

The Million-Pound Bank Note

Mark Twain ~

Dramatized for radio by Walter Hackett

CAST OF CHARACTERS

HENRY ADAMS

SERVANT

SECOND MAN

LLOYD HASTINGS

TOD

WOMAN

FIRST COCKNEY

MR. SMEDLEY

THIRD MAN

GORDON FEATHERSTONE

HOTEL MANAGER

BUTLER

ABEL FEATHERSTONE

SECOND COCKNEY

PORTIA LANGHAM

ALBERT HAWKINS

FIRST MAN

SIR ALFRED

HENRY. When I was twenty-seven years old, I was a mining broker's clerk in San Francisco. I was alone in the world, and had nothing to depend upon but my wits and a clean reputation. These were setting my feet in the road to eventual fortune, and I was content with the prospect. During my spare time, I did outside work. One of my part-time employers was Lloyd Hastings, a mining broker. During this period I was helping Hastings to verify¹ the Gould and Curry Extension papers, covering what seemed to be a highly valuable gold mine. One morning at two, after six hard hours of work on these papers, Lloyd Hastings and I went to the What Cheer restaurant in Frisco. As we lingered over our coffee, he offered me a proposition.

HASTINGS. Henry, how would you like to go to London?

HENRY. Thank you, no.

HASTINGS. Listen to me. I'm thinking of taking a month's option² on the Gould and Curry Extension for the locators.

HENRY. And—?

HASTINGS. They want one million dollars for it.

HENRY. Not too much—if the claim works out the way it appears it may.

HASTINGS. I'm going to try to sell it to London interests, which means a trip there, and I want you to go with me, because you know more about these papers than I.

1. Here, *prospect* means "possibility of future success." To *verify* the papers is to check the accuracy of their information.

2. In financial terms, an *option* is a right to buy or sell something for a certain price and within a certain time.

Vocabulary

proposition (prop' ə zish' ən) *n.* something offered for consideration; proposal

The Million-Pound Bank Note

HENRY. No, thanks.

HASTINGS. I'll make it well worth your while. I'll pay all your expenses, and give you something over if I make the sale.

HENRY. I have a job.

HASTINGS. I'll arrange for you to get a leave of absence. What do you say?

HENRY. No.

HASTINGS. Why?

HENRY. If I go to London, I'll get out of touch with my work and with mining conditions here, and that means months getting the hang of things again.

HASTINGS. That's a pretty slim excuse, Henry.

HENRY. More important, perhaps, I think you're doomed to failure.

HASTINGS. But you just said the claim is valuable.

HENRY. It may well turn out that way, but right now its real value can't be proved. And even so, a month's option may leave you too little time to sell it; unless you sell it within the option time, you'll go stone broke.

HASTINGS. I'm willing to gamble.

HENRY. Well, I'm not.

HASTINGS. Think—a free trip to London.

HENRY. I've no desire to go to London. I'll remain right here in Frisco.

HASTINGS. [*Fading.*]³ Very well, but I know you're making a mistake, Henry.

HENRY. One of my few diversions⁴ was sailing in the bay. One day I ventured too

far, and was carried out to sea. Late that night, I was picked up by a freighter which was bound for London. It was a long voyage, and the captain made me work my passage without pay, as a common sailor. When I stepped ashore at London my clothes were ragged and shabby, and I had only a dollar in my pocket. This money fed and sheltered me for twenty-four hours. During the next twenty-four I went without food and shelter. I tried to get a job, doing manual labor. But the reply was always the same.

COCKNEY.⁵ I'm not sure you'd do. You ain't the sort. [*Suspiciously.*] Look, 'ere, you're a Yank, ain't you?

HENRY. The next morning, seedy and hungry, I was dragging myself along Portland Place, when my desiring eye fell on a tempting treasure lying in the gutter. It was a luscious big pear—minus one bite. My mouth watered for it. But every time I made a move to get it, some passing eye detected my purpose. I was just getting desperate enough to brave all the shame, when a window behind me was raised.

GORDON. [*Away.*] I say, you there, will you step in here, please?

HENRY. It was a very sumptuous⁶ house and an equally sumptuous room into which I was ushered by a servant. A couple of elderly gentlemen were sitting by the window. At that moment if I had known what they had in mind, undoubtedly I would have bolted for the door. They looked me over very thoroughly.

3. The *fading* of Hastings's voice indicates the end of the scene.

4. *Diversions* are activities that amuse and take one's mind away from work or worries.

5. A *cockney* is a person who speaks with an accent found only in a certain district of London.

6. Things that are *sumptuous* (sump' chōō əs) are expensive, showy, and magnificent.



Bank of England

Promise to pay the Bearer on Demand ⁰⁰⁰⁰⁰⁰⁰
the Sum of **One Million Pounds**
1890, May 27 London 27 May 1890

One Million

LONDON

For the Gov. and Company of the
BANK OF ENGLAND ⁰⁰⁰⁰⁰⁰⁰

J. S. Hayward
Chief Cashier

GORDON. He looks poor enough, don't you think, brother?

ABEL. Very. Er, young man, you are poor?

HENRY. Extremely!

ABEL. Good! And honest, too?

HENRY. Honesty is about all I have left; that, and character.

ABEL. Splendid!

