby, as a man appeared there and began distributing his card amongst the throng.

“He is the general manager of the Shop of Idleness,” said the salesman. “As you say, he is a pleasant-looking fellow, but you must beware of him, Bobby. He is not a good person to have around. He is a very active business man, and actually follows people to their homes, and forces his way in, and describes his stock to them as being the best in the world. And all the time he is doing so he is peering around in their closets, in their chests, everywhere, with the intention of robbing them. The fact that he is so pleasant to look at makes him very popular, and I only tell you the truth when I say to you that he is the only rival we have in business that we are really afraid of. We can compete with Folly but—”

Mr. Promptness’s words were interrupted by his rival across the way, who, observing Bobby standing in the doorway, cleverly tossed one of his cards across the street so that it fell at the little boy’s feet. Bobby stooped down and picked it up and read it. It went this way:

THE SHOP OF IDLENESS
PROCRASTINATION,
General Manager

Put Off Everything And Visit Our Shop

“So he’s Procrastination, is he?” said Bobby, looking at the man with much interest, for he had heard his father speak of him many a time, only his father called him “old Putoff.”

“Yes, and he is truly what they say he is,” said Mr. Promptness; “the thief of time.”

“He doesn’t look like a thief,” said Bobby.

Now it is a peculiarity of Procrastination that he has a very sharp pair of ears, and he can hear a great many things that you wouldn’t think could travel so far, and, as Bobby spoke, he turned suddenly and looked at him, waved his hand, and came running across the street, calling out to Bobby to wait. Mr. Promptness seized Bobby by the arm, and pulled him into the Time Shop, but not quickly enough, for he was unable to close the door before his rival was at their side.

“Glad to see you, my boy,” said Procrastination, handing him another card.

“Come on over to my place. It’s much easier to find what you want there than it is here, and we’ve got a lot of comfortable chairs to sit down and think things over in. You needn’t buy anything to-day, but just look over the stock.”

The Time Shop – Part 5

“Don’t mind him, Bobby,” said Mr. Promptness, anxiously whispering in the boy’s ear. “Come along with me and see the things we keep on the upper floors—I am sure they will please you.”

“Wait just a minute, Mr. Promptness,” replied Bobby.

“I want to see what Mr. Procrastination looks like close to.”

“But, my dear child, you don’t seem to realize that he will pick your pocket if you let him come close—” pleaded Mr. Promptness But it was of no use, for the unwelcome visitor from across the way by this time had got his arm through Bobby’s and was endeavoring to force the boy out through the door, although the elevator on which Bobby and Mr. Promptness were to go up-stairs was awaiting them.

“When did you come over?” said Procrastination, with his pleasantest smile, which made Bobby feel that perhaps Mr. Promptness, and his father, too, for that matter, had been very unjust to him.

“Going up,” cried the elevator boy. “Come, Bobby,” said Mr. Promptness, in a beseeching tone. “The car is just starting.”

“Nonsense. What’s your hurry?” said Procrastination.

“You can take the next car just as well.”

“All aboard!” cried the elevator boy.

“I’ll be there in two seconds,” returned Bobby.

“Can’t wait,” cried the elevator boy, and he banged the iron door to, and the car shot up to the upper regions where the keepers of the Time Shop kept their most beautiful things.

“Too bad!” said Mr. Promptness, shaking his head, sadly. “Too bad! Now, Mr. Procrastination,” he added fiercely, “I must ask you to leave this shop, or I shall summon the police. You can’t deceive us. Your record is known here, and—”

“Tutt-tutt-tutt, my dear Mr. Promptness!” retorted Procrastination, still looking dangerously pleasant, and smiling as if it must all be a joke. “This shop of yours is a public place, sir, and I have just as much right to spend my time here as anybody else.”

“Very well, sir,” said Mr. Promptness, shortly. “Have your own way if you prefer, but you will please remember that I warned you to go.”

Mr. Promptness turned as he spoke and touched an electric button at the back of the counter, and immediately from all sides there came a terrific and deafening clanging of bells; and from up-stairs and down came rushing all the forces of time to the rescue of Bobby, and to put Procrastination out. They fell upon him like an army, and shouting, and struggling, but still smiling as if he thought it the greatest joke in the world, the unwelcome visitor was at last thrust into the street, and the doors were barred and bolted against his return.

"Mercy me!" cried Bobby's friend the Clock, rushing up just as the door was slammed to. "What's the meaning of all this uproar?"

"Nothing," said Mr. Promptness, "Only that wicked old Procrastination again. He caught sight of Bobby here—"

"He hasn't hurt him?" cried the Clock.

"Not much, if any," said Mr. Promptness.

"You didn't have anything to do with him, did you, Bobby?" asked the Clock, a trifle severely.

"Why, I only stopped a minute to say how do you do to him," began Bobby, sheepishly.

“Well, I’m sorry that you should have made his acquaintance,” said the Clock; “but come along. It’s getting late and we’re due back home. Paid your bill?”

“No,” said Mr. Promptness, sadly. “He hasn’t had it yet, but there it is, Bobby. I think you will find it correct.”

He handed the little visitor a memorandum of all the charges against him. Bobby ran over the items and saw that the total called for a payment of eight days, and fifteen hours, and twenty-three minutes, and nine seconds, well within the value of the time-checks the good floorwalker had given him, but alas! when he put his hand in his pocket to get them they were gone. Not even a minute was left!

Procrastination had succeeded only too well!

“Very sorry, Bobby,” said Mr. Promptness, “but we cannot let the goods go out of the shop until they are paid for. However,” he added, “although I warned you against that fellow, I feel sorry enough for you to feel inclined to help you a little, particularly when I realize how much you have missed in not seeing our treasures on the higher floors. I’ll give you five minutes, my boy, to pay for the little card for your mother’s Christmas present.”

He placed the card in the little boy’s hand, and turned away with a tear in his eye, and Bobby started to express his sorrow at the way

things had turned out, and his thanks for Mr. Promptness's generosity, but there was no chance for this. There was a whirr as of many wheels, and a flapping as of many wings. Bobby felt himself being whirled around, and around, and around, and then there came a bump. Somewhat terrified he closed his eyes for an instant, and when he opened them again he found himself back on the parlor rug, lying in front of the fire, while his daddy was rolling him over and over. The lad glanced up at the mantel-piece to see what had become of the Clock, but the grouchy old ticker stared solemnly ahead of him, with his hands pointed sternly at eight o'clock, which meant that Bobby had to go to bed at once.

"Oh, let me stay up ten minutes longer," pleaded Bobby.

"No, sir," replied his father. "No more Procrastination, my son—trot along."

And it seemed to Bobby as he walked out of the room, after kissing his father and mother good-night, that that saucy old Clock grinned.

INCIDENTALLY let me say that in the whirl of his return Bobby lost the card that the good Mr. Promptness had given him for his mother, but the little fellow remembered the words that were printed on it, and when Christmas morning came his mother found them painted in watercolors on a piece of cardboard by the boy's own hand; and when she read them a tear of happiness

came into her eyes, and she hugged the little chap and thanked him, and said it was the most beautiful Christmas present she had received.

“I’m glad you like it,” said Bobby. “It isn’t so very valuable though, Mother. It only cost me two hours and a half, and I know where you can get better looking ones for five minutes.”

Which extraordinary remark led Bobby’s mother to ask him if he were not feeling well!

The Send and Fotch Book – Part 1

By Esther Greenacre Hall

TWILIGHT was weaving dusky blue threads through the warp of the tree branches as Nancy Davis stepped from the back door of the log cabin that squatted like a gray toad on the bank of Dog-leg Creek. For a moment she paused, feeling herself a part of the pattern of the Kentucky forest. Only a whippoorwill's soft call and the murmur of the water broke the stillness.

