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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MR. CHIPFELLOW'S JACKPOT ***

Being one of the richest men in the world, it was only natural that many people anticipated the day he would die. For someone should claim—

Mr. Chipfellow's Jackpot

by
Dick Purcell

"I'M getting old," Sam Chipfellow said, "and old men die."

His words were an indirect answer to a question from Carter Hagen, his attorney. The two men were standing in an open glade, some distance from Sam Chipfellow's mansion at Chipfellow's Folly, this being the name Sam himself had attached to his huge estate.

Sam lived there quite alone except for visits from relatives and those who claimed to be relatives. He needed no servants nor help of any kind because the mansion was completely automatic. Sam did not live alone from choice, but he was highly perceptive and it made him uncomfortable to have relatives around with but one thought in their minds: *When are you going to die and leave me some money?*

Of course, the relatives could hardly be blamed for entertaining this thought. It came as naturally as breathing because Sam Chipfellow was one of those rare individuals—a scientist who had made money; all kinds of money; more money than almost anybody. And after all, his relatives were no different than those of any other rich man. They felt they had rights.

Sam was known as The Genius of the Space Age, an apt title because there might not have been any space without him. He had been extremely versatile during his long career, having been responsible for the so-called eternal metals—metal against which no temperature, corrosive, or combinations of corrosives would prevail. He was also the pioneer of telepower, the science of control over things mechanical through the electronic emanations of thought waves. Because of his investigations into this power, men were able to direct great ships by merely "thinking" them on their proper courses.

These were only two of his contributions to progress, there being many others. And now, Sam was facing the mystery neither he nor any other scientist had ever been able to solve.

Mortality.

There was a great deal of activity near the point at which the men stood. Drills and rock cutters had formed three sides of an enclosure in a ridge of solid rock, and now a giant crane was lowering thick slabs of metal to form the walls. Nearby, waiting to be placed, lay the slab which would obviously become the door to whatever Sam was building. Its surface was entirely smooth, but it bore great hinges and some sort of a locking device was built in along one edge.

Carter Hagen watched the activity and

considered Sam's reply to his question. "Then this is to be a mausoleum?"

Sam chuckled. "Only in a sense. Not a place to house my dead bones if that's what you mean."

Carter Hagen, understanding this lonely old man as he did, knew further questions would be useless. Sam was like that. If he wanted you to know something, he told you.

So Carter held his peace and they returned to the mansion where Sam gave him a drink after they concluded the business he had come on.

Sam also gave Carter something else—an envelope. "Put that in your safe, Carter. You're comparatively young. I'm taking it for granted you will survive me."

"And this is—?"

"My will. All old men should leave wills and I'm no exception to the rule. When I'm dead, open it and read what's inside."



CARTER Hagen regarded the envelope with speculation. Sam smiled. "If you're wondering how much I left you, Carter, I'll say this: You might get it all."

Hagen strove to appear nonchalant but his eyes widened regardless. Sam enjoyed this. He said, "Yes, you'll have as much chance as anyone else."

"You mean as much chance as any of your relatives?"

"I mean what I said—as much as anyone. I've given them no more consideration than anyone else."

Carter Hagen stared, puzzled. "I'm afraid I don't understand you."

"I didn't expect you to, but that will come later. I'll tell you this much, though. No one will be barred. The winner will take all, and the winner may be anyone on this planet. My one regret is that I won't be around to see who gets the jackpot."

Carter Hagen dutifully pocketed the will and left. He returned on other business a week later. Sam Chipfellow's first question was, "Well, what did you think of it?"

"Think of what?"

"My will."

Carter Hagen straightened to an indignant five-foot-six. "Mr. Chipfellow, I don't like having my integrity questioned. Your will was in a sealed envelope. You instructed me to read it after your death. If you think I'm the sort of man who would violate a trust—"

Sam put a drink into his attorney's hand. "Here, take this. Calm down."

Carter Hagen gulped the drink and allowed his feathers to smooth down. As he set down his glass, Sam leaned back and said, "Now that that's over, let's get on with it. Tell me—what did you think of my will?"

The attorney flushed. It was no use trying to fool Chipfellow. He was a master at that damned thought business. "I—I did look at it. I couldn't resist the temptation. The envelope was so easily opened."

