

Year 8:
Short Stories through the Ages



Name:

Class:

"The Miller's Tale" by Geoffrey Chaucer

In Oxford there once lived a rich old lout
Who had some guest rooms that he rented out,
And carpentry was this old fellow's trade.
A poor young scholar boarded who had made
His studies in the liberal arts, but he
Had turned his fancy to astrology
And knew the way, by certain propositions,
To answer well when asked about conditions,
Such as when men would ask in certain hours
If they should be expecting drought or showers,
Or if they asked him what was to befall
Concerning such I can't recount it all.
This student's name was Nicholas the Handy.
He led a secret love life fine and dandy,
In private always, ever on the sly,
Though meek as any maiden to the eye.
With Nicholas there were no other boarders,
He lived alone, and had there in his quarters
Some fragrant herbs, arranged as best to suit,
And he himself was sweeter than the root
Of licorice or any herb at all.
His Almagest and books both great and small,
An astrolabe for plotting outer space,
And counters used in math were all in place
On shelves between the headposts of his bed.
His storage chest was draped with cloth of red,
And on its top there lay a psaltery
On which at night he'd play a melody,
So sweet a sound that all the chamber rang;
And *Angelus ad virginem* he sang,
And after that would follow "The King's Note."
Folks often praised him for his merry throat.
And this was how this sweet clerk's time was spent,
While friends provided money for his rent.
The carpenter had newly wed a wife,
One whom he loved more than his very life;
Her age was eighteen years. He jealously
Kept her as if inside a cage, for she
Was one both young and wild, and he had fears
Of being a cuckold, so advanced in years.
Not educated, he had never read
Cato: one like himself a man should wed,
He ought to marry mindful of his state,
For youth and age are often at debate.
But since he had been captured in the snare,

Like others folks he had his cross to bear.
And fair this young wife was! She had withal
A body like a weasel, slim and small.
She wore a belt with little stripes of silk;
An apron was as white as morning milk
Upon her loins, pleated daintily.
Her white smock, too, had fine embroidery;
The collar was embellished round about
With lovely coal-black silk inside and out,
And ribbons on the snowy cap she wore
Were of the same silk that her collar bore.
She wore a silken headband, broad and high.
And certainly she had a wanton eye;
Her brows were thinly plucked, and like a bow
Each one was arched, and black as any sloe.
Indeed she was a blissful sight to see,
Moreso than any pear tree that could be
And softer than the wool upon a wether.
Upon her belt was hung a purse of leather,
Silk-tasseled and with brassy spangles pearled.
And there's no man so wise in all this world,
Though you may go and search it every inch,
Could dream a doll so lovely, such a wench.
And brighter far did shine her lovely hue
Than gold coins in the Tower when they're new.
Her song was loud and lively as the call
Of any swallow perching on the wall.
She'd skip about and play some game or other
As any kid or calf behind its mother.
Her mouth was sweet as any mead whatever
Or as a hoard of apples on the heather.
Skittish she was, just like a jolly colt,
Tall as a mast, straight as an archer's bolt.
The brooch on her low collar was as large
As is the boss upon a shield or targe.
Her shoes, well laced, high up her legs would reach.
She really was a primrose, quite a peach,
One fit for any lord to lay in bed
Or any worthy working man to wed.

Now sir, and sir again, it came to pass
That one fine day this Handy Nicholas
With this young wife began to flirt and play,
Her husband off at Osney (anyway
These clerks are cunning when made to wait)
And Nicholas caught her by the waist;
"Surely," he said, "if I don't have my way,

For secret love, dear, I'll have to go away."
 He held her hips as he went on to say,
 "My darling, you must love me right away
 Or I will die, God save me!" Like a colt
 Inside a shoeing frame she tried to bolt,
 She turned her face away defiantly.
 "Upon my faith, you'll get no kiss from me!
 Why, let me go," she said, "stop, Nicholas,
 Or I will cry 'Out!', 'Help me!' and 'Alas!'
 Unhand my body, show some courtesy!"
 But then for mercy he made such a plea
 And spoke so fairly, offering so fast
 His all to her, that she agreed at last
 To grant to him her love: she made her promise
 To be at his commandment, by Saint Thomas
 Of Kent, when she saw opportunity.
 "My husband is so full of jealousy,
 If you don't wait and privy be," she said,
 "I know right well that I'm as good as dead.
 You must be secret, keep this matter quiet."
 "Nay," Handy said, "don't you be worried by it.
 A clerk has for his time not much to show
 If he can't fool a carpenter." And so
 The two were in accord and gave their word
 To wait awhile as you've already heard.
 When Nicholas got through with all of this
 And he held her sweetly and gave her a kiss
 Then he released her and took his psaltery,
 And played it hard, a lively melody.
 Now to the parish church it came to pass
 That in her Christian works and for the mass
 This good wife went upon one holy day.
 Her forehead shone as bright as day, the way
 She'd scrubbed it so when washing after work.
 Now in that church there was a parish clerk
 Whose name was Absalon. His curly hair
 Was shiny, bright as gold found anywhere,
 And spread out like a broad fan on his head
 With straight and even part. A healthy red
 Was his complexion, eyes gray as a gander.
 The tracery of Saint Paul's was no grander
 Than his shoes' openwork, with fine red hose.
 The lad was trimly dressed from head to toes;
 He wore a sky-blue tunic that in places
 Was tricked out with the loveliest of laces,
 And over it his surplice was as bright
 As any blossom seen, a purest white.

A merry child he was, as God may save.
He well could let your blood, and clip and shave,
And draw you up a deed and quittance too.
Some twenty different ways the fellow knew
To demonstrate the latest Oxford dance;
He'd kick his heels about and blithely prance
And play some merry tunes upon the fiddle.
Loud treble he was known to sing a little
And he could play as well on the guitar.
In Oxford there was not a single bar
That he did not go visit with his act
If there was any barmaid to attract.
This Absalon so jolly, fond of play,
Went with a censer on that holy day
To cense the parish wives. And as he passed,
Many a longing look on them he cast--
Especially on this carpenter's wife.
Just looking at her made a merry life.
She was so neat and sweet, this wanton spouse,
That if he'd been a cat and she a mouse
At once he would have caught her. Absalon,
This parish clerk so jolly, full of fun,
Could not, for the love longing in his heart,
Take offerings from wives, he'd take no part,
For courtesy, he said, and never might.

The moon, when night had come, was full and bright
As Absalon took guitar under arm,
His thoughts upon whom he might wake and charm;
Thus amorous and jolly, off he strode
Until he reached the carpenter's abode
Soon after cockcrow. He then took his station
Beside a casement window, its location
Right in the old man's bedroom wall. And there
He daintily began to sing his air:
"Now, dearest lady, if your will it be,
It is my prayer that you will pity me."
He sang and played the guitar right in tune.
The carpenter awoke and heard him croon
And said then to his wife, "Why, Alison,
What's going on? Is that not Absalon
Who's chanting there below our bedroom wall?"
And she replied, "Yes, John, no doubt at all,
As God knows, I can hear him tone for tone."
Now shouldn't one leave well enough alone?
From day to day this jolly parish clerk
Wooed her till he was woebegone. He'd work

Upon it night and day and never rest;
He'd comb his spreading locks, he smartly dressed;
By go-betweens and proxies he would woo
And swore he'd be her servant ever true;
He warbled to her like a nightingale;
He sent her honeyed wine, some mead, spiced ale,
And cakes still piping hot. And since she knew
Of city ways, he offered money too;
For some folks can be won by such largess,
And some by blows, and some by kindness.
To show her his abilities so varied,
He even went on stage, portraying Herod.
But what would this avail him with the lass?
For she so loved this Handy Nicholas
That Absalon could elsewhere toot his horn;
He had for all his labor only scorn.
And so she made poor Absalon an ape,
Made all his earnest efforts but a jape.
The proverb tells the truth, it's not a lie,
Here's how it goes: "The one nearby and sly
Will always make the distant dear one hated."
Though Absalon go mad, wrath unabated
Because he was so far out of her sight,
Nigh Nicholas was standing in his light.
Well may you fare, O Handy Nicholas,
For Absalon must wail and sing "Alas"!

And so it was that on one Saturday
The carpenter to Osney made his way,
And Handy Nicholas and Alison
Were in accord on what was to be done,
That Nicholas should now devise a wile,
This simple jealous husband to beguile;
And if their little game turned out all right,
She then could sleep in Handy's arms all night,
As this was his desire and hers as well.
So right away--no further words to tell,
For Nicholas no longer meant to tarry--
He slyly to his room began to carry
Both food and drink to last a day or two.
He told her what to lead her husband through
If he should ask for Nicholas: she'd say
She didn't know his whereabouts, all day
Upon the lad she had not laid an eye;
She thought some malady he had was why,
For though her maid cried out, the lad to call,
He wouldn't answer any way at all.

