

Short Change

It's not as if I'm about to die, but I am inches away from a fate far worse and all I can do is sit here, wonder, and wait for the inevitable event to take place. Many have been lost in a similar tragic fashion before, so I shouldn't be so surprised by the predicament I currently find myself in, though I guess one can hardly prepare themselves for this type of terrifying occurrence.

I've lived a good life, right? In my 94 years I've seen a plethora of things as I've made my way to places all over the country. My purpose has been fulfilled time and time again—helping people in the small, trivial way that I was created to, and my copper surfaces still shine bright with the best of them. I get my job done as well as any of the others. Over the decades I've found myself in numerous donation jars (you know, the ones for things like cancer research in the checkout line at the grocery store?) and I've been used to buy more ice cream cones and candy bars than I can count. Some of my favorite times in life have been seeing the smiles on my keepers' faces when they trade me, along with others they have saved, for a delicious treat.

My fondest memories are from long, long ago during the time I spent with Clara. She was 9 years old at the time that I entered her possession. I was given to her as part of her weekly allowance from her father. For a short time she kept me in her coin purse—it was a lovely shade of pink and lined with a smooth, silky fabric. When the purse became so full that the zipper would no longer close, she poured my companions and me into a large, glass jar that she kept on her bedroom nightstand. Through the transparent walls of the jar I had a clear view of a page from a magazine that Clara had torn out and pinned up on her wall. The page displayed a photo of a shimmering, purple bicycle that I could see Clara desperately desired. I watched as she

gazed at the photo every night as she drifted off to sleep.

My anticipation grew as the months went on and the weight above me increased with each new load Clara emptied into the jar. I could sense the day that we would all be exchanged for the ever-yearned-for bicycle approaching. Sure enough, a week later I said goodbye as Clara carried her precious container to the store. I relished in her excitement as the employee emptied the contents onto the counter, separating and counting all of us. I caught a glimpse of Clara's face as another employee rolled out her prize, right before I was swiftly swept into the cash register. I'll never forget how wonderful the experience made me feel that day.

Of course, life hasn't been all good. There was the time I spent four whole years tucked away, trapped inside a tattered old sock that was crammed in the back of an elderly man's closet. My escape came one glorious afternoon when the man's wife decided to do some spring cleaning. And I've always hated it when people use me on their scratch-card lottery tickets, wearing down my circumference and leaving me coated in a grimy, powdery residue. *Yuck!* I've never even had the privilege of having someone win off of any of the tickets that I've so humbly sacrificed my wellbeing to reveal to them. Even so, I can hardly complain about my past. None of my experiences up to this point could compare to what is about to come.

I'd been through this routine many times before: given as change, stowed in a wallet, set on a desk or deposited into a piggy bank waiting to get cleared out and moved along to the next recipient. This time though, I was not so lucky. Moments ago I had been safely in the possession of a beautiful businesswoman who wore a black pencil skirt, red pumps, and a white form-fitted collared shirt. She had received me as change from the purchase of her morning coffee at a café down the road, and now had me cradled in a receipt along with a couple quarters,

a dime, and a few more pennies. She left the coffee shop in a hurry, probably in a rush to get to a fancy job. I imagine she is a lawyer—not someone who has much use for an insignificant penny like me. As she strode along, she fumbled with her purse, trying to deposit the change into her wallet. I was right at the edge of her grasp, dangerously close to falling until finally, I slipped.

I dropped quickly, tumbling downward and hitting the pavement with a light clinking sound. I bounced and rolled away as the woman kept moving, not giving me a second thought. I fell off the curb of the sidewalk, landing alarmingly close to a storm drain on the side of the street. A light kick or a gentle flow of rainwater would push me through the grate, sending me to spend an eternity in the sewer’s watery depths. It could happen at any moment.

Why did I have to be created as a penny? Why couldn’t I have been made as a nice, crisp dollar bill? Or better yet, a one hundred dollar bill?! Just think of all of the things I could do. If only I were worth more...then nobody would be so careless with me. But my unfortunate fate has been decided and it’s only a matter of time before some greater force knocks me to my everlasting doom. It’s no use wallowing in my despair, feeling cheated by reality.

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A block down the road from where the sorrowful penny is stranded a mother exits a market, holding the hand of her little boy. The two are enjoying a typical afternoon of running errands, picking up the ingredients for tonight’s meal. The young boy is glum from the uneventful activity of accompanying his mother around the grocery store. He walks with his head hung low, a slight frown stretched across his mouth, until he spots something shiny and interesting on the road by a storm drain.

“Look mommy, look!” the little boy cried, pointing at what he had spotted. He tugged at

his mother's hand, pulling her closer to the object in the street. His mother looks down and sees what has her son so excited.

“A penny,” she said with a smile. “You’d better pick it up—it could be lucky.” The boy beams with innocent wonder as he slowly reaches down, scooping the penny up with tiny fingers. He polishes away the dirt clinging to its edges and examines it carefully before sliding the new treasure safely into his pocket.

Relief.