

9: Grandpa Joe Takes a Gamble

The next day, when Charlie came home from school and went in to see his grandparents, he found that only Grandpa Joe was awake. The other three were all snoring loudly.

'Ssshh!' whispered Grandpa Joe, and he beckoned Charlie to come closer. Charlie tiptoed over and stood beside the bed. The old man gave Charlie a sly grin, and then he started rummaging under his pillow with one hand; and when the hand came out again, there was an ancient leather purse clutched in the fingers. Under cover of the bedclothes, the old man opened the purse and tipped it upside down. Out fell a single silver sixpence. 'It's my secret hoard,' he whispered. 'The others don't know I've got it. And now, you and I are going to have one more fling at finding that last ticket. How about it, eh? But you'll have to help me.'

'Are you sure you want to spend your money on that, Grandpa?' Charlie whispered.

'Of course I'm sure!' spluttered the old man excitedly. 'Don't stand there arguing! I'm as keen as you are to find that ticket! Here — take the money and run down the street to the nearest shop and buy the first Wonka bar you see and bring it straight back to me, and we'll open it together.'

Charlie took the little silver coin, and slipped quickly out of the room. In five minutes, he was back.

'Have you got it?' whispered Grandpa Joe, his eyes shining with excitement.

Charlie nodded and held out the bar of chocolate. **WONKA'S NUTTY CRUNCH SURPRISE**, it said on the wrapper.

'Good!' the old man whispered, sitting up in the bed and rubbing his hands. 'Now — come over here and sit close to me and we'll open it together. Are you ready?'

'Yes,' Charlie said. 'I'm ready.'

'All right. You tear off the first bit.'

'No,' Charlie said, 'you paid for it. You do it all.'

The old man's fingers were trembling most terribly as they fumbled with the wrapper.

'We don't have a hope, really,' he whispered, giggling a bit. 'You do know we don't have a hope, don't you?'

'Yes,' Charlie said. 'I know that.'

They looked at each other, and both started giggling nervously.

'Mind you,' said Grandpa Joe, 'there is just that tiny chance that it might be the one, don't you agree?'

'Yes,' Charlie said. 'Of course. Why don't you open it, Grandpa?'

'All in good time, my boy, all in good time. Which end do you think I ought to open first?'

'That corner. The one furthest from you. Just tear off a tiny bit, but not quite enough for us to see anything.'

'Like that?' said the old man.

'Yes. Now a little bit more.'

'You finish it,' said Grandpa Joe. 'I'm too nervous.'

'No, Grandpa. You must do it yourself.'

'Very well, then. Here goes.' He tore off the wrapper.

They both stared at what lay underneath. It was a bar of chocolate — nothing more.

All at once, they both saw the funny side of the whole thing, and they burst into peals of laughter.

'What on earth's going on!' cried Grandma Josephine, waking up suddenly.

'Nothing,' said Grandpa Joe. 'You go on back to sleep.'

10: The Family Begins to Starve

During the next two weeks, the weather turned very cold. First came the snow. It began very suddenly one morning just as Charlie Bucket was getting dressed for school. Standing by the window, he saw the huge flakes drifting slowly down out of an icy sky that was the colour of steel.

By evening, it lay four feet deep around the tiny house, and Mr Bucket had to dig a path from the front door to the road.

After the snow, there came a freezing gale that blew for days and days without stopping. And oh, how bitter cold it was! Everything that Charlie touched seemed to be made of ice, and each time he stepped outside the door, the wind was like a knife on his cheek.

Inside the house, little jets of freezing air came rushing in through the sides of the windows and under the doors, and there was no place to go to escape them. The four old ones lay silent and huddled in their bed, trying to keep the cold out of their bones. The excitement over the Golden Tickets had long since been forgotten. Nobody in the family gave a thought now to anything except the two vital problems of trying to keep warm and trying to get enough to eat.

