

GOLD



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Gold

The heat was punishing and my temper made the work none too easier. After weeks and weeks of trying to avoid digging the back of the garden up, I had finally relented. Louise watched on from the kitchen window to ensure that I was doing a good job of it.

I paused and took a drink from the bottle. The water was warm in the midday sun. The only refreshment while I dug all the rocks and dead plants up.

“I’ll make you a nice cup of tea when you finish it all,” she said.

I drank and surveyed my work. I had barely made a dent. I was both dismayed and pleased with this. Dismayed that after two hours of back-breaking work I had achieved very little and pleased because I had proved myself right with Louise. Not that it would have any effect on her. She wanted it finished by dinnertime.

“Tomorrow we will go to the garden centre and buy new plants,” she said. “I want to make it all beautiful before you go back to work on Monday.”

Great. Two solid days of hard labour followed by another week at the grind. It made the digging all the more hateful. To follow it with another seven days of that grim office and the loathsome Mr Bartlett and his passive-aggressive mood swings. I had come close to walking out at least ten times last week.

I put the bottle of water back on the pathway to make sure it didn’t tip over and resumed my digging stance. My back creaked in protest and I winced at the small shard of pain that knifed into my lower back muscles.

Shoving the spade into the dry, almost solid, clay, I jarred against it as I hit yet another rock. How many of these things were buried at the back here?

Like an abandoned rock garden long forgotten in the 1950s and left for me to dig up because the wife wanted an English rose garden.

“It’s my first proper garden,” she had said to me earlier. “Can’t we make it nice?”

I bent down and pulled away pieces of dried-up soil and bits of dead root. Beneath the soil was a yellowish piece of garbage. I had already found a doll, along with part of a bike and a pipe. I grabbed the side of it and pulled it away. As it came free, I saw that it was a heavy piece of metal, but a dirty brownish-yellow.

I picked it up and brushed the dirt off it. It weighed heavy in my hand. The sun caught it and it glittered like — like gold.

I raised it to the light of the sun and gazed at it. It couldn't be. Not just buried in the back of our garden. Louise had noticed me staring into space again and was staring at me from the sink. I waved at her and she waved back; she nodded at the back of the garden and the shovel. I waved more frantically for her to come out and talk to me. I saw her muttering to herself as she went to the side entrance door of the house and then appeared at the top of the path leading down the garden.

"What?" she said, frowning at me.

"Look at this," I said, holding out the fragment in my hand.

"What is it?" she said, squinting at it in the sun.

I leaned towards her to lower my voice. "I think it's gold," I said.

Louise pulled her head back and looked at me in disbelief. "Gold?" she said, her lips pulled away in a tight grimace.

I nodded. "I think so. Feel the weight of it."

She took it from me and she nearly dropped it. She caught it in both hands and raised the weight of it up and down, bouncing the large rock between her fingers.

"It's heavy," she said.

I nodded again. "Like gold. Gold is heavy."

"How do you know it's gold?" she asked me.

"I don't. But gold is heavy, and that rock is heavy. Plus, it's the colour of gold. It looks like it could be gold."

Her eyes went from me to the rock and back to me again. "Gold?" she asked, her voice lowered in a serious tone.

I took it from her and examined it. Small crevices ran around it and inside the grooves, the colour remained consistent. A solid gold colour, discoloured by years of being underground.

"That must be worth a lot of money," she said.

"Yeah," I said. In front of me at the top of the path lay the two-bedroom terrace house we had bought. We still owed a fortune on it, a mortgage that would take us years to pay off. Me working for Mr Bartlett, Louise and her part-time job at the small clothing manufacturer three days a week. Things were tight much of the time, but we got through okay.

But if this were a solid piece of gold, we could pay off the entire house loan. We would have enough left over to put a big pile of cash in the bank. We could invest some of it, buy a brand new car. Get new clothes. Go on holiday. We hadn't had a holiday for years. Just the occasional day trip to the seaside. Hardly two weeks in the sun.

This rock in my hand could be the end of all our troubles. It could be the beginning of a whole new life.

I laughed and threw the rock a few inches in the air. It landed in my hand awkwardly and fell to the ground with a solid thud. A piece fell off and revealed the familiar brownish colour of the rocks I had been digging up for the last few hours. It was just another rock painted yellow. Maybe to decorate the rock garden from bygone days.

“Gold,” said Louise and hissed air at me through her teeth. She marched off back to the house. “I want it all dug up by dinnertime.”

Reading Comprehension Questions

What is the weather like in the story?

What is the narrator's mood at the beginning of the story?

How long had it been before the narrator decided to dig the garden?

How much progress has the narrator made in the garden?

He says he was both dismayed and pleased with the progress. What is he happy about? And what is he not so happy about?

What are Louise's plans for the garden?

Why is the narrator angry to spend his weekend this way?

Does he like his job? How do you know?

What does the shovel hit?

What items had the narrator found while digging?

What item does he find that is so interesting to him?

What does he think it is? Why does he think this?

What does his wife think?

What fantasies does the narrator have about the object?

What shatters all his fantasies?

Vocabulary

Go through all the story and find any new or difficult words and phrases.

Look these words and phrases up in your dictionary and make a note of them in your vocabulary notebook.

Write down the meaning of all the words and phrases.

Now try to use these words and phrases in sentences of your own.

Discussion Questions

What kind of person is the narrator? Describe his life and what he thinks of it.

Is he foolish? Or just naïve and wishful?

What kind of person is his wife?

Do you think they could solve all their problems with a piece of gold? Or would they just find new problems?

Why do people have fantasies of finding gold or winning the lottery? Why don't they do something about their lives to make themselves happier?

If you found something valuable like gold or a diamond, what would you do with it?

Can sudden wealth make a person happy? Why/why not?

Are you happy with all that you have in your life? Could a piece of gold improve your life?

How could the man in the story improve his life? Do you think his wife would support him?

What three steps could you make to improve your life, starting from today? What is stopping you from starting?

Credits

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