

The Reward

(Lord Dunsany)

Our talk at the Club one day was of opportunity and determination. Some said opportunity was required for success, and millions never had it; other that only determination was needed. And then Jorkens joined in, all for determination. If a man was determined to get anything, and stuck to it long enough, he got it, said Jorkens.

'Anything?' asked Terbut.

'Anything,' Jorkens replied, 'so long as he sticks to it, and sticks to it hard enough and long enough. Anything whatever.'

Terbut disagreed.

'Life is like a race,' Jorkens went on, 'in which they tire after a while and sit down, or get interested in something else instead. The man who keeps on wins the race.'

'And suppose a man wanted to be skating champion of the Sahara,' said Terbut, 'and couldn't afford the money to get there.'

'He'd make the money,' said Jorkens. 'And he'd build a skating-rink in the Sahara and organize a competition there. He'd be skating champion all right, if he really gives all his time to it.'

'Could you tell us a case like that?' asked one of us.

'As a matter of fact, I can,' said Jorkens, 'a very similar case.'

'Let's hear it,' said Terbut.

'There was a young fellow,' said Jorkens, 'to whom his parents probably used to say the very things that we have been saying now; and very likely he, as many young fellows do, may have wanted to prove them wrong. I don't know: it was a long time ago. But, whatever his motive was, he hit on a most extraordinary ambition, and stuck to it. It was nothing less than to be appointed Court acrobat.'

'What?' said Terbut.

'Acrobat,' Jorkens went on, 'to the Court of the country in which he lived.'

'What kind of country was that?' asked Terbut.

'Never mind what country it was,' said Jorkens. 'And as a matter of fact its customs weren't so silly as you suppose. They had no post of Court acrobat, and never had had. But that didn't stop young Gorgios. That was his name. He was a good athlete when he came by his wild idea at about the age of sixteen, and had won the high jump and the hurdles and the hundred yards at his school.'

'Well, there was opportunity,' argued Terbut, 'if he was born a good athlete.'

'But wait a moment,' said Jorkens. 'You don't remain an athlete all your life, and he still had to get the post created.'

'How did he do that?' asked Terbut.

'Simply by sticking to it,' said Jorkens. 'He went into politics. They all do in that country. But he went into them harder than anyone else, and never gave up his ambition. Of course he made speeches, and fine ones, on many other subjects; but all the while he stuck to his one idea. The years went by, and the day came when he had power enough to preach his ambition openly, and he told them how the glory of their country and of its ancient throne would be increased if the post of Court acrobat were created. He gave examples of other Courts and greater ones. Of course many opposed him: that is politics. Of course it took a long time: that is politics too. But as the years went by he wore down opposing arguments, till he had taught people what a lesson it would be to all the nations to have a young athlete at Court exhibiting perfect physical fitness, and how such an example would strengthen their soldiers and enable them finally to win the just rights of the nation in victorious battle against their accursed neighbours. And so the idea caught on; and to make a very long story short, the post of Court acrobat was duly created.'

'Both parents of Gorgios were by then long dead. By then, little remained to be done: he had only to stick for a few more days to that wild idea of his, and then, when the question arose of choosing an athlete to fill the newly-made post, whom could they choose but the man who had worked for it all those years?'

