



Learn English Through Stories

**Adapted and modified by
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Harry

This boy was a world-beater. Everything he touched turned to money, and at the age of fourteen he had over six hundred dollars in the Valley Bank, money he had made by himself. He was born to sell things. At eight or nine he was ringing door bells and showing housewives beautiful coloured pictures of Jesus Christ and other holy people—from the Novelty Manufacturing Company, Toledo, Ohio—fifteen cents each, four for a half dollar. “Lady,” he was saying at that early age, “this is Jesus. Look. Isn’t it a pretty picture? And only fifteen cents. This is Paul, I think. Maybe Moses. You know. From the Bible.”

He had all the houses in the foreign district full of these pictures, and many of the houses still have them, so you can see that he exerted a pretty good influence, after all.

After a while he went around getting subscriptions for *True Stories Magazine*. He would stand on a front porch and open a copy of the magazine, showing pictures. “Here is a lady,” he would say, “who married a man thirty years older than her, and then fell in love with the man’s sixteen-year-old son. Lady, what would *you* have done in such a fix? Read what this lady did. All true stories, fifteen of them every month. Romance, mystery, passion, violent lust, everything from A to Z. Also editorials on dreams. They explain what your dreams mean, if you are going on a voyage, if money is coming to you, who you are going to marry, all true meanings, scientific. Also beauty secrets, how to look young all the time.”

In less than two months he had over sixty married women reading the magazine. Maybe he wasn’t responsible, but after a while a lot of unconventional things began to happen. One or two wives had secret love affairs with other men and were found out by their husbands, who beat them or kicked them out of their houses, and a half dozen women began to send away for eye-lash beautifiers, bath salts, cold creams and things of that sort. The whole foreign neighborhood was getting to be slightly immoral. All the ladies began to rouge their lips and powder their faces and wear silk stockings and tight sweaters.

When he was a little older, Harry began to buy used cars, Fords, Maxwells, Saxons, Chevrolets and other small cars. He used to buy them a half dozen at a time in order to get them cheap, fifteen or twenty dollars each. He would have them slightly repaired, he would paint them red or blue or some other bright color, and he would sell them to high school boys for three and four

times as much as he had paid for them. He filled the town with red and blue and green used automobiles, and the whole countryside was full of them, high school boys taking their girls to the country at night and on Sunday afternoons, and anybody knows what that means. In a way, it was a pretty good thing for the boys, only a lot of them had to get married a long time before they had found jobs for themselves, and a number of other things happened, only worse. Two or three girls had babies and didn't know who the other parent was, because two or three fellows with used cars had been involved. In a haphazard way, though, a lot of girls got husbands for themselves.

Harry himself was too busy to fool around with girls. All he wanted was to keep on making money. By the time he was seventeen he had earned a small fortune, and he looked to be one of the best-dressed young men in town. He got his suits wholesale because he wouldn't think of letting anyone make a profit on him. It was his business to make the profits. If a suit was marked twenty-seven fifty, Harry would offer the merchant twelve dollars.

"Don't tell *me*," he would say. "I know what these rags cost. At twelve dollars you will be making a clean profit of two dollars and fifty cents, and that's enough for anybody. You can take it or leave it."

He generally got the suit for fifteen dollars, alterations included. He would argue an hour about the alterations. If the coat was a perfect fit and the merchant told him so, Harry would think he was being taken for a sucker, so he would insist that the sleeves were too long or that the shoulders were too loose. The only reason merchants tolerated him at all was that he had the reputation of being well-dressed, and to sell him a suit was to get a lot of good free advertising. It would bring a lot of other young fellows to the store, fellows who would buy suits at regular prices.

Otherwise, Harry was a nuisance. Not only that, the moment he made a purchase he would begin to talk about reciprocity, how it was the basis of American business, and he would begin to sell the merchant earthquake insurance or a brand new Studebaker. And most of the time he would succeed. All sorts of business people bought earthquake insurance just to stop Harry talking. He chiseled and he took for granted chiseling in others, so he always quoted chisel-proof prices, and then came down to the regular prices. It made his customers feel good. It pleased them to think that they had put one over on Harry, but he always had a quiet laugh to himself.

