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## HAPPY HARRY'S DREAM MACHINE

Everyone knew when Happy Harry was coming. He would be sitting at the front of a bright and colourful wagon. Surprisingly, there was no horse pulling it like ordinary people had to use, so it was a mystery how it moved at all. Maybe it had something to do with the big wheel mounted on the roof, which was a wonder in itself. As it turned, so did the objects attached to the rim. Round and round in a circle like on a carousel they went – not painted horses, but the sun, the moon and a number of stars; all shining and sparkling, while sweet, jolly music played from somewhere inside the wagon. But it was more than just an extraordinary wagon, big letters painted on the side declaring it to be “Happy Harry’s Dream Machine”.

He kept a close eye on the wheel, in particular how brightly everything shone; and this was important when he was approaching houses. Should one or more of the stars begin to dim he knew there was someone near who was quite sad; and he would continue on until he was right outside a house where a star stopped shining altogether. Here was where he stopped now, knowing an unhappy person lived there; and Harry had the means to cheer them up. Climbing off the wagon, he went and knocked on the front door of the house which had made the light in the star go out. An old lady opened it and smiled a greeting, but the smile was obviously hard for her. “Good morning,” said Harry chirpily, “If you don’t mind me saying so, you don’t seem all that happy. May I ask why?”

“Oh, I am sorry,” apologised the lady, “Do I really look that glum? It’s because of my husband, you see. He’s in hospital and I’m worried about him.”

“Hmm...” Harry paused for a moment, then asked: “Do you have trouble sleeping?”

“Yes, very much so,” she confessed. “I keep having these terrible dreams about what’s happening to Jim.”

“Then I’ve come just in time,” said Harry. “I have something that will help. If you would bear with me for a minute...” Leaving the old lady in the doorway, he went to the wagon and returned shortly after with a small glass bottle which he handed to her. “Before you go to sleep tonight, take out the stopper and place the bottle close to your bed. I promise it will give you a peaceful night and some pleasant dreams.”

The lady frowned. “A little bottle can do that?”

“Yes, my word it can,” Harry assured her, “At least, what’s in it can.”

“But I don’t know if I can afford it,” she admitted. “How much does it cost?”

“Nothing at all,” Harry declared, “But there are conditions. It should only be used the once; and when you awake in the morning, you must put the stopper back in tightly and return the bottle to me. I expect to be around for a few days, depending how many more sad people I find.”

Happy Harry’s Dream Machine trundled on through the countryside, stopping occasionally to leave more little bottles with sad and unhappy people who were all told the same conditions. So far on this latest trip he had only come across a few scattered houses and farms; now, however, he was approaching a larger community, a small town called Frugal. Unusual name,

he was thinking when something strange began to happen. Not only were the stars on the turning wheel growing dim; but the sun and moon were too. "Oh dear," muttered Harry to himself. "There must be lots of unhappy people living here. I just hope I have enough bottles for them all."

Harry's first call was to a small farm on the outskirts of town. The farmer met him at the door, and on being asked the usual question, he replied: "Both I and my wife can barely sleep at all. We have really bad dreams about losing the farm because we are so short of money."

"But you must be able to sell what you grow, surely?" puzzled Harry.

"We do," he explained, "Loads of potatoes and carrots; but the price we get for them is barely enough to cover costs. It's getting worse, too," the farmer added. "He keeps dropping the price he'll pay; and when I complain, Frugal says I can always sell to someone else. But there *isn't* anyone, not round here."

"Frugal, you say?" queried Harry, "The same as the name of the town."

"That's because Frugal MacDougal owns the general store," said the man. "And almost everything else in town; as well as quite a few houses that he rents out. I'm only glad we own ours - we could never afford the rent he charges; I don't know how *anyone* can."

Leaving a little bottle of sweet dreams with the unhappy farmer, Harry continued on towards the town; and the closer he came, the darker the lights on the wheel grew. It seemed clear that this visit was going to take longer than any of the others he'd made and he might have to be around for a week at least. Just as he was driving down the first street, all of the lights on the wheel went out, every single one. So many unhappy people, Harry thought. How could this be? After visiting a few houses it became obvious that Frugal MacDougal was the problem.