So this went on for all that Saturday;
 This Nicholas up in his chamber lay,
 And ate and slept, or did what he thought best,
 Till Sunday when the sun went to its rest.
 This simple carpenter began to wonder
 About him, if some ailment had him under.
 "By dear Saint Thomas, I'm now full of dread
 That things aren't right with Nicholas," he said.
 "O God forbid that suddenly he's died!
 For sure a ticklish world's where we abide;
 Today I saw 'em tote a corpse to kirk
 Though Monday last I saw the man at work.
 "Go up," he told his knave at once. "Go on,
 Call at his door, knock on it with a stone,
 See how it is, and tell me truthfully."
 The knave went up the stairway sturdily
 And cried out at the chamber door; he stood
 There pounding like a madman on the wood.
 "What are you at, O Master Nicholay?
 How can you sleep for all the livelong day?"
 All was for naught, for he heard not a sound.
 But then a hole low in the door he found
 (The one through which the cat was wont to creep),
 And through this hole he took a thorough peep
 Until at last he had the lad in sight.
 This clerk sat gaping upward as he might
 If he were staring off at the new moon.
 He went back down the stairs, and none too soon,
 To tell his master how he'd seen the man.
 To cross himself the carpenter began,
 And said, "Help us, I pray, Saint Frideswide!
 A man knows little of what shall betide.
 This man has fallen with his astronomy
 Into some madness or some malady.
 I always figured it would end just so!
 God's privacy's a thing men shouldn't know.
 Yea, blessed always is the simple man
 Who knows his creed and that is all he can!
 So fared another clerk with astromy:
 He walked out through the fields to try to see
 The future in the stars, and got for it
 A fall into a fertilizer pit,
 One he had not foreseen. Yet by Saint Thomas,
 I pity Handy Nicholas. I promise,
 He shall be scolded for such studying,
 If that I may, by Jesus, heaven's King!
 Get me a staff, and neath the door I'll pry

While you heave on it, Robin. By and by
 He'll come out of his studying, I'll bet."
 Then at the chamber door he got all set.
 His knave was very strong in any case
 And by the hasp he heaved it from its place,
 The door went falling in right to the floor.
 Nicholas sat as stonily as before,
 Continuing to gape into the air.
 The carpenter assumed it was despair;
 He took him by the shoulders mightily
 And shook him hard, and cried reproachingly,
 "What is it, Nicholay? Look down! Awake,
 Think on Christ's passion! Here the sign I make
 Now of the cross, from elf and evil sprite
 To keep you." He began then to recite
 At once a night spell on the walls about
 As well as on the threshold leading out:
 "O Jesus and Saint Benedict, we pray
 You'll bless this house from every demon's sway.
 Night falls--White Paternoster, help defeat her!
 Where have you gone, O sister of Saint Peter?"
 And then at last this Handy Nicholas
 Began to sorely sigh, and said, "Alas!
 Shall all the world so soon be swept away?"
 The carpenter replied, "What's that you say?
 On God, like we hard workers do, now think."
 And Nicholas then said, "I need a drink,
 And afterwards we'll speak in privacy
 Of certain things concerning you and me.
 I'll surely tell no other what I've learned."
 The carpenter went down, then soon returned,
 With a full quart of strong ale, up the stairs;
 And when they both had finished up their shares,
 Nick tightly shut the door. As to confide,
 This carpenter he set down by his side.
 He said, "Now, John, my host both kind and dear,
 Your word of honor you must give me here
 That to no man this secret you'll disclose;
 For it is Christ's own secret that I pose,
 And if you tell it, sad will be your fate.
 There's such a vengeance if you should relate
 What I'm to say, you'll reap insanity."
 "By Christ's own holy blood, it shall not be,"
 Old John replied, "for I am not a blabber,
 No, I must say, I'm not an idle gabber.
 Say what you will, which I will never tell
 To child nor wife, by him who harrowed hell!"

"Now, John," said Nicholas, "believe you me,
 I found this out through my astrology
 As I looked on the moon when it was bright.
 This Monday at a quarter of the night
 There shall come down so furious a rain
 Not half its force did Noah's flood contain.
 This world," he said, "in less than one small hour
 Shall all be drowned, so hideous the shower.
 Mankind shall thus be drowned and lose all life."
 The carpenter replied, "Alas, my wife!
 My Alison, alas! She too will drown?"
 And in his sorrow nearly falling down,
 He said, "No remedy will make it pass?"
 "Why, yes, by God," said Handy Nicholas,
 "If you'll work by sound learning and advice.
 Don't work from your own head, that won't suffice.
 As Solomon once said (and it is true),
 'Work all by counsel and you'll never rue.'
 If you'll work by good counsel, I've no doubt
 That mast and sail we then can do without,
 For I will save your wife and you and me.
 Have you not heard how Noah came to be
 Saved by our Lord, who warned him beforehand
 That water was to devastate the land?"
 "Yes," said the carpenter, "quite long ago."
 "Have you not heard," said Nicholas, "also
 Of Noah's troubles with his fellowship
 Until he finally got his wife to ship?
 There is no doubt, I daresay, as to whether
 He would have given up his last black wether
 That she might have a vessel to herself.
 Do you know, then, what's best to do yourself?
 Haste is required, and for a hasty thing
 No time for preaching nor for tarrying.
 "Be off at once and fetch into this inn
 Three kneading troughs or tubs--we'll have one then
 For each of us; but see that each is large,
 So each of us may float as on a barge.
 And have therein some victuals too, at best
 Enough to last a day--fie on the rest!
 The waters will subside and go away
 At nine or so on the following day.
 But Robin must not know of this, your knave,
 And Jill your maid I also cannot save;
 Don't ask me why, for though you ask of me
 I will not tell a soul God's privy.
 Suffice it, John, lest you go raving mad,

To have the same good grace that Noah had;
 Your wife I'll surely save without a doubt.
 Be on your way, get busy hereabout.
 "But when you have, for her and you and me,
 Secured these kneading tubs, then hang the three
 Up in the roof--and hang them very high,
 That our provision no man may espy.
 And when you have accomplished what I've said,
 And stored enough good fare to keep us fed,
 An ax besides to whack the cord in two
 When comes the rain, so we can ride it through;
 And when you've knocked a hole up in the gable,
 Toward the garden and above the stable,
 That we may freely pass upon our way
 Until the mighty shower's gone away,
 Then merrily we'll float, I undertake,
 Just as the white duck floats behind the drake.
 'How, Alison! How, John!' I'll call to you.
 'Be merry, for the flood will soon be through!'
 And you will say, 'Hail, Master Nicholay!
 Good morning, I can see you, it is day!'
 And then we shall be lords, throughout this life,
 Of all the world, like Noah and his wife.
 "But of one thing you must be warned about:
 Be well advised, on that night never doubt
 That when each one of us has gone on board,
 We must not speak a word. We can't afford
 One call or cry but only silent prayer,
 For it's God's own dear will that I declare.
 "Your wife and you, therefore, hang far apart;
 God give you speed! Let's make a start
 Tomorrow night when everyone's asleep,
 Into our kneading tubs we then shall creep
 And there we'll sit awaiting God's good grace.
 Be on your way, I have no longer space
 To sermonize on this, and so I'll cease.
 It's said, 'But send the wise and hold your peace.'
 Well, you are wise, so you I needn't teach.
 Get going now and save us, I beseech."
 This simple carpenter went on his way
 With many an "Alas" and "Wellaway,"
 And to his wife he told his privy.
 Now she was well aware, much more than he,
 Of what this cunning plan was to imply.
 She acted, though, as if about to die;
 "Alas! Go now immediately," she said,
 "Help us escape or all of us are dead!"

I am the truest of devoted wives,
 So go, dear spouse, and help to save our lives."
 See what a great thing is emotion! Why,
 Of what one may imagine one can die,
 So deep is the impression it can make.
 This silly carpenter began to shake;
 He feared he was to witness verily
 Old Noah's flood come rolling like the sea
 To drown young Alison, his honey dear.
 He weeps and wails, he looks so sad and drear
 As many a sigh he heaves, a mournful sough.
 He goes and gets a kneading trough somehow,
 One tub and then another, which he then
 Has privately transported to the inn;
 In privacy he hangs them as instructed.
 Three ladders with his own hands he constructed
 By which they would go climbing rung by rung
 Up to the rafters where the tubs were hung.
 He put in each of them some cheese and bread
 And good ale in a jug, to keep them fed
 Sufficiently for what would be a day.
 Before beginning, though, all this array
 He had his knave and maid as well to go
 Upon an errand to London. And so
 Upon that Monday, as it drew to night,
 He shut the door, lit not one candlelight,
 Arranged all things to look as they should be,
 And up into their tubs then climbed the three.
 They sat the time a furlong takes to walk.
 Said Nick, "Now Paternoster, then no talk!"
 And "Mum," said John, and "Mum," said Alison.
 The carpenter's devotions were begun,
 He stilly sat, prayed to the Holy Spirit,
 And waited for the rain, intent to hear it.
 But dead asleep from all his weariness
 The carpenter soon fell--it was, I guess,
 Around the curfew time. Yet even then
 He sorely groaned, such pain his soul was in.
 (He also snored, the way his noggin lay.)
 Then down his ladder crept young Nicholay,
 And Alison down hers as softly sped;
 Without a single word they went to bed
 Right where the carpenter was wont to be.
 And there the revel and the melody!
 Until the bell of Lauds began to ring
 And friars in the chancel were to sing.
 Now Absalon, the amorous parish clerk

(Still woebegone from being so lovestruck),
Upon that Monday was down Osney way
To join companions for some sport and play.
While there he chanced to ask a cloisterer
In private about John the carpenter.
They went outside the church, and to this clerk
The monk said, "I've not seen him here at work
Since Saturday. I'd say, as best I have it,
He's been sent out for timber by the abbot.
For timber he will very often go
And stay out at the grange a day or so.
If not, he's surely at his house today.
Which place he's at I can't for certain say."
This Absalon was thrilled, his heart was light.
"It's time," he thought, "to stay awake all night,
For I saw not one stirring of the man
About his door, not once since day began.
"As I may thrive, at crowing of the cock
Privately at his window I will knock,
The one so low there in his bedroom wall.
To Alison I'll speak and tell her all
About my longing. This time I won't miss
But at the least will get from her a kiss.
That will be, by my faith, some consolation;
My mouth has itched all day, a situation
That is a sign of kissing at the least.
And, too, last night I dreamt about a feast.
Therefore I'll go and sleep an hour or two,
Then I will stay up all the night and woo."
At first cockcrow, at once from his repose
This jolly lover Absalon arose
And donned attire as smart as any viewed.
Some cardamon and licorice he chewed,
To scent his breath, before he combed his hair.
A true-love herb as well he chose to bear
Beneath his tongue, thereby to be exquisite.
Then to the old man's house he made his visit.
There quietly he stood beneath the casement
(It reached down to his breast, so low its placement);
He cleared his throat and spoke in softest voice:
"What are you doing, honeycomb, my choice
And fairest bird, my sweetest cinnamon?
Awake and speak to me, sweet Alison.
How little do you think upon my woe;
I sweat for your love everywhere I go.
Yes, darling, I have for you such a love
You've got me mourning like a turtledove,

