

When Money Talks, Listen!

A heartwarming story about a mysterious old man that will forever change the way you think about money.



Rich Ezzo

Cover design by:

Charles C. Somerville

WhoElseCCS@aol.com

www.lizardofcupcakelake.com

www.cafepress.com/crittentonhall

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The Edge

“Daddy, can I borrow twenty dollars? I’m going out to lunch today with Justine,” my seventeen-year-old daughter, Lisa, sings as she skips passed the bathroom. Borrow, ha, I think, as I dip my overused disposable razor into the sink.

Sure,” I say, “I’ll just pull it out of your college fund that I never started seventeen years ago,” I mumble to myself in defeat.

“Ouch!” The old dull razor bites me, right on the chin. Twenty dollars buys some nice razors, I think to myself. The real ones. The ones with three blades. Or is it four now? Maybe it’s five. Mine still has two. I wonder what five would feel like?

“Honey?” my wife say’s sweetly as she gently taps on the door and interrupts my fantasy. She is almost petting it. I wince, but not just from styptic pencil. She is being too sweet. She wants something, and that something probably isn’t free.

“Yep,” I answer, and open the door. Those green eyes soften me up, and that shy little sideways smile always wins me over. Amy is her name. We met in a bar. Not that storybook, synchronistic meeting everyone wishes happened to them so they could tell their grandchildren about. Nope, we met in a bar. And not even some fancy one. A pub. Oh, well, who cares? It still is the luckiest thing that’s ever happened to this guy.

“Ooh, you cut yourself. Poor baby,” she say’s and then kisses my cheek. She is really pouring it on.

“I’ll live. But thanks for the pampering. Perhaps I should self mutilate myself more often,” I say. She chuckles, and then follows me into our room. She’s staying behind, following like a cub in the wild when momma bear is hunting. I stop and turn. She’s playing with her nails, never a good sign.

“Yes?” I sigh, but it sounds more like, “what do you want from me this time?” I wonder what’s happened to me, I used to be a romantic guy. The truth is

I'd give her anything. And the same goes for my kids. I just don't have much. Money, that is. That's what weakens me. It steals my romance. My compassion. I hate it. Give me one freaking day where I don't think about it at all. It's worse than a broken heart. At least that can almost feel good because it feels so bad. Lacking money never feels good in any way, shape, or form. It stops just shy of making you cry, because after a cry you might actually feel some relief.

"Now that it's summer vacation from school," she continues, handing me my clothes as I dress, "I thought maybe I could take up golf". I feel the air come out of me.

"The kids are busy doing their own things, and some of the other teachers play in this league. It's only once a week, but I think it would be good for me to get out there and do something fun once in a while, don't you?" she says, putting the sell on.

No need to sell, my love. I'd buy you your own golf course if only I could. You're a great wife, and a great mother, and I wish the world were mine to give you.

"Do you know how expensive clubs are?" I hear my other self say to her. That's the self that's not so nice. And that's the only one she ever gets to hear anymore. I'm sorry, honey.

"No, but I can get some used ones somewhere, right?"
Used. I'm a psychologist, have my own practice, and my wife has to ask, no, practically beg, if she can buy some used golf clubs. Damn it.

"Sure. I guess. Look in the paper and on the web. If you can find a set for under two hundred, then okay," I say as I push my tie up and exhale the last of my air.

"Thank you, sweetie!" she says and throws her arms over my shoulders from behind me and kisses my neck. And there it is. There is that fraction of a second that I live for. The one where I feel like a good husband and a good father. But in a snap, it's gone. She's gone.

I make a decent living. I have a modest, nice four-bedroom home, two cars, and all the fixins. But, I just can't seem to get an ounce of breathing room.

Between the mortgage, the cars, the taxes, the groceries, and everything else, there just isn't much left over. When we need new windows, we tap the house for a second mortgage. The furnace goes unexpectedly? Hit the credit card. It's living too close to the edge, all the time, and it's slowly killing me.

I Miss Funny

I pull into Johnny's Corner Market, the highlight of my day. Johnny is a retired bus driver who's owned this store for four years now, and I don't think I've ever seen him unhappy. I figure that means he must do pretty well here. That's the way I look at people now. If they're happy, they must have money.

