Why did Harry decide to give up his little game?

My cousin, Harry, keeps a large curiously shaped bottle on permanent display in his study.

Despite the fact that the bottle is tinted a delicate shade of green, an observant visitor would soon notice that it is filled with what looks like a thick, greyish substance.

If you were to ask Harry what was in the bottle, he would tell you that it contained perfumed mud.

If you expressed doubt or surprise, he would immediately invite you to smell it and then to rub some into your skin.

This brief experiment would dispel any further doubts you might have.

The bottle really does contain perfumed mud.

How Harry came into the possession of this outlandish stuff makes an interesting story, which he is fond of relating.

Furthermore, the acquisition of this bottle cured him of a bad habit he had been developing for years.

Harry used to consider it a great joke to go into expensive cosmetic shops and make outrageous requests for goods that do not exist.

He would invent fanciful names on the spot.

On entering a shop, he would ask for a new perfume called 'Scented Shadow' or for 'insoluble bath cubes'.

If a shop assistant told him she had not heard of it, he would pretend to be considerably put out.

He loved to be told that one of his imaginary products was temporarily out of stock and he would faithfully promise to call again at some future date, but of course, he never did.

How Harry managed to keep a straight face during these performances is quite beyond me.

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Harry does not need to be prompted to explain how he bought his precious bottle of mud.

One day, he went to an exclusive shop in London and asked for 'Myrolite'.

The shop assistant looked puzzled and Harry repeated the word, slowly stressing each syllable.

When the woman shook her head in bewilderment, Harry went on to explain that 'myrolite' was a hard, amber-like substance which could be used to remove freckles.

This explanation evidently conveyed something to the woman who searched shelf after shelf.

She produced all sorts of weird concoctions, but none of them met with Harry's requirements.

When Harry put on his act of being mildly annoyed, the assistant promised to order some for him.

Intoxicated by his success, Harry then asked for perfumed mud.

He expected the assistant to look at him in blank astonishment.

However, it was his turn to be surprised, for the woman's eyes immediately lit up and she fetched several bottles which she placed on the counter for Harry to inspect.

For once, Harry had to admit defeat.

He picked up what seemed to be the smallest bottle and discreetly asked the price.

He was glad to get away with a mere twenty pounds and he beat a hasty retreat, clutching the precious bottle under his arm.

From then on, Harry decided that this little game he had invented might prove to be expensive.

The curious bottle, which now adorns the bookcase in his study, was his first and last purchase of rare cosmetics.

The assistant promised to order the 'Myrolite' Harry had already asked for, so he then said he wanted perfumed mud.

This time her eyes lit up and she immediately fetched several bottles, which she put on the counter.

Harry picked up the smallest bottle, and when he learned the price (20), he paid and left with the bottle under his arm.

This curious bottle, now in his study, was his first and last purchase of rare cosmetics.

For me, a day's shopping is the best way I think of to pass a day away from college or work.

I have been looking forward to a day out shopping for weeks because I have wanted to get some new clothes for ages, so last Friday I took a day off.

I got up at the usual time (as if I were going to work or college) because for me, shopping is as serious as work.

Before I left the house, I made sure I put on a good pair of walking shoes and then caught the bus into the centre of the town.

Some people visit all the shops in the hope that they will find what they want at the prices they want to pay.

Not me: I'm one of those shoppers who has a list of purchases-and with a fairly good idea of how much I want to pay.

The first thing I wanted was something to wear to a friend's wedding next month-and I didn't want to pay very much.

I found just what I wanted in the second shop I visited.

And in the second shoe shop I visited, I found a pair of shoes that would go with the new clothes and which I could wear to work afterwards.

Within an hour, I had bought the most important things on my shopping list.

I was so pleased!

But then came the most difficult part of the day.

The third thing on my shopping list was 'Birthday present for Pat'.

I like to give her a present, but it is always so difficult.

This year, I decided, I would buy her a book.

Do you know how long I spent in one large book shop?

Two hours!

And even then I didn't get her a book-although I bought three for myself!

By the time I got home, it was six o'clock.

I was absolutely exhausted, but pleased that I had managed to buy two things on my list.

The essence of the joke, from Harry's point of view, was that he would take up the shop assistants' time without having to buy anything.

On Harry's visits to expensive cosmetics shops, he was delighted if the shop assistant believed the product actually existed.

When Harry was presented with several bottles of perfumed mud, he picked up the smallest bottle, hoping it wouldn't be too expensive.

The bottle is filled with what seems to be a thick, greyish substance.

He thought it funny to ask for goods that do not exist.

He requested goods that do not exist, for which he would invent names on the spot.

He loved it when he was told that the product was out of stock.

It was then that Harry decided the game he had invented might prove expensive and he has not played it since.

He likes to relate how he came into possession of this weird stuff.

He felt that for a mere twenty pounds, he had had a lucky escape.