One year the whole San Joaquin valley was nearly ruined by a severe frost that all but wiped out a great crop of grapes and oranges. Harry got into his Studebaker and drove into the country. Frost-bitten oranges were absolutely

worthless because the Board of Health wouldn't allow them to be marketed, but Harry had an idea. He went out to the orange groves, and looked at the trees loaded with fruit that was now worthless. He talked to the farmers and told them how sorry he was.

Then he said:

"But maybe I can help you out a little. I can use your frost-bitten oranges . . . for hog and cattle feed. Hogs don't care if an orange is frost-bitten, and the juice is good for them the same way it's good for people . . . vitamins. You don't have to do anything. I'll have the oranges picked and hauled away, and I'll give you a check for twenty-five dollars, spot cash."

That year he sent over twenty truckloads of frost-bitten oranges to Los Angeles for the orange-juice stands, and he cleaned up another small fortune.

Everyone said he could turn anything into money. He could figure a way of making money out of anything. When the rest of the world was down in the mouth, Harry was on his toes, working on the Los Angeles angle of disposing of bad oranges.

He never bothered about having an office. The whole town was his office, and whenever he wanted to sit down, he would go up to the eighth floor of Cory Building and sit in M. Peters' office, and chew the rag with the attorney. He would talk along casually, but all the time he would be finding out about contracts, and how to make people come through with money, and how to attach property, and so on. A lot of people were in debt to him, and he meant to get his money.

He had sold electric refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, radios, and a lot of other modern things to people who couldn't afford to buy them, and he had sold these things simply by talking about them, and by showing catalogue pictures of them. The customer had to pay freight and everything else. All Harry did was talk and sell. If a man couldn't pay cash for a radio, Harry would get five dollars down and a note for the balance, and if the man couldn't make his payments, Harry would attach the man's home, or his vineyard, or his automobile, or his horse, or anything else the man owned. And the amazing thing was that no one ever criticised him for his business methods. He was very smooth about attaching a man's property, and he would calmly explain that it was the usual procedure, according to law. What was right was right.

No one could figure out what Harry wanted with so much money. He already had money in the bank, a big car, and he wasn't interested in girls; so what

was he saving up all the money for? A few of his customers sometimes asked him, and Harry would look confused a moment, as if he himself didn't know, and then he would come out and say:

"I want to get hold of a half million dollars so I can retire."

It was pretty funny, Harry thinking of retiring at eighteen. He had left high school in his first year because he hadn't liked the idea of sitting in a classroom listening to a lot of nonsense about starting from the bottom and working up, and so on, and ever since he had been on the go, figuring out ways to make money.

Sometimes people would ask him what he intended to do after he retired, and Harry would look puzzled again, and finally he would say, "Oh, I guess I'll take a trip around the world."

"Well, if he does," everyone thought, "he'll sell something everywhere he goes. He'll sell stuff on the trains and on the boats and in the foreign cities. He won't waste a minute looking around. He'll open a catalogue and sell them foreigners everything you can think of."

But things happen in a funny way, and you can never tell about people, even about people like Harry. Anybody is liable to get sick. Death and sickness play no favourites; they come to all men. Presidents and kings and movie stars, they all die, they all get sick.

Even Harry got sick. Not mildly, not merely something casual like the flu that you can get over in a week, and be as good as new again. Harry got T. B. and he got it in a bad way, poor kid.

Well, the sickness got Harry, and all that money of his in the Valley Bank didn't help him a lot. Of course he did try to rest for a while, but that was out of the question. Lying in bed, Harry would try to sell life insurance to his best friends. Harry's cousin, Simon Gregory, told me about this. He said it wasn't that Harry really wanted more money; it was simply that he couldn't open his mouth unless it was to make a sales talk. He couldn't carry on an ordinary conversation because he didn't know the first thing about anything that didn't have something to do with insurance, or automobiles, or real estate. If somebody tried to talk politics or maybe religion, Harry would look irritated, and he would start to make a sales talk. He even asked Simon Gregory how old he was, and when Simon said that he was twenty-two, Harry got all excited.