'So Gorgios was appointed acrobat to the Court, and learned so late in life, what always takes time, that his parents were right after all. It only remained then to inaugurate him. And that is where I came on the scene, wandering about Europe as I used to do in those days when food used to be cheap and I was young and could easily walk long distances. I came to that country and they were wonderfully friendly, and they let me see the great ceremony, which took place as soon after the creation of the post as Gorgios's uniform could be got ready. And very magnificent clothing it was, a tight-fitting suit of red velvet, all gay with gold buttons and shining with lines of gold lace that wound and twisted about it. The great throne-room had been turned into a kind of gymnasium, with the members of the Royal House seated along a raised platform at one end, and the principal officers standing beside and behind them. Great curtains of red and gold were hung along the walls, and the high swings of acrobats hung down with gilded ropes from the ceiling, and a row of neat hurdles was arranged on the polished floor: like the ones over which Gorgios had won his race when at school. Lights glittered, a band in pale green and gold played softly, and it was indeed a splendid scene. I will not describe it to you, because everything there, the uniforms and the ladies' brilliant dresses, was utterly put in the shade by the moment when the doors opened with a flood of golden light, and the old man in his brilliant uniform appeared between them for the crowning of his life's work. His white hair and the red uniform of the Court acrobat showed each other off to perfection, and his thin figure worn with age was made all the more melancholy by the tight-fitting uniform. As though tired by his long patience and the work of a lifetime, he walked slowly in his pointed shoes and leaned on a gilded stick. He came to the hurdles that he remembered, over which once he had won so easy a victory. As he came to the first he looked up for a moment with a slightly sad expression towards the royal platform, as

though he asked some question with his eyes. Whatever the question was it was at once understood: royal smiles were directed towards him, and gentle applause broke out from every hand, which he understood at once, and the old bent form moved on away from the hurdle. Once he raised a hand to touch the lowest of the swings that were hung from the ceiling. But again the applause broke out, assuring him that no actual activity was expected of him. And so; having made his bows, he was led to a seat, his life's ambition achieved. It must have taken him more than sixty years to do it, since first he came by that strange ambition of his. But he did it. Not many stick to a thing for so long.'

And Jorkens uttered a quiet sigh, so clearly mourning over some lost ambition that he himself had given up, that not even Terbut asked him what it was.

About the Author

Lord Dunsany (1878 – 1957) like James Joyce was an Irishman. He has been described as one of the most charming of modern Irish writers of stories and plays. He was educated at Eton, one of England's most famous public schools, and at Sandhurst Military College. He is considered the narrator of fantastic adventures. "The Reward" is an example of such stories.

Theme

The story is a fantastic adventure of a young man, Gorgios, a good athlete of his age. He hit on a wild idea of becoming a Court acrobat. He worked for it and stuck to it long enough, and remained determined in his mission. He ultimately succeeded in achieving his ambition in more than sixty years without using any short cut or becoming frustrated. A person who remains determined and keeps on his struggle wins his ambition.

Reading Notes

skating-rink	a place made for skating
hit on	thought of
just rights, accursed neighbours	one's own country is always right, and its enemies are always wrong.
inaugurate him	appoint him officially
wound	(past tense of wind) move in curves
in pale green and gold	in pale green uniforms with gold lace on them
was put in the shades	seemed less brilliant by comparison
the crowning	the supreme moment, the reward
from every hand	from every side

EXERCISES

1. Choose the correct answer.

- i. Jorkens said that a man who wanted to succeed had to be
a) an athlete. b) a determined person.
c) a lucky man. d) a hardworking person.
- ii. The man who keeps on wins
a) the reward. b) the race.
c) the shield. d) the trophy.
- iii. He'd be skating champion if he really gave
a) some money. b) his passion.
c) all his time to it. d) his energies.
- iv. He hit on a most extraordinary ambition, to be appointed
a) an inspector. b) a magistrate.
c) a clerk. d) a Court acrobat.
- v. At the age of sixteen he won the
a) high jump. b) the hurdles.
c) the hundred yards race. d) high jump, the hurdles and the hundred yards.
- vi. Gorgios probably wanted to
a) make his country powerful. b) prove his parents wrong.
c) wear a splendid uniform. d) create a post of Court acrobat.
- vii. When Gorgios was inaugurated, the people applauded because he
a) had achieved his ambition.
b) looked splendid in his uniform.
c) performed on the hurdles and swings.
d) defeated his enemies.
- viii. The great throne-room had been turned into a kind of
a) swimming pool. b) gymnasium.
c) stadium. d) race track.
- ix. Terbut
a) asked Jorkens what his own ambition was?
b) believed Jorkens' story. c) disagreed with Jorkens.
d) improved Jorkens' story.
- x. Gorgios achieved his ambition by
a) building a skating-rink. b) going into politics.
c) getting an opportunity. d) winning the hundred yards.