There is something about very cold weather that gives one an enormous appetite. Most of us find ourselves beginning to crave rich steaming stews and hot apple pies and all kinds of delicious warming dishes; and because we are all a great deal luckier than we realize, we usually get what we want — or near enough. But Charlie Bucket never got what he wanted because the family couldn't afford it, and as the cold weather went on and on, he became ravenously and desperately hungry. Both bars of chocolate, the birthday one and the one Grandpa Joe had bought, had long since been nibbled away, and all he got now were those thin, cabbage meals three times a day.

Then all at once, the meals became even thinner.

The reason for this was that the toothpaste factory, the place where Mr Bucket worked, suddenly went bust and had to close down. Quickly, Mr Bucket tried to get another job. But he had no luck. In the end, the only way in which he managed to earn a few pennies was by shovelling snow in the streets. But it wasn't enough to buy even a quarter of the food that seven people needed. The situation became desperate. Breakfast was a single slice of bread for each person now, and lunch was maybe half a boiled potato.

Slowly but surely, everybody in the house began to starve.

And every day, little Charlie Bucket, trudging through the snow on his way to school, would have to pass Mr Willy Wonka's giant chocolate factory. And every day, as he came near to it, he would lift his small pointed nose high in the air and sniff the wonderful sweet smell of melting chocolate. Sometimes, he would stand motionless outside the gates for several minutes on end, taking deep swallowing breaths as though he were trying to eat the smell itself.

'That child,' said Grandpa Joe, poking his head up from under the blanket one icy morning, 'that child has got to have more food. It doesn't matter about us. We're too old to bother with. But a growing boy! He can't go on like this! He's beginning to look like a skeleton!'

'What can one do?' murmured Grandma Josephine miserably. 'He refuses to take any of ours. I hear his mother tried to slip her own piece of bread on to his plate at breakfast this morning, but he wouldn't touch it. He made her take it back.'

'He's a fine little fellow,' said Grandpa George. 'He deserves better than this.'

The cruel weather went on and on.

And every day, Charlie Bucket grew thinner and thinner. His face became frighteningly white and pinched. The skin was drawn so tightly over the cheeks that you could see the shapes of the bones underneath. It seemed doubtful whether he could go on much longer like this without becoming dangerously ill.

And now, very calmly, with that curious wisdom that seems to come so often to small children in times of hardship, he began to make little changes here and there in some of the things that he did, so as to save his strength. In the mornings, he left the house ten minutes earlier so that he could walk slowly to school, without ever having to run. He sat quietly in the classroom during break, resting himself, while the others rushed outdoors and threw snowballs and wrestled in the snow. Everything he did now, he did slowly and carefully, to prevent exhaustion.

Then one afternoon, walking back home with the icy wind in his face (and incidentally feeling hungrier than he had ever felt before), his eye was caught suddenly by something silvery lying in the gutter, in the snow. Charlie stepped off the kerb and bent down to examine it. Part of it was buried under the snow, but he saw at once what it was.

It was a fifty-pence piece!

Quickly he looked around him.

Had somebody just dropped it?

No — that was impossible because of the way part of it was buried.

Several people went hurrying past him on the pavement, their chins sunk deep in the collars of their coats, their feet crunching in the snow. None of them was searching for any money; none of them was taking the slightest notice of the small boy crouching in the gutter.

Then was it his, this fifty pence?

Could he have it?

Carefully, Charlie pulled it out from under the snow. It was damp and dirty, but otherwise perfect.

A **WHOLE** fifty pence!

He held it tightly between his shivering fingers, gazing down at it. It meant one thing to him at that moment, only one thing. It meant **FOOD**.

Automatically, Charlie turned and began moving towards the nearest shop. It was only ten paces away . . . it was a newspaper and stationery shop, the kind that sells almost everything, including sweets and cigars . . . and what he would do, he whispered quickly to himself . . . he would buy one luscious bar of chocolate and eat it all up, every bit of it, right then and there . . . and the rest of the money he would take straight back home and give to his mother.