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Riches to Rags

by Garf Collins

The setting sun reflected off the ornamental lake created a glow on the ceiling of the Versailles room. Walt flourished his beloved hunter watch, which he had kept since undergraduate days. It told the date as well as the time. 8th May 2019 9.30.

His young wife swept in through the double doors. *God, that woman knows how to dress to impress*, he thought. “Hi, darling. What are you up to today. It’s time we planned an early night if you know what I mean!”

“So sorry my little pudding. I’ve got Freddie and Almeda coming over tonight to talk about that big ball we are organizing.”

Well that’s that then, thought Henry, *as his wife departed with her jewellery sparkling in the sunlight, I’m not sure I’m getting what I paid for there. I wonder if I’ve got time to go to town for lunch.* He took out his watch.

“Must be something wrong. The damn things gone barmy. It’s obviously not 2017.” As he looked up, he saw that the room was completely bare. He was sitting with architects plans, clutching a solicitor’s letter headed PRENUPTIAL AGREEMENT.

“I must be going mad,” he shouted as he ran into the garden.

As he ran down the drive, the trees so magnificently planted popped out onto lorries and were driven away. He looked at his watch again. 2016.

Walt was overwhelmed by this madness, so he drove to the nearby town and took a room in the Red Heart for the night.

After a troubled sleep, he ordered some coffee and looked at the email on his phone.

“22nd May 2014, read the first one. Subject Sale of Walemil Industries

Wal, here are the papers to sign to complete the deal. These include the settlement with Emily now that you have decided to part company.

After leaving the hotel, he came across a semi-derelict building which he seemed to recognize. Outside it, a board announced. ‘Acquired by Waltemil Industries.’ Then he remembered this was where he had started his company. He consulted his watch after fumbling through his working overalls. 9th April 2003. For a moment, he dwelt with pride on the enormous conglomerate they had built from that small beginning which now enabled the life he was enjoying. “Except I’m not,” he moaned as he returned to the hotel.

“How can I help you, sir?” said the receptionist.

“I’ve just come to collect my things.”

“But Sir. You’ve just arrived,” she said, looking at his scruffy clothes and wondering if he was the sort of person they wanted to encourage.

“I really am...,” began Walt but realized that she might be right as he saw on the wall display the date 17th July 1990. He caught sight of himself in a mirror in the hall and saw a slender youth of about twenty-four whose clothes were old and worn. Despite his confident manner, he was obviously penniless.

Walt left the hotel again and with great trepidation took out his watch once more.