

Going to Aunt Ludie's chalet is always a treat. Uncle Burl built it as a wedding present for Ludie forty years ago. It always feels cozy and warm, just the right size for them, and always room for friends. Ludie and Burl had no children, but they consider everyone in the village to be family. Ludie and Earl invite us to come stay with them every summer and winter, and I always enjoy being with them and learning something new.

Last winter, Burl took me to his tool room and showed me how to use the cast iron machine that rolls newspapers into logs for kindling. After the machine rolls the newspaper, it holds the paper until the paper log is tied with a length of string. I am fascinated watching Earl work at his bench, making leather straps for the fishing creels that Ludie makes. Ludie promised to let me make a fishing creel this year, and Burl said we would make some rope with his hand-crank rope maker.

When we arrived, Uncle Burl was in the attic, so Ludie showed us the hidden stairway to the attic. It was through their refrigerator! The refrigerator was built flush into the

wall and there was really no refrigerator behind the door, just stairs that led upward. I looked back at Aunt Ludie, and she pointed to the pull-out drawers next to the sink, her new refrigerator. Wow! A secret passage in their own home.

I led the way up the stairs with Mom, Dad, and Aunt Ludie right behind. Hello and welcome, Burl said as he gave us all a warm hug. You're just in time to help sort out what we call the antique store, because that's about all that's stored up here. There are things left to us by relatives, and items we no longer need. It's time they find a new home. We are thinking of making a reading nook and library up here because of the beautiful views on all four sides, but first, all this has to go.

Mom and Ludie looked through boxes of old dresses and hats, while Dad and Burl searched through boxes for anything worth keeping. I found a toy train set that Dad said we could take home, and a set of heavy cast iron laundry irons. Ludie explained that the irons were heated on the wood stove, then hot coals were placed inside the

irons to keep them hot while you ironed your clothes.
Wow, those women must have had strong arms.

Mom and Ludie disappeared and soon returned with plates of sandwiches, cake and a pitcher of tea. It was nice eating in the attic, with light streaming through the windows. It felt like being in a tree house.

After lunch, the men began to carry things down to Burl's truck. The afternoon sunlight from the west facing windows now shone on a small chest that had been hidden in the shadows. The chest was made of wood and a scene of a river and mountains was painted on the lid. I tried to open it but the lid was stuck. "Uncle Burl, come see what I found!" Everyone clambered up the stairs for a look. "Oh, Ludie exclaimed, it's Ludwig's chest." "Who is Ludwig?" Dad asked. "He was a nice young man that stayed with us for a month, about two years after we were married. We made a bedroom up here with a table for him to study. He was studying under our priest before heading off to another church. I wonder why he didn't come back for his box? All the times we've been up here and we didn't

notice it.” We all sat on the floor, while Burl carefully pried the stuck lid open.

There was a letter on top of a blanket. Burl put on his glasses and read aloud. Burl and Ludie, you have kindly taken me into your home and treated me as if I were your brother. I can not express my gratitude in words for your love and warm hospitality, so I am leaving you this gift that was given to my grandparents many years ago as payment for a new horse cart. I hope you will treasure it as our family has. Thank you for many happy days and warm memories that I will always cherish. Warmest regards, Ludwig. Burl stood in the sunlight and Ludie took his arm. The days with Ludwig had been wonderful ones and they truly thought of him as a brother. They missed him terribly when he left, and the house seemed empty without him.

Well, said Burl smiling, shall we see what treasure has been left to us?” Something was wrapped in the blanket. They were books! Books with bright ink drawings. Burl said that books with colorful ink drawings were called illuminated books. They had handtooled leather covers

with gilded pages and even the covers were painted with fancy designs. They were about historical travels, and beautiful paintings depicted the journies. It was like an early encyclopedia.

I reached in and took out the last book. It was not like the others. The cover was made of two plain pieces of wood that were fastened together with thin strips of leather. The paper was thick and had ragged edges, like it had been torn, and the pages were handwritten like a diary. The pages had yellowed, but the ink was still clear. “What’s that you’ve got asked Dad?” I handed the book to Burl and he gingerly turned to the first page. It read; *The Mystery of the Gold Coin*. The daylight was starting to fade, so we took the books out through the refrigerator door to the living room where we could see by lamplight. Burl opened the plain looking book again, and as he turned to the next page, a small gold disk wrapped in a faded blue ribbon fell out of the book. Dad picked it up for him and they examined it under the lamp. We need a flashlight and a magnifying glass from the desk. Dad quickly found them, and they carefully examined the disk. It could be an old

coin with the edges worn down from use. There seems to be an engraving of a man on the disk, but it has almost been worn away. I'll go to the museum tomorrow and see if they can help identify it.

Burl returned to the book and slowly read aloud; This medal has been handed down through our family for many generations. This is the record of events regarding our ancestor, Gauthier, which in French, means army ruler, or to govern. Not much is known about his life, only this account which came with the gold medal.