GORDON. If my brother and I are judges of people, we'd say you are just the man for whom we have been searching. By the way, you are also intelligent, I would say.

HENRY. Yes, sir, I am. But what do you mean by saying that I appear to be just the man for whom you have been searching?

GORDON. And we don't know you. You're a perfect stranger. And better still, an American.

HENRY. It's very kind of you gentlemen to call me into your home, but I'm a bit puzzled. Could you tell me what you have in mind?

ABEL. Might we inquire into your background?

HENRY. Pretty soon they had my full story. Their questions were complete and searching, and I gave them straightforward answers. Finally one said:

GORDON. Oh, yes, we're certain you will do, eh, brother?

ABEL. Definitely! He is elected.

HENRY. To what am I elected, please?

GORDON. This envelope will explain everything. Here, take it. [*Hastily.*] No, don't open it now. Take it to your lodgings and look it over carefully.

ABEL. Being sure not to be rash⁷ or hasty.

HENRY. I'd like to discuss the matter.

GORDON. There is nothing to discuss at the moment.

HENRY. Is this a joke?

ABEL. Not at all. And now good day.

GORDON. And good luck.

ABEL. Cheerio!

HENRY. As soon as I was out of sight of the house I opened my envelope and saw it contained money. I lost not a moment, but shoved note and money into my pocket, and broke for the nearest cheap eating house. How I did eat! Finished, I took out my money and unfolded it. I took one glimpse and nearly fainted. It was a single million-pound bank note. Five millions of dollars! It made my head swim. The next

7. To be *rash* is to act without thought or preparation.

The Million-Pound Bank Note

thing I noticed was the owner of the eating house. His eyes were on the note, and he was petrified.⁸ He couldn't stir hand or foot. I tossed the note toward him in careless fashion.

HAWKINS. Is it real, sir! A million-pound note?

HENRY. [*Casually.*] Certainly. Let me have my change, please.

HAWKINS. Oh, I'm very sorry, sir, but I can't break the bill.

HENRY. Look here—

HAWKINS. Hawkins is the name, Albert Hawkins, proprietor.⁹ It's only a matter of two shillings you owe, a trifling sum. Please owe it to me.

HENRY. I may not be in this neighborhood again for a good time.

HAWKINS. It's of no consequence, sir. And you can have anything you want, any time you choose, and let the account run as long as you please. I'm not afraid to trust as rich a gentleman as you, just because you choose to play larks¹⁰ by dressing as a tramp.

HENRY. Well, thank you. I shall take advantage of your kindness.

HAWKINS. Not at all, sir, [*Fading.*] and please, sir, enter my humble restaurant place any time you wish. I shall be honored to receive you.

HENRY. I was frightened, afraid that the police might pick me up. I was afraid of the two brothers' reaction when they

discovered they had given me a million-pound note instead of what they must have intended giving—a one-pound note. I hurried to their house and rang the bell. The same servant appeared. I asked for the brothers.

SERVANT. They are gone.

HENRY. Gone! Where?

SERVANT. On a journey.

HENRY. But whereabouts?

SERVANT. To the Continent,¹¹ I think.

HENRY. The Continent?

SERVANT. Yes, sir.

HENRY. Which way—by what route?

SERVANT. I can't say, sir.

HENRY. When will they be back?

SERVANT. In a month, they said.

HENRY. A month! This is awful! Tell me how to get word to them. It's of great importance.

SERVANT. I can't, indeed. I've no idea where they've gone, sir.

HENRY. Then I must see some member of the family.

SERVANT. Family's been away too; been abroad months—in Egypt and India, I think.

HENRY. There's been an immense mistake made. They'll be back before night. Tell them I've been here, and that I'll keep coming till it's all made right, and they needn't worry.

SERVANT. I'll tell them, if they come back, but I'm not expecting them. They said you'd be here in an hour to make inquiries,

8. *Petrified* means "turned to stone." The man is struck rigid with astonishment.

9. As a *proprietor* (prə pri'ə tər), Hawkins is the owner and operator of a small business.

10. The British expression *play larks* means "joke around."

11. *The Continent* is how the British often refer to mainland Europe.

but I must tell you it's all right, they'll be here on time to meet you. [*Fading.*] And that's all they said.

HENRY. [*Slowly.*] I had to give it up and go away. What a riddle it all was! They would be here "on time." What could that mean? Then I thought of the letter. I got it out and read it. It said: "You are an intelligent and honest man, as one can see by your face. We conceive you to be poor and a stranger. Enclosed you will find a sum of money. It is lent to you for thirty days, without interest. Report to this house at the end of that time. I have a bet on you. If I win it you shall have any situation¹² that is in my gift, any, that is, that you shall be able to prove yourself familiar with and competent to fill." That was all. No signature, no address, no date. I hadn't the least idea what the game was, nor whether harm was meant me or kindness. The letter said there was a bet on me. What kind of a bet? Was the bet that I would abscond¹³ with the million-pound bank note? Which brother was betting on my honesty? I reasoned this way: if I ask the Bank of England to deposit it to the credit of the man it belongs to, they'll ask me how I came by it, and if I tell the truth, they'll put me in the asylum; on the other hand, if I lie, they'll put me in jail. The same result would follow if I try to bank it anywhere or borrow money on it. Therefore, I have to carry this burden around until those men come back. A month's suffering without wages or profit—

unless I help win that bet, whatever it may be. If I do, I will get the situation I am promised. My hopes began to rise high. Then I looked at my rags. Could I afford a new suit? No, for I had nothing in the world but a million pounds. Finally I gave in and entered a fashionable tailor shop. The clerk looked at me very arrogantly.¹⁴

TOD. [*Icily.*] No chores to be done here. Get out!

