

The Free Press' Short Story

TREASURE ON EARTH

FLORENCE KERRIGAN

"Ever more!" At Evelyn's tone the Morton twins, Bob and Jerry, and their older sister Charlotte paused in the act of helping themselves to hot cakes and honey and stared at the oldest of the Morton family.

"Forever more!" repeated Evelyn. "What's it all about?" Jerry wanted to know.

Evelyn turned back to the first sheet of the checkbook, paper she held and read it again in silence, as if to make sure that she read aright.

"It's from Great-uncle Abner Horne," she began. "And who's he, for Pete's sake?" asked Charlotte.

"Adam's grandson," said Jerry, flippancy. "Hey, Charlie, go easy on the honey!"

"Great-uncle Abner?" explained Evelyn. Just as if they did not know, "was Grandfather Horne's brother. He's a bachelor and we are his nearest of kin, but he wants to be fair about leaving his fortune. Of course we never expected a cent of it."

"Great-uncle Abner hasn't shuffled off this mortal coil, has he?" asked Jerry. "No, but it seems that there are some other people who might be better fitted to handle his estate, so he says, and he doesn't want the mere fact that we are his flesh and blood to influence him unduly. So he wants me to go out there and stay for a month and handle the income just as we would if it was ours to keep. There'll be a housekeeper and the housekeeping expenses will be handled by her just as if Great-uncle Abner was there, too. The income which we are to use is our personal income, which will one day belong to one of us, whichever he thinks the wisest use of it. I'm to go next week. Think you can manage the house while I'm gone, Charlie?"

"Have to," said Charlotte, with an impish grin. "School's out, and the twins will have to help. Anyway we'll do that for you to help you get the family fortune!"

"How much is it?" asked Jerry. "Doesn't know!" gasped Evelyn. "Are you all going to be there together?" asked Bob.

"I don't know," confessed Evelyn, glancing over the letter again. "Here, Char, you're the keep of the bunch, see what you can make out of the letter!"

Charlotte read it carefully. "I read it the same way you've told us," she said, quietly. "I wonder how much the income will be for that month?"

"We'll have to wait and see," said Evelyn, beginning to eat a hot cake in a dazed fashion.

The next few days were hectic ones. Evelyn's wardrobe was not in exactly traveling order. Last minute instructions were necessary to give to Charlotte who had never managed the home before and did not know much about cooking or the routine of housekeeping. The trip to Uncle Abner's home took two days.

Evelyn arrived at Hillcrest on the appointed day. Uncle Abner's chauffeur met her and took her and her bags to the mansion on top of the hill. It was a typical southern home of pre-war days, with tall white pillars supporting the porch roof, and very formal looking French windows opening onto a closely-clipped, velvet lawn. Evelyn loved it the minute she saw it.

Great-uncle Abner received her in the library. He was a wrinkled little man, with dry, whispering voice in keeping with his appearance. "You're Mattie's daughter, aren't you?" he asked, looking her up and down with his bright black eyes. "Sit down." He pushed a button under the edge of his table and sat back in silence. In a moment an elderly woman appeared in answer to the ring. "Ask the others to come in, Maggie," he said.

A longer silence followed, in which Evelyn began to feel uncomfortable. She was glad she had stopped for a shoe shine at the city terminal. She was glad she had mended the slip in her glove, although there was no way he could possibly see it. Somehow she had a feeling that he was not missing much and that his keen eyes did not stop at merely outward appearances either.

She welcomed the arrival of two other women. One was a young girl just two or three years older than herself, and the other was a woman in her forties. The girl introduced as Marguerite Denise, had a bright and vivacious manner, shifty blonde hair, and well-kept hands and feet. The older woman, Mrs. Spencer, was stiff and precise in her manner, with a reverent solicitude for Uncle Abner which seemed to Evelyn to be somewhat unalloyed. To be sure, when he dropped his handkerchief, Evelyn restored it to him without thinking

of doing otherwise, but she did think that it was unnecessary to be forever arranging his pillows and his robe. She fancied it annoyed him; but perhaps Mrs. Spencer knew him better than she did.

"I've called you here, as you know," said the dry, old voice, precisely, "to let which of you is most fitted to carry on my fortune after I have gone. Just because Evelyn here happens to be my flesh and blood, that's no call why she should have all my money when I'm gone."

"Oh, don't talk of that," said Mrs. Spencer, with a fluttering gesture of her hands. "God grant that you may be spared to us many years yet."

"I'm ninety-eight," said Uncle Abner, matter-of-fact, "and it stands to reason I haven't many years comin' to me."

"Have you—thought of dividing your estate?" ventured Mrs. Spencer.

