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A New Beginning

by Mary Brannigan

I've often fantasised about finding a massive stash of cash. Well, why not. It brightened up many a miserable evening in my pokey bedsit in Battersea. The thought crossed my mind again as I dressed to the nines for the party at Marcie's new flat in the Barbican. We'd been friends all through university, but whereas she'd graduated with a first in economics, I'd left with a measly third in English Literature. While Marcie nailed a good position with a prestigious firm of accountants, I struggled in one low paid job after another. Now my friend had reached the dizzy heights of partner in her firm, and had managed to buy her first home. So I was on my way to the house warming.

The tube was relatively empty as I took my seat, the rush hour being over for another day. I was picking up a discarded Evening Standard from an adjoining seat when I noticed the briefcase on the floor. There were no other passengers in this section of the compartment, so I picked it up in readiness for handing to the guard at the end of my journey. Being of a nosey disposition I decided to take a peek inside. To my amazement it was stuffed full with fifty pound notes. Who says dreams don't come true. Must be at least a hundred thousand I thought. I imagined the guard's face when I'd given it to him. Then I began to wonder if I should take it to a police station instead. After all, what if the guard decided to keep it for himself?

I had another twenty minutes before reaching my destination and during this time I came up with all sorts of theories as to how it came to be there. Who carried this amount of money around in a briefcase? As the minutes passed I began to think of all the things I could do with the money. Top of my list was a flat I'd seen advertised in the estate agents on my local high street. There might even be enough to jettison my second hand furniture if I moved. Get thee behind me satan I thought, as my conscience began to prick at the very idea of keeping the case. I'd never as much as stolen a sweet from the corner shop as a child. My parents were honest people who had taught us children the value of working for we wanted. They didn't even believe in buying goods on credit.

However, now that my fantasy had become reality I couldn't bear the thought of letting it go. Surely someone who carried this amount of money on the tube must have plenty more where this came from. By the time the train pulled into my station the decision was made. I crossed to the opposite platform and boarded the next train back home. When I walked into my bedsit the dinginess of the place reinforced my plan of action. For the first time in my life dishonesty seemed the best policy. Nonetheless, I had a restless night tossing and turning at the enormity of what I was doing. Next morning I rang my employer feigning a bad dose of flu to enable me to head straight for the estate agency in order to view the flat they'd advertised. It was everything I'd hoped for, with floor to ceiling windows affording views over the river. I didn't hesitate to make an offer slightly below the asking price. After all I was a cash buyer with a deposit of one hundred and thirty thousand which would mean a mortgage of only seventy thousand affordable on even my low salary. The briefcase had, in fact, contained two hundred thousand but I was keeping back the balance for furniture and emergencies.

It transpired that the flat's owners were living abroad and wanted a quick sale. Thus things moved swiftly and two months later I had the keys in my possession ready to move in. By dint of careful shopping at stores holding clearance sales I managed to get what I wanted within budget. Having had my elegant goods delivered to my new home in advance of moving day, all that remained to do was hand the bedsit keys to my old landlord and make my way to ten Battersea Wharf. I wandered around the large rooms arranging things to my liking. Then I sat down to write my change of address cards for Marcie and my other friends.

By nightfall I was more than ready drop into my comfortable king sized bed. Before going to sleep I picked up the newspaper I'd bought that morning and flicked through the headlines. Then I saw it "Bank robber apprehended in Chelsea". It seemed two hundred thousand pounds had been stolen from the local branch of Barclays two months ago, and the police had found the fingerprints of a known felon at the scene. The money was still missing as the culprit claimed to have lost it on his journey fleeing from the scene of the crime. For a moment I felt my heart leap in fear, till I remembered they couldn't possibly know where it had gone. Putting my lingering sense of guilt to rest in my subconscious I dropped off to sleep.

On waking next morning I stretched out to luxuriate in my new bed, only to find myself aching and cramped in my old armchair in the bedsit.