My appetite's that of a maid," he cried.
 "Get from the window, jackass," she replied.
 "So help me God, there'll be no 'come and kiss me.'
 I love another and, by Jesus, he
 Is better far than you or I'm to blame.
 Unless you want a stoning, in the name
 Of twenty devils, let me sleep. Away!"
 "Alas," said Absalon, "and welladay,
 That my true love is ever so beset!
 At least then kiss me, if that's all I get,
 For Jesus' love and for the love of me."
 "Will you then go," she said, "and let me be?"
 "Yes, darling, surely," he was quick to say.
 "Get ready, then," she said, "I'm on my way."
 To Nicholas she whispered, "Shh, be still;
 Of laughter you're about to get your fill."
 Now Absalon got down upon his knees
 And said, "I am a lord by all degrees,
 For after this I hope there's more to follow.
 Come, grace me, darling, my sweet little swallow!"
 She opened up the window then with haste.
 "Come on," she said, "be quick, no time to waste,
 We don't want neighbors seeing you've come by."
 Absalon wiped his mouth till it was dry.
 The night was dark and still, not even a hum,
 And from the window she stuck out her bum;
 And Absalon, not knowing north from south,
 Then kissed her naked ass with eager mouth
 Before he was aware of all of this.
 Then back he started, something seemed amiss:
 A woman has no beard, he knew as much,
 Yet this was rough and hairy to the touch.
 "O fie!" he said. "Alas! what did I do?"
 "Tee hee," said she, and clapt the window to.
 Poor Absalon had reached a sorry pass.
 "A beard, a beard!" laughed Handy Nicholas.
 "God's body, this is really going swell."
 Poor Absalon heard all this very well,
 In anger had to give his lip a bite,
 And to himself he said, "I'll set you right."
 Who's rubbing now, who's scrubbing now his lips
 With dust, with sand, with straw, with cloth, with chips,
 But Absalon, who's crying out "Alas!
 May Satan take my soul if I'd not pass
 Up owning this whole town that I might be
 Avenged for this despite they've done to me.
 Alas," he cried, "I didn't turn aside!"

His hot love then was cold, indeed had died;
 For from the time he kissed her naked ass
 He didn't give one cress for any lass,
 For he'd been cured of all his malady;
 All lovers he denounced repeatedly
 And wept just like a child who has been whipped.
 Across the street a little ways he slipped
 To see a blacksmith, Master Gervase, who
 Was known for plow parts, shares and coulter too,
 And at his forge was busy making more.
 This Absalon knocked softly at his door
 And said, "Quick, Gervase, get this door undone."
 "Who's there?" he asked. "It's me, it's Absalon."
 "Why, Absalon! By Christ's sweet tree, I say,
 Why up so early? *Benedicite!*
 What's ailing you? God knows, some merry girl
 Is what brings you out prowling in a whirl,
 And by Saint Neot you follow what I mean."
 But Absalon was caring not a bean
 For all his play, he didn't speak or laugh,
 For he had much more tow on his distaff
 Than Gervase knew. He said, "My friend so dear,
 This red-hot coulter in the chimney here--
 Lend it to me. There's something I must do
 And then right soon I'll bring it back to you."
 "Why, surely," Gervase said, "if it were gold
 Or a poke of nobles in a sum untold,
 As I'm a smith, 'twould be yours every bit.
 But what the devil will you do with it?"
 "Let that," said Absalon, "be as it may.
 I'll tell you all about it when it's day."
 He grabbed it by the handle, which was cool,
 And quietly went out, and with the tool
 He went again to the carpenter's wall.
 He cleared his throat to give a little call
 And knocked upon the window as before.
 "Who's there?" he heard young Alison once more.
 "Who's knocking there? It is a thief, I'll bet."
 "Why, no," he said, "God knows, my little pet,
 It's Absalon. My darling little thing,
 I've brought for you," said he, "a golden ring.
 So help me God, my mother gave it to me.
 It's well engraved, it is a fine thing truly.
 I'll let you have it for another kiss."
 Nicholas was up and refused to miss,
 And thought he would improve upon the jape
 And have him kiss his bum ere he escape.

He hastened to the window, turned around,
 And stuck his bottom out without a sound,
 Both buttocks and beyond, right to the thighs.
 Then Absalon, who had to strain his eyes,
 Said, "Speak, sweet bird, I know not where thou art."
 And Nicholas at this let fly a fart
 So great it sounded like a thunderclap--
 It nearly blinded Absalon, poor chap.
 But he was set with his hot iron to move,
 And Nicholas was smote right in the groove.
 Off came the skin a handbreadth wide and some,
 The hot iron had so burnt him in his bum,
 And from the smart he thought that he would die.
 Just like a madman he began to cry,
 "Help! Water, water! Help me, for God's sake!"
 The carpenter by then had stirred awake;
 He heard mad cries of "Water!" loud and clear,
 And thought, "Alas, the Flood of Noel's here!"
 He sat right up without the least ado
 And grabbed his ax and whacked the cord in two,
 Then down went everything--no time for sale
 Of any of his bread or any ale:
 He hit the floor, and there unconscious lay.
 Then Alison and Handy right away
 Cried out "Help!" and "Disaster!" in the street.
 The neighbors, high and low, ran there to meet,
 They stood and stared at poor unconscious John
 Who lay there on the floor so pale and wan,
 For from the fall he had a broken arm.
 But he himself was blamed for all his harm;
 For when he spoke, each word was then denied
 By Nicholas and Alison his bride.
 They made the claim to all that he was mad:
 Some ghastly fear of "Noel's flood" he had,
 A fantasy that had him so deranged
 Three kneading tubs the old man had arranged
 To buy and hang there in the roof above;
 And then he had implored them, for God's love,
 To sit up there and keep him company.
 The people laughed at such a fantasy;
 Up at the roof they all began to gape,
 And turned the old man's harm into a jape.
 No matter what the carpenter insisted,
 It was for naught, his reasons were resisted.
 With such great oaths the fellow was put down,
 He was considered mad throughout the town;
 Each learned man agreed with every other,

Saying, "The man is mad, beloved brother,"
And everyone just laughed at all his strife.
So she was screwed, the carpenter's young wife,
Despite all jealous safeguards he could try;
And Absalon has kissed her nether eye,
And Nicholas is scalded in the rear.
This tale is done, God save all who are here!

The Tell-Tale Heart by Edgar Allan Poe

TRUE!—nervous—very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why *will* you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses—not destroyed—not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily—how calmly I can tell you the whole story.

It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night. Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! One of his eyes resembled that of a vulture—a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees—very gradually—I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye for ever.

Now this is the point. You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen *me*. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded—with what caution—with what foresight—with what dissimulation I went to work! I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him. And every night, about midnight, I turned the latch of his door and opened it—oh, so gently! And then, when I had made an opening sufficient for my head, I put in a dark lantern, all closed, closed, so that no light shone out, and then I thrust in my head. Oh, you would have laughed to see how cunningly I thrust it in! I moved it slowly—very, very slowly, so that I might not disturb the old man’s sleep. It took me an hour to place my whole head within the opening so far that I could see him as he lay upon his bed. Ha!—would a madman have been so wise as this? And then, when my head was well in the room, I undid the lantern cautiously—oh, so cautiously—cautiously (for the hinges creaked)—I undid it just so much that a single thin ray fell upon the vulture eye. And this I did for seven long nights—every night just at midnight—but I found the eye always closed; and so it was impossible to do the work; for it was not the old man who vexed me, but his Evil Eye. And every morning, when the day broke, I went boldly into the chamber, and spoke courageously to him, calling him by name in a hearty tone, and inquiring how he had passed the night. So you see he would have been a very profound old man, indeed, to suspect that every night, just at twelve, I looked in upon him while he slept.

Upon the eighth night I was more than usually cautious in opening the door. A watch’s minute hand moves more quickly than did mine. Never before that night had I *felt* the extent of my own powers—of my sagacity. I could scarcely contain my feelings of triumph. To think that there I was, opening the door, little by little, and he not even to dream of my secret deeds or thoughts. I fairly chuckled at the idea; and perhaps he heard me; for he moved on the bed suddenly, as if startled. Now you may think that I drew back—but no. His room was as black as pitch with the thick darkness (for the shutters were close fastened,

through fear of robbers), and so I knew that he could not see the opening of the door, and I kept pushing it on steadily, steadily.

I had my head in, and was about to open the lantern, when my thumb slipped upon the tin fastening, and the old man sprang up in the bed, crying out—"Who's there?"

I kept quite still and said nothing. For a whole hour I did not move a muscle, and in the meantime I did not hear him lie down. He was still sitting up in the bed listening;—just as I have done, night after night, hearkening to the death watches in the wall.

Presently I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror. It was not a groan of pain or of grief—oh, no!—it was the low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe. I knew the sound well. Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me. I say I knew it well. I knew what the old man felt, and pitied him, although I chuckled at heart. I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise, when he had turned in the bed. His fears had been ever since growing upon him. He had been trying to fancy them causeless, but could not. He had been saying to himself—"It is nothing but the wind in the chimney—it is only a mouse crossing the floor," or "it is merely a cricket which has made a single chirp." Yes, he has been trying to comfort himself with these suppositions; but he had found all in vain. *All in vain*; because Death, in approaching him, had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim. And it was the mournful influence of the unperceived shadow that caused him to feel—although he neither saw nor heard—to *feel* the presence of my head within the room.

