

## The hole in the wall B2/C1

Joanna is the last market trader in her family. When she goes to the capital city to sell her fruits, she discovers something worth more than money.

### Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the text and do the exercises.

### Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

#### Vocabulary

1. .... a trader
2. .... foolish
3. .... a fortune
4. .... a cart
5. .... a stall
6. .... to lose your mind
7. .... greed
8. .... priceless

#### Definition

- a. so valuable that it is impossible to say how much it should cost
- b. a small vehicle with two or four wheels that a horse or person can pull
- c. to start behaving in a silly or strange way
- d. a large amount of money
- e. a person who buys and sells things
- f. stupid, unwise or not thinking sensibly
- g. a table or small shop with an open front for selling things at a market
- h. a strong desire for more money, food, things, etc. than you need

## The hole in the wall — B2/C1

Joanna Paresi was the last one left – the last living person in a family who had been market traders for hundreds of years. She was born at the foot of the mountains that stood over her home like giants, and she had lived there all her life. On the highest of those mountains, the stone fruit grew. Late in the year, the fruit fell. Most of it rolled and fell down the mountains and was never seen again. But some rolled down into a small valley, hidden deep in the mountains. Joanna's family were the only people who knew about the valley.

When the stone fruit dropped from the trees, they were black and hard. Over four long months, they slowly turned from black to grey and, at last, to silver. Then their skin would break open easily to show the sweet, sun-coloured fruit inside.

When they were ripe, the stone fruit were the most popular food in the whole region. On market day, people got up really early and queued for hours to buy them. Joanna's family always had more to sell than anyone else. The fruit had made her family plenty of money over the years, but they were not as wealthy as the market sellers in the distant capital city. Joanna

had always wondered why her family never sold the stone fruit there, at the most important market in the country. Her mother said that someone foolish had tried once, and failed.

Nevertheless, as the years passed, Joanna dreamed about trying. The spring after her mother died, she finally prepared for the long, long journey. It would take almost four months to reach the capital city, which left no time to spare ... *but it could be done.*

When the people of the city tasted stone fruit for the first time, ripe just in time for market, she would make her fortune.

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Joanna walked all the way to the capital, pushing a wooden cart full of stone fruit. She carried with her a beautiful wooden market stall that had been in her family for generations. On this stall, she would sell her fruit. When she finally arrived at the city, she was exhausted after months on the road. But her timing could not have been better. The stone fruit were almost ripe. So far, her plan was a success.

Of course, there was a tax to pay to enter the city gates. And there were market fees to pay. Plus, strange, new foods like hers needed to be officially tested and declared safe before they could be sold. The tests were not cheap and they took days to complete.

Joanna spent all her money on the tests and a place to sleep while she waited. To raise more money, she was forced to sell her beautiful family stall. She felt both guilty and sad, but it had to be done. Besides, after she sold the fruit, she could always buy the stall back before she returned home.

Finally, the tests were finished and she was allowed to sell her fruit. She used the last of her cash to rent a cheap ordinary stall. However, while she had been waiting, the perfect, silver stone fruit had turned white. The skin became tough, and their sweet flavour was lost.

With her boring stall and, worst of all, her overripe fruit, no customers wanted to buy. In the end, she sold all the half-rotten stone fruit to a farmer to feed his pigs. He bought her cart too, and paid her much less than its value.

She had lost everything.

Joanna left the market in defeat and wandered through the unfamiliar city. Its streets were filled with shops of every kind. In one she saw the beautiful, handmade market stall that her mother had given her. It was for sale at a price she could never afford.

Tears ran down her face, and she ran until she was lost in the backstreets. At last, she lay down in a corner and fell into a sleep of exhaustion and sadness.

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When Joanna woke again, it was dark. But there was something even darker on the wall opposite where she was lying: a hole in the wall.

It wasn't a door, because it didn't reach the ground. It wasn't a window either. This was just a hole in the wall. It had ... nothing. Just like her.

Joanna was filled with anger, at the market and at herself. She pulled off one of her boots. It was full of holes from her long journey to disaster. She threw it across the street at the hole.

It disappeared into the hole, but there was no sound as it landed. The boot was gone. It was just one more thing she had lost in her foolishness. She laughed hopelessly and closed her eyes on the world. But then she heard a familiar sound.

She opened her eyes again.

Something shiny lay on the ground. It was a single penny. It was enough to buy a meal. It was definitely worth more than her old boot had been.

It must be a joke, she thought. She waited for whoever it was to come out and start laughing at her. But nothing happened. She pulled off her other boot and threw it after the first. She saw it fly through the hole into nothing. But this time, she saw another coin fly back out, then a second and a third.

Joanna leaned forward to pick up the nearest coin. She held it close to her face ... *It was real!*

She picked up the other coins: *three pennies*. She could buy new boots now.

She took off her belt and threw it at the hole. In it went – and more coins flew back out. She picked those up too and counted her fortune: ten pennies. Enough for new boots *and* a simple belt!

Excited, she quickly took off her travelling coat, her jacket and both socks. She threw each one into the hole.

When the sound of metal falling on stone ended, she was holding a small pile of coins. She counted them, over and over, through the rest of the night.

When dawn came, the hole in the wall had disappeared. Perhaps she had lost her mind along with her fruit, her cart and her mother's stall.

Fine. She didn't care. She had thirty-eight pennies.

And if you're a good trader, all you need is somewhere to start.

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There had probably never been a more unusual trader in the capital than Joanna. She went from shop to shop in her bare feet and undershirt, holding her pile of pennies. From only the cheapest shops, she bought:

a large bag;

a long shirt and a piece of old rope to use as a belt;

a pair of broken wooden shoes;

and, last but not least, all the old, broken or useless things the traders would sell her.