"Hit's that still you could nigh hear the roots of growing things a-pushing through the ground," she murmured to herself. "'Pears like a pretty spring night like this oughter quiet my spirits and keep 'em from fester in' fer want of a new dress. But la me! Hit's sech a sweety dress—leastways the picter in the book makes hit seem so. Gin I had that dress I could hold up my head to be above even that proudful Mary Perkins."

With a shake of her tousled brown head as though to brush aside troublesome thoughts, Nancy tilted up her pointed chin and in a high sing-song called out, "Here pig-wee, pig-wee, pig-wee. Here piggy, piggy, pig." Her call trailed away over the narrow valley. She paused. Then in a loud, guttural tone added, "Ugh-ugh-ugh."

There was a rustle at the edge of the clearing and an elephantine

hog lumbered into the open. From the gourd in the crook of her arm, Nancy threw out table scraps.

“Hit’s a pure pity you hain’t got ary appetite, George Washington,” she chuckled.

“Ary sence we found you half starved last winter you been eating more of our vittles than us young-uns put together.”

“Nancy, oh, Nannie,” called a small girl from the door. “Won’t you leave us study on the send-and-fotch book now? We’ll both be mighty keerful of it—honest.”

“Shore ’nough. I’ll get hit fer you,” answered Nancy. “ ‘Bye, Washington. Come on into the house, children.”
Inside the one-room cabin a fire flamed on the stone hearth, casting vagrant shadows on the log walls and lighting up the faces of the small boy and girl and old man as they sat before it. From the mantel Nancy took down the brilliantly colored mail-order catalogue and dropped down on a hickory stool close to the fire.

“Lemme hold hit,” cried Tom, making a grab at the book.

But Nancy hugged it close in her arms. “Fer shame on you, Tom Davis. We got to gentle this book. Never have we had sech a pretty thing afore and hit’s untelling when we’ll e’er ag’in possess one. You and Lucy stand beside me and look on whilst I turn the pages.

La, Gran'pappy," she added, smiling up at the old man, "I shore wish you could pleasure in this book, too."

Gran'pappy blinked his faded eyes. "I shore do crave to look, too, gal. Gin my eyes could see right I'd read off as smart as you, fer I reckon I'm the onliest old body on Dog-leg Creek as can read."

The girl nodded. "You're the knowingest man here-abouts. Ary body knows hit's your eyes 'n' not your skull-piece that don't work to do no good."

"Haste, Nannie. Show us the play pretties." Tom nudged his big sister impatiently. Intently the three scrutinized the toys.

"There's one o'them engine buggies like teacher narrates about." Tom pointed to a toy automobile.

"And there's a store least-un. Hain't hit sweety-looking," cried Lucy indicating a doll pictured on one of the pages.

The toys entirely inspected, Lucy asked to turn to the clothes. "I plumb hate to look at wearing things," Nancy said hesitantly.

"Hit hurts my feelings to see clothes we need so turrible bad and can't buy."

Lucy's face was wistful as she eyed the models in the dress

section. “Them dresses is too pretty to wear,” she sighed. “I allow folks jest buys them to gladden their hearts by looking on them ary day. They don’t never wear them, do they?”

“Silly-wit,” scoffed her brother. “Course folks wear them. Hurry up and leave me see the overalls. They’re what I want.”

But Lucy hovered over the dresses. “That blue one’s the dress I hungers atter,” she said. “And Nannie wants that red one. Don’t you, Nannie?”

Nancy said nothing but stared at her favorite. It was a large colored style plate—red and white print with perky ruffles. “That’s jest the kind of dress I been acraving all my days—only I didn’t know it,” she thought. “Gin Mary Perkins could see me in sech a fine frock—”

She bent close to the page and read below the picture:
“One of the loveliest dresses $1.35 ever bought. Study its lines a moment! The graceful drooping bow—the graceful ripple of the new flounced cuffs, of the fashionable peplum ruffle in front, of the all-around flared skirt, the easy curve of the fitted waist! Picture the gay red background with white figures. Remember that the fabric is guaranteed washable. Sizes fourteen to twenty years—$1.35.

Some of the words Nancy did not understand. But they sounded

grand, like poetry the teacher read in school. She shut the catalogue abruptly.

“Oh, Nannie, I hain’t finished looking!”

“Lemme see the overalls.”

But Nancy was firm. “Gin we look on hit much longer we’ll get to craving things so bad we won’t pleasure in ary thing we have or do.”

Gran’pappy looked at her understandingly. “Nancy’s right,” he quavered. “Hit’s a pure pity to think too much on what we hain’t got.”

Nancy stood up and put the catalogue back on the mantel.

“Shuck off your clothes, young-uns, and go to bed,” she said.

When the rest were asleep Nancy crawled out of bed and wrapped a quilt around her shoulders. “I’m weak, pure weak,” she thought as she took down the catalogue and crouched beside the hearth. By the light of the dying embers she stared at the red and white dress, reading again and again, “One of the loveliest dresses $1.35 ever bought.”

May slipped slowly into June. Every day from sun-up to sun-

setting the Davis children hoed corn in the steep patch that lay high on the hillside above the cabin. The children's legs ached. Their backs ached. The sun was a great hot hand pressing mercilessly down upon their heads. Nancy hoed with slow, even strokes. Several rows above her, Tom and Lucy lifted their hoes jerkily, stopping often to rest.

"Psst, Nannie. Thar comes Mary Perkins," warned Lucy.

Nancy pushed back her straw hat. Sure enough. Picking her way up the slope was a girl in a crisp black and white calico. Mary's father was the biggest moonshiner on Dog-leg. It was no wonder that Mary always had pretty dresses and even wore shoes in summer time. Nancy disliked Mary because of her superior manner, while Mary bore a grudge against the other girl for beating her in a spell-down before school closed. Their manner bespoke their mutual dislike.

"Howdy," said Mary, not too warmly, yet affably enough.

"Howdy," Nancy gruffly returned the greeting. She was acutely aware of the tear in her skimpy skirt and of dust on her legs and face.

"I jest been down to the store sending off an order fer some new clothes," volunteered the visitor. "I figgered I'd need a new dress fer the anniversary celebration."

Tom and Lucy edged down the hill. “What cel’bration?” asked Tom.

“Why, ain’t you heern tell? Thar’s going to be great goings-on in Windsor-townfireworks ’n’ a merry-go- round ’n’ speeches ’n’ the governor hisself will be thar.”

“Really!”

“The governor!”

“Yes. I allow folks from ary holler fer miles around will be thar. Hit’s too bad you got young-uns and an old grandsir’ to keer fer, Nancy. I don’t reckon you’ll be going.
Will you?”

“Likely not,” Nancy answered.

The Send and Fotch Book – Part 2

Tom and Lucy raced down to the cabin to tell their grandparent the news, and Nancy followed as soon as Mary had left.

“To think that the governor of this great Kaintucky-land will be thar!” exclaimed the old man when he heard the news. “I’m too trimblish to go the twenty mile to Windsor-town, e’en gin we had a mule to ride. But you young-uns can go. There’s no need for you to stay home with me.”

Tom and Lucy set up whoops of glee, but Nancy’s face was sober. “I don’t feel to go without you, Gran’pappy,” she said. “I’d ruther bide at home.”

“Shame on you, Nancy Davis,” scolded Gran’pappy.

“Would you keep the younguns from paying honor to our grandsir’s that made this Kaintucky-land free from the English rule? I’m nigh the end of the trail. But you young-uns are jest putting foot to life. You need to see great folk like a governor so’s you’ll everly grow big in your deeds and thoughts.”

“What’ll we wear?” cried Lucy.

Nancy frowned. “Fer massy sake, I don’t see how we can go to

Windsor-town! Tom's trousers are nigh worn through the seat. And Lucy's calico has more holes than our picket fence. This dress of mine is so short I'm ashamed to have even the chickens see me in hit."

Gran'pappy blinked in distress. "I hain't never put countenance to vanity," he said. "But I'd ruther you stayed home than to be unseemly clad in the presence of the governor."