When I had waited a long time, very patiently, without hearing him lie down, I resolved to open a little—a very, very little crevice in the lantern. So I opened it—you cannot imagine how stealthily, stealthily—until, at length, a single dim ray, like the thread of the spider, shot from out the crevice and full upon the vulture eye.

It was open—wide, wide open—and I grew furious as I gazed upon it. I saw it with perfect distinctness—all a dull blue, with a hideous veil over it that chilled the very marrow in my bones; but I could see nothing else of the old man's face or person: for I had directed the ray as if by instinct, precisely upon the damned spot.

And now have I not told you that what you mistake for madness is but over-acuteness of the senses?—now, I say, there came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I knew *that* sound well too. It was the beating of the old man's heart. It increased my fury, as the beating of a drum stimulates the soldier into courage.

But even yet I refrained and kept still. I scarcely breathed. I held the lantern motionless. I tried how steadily I could maintain the ray upon the eye. Meantime the hellish tattoo of the

heart increased. It grew quicker and quicker, and louder and louder every instant. The old man's terror *must* have been extreme! It grew louder, I say, louder every moment!—do you mark me well? I have told you that I am nervous: so I am. And now at the dead hour of the night, amid the dreadful silence of that old house, so strange a noise as this excited me to uncontrollable terror. Yet, for some minutes longer I refrained and stood still. But the beating grew louder, louder! I thought the heart must burst. And now a new anxiety seized me—the sound would be heard by a neighbor! The old man's hour had come! With a loud yell, I threw open the lantern and leaped into the room. He shrieked once—once only. In an instant I dragged him to the floor, and pulled the heavy bed over him. I then smiled gaily, to find the deed so far done. But, for many minutes, the heart beat on with a muffled sound. This, however, did not vex me; it would not be heard through the wall. At length it ceased. The old man was dead. I removed the bed and examined the corpse. Yes, he was stone, stone dead. I placed my hand upon the heart and held it there many minutes. There was no pulsation. He was stone dead. His eye would trouble me no more.

If still you think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body. The night waned, and I worked hastily, but in silence. First of all I dismembered the corpse. I cut off the head and the arms and the legs.

I then took up three planks from the flooring of the chamber, and deposited all between the scantlings. I then replaced the boards so cleverly, so cunningly, that no human eye—not even *his*—could have detected any thing wrong. There was nothing to wash out—no stain of any kind—no blood-spot whatever. I had been too wary for that. A tub had caught all—ha! ha!

When I had made an end of these labors, it was four o'clock—still dark as midnight. As the bell sounded the hour, there came a knocking at the street door. I went down to open it with a light heart,—for what had I *now* to fear? There entered three men, who introduced themselves, with perfect suavity, as officers of the police. A shriek had been heard by a neighbor during the night; suspicion of foul play had been aroused; information had been lodged at the police office, and they (the officers) had been deputed to search the premises.

I smiled,—for *what* had I to fear? I bade the gentlemen welcome. The shriek, I said, was my own in a dream. The old man, I mentioned, was absent in the country. I took my visitors all over the house. I bade them search—search *well*. I led them, at length, to *his* chamber. I showed them his treasures, secure, undisturbed. In the enthusiasm of my confidence, I brought chairs into the room, and desired them *here* to rest from their fatigues, while I myself, in the wild audacity of my perfect triumph, placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which reposed the corpse of the victim.

The officers were satisfied. My *manner* had convinced them. I was singularly at ease. They sat, and while I answered cheerily, they chatted of familiar things. But, ere long, I felt myself

getting pale and wished them gone. My head ached, and I fancied a ringing in my ears: but still they sat and still chatted. The ringing became more distinct:—it continued and became more distinct: I talked more freely to get rid of the feeling: but it continued and gained definitiveness—until, at length, I found that the noise was *not* within my ears.

No doubt I now grew *very* pale;—but I talked more fluently, and with a heightened voice. Yet the sound increased—and what could I do? It was *a low, dull, quick sound—much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton*. I gasped for breath—and yet the officers heard it not. I talked more quickly—more vehemently; but the noise steadily increased. I arose and argued about trifles, in a high key and with violent gesticulations, but the noise steadily increased. Why *would* they not be gone? I paced the floor to and fro with heavy strides, as if excited to fury by the observation of the men—but the noise steadily increased. Oh God! what *could* I do? I foamed—I raved—I swore! I swung the chair upon which I had been sitting, and grated it upon the boards, but the noise arose over all and continually increased. It grew louder—louder—*louder!* And still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God!—no, no! They heard!—they suspected!—they *knew!*—they were making a *mockery* of my horror!—this I thought, and this I think. But any thing was better than this agony! Any thing was more tolerable than this derision! I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die!—and now—again!— hark! louder! louder! louder! *louder!*—

“Villains!” I shrieked, “dissemble no more! I admit the deed!—tear up the planks!—here, here!—it is the beating of his hideous heart!”

The Devoted Friend by Oscar Wilde

One morning the old Water-rat put his head out of his hole. He had bright beady eyes and stiff grey whiskers and his tail was like a long bit of black India rubber. The little ducks were swimming about in the pond, looking just like a lot of yellow canaries, and their mother, who was pure white with real red legs, was trying to teach them how to stand on their heads in the water.

“You will never be in the best society unless you can stand on your heads,” she kept saying to them; and every now and then she showed them how it was done. But the little ducks paid no attention to her. They were so young that they did not know what an advantage it is to be in society at all.

“What **disobedient** children!” cried the old Water-rat; “they really deserve to be drowned.”

“Nothing of the kind,” answered the Duck, “everyone must make a beginning, and parents cannot be too patient.”

“Ah! I know nothing about the feelings of parents,” said the Water-rat; “I am not a family man. In fact, I have never been married, and I never intend to be. Love is all very well in its way, but friendship is much higher. Indeed, I know of nothing in the world that is either **nobler** or rarer than a **devoted** friendship.”

“And what, pray, is your idea of the duties of a devoted friend?” asked a Green **Linnet**, who was sitting in a willow-tree hard by, and had overheard the conversation.

“Yes, that is just what I want to know,” said the Duck; and she swam away to the end of the pond, and stood upon her head, in order to give her children a good example.

“What a silly question!” cried the Water-rat. “I should expect my devoted friend to be devoted to me, of course.”

“And what would you do in return?” said the little bird, swinging upon a silver spray, and flapping his tiny wings.

“I don’t understand you,” answered the Water-rat.

“Let me tell you a story on the subject,” said the Linnet.

“Is the story about me?” asked the Water-rat. “If so, I will listen to it, for I am extremely **fond of fiction.**”

“It is **applicable** to you,” answered the Linnet; and he flew down, and **alighting** upon the bank, he told the story of The Devoted Friend.

“Once upon a time,” said the Linnet, “there was an honest little fellow named Hans.”

“Was he very **distinguished**?” asked the Water-rat.

“No,” answered the Linnet, “I don’t think he was distinguished at all, except for his kind heart, and his funny round good-humoured face. He lived in a tiny cottage all by himself, and every day he worked in his garden. In all the country-side there was no garden so lovely as his. Sweet-William grew there, and Gilly-flowers, and Shepherds’-purses, and Fair-maids of France. There were damask Roses, and yellow Roses, lilac Crocuses, and gold, purple Violets and white. Columbine and Ladysmock, Marjoram and Wild Basil, the Cowslip and the Flower-de-luce, the Daffodil and the Clove-Pink bloomed or blossomed in their proper order as the months went by, one flower taking another flower’s place, so that there were always beautiful things to look at, and pleasant odours to smell.

“Little Hans had a great many friends, but the most devoted friend of all was big Hugh the Miller.

Indeed, so devoted was the rich Miller to little Hans, that he would never go by his garden without leaning over the wall and plucking a large nosegay, or a handful of sweet herbs, or filling his pockets with plums and cherries if it was the fruit season.

“‘Real friends should have everything in common,’ the Miller used to say, and little Hans nodded and smiled, and felt very proud of having a friend with such noble ideas.

“Sometimes, indeed, the neighbours thought it strange that the rich Miller never gave little Hans anything in return, though he had a hundred sacks of flour stored away in his mill, and six milch cows, and a large flock of woolly sheep; but Hans never troubled his head about these things, and nothing gave him greater pleasure than to listen to all the wonderful things the Miller used to say about the **unselfishness** of true friendship.

“So little Hans worked away in his garden. During the spring, the summer, and the autumn he was very happy, but when the winter came, and he had no fruit or flowers to bring to the market, he suffered a good deal from cold and hunger, and often had to go to bed without any supper but a few dried pears or some hard nuts. In the winter, also, he was extremely lonely, as the Miller never came to see him then.

“‘There is no good in my going to see little Hans as long as the snow lasts,’ the Miller used to say to his wife, ‘for when people are in trouble they should be left alone, and not be bothered by visitors. That at least is my idea about friendship, and I am sure I am right. So I shall wait till the spring comes, and then I shall pay him a visit, and he will be able to give me a large basket of primroses and that will make him so happy.’

“‘You are certainly very thoughtful about others,’ answered the Wife, as she sat in her comfortable armchair by the big pinewood fire; ‘very thoughtful indeed. It is quite a treat to

hear you talk about friendship. I am sure the **clergyman** himself could not say such beautiful things as you do, though he does live in a three-storied house, and wear a gold ring on his little finger.'

"But could we not ask little Hans up here?" said the Miller's youngest son. 'If poor Hans is in trouble I will give him half my porridge, and show him my white rabbits.'