"You'll all get something," said the old man, waving a claw-like hand as if to brush aside the interruption. "It's the bulk of the estate I'm worryin' over. I don't want it to run through; so I'm insistin' you like I said. The normal income per month is two thousand dollars. Each of ye will have that while yer here, for a month, beginning to-morrow."

"Two—two thousand dollars!" gasped Evelyn.

"Ye'll do with that just what ye'd do if it were yer own. It is yer own. I'm givin' it to ye. The one that makes the best use of it will inherit the house and that income each month. The other two will get a cash settlement."

"You mean—Marguerite was apparently just grasping the facts. You mean I've got two thousand dollars—mine!"

"Oh, naturally not," Uncle Abner hastened to assure you. "Two thousand dollars each to spend as you wish." He waved a thin forefinger vaguely before him. "But ye'll need to tell me what ye done with it before ye leave. The one that uses it the best will be—but I told ye that afore. When a feller tells the same thing over twice, he's gettin' old, and I ain't comin' to that yet!"

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show you I know how to spend, how to take my place as head of a house like this—

"Yes, I know," he said, wearily. "But after all, my dear child—"

"If you had given it away," said Mrs. Spencer, deliberately, "you would have it now, in a broader sense. But you laid up treasure on earth where moth and rust doth corrupt."

"I know—"

Evelyn felt her heart go out to him. She ran to him and put her arms around him. "Poor Uncle Abner," she crooned. "As if that made any difference! You've given us a wonderful month here and—dearest, isn't there anything left? Not even your books?" There ensued an inarticulate sound. "You can come with us, Uncle."

He twisted around in her arms and looked at the fresh young face so near his own. "Eh?" Come live with you? What for?"

"Because we love you! Look—Uncle Abner—"

She fumbled in the pocket of her sweater and brought out a folded letter from the twins. "We think Uncle Abner must be well," they had written. "What you've said about him and the stories he's told you and everything. Can't you get him to visit us some time?"

"They said that about me?" he asked. "And you'd take me into your home—without a cent—my doctor's bills ain't small, home held him tighter. I know. But if they'll keep you with us for a long, long while—the twins will love the way you play the jew's-harp—"

"Oh, that—"

"He laughed depreciatingly. "Well—I dunno—"

He sat up straighter and looked at the three of them. "Who said I lost my money?" he demanded. "I ain't lost nary cent of it! I never had nothin' but money all my life," he went on, after a moment of stunned silence. "I thought money was all there was to care about. An' then Evvie come along. She did somethin' with her money. She gave some of it away, and she used some of it for pleasure, and she used some of it to make herself bigger in the future; besides that she give herself to me—her love, an' her time, an' her youth to an old coddler like me. Then I heard whisper that she was just doin' it—Evvie girl, I hadn't ought to have listened but—I've never had nothin' but money in my life an' I wasn't just sure—so I tested ye some more. Givin' a fortune away ain't the way to use it; throwin' it away on silly gimcracks ain't the way to use it; but usin' it with love to make folks happy, givin' a hundred dollars of money an' a thousand dollars of love—that's the way. So I'm goin' to divide the cash among ye now—but the house an' the income—well, I guess me an' Evvie can find plenty to do with them, eh, Evvie?"

A budding politician

Aptitude for a political career appears as an early age, reports a Toronto amateur psychologist, whose reading of Hansard has convinced him that Parliamentary skill is most frequently displayed in the parrying of awkward questions. As an example he cites the case of his five-year-old daughter, on whom he was called to deliver judgment.

This young lady plays with her next door neighbor, Barbara, relations being usually very amicable. Nevertheless, on the day in question, a dispute over territorial rights in a sand-box had arisen. Instead of relying on diplomatic suggestion and arbitration, as their elders and betters invariably do, the young ladies resorted to direct action, and were vigorously assailing each other with shovels, when higher powers intervened.

As a one-man court of inquiry, our heroine's father began investigations. "Why did you hit Barbara with your shovel?" he asked.

"I didn't, Daddy," was the reply, astonishing in the face of the evidence and her habitual truthfulness. "It was Barbara's shovel."—The Printed Word.

TELEPHONE TALKS IN THE WATSON FAMILY



Muriel Watson used to worry about Bob's frequent trips to the "raw edges of civilization"—to mining towns and construction camps where life was rough and comforts few. Now he telephones her and the children from each new location, cheering them, and himself, in the process. "After all," he muses, "you're never out of civilization as long as you have the telephone."



Reductions in telephone rates—local and long distance—in 1935, '36 and '37 have effected savings to telephone users in Ontario and Quebec of nearly one million dollars yearly.

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Advertisement for Carrolls' Limited, featuring 'Free Delivery' and 'Store Closed Wednesday Afternoons'.