



Millionaire Mike's Thanksgiving

Adapted from a story by Eleanor H. Porter

He was a young millionaire sitting in a wheel chair on the pier waiting for the boat. He had turned his coat-collar up to shut out the wind, and his hat brim down to shut out the sun. For the time being he was alone.

It was Thanksgiving, but the Millionaire was not thankful. He was not thinking of what he had, but of what he wanted. He wanted his old strength of limb, and his old freedom from pain. True, the doctors had said that he might have them again in time, but he wanted them now. He wanted his girlfriend with him, too.

His girlfriend had been very sweet and gentle about it, but she had been firm. As he could recollect it, their conversation had run something like this:

"But I want you with me, all day. Today of days."

"But, Billy, don't you see? I promised; besides, I ought to do it. I am the president of the club. If I shirk responsibility, what can I expect the others to do?"

"But I need you just as much - yes, more - than those poor families."

"Oh, Billy, how can you say that, when they are so very poor, and when every one of them is the proud kind that would simply rather starve than go after their turkey and things! That's why we girls take them to them. Don't you see?"

"Oh, yes, I see. I see I don't count. It couldn't be expected that I'd count - now!" And he patted the crutches at his side.

It was despicable of him, and he knew it. But he said it. He could see her eyes now, all hurt and sorrowful as she went away. . . . And so this morning he sat waiting for the boat, a long, lonely day in prospect in his bungalow on the island, while behind him he had left the dearest girl in the world, who, with a group of wealthy girls, was to distribute Thanksgiving baskets to the poor.

Not that his day needed to be lonely. He knew that. A dozen friends stood ready and anxious to supply him with a good dinner and plenty of companionship. But he would have none of them. As if he wanted a Thanksgiving dinner!

And so, alone, he waited in the wheel chair; and how he hated it. How could he bear to be in a chair rather than a car? Since the accident, however, his injured back had stopped him from driving cars, and he relied on his crutches or the wheel chair, in which he was pushed around by John, an employee.

With a frown the Millionaire twisted himself about and looked behind him. It was near the time for the boat to start, and there would not be another for three hours. Where was John? From the street hurried a jostling throng of men, women, and children. Longingly the Millionaire watched them. He did not want to spend the next three hours where he was. If he could be pushed on to



the boat, he would trust to luck for the other side. With his still weak left arm he could not propel himself, but if he could find some one...

Twice, with one of the newspapers that lay in his lap, he made a feeble attempt to attract attention; but the Millionaire was used to commanding, not begging, and his action passed unnoticed. He saw then in the crowd the face of a friend, and with a despairing gesture he waved the paper again. But the friend passed by without noticing. What happened then was so entirely unexpected that the Millionaire fell back in his chair dumb with amazement.

"Here, Mister, you're not doing yer job! You can't sell nothing that way," scoffed a friendly voice. "Here, now, watch!" And before the Millionaire could collect his wits he saw the four newspapers he had bought that morning to help pass the time, snatched into the grimy hands of a small boy and promptly made off with.

The man's angry word of remonstrance died on his lips. The boy was darting in and out of the crowd, shouting "Paper, here's yer paper!" at the top of his voice. He didn't return until the last pair of feet had crossed the gangplank. Then in triumph he hurried back to the waiting man in the wheel chair and dropped into his lap a tiny heap of coins.

"Sold out, partner!" he crowed delighted. "Sold out!"

"But....I.....you...." gasped the man, speechless.

"Aw, forget it, it wasn't nothing" disdained the boy airily. "You see, you've got to holler."

"To holler?"

"Sure, Mister, or you can't sell nothing! I've been watching you, and I saw right off that you wasn't doing yer job proper. Why, partner, you can't sell papers like you was handing out free donuts at a picnic. You've got to yell at 'em, and git their attention. Of course, you can't run like I can" - his voice softened awkwardly as his eyes fell to the crutches at the man's side - "but you can holler, and not just sit there shaking 'em easy at 'em, like you did a minute ago. That ain't no way to sell papers!"

With a half-smothered exclamation the Millionaire fell back in his chair. He knew now that he was not a millionaire, but a "Mister" to the boy. He was not William Seymore Haynes, but a cripple selling papers for a living. He would not have believed that a turned-up collar, a turned down soft hat, and a few jerks of a newspaper could have made such a metamorphosis.

"You'll catch on in no time now, partner," resumed the boy soothingly, "and I'm mighty glad I was here to set you going. Sure, I sells papers myself, I does, and I knows how it is. Don't look so flabbergasted. It ain't nothing. Shucks! Ain't we got to help each other out when we can?"

The Millionaire bit his lip. He had intended to offer money to this boy, but with his gaze on that glowing countenance, he knew that he could not. He had come suddenly face to face with something for which his gold could not pay.