On his second day in the town Harry actually met the man in question. By then, the reputation of Happy Harry's little bottles of sweet dreams had spread. No longer did he have to go to find the sad people: they came to him, and there was a queue of them by the Dream Machine waiting patiently; except for one. "Hurry up," grumbled a craggy, sour-faced man back in the queue, "I haven't got all day."

Harry gave him a look of disapproval, but said nothing until he was at the front of the line. "My guess is you are Frugal MacDougal," he commented pleasantly, "What can I do for you?"

"What do you think?" grumbled Frugal. "I've come for a bottle of sweet dreams."

Harry frowned. "Do you have bad dreams and sleepless nights, then?"

"Always about money," declared the grumpy man. "The people here are the cause - they spend less and less; so I have to put my prices up to make a decent profit and all they do is complain. It's so unfair. Be that as it may, I can't stand here gabbing all day. Just give me a bottle of your sweet dreams and I'll be on my way."

"A 'please' might have been nice," suggested Harry, "But I won't worry about that, or a 'thank you' because I can't give you a bottle. They are only for deserving people, and from what I've heard you aren't one of them." For a moment it seemed there would be an angry outburst; but Frugal simply stiffened, scowled at Harry, then stormed off.

Returning to his general store there were two customers waiting for him. To one he said: "You are late with your rent, Mrs. Hope, yet again."

"I know, Mr. MacDougal," replied the lady sheepishly, "And I came to ask if you could give me a few more days. I don't have the money right now."

"That's not good enough," grated Frugal, and he was about to threaten to evict the lady and her family from their home; then he noticed she had a little bottle in her hand. "Is that, by any chance, one of Happy Harry's bottles?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. "I used it last night and it gave me the best sleep I've had in weeks. Now I have to return it to Harry like he said."

After a few seconds thought, Frugal decided to make her an offer: "Tell you what I'll do - in exchange for the bottle I'll allow you another week to come up with the money for your rent."

"But I have to take it back to Harry," insisted Mrs. Hope. "That was one of the conditions."

"It's alright," Frugal assured her. "I'll return it for you. Now, how does this little bottle of sweet dreams work; what does one have to do?"

Over the course of the coming day, Frugal managed to collect himself six sweet dream bottles; each traded for different things – like only charging last week's lower price for a bag of sugar, and agreeing to sell just a half pound of apples instead of a full pound; something he had never done before. That night, before he settled down to sleep he took the stopper out of a bottle and placed it on the floor beside the bed. Following a moment's thought he uncorked another for good measure.

It didn't take him long to fall asleep, nor for the dreams to begin; and the first one he had was quite usual: all about how to make more money. It continued pleasantly for a while and he was seeing himself opening the front door of his shop. Surprisingly, there was a larger-than-normal group of people waiting outside. "I'm open for business," he heard himself grumble and was about to go back into the shop when something peculiar happened. The sad, gloomy looks on the faces which his customers always wore turned to beaming smiles; and because it was so unexpected Frugal imagined it had something to do with Happy Harry's sweet dream bottles. Next, the people began laughing. Yes, thought Frugal, maybe I am dreaming how it will be tomorrow and all of these happy folk will spend lots of money, more than they ever did before they had some sweet dreams. In a second or two, however, it all went wrong. The laughing people simply turned panic and walked away, leaving the street outside Frugal's shop empty.

He awoke in panic. Sweet dreams, phooey! That was a nightmare. Perhaps he should have opened more bottles? He uncorked another two and tried again to sleep. This time he dreamed he was outside his shop waiting for the farmers to come with their goods for sale. They did, certainly, lots of them; but when he told them that he would pay the same price as always, they laughed in his face, turned their wagons around and drove off. Okay, he thought, I don't care – I've still got plenty of supplies to sell; only, when he went back inside the bins of vegetables and fruit were empty.

Not having had much sleep, Frugal was becoming very tired. "One last try," he hissed to himself, and opened the remaining two bottles. If he'd thought the first dreams were awful, the one he had now was the worst yet. Somehow, he was above the town and looking down. The streets were full of people, many walking and quite a few with carts and wheelbarrows that were loaded with furniture. The farmers were there too, their wagons full of fruit, vegetables and other produce which, it seemed, they were taking not to Frugal's shop, but somewhere else. The scene he was witnessing started to cloud and in seconds he was back on the ground walking through the town which was completely deserted – everybody had left and he was completely alone.

