

A CHARMING  
SHORT STORY

## The One-Cent Prize

COMPLETE IN  
THIS ISSUE

—EMMA C. DOWD—

"JUST like an old maid! Only one cent! If it was a man he'd say five dollars out and out, or a book, or something. I wonder if she thinks anybody is simpleton enough to work a whole week for one cent. No, thank you; you don't catch this chap in any such game." And Fred Simpson concluded his little speech by elevating his freckled nose as high as convenience would allow.

A dozen boys and girls had grouped themselves in the shade of the big elm tree just west of the school-house; and there seemed to be but one opinion respecting the prize which had that afternoon been offered by Miss Brinsley, a wealthy maiden lady of Southdown.

"Halloo! here comes the Sexton!" shouted Henry Giddings, as an overgrown, awkward boy drew near, with a tin dinner-pail and a small, thin book in his hand. "Guess he's going to try for the One-Cent Prize. He's got his spelling book."

A laugh went around the little circle at Ruel Sexton's expense; but Ruel took it good-naturedly, as he always took the boys' jokes and banterings. He had been dubbed "the Sexton" on the first day of his attendance at the "big elm school-house," and the name had clung to him for the three years afterward, till Ruel had grown to hear it with no more thought that if his mates had called him Tom, Hal, or Sam, had he chanced to own one of those time-honored nicknames.

"I don't know," I'm going to try for the prize," answered Ruel, in his easy, monotonous drawl. "I'm as likely as not to carry home my spelling book any night if the words look harder'n usual. It appears to me that one cent ain't an amazing big prize to try for."

"But it is only the first week that it is one cent," spoke up a little girl. "Miss Brinsley said it was to be doubled every week."

"Oh, yes," said Fred Simpson, ironically, "counting on his fingers, 'one cent the first week, two cents the second week, four cents the third, eight cents the fourth, and the whole sum of sixteen cents the fifth week. The Sexton had better try for it by all means. He might get enough to buy him a new coat.'"

At this a slight blush rose to the boy's face, but he replied, good-humoredly, looking down at his coat sleeves and giving each a little pull nearer the sun-browned wrists.

"I reckon I'd earn it quicker sawing up Deacon Chauker's wood. Miss Chauker said she'd get me a new coat when I got the wood all done."

"How much have you got to do?" asked Henry.

"Well," said Ruel, slowly, as if taking a mental measurement of the Deacon's wood pile. "I reckon there's as much as ten load in all. But I've got it more'n half done."

"You'd better stick to the wood, then!" was Henry's comment, as the little group broke up and moved off in twos and threes down the road.

A few rods further on, where the road branched off toward the left, Ruel Sexton turned aside to pursue his solitary walk of two miles. Ruel was an orphan, and Deacon Chauker's low, red farmhouse, nestled at the foot of Spruce Knob, was the only home he knew. He was a distant relative of the Deacon's, but so very distant that he could not be said to occupy a relative place in the household. He was not ill-treated; but he was only the "chore boy" to the Deacon and his wife and Aunt Matilda, and was never en-

couraged to venture beyond the kitchen and his own tiny room in the loft above.

His walk home led through the woods for the greater part; and as it was yet early September, everything was still in its fall summer beauty. Ruel loved all wild things, and to-day he could not forbear stopping now and then to pluck a waving fern or to gather a handful of the blue gentians which fringed the little brook. But recollecting the pile of wood to be sawed before his coat sleeves were to be lengthened, he hastened on, thinking there might be time for a little work before he must go for the cows. Afterward, plying the saw to and fro, his thought reverted to the spelling prize.

"Let's see," he mused. "The whole term is fifteen weeks; and Miss Roberts said that the last examination would count the same as a week; so that makes sixteen. I wonder how much it would all make. Henry said it would be only sixteen cents the fifth week. That isn't much. Then the sixth week it would be twice that. Twice sixteen is thirty-two, and twice thirty-two is sixty-four, and twice sixty-four is one hundred and twenty-eight, and twice one hundred and twenty-eight is two hundred and fifty-six, and twice two hundred and fifty-six is five hundred and twelve."

The saw stopped, and Ruel stared at the log in a dazed sort of way. Could it be five dollars and twelve cents! "I must have made a mistake," he thought, with a half-ashamed laugh that he could for a moment have believed that it would amount to so large a sum. "I'll figure it out on my slate when I get my chores done," was his conclusion; and he gave himself to his work.

