

Vernon Berry opened the gate and walked through the little garden with a smile on his face and a thick book in one hand. Long experience had taught him how to sell books to people who did not want them. He had an ideal, deep voice and could talk well. He could make people laugh. He was clean and well-dressed. He was a kind of man that people like at once, and he knew it himself. In short, he was a success.

He rang the bell at the front door. It was opened after a short while by a young woman with an anxious face. From the absence of a ring on her hand, he was sorry to see that she was not married; but she might have a brother or a cousin who read serious books.

“Good morning, Madam,” he said. “Are you interested in buying a copy of *The History of the World*? There are twelve in all, and I have one of the books here to show you. They give good pictures of”

“I’m sorry,” the woman interrupted. “I’m cooking, and I have no time to talk about history. I must go back to the kitchen. Good day!” And before he had time to answer, she shut the door.

Berry was shocked to be interrupted so quickly, but did not want to give up so easily. He walked round the house and knocked at the back door. It was opened by the same woman.

“You, again!” she cried.

“Well,” he said, “you told me that you were busy, so I took the trouble to come round to the back. Perhaps you’ll let me sit in the kitchen and tell you about this interesting history book while you cook the dinner. It’s so valuable and useful that you’ll regret missing the chance of buying it.” He smiled and showed his white teeth.

“Well, you can come in and sit down if you like. Over there,” she said and pointed to a chair.

“But you’ll be wasting your time. I’m not interested in history and I have no money to spend on books.”

Berry sat down and placed his heavy book carefully on the kitchen table. As he sold one copy, it meant more money for him, and he felt sure that he could make this woman buy one. He

discussed it in his pleasant voice while she cooked, told her all the advantages of having the book, and talked about the low price.

Suddenly the woman interrupted him.

“Just wait a minute,” she said and left the kitchen. Berry heard her opening a drawer and then she came back with a notebook and pencil in her hands. She sat down with him at the table without thinking about her cooking at all.

“Go on, please,” she said.

He began again. She took notes while he talked and sometimes asked him to repeat the words he said. Berry felt happy to get her to listen to him, and thought to himself, “It is really rewarding to persuade people to buy unnecessary things!” At last he came to an end.

He closed the book and said, “Well, what do you think, Madam? Don't you think it is wise to buy it?”

“Oh, no,” she said with surprise. “I told you at the beginning that I'm not interested in history, and I certainly don't want to spend a lot of money on a history book. Good day!” She opened the back door.

“But why did you take all those notes about it?” Berry asked. “You seemed very interested.”

“Oh,” she said, “my brother is in the same line of business. He visits houses and tries to sell books, but he isn't as successful as you are. So I've written down some of the things you said.

You're very clever, and I'll show the notes to my brother. Then he'll know the words to say when he tries next time, and he may be able to earn more money. Thank you very much for your help.

I'm glad you came.”

One day, I saw a boy from my class walking home from school. He was new to our school, and I knew almost nothing about him. He was one of those students who topped all the tests. His name was Kyle. It seemed that he was carrying all of his books. I thought to myself, “Why does anyone bring home all his books on a Friday? He must really be weird.” I shrugged my shoulders and went on.

As I walked on, I saw a bunch of kids running toward Kyle. They knocked the books out of his arms and tripped him, so he landed in the dirt. His glasses went flying, and I saw them land in the grass about 10 feet away. He looked up so sadly; he was almost crying.

So I went over and helped him pick up his books, and handed him his glasses. “Those guys are so stupid,” I told him. Kyle started to smile and said, “Hey, thanks!” I could see that I had really cheered him up. As it turned out, Kyle had only moved to the area a few weeks earlier, but those guys had done the same thing to him nearly every day. “But they won’t be doing it again!” he said angrily. “Forget them, Kyle,” I said, and invited him to play football on Saturday with me and my friends. He said yes.

It was a great weekend with Kyle and my friends, and the more we got to know him, the more we all liked him. Monday morning came, and there was Kyle with all his books again. “Sorry, you didn’t get much time to look at all those books,” I joked. He just laughed and handed me half of them to carry. Kyle and I became best friends, and over the next four years, although he never took all his books home again, he continued to be at the top of his class. Now that we were seniors, he was planning to be a doctor, while I was going to study for business on a football scholarship. A lot of things had changed during our time at high school, but especially for Kyle. Each year, one student is chosen by the teachers to make a speech at the high school leaving ceremony. This year, they had chosen Kyle.

As he started his speech, he cleared his throat, and began, “This is a time of year for thanking all those who helped us make it through high school — our parents, our teachers, our sisters and

brothers, but mostly, our friends. I am here to tell you that being a friend to someone is the best gift you can give them. I am going to tell you a story.”

I could not believe my ears as Kyle began to tell everyone the story of the day we first met. He had been planning to kill himself that weekend! He said that he had taken all the books from his locker so that his mom wouldn't have to do it later. Then, once more, those guys had attacked him. “But I was saved. My friend saved me.”

I heard the gasp go through the crowd as this ordinary, yet now popular, boy told us about his weakest moment. “If you remember one thing that I say,” Kyle continued, “remember that we all have the power to change people's lives. On that unhappy day, my friend chose to help me. And that changed everything. We all have the power to make other people happy or sad, not just for a minute but for a lifetime.”