



The Romance of a Busy Broker

by O. Henry



Steven Pitcher was a clerk. He worked at the busy office of Harvey Maxwell, the stockbroker. Steven kept to himself at work. He always minded his own business. He almost never let any of his feelings show on his face.

But this morning Steven looked surprised. His employer, Mr. Maxwell, had entered the office at 9:30 sharp. He always did this. But today, the young lady who was his secretary arrived at the same time. She was at his side.

"Good morning, Pitcher," Mr. Maxwell said. Then Maxwell went straight to his desk. He quickly began to look through the large pile of letters and telegrams there.

The young lady had been Mr. Maxwell's secretary for a year. She was very pretty in a special way. And on this morning, she seemed to shine with happiness. Her eyes were bright. Her expression was joyful.

Steven Pitcher noticed a difference in the way she acted this morning. She did not go straight into the next room where her desk was. Instead, she waited in the main office. Once she even walked over to Maxwell's desk. She was near enough for him to be aware of her presence.

The person sitting at that desk was thinking of nothing but his work. He was a very busy broker. And he was completely caught up in his business.

Suddenly, Maxwell looked up. "Well, what is it?" he asked sharply. "Is it anything important?" His opened mail was still lying about on his crowded desk. His gray eyes flashed upon her impatiently. "Well, what is it?" he repeated.

"Nothing," answered the secretary. She moved away with a little smile.

"Mr. Pitcher," she said to the clerk. "Did Mr. Maxwell say anything yesterday about hiring another secretary?"

"He did," answered Pitcher. "He told me to go about hiring another one. I called the agency yesterday afternoon. I asked them to have a few candidates come over this morning. It's 9:45. But no one has showed up yet."

"I will do the work as usual then," said the young woman. "I'll stay here until someone comes to take my place." And she went to her desk and began to work.

Perhaps you have never been in a broker's office during the mad rush of business. If so, you may have trouble imagining it. Every minute—no, every second—is packed with work.

And this day was an especially busy one for Maxwell. The ticker began to reel out pages of tape. The desk telephone never stopped ringing. People began to rush into the office. They kept calling things out excitedly. Messengers ran in and out with telegrams and messages. The clerks in the office jumped about like sailors during a storm.

Maxwell shoved his chair back against the wall. He **conducted** business like a tap dancer. He jumped from ticker to phone, from desk to door. You would not have believed how **briskly** he did all this.

Suddenly the stockbroker realized that two people were standing near his desk. One was a young man. He had never seen him before. The other person was Pitcher.

"Excuse me," said Pitcher. "There's someone here to see you about the job."

Maxwell turned partly around. His hands were filled with papers.

"Job? What job?" he asked with a frown.

"The job of secretary," said Pitcher. "You told me yesterday to call the agency. You asked me to have them send someone over this morning."

"Are you losing your mind, Pitcher?" said Maxwell. "Why should I have given you any such **instructions**? Miss Leslie has done wonderful work during the year she has been here. The job is hers for as long as she chooses to keep it."

Maxwell turned to the young man. "There's no place open here, I'm afraid," said Maxwell. "I am very, very sorry."

Maxwell turned back to Pitcher. "Call up the agency, Pitcher," he said. "Tell them not to send any other people here."

The young man left the office. And Pitcher thought to himself that Mr. Maxwell seemed to be forgetting more and more things as the days went by.