"Aw shucks! We can't go then. We'll never get money fer clothes," grumbled Tom.

" 'Pears like we never do have ary frolicking," choked Lucy. "Waal, mayhaps we can contrive clothes some way," said Nancy, but in her heart she was doubtful.

One noon several days later as Nancy was putting cornpone to bake on the hot hearthstones, Tom burst in the door crying, "Nat Hill and Sam Perkins are quarreling at each other over George Washington. They both claims him."

Nancy flew outside, Gran'pappy hobbling after her. The two men down at the picket fence took no notice of the children as they eyed the hog which was rooting around the porch.

"That thar's my hog," shrilled Nat Hill. "Hit run wild last

summer with my other shotes but hit never come home in the fall. Hit's my own hog I tell you, Sam Perkins."

"That's jest how come me to lose my hog," declared Perkins. "See that long scar on that creetur's left shoulder? Waal, my brute had a scar jest like that. He laid down on my scythe and cut hisself."
"Shucks, ary hog is likely to get cut up in the brush. That ain't nary proof. That's my hog and gin you doubt hit look at hits left hind leg. See? Hit's shorter than tothers."

"Hit is that," reluctantly agreed Perkins.

"Yes, and hogs can't shorten their legs theirselves. Their legs are born right or not right. Now my hog was born with three right legs and one short-like. That's my hog fer sartain 'n' I'll jest take him long home."

"Neither of you is toting that hog away," cried Nancy.
The men turned to her in surprise. "How come you by that hog, gal?" drawled Perkins.

"He come here nigh starved last winter," answered Nancy. "We fed him like a leastun fer months. Being's how you hain't sartain you ever even seen him afore, I'll keep him." Her eyes flashed and her voice was determined.

"Dad-burned, but I craves that shote," grumbled

Perkins.

Nancy's eyes narrowed. "Fer-why don't you buy hit offen me?"

The men shuffled their feet in the dust.

"Waal, I don't—" began Hill.

But Perkins smiled in a superior manner. "I'll give a dollar."

Hill's mouth dropped in surprise but Nancy turned and walked away. "A dollar!" she said scornfully over her shoulder.

"Hey, gal, I'll part with two dollar," called Hill.

"Four," shouted Perkins.

"Four-fifty." The men glared at each other.

"Five dollar," boomed Perkins.

Nancy hastened back to the fence. "He's yourn. Gin you got the money you can tote him home now."

In awed silence the others watched Perkins open a worn leather pouch and extract five crumpled dollar bills. Who but a moonshiner could possess that much money at one time! Nancy

stretched out her hand. Her fingers trembled slightly as they gripped the bills. “Run fetch a rope fer Washington,” she told Tom in a voice husky with suppressed excitement.

“Waal, five dollar’s a right smart bit of money,” said Hill as he started off to follow Perkins and the hog down the trail. “That money’d buy enough store vittles to last our folks all winter. I’m right proud I didn’t squander ary cash. Besides the shote hain’t as fine looking as I jedged it was at first.”

As soon as the men were out of sight, the Davises hugged one another excitedly. “Now we can buy some
clothes,” squealed Lucy.

“We’ll go to Windsor-town.”

“You can see the governor,” beamed Gran’pappy.

All afternoon the family pored over the catalogue, Gran’pappy hovering around the children giving advice and trying unsuccessfully to distinguish the objects on the pages. At last the list was completed and Nancy read aloud: “Shirt fer Gran’pappy, seventy cents; overalls fer Gran’pappy, seventy-nine cents; shirt fer Tom, fifty cents; over-alls fer Tom, seventy-nine cents; dress fer Lucy, seventy-nine cents; dress fer me, one dollar and thirty-five cents.”

She paused. “Hit ain’t seemly fer me to get a costlier frock than Lucy. I—”

“Shucks, gal, you need that red dress fer your sperrit’s good,” said her grandfather.

“Now you tote that order right down to the store and have Lucas Wiley back the letter fer you ’n’ help you fill out the order paper proper.”

As Nancy stood up, the catalogue slid off her lap to the floor. She stooped to pick it up. It was open at a page of queer-looking articles. Beneath the largest one pictured there she read: “For those who can’t see to read, this magnifying glass is a blessing. Guaranteed to make letters three times their normal size. Even the weakest eyes can see when this is used. It sells for only $1.20.”

Nancy stared at it. Was there really something that could help Gran’pappy read?

“Hain’t you never coming?” called Tom.

“Walk on,” answered Nancy. “I’ll foller.”

With her stubby pencil she crossed out on the paper, “Red and white dress.” And in its place she wrote,

“Reading glass, $1.20.”

“ ‘Bye, Gran’pappy,” she said huskily.

Her feet, usually so swift and sure, acted strangely as she hurried down the creek trail. They slipped on wet stones in the branch bed and stumbled. A blackberry bush stretched a teasing bramble across the path. But Nancy neither heard the rip of her dress as she passed it nor felt the ugly scratch it left on her cheek. The red dress was gone. She’d never see its gladsome color, never touch its ruffles that were crisp and white.

There was great excitement in the Davis cabin three weeks later when a neighbor stopped by to leave the mailorder package. Nancy opened the box herself.

“I see some blue. Hit’s my dress,” shrieked Lucy.

“You’re the awkwardest gal. Get out of my way,” ordered Tom. “Thar’s my overalls.”

Nancy handed a package to old John Davis. “Here’s a surprise fer you, Gran’pappy,” she said.

With trembling fingers he unwrapped it. “Why, what be this? Hit’s glass.

The Send and Fotch Book – Part 3

Nancy picked up the catalogue. “Hold the glass over some writing,” she said eagerly. “I think that’s how you use hit. Thar, now look through the glass.”

The children crowded close. There was a breathless silence. The old man bent low and squinted through the oval. His voice came slow and wondering.

“Praise be to the Lord! I can read. I can see them words like my eyes was young ag’in. Hit’s magic, pure magic. How come this charm to me, Nancy gal?”

Briefly she explained how she’d noticed the glass in the send-and-fotch book.

“Ne’er did I think sech happiness would reach me,” marveled Gran’pappy. “I’m plumb wore out with happiness.” And he sank down on a chair.

When the excitement had subsided Lucy suddenly cried, “Whar’s Nancy’s frock?”

“Why, hain’t it here?” asked the old man anxiously.

Nancy picked up papers busily. “I changed my mind. It was too noisysome a color.”

The children looked at her, perplexed. “But you wanted hit !”
Lucy puzzled.

Gran’pappy looked at Nancy searchingly. “I allow with my glass you must ’a’ spent all the money. Didn’t you, gal ?” he asked.

“Nigh all”

“I reckoned so. You’re the unselfishest gal ever I knowed, Nancy.”

Nancy sent him a quick smile but her lips trembled.
Early in the morning a week later the Davis children started on their journey to Windsor-town. By taking two days for the twenty miles, they could get there
easily.

“Now don’t mourn e’en a little grain ’cause I can’t go,”
Gran’pappy told them in farewell. “With my reading glass I’m so gladsome that I don’t care ’bout seeing ten governors. Jes’ go on and have a good time.”

Tom and Lucy were in the gayest of spirits, and Nancy had to remind them constantly not to go too fast and get worn out on the first part of the trip. All three wore their old clothes. The new

apparel was wrapped in a gunny sack and slung across Nancy's back. Never before had the Davises been away from their valley, and every twist of the trail was alluring. Although Nancy tried her best to think only of the frolicking ahead, her thoughts persisted in turning to the red dress. How happy she would be if it were tucked in the roll on her back. Instead she had with her the linsey dress. It was her winter frock. She had woven it from wool that she had dyed in walnut bark. It was a coarse, heavy dress. How uncomfortable she'd look and feel in it on a hot day.

It was very early in the morning when the children entered Windsor-town on the day of the celebration. But already the town was full of people.

"Lookit the big houses," said Tom, pointing to a small two-story building.