HENRY. Perhaps you have a misfit suit.

TOD. We don't give away suits, even misfits.

HENRY. I can pay for it.

TOD. Follow me.

HENRY. He took me into a back room, and overhauled a pile of rejected suits. He tossed the rattiest looking one at me. I put it on. It didn't fit. It wasn't in any way attractive.

TOD. You may have that for four pounds, cash.

HENRY. It would be an accommodation to me if you could wait some days for the money. I haven't any small change about me.

TOD. [*Sarcastically.*]¹⁵ Oh, you haven't? Well, of course, I didn't expect it. I'd only expect gentlemen like you to carry large change.

HENRY. My friend, you shouldn't judge a stranger always by the clothes he wears. I am quite able to pay for this suit.

12. Here, *situation* means "a job or position of employment."

13. If Henry were to *abscond*, he would flee secretly and hide.

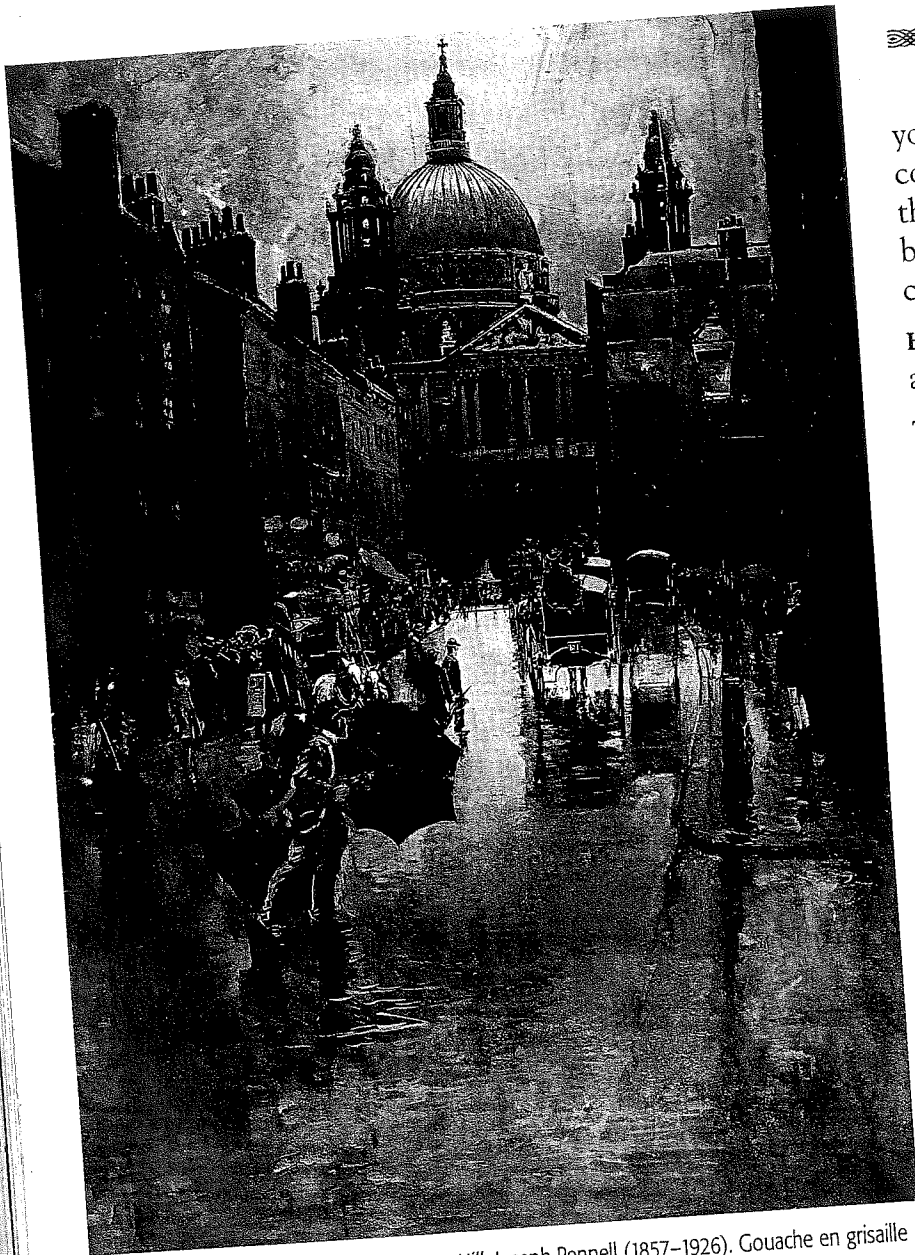
14. *Arrogantly* means "in a self-important way; proudly."

15. Tod speaks in a sharp, mocking way (*sarcastically*).

Vocabulary

conceive (kən sēv') *v.* to form an image or idea of

competent (kəm' pət ənt) *adj.* having enough ability for the purpose; capable



West Front of St. Paul's from Ludgate Hill. Joseph Pennell (1857–1926). Gouache en grisaille on paper laid down on board, 20 x 13¾ in. Private collection.