"What a silly boy you are!" cried the Miller; 'I really don't know what is the use of sending you to school. You seem not to learn anything. Why, if little Hans came up here, and saw our warm fire, and our good supper, and our great cask of red wine, he might get **envious**, and envy is a most terrible thing, and would spoil anybody's nature. I certainly will not allow Hans' nature to be spoiled. I am his best friend, and I will always watch over him, and see that he is not led into any temptations. Besides, if Hans came here, he might ask me to let him have some flour on credit, and that I could not do. Flour is one thing, and friendship is another, and they should not be confused. Why, the words are spelt differently, and mean quite different things. Everybody can see that.'

"How well you talk!" said the Miller's Wife, pouring herself out a large glass of warm ale; 'really I feel quite drowsy. It is just like being in church.'

"Lots of people act well,' answered the Miller; 'but very few people talk well, which shows that talking is much the more difficult thing of the two, and much the finer thing also'; and he looked **sternly** across the table at his little son, who felt so ashamed of himself that he hung his head down, and grew quite scarlet, and began to cry into his tea. However, he was so young that you must excuse him."

"Is that the end of the story?" asked the Water-rat.

"Certainly not," answered the Linnet, "that is the beginning."

"Then you are quite behind the age," said the Water-rat. "Every good story-teller nowadays starts with the end, and then goes on to the beginning, and concludes with the middle. That is the new method. I heard all about it the other day from a critic who was walking round the pond with a young man. He spoke of the matter at great length, and I am sure he must have been right, for he had blue spectacles and a bald head, and whenever the young man made any remark, he always answered 'Pooh!' But pray go on with your story. I like the Miller **immensely**. I have all kinds of beautiful sentiments myself, so there is a great sympathy between us."

"Well," said the Linnet, hopping now on one leg and now on the other, "as soon as the winter was over, and the primroses began to open their pale yellow stars, the Miller said to his wife that he would go down and see little Hans."

“‘Why, what a good heart you have!’ cried his Wife; ‘you are always thinking of others. And mind you take the big basket with you for the flowers.’

“So the Miller tied the sails of the windmill together with a strong iron chain, and went down the hill with the basket on his arm.

“‘Good morning, little Hans,’ said the Miller.

“‘Good morning,’ said Hans, leaning on his spade, and smiling from ear to ear.

“‘And how have you been all the winter?’ said the Miller.

“‘Well, really,’ cried Hans, ‘it is very good of you to ask, very good indeed. I am afraid I had rather a hard time of it, but now the spring has come, and I am quite happy, and all my flowers are doing well.’

“‘We often talked of you during the winter, Hans,’ said the Miller, ‘and wondered how you were getting on.’

“‘That was kind of you,’ said Hans; ‘I was half afraid you had forgotten me.’

“‘Hans, I am surprised at you,’ said the Miller; ‘friendship never forgets. That is the wonderful thing about it, but I am afraid you don’t understand the poetry of life. How lovely your primroses are looking, by-the-bye’!

“‘They are certainly very lovely,’ said Hans, ‘and it is a most lucky thing for me that I have so many. I am going to bring them into the market and sell them to the **Burgomaster’s** daughter, and buy back my wheelbarrow with the money.’

“‘Buy back your wheelbarrow? You don’t mean to say you have sold it? What a very stupid thing to do’!

“‘Well, the fact is,’ said Hans, ‘that I was **obliged** to. You see the winter was a very bad time for me, and I really had no money at all to buy bread with. So I first sold the silver buttons off my Sunday coat, and then I sold my silver chain, and then I sold my big pipe, and at last I sold my wheelbarrow. But I am going to buy them all back again now.’

“‘Hans,’ said the Miller, ‘I will give you my wheelbarrow. It is not in very good repair; indeed, one side is gone, and there is something wrong with the wheel-spokes; but in spite of that I will give it to you. I know it is very generous of me, and a great many people would think me extremely foolish for parting with it, but I am not like the rest of the world. I think that **generosity** is the **essence** of friendship, and, besides, I have got a new wheelbarrow for myself. Yes, you may set your mind at ease, I will give you my wheelbarrow.

“Well, really, that is generous of you,’ said little Hans, and his funny round face glowed all over with pleasure. ‘I can easily put it in repair, as I have a plank of wood in the house.’

“A plank of wood’! said the Miller; ‘why, that is just what I want for the roof of my barn. There is a very large hole in it, and the corn will all get damp if I don’t stop it up. How lucky you mentioned it! It is quite remarkable how one good action always breeds another. I have given you my wheelbarrow, and now you are going to give me your plank. Of course, the wheelbarrow is worth far more than the plank, but true, friendship never notices things like that. Pray get it at once, and I will set to work at my barn this very day.’

“Certainly,’ cried little Hans, and he ran into the shed and dragged the plank out.

“It is not a very big plank,’ said the Miller, looking at it, ‘and I am afraid that after I have mended my barn-roof there won’t be any left for you to mend the wheelbarrow with; but, of course, that is not my fault. And now, as I have given you my wheelbarrow, I am sure you would like to give me some flowers in return. Here is the basket, and mind you fill it quite full.’

“Quite full?’ said little Hans, rather **sorrowfully**, for it was really a very big basket, and he knew that if he filled it he would have no flowers left for the market and he was very anxious to get his silver buttons back.

“Well, really,’ answered the Miller, ‘as I have given you my wheelbarrow, I don’t think that it is much to ask you for a few flowers. I may be wrong, but I should have thought that friendship, true friendship, was quite free from selfishness of any kind.’

“My dear friend, my best friend,’ cried little Hans, ‘you are welcome to all the flowers in my garden. I would much sooner have your good opinion than my silver buttons, any day’; and he ran and plucked all his pretty primroses, and filled the Miller’s basket.

“Good-bye, little Hans,’ said the Miller, as he went up the hill with the plank on his shoulder, and the big basket in his hand.

“Good-bye,’ said little Hans, and he began to dig away quite merrily, he was so pleased about the wheelbarrow.

“The next day he was nailing up some honeysuckle against the porch, when he heard the Miller’s voice calling to him from the road. So he jumped off the ladder, and ran down the garden, and looked over the wall.

“There was the Miller with a large sack of flour on his back.

“Dear little Hans,’ said the Miller, ‘would you mind carrying this sack of flour for me to market?’

“‘Oh, I am so sorry,’ said Hans, ‘but I am really very busy to-day. I have got all my creepers to nail up, and all my flowers to water, and all my grass to roll.’

“‘Well, really,’ said the Miller, ‘I think that, considering that I am going to give you my wheelbarrow, it is rather unfriendly of you to refuse.’

“‘Oh, don’t say that,’ cried little Hans, ‘I wouldn’t be unfriendly for the whole world’; and he ran in for his cap, and trudged off with the big sack on his shoulders.

“‘It was a very hot day, and the road was terribly dusty, and before Hans had reached the sixth milestone he was so tired that he had to sit down and rest. However, he went on bravely, and as last he reached the market.

After he had waited there some time, he sold the sack of flour for a very good price, and then he returned home at once, for he was afraid that if he stopped too late he might meet some robbers on the way.

“‘It has certainly been a hard day,’ said little Hans to himself as he was going to bed, ‘but I am glad I did not refuse the Miller, for he is my best friend, and, besides, he is going to give me his wheelbarrow.’

“‘Early the next morning the Miller came down to get the money for his sack of flour, but little Hans was so tired that he was still in bed.

“‘Upon my word,’ said the Miller, ‘you are very lazy. Really, considering that I am going to give you my wheelbarrow, I think you might work harder. Idleness is a great sin, and I certainly don’t like any of my friends to be idle or sluggish. You must not mind my speaking quite plainly to you. Of course I should not dream of doing so if I were not your friend. But what is the good of friendship if one cannot say exactly what one means? Anybody can say charming things and try to please and to flatter, but a true friend always says unpleasant things, and does not mind giving pain. Indeed, if he is a really true friend he prefers it, for he knows that then he is doing good.’

“‘I am very sorry,’ said little Hans, rubbing his eyes and pulling off his night-cap, ‘but I was so tired that I thought I would lie in bed for a little time, and listen to the birds singing. Do you know that I always work better after hearing the birds sing?’

“‘Well, I am glad of that,’ said the Miller, clapping little Hans on the back, ‘for I want you to come up to the mill as soon as you are dressed, and mend my barn-roof for me.’

“‘Poor little Hans was very anxious to go and work in his garden, for his flowers had not been watered for two days, but he did not like to refuse the Miller, as he was such a good friend to him.

“Do you think it would be unfriendly of me if I said I was busy?’ he inquired in a shy and timid voice.

“Well, really,’ answered the Miller, ‘I do not think it is much to ask of you, considering that I am going to give you my wheelbarrow; but of course if you refuse I will go and do it myself.’

“Oh! On no account,’ cried little Hans and he jumped out of bed, and dressed himself, and went up to the barn.

“He worked there all day long, till sunset, and at sunset the Miller came to see how he was getting on.

“Have you mended the hole in the roof yet, little Hans?’ cried the Miller in a cheery voice.

“It is quite mended,’ answered little Hans, coming down the ladder.

“Ah!’ said the Miller, ‘there is no work so delightful as the work one does for others.’

“It is certainly a great privilege to hear you talk,’ answered little Hans, sitting down, and wiping his forehead, ‘a very great privilege. But I am afraid I shall never have such beautiful ideas as you have.’

“Oh! They will come to you,’ said the Miller, ‘but you must take more pains. At present you have only the practice of friendship; some day you will have the theory also.’

“Do you really think I shall?’ asked little Hans.

“I have no doubt of it,’ answered the Miller, ‘but now that you have mended the roof, you had better go home and rest, for I want you to drive my sheep to the mountain to-morrow.’

“Poor little Hans was afraid to say anything to this, and early the next morning the Miller brought his sheep round to the cottage, and Hans started off with them to the mountain.

It took him the whole day to get there and back; and when he returned he was so tired that he went off to sleep in his chair, and did not wake up till it was broad daylight.

“What a delightful time I shall have in my garden,’ he said, and he went to work at once.

