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My Lost Dollar

— *Stephen Leacock*

Never lend books, for no one ever returns them; the only books I have in my library are those that other people have lent me

— Anatole France

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Warm-up

Do the following warm-up activities:

1. List the things you might have borrowed from someone and forgotten to return.
2. Share an experience when a friend totally forgot to return something precious that you had lent him/her.

About the Author



Stephen Leacock (1869 – 1944): Stephen Leacock was an English-born Canadian teacher, political scientist, writer, and humourist. In the early part of the 20th century he was the best-known humourist in the English-speaking world. He is known for his light humour along with criticisms of people's follies. The Stephen Leacock Memorial Medal for Humour was named in his honour. In 1921 he was a founding member of the Canadian Authors' Association. Leacock was diagnosed with throat cancer and died on 28th March 1944. Some of his fiction works are *Nonsense Novels* (1911), *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich* (1914), *Essays and Literary Studies* (1916), *The Iron Man and the Tin Woman* (1929), *My Remarkable Uncle* (1942). For the non-fiction list also he has a long list including *Elements of Political Science* (1906), *The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice* (1920), *Humour: Its Theory and technique, with Examples and Samples* (1935) etc.

The Passage

Glossary

Difficult words:

prospect = chance, probability

grave = tomb

merely = simply, plainly, only

emphasis = stress, force

grudge = to allow unwillingly, to show discontent

demeanour = way of behaving

apparently = clearly, obviously

The Passage

My friend Todd owes me a dollar. He has **owed** it to me for twelve months, and I fear there is little **prospect** of his ever returning it. I can **realize** whenever I meet him that he has forgotten that he owes me a dollar. He meets me in the same frank friendly way as always. My dollar has clean gone out of his mind. I see that I shall never **get it back**.

On the other hand I know that I shall remember all my life that Todd owes me a dollar. It will make no difference, I trust, to our friendship, but I shall never be able to forget it. I don't know how it is with other people; but if any man borrows a dollar from me I carry the recollection of it to the grave.

Let me **relate** what happened. Todd **borrowed** this dollar last year on the 8th of April (I mention the date in case this should ever meet Todd's eye), just as he was about to leave for Bermuda. He needed a dollar in change to pay his taxi; and I lent it to him. It happened quite simply and naturally, I hardly realized it till it was all over. He merely said, 'Let me have a dollar, will you!' And I said, 'Certainly. Is a dollar enough?' I believe, in fact I know, that when Todd took that dollar he meant to pay for it.

self-conscious =
a feeling of what
others may think of
one

debts = owing
money

probable = possible
expansion = an
act of increasing,
enlarging

conclusion = end,
sum up

**One word
substitute:**

at par = at the same
value

to get back = to
receive something
later

Verbs and Idioms:

to owe = to have
responsibility to pay
or repay

to realize = to
understand easily

to borrow = to take
with the promise to
return

to relate = to
associate

to mislead = to lead
in negative way/
wrong direction

He sent me a note from Hamilton, Bermuda. I thought when I opened it that the dollar would be in it. But it wasn't. He merely said that the temperature was up to nearly 100. The figure **misled** me for a moment.

Todd came back in three weeks. I met him at the train – not because of the dollar, but because I really **esteem** him. I felt it would be nice for him to see someone waiting for him on the platform after being away for three weeks. I said, 'Let's take a taxi up to the Club.' But he answered, 'No, let's walk.'

We spent the evening together, talking about Bermuda. I was thinking of the dollar but of course I didn't **refer** to it. One simply can't. I asked him what currency is used in Bermuda, and whether the American Dollar goes **at par**. I put a slight **emphasis** on the American Dollar, but found again that I could not bring myself to make any reference to it.

It took me some time (I see Todd practically every day at my Club) to realize that he had completely forgotten the dollar. I asked him one day what his trip cost him and he said that he kept no accounts. A little later I asked him if he felt settled down after his trip, and he said that he had practically forgotten about it. So I knew it was all over.

In all this I bear Todd no **grudge**. I have simply added him to the list of men who owe me a dollar and who have forgotten it. There are quite a few of them now. I make no difference in my **demeanour** to them, but I only wish that I could forget.

behaviour

I meet Todd very frequently. Only two nights ago I met him out at dinner and he was talking, **apparently** without **self-consciousness**, about Poland. He said that Poland would never pay her **debts**. You'd think a thing like that would have reminded him wouldn't you? But it didn't seem to.

But meantime a thought – a rather painful thought – has begun to come into my mind at intervals. It is this. If Todd owes me a dollar and has forgotten it, it is possible – indeed it is theoretically **probable** – that there must be men to whom I owe a dollar which I have forgotten. There may be a list of them. The more I think of it the less I like it, because I am quite sure that if I had once forgotten a dollar, I should never pay it, on this side of the grave.

If there are such men I want them to speak out. Not all at once: but in reasonable numbers, and as far as may be in alphabetical order, and I will immediately write their names down on paper. I don't count here men who may have lent me an odd dollar over a bridge table: and I am not thinking (indeed I am taking care not to think) of the man who lent me thirty cents to pay for a bottle of plain soda in the Detroit Athletic Club last month. I always find that there's nothing like plain soda after a tiring ride across the Canadian frontier, and that man who advanced that thirty cents knows exactly why I felt that I had done enough for him. But if any man ever lent me a dollar to pay for a taxi when I was starting for Bermuda, I want to pay it.

to esteem = to
respect highly

to refer = to
mention

More than that: I want to start a general movement, a 'Back to Honesty' movement, for paying all these odd dollars that are borrowed in moments of **expansion**. Let us remember that the greatest nations were built up on the rock basis of absolute honesty.

In **conclusion** may I say that I do particularly ask that no reader of this book will be careless enough to leave this copy round where it might be seen by Major Todd, of the University Club of Montreal.