"Morning to ya, Dan!" he says while rearranging some Twinkies and Ho Ho's.

"Hey, Johnny," I reply. I like Johnny's coffee. It's not the best in town, but I get to make it myself, and mix regular with decaf, and even a little hazelnut sometimes. I can pour in as much sugar as I want without being judged by some young, health conscious teenager waiting on me.

"Beautiful day out there, huh Dan?" he says as he pats my shoulder on his way behind me to the counter.

"Yea, it is." I say, feeling guilty that I didn't even notice.

"What's it gonna be today, kiddo?" Johnny asks as he points to the scratch off tickets. My vice. My last hope.

"Let's go with a five dollar ticket today. You pick it." He rips one off and hands it to me. "Paid for Life," it reads on the front.

"Good choice, Johnny."

"Good luck, Danny," he says with a wink. "Maybe one of these days you'll hit the big one."

"Yes, sir. And let's hope it's today!" I say as I leave. I notice the bells ring as I head out the door and think maybe they're telling me something. It's amazing how you look for clues from the universe when you're broke and desperate. The bells ring everyday, for everyone, and I'm thinking it means I just won. Pathetic.

"What's up, Doc?" I hear as I enter my office. I hear it everyday. It's my receptionist who doubles as my assistant. I can't afford to have both. She's a college dropout who now wants to be an actress. From Syracuse, New York? It's

tough enough if we were in LA. Good luck, sweetheart! Even working for me pays better than that, I think.

“Morning, Scarlet,” I answer. That’s her stage name, Scarlet. I love it. Nobody looks less like a Scarlet than this mousy little girl. Her real name is Nancy. But she’s sweet and funny. I’m glad she works here.

“So, you want the good news, or the bad news first?” Scarlet says to me while she’s busy Instant Messaging with one of her dropout buddies. My heart skips a beat. When you are in as fragile a mental state as I am, you can’t handle any bad news. You feel like a boxer on his heels who knows he’ll drop from even a glancing blow.

“Ah, what now?” I ask as my eyes drop closed.

“Ok, I’ll choose for you,” She says. “We’ll start with the bad news. Both of your morning appointments canceled today.”

“Are you kidding me? Why, what happened?” I snap back. Scarlet looks around her desk for her notes. She always scribbles on a napkin or envelope. It used to bother me, but it doesn’t anymore.

“Forget it. What’s the good news?” I ask with the tiniest hope there is any.

“You’ve got the morning off!” She says as she turns over her shoulder and smiles at me. And she means that. I wish I could look at it the same way. But to me, patients are dollars. They just cost me two hundred dollars in lost wages. Couple that with the golf clubs for my wife, my daughter’s lunch, and I’m out four hundred and twenty dollars and it’s not even 9am. Four hundred and twenty bucks!

“Gee, thanks.” I mutter.

“No sweat,” I hear her say as walk into my office, “Guess that means you can keep the bloody tissue on your chin all morning,” I hear her laugh turn into a muffle as I shut my door.

Later that morning, I’m jolted by a knock on my door. I fell asleep with my head on my desk. I can hardly lift it. My jaw feels locked open and I can see drool

on my blotter. Was I asleep or am I having a stroke? I try to shake myself awake.

“Yes?” I stutter.

The door opens, and Scarlet sneaks in and shuts the door behind her. She looks devious.

“Nice bed head!” she says. “Well, you want the good news or the bad news?” she continues. I give her a look that must tell her I am in no condition to play games.

“Ok. There is this guy in the lobby. He just walked in off the street and wants to see you,” she’s whispering with a slight chuckle.

“Who is he? What does he want?” I ask.

“He says he needs to have a therapy session. He wants to meet with you now. He said he understands that it’s very short notice, but he’ll pay DOUBLE for the inconvenience if you have time. Which of course you do, since both your morning sessions canceled.”

“Ok, well, I guess I can see him. Though I am a little concerned considering you are finding this so amusing. What’s going on?” I ask.