Viewing the painting: What would you want to see or do if you were in this scene with a million-pound bank note?

TOD. Hah!

HENRY. I simply don't wish to put you to the trouble of changing a large note.

TOD. As long as rebukes are going around, I might say that it wasn't quite

the bill yourself.

SMEDLEY. Bill, bill! Let me see it! [Pause.] Tod, you ass, selling an eccentric milliona

16. Here, *infer* means "to come to a conclusion based on something assumed."

Vocabulary

rebuke (ri būk') *n.* an expression of sharp criticism or disapproval
eccentric (ik sen' trik) *adj.* not usual or normal in behavior; peculiar

such an unspeakable suit as that. Tod, you're a fool—a born fool! Drives every millionaire away from this place, because he can't tell a millionaire from a tramp. Here, sir, are some suits more in keeping with your position.

HENRY. Thank you, but this one will do.

SMEDLEY. Of course it won't do! I shall burn it. Tod, burn this suit at once.

TOD. Yes, Mr. Smedley.

SMEDLEY. We shall be honored to outfit you completely, sir . . . morning clothes, evening dress, sack suits, tweeds, shetlands—everything you need. Come, Tod, book and pen. Now—length of leg, 32 inches; sleeve—

HENRY. But look here, I can't give you an order for suits, unless you can wait indefinitely,¹⁷ or change this bill.

SMEDLEY. Indefinitely, sir. It's a weak word, a weak word. *Eternally*, that's the word, sir. Tod, rush these things through. Let the minor customers wait. Set down the gentleman's address and—

HENRY. I'm changing my quarters. I'll drop in and leave the new address.

SMEDLEY. Quite right, sir, quite right. One moment—allow me to show you out, sir. And don't worry about paying us. [*Fading.*] Your credit is the highest. Good day, sir, good day. You honor us greatly, sir.

HENRY. [*As though sighing.*] Well, don't you see what was bound to happen? I drifted naturally into whatever I wanted. Take my hotel, for example. I merely showed the resident manager my million-pound note, and he said:

MANAGER. We are honored to have you as a guest, sir. Now, I have just the suite for you. It consists of a bedroom, sitting room, a dressing room, a dining room, two baths and—

HENRY. I'll pay you a month in advance with this.

MANAGER. [*Laughing.*] You honor our simple hotel, sir. Pray, don't worry about the bill.

HENRY. But it may be several months before I can pay you.

MANAGER. We're not worried, Mr.—er—

HENRY. Henry Adams.

MANAGER. Mr. Adams, you are a most distinguished guest. [*Fading.*] Anything you desire, please name it and we shall procure it for you immediately. Thank you, sir.

HENRY. And there I was, sumptuously housed in an expensive hotel in Hanover Square. I took my dinners there, but for breakfast I stuck by Hawkins' humble feeding-house, where I had got my first meal on my million-pound bank note. I was the making of Hawkins.

[*SOUND. Rattle of dishes and silver, customers' voices ad-libbing¹⁸ in background.*]

HAWKINS. Business is brisk, sir, very brisk, indeed, and has been ever since you and your million-pound bank note became patrons of my humble establishment. I've had to hire extra help, put in additional tables. Look for yourself, sir. There's a long line waiting to get in. Why, I'm famous and fair on my way to becoming wealthy.

17. To wait *indefinitely* would be for an unlimited length of time.

18. *Ad libbing* is saying things that are not written in a script.

COCKNEY 2. Pardon me, Guv'ner,¹⁹ but aren't you the gentleman what owns the million-pound bank note?

HAWKINS. Look here, you, go away and stop bothering Mr.— Mr.—

HENRY. Adams.

HAWKINS. Mr. Adams.

COCKNEY 2. I was just anxious to get a look at him.

HAWKINS. Who? Mr. Adams?

COCKNEY 2. No. The bank note.

HENRY. Glad to oblige. There you are.

COCKNEY 2. By George, it is real. [*Fading.*] Now I can go home and tell me old lady I've seen it with me own eyes. I hopes she believes me, but she won't.

HAWKINS. Mr. Adams, I wonder if I couldn't force upon you a small loan—even a large one.

HENRY. Oh, no.

HAWKINS. Please allow me, sir.

HENRY. [*Relenting.*]²⁰ Well, as a matter of fact, I haven't gotten around to changing this note.

HAWKINS. Fifty pounds might help tide you over. You know, a little spending money?

HENRY. It would help, a bit.

HAWKINS. I consider it a great honor. [*Fading.*] Indeed, a very great honor. Here you are, Mr. Adams, fifty pounds it is. [*Fading.*] And don't worry about repaying me.

HENRY. I was in, now, and must sink or swim. I walked on air. And it was natural,

for I had become one of the notorieties²¹ of London. It turned my head, not just a little, but a great deal. The newspapers referred to me as the "Vest-Pocket Millionaire." Then came the climaxing stroke: "Punch" caricatured²² me! Wherever I went, people cried:

MAN 1. There he goes!

MAN 2. That's him!

WOMAN 1. Morning, Guv'ner.

MAN 3. He's a bit of all right, he is.