“But somehow he was never able to look after his flowers at all, for his friend the Miller was always coming round and sending him off on long errands, or getting him to help at the mill. Little Hans was very much distressed at times, as he was afraid his flowers would think he had forgotten them, but he consoled himself by the reflection that the Miller was his best friend. ‘Besides,’ he used to say, ‘he is going to give me his wheelbarrow, and that is an act of pure generosity.’

“So little Hans worked away for the Miller, and the Miller said all kinds of beautiful things about friendship, which Hans took down in a note-book, and used to read over at night, for he was a very good scholar.

“Now it happened that one evening little Hans was sitting by his fireside when a loud rap came at the door. It was a very wild night, and the wind was blowing and roaring round the house so terribly that at first he thought it was merely the storm. But a second rap came, and then a third, louder than any of the others.

“‘It is some poor traveller,’ said little Hans to himself, and he ran to the door.

“There stood the Miller with a lantern in one hand and a big stick in the other.

“‘Dear little Hans,’ cried the Miller, ‘I am in great trouble. My little boy has fallen off a ladder and hurt himself, and I am going for the Doctor. But he lives so far away, and it is such a bad night, that it has just occurred to me that it would be much better if you went instead of me. You know I am going to give you my wheelbarrow, and so, it is only fair that you should do something for me in return.’

“‘Certainly,’ cried little Hans, ‘I take it quite as a compliment you coming to me, and I will start off at once. But you must lend me your lantern, as the night is so dark that I am afraid I might fall into the ditch.’

“‘I am very sorry,’ answered the Miller, ‘but it is my new lantern, and it would be a great loss to me if anything happened to it.’

“‘Well, never mind, I will do without it,’ cried little Hans, and he took down his great fur coat, and his warm scarlet cap, and tied a muffler round his throat, and started off.

“What a dreadful storm it was! The night was so black that little Hans could hardly see, and the wind was so strong that he could scarcely stand. However, he was very courageous, and after he had been walking about three hours, he arrived at the Doctor’s house, and knocked at the door.

“‘Who is there?’ cried the Doctor, putting his head out of his bedroom window.

“‘Little Hans, Doctor.’

“‘What do you want, little Hans?’

“‘The Miller’s son has fallen from a ladder, and has hurt himself, and the Miller wants you to come at once.’

“All right!’ said the Doctor; and he ordered his horse, and his big boots, and his lantern, and came downstairs, and rode off in the direction of the Miller’s house, little Hans trudging behind him.

“But the storm grew worse and worse, and the rain fell in torrents, and little Hans could not see where he was going, or keep up with the horse.

At last he lost his way, and wandered off on the moor, which was a very dangerous place, as it was full of deep holes, and there poor little Hans was drowned. His body was found the next day by some goatherds, floating in a great pool of water, and was brought back by them to the cottage.

“Everybody went to little Hans’ funeral, as he was so popular, and the Miller was the chief mourner.

“As I was his best friend,’ said the Miller, ‘it is only fair that I should have the best place’; so he walked at the head of the procession in a long black cloak, and every now and then he wiped his eyes with a big pocket-handkerchief.

“Little Hans is certainly a great loss to everyone,’ said the Blacksmith, when the funeral was over, and they were all seated comfortably in the inn, drinking spiced wine and eating sweet cakes.

“A great loss to me at any rate,’ answered the Miller; ‘why, I had as good as given him my wheelbarrow, and now I really don’t know what to do with it. It is very much in my way at home, and it is in such bad repair that I could not get anything for it if I sold it. I will certainly take care not to give away anything again. One always suffers for being generous.’”

“Well?” said the Water-rat, after a long pause.

“Well, that is the end,” said the Linnet.

“But what became of the Miller?” asked the Water-rat.

“Oh! I really don’t know,” replied the Linnet; “and I am sure that I don’t care.”

“It is quite evident then that you have no sympathy in your nature,” said the Water-rat.

“I am afraid you don’t quite see the moral of the story,” remarked the Linnet.

“The what?” screamed the Water-rat.

“The moral.”

“Do you mean to say that the story has a moral?”

“Certainly,” said the Linnet.

“Well, really,” said the Water-rat, in a very angry manner, “I think you should have told me that before you began. If you had done so, I certainly would not have listened to you; in fact, I should have said ‘Pooh,’ like the critic. However, I can say it now”; so he shouted out “Pooh” at the top of his voice, gave a whisk with his tail, and went back into his hole.

“And how do you like the Water-rat?” asked the Duck, who came paddling up some minutes afterwards. “He has a great many good points, but for my own part I have a mother’s feelings, and I can never look at a confirmed bachelor without the tears coming into my eyes.”

“I am rather afraid that I have annoyed him,” answered the Linnet. “The fact is, that I told him a story with a moral.”

“Ah! That is always a very dangerous thing to do,” said the Duck.

And I quite agree with her.

The Miner At Home by D. H. Lawrence

Like most colliers, Bower had his dinner before he washed himself. It did not surprise his wife that he said little. He seemed quite **amiable**, but evidently did not feel **confidential**. Gertie was busy with the three children, the youngest of whom lay kicking on the sofa, preparing to squeal; therefore she did not concern herself overmuch with her husband, once having **ascertained** by a few **shrewd** glances at his heavy brows and his blue eyes, which moved conspicuously in his black face, that he was only pondering.

He smoked a **solemn** pipe until six o'clock. Although he was a really good husband, he did not notice that Gertie was tired. She was getting irritable at the end of the long day.

"Don't you want to wash yourself?" she asked, grudgingly, at six o'clock. It was sickening to have a man sitting there in his pit-dirt, never saying a word, smoking like a Red Indian.

"I'm ready, when you are," he replied.

She lay the baby on the sofa, barricaded it with pillows, and brought from the scullery a great **panchion**, a bowl of heavy earthenware like brick, glazed inside to a dark mahogany colour. Tall and thin and very pale, she stood before the fire holding the great bowl, her grey eyes flashing.

"Get up, our Jack, this minute, or I'll squash thee under the blessed panchion."

The fat boy of six, who was rolling on the rug in the firelight, said broadly: "Squash me, then."

"Get up," she cried, giving him a push with her foot.

"Gi'e ower," he said, rolling jollily.

"I'll smack you," she said grimly, preparing to put down the panchion.

"Get up theer," shouted the father.

Gertie ladled water from the boiler with a tin ladling can. Drops fell from her ladle hissing into the red fire, splashing on to the white hearth, blazing like drops of flame on the flat-topped fender. The father gazed at it all, unmoved.

"I've told you," he said, "to put cold water in the panchion first. If one o' th' children goes an' falls in..."

"You can see as 'e doesn't then," snapped she. She tempered the bowl with cold water, dropped in a flannel and a lump of soap, and spread the towel over the fender to warm.

Then, and only then, Bower rose. He wore no coat, and his arms were freckled black. He stripped to the waist, hitched his trousers into the strap, and kneeled on the rug to wash

himself. There was a great splashing and spluttering. The red firelight shone on his cap of white soap, and on the muscles of his back, on the strange working of his red and white muscular arms, that flashes up and down like individual creatures.

Gertie sat with the baby clawing at her ears and hair and nose. Continually she drew back her face and head from the cruel little baby-clasp. Jack has hanging onto the kitchen door.

“Come away from that door,” cried the mother.

Jack did not come away, but neither did he open the door and run the risk of incurring his father’s wrath. The room was very hot, but the thought of a draught is abhorrent to a miner.

With the baby on one arm, Gertie washed her husband’s back. She sponged it carefully with the flannel, and then, still with one hand, began to dry it on the rough towel.

“Canna ter put th’ childt down an’ use both hands?” said her husband.

“Yes; an’ then if th’ child **screets**, there’s a bigger to-do than iver. There’s no suitin’ some folk.”

“The childt ud non screet.”

Gertie plumped it down. The baby began to cry. The wife rubbed her husband’s back till it grew pink, whilst Bower quivered with pleasure. As soon as she put the towel down: “Shut that childt up,” he said.

He wrestled his way into his shirt. His head emerged, with black hair standing roughly on end, He was rather an ugly man, just above medium height, and stiffly built. He had a thin black moustache over a full mouth, and a very full chin that was marred by a blue seam, where a horse had kicked him when he was a lad in the pit.

With both hands on the mantelpiece above his head, he stood looking in the fire, his whitish shirt hanging like a smock over his pit trousers.

Presently, still looking absently in the fire, he said: “Bill Andrews was standin’ at th’ pit top, an’ give ivery man as ‘e come up one o’ these.”

He handed to his wife a small whity-blue paper, on which was printed simply:

February 14, 1912.

To the Manager-

I hereby give notice to leave your employment fourteen days from above date.

Signed –

Gertie read the paper, blindly dodging her head from the baby’s grasp.

“Ab’ what d’you reckon that’s for?” she asked.

“I suppose it means as we come out.”

“I’m sure!” she cried in **indignation**. “Well, *tha’rt* not going to sign it.”

“It’ll ma’e no diff’rence whether I do or dunna – t’others will.”

“Then let ‘em!” She made a small clicking sound in her mouth. “This ‘ill ma’e th’ third strike as we’ve had sin’ we’ve been married; an’ a fat lot th’ better for it you are, arena you?”

He squirmed unesasily.

“No, but we mean to be,” he said.

“I’ll tell you what, colliers is a **discontented** lot, as doesn’t know what they *do* want. That’s what they are.”

“Tha’d better not let som o’ th’ colliers as there is hear thee say so.”

“I don’t care who hears me. An’ there isn’t a man in Eastwood but what’ll say as th’ last two strikes has ruined the place. There’s that much bad blood no atween th’ mesters an’ th’ men as there isn’t a thing but what’s **askew**. An’ what *will* it be, I should like to know!”

“It’s not on’y here; it’s all ower th’ country alike,” he gloated.