“First of all, he’s dressed in a green suit and has a walking stick!” she spits out. “Second, he looks and sounds EXACTLY like Anthony Hopkins. You know, the actor. Silence of the Lambs, Hannibal?” she goes into character “a nice Chianti and some lima beans.”

“Fava beans. Yes, I know who he is, thank you” I interrupt.

“And third,” she continues, laughing harder now “is that he says his name is Money. Mr. Money. You know, like Bond, James Bond? He said it just like that. Money, Mr. Money!” she says, crossing her legs looking like she’s about to wet herself.

“Ok, ok, sssh,” I murmur, now laughing a little with her.

“Alright, give me a minute, and then send the freak in,” I say, and she nearly collapses. I realize that’s probably the first remotely funny thing I’ve said in front of her since she’s been here. It feels good. I almost forgot about funny. She composes herself, and slips out of my office.

I take a deep breath. Then another. You wanna pay double Mr. Money? You got it. Then I hear the knock on my door.

“Yes, come in,” I say and rise to my feet.

Money Time

The first sound I hear is the creak of my door. The second is the sound of his shoes. Leather. Nice. They sound like a saddle on a horse. Must be expensive.

As he comes into view, I notice he is a dead ringer for Hopkins! Scarlet was right. I'm captivated, frozen almost.

"Ahh, yes. You're Doctor Daniel Meager," he says and turns to shut the door.

"I'm Money. Mr. Money," he says as he approaches, and we shake hands.

"Yes. I'm Dr. Meager. It's nice to meet you," I say noticing the steel blue eyes. I smell old spice. Or is that skin bracer? Could even be something expensive. I'm not sure, but it reminds me of my grandfather, and I love it.

"Please, sit," he says, and we do. Then I realize this is my office, and that's what I was supposed to say.

"So, how can I help you today?" I ask.

"I'm misunderstood," he says matter-of-factly and leans his ivory crowned walking stick against my desk.

"Yes, well, many of us are."

"Really? And how are you misunderstood, Daniel?" he shoots back.

"I'm...well, Mr. Money, this really isn't about me." Did he call me Doctor or Daniel? He shows me a slight grin for a moment, and then gazes out the window.

"Nice view," he comments.

"Thank you," I answer. Outside my window is a small park with a couple of picnic tables and plenty of trees for shade.

"Trees are good teachers. They never try to be anything they're not," he says out of the blue. "When the wind blows, they don't fight it, just sway with it. When fall comes, they don't cling to their leaves, but let them go when the time comes." He seems to be talking to himself almost. "And if a bird or a squirrel needs a home, they welcome them with open arms. Beautiful," he finishes, almost meditating.

“I have a new appreciation for trees, now. Perhaps I’ll even hug one later, thank you, Mr. Money.”

“My pleasure,” he replies, with a slow cadence. This guy intrigues me.

“So, Mr. Money. And, is that how you would like me to address you, as Mr. Money?” I ask.

“Yes, well, it seems that’s my name.”

“Very well, then, Mr. Money, I…”

“It’s not mister, as in M then R then period,” he interrupts. My name is Mister. But spelled Myster, with a Y instead of an I.”

“Oh,” I say. “So your name actually is Myster Money? What, didn’t your parent’s like you?” I joke. I think he grinned, maybe.

“Is that what they teach you in school, Daniel? Blame the parents?” he fires.

“I was just making a joke, trying to,” I reply, a bit sheepishly.

“Glad I’m not a parent. I’m blamed enough already,” he says. Curious comment. Which reminds me to take notes, so I grab my pad and jot quickly, “no kids, feels blame.”

“And you, Doctor? Do you?”

“Hm, what, have kids? Yes, two.”

“Feel blame.” he says right through my answer.

“Myster Money,” I lean in. “Why are you really here?”

He mirrors my lean in, “You tell me?” he returns.

“Myster Money,” I begin. “You walk into this office off the street, telling my assistant that you were willing to pay double just to see me. Surely, there’s a reason for this urgency?”

“Surely,” he replies.

“Well, would you like to discuss that?” I ask.

“Am I only sitting here now because I offered to pay double?”