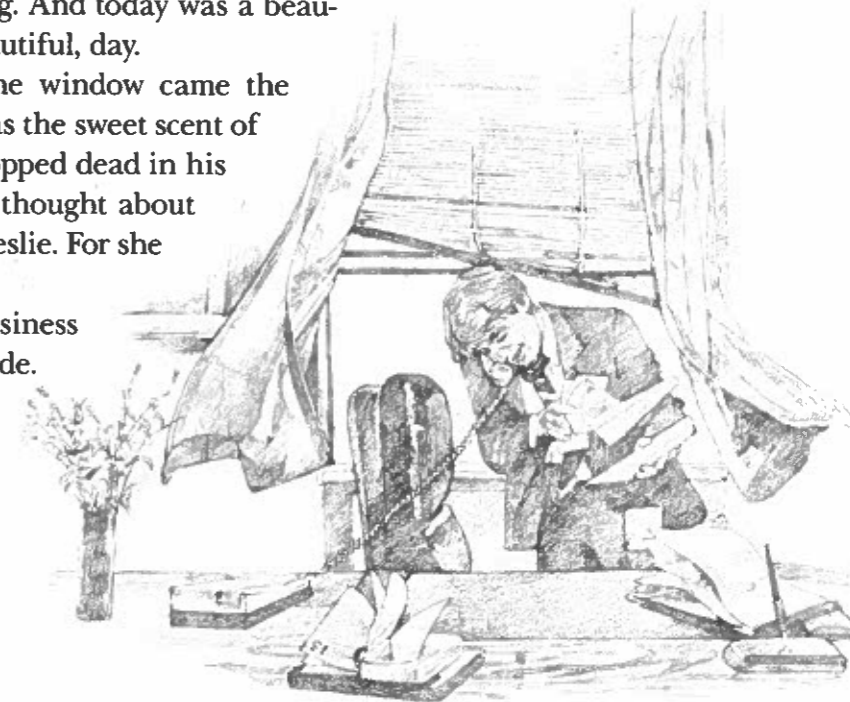
The rush of business grew faster and faster. Orders to buy and sell were coming and going as swiftly as the flight of birds. There was no time to stop for even a moment.

At noon, finally, there was a bit of a **lull** in business.

Maxwell stood near his desk. Telegrams and messages were in his hands. A pen was stuck over his right ear. His hair hung down over his forehead. The window in his office was open because it was Spring. And today was a beautiful, a gloriously beautiful, day.

And through the window came the trace of a scent. It was the sweet scent of lilac. Mr. Maxwell stopped dead in his tracks. Suddenly, he thought about his secretary, Miss Leslie. For she wore lilac perfume.

The world of business suddenly began to fade. She was in the next room. She was only twenty steps away.



"By George, I'll do it now," said Maxwell, half aloud. "I'll ask her now. I'm surprised I didn't do it long ago."

He dashed into the other office. He rushed to the desk. He was still clutching papers in both hands. The pen was still stuck above his ear.

"Miss Leslie," he began, hurriedly. "I have only a moment to spare. I want to say something in that moment. Will you be my wife? I haven't had time to ask you in the usual way. But I really do love you. Tell me quickly, please."

"Oh, what are you talking about?" exclaimed the young woman. She rose to her feet. She stared at him with eyes open wide.

"Don't you understand?" said Maxwell. "I want you to marry me. I love you, Miss Leslie. I wanted to tell you. And I took a moment when things slowed up a bit. They're calling me to come to the phone now."

He turned and shouted, "Tell them to wait a minute, Pitcher."

Then he turned back and said, "Won't you marry me, Miss Leslie?"

The secretary acted very strangely. At first she seemed amazed. Then tears came to her eyes. She smiled through them, and slid one of her arms tenderly about the broker's neck.

"I understand now," she said, softly. "It's this business. It has driven everything else out of your head for the moment. I was shaken up at first. Don't you remember, Harvey? We were married last night at eight o'clock in the little church around the corner."



GETTING THE MEANING OF THE STORY. Complete each of the following sentences by putting an *x* in the box next to the correct answer. Each sentence helps you get the meaning of the story.

- Miss Leslie had been Mr. Maxwell's secretary for
 a. a year.
 b. five years.
 c. ten years.
- The sweet scent of lilac reminded Mr. Maxwell
 a. of his garden.
 b. of Miss Leslie.
 c. that he planned to buy some perfume.
- Miss Leslie said that she would
 a. work until someone came to take her place.
 b. quit unless she got a large raise in salary.
 c. never marry Harvey Maxwell.
- Mr. Maxwell told Miss Leslie that he loved her when
 a. she arrived at work at 9:30.
 b. she said she was going to look for another job.
 c. things slowed up a bit at work.