"Lawsy, I never knowed there was so many folks in all Kaintucky," gasped Nancy.

Up and down the street the three went, halting at each tiny store window to inspect the displays with wondering eyes. By nine o'clock the dusty street was milling with people. Soon the crowd began to move toward a vacant lot where stood a great tent. Walking in the midst of the throng, Nancy and the children found themselves pushed into the tent. Grabbing Tom and Lucy, Nancy

propelled them up an aisle to a bench directly in front of the platform.

“My, we shore got fine places,” she panted.

“What comes now?” whispered Lucy.

“I heered somebody say the governor talks in here,” said her sister.

Nancy glanced at the women around her. Most of them wore bright-colored calicoes and ginghams. A few even had cheap silks.

“Howdy, Nancy,” said a patronizingly sweet voice.

Directly behind Nancy sat Mary Perkins in a red silk dress with a yellow straw hat atop her yellow curls. Nancy caught her breath at the sight of such finery. She managed a smile. Then she sank down as low as she could so the old winter’s dress wouldn’t show any more than necessary. The dress was terribly hot and Nancy’s face felt red.

Mary leaned forward to say, “I was proud pappy could holp you out by buying that hog. He says hit really wa’n’t worth the money but he aimed to give you a little extry money seeing you hain’t got ary pappy.”

Nancy flushed crimson and opened her lips to answer. But a piano began to bang out the national anthem. There followed speeches by Windsor officials, speeches by politicians from outside towns and more singing. Nancy scarcely heard them all. Why did Mary Perkins have to sit right behind her all dressed up in red silk while she wore her brown winter linsey?

“Ladies and gentlemen, it is my great pleasure and privilege to present the

Honorable George Henderson Williams, governor of the state of Kentucky.”

With a start Nancy realized where she was. She looked up at the tall, handsome manvwith white hair and kindly face. In a strong, compelling voice he spoke.

“No people in the United States have more right to be proud of their ancestry than have you mountain folk of Kentucky. It was your great-grandparents and their parents who first hewed their way through the forests from the Atlantic seaboard.

“The early Kentucky men were brave and courageous. But to me the women were the greatest to be admired. They left security and comfort. They came into the wilderness to fight beside their men, to bear children in deprivation, to care for their families

undaunted and tireless. They made their own soap. They ground their own corn. They even spun their own clothes and—”

The voice broke off and Nancy, who had been sitting ereet with glowing, uplifted face, felt the governor’s glance meet hers. He stepped to the edge of the platform. He leaned forward. “Would the little girl with the brown hair and brown dress mind standing up just a moment?”

Nancy looked about her.
“You. I mean you. The little lady in the second row between the two children,” said the governor.

Someone touched Nancy’s shoulder. “He means you,” people said. “Stand up, gal.”

Bewildered, Nancy found herself half lifted to her feet by her neighbors.

“That’s a lovely dress you have on, little girl,” said the speaker. “Isn’t it a handwoven linsey?”

She nodded dumbly.

“I thought so. My grandmother had one. And who wove it?”

“I—I did.”

“Really! Would you come up here?”

As in a dream Nancy walked up the platform steps. The governor took her hand and turned her to the audience.

“I singled this girl out while I was talking, for her dress is a linsey like one my grandmother had. I am glad that the customs of our ancestors are not forgotten. I am glad that our mountain women do not all wear store dresses and that by the light of the open fire one Kentucky girl still weaves her gowns.

“I have visited many cities and seen fine ladies in silks and satins, but to me no dress I saw was as lovely as this homespun brown linsey.” Turning, he clasped Nancy’s hand.

There was tumultuous applause. People stood up as Nancy went down to her seat.

They craned their necks to see the girl who had been honored by the governor. Lucy and Tom gripped her arms tightly, their faces shining. Even Tom was speechless. The governor continued his address, but Nancy’s head was so awhirl that she didn’t hear his words. Toward the end of the program Nancy could not resist looking over her shoulder at Mary Perkins.

Mary’s smile was ingratiating and honey sweet. “It’s a lovely dress,” her lips formed the words.

Nancy smiled a wise little smile of triumph to herself. She smoothed the brown linsey over her knees. It was a pretty weave after all. It must be getting cooler all of a sudden, for she now felt very comfortable in the winter dress. It was lucky she hadn't worn a flimsy store dress like the others.

Lucy plucked at her sleeve. "Hain't you proud you wore your old frock?" she said.

Nancy nodded. "The red dress was right smart looking," she whispered back. "But hit was too noisysome a color. A body wouldn't feel to live with hit long."

The Million Pound Banknote Part 1

When I was twenty-seven years old, I worked in San Francisco for a mining broker. I was an expert in all the details of buying and sellingstock. I was alone in the world, but I was intelligent and people thought well of me. So with these two things, I felt that I would soon be rich, and I was happy enough with that.

My time was my own after after work. On Saturdays I was in the habit of putting *that time into a little boat which I took sailing. One day I went too far out to sea, and was lost. Just as night fell, and I had almost lost hope, I was picked up by a small ship which was going to London. It was a long and stormy journey, and they made me work as a sailor to pay for my trip. When I stepped ashore in London my clothes were ragged and worn out, and I had only a dollar in my pocket. This money gave me somewhere to stay, and food to eat for twenty-four hours. During the next twenty-four hours I went without food and shelter.

About ten o'clock on the following morning, I was tired and hungry. In Portland Place, a child dropped a delicious big pear on the road after he had taken just one bite. I stopped, of course, and stared at that muddy pear as if it was treasure. My mouth watered for it, my stomach desired it, my whole body begged for the pear. But every time I made a move to get it someone saw what I was doing. Of course I straightened up then, and looked bored, and

pretended that I hadn't even been thinking about the pear. This kept happening and happening, and I still couldn't get the pear

I was getting desperate enough to take the pear despite all the shame of people watching me do it. But then a window behind me opened, and a gentleman spoke to me, saying 'Step in here, please'.

A well-dressed servant let me into the house. He took me to a richly-decorated room where a couple of elderly gentlemen were sitting. They sent away the servant, and made me sit down. They had just finished their breakfast. The sight of the food which was left over was almost too much for me. I could hardly think clearly in front of that food, but I was not asked to try any of it, so there was nothing I could do.

Now, something had been happening a little earlier. I didn't know about it until many days afterwards, but I will tell you about it now. A few days before, those two old brothers had been having a pretty hot argument. They had ended up agreeing to decide who was right by a bet, which is the English way of settling everything.

You will remember that the Bank of England once printed two banknotes of a million pounds each. These were to be used in a business deal with a foreign country. For some reason only one of

these banknotes had been used. The other was still the vaults of the Bank.

Well, the brothers were having a chat, and they started to wonder what would happen to a completely honest and intelligent stranger who was in London with no friends, and with no money but that million-pound bank-note, and no way to explain why he had that bank-note with him. Brother A said he would starve to death; Brother B said he wouldn't.

Brother A said he couldn't take the banknote to a bank because he would be arrested at once. So they went on arguing till Brother B said he would bet twenty thousand pounds that the man would live thirty days, at least, on that million, and keep out of jail as well. Brother A accepted the bet. Brother B went down to the Bank and bought that note. Then the brother dictated a letter, which one of his clerks wrote out in a beautiful round handwriting. After that the two brothers sat looking out of the window all day. They were looking for the right man to give the letter and bank-note to.

They saw many honest people go past, they were not intelligent enough. Other people were intelligent, but they not were honest enough. Many people were honest and intelligent, but they were not poor enough. If they were poor enough, they were not strangers in London. There was always something wrong, until I came along. However the brothers agreed that I was exactly what

they were looking for; so they had chosen me without arguing about it. And now here I was, waiting to find out why they wanted to see me.

The brothers began to ask me questions about myself, and soon they knew my story. Finally, they told me that I was the man they had been looking for. I said I was very pleased, and asked why they were looking for someone. One of the brothers handed me an envelope, and said I would find the explanation inside. I started to open it, but he told me not to do that. Instead I should take the letter back to the place where I was staying. I should read it carefully, and think about what I would do next.