Frugal didn't sleep at all after that. He just sat awaiting sunrise, and the moment it was light enough he hurried to where he knew Happy Harry would be. "Never mind 'good morning'," he growled as Harry greeted him pleasantly. "It is a *terrible* morning, and I've had a dreadful night, thanks to your little bottles of so-called sweet dreams. Here, you can have them back!" and he thrust the six bottles into Harry's hands.

"Where did you get these from?" asked Harry, "Not from me?"

"From your customers," Frugal snarled, "If you can call them that, seeing as you give your little bottles away for free. How you make a living like that I do not know."

"My living is making sad people happy," Harry explained. "In return for my help, these good folk give me all I need – food and shelter; and most of all their respect; and love, I suppose. And they all say the same about you - that you've been extremely mean to them. All you are interested in is taking money from those who can least afford it; and that will be your downfall. You saw it in your dreams, didn't you – what will happen if you carry on like you have?"

"How can you know that?" Frugal demanded to know. "I never told you what I dreamt."

"You didn't need to," said Harry, looking down at the little bottles in his hand. "Your bad dreams were so strong I can feel them through the glass; and you brought them on yourself,

Frugal. There were no sweet dreams in these six bottles. The people you got them from had already had their sweet dreams, in exchange for bad ones which poured back into the empty bottles – the ones, my greedy friend, that you opened last night. You saw the misery you have subjected these people to; and by reliving their dreams of sadness, you suffered as they have done.

"Their returned bottles contained memories of all the sadness and sorrow they recalled each and every night," Harry continued, "Mainly caused by you. Those bottles of bad dreams were supposed to be put in the Dream Machine for re-processing back into good ones. But you chose to open them before that could be done; and the bad dreams you had were the price you paid for being selfish and sneaky."

Frugal stood in silence, taking in what Harry had said. About to leave, he had a thought: "I don't suppose you could give me a little bottle of sweet dreams, a fresh one? I really need to get a good night's sleep – I am ever-so tired."

"I'll give you something better than that," declared Harry. "I offer you some good advice; and if you take it I can almost guarantee you can make sweet dreams happen by yourself..."

Frugal listened to everything Harry had to say; and he tossed it over in his mind on his way back through town. Were the changes to the way he did things really that necessary; could he bring himself to make them? Approaching his shop he noticed two of his regular customers waiting outside, and he decided to give Harry's advice a try. Putting on smile he said cheerfully: "Good morning, ladies. Come inside and tell me what I can do for you."

Mrs. Hope was first. "I managed to scrape up the rent, Mr. MacDougal," she said placing some money on the counter."

Frugal looked down at it with a frown. "No, no," he said shaking his head. "Not right at all."

"But it's the full amount, I'm sure it is," said Mrs. Hope; then she had a worrying thought: "Unless you've put the rent up again. Have you?"

"Far from it, my dear," said Frugal, pushing some of the money towards her; and he had to force himself to say what he did next: "As of today, all rents are reduced by half."

Mrs. Hope was astonished and so pleased. "Oh, thank you, Mr. MacDougal. Now I have enough left to buy the bag of flour I couldn't afford because all the money I had was for the rent."

"Actually," Frugal announced, "You may be able to afford more than just a bag of flour, Mrs. Hope; because, from now on, everything for sale in my shop will be half price." Turning to face the other lady, he said: "And you can tell your husband that I have decided to pay double for his potatoes, Mrs. Edwards."

It wasn't long before the news spread and people were flocking to Frugal MacDougal's store from everywhere; and so it continued to the point where, although he was paying more for goods and selling them for less than before, because people had spare money to spend on what they needed, they could afford to buy extra. Suddenly, Frugal was making more money than he had imagined even in his wildest dreams. He certainly wouldn't need one of Happy Harry's little bottles; and possibly neither would anyone else in town.

One very special man knew it only too well. The lights on the turning wheel told the story, all shining as brightly as they had ever done; maybe even brighter. So, the Dream Machine could trundle on its merry way into the sunset with its owner sitting at the front, a truly Happy Harry.