



*How Johnny the Wham
Sleeps in Money All the Time
and Joe the Wimp Shines and
Sees Things*

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*Advanced
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Once the Potato Face Blind Man began talking about arithmetic and geography, where numbers come from and why we add and subtract before we multiply, when the first fractions and decimal points were invented, who gave the rivers their names, and why some rivers have short names slipping off the tongue easy as whistling, and why other rivers have long names wearing the stub ends off lead pencils.

The girl, Ax Me No Questions, asked the old man if boys always stay in the home towns where they are born and grow up, or whether boys pack their packsacks and go away somewhere else after they grow up. This question started the old man telling about Johnny the Wham and Joe the Wimp and things he remembered about them:

Johnny the Wham and Joe the Wimp are two boys who used to live here in the Village of Liver-and-Onions before they went away. They grew up here, carving their initials, J. W., on wishbones and peanuts and wheelbarrows. And if anybody found a wishbone or a peanut or a wheelbarrow with the initials, J. W., carved on it, he didn't know whether it was Johnny the Wham or Joe the Wimp. They met on summer days, put their hands in their pockets and traded each other grasshoppers learning to say yes and no. One kick and a spit meant yes. Two kicks and a spit meant no. One two three, four five six of a kick and a spit meant the grasshopper was counting and learning numbers. They promised what they were going to do after they went away from the village. Johnny the Wham said, "I am going to sleep in money up to my knees with thousand dollar bills all over me for a blanket."

Joe the Wimp said, "I am going to see things and shine, and I am going to shine and see things." They went away. They did what they said. They went up into the grasshopper country near the Village of Eggs Over where the grasshoppers were eating the corn in the fields without counting how much. They stayed in those fields till those grasshoppers learned to say yes and no and learned to count. One kick and a spit meant yes. Two kicks and a spit meant no. One two three, four five six meant the grasshoppers were counting and learning numbers.

The grasshoppers, after that, eating ears of corn in the fields, were counting how many and how much. To-day Johnny the Wham sleeps in a room full of money in the big bank in the Village of Eggs Over. The room where he sleeps is the room where they keep the thousand dollar bills. He walks in thousand dollar bills up to his knees at night before he goes to bed on the floor. A bundle of thousand dollar bills is his pillow. He covers himself like a man in a haystack or a strawstack, with thousand dollar bills. The paper money is piled around him in armfuls and sticks up and stands out around him the same as hay or straw.

And Lizzie Lazarus, who talked with him in the Village of Eggs Over last week, she says Johnny the Wham told her, "There is music in thousand dollar bills. Before I go to sleep at night and when I wake up in the morning, I listen to their music. They whisper and cry, they sing little oh-me, oh-my songs as they wriggle and rustle next

to each other. A few with dirty faces, with torn ears, with patches and finger and thumb prints on their faces, they cry and whisper so it hurts to hear them. And often they shake all over, laughing.

“I heard one dirty thousand dollar bill say to another spotted with patches and thumb prints, ‘They kiss us welcome when we come, they kiss us sweet good-by when we go.’ ‘They cry and whisper and laugh about things and special things and extra extra special things—pigeons, ponies, pigs, special pigeons, ponies, pigs, extra extra special pigeons, ponies, pigs—cats, pups, monkeys, big bags of cats, pups, monkeys, extra extra big bags of special cats, pups, monkeys—jewelry, ice cream, bananas, pie, hats, shoes, shirts, dust pans, rat traps, coffee cups, handkerchiefs, safety pins— diamonds, bottles and big front doors with bells on—they cry and whisper and laugh about these things—and it never hurts unless the dirty thousand dollar bills with torn ears and patches on their faces say to each other, They kiss us welcome when we come, they kiss us sweet good-by when we go.’”

The old Potato Face sat saying nothing. He fooled a little with the accordion keys as if trying to make up a tune for the words, “They kiss us welcome when we come, they kiss us sweet good-by when we go.”

Ax Me No Questions looked at him with a soft look and said softly, “Now maybe you’ll tell about Joe the Wimp.” And he told her: Joe the Wimp shines the doors in front of the bank. The doors are brass, and Joe the Wimp stands with rags and ashes and chamois skin keeping the brass shining.

“The brass shines slick and shows everything on the street like a looking glass,” he told Lizzie Lazarus last week. “If pigeons, ponies, pigs, come past, or cats, pups, monkeys, or jewelry, ice cream, bananas, pie, hats, shoes, shirts, dust pans, rat traps, coffee cups, handkerchiefs, safety pins, or diamonds, bottles, and big front doors with bells on, Joe the Wimp sees them in the brass. “I rub on the brass doors, and things begin to jump into my hands out of the shine of the brass. Faces, chimneys, elephants, yellow hummingbirds, and blue cornflowers, where I have seen grasshoppers sleeping two by two and two by two, they all come to the shine of the brass on the doors when I ask them to. If you shine brass hard, and wish as hard as the brass wishes, and keep on shining and wishing, then always things come jumping into your hands out of the shine of the brass.”

“So you see,” said the Potato Face Blind Man to Ax Me No Questions, “sometimes the promises boys make when they go away come true afterward.”

“They got what they asked for—now will they keep it or leave it?” said Ax Me. “Only the grasshoppers can answer that,” was the old man’s reply. “The grasshoppers are older. They know more about jumps. And especially grasshoppers that say yes and no and count one two three, four five six.” And he sat saying nothing, fooling with the accordion keys as if trying to make up a tune for the words, “They kiss us welcome when we come, they kiss us sweet good-by when we go.”

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