HENRY. Why, I just swam in glory all day long. About the tenth day of my fame I fulfilled my duty to my country by calling upon the American Ambassador. He received me with enthusiasm, and insisted that I attend a dinner party he was giving the following night. Two important things happened at that dinner. I met two people who were to play important roles in the little drama I was living. Among the guests was a lovely English girl, named Portia Langham, whom I fell in love with in two minutes, and she with me; I could see it without glasses. And just before dinner, the butler announced:

[*BIZ. Guests ad-libbing in background, very politely.*]

BUTLER. [*Calling out.*] Mr. Lloyd Hastings.

HENRY. I stared at Hastings and he at me, his mouth open in surprise.

HASTINGS. I, er—pardon me, but are you? No, of course you can't be.

HENRY. [*Chuckling.*] But I am, Lloyd.

HASTINGS. Henry, I'm speechless. [*Suddenly.*] Don't tell me that you're also the Vest-Pocket Millionaire?

19. *Guv'ner* ("Governor") is Cockney dialect for addressing a man in authority or of a higher social class.

20. Here, *relenting* means "giving in."

21. A *notoriety* is someone who has become a celebrity.

22. *Punch* is a British humor magazine. It *caricatured* Henry in a cartoon that ridiculously exaggerated his features.

HENRY. Correct!

HASTINGS. I've seen your own name coupled with the nickname, but it never occurred to me you were *the* Henry Adams. Why, it isn't six months since you were clerking in Frisco, and sitting up nights helping me verify the Gould and Curry Extension papers. The idea of your being in London, and a vast millionaire, and a colossal celebrity! It's out of the Arabian Nights!

HENRY. I can't realize it myself.

HASTINGS. It was just three months ago that we were eating together, and I tried to persuade you to come to London with me. You turned me down and now here you are. How did you happen to come, and what gave you this incredible start?

HENRY. I'll tell you all about it, but not now.

HASTINGS. When?

HENRY. The end of this month.

HASTINGS. Make it a week.

HENRY. I can't. How's your business venture coming along?

HASTINGS. [*Sighing.*] You were a true prophet, Henry. I wish I hadn't come.

HENRY. Stop with me, when we leave here, and tell me all about it. I want to hear the whole story.

HASTINGS. You'll hear it, every last dismal word. [*Fading a bit.*] I'm so grateful to find a willing and sympathetic ear.²³

[*BIZ. Background ad-libbing out. A pause, then.*]

[PIANO. *Playing semi-classical tune in background.*]

HENRY. After dinner there was coffee and an informal piano recital and dear Miss Langham—lovely Portia Langham, the English girl. I eased her away from the music and the guests, to the library, where we talked.

[PIANO. *Out.*]

PORTIA. I'm really quite excited, Mr. Adams, meeting you like this. A millionaire!

HENRY. But I'm not one.

PORTIA. B-but of course you are.

HENRY. You're wrong.

PORTIA. I don't understand.

HENRY. You will! You will, that is, if you allow me to see you tomorrow.

PORTIA. [*As though smiling.*] Well, Mr. Adams—

HENRY. Henry.

PORTIA. Henry, then. I will give the invitation serious thought.

HENRY. Tomorrow is going to be a sunny day, just right for a picnic in the country. Yes?

PORTIA. Yes.

HENRY. I'll tell you the whole story then.

PORTIA. Do you think you should?

HENRY. Certainly! After all, we're going to be married.

PORTIA. [*Amazed.*] We—we're—going to—marry!

HENRY. Absolutely! I'll call for you at noon. Where?

PORTIA. Meet me here.

HENRY. You're a guest here?

²³. One who listens in a caring way is said to have a *sympathetic ear*.

The Million-Pound Bank Note

PORTIA. N—no, but it will be more convenient.

HENRY. Do you like me?

PORTIA. Yes, Henry. [*Fading.*] You're a very unusual young man, even if you are a millionaire, and even if you claim you aren't.

HENRY. All the way home I was in the clouds, Hastings talking, and I not hearing a word. When we reached my suite, he said to me:

HASTINGS. This luxury makes me realize how poor, how defeated I am. Even the drippings of your daily income would seem like a tremendous fortune to me.

HENRY. Unreel your story, Lloyd.

HASTINGS. I told you the whole story on the way over here.

HENRY. You did?

HASTINGS. Yes.

HENRY. I'll be hanged if I heard a word of it.

HASTINGS. Are you well?

HENRY. Yes. I'm in love.

HASTINGS. That English girl you were speaking to?

HENRY. Yes. I'm going to marry her.

HASTINGS. Small wonder you didn't hear a word I said.

HENRY. Now I'm all attention.

HASTINGS. I came here with what I thought was a grand opportunity. I have an option to sell the Gould and Curry Mine and keep all I can get over a million dollars.

HENRY. Sounds like a good proposition.

HASTINGS. Yes, it's a fine claim.

HENRY. Well?

HASTINGS. The parties here whom I tried to interest have backed down. And so here I am trying to peddle a gold mine, but with nary a buyer in sight. In addition, I am almost penniless.

HENRY. Surely you'll find a buyer.

HASTINGS. My option on the mine expires in a matter of days; in fact, at the end of this month.

HENRY. You *are* in a fix.

HASTINGS. Henry, you can save me. Will you do it?

HENRY. I? How?

HASTINGS. Give me a million dollars and my passage home for my option.

HENRY. I can't.