"Thank you," he stammered embarrassedly. "You - you were very kind." He paused, and gazed nervously back toward the street. "I was expecting some one. We were going to take that boat."

"No! Was you? And he didn't show up? Say, now, that's tough - on Thanksgiving, too!"

"As if I cared for Thanksgiving!" The words came tense with bitterness.



"Aw, come now, forget it!" There was a look of real concern on the boy's face. "That ain't no way to talk. It's Thanksgiving!"

"Yes, I know. For some it is." The man's lips snapped shut grimly.

"Aw, come off it! Never mind if your pal didn't show up. There are other pals. There's me, now. Tell you what, you come home with me! There won't be no boat now for a heap of time, and I'm going to Thanksgiving dinner. Come on! It ain't far. I'll wheel you."

The man stared frankly.

"Er - thank you," he murmured, with an odd little laugh; "but ..."

"Shucks! Of course ye can. What are you going to do, sit here? What's the use of moping like this when you've got an invite out to Thanksgiving dinner? And you'd better catch it while it's going, too. You see, some days I couldn't ask ye - there's not grub enough! But I can today, 'cause we got a surprise coming."

"Indeed!" The tone was abstracted, almost irritable; but the boy ignored this.

"Sure! It's a dinner - a Thanksgiving dinner brought in to us. Now ain't ye coming?"

"A dinner, did you say? Brought to you?"

"Yeaup!"

"Who brings it?"

"A lady what comes to see me and Kitty sometimes; and she's a peacherino, she is! She said she'd bring it."

"Do you know her name?" The words came a little breathlessly.

"You bet! Why, she's our friend, I tell you! Her name is Miss Daisy Carrolton, that 's what it is."

The man relaxed in his chair. It was the dearest girl in the world.

"Say, ain't you coming?" urged the boy, anxiously.

"Coming? Of course I'm coming," cried the man, with sudden energy. "Just catch hold of that chair back there, lad, and you'll see."

"Say, now, that's something, like," crowed the boy, as he briskly started the chair. "'It ain't far, you know."

Neither the boy nor the Millionaire talked much on the way. The boy was busy with his task; the man, with his thoughts. Just why he was doing this thing was not clear even to the man himself. He suspected it was because of the girl. He could imagine her face when she found that it was to him she was bringing her turkey dinner! He roused himself with a start. The boy was speaking.

"My! but I'm glad I stopped and watched you trying to sell papers. Think of you sitting there all this time waiting for that boat and on Thanksgiving, too! And don't you worry none! Ma and Kitty will be right glad to see you. It ain't often we can have company. It's usually us taking things other people give to us - not us giving ourselves."



"Oh," replied the man uncertainly. "Is that so?"

With a distinct shock it had come to the millionaire that he was not merely the disgruntled boyfriend planning a little prank to tease the dearest girl in the world. He was the honored guest of a family who were rejoicing that it was in their power to give a lonely cripple a Thanksgiving dinner. His face grew red at the thought.

"And I say, what is your name, partner?" went on the boy.

"You can call me Mike," retorted the man, nervously wondering if he could play the part. He caught a glimpse of the beaming face of the boy, his benefactor, and decided that he must play it.

"All right, then, Mike. We're here," announced the boy in triumph, stopping before a flight of steps that led to a basement door.

With the aid of his crutches the man descended the steps. Behind him came the boy with the chair. At the foot the boy flung wide the door and escorted his guest through a dark, evil-smelling hallway, into a kitchen beyond.

"Ma! Kitty! Look here!" he shouted, leaving the chair, and springing into the room. "I've brought home company to dinner. This is Mike. He was selling papers down at the dock, and he lost his boat. I told him to come on here and eat with us. I knowed what was coming, you see!"

"Why, yes, indeed, of course," fluttered a pale-faced little woman, plainly trying not to look surprised. "Sit down, Mr. Mike," she finished, drawing up a chair to the old stove.

"Thank you, but I -- I --" The man looked about for a means of escape. In the doorway stood the boy with the wheel chair.

"Here, Mr. Mike, maybe you wanted this. Say, Kitty, ain't this grand?" he ended admiringly, wheeling the chair to the middle of the room.

From the corner came the tap of crutches, and the man saw then what he had not seen before; a slip of a girl, perhaps twelve years old, with a helpless little foot hanging limp below the bottom of her skirt.

"Oh, oh!" she breathed, her eyes aflame with excitement. "It's a wheel chair! Oh, sir, how glad and proud you must be - with that!"

The man sat down, though not in the wheel chair. He dropped a little helplessly into the one his hostess had brought forward.

"Perhaps you'd like to try it," he managed to stammer.