I was puzzled. I wanted to find out more, but now they didn't want to talk to me. So I went out of the house, feeling hurt and insulted. It seemed that the two men had been having some kind of stupid joke with me. Yet I had to put up with it, because I was too poor and hungry to be able to get angry about insults from rich and powerful people.

I would have picked up the pear now and eaten it in front of everybody, but now it was gone. I had lost the pear because I had been called into the house. This made me even more upset with those two men. As soon as I was out of sight of the house I opened my envelope, and saw that there was money inside! I started to think differently about those people, I can tell you!

The Million Pound Banknote Part 2

I did not lose a moment. I pushed the money into my vest pocket, and ran to the nearest cheap eating house. Well, how I ate! At last I couldn't hold any more food. Then I took out my money and unfolded it. I had oneglimpse and I nearly fainted. It was a million pounds. That was five million dollars! It made me giddy to think about it.

I was so astonished that I must have sat there for almost a minute blinking at the banknote. When I remembered where I was, the first thing I noticed was the landlord. He had seen the banknote, and it seemed as though the sight had turned him to stone. He was worshipping the banknote with all his body and soul, but he couldn't move a hand or foot. At that moment I knew what I should do. It was the only logical thing I could do. I passed the note to him, and said carelessly 'Give me the change, please.'

Then he came back to normal. He made a thousand apologies for not being able to give me so much change. I couldn't get him to touch the banknote. He wanted to look at it all the time. He couldn't seem to get enough of looking at it, but he would not touch it. It was as if it was something too precious for his poor human hands to touch. I said 'I am sorry if this is a bit of a problem for you, but I must insist. Please change it, I haven't anything else.'

But he said that wasn't important. He was quite happy to let the small amount be paid another time. I said I might not be in his neighborhood again for a long time. But he said it didn't matter, he could wait. Also, I could have anything I wanted, any time I chose, and just pay him back whenever I was ready. He said he wasn't afraid to trust a rich gentleman like me, just because I had a sense of humour and liked to make a joke with people in the way I was dressed.

By this time another customer was entering, and the landlord hinted to me to put the banknote out of sight. He bowed at me all the way to the door. Then I went straight to that house and those brothers. I wanted to correct the mistake which had been made before the police started hunting for me to correct the mistake as well. I was pretty nervous; in fact, I was pretty badly frightened. Of course, there was no way that it was my fault. But I knew people well enough to know that if they find they've given a beggar a million-pound banknote when they thought it was one pound, they will be furious with him instead of being upset that they did not look properly, as they should have done.

As I approached the house I began to worry less. All was quiet there, which made me feel sure the huge mistake had not been discovered yet. I rang the doorbell. The same servant appeared. I asked for those gentlemen whom I had talked to earlier.

‘They are gone.’ He said this in the slightly rude, cold way of that type of servant.

‘Gone? Gone where?’

‘On a journey.’
‘They have gone to the Continent. I cannot say what road they are taking. They said they would be back next month.’

‘A month! Oh, this is awful! You must tell me how to send a message to them. It’s extremely important. Also I must see someone else in their family at once. There’s been a very big mistake. When they find out what has happened they’ll be back before night. Will you tell them I’ve been here? I will keep coming back here until the mistake is put right, and they needn’t be afraid.’

‘They said you would be here in an hour to make inquiries. I must tell you there is no problem, they’ll be here on time and expect you.’

So I had to give up and go away.It was all a big puzzle! I felt as though I was going mad. What did the servant mean when he said they would be here ‘on time’? I remembered the letter that was in the envelope with the banknote. Maybe that would explain. I took the letter out and read it. This is what it said:

You look as though you are an intelligent and honest man. We get the idea that you are poor and a stranger in London. You will find some money in this envelope. you can have it for thirty days, without interest. Come back to this house at the end of the month. I have made a bet. If I win it you shall have any employment that I can give you. That is, any job that you know how to do and can do well.'

There was no signature on the letter, no address, and no date. Well, here was a strange situation to be in! You know what had gone on before all this, but I did not. It was just a deep, dark puzzle to me. I hadn't the least idea what was going on. I did not know whether harm was meant to me or kindness. I went into a park, and sat down to try to think it out. I needed to work out the best thing to do.

At the end of an hour this is what I had decided. Maybe those men want something good for me, maybe they do not. There is no way to decide which is correct – so let it go. They are up to some game, or scheme, or experiment, of some kind. There is no way to know what it is – let it go. There's a bet on me. But I have no way to find out what the bet is – let it go. That finishes with the things I do not know about. All the rest is solid, and may be put into place with certainty. I can ask the Bank of England to put this banknote into the account of the man it belongs to. They'll do it, for they know him, although I don't. But they will ask me how I came to have the banknote with me. If I tell the truth, they'll put me in the asylum, and a lie will get me into jail.

The same thing will happen if I try to put the money in a bank somewhere or to borrow money on it. I have got to carry this great burden around until those men come back, whether I want to or not. It is useless to me, as useless as a handful of ashes. Yet I must take care of it, and watch over it, while I beg for my living. I couldn't give it away if I tried. No honest man would accept it or any robber want anything to do with it.

The Million Pound Banknote Part 3

Those brothers are safe. Even if I lose their banknote, or burn it, they are still safe. They can stop payment, and the Bank will return the money to them. But in the meantime I've got to suffer for a month without getting anything from it. But if I help to win that bet, whatever that bet is, they promised me that I would get a job. That would be good. Men like the brothers would be able to give me very good employment.

I started to think a lot about that job. My hopes began to rise high. I was sure that the salary would be large. It would begin in a month; after that I should be all right. Pretty soon I was feeling very happy again. By this time I was walking around the streets once more. The sight of a tailor's shop gave me a strong desire to get out of the rags I was wearing. I wanted to be properly dressed once more. Could I afford it? No; I had nothing in the world but a million pounds.

So I made myself go past the shop. But soon I came back again. I was feeling very tempted by the idea of getting a suit. I must have passed that shop six times while I struggled with temptation. At last I gave in; I had to. I asked in the shop if they had a badly-fitting suit that no-one wanted. The fellow I spoke to nodded his head towards another fellow, and gave me no answer. I went to the fellow, and he pointed to another fellow, and still

no-one spoke to me.

I waited till this other fellow had finished what he was doing. He then took me into a back room, and went through a pile of rejected suits. He selected the rattiest one for me, but I put it on. It didn't fit, and wasn't in any way attractive. But it was a new suit, and I very much wanted to have it; so I didn't complain.

I said, very politely 'It would be an big help to me if you could wait some days for the money. I am not carrying any small change on me.'

The fellow's face showed that he did not believe I could pay for the suit. He said 'Oh, you haven't any small change? Well, of course not, I didn't expect it. I'd only expect gentlemen like you to carry large change.'

This made me rather annoyed. So I said 'My friend, you shouldn't always judge a stranger by the clothes he wears. I am quite able to pay for this suit. I simply thought that it would be inconvenient for you to have to give change from a large banknote.'

His behaviour changed a a bit when he heard that. But he still acted as though he was much better than I was. He said 'I didn't mean any particular harm. But if we are criticizing each other, I might say that you have no reason to think that we can't give

change for any note that you are carrying around. You are wrong, because we can.'

I handed the note to him, and said 'Oh, all right then; I apologize.'

He smiled and took the banknote. He had one of those large smiles which goes all around the face. There are folds in it, and it curves, and it looks like where you have thrown a brick into a pond. Then when he looked quickly at the banknote this smile froze solid. His face turned yellow, and the smile looked like those wavy, worm-like spreads of lava which have hardened on the side of Mount Vesuvius.

I never before saw a smile which froze into place like that. The man stood there holding the bill, and looking like that until the shop owner came over to see what was the matter. He said, briskly: 'Well, what's up? what's the trouble? What does the customer still need? Come on; get him his change, Tod; get him his change.'