2. **Mark the sentences true or false.**

- i. They talked of money and determination.
- ii. Gorgios wanted to prove his parents wrong.
- iii. He went into politics to persuade them.
- iv. The creation of a post of Court acrobat would increase the glory of the country.
- v. It would inspire them to win the just rights.
- vi. Many athletes competed for the post of a Court acrobat.
- vii. The magnificent uniform of Gorgios impressed them all.
- viii. Everyone was sad on the inauguration.
- ix. The band played softly.
- x. Gorgios looked up with a slightly sad expression towards the royal platform.

3. **Answer the following questions. (in one or two sentences).**

- i. What was the subject discussed at the Club?
- ii. What did Terbut think of Jorkens' argument?
- iii. How did Jorkens convince that a man can become a skating champion of the Sahara?
- iv. How did Gorgios persuade his people to make his country strong?
- v. What was the viewpoint of the parents of Gorgios?
- vi. What were the arrangements made for the function of inauguration?
- vii. Describe the scene of inauguration. Write five sentences.
- viii. What were the feelings of Gorgios on the occasion?
- ix. Did Gorgios use any short cut to achieve his ambition?
- x. How long had Gorgios to stick to get his ambition achieved?

4. **Answer the following questions in 50 - 100 words.**

- i. Discuss the political views of Jorkens.
- ii. How did Gorgios achieve his ambition?
- iii. Do you agree or disagree with the viewpoint of the writer? Give five reasons.
- iv. Why were the brilliant dresses put in the shade at the inauguration?
- v. What is the lesson that the story teaches?

5. **Connect part of Column I with the relevant part of Column II.**

Column I	Column II
Some said opportunity was	ambition openly.
He was a good athlete when	few more days to that wild idea.
He went into them harder	food used to be cheap.
He had power to preach his	showed each other off to perfection.
He had only to stick for a	than sixty years to do it.
I used to do in those days when	than anyone else.
His white hair and the red uniform	he came by his wild idea.
It must have taken him more	required for success.

6. Punctuate the following lines.

life is like a race jorkens went on in which they tire after a while and sit down or get interested in something else instead the man who keeps on wins the race

7. Complete these sentences with the correct forms of the verbs in brackets.

- i. Jorkens said that if a man (be) determined to get anything, and (stick) to it long enough, he (get) it.
- ii. If a man (want) to be a skating champion of the Sahara, and (can) not afford the money to get there, he'd (make) the money.
- iii. He (be) skating champion if he really (give) all his time to it.
- iv. It was thought that the glory of the country (be) increased if the post of Court acrobat (be) created.
- v. It was decided that if a good athlete (can) be found, they (make) him Court acrobat.

8. Use the following phrasal verbs in your sentences.

- | | |
|-----------|------------|
| a) get in | b) get out |
| c) get on | d) get off |

9. Read the passage and answer the questions given at the end.

'Simply by sticking to it,' said Jorkens. 'He went into politics. They all do in that country. But he went into them harder than anyone else, and never gave up his ambition. Of course he made speeches, and fine ones, on many other subjects; but all the while he stuck to his one idea. The years went by, and the day came when he had power enough to preach his ambition openly, and he told them how the glory of their country and of its ancient throne would be increased if the post of Court acrobat were created. He gave examples of other Courts and greater ones. Of course many opposed him: that is politics. Of course it took a long time: that is politics too. But as the years went by he wore down the opposing arguments, till he had taught people what a lesson it would be to all the nations to have a young athlete at Court exhibiting perfect physical fitness and how such an example would strengthen their soldiers and enable them finally to win the just rights of the nation in victorious battle against their accursed neighbours. And so the idea caught on; and to make a very long story short, the post of Court acrobat was duly created.'

- a) Who joined the politics?
- b) How can the glory of the country be increased?
- c) How was the post of a Court acrobat created?
- d) Write down the main idea of the paragraph.