When she had spent all her money, Joanna returned to the street where she had spent the night. All day she sat there, looking at the empty wall opposite. People walked past her, shaking their heads. Some felt sorry for her. Others wondered what she was doing. But most people didn't pay her any attention.

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In the middle of the night, the hole in the wall appeared again. Joanna was happy to learn she hadn't imagined it.

She opened the empty bag in front of the hole. Then, one by one, she threw things into the hole. Even the wooden shoes went in. Only the bag remained. And when the sun rose, the bag was so full she could hardly close it or lift it from the ground.

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Joanna bought new clothes – nothing special, just a good hat, shirt and trousers, boots to take her home, a thick coat for winter in the mountains, and a new, bigger bag. She had enough money left to do some shopping at the market that had tried to ruin her. None of the traders recognised the woman who had been selling rotten fruit two days earlier.

After a busy day of trade, she returned to a particular shop. There, with great pleasure, she bought back her mother's stall. And then she went back to her lucky street with all the fine things she had bought at the market: silk carpets, fine wool, bags of spices and more.

She sat down for one last night, waiting for the hole.

She started with the spices, throwing them into the hole. Then she threw the wool and silk and the other things. A fountain of silver and gold coins poured out of the hole into the bag. When, at last, the coins stopped coming, her bag was filled with more money than she had ever known. She would never need to trade again!

For a moment, she considered throwing her family stall into the hole as well. She wondered what the hole might pay her. Would the hole reward her for its personal value as well as its price?

She shook her head. No amount of money would be worth it, not now nor ever again. But then she looked at the little shining mountain of coins and she had a new idea.

The hole had always given back more value than it took. So what about the gold and silver coins? What would the hole give her if she threw all the money in?

*What reward could be greater than all the money she had?*

Joanna lifted the heavy bag of coins. With shaking arms and legs, she began to swing the bag backwards and forwards, faster and faster ... and then she threw it.

The bag opened and the coins flew through the air. Five coins struck the wall and bounced onto the ground by her feet. All the rest fell into the hole and were gone.

She waited, watching the hole. But this time, nothing came back.

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There was a tax on traders departing the city. Joanna's last five coins were just enough to pay it.

She strode out in her good boots and new clothes. On her back, she carried her mother's stall. She walked all day and slept well at night, happy to be heading for home. As she got further and further away from the capital, the familiar mountains of home slowly rose ahead.

Her pockets were empty, but her heart was full.

From time to time she met other travellers on the road. When she saw them coming, she put up her stall and sold her story to anyone who wanted to buy it.

She never asked for much in return – just a coin or two if her customer had money, some food or drink if not. And although no one believed her story was true, they believed the lessons it contained. For some the lesson was ‘appreciate what you have’ or ‘greed will mean you lose everything.’ For others, it was ‘wisdom comes at a price.’

For Joanna, the last trader in her family, it was the answer to her question: *What reward could be greater than all the money she had?* Now she knew the answer was wisdom, priceless wisdom.

*Story written by Andrew Leon Hudson and adapted by Nicola Prentis.*

## Tasks

### Task 1

Write a number (1–8) to put the events in the order they are mentioned.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Joanna sees something she thinks is not real or must be a joke.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Joanna learns a valuable lesson.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Joanna decides to sell the stone fruit at the big market in the capital city.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Joanna is able to buy expensive things.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Joanna has no money and sleeps on the streets.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Joanna spends all her money while her fruit goes bad.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Joanna loses everything again.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Joanna buys basic new clothes and things that are worth very little.

### Task 2

Circle the best answer.

1. How did Joanna's family make their money?
  - a. They were the first market sellers in their town.
  - b. They knew where to find more stone fruit than anyone else.
  - c. They sold stone fruit in the capital city.
  
2. What was the first thing to go wrong for Joanna?
  - a. She arrived too late to the city.
  - b. She couldn't pay for the tests.
  - c. The tests took too long.
  
3. Why didn't people buy Joanna's fruit?
  - a. It had gone bad.
  - b. It was too expensive.
  - c. They didn't know what it was.

4. What did she think when the hole gave her the first coins?
  - a. Someone was doing it as a joke.
  - b. The money wasn't real.
  - c. She was imagining things.
  
5. Which sentence is true about the money that came from the hole?
  - a. It was of a lower value than the things that went into the hole.
  - b. It was of an equal value to the things that went into the hole.
  - c. It was of a higher value than the things that went into the hole.
  
6. What did Joanna NOT throw into the hole?
  - a. The things she had bought at the market
  - b. Her mother's stall
  - c. The money
  
7. Why was her 'heart full' when she left the city?
  - a. Because she had learned that money was less important than she thought.
  - b. Because she had a lot of money.
  - c. Because she was excited to go home.
  
8. What did the other travellers think of her story?
  - a. They thought it was true.
  - b. They learned something from it.
  - c. They didn't think it was worth paying to hear it.

## **Discussion**

Did you like the story? Do you agree that wisdom is more important than money?

## Answers

### Preparation task

1. e
2. f
3. d
4. b
5. g
6. c
7. h
8. a

### Task 1

- 4 Joanna sees something she thinks is not real or must be a joke.
- 8 Joanna learns a valuable lesson.
- 1 Joanna decides to sell the stone fruit at the big market in the capital city.
- 6 Joanna is able to buy expensive things.
- 3 Joanna has no money and sleeps on the streets.
- 2 Joanna spends all her money while her fruit goes bad.
- 7 Joanna loses everything again.
- 5 Joanna buys basic new clothes and things that are worth very little.

### Task 2

1. b
2. c
3. a
4. a
5. c
6. b
7. a
8. b