"Listen, Simon," he said, "you are my cousin, and I want to do you a favour. You haven't a day to lose if you intend to be financially independent when you are sixty-five. I have just the policy you need. Surely you can afford to

pay six dollars and twenty-seven cents a month for the next forty- three years. You won't be able to go to many shows; but what is more important, to see a few foolish moving pictures, or to be independent when you are sixty-five?"

It almost made Simon bawl to hear Harry talking that way, sick as he was.

The doctor told Harry's folks that Harry ought to go down to Arizona for a year or two, that it was his only hope, but when they talked the matter over with Harry, he got sore and said the doctor was trying to get him to spend his money. He said he was all right, just a cold in the chest, and he told his folks to ask the doctor to stay away. "Get some other doctor," he said. "Why should I go down to Arizona?"

Every now and then we would see Harry in town, talking rapidly to someone, trying to sell something, but it would be for only a day or two, and then he would have to go back to bed. He kept this up for about two years, and you ought to see the change that came over that poor boy. It was really enough to make you feel rotten. To look at him you would think he was the loneliest person on earth, but the thing that hurt most was the realization that if you tried to talk to him, or tried to be friendly toward him, he would turn around and try to sell you life insurance. That's what burned a man up. There he was dying on his feet, and still wanting to sell healthy people life insurance. It was too sad not to be funny.

Well, one day (this was years ago) I saw Simon Gregory in town, and he looked sick. I asked him what the trouble was, and he said Harry had died and that he had been at the bedside at the time, and now he was feeling rotten. The things Harry talked about, dying. It was terrible. Insurance, straight to the end, financial independence at sixty-five.

Harry's photograph was in *The Evening Herald*, and there was a big story about his life, how smart Harry had been, how ambitious, and all that sort of thing. That's what it came to, but somehow there was something about that crazy jackass that none of us can forget.

He was different, there is no getting away from it. Nowadays he is almost a legend with us, and there are a lot of children in this town who were born after Harry died, and yet they know as much about him as we do, and maybe a little more. You would think he had been some great historical personage, somebody to talk to children about in order to make them ambitious or something. Of course most of the stories about him are comical, but just the same they make him out to be a really great person. Hardly anyone remembers the name of our last mayor, and there haven't been any great

men from our town, but all the kids around here know about Harry. It's pretty remarkable when you bear in mind that he died before he was twenty-three.

Whenever somebody fails to accomplish some unusual undertaking in our town, people say to one another, "Harry would have done it." And everybody laughs, remembering him, the way he rushed about town, waking people up, making deals. A couple of months ago, for example, there was a tight-wire walker on the stage of the Hippodrome Theatre, and he tried to turn a somersault in the air and land on the tight-wire, but he couldn't do it. He would touch the wire with his feet, lose his balance, and leap to the stage. Then he would try it over again, from the beginning, music and all, the drum rolling to make you feel how dangerous it was. This acrobat tried to do the trick three times and failed, and while he was losing his balance the fourth time, some young fellow away back in the gallery hollered out as loud as he could, "Get Harry. Harry is the man for the emergency." Then everybody in the theatre busted out laughing. The poor acrobat was stunned by the laughter, and he began to swear at the audience in Spanish. He didn't know about our town's private joke.

All this will give you an idea what sort of a name Harry made for himself, but the funniest stories about him are the ones that have to do with Harry in heaven, or in hell, selling earthquake insurance, and automobiles, and buying clothes cheap. He was a world-beater. He was different. Everybody likes to laugh about him, but all the same this whole town misses him, and there isn't a man who knew him who doesn't wish that he was still among us, tearing around town, talking big business, making things pop, a real American go-getter.

Harry: The Boy Who Sold Everything

Harry was a special boy. He loved making money. Everything he did turned into money. By age fourteen, he had \$600 in the Valley Bank. He earned all of it himself. Harry was born to sell things.

When he was eight or nine, Harry went door to door. He showed housewives colorful pictures of Jesus and other holy people. These pictures came from a company in Ohio. Each picture cost fifteen cents, or four for fifty cents.

"Look, lady," Harry said, "this is Jesus. Isn't it beautiful? This one is Paul or maybe Moses. From the Bible." Soon, many houses in the neighborhood had these pictures. Some still do. Harry helped spread these pictures, which was a good thing.