“No, you are here because my schedule happened to be open, and you seemed as though it was important,” I lean back now. “Myster Money. Are you interested in being helped, or are you here just to play games? If it’s games, then

I am not interested, and I will have to end this session now and ask you to please leave,” I say with a nod to the door.

“Very well, yes. I’m sorry. No more games. I apologize for appearing to be difficult. As I said, I am misunderstood,” and now he leans back.

“Ok, good. So, you feel misunderstood. Let’s discuss that in some more detail, shall we?”

“Yes, fine,” he says.

“How so?” I ask, feeling good that we’re back on track.

“I’m not here to hurt people. I’m here to help them. To be of good use to you,” his eyes seem to be looking into my soul all of the sudden. I jot on my pad. “Not hurt people? Good use?”

“Ok, good. Let’s take a look at that more closely,” I suggest. “You’re not here to hurt people, what exactly do you mean by that?”

“People think when I’m not around, that the reason is to hurt them. To teach them a lesson. Perhaps that they’re bad, or not worthy,” he states, more serious now than he’s been.

“Ok. Please, continue,” Boy, isn’t this guy full of himself?

“I’m not here for any of those reasons,” he continues. “I’m here to act as a bridge for people. To assist them. If one lacks something, and wasn’t given the talent to create it, then I can help them acquire it. You see, I’m here for you, to serve you,” he says.

I write down on my pad, “crazy?” Also, “Ask him to refer to me as Doctor.”

He stands. “May I call you Daniel? No disrespect, I assure you, it just feels more personal,” he says with sincerity.

“Of course,” I tilt my pad towards me.

“Daniel, are you happy?” He grabs his walking stick.

“Why do you ask?”

“Cause I can’t make you so,” he says and points the stick at me.

“Ah, well, thanks for the concern. I suppose I can’t make you so, either.”

“Don’t know about that,” he says, and then picks up a picture of my family that’s on my desk.

“Beautiful.” he says.

“Thank you.”

“There’s your happiness, Daniel,” he says and puts it back.

“Daniel. I think that’s enough for today. We can begin with lesson one tomorrow. It’s nap time.” he winks and puts out his hand. I stand and shake it.

“Lesson one?” What do you mean, lesson one?”

“Tomorrow, let’s meet outside the office. Patterson Pond, say 11am?” he asks.

“Tomorrow? Uh, I’m sorry, but I’m booked up, mostly. Today was unusual, I had some clients cancel. If you would like to have another session, then please stop by and see Scarlet, and you can make an appointment.”

“If the sun’s shining, and you find that you’re free, I’ll be sitting under the big maple near the swing sets on the east shore at 11am,” and clicks his heels. “11am,” he turns to leave, “I can let myself out, thank you, Daniel,” and away he went.

I shake my head and write down some bullet points from the session for his file.

“Myster Money. Not worthy of me. Create Balance. I’m here for you. Misunderstood. Myster. Why Myster? I can’t make you happy? Myster-y?” I jump up, and run out of my office.

“Scarlet, did that guy run off without paying?” I ask, panicked. She swivels around in her chair, counting some fresh twenty’s.

“Nope, paid cash, and for two hours instead of one,” as she fans the bills. “But, he counted wrong. There’s too much. He left four hundred and twenty dollars.”

“What? That’s crazy... wait, did you say four twenty and twenty dollars?” I ask stunned, remembering that exact figure.

“Yepper.” She replies while smelling the fresh bills.

“Did you get him to fill out a new patient form?” I ask.

“Yikes. Sorry, he threw me off when he came in, and then I ran into your office, sorry,” she says shrugging her shoulders.

“That’s okay. Next time?” I say and she nods. “I’m going to shut my door. I need to take some more notes on our session, okay?”

“Sure. You’re the bossman.”

I head for my office, but Scarlet calls out after me.

“Oh, Doc. FYI, Mrs. Appleton called. She had to move her appointment tomorrow to Friday.

“Ok, thanks,” I begin to close my door, and then open it.

“Scarlet, what time was Mrs. Appleton supposed to be tomorrow? I am half afraid to hear the answer.

“11am.”