“Yes, it’s them blessed Yorkshire an’ Welsh colliers as does it. They’re that bug nowadays, what wi’ talking an’ spoutin’, they hardly know which side their backside hangs. Here, take this childt!”

She thrust the baby into his arms, carried out the heavy bowlful of black suds, mended the fire, cleared round, and returned for the child.

“Ben Haseldine said, an’ he’s a union man – he told men when he come for th’ union money yesterday, as th’ men doesn’t want to come out – not our men. It’s th’ union.”

“Tha knows nowt about it, woman. It’s a’ woman jabber, from beginnin’ to end.”

“You don’t intend us to know. Who wants th’ Minimum Wage? Butties doesn’t. There th’ butties’ll be, havin’ to pay seven shillin’ a day as men as ‘appen isn’t worth a penny more than five.”

“But the butties is goin’ to have eight shillin’ according to scale.”

“An’ then th’ men as can’t work tip-top, an’ is worth, ‘apen, five shillin’ a day, they get th’ sack: an’ th’ old men, an’ so on.”

“Nowt o’ th’ sort, woman, nowt o’ th’ sort. Tha’s got it off ‘am-pat. There’s goin’ to be

inspectors for all that, an' th' men'll get what they're worth, accordin' to age, an' so on."

"An' accordin' to idleness an' – what somebody says about 'em. I'll back. There'll be a lot o' fairness!"

"Tha talks like a woman as knows nowt. What does thee know about it?"

"I know what you did at th' last strike. And I know this much, when Shipley men had *their* strike tickets, not one in three signed 'em so there. An' *tha'rt* not goin' to!"

"We want a livin' wage," he declared.

"Hanna you got one?" she cried.

"Han we?" he shouted. "Han we? Who does more **chaunterin'** than thee when it's a short wik, an' tha gets 'appen a scroddy twenty-two shillin'? Tha goes at me 'ard enough?"

"Yi; but what better shall you be? What better *are* you for th' last two strikes – tell me that?"

"I'll tell thee this much, th' mesters doesna' mean us to ha'e owt. They promise, but they dunna keep it, not they. Up comes Friday night an' nowt to draw an' a woman fit to ha'e yet guts for it."

"It's nowt, but th' day-men as wants the blessed Minimum Wage – it's not butties."

"Its time as th' butties *did* ha'e ter let their men make a fair day's wage. Four an' sixpence a day is about as 'e's allowed to addle, whoever it may be."

"I wonder what you'll say next. You say owt as is put in your mouth, that's a fac'. What are thee, dost reckon? – are ter a butt, or day-man, or ostler, or are ter a mester? – for tha might be, ter hear thee talk."

"I nedna neither. It ought to be fair a' round."

"It ought, hang my rags, it ought! Tha'rt very fair to me, for instance."

"An' arena I?"

"Tha thinks 'cause tha gi'es me a lousy thirty shillin' reg'lar tha'rt th'e best man i' th' Almighty world. Tha mun be waited on han' an' foot, an' sided wi' whatever that says. But I'm *not!* No, an' I'm not, not when it comes to strikes. I've seen enough on 'em."

"Then niver open thy mouth again if it's a short wik, an' we're pinched."

"We're niver **pinched** that much. An' a short wik isn't no shorter than a strike wik; put that i' thy pipe an' smoke it. It's th' idle men as wants th' strikes."

“Hut thy mouth, woman. If every man worked as hard as I do...”

“He wouldn’t ha’e as much to do as me; an e’ wouldna. But *I’ve* nowt to do, as tha’rt flig ter tell me. No, it’s th’ idle men as wants th’ strike. It’s a union strike, this is, not a men’s strike. You’re sharpenin’ th’ knife for your own throats.”

“Am I not sick of a woman as listens to every tale as is poured into her ears? No, I’m not takin’ th’ kid. I’m goin’ out.”

He put on his boots determinedly.

She rocked herself with **vexation** and **weariness**.

A Sound of Thunder by Ray Bradbury

The sign on the wall seemed to quaver under a film of sliding warm water. Eckels felt his eyelids blink over his stare, and the sign burned in this **momentary** darkness:

TIME SAFARI, INC. SAFARIS TO ANY YEAR IN THE PAST. YOU NAME THE ANIMAL. WE TAKE YOU THERE. YOU SHOOT IT.

Warm phlegm gathered in Eckels' throat; he swallowed and pushed it down. The muscles around his mouth formed a smile as he put his hand slowly out upon the air, and in that hand waved a check for ten thousand dollars to the man behind the desk.

"Does this safari guarantee I come back alive?"

"We guarantee nothing," said the official, "except the dinosaurs." He turned. "This is Mr. Travis, your Safari Guide in the Past. He'll tell you what and where to shoot. If he says no shooting, no shooting. If you disobey instructions, there's a stiff **penalty** of another ten thousand dollars, plus possible government action, on your return."

Eckels glanced across the vast office at a mass and tangle, a snaking and humming of wires and steel boxes, at an aurora that flickered now orange, now silver, now blue. There was a sound like a gigantic bonfire burning all of Time, all the years and all the parchment calendars, all the hours piled high and set aflame.

A touch of the hand and this burning would, on the instant, beautifully reverse itself. Eckels remembered the wording in the advertisements to the letter. Out of chars and ashes, out of dust and coals, like golden **salamanders**, the old years, the green years, might leap; roses sweeten the air, white hair turn Irish-black, wrinkles vanish; all, everything fly back to seed, flee death, rush down to their beginnings, suns rise in western skies and set in glorious easts, moons eat themselves opposite to the custom, all and everything cupping one in another like Chinese boxes, rabbits into hats, all and everything returning to the fresh death, the seed death, the green death, to the time before the beginning. A touch of a hand might do it, the **merest** touch of a hand.

"Unbelievable." Eckels breathed, the light of the Machine on his thin face. "A real Time Machine." He shook his head. "Makes you think, If the election had gone badly yesterday, I might be here now running away from the results. Thank God Keith won. He'll make a fine President of the United States."

"Yes," said the man behind the desk. "We're lucky. If Deutscher had gotten in, we'd have the worst kind of dictatorship. There's an anti everything man for you, a **militarist**, anti-Christ, anti-human, anti-intellectual. People called us up, you know, joking but not joking. Said if Deutscher became President they wanted to go live in 1492. Of course it's not our business to conduct Escapes, but to form Safaris. Anyway, Keith's President now. All you got to worry about is-"

"Shooting my dinosaur," Eckels finished it for him.

"A Tyrannosaurus Rex. The Tyrant Lizard, the most incredible monster in history. Sign this release. Anything happens to you, we're not responsible. Those dinosaurs are hungry."

Eckels flushed angrily. "Trying to scare me!"

"Frankly, yes. We don't want anyone going who'll panic at the first shot. Six Safari leaders were killed last year, and a dozen hunters. We're here to give you the **severest** thrill a real hunter ever asked for. Traveling you back sixty million years to bag the biggest game in all of Time. Your personal check's still there. Tear it up." Mr. Eckels looked at the check. His fingers twitched.

"Good luck," said the man behind the desk. "Mr. Travis, he's all yours."

They moved silently across the room, taking their guns with them, toward the Machine, toward the silver metal and the roaring light.

First a day and then a night and then a day and then a night, then it was day-night-day-night. A week, a month, a year, a decade! A.D. 2055. A.D. 2019. 1999! 1957! Gone! The Machine roared.

They put on their oxygen helmets and tested the **intercoms**.

Eckels swayed on the padded seat, his face pale, his jaw stiff. He felt the trembling in his arms and he looked down and found his hands tight on the new rifle. There were four other men in the Machine. Travis, the Safari Leader, his assistant, Lesperance, and two other hunters, Billings and Kramer. They sat looking at each other, and the years blazed around them.

"Can these guns get a dinosaur cold?" Eckels felt his mouth saying.

"If you hit them right," said Travis on the helmet radio. "Some dinosaurs have two brains, one in the head, another far down the **spinal column**. We stay away from those. That's stretching luck. Put your first two shots into the eyes, if you can, blind them, and go back into the brain."

The Machine howled. Time was a film run backward. Suns fled and ten million moons fled after them. "Think," said Eckels. "Every hunter that ever lived would envy us today. This makes Africa seem like Illinois."

The Machine slowed; its scream fell to a murmur. The Machine stopped.

The sun stopped in the sky.

The fog that had **enveloped** the Machine blew away and they were in an old time, a very old time indeed, three hunters and two Safari Heads with their blue metal guns across their

knees.

"Christ isn't born yet," said Travis, "Moses has not gone to the mountains to talk with God. The Pyramids are still in the earth, waiting to be cut out and put up. Remember that. Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon, Hitler-none of them exists." The man nodded.

"That" - Mr. Travis pointed - "is the jungle of sixty million two thousand and fifty-five years before President Keith."

He indicated a metal path that struck off into green **wilderness**, over streaming swamp, among giant ferns and palms.

"And that," he said, "is the Path, laid by Time Safari for your use. It floats six inches above the earth. Doesn't touch so much as one grass blade, flower, or tree. It's an anti-gravity metal. Its purpose is to keep you from touching this world of the past in any way. Stay on the Path. Don't go off it. I repeat. Don't go off. For any reason! If you fall off, there's a penalty. And don't shoot any animal we don't okay."

"Why?" asked Eckels.

They sat in the ancient wilderness. Far birds' cries blew on a wind, and the smell of tar and an old salt sea, moist grasses, and flowers the color of blood.

"We don't want to change the Future. We don't belong here in the Past. The government doesn't like us here. We have to pay big graft to keep our franchise. A Time Machine is **finicky** business. Not knowing it, we might kill an important animal, a small bird, a roach, a flower even, thus destroying an important link in a growing species."

"That's not clear," said Eckels.

"All right," Travis continued, "say we accidentally kill one mouse here. That means all the future families of this one particular mouse are destroyed, right?"