"Doin' sums?" asked Lowly, concisely, stopping, dish towel in hand, to look over Ruel's shoulder, as he sat in the doorway to catch the last rays of light from the western sky.

Lowly was Mrs. Chauker's maid-of-all-work; and she and Ruel were best friends.

"I can't believe it! There must be a mistake!" said Ruel, in a breathless, excited way, scowling his forehead over his slateful of figures.

"Don't believe what?" said Lowly, looking puzzled.

"It is so much!" said Ruel, in a scared tone. "Miss Brinsley never would offer so much money!"

"I wish you'd tell me what you are talking about!" said Lowly, laughing. "I never see you so excited before. What does all you?"

"I'll tell you all about it, if you'll come and sit down here."

"If it's likely to be a long story I might as well hang up my dish towel first," and Lowly vanished behind the sink-room door, only to reappear a moment later, smoothing down her pink gingham apron, and she announced herself ready to hear what Ruel had to say.

"You see," the boy began, "Miss Brinsley was over to school this afternoon, and she said she got a letter from somebody the other day, and the spelling was so awful that it set her to thinking. She talked a good deal about the importance of learning to spell, and said a lot that I can't remember."

"I always thought she was a long-winded woman!" put in Lowly.

"Well, she finally said she would give a prize to every scholar for each week that he did not miss from now to Christmas; and if anybody should miss one he would lose his prize for that week. She said she was going to begin with one cent—"

"One cent!" broke in Ruel's listener, disbelievingly. "And such a rich woman!"

"You just wait!" said Ruel. "She said it would be one cent the first week, and then she would double the first week's prize to make the second, and double the second to make the third, and so on through the fifteen weeks of the term; and then we were to be examined on all we had been over in the fifteen weeks, and all that were perfect were to have the fifteenth prize doubled. So there will be sixteen prizes in all; or sixteen part-prizes, she called it. Now," lowering his voice, "how much do you suppose that last prize would be?"

"I don't know," said Lowly. "Somewhere near a dollar, likely."

"Over three hundred dollars!" said Ruel.

"Pshaw, Ruel Sexton! You've gone and made a mistake. It never could be so much in this world!" said Lowly, decisively.

"It don't seem so!" said Ruel. "But I've been clear through it two or three times; and I can't make it anything else."

"I'll light the lamp, and look it over myself. Dear, dear, if it was that, I'd wish I was going to school so I could try for it."

For the next five minutes two heads bent over the slate that had been in service since Deacon Chauker's babyhood, and two pairs of eyes eagerly scanned its surface. This is what they read:

\$ .01—first week.	\$ 2.56—ninth week.
2	2
.02—second week.	5.12—tenth week
2	2
.04—third week.	10.24—eleventh week.
2	2
.08—fourth week.	20.48—twelfth
2	2 week.
.16—fifth week.	40.96—thirteenth
2	2 week.
.32—sixth week.	81.92—fourteenth
2	2 week.
.64—seventh week.	163.84—fifteenth
2	2 week.
1.28—eight week.	\$327.68—Examination.

"It is all right!" ejaculated Lowly. "But, goodness me!" she continued. "That's only for each week. I'll just add 'em together, and see what the whole thing will be."

The stub of a pencil moved slowly in the girl's fingers, until figure after figure was gone carefully over. But neither she nor Ruel was prepared for the result.

"It's six hundred and fifty-five dollars and thirty-five cents! Well, I declare for it, if Miss Brinsley hasn't opened her heart this time; and her pocket-book, too, which is more to the purpose. Six hundred dollars! Yes, that's worth tryin' for."

"Lowly," said Ruel, deliberately, as he lifted his eyes from the slate, "I'm going to get that prize!"

"Are you good in spelling?" questioned Lowly, eyeing with a doubtful expression the written words placed opposite the figures.

"No," admitted the boy. "I 'most always miss. I went clear down to the foot of the class this morning on patriarch. But I can study, Lowly. Once in a while, when I've studied real hard, I've been perfect; and," he added brightly, "I'll study day and night. I'll do anything!"

"And I'll help you. I'll hear your lessons till you know every word by heart."

"Oh! will you?" exclaimed the boy, his