× 5 =
NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

REVIEWING STORY ELEMENTS. Each of the following questions reviews your understanding of story elements. Put an *x* in the box next to the correct answer to each question.

- What happened last in the *plot* of the story?
 a. Mr. Maxwell told the young man that there was no job for him there.
 b. Mr. Maxwell asked Miss Leslie to marry him.
 c. Miss Leslie said that she and Harvey were married last night.
- Which sentence best *characterizes* Harvey Maxwell?
 a. He was very lazy.
 b. He was very busy.
 c. He always arrived late for work.
- Where is this story *set*?
 a. at Harvey Maxwell's home
 b. in Miss Leslie's apartment
 c. in an office
- What was O. Henry's *purpose* in writing this story?
 a. to amuse the reader
 b. to teach the reader all about the business world
 c. to prove that wealth is more important than love

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NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

EXAMINING VOCABULARY WORDS. Answer the following vocabulary questions by putting an *x* in the box next to the correct answer. The vocabulary words are printed in **boldface** in the story. If you wish, look back at the words before you answer the questions.

- Mr. Maxwell jumped back and forth as **briskly** as a tap dancer. What is the meaning of the word *briskly*?
 - a. slowly
 - b. quickly
 - c. carelessly
- Maxwell gave Mr. Pitcher instructions to hire a new secretary. As used in this sentence, the word *instructions* means
 - a. a great deal of cash.
 - b. some food.
 - c. orders.
- It was very busy all morning, but at noon there was finally a lull. As used in this sentence, the word *lull* means a
 - a. quiet time.
 - b. loud noise.
 - c. difficult job to do.
- He conducted business by dashing from the phone to the desk to the door. The word *conducted* means
 - a. carried on or directed.
 - b. rested or stopped.
 - c. left for home.

	× 5 =	
NUMBER CORRECT		YOUR SCORE

ADDING WORDS TO A PASSAGE. Complete the following paragraph by filling in each blank with one of the words listed in the box below. Each of the words appears in the story. Since there are five words and four blanks, one word in the group will not be used.

O. Henry's real name was William Sidney Porter. As a young man, Porter was accused of stealing money from the bank where he _____. It is not clear if Porter _____ stole the money. But _____ of standing trial, he left the country. Later, Porter was _____ and sent to prison. He took the name, O. Henry, from the name of a prison guard.

caught business
worked
instead really

	× 5 =	
NUMBER CORRECT		YOUR SCORE

THINKING ABOUT THE STORY. Each of the following questions will help you to think critically about the selection. Put an *x* in the box next to the correct answer.

- Why was Miss Leslie amazed when Mr. Maxwell asked her to be his wife?
 - a. She thought he didn't like her.
 - b. She had already said no many times.
 - c. They were already married.
- Which statement is true?
 - a. Steven Pitcher didn't know that Mr. Maxwell and Miss Leslie were married.
 - b. Miss Leslie had been doing a poor job at work.
 - c. Mr. Maxwell didn't take his job seriously.
- We may infer (figure out) that Mr. Maxwell asked Miss Leslie to marry him
 - a. only one time.
 - b. at least two times.
 - c. while they were having lunch together at work.
- At the end of the story, Mr. Maxwell probably felt
 - a. sad.
 - b. smart.
 - c. surprised.

	× 5 =	
NUMBER CORRECT		YOUR SCORE

Thinking More about the Story. Your teacher might want you to write your answers.

- Why wasn't Miss Leslie angry with Harvey for forgetting they were married? Explain.
- Mr. Maxwell was very good at his work. Do you agree with this statement? Give reasons to support your answer.
- What is humorous, or funny, about "The Romance of a Busy Broker"? Point out as many things as you can.

Use the boxes below to total your scores for the exercises.

	+	G	GETTING THE MEANING OF THE STORY
	+	R	REVIEWING STORY ELEMENTS
	+	E	EXAMINING VOCABULARY WORDS
	+	A	ADDING WORDS TO A PASSAGE
	+	T	THINKING ABOUT THE STORY

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	=	S	Score Total: Story 2
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