



Chapter 11 Peter and Paul

“As I was saying,” the Other Professor resumed, “if you’ll just think over any Poem, that contains the words—such as

‘Peter is poor,’ said noble Paul,
‘And I have always been his friend:
And, though my means to give are small,
At least I can afford to lend.
How few, in this cold age of greed,
Do good, except on selfish grounds!
But I can feel for Peter’s need,
And I WILL LEND HIM FIFTY POUNDS!’

How great was Peter’s joy to find
His friend in such a genial vein!
How cheerfully the bond he signed,
To pay the money back again!
‘We ca’n’t,’ said Paul, ‘be too precise:
‘Tis best to fix the very day:
So, by a learned friend’s advice,
I’ve made it Noon, the Fourth of May.

But this is April! Peter said.
‘The First of April, as I think.
Five little weeks will soon be fled:
One scarcely will have time to wink!
Give me a year to speculate—
To buy and sell—to drive a trade—’
Said Paul ‘I cannot change the date.
On May the Fourth it must be paid.’

‘Well, well!’ said Peter, with a sigh.
‘Hand me the cash, and I will go.
I’ll form a Joint-Stock Company,



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And turn an honest pound or so.'
'I'm grieved,' said Paul, 'to seem unkind:
The money shalt of course be lent:
But, for a week or two, I find
It will not be convenient.'

So, week by week, poor Peter came
And turned in heaviness away;
For still the answer was the same,
'I cannot manage it to-day.'
And now the April showers were dry—
The five short weeks were nearly spent—
Yet still he got the old reply,
'It is not quite convenient!'

The Fourth arrived, and punctual Paul
Came, with his legal friend, at noon.
'I thought it best,' said he, 'to call:
One cannot settle things too soon.'
Poor Peter shuddered in despair:
His flowing locks he wildly tore:
And very soon his yellow hair
Was lying all about the floor.

The legal friend was standing by,
With sudden pity half unmanned:
The tear-drop trembled in his eye,
The signed agreement in his hand:
But when at length the legal soul
Resumed its customary force,
'The Law,' he said, 'we ca'n't control:
Pay, or the Law must take its course!'

Said Paul 'How bitterly I rue
That fatal morning when I called!
Consider, Peter, what you do!
You won't be richer when you're bald!
Think you, by rending curls away,

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To make your difficulties less?
 Forbear this violence, I pray:
 You do but add to my distress!

'Not willingly would I inflict,'
 Said Peter, 'on that noble heart
 One needless pang. Yet why so strict?
 Is this to act a friendly part?
 However legal it may be
 To pay what never has been lent,
 This style of business seems to me
 Extremely inconvenient!

'No Nobleness of soul have I,
 Like some that in this Age are found!
 (Paul blushed in sheer humility,
 And cast his eyes upon the ground)
 'This debt will simply swallow all,
 And make my life a life of woe!
 'Nay, nay, nay Peter!' answered Paul.
 'You must not rail on Fortune so!

'You have enough to eat and drink:
 You are respected in the world:
 And at the barber's, as I think,
 You often get your whiskers curled.
 Though Nobleness you ca'n't attain
 To any very great extent—
 The path of Honesty is plain,
 However inconvenient!

"Tis true, 'said Peter, 'I'm alive:
 I keep my station in the world:
 Once in the week I just contrive
 To get my whiskers oiled and curled.
 But my assets are very low:
 My little income's overspent:
 To trench on capital, you know,



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Is always inconvenient!

'But pay your debts!' cried honest Paul.
'My gentle Peter, pay your debts!
What matter if it swallows all
That you describe as your "assets"?
Already you're an hour behind:
Yet Generosity is best.
It pinches me—but never mind!
I WILL NOT CHARGE YOU INTEREST!'

'How good! How great!' poor Peter cried.
'Yet I must sell my Sunday wig—
The scarf-pin that has been my pride—
My grand piano—and my pig!'
Full soon his property took wings:
And daily, as each treasure went,
He sighed to find the state of things
Grow less and less convenient.

Weeks grew to months, and months to years:
Peter was worn to skin and bone:
And once he even said, with tears,
'Remember, Paul, that promised Loan!'
Said Paul 'I'll lend you, when I can,
All the spare money I have got—
Ah, Peter, you're a happy man!
Yours is an enviable lot!

'I'm getting stout, as you may see:
It is but seldom I am well:
I cannot feel my ancient glee
In listening to the dinner-bell:
But you, you gambol like a boy,
Your figure is so spare and light:
The dinner-bell's a note of joy
To such a healthy appetite!'



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Said Peter 'I am well aware
Mine is a state of happiness:
And yet how gladly could I spare
Some of the comforts I possess!
What you call healthy appetite
I feel as Hunger's savage tooth:
And, when no dinner is in sight,
The dinner-bell's a sound of ruth!

'No scare-crow would accept this coat:
Such boots as these you seldom see.
Ah, Paul, a single five-pound-note
Would make another man of me!'
Said Paul 'It fills me with surprise
To hear you talk in such a tone:
I fear you scarcely realize
The blessings that are all your own!

'You're safe from being overfed:
You're sweetly picturesque in rags:
You never know the aching head
That comes along with money-bags:
And you have time to cultivate
That best of qualities, Content—
For which you'll find your present state
Remarkably convenient!'

Said Peter 'Though I cannot sound
The depths of such a man as you,
Yet in your character I've found
An inconsistency or two.
You seem to have long years to spare
When there's a promise to fulfill:
And yet how punctual you were
In calling with that little bill!'

'One can't be too deliberate,'
Said Paul, 'in parting with one's pelf.

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With bills, as you correctly state,
I'm punctuality itself:
A man may surely claim his dues:
But, when there's money to be lent,
A man must be allowed to choose
Such times as are convenient!

It chanced one day, as Peter sat
Gnawing a crust—his usual meal—
Paul bustled in to have a chat,
And grasped his hand with friendly zeal.
'I knew,' said he, 'your frugal ways:
So, that I might not wound your pride
By bringing strangers in to gaze,
I've left my legal friend outside!

'You well remember, I am sure,
When first your wealth began to go,
And people sneered at one so poor,
I never used my Peter so!
And when you'd lost your little all,
And found yourself a thing despised,
I need not ask you to recall
How tenderly I sympathized!

'Then the advice I've poured on you,
So full of wisdom and of wit:
All given gratis, though 'tis true
I might have fairly charged for it!
But I refrain from mentioning
Full many a deed I might relate
For boasting is a kind of thing
That I particularly hate.

'How vast the total sum appears
Of all the kindnesses I've done,
From Childhood's half-forgotten years



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Down to that Loan of April One!
That Fifty Pounds! You little guessed
How deep it drained my slender store:
But there's a heart within this breast,
And I WILL LEND YOU FIFTY MORE!

'Not so,' was Peter's mild reply,
His cheeks all wet with grateful tears;
No man recalls, so well as I,
Your services in bygone years:
And this new offer, I admit,
Is very very kindly meant—
Still, to avail myself of it
Would not be quite convenient!

You'll see in a moment what the difference is between 'convenient' and 'inconvenient.' You quite understand it now, don't you?" he added, looking kindly at Bruno, who was sitting, at Sylvie's side, on the floor.

"Yes," said Bruno, very quietly. Such a short speech was very unusual, for him: but just then he seemed, I fancied, a little exhausted. In fact, he climbed up into Sylvie's lap as he spoke, and rested his head against her shoulder. "What a many verses it was!" he whispered.