Tod replied 'Get him his change! It's easy to say, Sir; but look at the bill yourself.' The owner took a look at the banknote and whistled under his breath with a lot of feeling. Then he dived for the pile of rejected clothing. He began to throw the clothes around, all the time talking excitedly to himself;
'Sell an eccentric millionaire such a terrible suit as that! Tod's a fool – a born fool. He is always doing something like this. He

pushes every millionaire away from this place, because he can't tell a millionaire from a tramp, and never could. Ah, here's the thing I am after. Please get those things off, Sir, and throw them in the fire.'

'Please put on this shirt and this suit for me. It's just right, exactly right. It is not showy, but rich and modest. It was made for a foreign prince – you may know him. His name is His Serene Highness the Hospodar of Halifax. He had to leave the suit with us and order something suitable for a funeral instead. His mother was going to die – but she didn't. That's all right; things can't always happen the way we – that is, the way they – there! The trousers are all right, they fit you perfectly, Sir. Now the waistcoat; aha, right again! And the coat; look at that, now! Perfect – the whole thing! In all my time as a tailor I have never seen something fit so well.'

I said that I was very pleased.

'Quite right, Sir, quite right. I have to say it will do as a temporary suit for you. But wait. When we have measured you, we will make something even better. Come, Tod, take a book and pen; get busy. Length of leg, 32 inches'. And so on. Before I could say a word he had measured me, and was giving orders for me to get dress-suits, morning suits, shirts, and all sorts of clothing.

When I got a chance I said: ‘But, my dear Sir, I can’t order these things. I don’t know when I can pay you unless you give me change for the banknote.’

‘Don’t know! Weak words, Sir, weak words. For ever – that’s right, Sir. I can wait for ever. Tod, rush these things through, and send them to the gentleman’s address without wasting time. Let the less important customers wait.’

The Million Pound Banknote Part 4

‘You are quite right, sir, quite right. One moment – let me show you out of the shop, sir. There – good day, sir, good day.’

Well, don’t you see what was going to happen after that? I simply started buying whatever I wanted, and asking for change. Within a week I had everything I needed to be comfortable. I stayed at an expensive private hotel in Hanover Square. I ate my dinners there, but for breakfast I kept going to Harris’s humble eating place, the place where I had got my first meal on my million-pound banknote. Thanks to me, things were going well for Harris. The news had got out that the foreign crazy man who carried million-pound bills in his pocket always ate at the place. That was enough. From being a poor, struggling, little business that did not make much money, Harris’ eating place had become famous, and overcrowded with customers.

Harris was so grateful that kept lending me money, and would not let me say no. So, I was a poor man who had money to spend. I lived like the rich and the great. I judged that sooner or later things were going to go wrong; but I was in this mess now, and I had to swim across it or drown.

You see, I thought that disaster had to happen eventually. This was the serious side, the sober side, yes, the tragic side, of a

situation which would otherwise have been completely ridiculous. In the dark of the night, the tragedy part was always in my mind. It was always warning and always worrying me and so I moaned and turned around in my bed, and sleep was hard to find. But in the cheerful daylight the tragedy disappeared, and I walked on air. I was so happy that I felt almost drunk with it.

You can't blame me for being happy. I had become rather well-known in the biggest city in the world. This stopped me from thinking clearly about things. You could not buy a newspaper, English, Scottish, or Irish, without reading one or more stories about the 'vest-pocket million-pounder' and things I had done or said.

At first, when the newspapers mentioned me, I was at the bottom of thegossip column. Next, I was listed above the lower aristocracy, and next above the barons. It went on and on. As my reputation increased I was mentioned earlier and earlier in the gossip column, until I reached as high as it was possible to go. There I stayed, being mentioned above all aristocrats but the royal family, and above all churchmen apart from the top one in all England. But I knew that although I was well-known, I had not earned my fame.

Then came the greatest moment of all – the official recognition, so to speak. *Punch* magazine showed a cartoon of me! In a single instant this changed me from someone who was notorious to

someone who was famous! Yes, my name and reputation were secure now; my place was established. I might be still joked about, but with respect, not rudely. I could be smiled at, but not laughed at. The time for that had gone by.*Punch* had pictured me dressed in rags, bargaining with a Beefeater for the Tower of London. Well, you can imagine how this affected a young fellow like me. No-one had ever taken notice of me before, and now suddenly I couldn't say anything that didn't catch on and get repeated everywhere.

When I left the house I kept overhearing people telling each other, 'There he goes; that's him!'. I couldn't eat breakfast without a crowd watching me; couldn't appear at the opera without being watched by a thousand opera glasses. Why, I just swam in glory all day long – that is all I can say about it.

You know, I even kept my old suit of rags. Every now and then I went out in them. I enjoyed the old pleasure of buying something unimportant and being insulted, and then showing the person insulting me the million-pound banknote. But I couldn't keep that up. The illustrated papers made the suit well-known. Now when I went out in it I was recognized at once and a crowd followed me. If I tried to buy something the man would offer me his whole shop on credit before I could even pull my note on him.

When I had been famous for about ten days I went to do my duty to my country. That is to say, I visited the American ambassador.

He received me with enthusiasm, but complained that I had been slow in coming to him. He said that there was only one way to get his forgiveness. One of his guests for his dinner-party that night had been taken ill, and I should take the vacant place. I said I would, and we started talking. It turned out that he and my father had been friends while boys at school. Later they were students together at Yale university, and had always been warm friends until my father's death.

So then he required me to visit him at his house any time I was free, and of course I was very happy to do this. In fact, I was more than willing; I was glad. When the crash came, he might somehow be able to save me from total destruction. I didn't know how, but I hoped that he might think of a way. I didn't dare to tell him everyting, because it had all become so complicated. I did wish that I might have been able to come to him before I started this strange life in London.

No, I couldn't tell him now. I was in too deep. That is, too deep to tell my new friend about the bet. However, I did not think things were completely out of control. Because you see, even though I was borrowing money, I was being very careful – that is, I was not spending more than my salary. Of course, I couldn't know what my salary was going to be. However I had a good enough idea. If I won the bet I could choose any job which that rich old gentleman could give me. Of course I would have to be good at the job, but I would be – I hadn't any doubt about that.

The Million Pound Banknote Part 5

I didn't worry about the bet. I had always been lucky. I estimated that I would be paid six hundred to a thousand pounds a year. Let us say that I might earn six hundred for the first year, and this would go up year by year, until I showed that I was worth a thousand a year. At present I only owed money for my first year's salary. Everybody had been trying to lend me money but I had always made up an excuse so that I did not need to take it. I only actually owed £300. The other £300 was money which I had used to buy things and for my food and a place to stay.

I believed that the money from my second year's salary would get me through the rest of the month – and I intended to make very sure that I went on being cautious and economical. When the month was over my employer would be back from his journey. Then I would be all right once more. I would immediately give up my next two years' salary to people whom I owed money, and get right down to my work.

It was a lovely dinner-party of fourteen. These were the Duke and Duchess of Shoreditch, and their daughter the Lady Anne-Grace-Eleanor-Celeste-and-so-forth-de-Bohun, the Earl and Countess of Newgate, Viscount Cheapside, Lord and Lady Blatherskite, There were also some men and women who were not aristocrats and the ambassador and his wife and daughter. The

daughter had a friend who was visiting her, an English girl who was twenty-two years old. Her name was Portia Langham and I fell in love with her in two minutes. And she fell in love with me – I could see it clearly.

There was also another guest, an American – but I shall say more of this later. People were still outside the dining room, sharpening their appetites for dinner and giving icy looks to those who arrived late. The servant announced that a Mr. Lloyd Hastings had arrived. As soon as he had finished being polite to his host, Hastings saw me. He came straight over with his hand stretched out in greeting; then he stopped just before he shook my hand. He said, with an embarrassed look: 'I beg your pardon, sir, I thought I knew you. Are you the – the …'.