Gauthier was in service to the king for most of his life. He served as a personal aide to His Majesty in many capacities. He tended to the personal affairs of the king. He served as an emissary on many occasions, at the palace and abroad. This afforded him ship passage to foreign lands, and the opportunity to bring news of discoveries, along with rich fabrics and jewelry for the king. Some said that Gauthier was a servant, but also a friend that walked at the king's elbow.

Gauthier oversaw all the plans and pageantry for the king's jubilee. The palace grounds were adorned with festive tents and banners, and the fields were prepared for the Royal Games. Horse racing was one of the king's favorite sports. Bright banners in purple, and green draped the king's platform, for which Gauthier had commissioned a special, two sided tent, that would allow the king and his court to be comfortably seated in the shade while enjoying the breeze, in full view of the activities. He had seen such a tent while abroad.

The jubilee was a great success and many foreign dignitaries were impressed with the pageantry, games and delicious food. On the last day of the jubilee, it was customary for the king to honor a few, select military men of valor who had shown exemplary leadership or who had fought honorably in the king's service. A silver tray lined in purple was brought forth as the king stood to address the crowd. The names of the seven military honorees were called out, and each man came and knelt before the king, to receive his silver medal of honor. There was one medal left that was different from the others, it was a gold coin,

of which only three were ever made. Two of them resided in the treasury. The coin was struck with the image of the king on one side, and on the other side, an inscription that read, faithful and true servant of the king. Gauthier was shocked when his name was announced to receive the coin. Never before had a civilian been awarded a medal. He bowed humbly before the king and received the gold coin. The king shook his hand in front of everyone and seated him on the platform with him. Honor of honors! Gauthier always carried the medal in his shirt pocket, close to his heart.

Gauthier was sent to oversee the arrival of the king at his seaside castle. Storms had passed through during the night and the beach was strewn with seaweed and driftwood. The special shade tent could not be set up until the beach was cleaned and raked. Because the summer palace had minimal staff, and the king's carriage would be arriving soon, Gauthier helped the staff to set up the tent, well clear of the incoming tide.

After the king retired for the evening, Gauthier retired to his chamber. That's when he noticed his gold coin was gone. He quickly called the staff to light lamps and search the palace for his medal. It was not found in the palace, so lamps were taken to the beach to search the large area of sand. The coin was not found, so Gauthier sent the staff back to the palace. He must find the coin! He waited on the beach until daybreak for the bright sun to appear, hoping the coin would shine brightly in the sunlight. Shells and starfish were visible on the beach, but no coin. He went to the tent to retrieve his coat, and there, caught in the corner fabric of the tent stake, shone his coin. He fell to his knees and thanked the Lord for His mercy. He ran to the castle kitchen and ordered a special lunch for all the staff.

While the king and his family spent their day on the beach, Gauthier and the servants celebrated finding his coin. He greatly appreciated them searching with him.

The priest that always traveled with the king, asked if he might speak. "Yes, please do, said Gauthier", expecting a

toast to the staff. I tell you, this is very much like the parable in Luke 15:8-10. Here, I will read it to you. Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!' Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Gauthier thought and then asked, "why would the angels rejoice over the woman repenting over losing, and then finding a lost coin?" The priest said that this story is really two stories in one. The first story is of a married woman. Married women would often wear a ten-coin necklace representing her marriage. The necklace was a wedding gift, so losing one coin from the necklace would make the necklace incomplete. You can imagine her joy at finding the coin and restoring her necklace.

The bigger picture of this story is the symbolism of the parable. Symbolically, we see that the woman is a picture

of God. The lost coin represents one of His sheep who has gone astray. God seeks out His lost sheep and returns them to the fold. So the restored necklace is a picture of the lost being restored to God. God says he will not lose one of His sheep. And like the woman and her friends, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

Gauthier carried his coin all his days, in his pants pocket where he absent mindedly, and lovingly, rubbed the coin, thinking about what it represented in the parable. Over his many years, the image and words were worn down. Not by sin, but from him thanking God each time he rubbed it. When Gauthier went home to his maker, the coin was always left with the oldest son in the family. When there was no son, it was given to someone highly esteemed who would pass on the message of the parable.

If you are reading this story and holding the gold medal, you have a story to pass on. Burl put the coin back into the book and said, we are made in God's image, we are

His workmanship, and if we have invited Jesus into our heart as our personal Savior, we too, serve a king, the King of Kings. He is our treasure. If we keep our lives clean and untarnished before God, we one day can hear, Well done, good and faithful servant, and, come My Bride, to the Wedding supper of the Lamb.

Burl then wrapped the plain book in the blanket and handed it to me. You are the oldest son, and it now belongs to you.

Are you the bride with the precious wedding gift, or are you the lost coin? Confess your sins today, repent, which means to turn away from your sins, and ask Jesus into your heart as your Savior.

