

New York, New York is a city of contrasts. New York at the beginning of the 1900s was a bustling center of 4 million people. While many people struggled to make living, the wealthy few lived a life of leisure and were often more concerned about their social standing than the plight of the less fortunate. In 1906, O. Henry published a collection of short stories set entirely in New York City. He entitled his work *The Four Million* because he was convinced that everyone in the city, rich or poor, had a story worth telling.

The following selection, set in New York City during this era, opens just as the main character has inherited \$1,000 from his wealthy uncle. This sum of money would have bought much more in 1900 than it would today. For example, a new car in 1900 cost about \$600, while a newspaper and a glass of cola each cost about 5 cents. The average industrial worker earned only about \$490 for an entire year of labor; a postal worker earned about 37 cents an hour.

## One Thousand Dollars

O. Henry

"One thousand dollars," repeated Lawyer Tolman, solemnly and severely, "and here is the money."

Young Gillian gave a decidedly amused laugh as he fingered the thin package of new fifty-dollar notes.

"It's such a confoundedly awkward amount," he explained, genially, to the lawyer. "If it had been ten thousand a fellow might wind up with a lot of fireworks and do himself credit. Even fifty dollars would have been less trouble."

"You heard the reading of your uncle's will," continued Lawyer Tolman, professionally dry in his tones. "I do not know if you paid much attention to its details. I must remind you of one. You are required to render to us an account of the manner of expenditure of this \$1,000 as soon as you have disposed of it. The will stipulates that. I trust that you will so far comply with the late Mr. Gillian's wishes."

"You may depend upon it," said the young man politely, "in spite of the extra expense it will entail. I may have to engage a secretary. I was never good at accounts."

Gillian went to his club. There he hunted out one whom he called Old Bryson.

Old Bryson was calm and forty and sequestered. He was in a corner reading a book, and when he saw Gillian approaching he sighed, laid down his book and took off his glasses.

"Old Bryson, wake up," said Gillian. "I've a funny story to tell you."

" I wish you would tell it to some one in the billiard room," said Old Bryson. "You know how I hate your stories."

" This is a better one than usual," said Gillian, rolling a cigarette; " and I'm glad to tell it to you. It's too sad and funny to go with the rattling of billiard bars. I've just come from my late uncle's firm of legal corsairs. He leaves me an even thousand dollars. Now, what can a man possibly do with a thousand dollars? "

"I thought," said Old Bryson, showing as much interest as a bee shows in a vinegar cruet, "that the late Septimas Gillian was worth something like half a million."

" He was," assented Gillian, joyously, " and that's where the joke comes in. He's left his whole cargo of doubloons to a microbe. That is, part of it goes to the man who invents a new bacillus and the rest to establish a hospital for doing away with it again.

There are one or two trifling bequests on the side.- the butler and the housekeeper get a seal ring and \$10 each. His nephew gets \$1,000."

"You've always had plenty of money to spend," observed Old Bryson.

"Tons," said Gillian. "Uncle was the fairy god-mother as far as an allowance was concerned."

"Any other heirs? " asked Old Bryson.

"None." Gillian frowned at his cigarette and kicked the upholstered leather of a divan uneasily.

"There is a Miss Hayden, a ward of my uncle, who lived in his house. She's a quiet thing - musical - the daughter of somebody who was unlucky enough to be his friend. I forgot to say that she was in on the seal ring and \$10 joke, too. I wish I had been. Then I could have had two bottles of brut, tipped the waiter with the ring and had the whole business off my bands. Don't be superior and insulting, Old Bryson - tell me what a fellow can do with a thousand dollars."

Old Bryson rubbed his glasses and smiled. And when Old Bryson smiled, Gillian knew that he intended to be more offensive than ever.

"A thousand dollars," he said, "means much or little. One man may buy a happy home with it and laugh at Rockefeller. Another could send his wife South with it and save her life. A thousand dollars would buy pure milk for one hundred babies during June, July, and August and save fifty of their lives. You could count upon a half hour's diversion with it at faro in one of the

**Corsairs:** pirates

**Bacillus:** bacterium

**Brut:** very dry (that is, not sweet) champagne.

**Rockefeller:** John D. Rockefeller, who built a great refining corporation in the late 1800s and became the first American billionaire.

