

THE MILLIONAIRE

Emmy Leeman

"Are you goin' to the Halloween parade?" the boy asked. He didn't look up from his oatmeal bowl. He knew the answer. His half-grown brother, thin as a scarecrow, knees and elbows protruding, didn't raise his hazel eyes either.

"Goin'? Sure I'm goin'. An' I'm aimin' to take first prize, too!"

The younger boy, a handsome chap of eleven, with square shoulders and a thick mane of curls, sat up straight and looked at Bill with incredulous blue eyes.

"How you thinkin' on doin' that? They'll have floats 'n store-bought outfits 'n everthin'," he protested. "You know one of them town kids'll win, sure."

"Not this year they won't," said Bill with determination, "I'm goin' as a corn shock. Hurry up," he urged, "an' you can help me."

The younger boy trotted along to the barn, peering up into his face, asking questions. Finally, unsatisfied with the monosyllabic answers, he planted his square little body in the barn door and announced,

"I ain't havin' nothin' to do with this dang foolishment. If you want to, go ahead. Make a fool of yourself; but count me out!" He turned to leave, face flushed and set.

Bill, head churning out ideas, looked at his brother, surprised; then his face softened and he said,

"Come on, Kid, and help me. It'll work! Remember last summer when we worked for Ol' Man Wilkins? Planted his big ol' garden an' tended it; pulled weeds out of his soybeans 'till our backs liked to broke; and dug those trenches so the chinch bugs couldn' get from one field t' th' other?"

"Yeah, I remember," replied the other boy, unconvinced. "But this is different."

"No it ain't," exclaimed Bill, "you said then we'd never save sixteen dollars to buy Old Charlie an' you cried an' begged to go swimmin' in the gravel pit or cat fishin' behind Corbens. But we done it and now ain't you glad?"

Bob, thinking of the two of them bouncing on Charlie's wide bay back, splashing through the shallow creek, and laughing until tears came, made up his mind.

"O.K. I'll help. How we goin' to win the five dollars?"

The two boys, blond head and dark close together, worked the whole long weekend. They bound together long stalks of corn with binder twine, careful not to break the brittle leaves. They snipped and measured until the costume fit Bill's skinny frame. Not wanting to stop, they went to eat only when their mother called the third time, with an edge to her voice.

The boys' eyes glistened with excitement as they waited for the school bus Monday morning.

"Now remember, don't tell anybody what I'm wearin'," cautioned Bill. He kicked a rock nonchalantly but the other could tell from the stiff set of his shoulders that it was important to him.

"Don't worry. I ain't tellin' nothin'," promised Bob, convinced by now they could win the five dollars.

Clouds hung low in the sky when they jumped from the bus that evening. A stiff wind blew from the east, whirling orange maple leaves around them as they rushed to feed stock and milk cows. It was dark when, gulping their supper, they loaded the corn shock in the old Model A. The family piled in; the boys rode in the back and held a tattered Indian blanket over their creation.

The band was already warming up as their father parked the truck near an alley.

"Keep it covered with the blanket, Bob!" whispered Bill, as they struggled with the bulky thing.

"Jeez, look at the witches and scarecrows," exclaimed Bob, his eyes wide. Bill struggled into the costume.

"Stick your hand through the hole we left for the jack-o-lantern," directed his brother.

The shock was heavier than he remembered and his thin knees almost buckled as he marched with the other contestants around the band platform. A gang of half-grown boys lurked on the opposite side of the judges. They called out insults or whistled and clapped for the ones they thought were girls. When Bill weaved by in his homemade apparition, they really began the catcalls.

"Hey Ichabod, is that your head?"

"Boy, corn is right!"

"Get a horse!"

Bill tried to ignore them but each time he plodded by, they became more aggressive. They blew out the candle in the jack-o-lantern; tripped him with sticks; and finally stepped on the end of the stalks, by now trailing on the street. Bob, sitting near on a rail fence, blinked back hot tears, humiliated and sad. He saw the three judges, as one, turn their eyes away from the disintegrating corn shock and toward the garish, crepe-papered bicycle and cart. Bill, peering through the little slot, saw this too. Suddenly he could control himself no longer—the jeering, the immobility, and now the disappointment. In one convulsive movement, he shed the now-hated corn shock and leaped into the knot of his antagonists. Arms and legs flailed; feet kicked and stomped; and he battered them with his head. The boys, stunned, stumbled away from the whirling dynamo, but Bill, seeing only a red blur, leaped after the fleeing figures and rode one, half again his size, to the ground. The two tumbled over and over on the graveled street, Bill thwacking the other boy at every turn with his work-hardened fists.

“I’ll fix ya’.” Smack. “You Bastard.” Bang. “Take that . . . and that.” Slam. “I don’ . . . want . . . their dam’ . . . five dollars.” Sock. “Someday.” Sob. “Someday I’ll have a million dollars. . .”

A WRITER’S LESSON

Melissa Stone

“Speak to me, Wise One, and impart unto me those qualities favored by the muses and possessed by the universal scribes whom fortune has smiled upon through the ages. Homer, Plutarch, Shakespeare and Chaucer! Milton, Bacon, Hawthorne and Camus! Frost, Eliot, Ibsen, and Albee! Tell me the mystery of these men so that I, too, may reach the pinnacle of aesthetic bliss through my art. For art is the true . . .”

“Kid, are you telling me that you want to be a writer,” the good humored professor interrupted as he lit the stub of a stale cigar.

“Not just a writer, Sir! I want to be a master!”