HASTINGS. But you're wealthy.

HENRY. I—I—not really.

HASTINGS. You have a million pounds—five millions of dollars. Buy the mine and you'll double, maybe triple your investment.

HENRY. I'd like to help, but I can't.

HASTINGS. You know the value of this mine, as well as I do.

HENRY. [*Tired.*] Oh, Lloyd, I wish I could explain, but I can't. What you ask is impossible.

HASTINGS. That's quite all right. I'm sorry to have bothered you, Henry. [*Fading.*] You must have a good reason in turning me down, I'm sure.

HENRY. It hurt me to have to refuse Lloyd, but it made me comprehend my delicate and precarious²⁴ position. Here I was, deep in debt, not a cent in the world, in love

24. *Precarious* means "exposed to risk or danger."

with a lovely girl, and nothing in front of me but a promise of a position, if, if I won the bet for the nameless brother. Nothing could save me. The next day, Portia and I went on our picnic in the country. I told her the whole story, down to the last detail. Her reaction wasn't exactly what I thought it would be.

[SOUND. Bird singing in background. Weave in and out of this scene.]

PORTIA. [Laughs.] Oh, Henry, that's priceless.

HENRY. [A bit stiffly.] I fail to see the humor.

PORTIA. But I do, more than you can imagine.

HENRY. Here I am mixed up in a bet between two eccentric old men, and for all they care I might well be in jail.

PORTIA. [Still laughing.] Wonderful, the funniest thing I've ever heard.

HENRY. Pardon me if I don't laugh.

PORTIA. [Stops laughing.] Sorry, but it is both funny and pathetic.²⁵ But you say that one of the men is going to offer you a position?

HENRY. If I win the bet.

PORTIA. Which one is he?

HENRY. I don't know. But I have one solution. If I win, I get the position. Now, I've kept a very careful track of every cent I either owe or have borrowed, and I'm going to pay it back from my salary. If the position pays me six hundred pounds a year, I'll—I'll—

PORTIA. You'll what?

HENRY. I'll— [He whistles.] To date I owe exactly six hundred pounds, my whole year's salary.

PORTIA. And the month isn't ended.

HENRY. If I'm careful, my second year's salary may carry me through. Oh, dear, that is going to make it difficult for us to get married immediately, isn't it?

PORTIA. [Dreamily.] Yes, it is. [Suddenly.] Henry, what are you talking about? Marriage! You don't know me.

HENRY. I know your name, your nationality, your age, and, most important, I know that I love you. I also know that you love me.

PORTIA. Please be sensible.

HENRY. I can't. I'm in love.

PORTIA. All this sounds like a play.

HENRY. It is—a wonderful one. I'll admit my owing my first two years' pay is going to pose a problem insofar as our getting married is concerned. [Suddenly.] I have it! The day I confront those two old gentlemen, I'll take you with me.

PORTIA. Oh, no. It wouldn't be proper.

HENRY. But so much depends upon that meeting. With you there, I can get the old boys to raise my salary—say, to a thousand pounds a year. Perhaps fifteen hundred. Say you'll go with me.

PORTIA. I'll go.

HENRY. In that case, I'll demand two thousand a year, so we can get married immediately.

PORTIA. Henry.

HENRY. Yes?

PORTIA. Keep your expenses down for the balance of the month. Don't dip into your third year's salary.

25. Something that's *pathetic* inspires pity or sadness.

HENRY. And that is how matters stood at that point. Thoughts raced through my mind. What if I lost the bet for my nameless benefactor? What if he failed to give me a position? Then the answer came to me, like a flash of lightning. I roused Lloyd Hastings from bed. He was a bit bewildered.

HASTINGS. I don't understand you. What are you getting at?

HENRY. Lloyd, I'm going to save you. Save you—understand!

HASTINGS. No.

HENRY. I'll save you, but not in the way you ask, for that wouldn't be fair, after your hard work and the risks you've run. Now, I don't need to buy a mine. I can keep my capital moving without that; it's what I'm doing all the time. I know all about your mine; I know its immense value and can swear to it if anybody wishes it. You shall sell it inside of the fortnight²⁶ for three million cash.

HASTINGS. Three million!

HENRY. Right!

HASTINGS. But how?

HENRY. By using my name freely—and right now my name is on the tip of everybody's tongue. We'll divide the profits, share and share alike.

HASTINGS. [*Overjoyed.*] I may use your name! Your name—think of it! Man, they'll flock in droves, these rich English. They'll fight for that stock. I'm a made

26. In financial terms, *capital* is wealth that is used to produce more wealth. A *fortnight* is two weeks.

man,²⁷ a made man forever. [*Fading.*] I'll never forget you as long as I live . . . never, never . . .

HENRY. In less than twenty-four hours London was abuzz! I hadn't anything to do, day after day, but sit home, and wait for calls.

SIR ALFRED. Then I may assume, Mr. Adams, that you consider this mining property a sound investment?

HENRY. A very sound investment, Sir Alfred.

SIR ALFRED. And what of this American chap, Hastings?

HENRY. I know him very well, and he is as sound as the mine.

SIR ALFRED. Then I think I shall invest in this property. Your recommendation does it.

[*SOUND. Telephone bell.*]

HENRY. Excuse me, Sir Alfred.