'Vest-pocket monster? I am, indeed. Don't be afraid to call me by my nickname; I'm used to it.'

'Well, well, this is a surprise. Once or twice I've seen your name together with that nickname. I never thought that you could be the Henry Adams people were talking about. Just six months ago you were working for Blake Hopkins in San Francisco. You also used to work nights on a second job, helping me arrange and check the papers and statistics on the Gould and Curry Mine Extension. I am amazed that you are in London, and a millionaire, and a huge celebrity! Why, it's like a fairy story. I just

can’t believe it; can’t comprehend it. Give me a minute, because my head is spinning.’

‘The fact is, Lloyd, That things are about the same for both you and I. I can’t really understand it myself.’

‘Dear me, it is amazing, isn’t it? Why,just three months ago we went to the What Cheer restaurant – went there at two in the morning. We had a meal and coffee because we had been working hard for six hours over those papers. I tried to persuade you to come to London with me. I offered to get you permission to be away from your job and pay all your expenses, and give you something extra if I succeeded in making the sale. You would not listen to me. You said I wouldn’t succeed, and you couldn’t afford to lose business and it would take you a long time to get the hang of things again when you got back home. And yet here you are. How odd it all is! How did it happen that you came after all, and whatever gave you this incredible start?

‘Oh, just an accident. It’s a long story – a romance, one may say. I’ll tell you all about it, but only at the end of this month. But how is your business going?’

His cheerfulness vanished like a breath, and he said with a sigh: You were a true prophet, Hal, a true prophet. I wish I hadn’t come. I don’t want to talk about it.’

‘But I want to hear the whole story, every word.’

‘I’m so grateful! Just to find someone who is interested in me and what I am doing. After what has happened to me here here – Lord! I could go down on my knees for it!’ He gripped my hand hard, and straightened himself up. He was all right and cheerful after that, so then we got ready for the dinner – which didn’t happen.

‘No; the usual thing happened. This always happens with that horrible and annoying English system – no-one could decide who was the most important person there, so there was no dinner. Englishmen always eat dinner before they go out to dinner, because they know that this might happen. But nobody ever warns the stranger, and so he walks placidly into the trap. Of course, nobody was hurt this time, because we had all eaten dinner already. None of us were new to this except Hastings, and when Hastings was invited by the Ambassador he was told that because of this the
English custom there would not be any dinner.

Because it is usual to act as though dinner will happen, everybody took a lady and we went down to the dining-room. There the usual problems began. The Duke of Shoreditch wanted to sit at the head of the table, saying that he was more important than the Ambassador, but I refused to let him have his way.

The Million Pound Banknote Part 6

I said that in the gossip column I came before all dukes who were not relatives of the king. Therefore I should go first on this occasion. The question couldn't be settled, of course, no matter how much we argued about it – and we did argue. So we all went back to the drawing-room again and ate lunch – for lunch you get a plate of sardines and a strawberry, and you stand together and eat that.

For lunch the question of who goes first is not so difficult. The two most important people toss a coin. The one that wins is the first to start eating his strawberry, and the loser gets the shilling. The next two toss a coin, then the next two, and so on. After lunch, card tables were brought out, and we all played cribbage. We bet sixpence a game. The English never play any game for amusement. They won't play if they can't win something or lose something, but they don't care if they win or lose.

We had a lovely time. Certainly two of us had a lovely time – and those two were Miss Langham and I. I was so bewitched by her that I couldn'tkeep score if the points went too high. When I won a game I never noticed and just started again. I would have lost every game, only the girl was the same. You see she was in just as bewitched as I. So neither of us ever completed a game. But we didn't bother to wonder why we didn't; we just knew we were

happy, and didn't want to know anything else, and didn't want to be interrupted.

And I told her – I did, indeed – told her I loved her. Well, she blushed until her hair turned red. But she liked it; she said she did. Oh, there was never such an evening! Every time I marked the score I added a little message; every time she scored she replied to it. I couldn't even say 'Two for this' without adding, 'My, how sweet you do look!' and she would say, 'Two, four, and a pair are eight – oh, do you think so?'. Then she would peep at me from under her eyelashes, you know, and try to look all sweet. Oh, it was just too wonderful!

Well, I was perfectly honest and I told her everything. I said that I hadn't any money at all. All I had was the million-pound note she'd heard so much about, and that note didn't belong to me. That made her curious. Talking quietly I told her the whole story right from the start. It nearly killed her with laughing. I couldn't see what made her laugh, but there it was. Every half-minute some new detail would make her laugh again, and I would have to stop for as much as a minute and a half to give her a chance to stop laughing. She laughed so much she could hardly stand – yes, she did; I never saw anything like it.

I never before saw a painful story – a story of a person's troubles and worries and fears – make someone laugh like that. So I loved her even more, seeing she could be so cheerful when there wasn't

anything to be cheerful about. I joked that I might soon need that kind of wife the way my future looked. I told her that of course, we should have to wait a couple of years, till I could pay off my debts with my salary. She joked back that she didn't mind that, only she hoped I would be as careful as possible with the money. I must try not to spend any of our third year's pay.

Then she began to get a little worried, and wondered if we were making a mistake. So she decided my salary for the first year should be higher than before. This was good sense, though it made me feel a little less sure than I had been that everything would work as we planned. However it gave me a good business idea, and told it to her without trying to hide anything.

'Portia, dear, would you mind going with me on the day when I confrontthose old gentlemen?'

She looked a little worried about this, but said 'N-o; if my being with you would make you happier. But – do you think that it would be good manners for me to come?'

'No, I don't think that it would – in fact, I'm afraid it wouldn't. But, you see, it's just so very important that-'
'Then I'll go anyway, whether it's good manners or not' she said, with a beautiful and generous enthusiasm. 'Oh, I shall be so happy to think I'm helping you!'

‘You won;t just be helping – you’ll be doing it all. You’re beautiful and so lovely that no-one can argue with you. With you there I can increase our salary till I break those good old fellows, and they’ll never have the heart to struggle.’

Oh! You should have seen the blush on her face, and the shine in her happy eyes!

She said ‘It is wicked to say nice things that you know are not true! What you say is wrong, but I’ll still go with you. Maybe then you will see that other people don’t see things the way you do. That will teach you a lesson’

Was I less worried after that? Did I think that everyting would go well? You may judge by this fact: right then and there I decided that I would ask for a salary of twelve hundred pounds for the first year. But I didn’t tell her; I saved it for a surprise. All the way home I was so happy I couldn’t think properly. I heard Hastings talking, but did not hear a word. When he and I entered my parlor, he brought me down to earth. He was amazed by my many comforts and luxuries.

‘Let me just stand here for a little while and look at everything. Dear me! it’s a palace – it’s just a palace! And in it everything anybody could want, including a warm coal fire and supper standing ready. Henry, it doesn’t just make me realize how rich you are; it makes me realize, it makes me completely understand,

how poor I am – how poor, and how miserable, how defeated and crushed!'

This language really upset me. It scared me right out of my dreams. Again I remembered that I was standing on a half-inch crust, and there was a volcano underneath.

The Million Pound Banknote Part 7

I had been dreaming without knowing it. In fact I had been dreaming for a while now, but I hadn't allowed myself to know it. But now – oh, dear! I remembered that I owed a lot of money. I had not a cent in the world, and a lovely girl's happiness or sadness depended on me. There was nothing in my future but a salary which I might never get! Oh, I was ruined past hope! Nothing could save me!

As I thought these things, Hastings said 'Henry, just the left-over bits of your daily income would- '
'Oh, my daily income! Here, drink down this Scotch, and cheer up. Or, no – you're hungry; sit down and-'
'Not a bite for me; I'm not hungry. I can't eat these days, but I'll drink with you till I drop. Come!'

'I'm with you! Ready? Here we go! Now then, Lloyd, tell your story while I prepare the drinks'.