Sam was regarding him keenly but without anger. "I know you're a crook, Hagen, but no more so than most people. So don't sit there cringing."

"This will is—well, amazing, and getting an advance look didn't help me a bit unless—" Hagen looked up hopefully. "—unless you're willing to give me a slight clue—"

"I'll give you nothing. You take your chances along with the rest."

Hagen sighed. "As to the will itself, all I can say is that it's bound to cause a sensation."

"I think so too," Sam said, his eyes turning a trifle sad. "It's too bad a man has to die just at the most interesting point of his life."

"You'll live for years, Mr. Chipfellow. You're in fine condition."

"Cut it out. You're itching for me to shuffle off so you can get a crack at what I'm leaving behind."

"Why, Mr.—"

"Shut up and have another drink."

CARTER Hagen did not have long to wait as life-times go. Eighteen months later, Sam Chipfellow dropped dead while walking in his garden. The news was broadcast immediately but the stir it caused was nothing to the worldwide reaction that came a few days later.

This was after all the relatives, all those who thought they had a faint chance of proving themselves relatives, and representatives of the press, radio, and video, gathered in the late Sam Chipfellow's mansion to hear the reading of the will. Carter Hagen, seeking to control his excitement, stood before a microphone installed for the benefit of those who couldn't get in.

He said, "This is the last will and testament of Samuel Chipfellow, deceased. As his lawyer, it becomes my duty to—"

An angry murmur went up from those assembled. Exclamations of impatience. "Come on! Get on with it. Quit making a speech and read the will, we can't wait all day!"

"Quiet, please, and give me your closest attention. I will read slowly so all may hear. This is Mr. Chipfellow's last testament:

"I, Samuel B. Chipfellow, have made a great deal of money during my active years. The time now comes when I must decide what will become of it after my death. I have made my decision, but I remain in the peculiar position of still not knowing what will become of it. Frankly, I'm of the opinion that no one will ever benefit from it—that it will remain in the place I have secreted it until the end of time."

A murmur went up from the crowd.

"A treasure hunt!" someone cried. "I wonder if they'll distribute maps!"

Carter Hagen raised his hand. "Please! Let's have a little more order or the reading will not continue."

The room quieted and Hagen's droning voice was again raised:

"This place consists of a vault I have had erected upon my grounds. This vault, I assure you, is burglar-proof, weather-proof, cyclone-proof, tornado-proof, bomb-proof. Time will have no effect upon its walls. It could conceivably be thrown free in some great volcanic upheaval but even then the contents would remain inaccessible."

"There is only one way the vault can be opened. Its lock is sensitized to respond to a thought. That's what I said—a thought. I have selected a single, definite, clear-cut thought to which the combination will respond."

"There is a stone bench in front of the vault door and I decree that any person who wishes, may sit down on this bench and direct his or her thought at the door. If it is the correct one, the door will open and the person causing this to happen shall then be the possessor of all my worldly wealth which lies inside."

"Because of the number of persons who will no doubt wish to try their luck, I decree further that each shall be given thirty seconds in which to project their thought. A force of six men shall be hired to supervise the operation and handle the crowds in the neighborhood of the vault. A trust fund has been already set up to pay this group. The balance of my wealth lies awaiting the lucky thinker in the vault—all save this estate itself, an item of trifling value in comparison to the rest, which I bequeath to the State with the stipulation that the other terms of the will are rigidly carried out."

"And so, good luck to everyone in the world. May one of you succeed in opening my vault—although I doubt it. Samuel B. Chipfellow. P.S. The thought-throwing shall begin one week after the reading of the will. I add this as a precaution to keep everyone from rushing to the vault after this will is read. You might kill each other in the stampede. S. B. C."

There was a rush regardless. Reporters knocked each other down getting to the battery of phones set up to carry the news around the world. And Sam Chipfellow's will pushed all else off the video screens and the front pages.

DURING the following weeks, millions were made through the sale of Chipfellow's thought to the gullible. Great commercial activity began in the area surrounding the estate as arrangements were made to accommodate the hundreds of thousands who were heading in that direction.

A line began forming immediately at the gate to Chipfellow's Folly and a brisk market got under way in positions therein. The going figure of the first hundred positions was in the neighborhood of ten thousand dollars. A man three thousand thoughts away was offered a thousand dollars two days before the week was up, and on the last day, the woman at the head of the line sold her position for eighteen thousand dollars.

