

The £1,000,000 Bank Note

*Dramatized by Dave Brandl
from the story by Mark Twain*

Excerpted from the full-length drama, "Twain...On Stage."

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DEDICATION

To my beautiful daughters, Melissa, Alison, and Stephanie.

STORY OF THE PLAY

“The £1,000,000 Bank Note” is about two wealthy British siblings who bet whether a destitute man can survive a month in London if they give him a £1,000,000 bank note, which he can neither account for being in his possession, nor turn into cash.

This play is excerpted from a full-length drama, “Twain...On Stage,” offered by Eldridge Publishing.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

- Scene 1:** Annabel’s home in London.
- Scene 2:** Mrs. Harris’ diner in London.
- Scene 3:** Annabel’s home.
- Scene 4:** Miss Stewart’s shop in London.
- Scene 5:** Mrs. Harris’ diner.
- Scene 6:** Charles Ford’s residence.
- Scene 7:** A pub in London.
- Scene 8:** Annabel’s home.

PROPS

Breakfast leftovers on tray
Envelope with letter
Pile of suits (one too large and one with a vest)
Dressing screen
Shirt
Measuring tape
Pen and book
Dishes, cups, silverware, coffee pot
Newspaper
Money
Cribbage board and cards
Slip of paper

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(5 m, 5 w)

ANNABEL: Wealthy older woman.

EDWARD: Annabel's brother.

JULIE: Annabel's maid.

HENRY ADAMS: Young man, penniless.

MRS. HARRIS: Owner of a small diner.

TOD: A tailor's clerk.

MISS STEWART: Proprietress of a tailor shop.

CHARLES FORD: American ambassador to England.

LLOYD HASTINGS: Henry's friend.

PORTIA LANGHAM: Young woman.

TIME: Events probably take place during the late 1800s, but there are many things that haven't changed much since then.

ACCENTS: The use of British accents is unnecessary. However, if the director chooses to use accents, it should be noted that ANNABEL, EDWARD, JULIE, and PORTIA are from the cultured upper class; MISS STEWART is middle class; and TOD and MRS. HARRIS are working class; and each accent should reflect the appropriate social station of the character.

Performance time: About 50 minutes.

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Scene 1

(AT RISE: ANNABEL is seated in one of two elegant chairs, looking out the window of her London home. She is an older woman, well-dressed. Nearby is a table with leftovers from breakfast. Annabel peers intently out the window, mumbling to herself and shaking her head.)

ANNABEL: No, not that one, either.

(The door opens and EDWARD enters. He is about the age of ANNABEL, and equally well-dressed.)

EDWARD: Any prospects, sister?

ANNABEL: Not yet. I've seen many honest faces go by that were not intelligent enough. Many that were intelligent, but not honest enough. Many that were both, but the possessors were not poor enough. Or, if poor enough, were not strangers.

EDWARD: I'm sure the right one will come along eventually. After all, there is no time limit on finding the person to settle our little bet.

ANNABEL: Good thing for you, brother. Or I'll be twenty thousand pounds richer very soon.

EDWARD: Always so sure of yourself, aren't you, Annabel?

ANNABEL: You made a fool's bet, Edward. No matter who he is, the man will starve to death. *(A beat.)* Did you get it?

EDWARD: *(Holds up envelope.)* In here. A bank note for one million pounds.

ANNABEL: The Bank of England sold it to you?

EDWARD: They were surprised by my request, of course. But they sold it all the same. Perfectly legal.

ANNABEL: I would have thought it unavailable by now.

EDWARD: A little research revealed that the Bank of England once issued two notes of a million pounds each, to be used for a special purpose connected with some

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EDWARD: *(Continued.)* public transaction with a foreign country. For some reason or other, only one of these had been used and canceled; the other still lay in the vaults of the bank. So, for the sum of one million pounds, I bought it, and here it is.

ANNABEL: All right. Let's assume we find the right man. I want to go over the specifics of this bet one more time. After all, we are talking about twenty thousand pounds.

EDWARD: I quite agree. We should both be clear on all the particulars.

ANNABEL: Very well. First, we find a poor and friendless stranger ...

EDWARD: Who is honest and intelligent.