[*SOUND. Receiver lifted from hook.*]

HENRY. [*Into phone.*] Yes, this is Henry Adams. Who? Sir John Hardcastle. Yes, Sir John. The Gould and Curry Extension? Yes, I know a great deal about it. I certainly would recommend it as a shrewd investment. The mine is worth far more than the asking price. Yes, Mr. Hastings is very well known in the States. Honest as the day is long, as they say. Yes, I suggest you contact Mr. Hastings. Thank you. Not at all. Good day, Sir John.

27. A *made man* is one who is assured of success.

Vocabulary

benefactor (ben' ə fak' tər) *n.* one who gives financial assistance
shrewd (shrōōd) *adj.* sharp, clever, and practical



Indeed! Edward C. Clifford (1858–1910). Christopher Wood Gallery, London.

Viewing the painting: Compare this picture with the scene from the movie on page 572. Which do you think is truer to the story? Why?

[SOUND. Receiver replaced onto hook.]

SIR ALFRED. That clinches it. If Sir John is in, so am I. Do you suppose that your Mr. Hastings would mind if I brought in a few discreet friends on this venture?

HENRY. Er, no, in fact I'm sure he wouldn't. Mr. Hastings is a very democratic chap.

SIR ALFRED. Directly I shall go and call upon Mr. Hastings. By the way, exactly where is this mine?

HENRY. California.

SIR ALFRED. Is that near Washington, D.C.?

HENRY. Not exactly.

SIR ALFRED. A pity, for I had thought of asking the British Ambassador to look at

it. [Fading.] Well, I'm off. Thank you for your advice. Good day, Mr. Adams.

HENRY. And that's the way it went—a steady stream of wealthy Londoners asking my advice, which, of course, I gave freely. Meanwhile I said not a word to Portia about the possible sale of the mine. I wanted to save it as a surprise; and then there always was the possibility the sale might fall through. The day the month was up, she and I, dressed in our best, went to the house on Portland Place. As we waited for the two old gentlemen to enter, we talked excitedly.

PORTIA. You're certain you have the bank note with you?

The Million-Pound Bank Note

HENRY. Right here. Portia, dearest, the way you look it's a crime to ask for a salary a single penny under three thousand a year.

PORTIA. You'll ruin us.

HENRY. Just trust in me. It'll come out all right.

PORTIA. [*Worried.*] Please remember if we ask for too much we may get no salary at all; and then what will become of us, with no way in the world to earn our living? [*Fading.*] Please handle this delicately, Henry.

HENRY. When the two old gentlemen entered, of course they were surprised to see Portia with me. I asked them to introduce themselves, which they did.

GORDON. I am Gordon Featherstone.

ABEL. And I am Abel Featherstone.

HENRY. Gentlemen, I am ready to report, but first may I ask which of you bet on me?

GORDON. It was I. Have you the million-pound note?

HENRY. Here it is, sir.

GORDON. Ah! I've won. *Now* what do you say, Abel?

ABEL. I say he did survive, and I've lost twenty thousand pounds. I never would have believed it.

HENRY. Perhaps you might enlighten²⁸ me as to the terms of the bet.

GORDON. Gladly! The Bank of England once issued two notes of a million pounds each. Only one of these had been used and cancelled; the other lay in the vaults. Well, Abel and I got to wondering what would happen to a perfectly honest and intelligent stranger turned adrift in London without a

friend and with no money in the world but the million-pound bank note. Abel said he would starve to death, and I claimed he wouldn't. My brother said he would be arrested if he offered the note at a bank. Well, we went on arguing until I bet him twenty thousand pounds that the man would live thirty days, *anyway*, on that million, and keep out of jail, too.

ABEL. And I took him up.

HENRY. How did you know I was the right choice?

ABEL. After talking with you, we decided you had all the qualifications.

GORDON. And that pear incident, if you had picked it up very boldly, it would have proved to us you were nothing but a tramp.

HENRY. You don't know how tempted I was to do just that.

GORDON. And so you shall receive your reward—a choice of any position you can fill.

HENRY. First I ask that you look at this scrap of paper, all of you. You, too, Portia.

GORDON. A certificate of deposit in the London and County Bank—

ABEL. In the sum of—

GORDON. Two hundred thousand pounds.

PORTIA. Henry, is it yours?

HENRY. It is. It represents my share of the sale of a mining property in California, sold by my friend Lloyd Hastings; a sort of commission, as it were. It all came about by thirty days' judicious²⁹ use of that little loan you gentlemen let me have. And the only use I made of it was to buy trifles and offer the bill in change.

28. To *enlighten* is to give or reveal knowledge or wisdom.

29. *Judicious* means "showing good judgment."

ABEL. Come, this is astonishing.

GORDON. It's incredible.

HENRY. [*Laughing.*] I can prove it.

PORTIA. Henry, is that really your money? Have you been fibbing to me?

HENRY. I have, indeed. But you'll forgive me, I know.

PORTIA. [*Half-smiling.*] Don't you be so sure.

HENRY. Oh, you'll get over it. Come, let's be going.

GORDON. Wait! I promised to give you a situation, you know.

HENRY. Thank you, but I really don't want one.

PORTIA. Henry, I'm ashamed of you. You don't even thank the good gentleman. May I do it for you?

HENRY. If you can improve upon it.

