Luisa: Are you still here? I thought you got off at 3:00.   
  
Max: I picked up a second shift. I could use the money.   
  
Luisa: But I thought you had another part-time job in the evenings.   
  
Max: I normally do, but the restaurant where I work has been cutting back my hours, so I’m trying to pick up as many extra shifts here as I can.   
  
Luisa: And don’t you work at the amusement park on the weekend?   
  
Max: I do half the year, but it’s winter and the park only keeps a skeleton crew on during these months. In the meantime, I’m working for a temp agency, which gives me short-term assignments.   
  
Luisa: I don’t know how you juggle all these jobs.   
  
Max: I have no choice. I have to piece together an income if I want to pay rent.   
  
Luisa: Have you ever thought about going back to school to qualify for other work, something full-time?   
  
Max: Sure, all the time. I’d like a better job, one with benefits and a reliable salary.   
  
Luisa: What’s stopping you?   
  
Max: I have to pay for something called “food,” and I haven’t met my fairy godmother yet!

Luisa begins our dialog by saying to Max “Are you still here?” This is one of those questions you ask when you’re surprised about something obviously Luisa so can see that Max still wherever they are. She says “I thought you got off at 3:00”. To get off of work means to finish your work schedule, to be able to leave the place where you work. If someone says “What time do you get off?” they mean “What time do you get off of work? When do you stop working? What time do you stop working?” Max says “I picked up a second shift”. A shift refers to a period of time when people work, usually this term is used for job when people work at that particular location more than 8 hours or that there are people working at that location for more than 8 hours. It might be, for example, a place where there are someone working 24 hours a day. Well one person is not going to work 24 hours straight so they break up the day into shift so if you work the day shift, you’re working probably from 8 in the morning to around 4, 5 in the afternoon. If you’re working a night shift, you’ll be working perhaps from 4, 5 in the afternoon to midnight. If you’re working what we call the … shift, you’re working probably from 11 o’clock at night or midnight to 7 or 8 in the morning. Those are shifts then, division of the work day in a place that usually opens for more than 8 hours. Max says he picks up a second shift. To pick up here means to get, to obtain. He was working one shift and now he picks up a second shift which means of course he’s working more than 8 hours a day. Why have Max done this? Well he says “I could use the money”. When someone says “I could use the money”, he means that he would be able to benefit from getting more money. He has some needs of extra money. Luisa says “But I thought you had another part-time job in the evenings”. A part-time job is a job usually that is less than 40 hours per week. In United States, 40 hours per week is considered full-time. If it’s less than 40 hours, we might call it part-time. Luisa has thought that Max have another part-time job. Max says “I normally do, but the restaurant where I work has been cutting back my hours”. When we talk about someone cutting back on something we mean that he’s using less of it or he is reducing the number of something. The two-word phrasal verb to cut back then means to reduce the number of something. In this case we’re talking about the restaurant where Max works cutting back his hours. His hours refer to the number of hours that he can work. Max says he’s trying to pick up as many extra shifts here as I can. Luisa then asks “And don’t you work at the amusement park on the weekend?” An amusement park is a large park usually that has lots of what we would call rides in them, places where people especially children can play games and get into these machines that go really fast for example. Disney land is an example of an amusement park here in California. Luisa asks if Max is still working at the amusement park on the weekend. He says “I do half the year” meaning I do work there half of the year “but it’s winter and the park only keeps a skeleton crew on during these months”. Max is saying that the amusement park where he normally works in the summer time only has a skeleton crew during the winter time. A phrase skeleton crew refers to a very small number of workers, the minimum number of workers you can have that … If a business doesn’t have very many customers, it might have very few employees and we might call that a skeleton crew. If during busy time, the company has more employees. This is the case with the amusement park, it has the skeleton crew. The word crew just refers to a group of people. The word skeleton is normally used to describe the bone of your body or the bone of an animal. Max says “In the meantime (meaning during the winter season) I’m working for a temp agency, which gives me short-term assignments”. A temp agency is a company that finds people temporary jobs. The word temp is short for temporary meaning short term, not permanent, not for a long time. There are of course companies that find workers, find people to work for companies that just need workers for short period of time. Max says the temp agency gives him short-term assignment. Short-term refers to a short amount of time, perhaps a week, perhaps even a day. I used to work for 10 agencies when I was in college. I would call up every morning and see if they have any work for me and they would send me to job that would last maybe one day, maybe two or three days, sometime as long as a month. Temp agencies are very popular now especially when the economy is not doing so well, companies don’t want to hire employees full-time. Luisa says “I don’t know how you juggle all these jobs”. The verb to juggle usually refers to throwing objects up in the air and keeping them up in the air. We refer to someone who does that as a juggler but here the verb means to handle many different things at the same time, to be able to do many different things at the same time. Max says “I have no choice (I have no other option). I have to piece together an income if I want to pay rent”. To piece together something means to put together, to assemble. An income refers to the money you get for working. Max is saying that he has to work a little bit at this job and a little bit at that job in order to make enough money to pay for his rent. Luisa says “Have you ever thought about going back to school to qualify for other work, something full-time?” To qualify for something means to have the skills and or education in order to be able to do something. So for example, if you want to be a doctor, you have to study for many years in order to qualify for that kind of job. At least I hope you study many years if you’re a doctor. If not, please don’t be my doctor. Luisa is asking if Max have thought about going back to school to qualify for some kind of job that would be full-time, that would be 40 hours a week. Max says “Sure, all the time” meaning I have thought of it a lot. He says “I’d like a better job, one with benefits and a reliable salary”. Benefits refer to things such as … and vacation time and sick-benefit money you get when you can’t work because you’re sick. These are common benefits that you get when you have the full-time job. Salary refers to money that you get to work at a certain place usually by the month or by the year. When we talk about the salary, we’re talking about money you get regardless of how many hours you work. There are two kinds of way of getting pay. One is by the hours when you get pay, a certain amount of money, for every hour you work. Another way of getting pay is by salary, when you are getting pay on a salary we would say, you are getting a certain amount of money and expected to do your job even if it takes more than the normal 40 hours per week. Luisa says “What’s stopping you?” what’s preventing you from going back to school. Max says “I have to pay for something called food”. Max is making a joke here, he’s saying that he can’t afford to go back to school he doesn’t have enough money to go back to school because in addition to pay his rent, he also has to eat and to eat he has to buy food. He finishes by saying “I haven’t met my fairy godmother yet!” A fairy godmother is a character from children story, story that we tell children usually involve in a woman who has some sort of magical power. The fairy godmother is a common character in certain fairy tales that are told to children. These are made up story about magical advent. Here Max is using the expression to mean that he hasn’t found someone who just going to give him money to pay for his expenses and to go to school. Now let’s listen to the dialog this time at a normal speed.  