Later, Harry sold magazine subscriptions. The magazine was called True Stories. He showed pictures from the magazine to women. "This story is about a lady," he said. "She married an older man but loved his young son. What would you do? This magazine has fifteen true stories every month. Romance, mystery, and more. It also explains dreams and gives beauty tips." In two months, over sixty women bought the magazine. After that, some women started acting differently. A few had secret love affairs. Others used makeup and wore new clothes. The neighborhood changed a little.

When Harry was older, he bought used cars. He got old Fords, Chevrolets, and other small cars for cheap—\$15 or \$20 each. He fixed them a little and painted them bright colors like red or blue. Then he sold them to high school boys for much more money. Soon, the town was full of colorful cars. Boys drove their girlfriends to the countryside at night or on weekends. This caused some problems. Some boys had to marry early. A few girls had babies and didn't know who the father was. But many girls found husbands because of the cars.

Harry was too busy to spend time with girls. He only cared about money. By seventeen, he was rich for his age. He dressed well, too. He bought suits at low prices because he didn't like others making money from him. If a suit cost \$27.50, Harry offered \$12. "I know how much this costs," he said. "At \$12, you still make money." He usually got the suit for \$15, with changes to fit him perfectly. He argued about every detail. Store owners sold to him because Harry's style brought other customers. But Harry was difficult. After buying something, he tried to sell the store owner insurance or a car. He often succeeded.

One year, a big frost ruined oranges and grapes in the San Joaquin Valley. The oranges were worthless because they couldn't be sold for food. Harry had an idea. He drove to the farms and talked to farmers. "I'm sorry about your oranges," he said. "But I can use them for animal feed. Hogs don't mind frost. I'll pick the oranges and pay you \$25 cash." The farmers agreed. Harry sent the oranges to Los Angeles for juice stands. He made a lot of money again.

People said Harry could make money from anything. When others were sad, Harry was busy. He didn't need an office. The whole town was his office. Sometimes he sat in a lawyer's office to talk and learn about business, like contracts and collecting money. Many people owed him money. He sold things like refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, and radios to people who couldn't afford them. If they couldn't pay, Harry took their house, car, or other things. He said it was normal business. Nobody got mad at him. He was smooth and

smart.

Nobody knew why Harry wanted so much money. He had a big car and nice clothes. He didn't care about girls. When people asked, Harry said, "I want \$500,000 so I can retire." That was funny because he was only eighteen. He left high school early. He didn't like classes about working slowly to succeed. He wanted to move fast.

People asked what he would do after retiring. Harry looked confused. "Maybe I'll travel the world," he said. Everyone thought he would sell things everywhere he went—on trains, boats, and in foreign cities.

But life can be surprising. Even Harry got sick. He didn't have a small illness like a cold. He had tuberculosis, a serious disease. His money couldn't help much. He tried to rest, but he couldn't stop selling. In bed, he tried to sell insurance to his friends. His cousin Simon said Harry didn't want more money—he just didn't know how to talk about anything else. If someone talked about politics or religion, Harry got annoyed and started selling.

The doctor said Harry should go to Arizona to get better. But Harry didn't want to spend money. "It's just a cold," he said. "I don't need a new doctor." Sometimes Harry went to town to sell things, but he was too sick. He had to rest again. Over two years, he changed. He looked lonely and weak. It was sad. If you tried to be kind to him, he would try to sell you insurance. That made people feel bad.

Harry died when he was young. His cousin Simon was with him. Simon said Harry talked about insurance until the end. It was sad and strange. The newspaper wrote a big story about Harry. It said he was smart and worked hard. Everyone in town remembered him.

Now, Harry is like a legend. Even children born after he died know his story. They hear funny stories about him. People say he was great, even if he caused some trouble. When someone fails at something hard, people say, "Harry would have done it!" Everyone laughs, remembering how Harry rushed around, making deals.

Once, at a theater, a man tried to do a trick on a tightrope. He failed many times. Someone shouted, "Get Harry! He could do it!" The whole audience laughed. The performer didn't understand, but it showed how famous Harry was. People still tell funny stories about Harry selling things in heaven or hell. He was different. The town misses him. Everyone wishes he was still here, making things exciting, a true American go-getter.