PORTIA. I shall. Uncle Abel, first, thank you for making this possible. And, dear Father—

HENRY. Hold on. You're her uncle?

ABEL. I am.

HENRY. And you—

GORDON. Yes, I'm her step-father.

PORTIA. And the dearest one that ever was. You understand now, don't you, Henry, why I was able to laugh when you told me the story of the bet with the two nameless gentlemen. Of course I couldn't miss knowing that it was this house and that the two men were Father and Uncle Abel.

HENRY. Sir, you *have* got a situation open that I want.

GORDON. Name it.

HENRY. Son-in-law.

GORDON. Well, well, well! But if you haven't ever served in that capacity, you of course can't furnish satisfactory recommendations to satisfy the conditions of the contract.

HENRY. Only just try me for thirty or forty years.

GORDON. What do you think, Abel?

ABEL. Well, he does look to be a satisfactory sort.

GORDON. And you, Portia?

PORTIA. I agree—heartily.

GORDON. Very well. Take her along. If you hurry, you can reach the license bureau before it closes. [*Fading.*] Hop to it now.

HENRY. Happy, we two? Indeed, yes! And when London got the whole history of my adventure for a month, how it did talk. My Portia's father took the million-pound bank note to the Bank of England, cashed it, had it cancelled, and he gave it to us at our wedding. Framed, it now hangs in our home. It gave me my Portia, but for it I could not have remained in London, would not have appeared at the American Ambassador's, never should have met her. And so I always say: Yes, it's a million-pounder; but it made but one purchase in its life, and then got the article for only about a tenth part of its value.

THE END



Responding to Literature

PERSONAL RESPONSE

- ◆ Take a look at the graph you created in the Reading Focus on page 572. How do your ideas of what to do with a million dollars compare with how Henry uses the million-pound note?

Analyzing Literature

RECALL

1. Why did Hastings want Henry to travel to London, England?
2. What do the two wealthy gentlemen offer Henry? What is his response when he realizes the value of the bill?
3. How do the shop people respond to the million-pound note? How do they contribute to Henry's fame?
4. How does Henry manage to earn his own fortune?

INTERPRET

5. Why is it ironic that Henry finds himself on a freighter bound for London?
6. What do you think Gordon and Abel are trying to test?
7. Why does Henry achieve fame as the "Vest-Pocket Millionaire"?
8. What does Henry's success with the uncashed million-pound note tell you about his personality and business skills?



EVALUATE AND CONNECT

9. Were you surprised by the climax of the story? Do you think Twain gave enough clues to make the gentlemen's bet and Portia's connection to the two men believable? Explain.
10. **Theme Connection** How does having a million-pound bank note affect Henry? How would it affect you?

LITERARY ELEMENTS

Stage Directions

Mark Twain originally wrote "The Million-Pound Bank Note" as a short story. Many years later, Walter Hackett adapted the story as a radio play. Like a traditional play, a radio play includes **stage directions** written in italic type and set in brackets. However, directions about scenery, movement, lighting, or props are unnecessary. In a radio play, the audience must use its imagination to visualize the characters and the setting. The only stage directions deal with sound effects and how the actors should say their lines.

1. Compare Henry's first meal at Hawkins's restaurant on pages 575–576 with the stage directions on page 579 when he returns there. What difference would the addition of sound effects make to the listener?
2. A number of times in the play the word *fading* appears within a character's speech. What effect do you think the dramatist is trying to achieve in these places? What would the speech sound like?

● See **Literary Terms Handbook**, p. R10.

Extending Your Response

Writing About Literature

Dialogue and Monologue This dramatization contains **dialogue**—conversations between characters—and **monologues**—speeches Henry directs to the audience. From which of these do you learn more about Henry? From which do you learn more about the action in the play? Support your ideas with quotations from the play.

Creative Writing

Henry's Headlines Write a series of brief newspaper articles from the point of view of a London journalist hot on the trail to describe Henry's wealth, adventures, and romance.

Literature Groups

Making Judgments Discuss the assumptions people make about Henry when they see his shabby clothes and how those assumptions change when they see his million-pound note. What conclusions can be drawn about how the appearance of wealth affects our judgment of people?

interNET CONNECTION

You can find out more about Mark Twain and his writings on the Internet. Just type *Mark Twain* or *Samuel Clemens* in the subject window of a search engine. You can even find the entire text of some of his novels and short stories if you'd like to read them.

Reading Further

To read more by or about Mark Twain, try:
The Prince and the Pauper
A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court
Young Mark Twain and the Mississippi by Harnett T. Kane

Save your work for your portfolio.

Skill Minilesson

VOCABULARY • ETYMOLOGY

Words have histories. Knowing where a word comes from can help you understand what it means now and why it means that. For example, *eccentric* comes from the Greek words *ek*, meaning "out of," and *kentron*, meaning "center." So an *eccentric* millionaire is one who is sort of "off center," or odd.

The history of a word is called its **etymology**. Here are the etymologies of some other words from "The Million-Pound Bank Note."

proposition: from the Latin *pro-* ("forward") and *positio* ("to place")

benefactor: from the Latin *bene-* ("well") and *facere* ("to do").

rebuke: from the Latin *re-* ("back") and the Old French *buchier* ("to beat")

PRACTICE Choose one of the words from the above list and briefly explain how the etymology of that word is connected to its present-day meaning.