**Faro:** a gambling game played with cards.

fortified art galleries. It would furnish an education to an ambitious boy. I am told that a genuine Corot was secured for that amount in an auction room yesterday. You could move to a New Hampshire town and live respectably two years on it. You could rent Madison Square Garden for one evening with it, and lecture your audience, if you should have one, on the precariousness of the profession of heir presumptive."

"People might like you, Old Bryson," said Gillian, always unruffled, "if you wouldn't moralize. I asked you to tell me what I could do with a thousand dollars."

"You?" said Bryson, with a gentle laugh. "Why, Bobby Gillian, there's only one logical thing you could do. You can go buy Miss Lotta Lauriere a diamond pendant with the money, and then take yourself off to Idaho and inflict, your presence upon a ranch. I advise a sheep ranch, as I have a particular dislike for sheep."

"Thanks," said Gillian, rising, "I thought I could depend upon you, Old Bryson. You've hit on the very scheme. I wanted to chuck the money in a lump, for I've got to turn in an account for it, and I hate itemizing."

Gillian phoned for a cab and said to the driver: "The stage entrance of the Columbine Theatre."- Miss Lotta Lauriere was assisting nature with a powder puff, almost ready for her call at a crowded Matinee, when her dresser mentioned the name of Mr. Gillian.

"Let it in," said Miss Lauriere. " Now, what is it, Bobby? I'm going on in two minutes."

"Rabbit-foot your right ear a little," suggested Gillian, critically. " That's better. It won't take two minutes for me. What do you say to a little thing in the pendant line? I can stand three ciphers with a figure one in front of 'em."

"Oh, just as you say," carolled Miss Lauriere. my right glove, Adams. Say, Bobby, did you see that necklace Della Stacey had on the other night? Twenty-two hundred dollars it cost at Tiffany's. But, of course -pull my sash a little to the left, Adams."

"Miss Lauriere for the opening chorus!" cried the call boy without.

Gillian strolled out to where his cab was waiting.

"What would you do with a thousand dollars if you had it?" be asked the driver.

"Open a s'loon," said the cabby, promptly and huskily. " I know a place I could take money in with both hands. It's a

**Corot:** painting by Jean Baptiste Camille Corot, a 19<sup>th</sup> century French artist known for his landscapes.

**Heir presumptive:** one who is expected to inherit the estate of another.

**Ciphers:** zeroes.

four-story brick on a corner. I've got it figured out. Second story - Chinks and chop suey; third floor - manicures and foreign missions; fourth floor - poolroom. If you was think-of putting up the capital.

"Oh, no," said Gillian, I merely asked from curiosity. I take you by the hour. Drive 'til I tell you to stop."

Eight blocks down Broadway Gillian poked up the trap with his cane and got out. A blind man sat upon a stool on the sidewalk selling pencils. Gillian went out and stood before him.

"Excuse me," he said, " but would you mind telling me what you would do if you had a thousand dollars?"

"You got out of that cab that just drove up, didn't you? " asked the blind man.

"I did," said Gillian.

" guess you are all right," said the pencil dealer, "to ride in a cab by daylight. Take a look at that, if you like."

He drew a small book from his coat pocket and held it out. Gillian opened it and saw that it was a bank deposit book. It showed a balance of \$1,785 to the blind man's credit.

Gillian returned the book and got into the cab.

"I forgot something," he said. "You may drive to the law offices of Tolman & Sharp, at - Broad- way."

Lawyer Tolman looked at him hostilely and inquiringly through his gold-rimmed glasses.

" I beg your pardon," said Gillian, cheerfully, "but may I ask you a question? It is not an impertinent one, I hope. Was Miss Hayden left anything by my uncle's will besides the ring and the \$10?"

" Nothing," said Mr. Tolman.

" I thank you very much, sir," said Gillian, and on he went to his cab. He gave the driver the address of his late uncle's home.