There were many learned roundtables and discussions as to the nature of Chipfellow's thought. The majority leaned to the belief that it would be scientific in nature because Chipfellow was the world's greatest scientist.

This appeared to give scientifically trained brains the edge and those fortunate in this respect spent long hours learning what they could of Chipfellow's life, trying to divine his performance in the realm of thought.

So intense was the interest created that scarcely anyone paid attention to the activities of Chipfellow's closer relatives. They sued to break the will but met with defeat. The verdict was rendered speedily, after which the judge who made the ruling declared a recess and bought the eleven thousandth position in line for five hundred dollars.

On the morning of the appointed day, the gates were opened and the line moved toward the vault. The first man took his seat on the bench. A stopwatch clicked. A great silence settled over the watchers. This lasted for thirty seconds after which the watch clicked again. The man got up from the bench eighteen thousand dollars poorer.

The vault had not opened.

Nor did it open the next day, the next, nor the next. A week passed, a month, six months. And at the end of that time it was estimated that more than twenty-five thousand people had tried their luck and failed.

Each failure was greeted with a public sigh of relief—relief from both those who were waiting for a turn and those who were getting rich from the commercial enterprises abutting upon the Chipfellow estate.

There was a motel, a hotel, a few night clubs, a lot of restaurants, a hastily constructed bus terminal, an airport and several turned into parking lots at a dollar a head.

The line was a permanent thing and it was soon necessary to build a cement walk because the ever-present hopeful were standing in a ditch a foot deep.

There also continued to be an active business in positions, a group of professional standers having sprung up, each with an assistant to bring food and coffee and keep track of the ever fluctuating market in positions.

And still no one opened Chipfellow's vault.

It was conceded that the big endowment funds had the inside track because they had the money to hire the best brains in the world; men who were almost as able scientifically as had been Chipfellow himself but unfortunately hadn't made as much money. The monied interests also had access to the robot calculators that turned out far more plausible thoughts than there were positions in the line.

A year passed. The vault remained locked.

BY that time the number of those who had tried and failed, and were naturally disgruntled, was large enough to be heard, so a rumor got about that the whole thing was a vast hoax—a mean joke perpetrated upon the helpless public by a lousy old crook who hadn't any money in the first place.

Vituperative editorials were written—by editors who had stood in line and thrown futile thoughts at the great door. These editorials were vigorously rebutted by editors and columnists who as yet had not had a chance to try for the jackpot.

One senator, who had tried and missed, introduced a law making it illegal to sit on a stone bench and hurl a thought at a door.

There were enough congressional failures to pass the law. It went to the Supreme Court, but was tossed out because they said you couldn't pass a law prohibiting a man from thinking.

And still the vault remained closed.

Until Mr. and Mrs. Wilson, farm people impoverished by reverses, spent their last ten dollars for two thoughts and waited out the hours and the days in line. Their daughter Susan, aged nine, waited with them, passing the time by telling her doll fairy tales and wondering what the world looked like to a bird flying high up over a tree top. Susan was glad when her mother and father reached the bench because then they all could go home and see how her pet rabbit was doing.

Mr. Wilson hurled his thought and moved on with drooping shoulders. Mrs. Wilson threw hers and was told to leave the bench. The guard looked at Susan. "Your turn," he said.

"But I haven't got any thought," Susan said. "I just want to go home."

This made no sense to the guard. The line was being held up. People were grumbling. The guard said, "All right, but that was silly. You could have sold your position for good money. Run along with your mother and father."

Susan started away. Then she looked at the vault which certainly resembled a mausoleum and said, "Wait—I have too got a little thought," and she popped onto the bench.

The guard frowned and snapped his stop watch.


Susan screwed her eyes tight shut. She tried to see an angel with big white wings like she sometimes saw in her dreams and she also tried to visualize a white-haired, jolly-faced little man as she considered Mr. Chipfellow to be. Her lips moved soundlessly as she said,

Dear God and all the angels—please have pity on poor Mr. Chipfellow for dying and please make him happy in heaven.

Then Susan got off the bench quickly to run after her mother and father who had not waited.

There was the sound of metal grinding upon metal and the great door was swinging open.

THE END

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