**THE OUSTSIDE CHANCE**

It’s a funny thing about money. If you haven’t got it, you think it’s the most important thing in the world. That’s what I used to think, too. I don’t any more, though, and I learned the hard way.

When I was at school, we had this English master. He was always quoting to us from famous writers. I wasn’t very interested, and I don’t remember much about it now. But it’s funny how things come back to you. He used to say:

“When the gods wish to punish us, they answer our prayers.”

Sounds a bit silly, doesn’t it? Well, I didn’t understand it then, either, but I can tell you what it means now. It means if you want something really badly, you’ll probably get it. But you’ll probably get it in a way you don’t expect.

I mean, you might have to pay a price you didn't bargain for.

It started one rainy day, when I was coming home from work.

I’m a motor mechanic, and I like working in the garage. But, I was restless. I’d always had this dream of owning my own business. Nothing big－just something I could build up. I don’t mind hard work, you see, if I’m working for myself. That’s why I’d left my mum and dad in the North. and come to London. I thought I’d make more money that way.

We’d had arguments about it. My dad and I. He didn’t see why I should went to leave home when I had enough money to live on.

Enough! Enough for what? I used to ask him. To live as he had in a council house all his life, with nothing to look forward to but a gold watch and a pension?

Oh, I was fond of him, you see, and it annoyed me to see him so content. He had nothing to show for all those years of work in that noisy factory.

Anyway, all this was on my mind, as I walked home that night. The rain didn’t help, either. I remember thinking, if only I could get a thousand pounds--just that, just a thousand.

I stopped and bought a newspaper outside the Tube. I thought it would take my mind off things on the way home. I could read about other people’s troubles for a change. See what films were on.

I don’t know when I first realised there was something wrong with the paper. It looked ordinary enough. But there was something about it that didn’t seem quite right. As if there was a gap in the news. As if it was a jump ahead. So, in the end, I looked at the front page, and instead of Tuesday 22nd November, it said Wednesday 23rd November.

“My God,” I thought, “It’s tomorrow’s paper!”

I didn’t believe it to start with. But is did explain why all the news was different. There couldn’t be any other explanation. Somehow, I had bought tomorrow’s paper－today!

And that was the moment I realised it. The moment I realised that all my prayers could be answered. My hands were shaking so much that I could hardly turn the pages. But they were there. The results of tomorrow’s races!

I looked at the winners, and chose from them carefully. I picked only the outsiders that had won at prices like 30-1.

Next morning, I went to the bank, drew out just about all I had－$150. I laid my bets during my lunch hour. I went to several shops. I didn’t want anyone to become suspicious.

It’s a funny thing, but I just knew the horses would win. And －God forgive me－I never stopped to think why I had been given this chance to see into the future.

They did win－every one of them. All I had to do was to go round and collect my money, and I couldn’t wait to get home and count it. $4,000!!

Well, nothing could stop me now! I’d give in my notice at work the next day, and look for a place of my own. Wait till I told Mum and Dad! They’d hardly be able to believe it.

I switched on the television, but I couldn’t concentrate on it. I kept thinking what I’d do with the money. I hardly heard a word of the programme.

Then the news came on.

The announcer mentioned Selby. That was where my parents lived. I began to listen.

There had been an explosion up there, that afternoon, followed by a fire in a factory. Twenty-two people had been killed, and many more were in hospital. I don’t remember the rest－something about a government enquiry.

I stopped listening, but I couldn’t move out of the chair. I think I must’ve known then that my dad was dead－even before the telegram came.

The newspaper had fallen on the floor. I picked it up, not realising what I was doing. Then I saw it－in the “Stop Press.” FACTORY DISASTER IN SELBY. MANY FEARED DEAD. I hadn’t seen it before. I’d been too busy picking winners. I could’ve saved my dad’s life, but I’d been too busy picking bloody winners. I don’t often cry, but the words swam in front of me then.

There isn’t much more to tell. I got my own business, and I’m doing well. As for my Mum, she was paid insurance by the firm that owned the factory, so she’s better off than she ever was. The only thing is, she doesn’t care if she’s alive or dead now my Dad’s gone.

When the gods wish to punish us, they make a damn good job of it .