ANNABEL: Of course. Then we give him that envelope with the one million pound bank note ...

EDWARD: And the letter.

ANNABEL: Ah. The letter. Let me hear it.

EDWARD: *(Pulls letter from envelope and reads.)* "You are an intelligent and honest man, as one may see by your face. We perceive you to be poor and a stranger. Enclosed you will find a sum of money."

ANNABEL: "A sum of money." *(Laughing.)* That's a good one!

EDWARD: *(Reads.)* "It is lent to you for thirty days, without interest. Report at this house at the end of that time. I have a bet on you. If I win it, you shall have any position I can offer. Any, that is, which you shall be able to prove yourself familiar with and competent to fill." *(Folds up letter and returns it to the envelope.)* That's it. No signature. No address. No date. Satisfied?

ANNABEL: Oh, yes. And you'll soon owe me twenty thousand pounds.

EDWARD: Don't be too sure, Annabel.

ANNABEL: Come, now, Edward. A poor, friendless man adrift in London with nothing but a million pound bank note? And no way to account for it being in his possession?

EDWARD: Correct. And I tell you, he'll not starve to death.

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ANNABEL: If he tries to cash it at a bank, they'll arrest him on the spot. And where else could he present it, hmm?

EDWARD: He will live the thirty days, and keep out of jail, too. All we have to do is find the right man.

ANNABEL: Easier said than done. (*Looks out window.*) I've observed dozens of people walking up and down Portland Place this morning ... without success ... oh, wait. Look at this. Do you see that man, there?

EDWARD: (*Looking out window.*) Which one? There are several.

ANNABEL: There. You see the nursemaid pulling that child along?

EDWARD: Yes.

ANNABEL: Just this side of them. See?

EDWARD: You mean the man staring at the street?

ANNABEL: Not the street. Look closer.

EDWARD: He's looking at that ... that ... what is that?

ANNABEL: It seems to be a pear, or some kind of fruit. The child took a bite out of it and threw it in the street.

EDWARD: So it is. So it is. And he's studying it intently.

ANNABEL: And licking his lips. He looks hungry. And look at his clothes. I'd say he's poor enough.

EDWARD: Granted. Now he's looking at the other people.

ANNABEL: He's making a move for the pear. No, that woman looked at him and he stopped.

EDWARD: Now she's passed him. There he goes again ... no, now that other man looked at him and he stopped again.

ANNABEL: So, he has standards. He's hungry, but not desperate enough to pick up a half-eaten, mud-covered pear in public.

EDWARD: Honest enough?

ANNABEL: So it seems. But what about intelligence?

EDWARD: Or friends?

ANNABEL: He's the most likely one I've seen all morning. Shall we interview him?

EDWARD: By all means. (*Opens door and calls.*) Julie? Come here please.

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(JULIE, Annabel's maid, enters.)

JULIE: Yes, sir?

EDWARD: Come, look out the window with us.

JULIE: Yes, sir.

ANNABEL: Do you see that man out there, in the ragged clothes?

JULIE: Yes ... what is he doing?

ANNABEL: He's hungry, and he's trying to pick up that pear in the mud without being seen by anyone.

JULIE: Oh, how dreadful!

EDWARD: Would you please ask him to come in here?

JULIE: That man?

EDWARD: Yes, please.

JULIE: Into this house?

ANNABEL: Yes, Julie.

JULIE: *(Looks at THEM for a moment.)* As you wish. *(SHE exits, closing the door behind her.)*

ANNABEL: I do believe Julie must think us mad.

EDWARD: No matter. If he's the one, we'll give her instructions to deal with him ... but not too much information. The specifics of our wager cannot be made public.

ANNABEL: Agreed. If it somehow gets back to our subject, it may influence his actions.

EDWARD: Can't have that. I intend to win this bet fairly.

ANNABEL: If you win.

(The door opens. JULIE enters.)

JULIE: This way, sir.

(SHE ushers in HENRY ADAMS. He is a young man, good looking, but unkempt and wearing shabby clothes. He is surprised and confused by the elegance of the room. He frequently eyes the breakfast dishes hungrily. Unsure of his reason for being here, he stands near the door and waits to see what happens.)

End of Freeview

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