

TOO MUCH FOR A FOOL!

It was a beautiful day, a sun in the sky kind of day, and he was strolling down the street, pretty much rolling down the street, with a big stride and a look in his eye that said what he didn't care about wasn't worth caring about.

"Good morning to you!" he called out to everyone he saw, and anybody who knew any better shouted, "Good morning!" back, And when they did, he raised his hat, his old brown derby, and walked on. He was glad and they were glad: the whole world was at his fingertips and the whole town was at his disposal and all his worries could be placed on the head of a pin and blown away by the smallest of breezes.

And he was right: it *was* a good morning. A beautiful day and if there was a cloud in the sky, it was surely packing its bag and heading somewhere else. The sun shone so hard it didn't just look brighter, it sounded brighter, like a big brass gong, and the sky was so blue you'd have thought there had never been any other colours.

He strolled past stores and banks and houses and libraries. He strolled by mothers with prams and old men with sticks and boys and girls with bikes and balls, and to everyone he met he wished a cheery good morning. And if they had an atom of sense in their skull, they wished him good morning back. The minister on his way to church, the doctor hurrying to a bedside, even the cop on the beat: from everyone a tip of the hat and a "Good morning to you!"

On he went, his stride somehow lengthening til it seemed his legs must be longer than his body, his smile getting wider until it was broader than his face, and his eyes – already glittering like blue marbles – becoming brighter and shinier until you swore they contained the sky and the sun, all trapped together in the twin sockets of his face. Nobody knew where he was going, in his old brown derby and his red ascot with the yellow diamond pin, and nobody wanted to either. Just so long as he was going there.

It was a beautiful day, getting more and more that way by the second, as he walked through the town square. A balloon-seller bent down to give a little girl her change, and maybe he didn't see the man in the crown brown derby and the red ascot. Or maybe he did and he was too busy counting out dimes to hear his greeting. Maybe he was just an old grouch. Nobody could say, and it would soon be too late to ask, because just as the balloon-seller was getting up again and the little girl was walking away with her purchase, a pair of big long brogues stopped in front of the balloon cart and an old brown derby tipped down as a voice said:

"I said good morning!"

The balloon-seller looked up. He was a cheery soul, a friendly man with time for everyone, but when he saw the face under the brown derby, he went whiter than bone.

"I said –"

The balloon-seller wanted to reply, he really did, but the words that were trying to fly up into his mouth got stuck in his throat and fluttered there like birds trapped in a chimney. So he said nothing.

"Seems to me some people got no manners!" said the voice, and he took the yellow diamond pin from out of his red ascot and he

- *popped* -

the balloon-seller.

He shook the tiny drop of red from his pin and stuck it back in his ascot.
“Too much for a fool!” he cried.

On he walked, his mood recovering now, nothing different in the world except for an empty balloon cart and a perfectly round drop of something red on the ground. On he walked, down the crowded hill and past the old town hall and through the park.

“Good morning!” he called and everyone he called to responded. Maybe they didn’t sound as full of cheer-o as they might, but such is life.

In the park there was a small crowd, watching a game of bowls. He was about to stop by to take a look – he loved games of all kinds – when the crowd turned. They all had sad and angry faces, like they didn’t know how to feel.

“Good morning!” he cried, to be sociable. But none of them said good morning back.

He decided to give them a second chance.

“Sure is a beautiful day,” he said.

Nothing.

This was too much. There was nothing for it.

He turned their frowns upside down.

“Too much for a fool!” he said, striding on.

Soon the spring had returned to his step, and he walked on out of the town and through the countryside. Fields of yellow waved as he passed, trees bent down to give him apples, and the cows themselves mooed their approval.

But now he could hear other feet behind him, loud, running feet, and he could hear shouts, and stones falling on the road. Without breaking step, he blinked his eyes. The air seemed to blink with him, with a porcelain click you could hear. Behind him, the feet and the stones and the shouts were swallowed up in flames.

The fire didn’t stop, somehow. It spread from tree to field to village and town, and soon the whole world was burning.

Just as it became a ball of yellow flame, a tiny planet playing at being a sun, he saw the bridge. Untouched by fire, it started in the middle of the burning road in front of him and it rose up high, ever higher into the blue sky.

He began to climb, his stride longer still until he seemed to step over moons and worlds.

The planet turned black behind him, charred and useless. He didn’t even look back, just sniffed the black vacuum like it was the freshest air of a spring morning, and strode on. His voice echoed in the emptiness like a holler in a canyon.

“Too much for a fool!”