Miss Hayden was writing letters in the library. She was small and slender and clothed in black. But you would have noticed her eyes. Gillian drifted in with his air of regarding the world as inconsequent.

I've just come from old Tolman's," he explained. They've been going over the

**Poked up the trap:** pushed open the door in the roof of the cap (to tell the driver that he wanted to stop).

papers down there. They found a - Gillian searched his memory for a legal term - they found an amendment or a postscript or something to the will. It seemed that the old boy loosened up a little on second thoughts and willed you a thousand dollars. I was driving up this way and Tolman asked me to bring you the money. Here it is. You'd better count it to see if it's right."

Gillian laid the money beside her hand on the desk. Miss Hayden turned white. "Oh!" she said, and again "Oh!"

Gillian half turned and looked out the window. "I suppose, of course," he said, in a low voice, that you know I love you."

"I am sorry," said Miss Hayden, taking up her money.

"There is no use?" asked Gillian, almost lightheartedly.

"I am sorry," she said again.

"May I write a note?" asked Gillian, with a smile, he re-seated himself at the big library table. She supplied him with paper and pen, and then went back to her secretaire.

Gillian made out his account of his expenditure of the thousand dollars in these words:

Paid by the black sheep, Robert Gillian, \$1,000 on account of the eternal happiness, owed by Heaven to the best and dearest woman on earth."

Gillian slipped his writing into an envelope, bowed and went his way.

His cab stopped again at the offices of Tolman & Sharp.

"I have expended the thousand dollars," he said cheerily, to Tolman of the gold glasses, "and I have come to render account of it, as I agreed. There is quite a feeling of summer in the air - do you not think so, Mr. Tolman?" He tossed a white envelope on the lawyer's table. You will find there a memorandum, sir, of the modus operandi of the vanishing of the dollars."

Without touching the envelope, Mr. Tolman went to a door and called his partner, Sharp. Together they explored the caverns of an immense safe. Forth they dragged, as trophy of their search a big envelope sealed with wax. This they forcibly invaded, and wagged their venerable heads together over its contents. Then Tolman became spokesman.

"Mr. Gillian," he said, formally, "there was a codicil to your uncle's will. It was intrusted to us privately, with instructions that it be not opened until you had furnished us with a full account of your handling of the

**Secrétaire:** a desk with a small bookcase on the top.

**Modus operandi:** method of functioning, or conducting business.

**Codicil:** a supplement to a will.

\$1,000 bequest in the will. As you have fulfilled the conditions, my partner and I have read the codicil. I do not wish to encumber your understanding with its legal phraseology, but I will acquaint you with the spirit of its contents.

In the event that your disposition of the \$1,000 demonstrates that you possess any of the qualifications that deserve reward, much benefit will accrue to you. Mr. Sharp and I are named as the judges, and I assure you that we will do our duty strictly according to justice-with liberality. We are not at all unfavorably disposed toward you, Mr. Gillian. But let us return to the letter of the codicil. If your disposal of the money in question has been prudent, wise, or unselfish, it is in our power to hand you over bonds to the value of \$50,000, which have been placed in our hands for that purpose. But if - as our client, the late Mr. Gillian, explicitly provides - you have used this money as you have money in the past, I quote the late Mr. Gillian - in reprehensible dissipation among disreputable associates - the \$50,000 is to be paid to Miriam Hayden, ward of the late Mr. Gillian, without delay. Now, Mr. Gillian, Mr. Sharp and I will examine your account in regard to the \$1,000. You submit it in writing, I believe. I hope you will repose confidence in our decision."

Mr. Tolman reached for the envelope. Gillian was a little the quicker in taking it up. He tore the account and its cover leisurely into strips and dropped them into his pocket.

"It's all right," he said, smilingly. "There isn't a bit of need to bother you with this. I don't suppose you'd understand these itemized bets, anyway. I lost the thousand dollars on the races. Good-day to you, gentlemen."

Tolman & Sharp shook their beads mournfully at each other when Gillian left, for they heard him whistling gayly in the hallway as he waited for the elevator.

<p><b>Liberality:</b> generosity. <b>Reprehensible dissipation:</b> shameful loose living.</p>
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