'Why? I mean, do you want to hear it over again?
Henry, you alarm me. Didn't I tell you the whole story on the way here?'

'I'm afraid I did not hear a word of it.'

‘Henry, this is a serious thing. It troubles me. What did you have to drink at the ambassador’s?’

Then I suddenly realized what had happened, and I admitted it like a man.

‘I was not listening, because at the ambassador’s, I took the dearest girl in this world into my heart.’

So then he came over with a rush, and we shook hands, and shook, and shook till our hands ached. He was not angry with me for not having heard a story which had lasted while we walked three miles. He just sat down, like the patient, good fellow that he was, and told his story all over again.

In brief his story was this. Lloyd had come to England with what he thought was a grand opportunity. He had the chance to sell the new part of the Gould and Curry Mine. He had to give a million dollars to the people who had found that part, and if he sold for more than a million dollars, he could keep the rest.

He had worked hard. He had talked to anyone who might help him. He had tried everything possible without being dishonest. Now he had spent nearly all the money he had in the world. Still he had not been able to get a single capitalist to listen to him, and his money would run out at the end of the month. In a word, he was ruined. Then he jumped up and cried out:

‘Henry, you can save me! You can save me, and you’re the only man in the universe that can. Will you do it? Won’t you do it? Give me a million dollars and pay for my journey home and you can sell the mine extension instead! Please don’t, don’t refuse!’

I was in a kind of agony. I was just about to say, ‘Lloyd, I also have no money. I don’t have a penny, and I am in debt!’ But then a white-hot idea came flaming through my head. I gripped my jaws together, and calmed myself down until I was as cold as a capitalist. When I spoke, I was all business and completely in control of myself.

‘I will save you. But I will do it in a way that would be fair to you. You have worked hard, and taken many chances. I don’t need to buy mines. In a busy place like London I can keep my money moving without buying anything. It’s what I do, all the time. Here is what I’ll do for you. I know all about that mine, of course. I know it is very valuable, and if anybody asks me I will swear that is the truth. In a fortnight you will sell all your shares for three million cash by using my name as much as you like. We’ll share out the moeny you get.’

Do you know, he was so mad with joy that he would have danced on the furniture until he had smashed it to little pieces? He would have broken everything in the place, if I hadn’t tripped him up and tied him. Then he lay there, perfectly happy, saying ‘I may use your name! Your name – think of it! Man, crowds of these

rich Londoners will come to buy, they'll fight for those shares! I've got my life in order, it's all sorted out, and I'll never forget you as long as I live!'

In less than twenty-four hours all London was talking! I hadn't anything to do, day after day, but sit at home and say to everyone who asked 'Yes; I told him to use my name. I know the man, and I know the mine. The man is completely honest and reliable, and the mine is worth much more money than he asks for it.'

In the meantime I spent all my evenings at the ambassador's with Portia. I didn't say a word to her about the mine; I saved it for a surprise. We talked about my salary; never anything but salary and love; sometimes love, sometimes salary, sometimes love and salary together. The ambassador's wife and daughter took great interest in our little love affair. They kept finding clever ways for us to be alone together. And they kept the ambassador in the dark so he had no idea what was going on. Well, it was just lovely of them!

When at last the month had finished, I had a million dollars in my bank account in the London and County Bank. Hastings had the same. I dressed in my best clothes and drove by the house in Portland Place. I judged by the look of the house that the people I wanted were home again. Therefore I went on to the ambassador's and got my precious Portia. We returned to

Portland place, talking salary with all our might. She was excited and worried, and it made her more beautiful than I could stand.

The Million Pound Banknote Part 8

'My dear, you look so beautiful that it would be criminal for me to accept a salary of under three thousand a year.' I said. 'Don't you be afraid. Just keep on looking like that, and trust me. It will all come out right.'

As it happened, I had to keep encouraging her to be brave for the whole journey. She wanted my to accept a lower salary, and kept saying 'Henry, Henry, you'll ruin us! Oh, please remember that if we ask for too much we may get no salary at all. Then what will happen to us? We have no way in the world to make any money.'

We were shown into the room in by that same servant as before. There they were, the two old gentlemen. Of course, they were surprised to see my wonderful Portia with me, but I said: It's all right, gentlemen; she is my future wife. I am ready to report.'

And I introduced them to her, and told Portia their names. It didn't surprise them that I knew who they were. They knew I would have discovered that. They seated us, and were very polite to me. They did their best to stop Portia from feeling embarrassed, and made her feel as comfortable as they could. Then one of them said 'Now we can decide the bet which my brother Abel and I made. If you have won for me, you shall have any job I can offer you. Do you have the million-pound note?'

When I handed the banknote to him he shouted ‘I’ve won!’. He slapped Abel on the back. ‘Now what do you say, brother?’

Abel replied ‘I say he did survive. Now I’ve lost twenty thousand pounds. I never would have believed it.’

‘I’ve even more to tell you,’ I said. ‘It is a rather long story. I want to visit you soon, and tell you all about the whole month. I promise you that it’s worth hearing what I have to say. In the meantime, take a look at this. It is a bank account with £200,000 in it. The money is mine. I earned it by being careful how I used that banknote you let me borrow. And I only tried to buy small, unimportant things with it.’

But now it was Portia’s turn to be surprised. Her eyes were spread wide, and she said ‘Henry, is that really your money? Have you been fibbing to me?’

‘I have indeed, dearie. But you’ll forgive me, I know.’

She pouted, and pretended to look serious. She said ‘Don’t you be so sure. You are a naughty thing to hide the truth from me like that!’

‘Oh, you’ll soon stop being upset, sweetheart, it was only in fun, you know. Come, let’s be going.’

‘But wait, wait! The job, you know. I want to give you the job,’ said my man.

‘Well,’ I said, ‘I’m just as grateful as I can be, but really I don’t want one.’

‘But you can choose the very best one I can give you.’

‘Thanks again, with all my heart; but I don’t even want that one.’

‘Henry, I’m ashamed of you. You haven’t thanked the good gentleman properly. May I do it for you?’

‘Indeed, you shall, dear, if you can do better. Let us see you try.’

She walked to my man and got up in his lap. Then she put her arm round his neck, and kissed him right on the mouth. The two old gentlemen shouted with laughter. I was so astonished and confused that I could not move a muscle.

Portia said ‘Papa, he has said he wouldn’t take any job you can give him; and I feel just as bad about it as -‘.

‘My darling, is that your papa?’

‘Yes; he’s my step-father, and the dearest one ever. You understand now, don’t you, why I laughed when you told me

everything at the ambassador's? You did not know that he was my relative. Papa's and Uncle Abel's little plan was giving you so juch worry and trouble!'

Of course, I now had something else to say. Without any fooling I went right to the important thing.

'Oh, my dearest dear sir, I was wrong about what I said before. You have got a job available that I want. Son-in-law'.

'Well, well, well! But you know, you haven't ever done that job before. So of course, you can't give a reference that shows that you can do the job well, and so – '
'Let me try – oh, I beg you, do please! Just test me for thirty or forty years, and if-
'Oh, well, all right. You are not asking for much, so
take her away.'

Are the two of us happy? There are not enough words in the entire dictionary to describe it. A day or two after that, London got the whole story of my month's adventure with that bank-note, and how the adventure ended. Did London talk, and have a good time? Yes.

Portia's papa gave back that friendly and very useful banknote to the Bank of England. Then the Bank

cancelled it and presented it to him. Portia's papa gave that banknote to us at our wedding. Ever since then it has always hung in its frame in the most important place in our home.

That banknote gave me my Portia. Without it I could not have remained in London. I would never have visited the ambassador, and never would have met her. And so I always say, 'Yes, that banknote's a million-pounder, as you see. But it was only ever used once to buy something, and then what it was used to buy was worth ten times as much.'

The End

https://epbookspot.wordpress.com/sixth-level-short-stories/the-million-pound-banknote/