"Oh, can I? Thank you!" breathed a rapturous voice. And there, for the next five minutes, sat the Millionaire watching a slip of a girl wheeling herself back and forth in his chair - his chair, which he had never before suspected of being "fine" or "wonderful" or "grand" - as the girl declared it to be.

Shrinkingly he looked about him. Everything was tattered and torn, broken and battered. He had almost struggled to his feet to flee from it all when the boy's voice stopped him.

"It's coming about 12 o'clock, the grub is; and it's going to be all cooked so we can begin to eat right off. There, how's that?" he questioned, standing away to admire the propped-up table he and his mother were setting with a few broken dishes.



"Now ain't you glad you ain't down there waiting for a boat what don't come?"

"Sure I am," declared the man, gazing into the happy face before him, and valiantly determining to be Mike now no matter what happened.

"And ain't the table pretty!" exulted the little girl. "I found that china cup with the gold on it. Of course it don't hold nothing, 'cause the bottom's fell out; but it looks pretty - and looks counts when company's here!"

The boy lifted his head suddenly.

"Look here! I'll make it hold something," he cried, diving his hands into his pockets, and bringing out some small coins. "You just wait. I'll get a bunch of flowers up at the square. We ought to have flowers, with company here."

"Hold on!" The Millionaire's hand was in his pocket now. His fingers were on a gold piece. "Here," he said a little huskily, "let me help." But the fingers, when he held them out, carried only the dime that Mike might give, not the gold piece of the Millionaire.

"Aw, go on!" scoffed the boy, jubilantly. "As if we'd let company pay! This is our show!" And for the second time that day the Millionaire had found something that money could not buy.

And thus it happened that the table, a little later, held a centerpiece of flowers - four near-to-fading pinks in a bottomless, gold-banded china cup.

It was the man who heard the sound of the car in the street outside. Instinctively he braced himself, and none too soon. There was a light knock, then in the doorway stood the dearest girl in the world, a large basket and a box in her hands.

"Oh, how lovely! You have the table all ready," she exclaimed, coming swiftly forward. "And what a fine ... Billy!" she gasped, as she dropped the box and the basket on the table.

The boy turned sharply.

"Aw! Why didn't you tell me?" he reproached the man; then to the Girl: "Do you know him? He said to call him Mike."

The man rose now. With an odd directness he looked straight into the Girl's startled eyes.

"Maybe Miss Carrolton don't remember me much, as I am now," he murmured.

The Girl flushed. The man, who knew her so well, did not need to be told that the angry light in her eyes meant that she suspected him of playing this masquerade for a joke, and that she did not like it. Even the dearest girl in the world had a temper - at times.

"But why are you here?" she asked in a cold little voice.

The man's eyes did not swerve.

"Jimmy asked me to come."

"He asked you to come!"

"Sure I did," interposed Jimmy, with all the anxiety of a host who sees his guest, for some unknown reason, being made uncomfortable. "I knowed you wouldn't mind if we did ask company to



help eat the dinner, and he lost his boat, you see, and had a face on him as long as my arm, he was so upset about it. He was selling papers down at the dock."

"Selling papers!"

"As it happened, I did not sell them," interposed the man, still with that steady meeting of her eyes. "Jimmy sold them for me. He will tell you that I wasn't doing my job, so he helped me out."

"Aw, forget it," grinned Jimmy sheepishly. "That was nothing. I only showed him you couldn't sell no papers without hollering."

A curious look of admiration and relief came to the face of the Girl. Her eyes softened. "You mean..."

She stopped, and the man nodded his head gravely.

"Yes, miss. I was alone, waiting for John. He must have got delayed. I had four papers in my lap, and after Jimmy had sold them and the boat had gone, he very kindly asked me to dinner, and - I came."

"Whew! Look at this!" cried an excited voice. Jimmy was investigating the contents of the basket. "Say, Mike, we got turkey! You see," he explained, turning to Miss Carrolton, "he hung back for a while, and wasn't fast coming. And I did hope it would be turkey - for company. Folks don't have company every day!"

"No, folks don't have company every day," repeated the Girl softly; and into the longing eyes opposite she threw, before she went away, one look such as only the dearest girl in the world can give - a look full of tenderness and love and understanding.



Long hours later, in quite a different place, the Girl saw the man again. He was not Mike now. He was the Millionaire. For a time he talked eagerly of his curious visit, chatting excitedly of all the delightful results that were to come from it. He would provide rest and comfort for the woman, a wheel chair and the best of surgeons for the little girl, school and even college for the boy. Then, after a long minute of silence, he said something else. He said it diffidently, and with a rush of bright color to his face - he was not used to treading quite so near to his heart.

"I never thought," he said, just touching the crutches at his side, "that I'd ever be thankful for these. But I was almost thankful today. You see, it was they that that brought me my dinner," he finished, and he could not hide the shake in his voice.

