

The Money Pouch

By Steve Heron

A small village clinging to the mountain's edge is home for Amish and his little brother Suhas. They live with their parents in a modest house. Even though the boys come from a poor family, they never beg for money.

Most afternoons the boys wait on the side of the track near their house with tiny posies of dry, wilted flowers. As trekkers descend into the village from higher in the Himalayan mountains, after a long day's walk, the boys greet them with beaming smiles.

'Namaste,' Amish and Suhas say as they hand the trekkers the flowers.

'Namaste,' the weary trekkers reply as they feel welcomed into the village.

Once a week the track past their house is as busy as a highway leading to the bustling market in Namche Bazaar. Jingles, jangles and the clunking of bells on trains of mule, obedient yak, and cows carrying vegetables, and all manner of goods meander through the mountains.

Because their family cow is too old to bear heavy loads, Amish and Suhas help their father and mother carry potatoes and other vegetables along the rugged rocky mountain tracks.

The market is a hubbub of sights, sounds, and smells. A calamity of colours doused in dust.

Amish and Suhas look forward to going to the markets to catch up with their friends to play football. It is their dream to one day play for the Nepal national football team. For this to happen, they need to attend school in the larger town at the distant end of the valley, but their family would find it difficult to afford the fees.

When the market ends for the day, Amish and Suhas' parents return home. The boys stay on with the other children who gather in the dusty horse field to play football. The youngest children chase the horses away so the older boys can play without interruption. Amish excels as

the players kick the ball with force to score between the makeshift goalposts. His talent saves many goals. Suhas is speedy and kicks two goals that afternoon.

On their way home from the dusty field, something catches Amish's eye in the dirt of the side of the track. It is a small leather pouch. Amish reaches down, grasps the pouch, and pauses for a moment before he opens it. The boy's eyes are as large as footballs as the pouch reveals rolls of money.

Amish and Suhas have never seen so much money. They imagine what they might do with the wealth.

'I could buy a new football and real football boots,' says Amish.

'I could buy the biggest bag of marbles,' says Suhas.

'What about new clothes for the family?' Amish looks at his ragged jacket.

'How about all the cakes in the bakery?' Suhas licks his lips.

'We could use the money to pay for us to go to school in the valley,' Amish closes his eyes, dreaming.

Suhas pokes Amish and wakes him from his daydream. 'What about a new cow for Father?'

Amish's thoughts shift to wondering who owns the fortune. 'I think we should find out who the money belongs to and give it back.'

'Maybe one of the foreign trekkers lost it on their travels,' says Suhas.

'Someone may have dropped it on the way to or from the market,' thinks Amish.

Although the temptation to keep the money for themselves is strong, the boys decide it's right to find the owner. Their search takes them to every corner of the village. They ask the lady at the adventure store, the man at the bakery, the mother nursing her baby, and the old man ploughing the fields.

They ask the children playing marbles in the dirt, the lonely girl using rocks to play knucklebones, the children playing badminton on the dusty track, the girls spinning their wobbly

hula hoops, and the boys playing cricket with a box and a stick. No one knows who owns the money pouch.

Their final enquiries are at the guest houses and lodges where the trekkers stay. No one.

Amish and Suhas cast long shadows just before the sun creeps behind the jagged mountains.

When they arrive home, they see their father and mother sitting on the steps in the last of the daylight. Father's face is buried in his hands, sobbing. Mother is comforting him with her hand on his shoulder.

'What's wrong Father?' Amish asks.

Father is too upset to speak.

Mother speaks for him, 'Something terrible has happened, we can't tell you about it.'

Amish and Suhas try to imagine what could be so terrible. They want to tell their parents about the money pouch, but it doesn't seem to be the right time. The boys wander inside and prepare for the evening.

Later, at the family meal table, their father is less upset.

'How was your day boys?' he asks.

'I saw many friends at the markets,' says Suhas.

Amish puffs out his chest. 'I saved eight goals in football.'

'And I kicked two.' Suhas shakes his hands in victory.

'And,' Amish says as he places the money pouch on the table, 'we found this on the track near the field.'

Father's jaw drops. He is speechless. Mother puts her hand on Father's shoulders, and she gasps.

'We went into the village to find the owner but no luck,' Amish adds.

Tears roll over Father's cheeks.

'Why are you so sad Father?' asks Suhas.

'I'm not sad. I'm grateful,' Father chuckles.

‘Do you know who owns the money pouch?’ Amish asks.

‘Yes,’ father replies.

‘That’s good because we’d like to give it back,’ says Suhas.

‘The people who lost this pouch are proud folks, trying to do their best to feed their family. They are saving to send their sons to school at the distant end of the valley. Today, the father dropped this pouch on his way to the village bank.’

‘I’d like to meet these wonderful people,’ Amish says.

‘You already know them,’ Mother answers, ‘the pouch belongs to your father and I.’

Suhas laughs in disbelief, and Amish’s shakes his head, astonished. He picks up the pouch and places it in his father’s rough-hewn hands. His father’s face glows with tremendous gratitude.

Father places one hand on Amish’s shoulder and the other on Suhas and says, ‘Thank you. I am so proud to have such honest sons. You both deserve a good education.’

As their mother embraces the three, Amish and Suhas say, ‘You’re the best parents anyone could have.’

END

Choosing to do what is right, even though tempted to do otherwise, is a thing of courage.

Those who are honest are gifted with inner peace.