"Right"

"And all the families of the families of the families of that one mouse! With a stamp of your foot, you **annihilate** first one, then a dozen, then a thousand, a million, a billion possible mice!"

"So they're dead," said Eckels. "So what?"

"So what?" Travis snorted quietly. "Well, what about the foxes that'll need those mice to survive? For want of ten mice, a fox dies. For want of ten foxes a lion starves. For want of a lion, all manner of insects, vultures, **infinite** billions of life forms are thrown into chaos and destruction. Eventually it all boils down to this: fifty-nine million years later, a caveman, one of a dozen on the entire world, goes hunting wild boar or saber-toothed tiger for food. But you, friend, have stepped on all the tigers in that region. By stepping on one single mouse.

So the caveman starves. And the caveman, please note, is not just any expendable man, no! He is an entire future nation. From his loins would have sprung ten sons. From their loins one hundred sons, and thus onward to a civilization. Destroy this one man, and you destroy a race, a people, an entire history of life. It is comparable to slaying some of Adam's grandchildren. The stomp of your foot, on one mouse, could start an earthquake, the effects of which could shake our earth and destinies down through Time, to their very foundations. With the death of that one caveman, a billion others yet unborn are throttled in the womb. Perhaps Rome never rises on its seven hills. Perhaps Europe is forever a dark forest, and only Asia waxes healthy and **teeming**. Step on a mouse and you crush the Pyramids. Step on a mouse and you leave your print, like a Grand Canyon, across Eternity. Queen Elizabeth might never be born, Washington might not cross the Delaware, there might never be a United States at all. So be careful. Stay on the Path. Never step off!"

"I see," said Eckels. "Then it wouldn't pay for us even to touch the grass?"

"Correct. Crushing certain plants could add up **infinitesimally**. A little error here would multiply in sixty million years, all out of proportion. Of course maybe our theory is wrong. Maybe Time can't be changed by us. Or maybe it can be changed only in little subtle ways. A dead mouse here makes an insect imbalance there, a population disproportion later, a bad harvest further on, a depression, mass starvation, and finally, a change in social temperament in far-flung countries. Something much more subtle, like that. Perhaps only a soft breath, a whisper, a hair, pollen on the air, such a slight, slight change that unless you looked close you wouldn't see it. Who knows? Who really can say he knows? We don't know. We're guessing. But until we do know for certain whether our messing around in Time can make a big roar or a little rustle in history, we're being careful. This Machine, this Path, your clothing and bodies, were sterilized, as you know, before the journey. We wear these oxygen helmets so we can't introduce our bacteria into an ancient atmosphere."

"How do we know which animals to shoot?"

"They're marked with red paint," said Travis. "Today, before our journey, we sent Lesperance here back with the Machine. He came to this particular **era** and followed certain animals."

"Studying them?"

"Right," said Lesperance. "I track them through their entire existence, noting which of them lives longest. Very few. How many times they mate. Not often. Life's short, When I find one that's going to die when a tree falls on him, or one that drowns in a tar pit, I note the exact hour, minute, and second. I shoot a paint bomb. It leaves a red patch on his side. We can't miss it. Then I **correlate** our arrival in the Past so that we meet the Monster not more than two minutes before he would have died anyway. This way, we kill only animals with no future, that are never going to mate again. You see how careful we are?"

"But if you come back this morning in Time," said Eckels eagerly, you must've bumped into

us, our Safari! How did it turn out? Was it successful? Did all of us get through-alive?"

Travis and Lesperance gave each other a look.

"That'd be a **paradox**," said the latter. "Time doesn't permit that sort of mess-a man meeting himself. When such occasions threaten, Time steps aside. Like an airplane hitting an air pocket. You felt the Machine jump just before we stopped? That was us passing ourselves on the way back to the Future. We saw nothing. There's no way of telling if this expedition was a success, if we got our monster, or whether all of us - meaning you, Mr. Eckels - got out alive."

Eckels smiled palely.

"Cut that," said Travis sharply. "Everyone on his feet!"

They were ready to leave the Machine.

The jungle was high and the jungle was broad and the jungle was the entire world forever and forever. Sounds like music and sounds like flying tents filled the sky, and those were pterodactyls soaring with cavernous gray wings, gigantic bats of delirium and night fever.

Eckels, balanced on the narrow Path, aimed his rifle playfully.

"Stop that!" said Travis. "Don't even aim for fun, blast you! If your guns should go off - - "

Eckels flushed. "Where's our Tyrannosaurus?"

Lesperance checked his wristwatch. "Up ahead, We'll bisect his trail in sixty seconds. Look for the red paint! Don't shoot till we give the word. Stay on the Path. Stay on the Path!"

They moved forward in the wind of morning.

"Strange," murmured Eckels. "Up ahead, sixty million years, Election Day over. Keith made President. Everyone celebrating. And here we are, a million years lost, and they don't exist. The things we worried about for months, a lifetime, not even born or thought of yet."

"Safety catches off, everyone!" ordered Travis. "You, first shot, Eckels. Second, Billings, Third, Kramer."

"I've hunted tiger, wild boar, buffalo, elephant, but now, this is it," said Eckels. "I'm shaking like a kid."

"Ah," said Travis.

Everyone stopped.

Travis raised his hand. "Ahead," he whispered. "In the mist. There he is. There's His Royal Majesty now."

The jungle was wide and full of twitterings, rustlings, murmurs, and sighs.

Suddenly it all ceased, as if someone had shut a door.

Silence.

A sound of thunder.

Out of the mist, one hundred yards away, came Tyrannosaurus Rex.

"It," whispered Eckels. "It....."

"Sh!"

It came on great oiled, resilient, striding legs. It towered thirty feet above half of the trees, a great evil god, folding its delicate watchmaker's claws close to its oily reptilian chest. Each lower leg was a piston, a thousand pounds of white bone, sunk in thick ropes of muscle, sheathed over in a gleam of pebbled skin like the mail of a terrible warrior. Each thigh was a ton of meat, ivory, and steel mesh. And from the great breathing cage of the upper body those two delicate arms dangled out front, arms with hands which might pick up and examine men like toys, while the snake neck coiled. And the head itself, a ton of sculptured stone, lifted easily upon the sky. Its mouth gaped, exposing a fence of teeth like daggers. Its eyes rolled, ostrich eggs, empty of all expression save hunger. It closed its mouth in a death grin. It ran, its pelvic bones crushing aside trees and bushes, its taloned feet clawing damp earth, leaving prints six inches deep wherever it settled its weight.

It ran with a gliding ballet step, far too poised and balanced for its ten tons. It moved into a sunlit area warily, its beautifully reptilian hands feeling the air.

"Why, why," Eckels twitched his mouth. "It could reach up and grab the moon."

"Sh!" Travis jerked angrily. "He hasn't seen us yet."

"It can't be killed," Eckels pronounced this verdict quietly, as if there could be no argument. He had weighed the evidence and this was his considered opinion. The rifle in his hands seemed a cap gun. "We were fools to come. This is impossible."

"Shut up!" hissed Travis.

"Nightmare."

"Turn around," commanded Travis. "Walk quietly to the Machine. We'll remit half your fee."

"I didn't realize it would be this big," said Eckels. "I miscalculated, that's all. And now I want out."

"It sees us!"

"There's the red paint on its chest!"

The Tyrant Lizard raised itself. Its armored flesh glittered like a thousand green coins. The coins, crusted with slime, steamed. In the slime, tiny insects wriggled, so that the entire body seemed to twitch and undulate, even while the monster itself did not move. It exhaled. The stink of raw flesh blew down the wilderness.

"Get me out of here," said Eckels. "It was never like this before. I was always sure I'd come through alive. I had good guides, good safaris, and safety. This time, I figured wrong. I've met my match and admit it. This is too much for me to get hold of."

"Don't run," said Lesperance. "Turn around. Hide in the Machine."

"Yes." Eckels seemed to be numb. He looked at his feet as if trying to make them move. He gave a grunt of helplessness.

"Eckels!"

He took a few steps, blinking, shuffling.

"Not that way!"

The Monster, at the first motion, lunged forward with a terrible scream. It covered one hundred yards in six seconds. The rifles jerked up and blazed fire. A windstorm from the beast's mouth engulfed them in the stench of slime and old blood. The Monster roared, teeth glittering with sun.

The rifles cracked again, Their sound was lost in shriek and lizard thunder. The great level of the reptile's tail swung up, lashed sideways. Trees exploded in clouds of leaf and branch. The Monster twitched its jeweler's hands down to fondle at the men, to twist them in half, to crush them like berries, to cram them into its teeth and its screaming throat. Its boulderstone eyes leveled with the men. They saw themselves mirrored. They fired at the metallic eyelids and the blazing black iris,

Like a stone idol, like a mountain avalanche, Tyrannosaurus fell.

Thundering, it clutched trees, pulled them with it. It wrenched and tore the metal Path. The men flung themselves back and away. The body hit, ten tons of cold flesh and stone. The guns fired. The Monster lashed its armored tail, twitched its snake jaws, and lay still. A fount of blood spurted from its throat. Somewhere inside, a sac of fluids burst. Sickening gushes drenched the hunters. They stood, red and glistening.

The thunder faded.

The jungle was silent. After the avalanche, a green peace. After the nightmare, morning.

Billings and Kramer sat on the pathway and threw up. Travis and Lesperance stood with

smoking rifles, cursing steadily. In the Time Machine, on his face, Eckels lay shivering. He had found his way back to the Path, climbed into the Machine.

Travis came walking, glanced at Eckels, took cotton gauze from a metal box, and returned to the others, who were sitting on the Path.

"Clean up."

They wiped the blood from their helmets. They began to curse too. The Monster lay, a hill of solid flesh. Within, you could hear the sighs and murmurs as the furthest chambers of it died, the organs malfunctioning, liquids running a final instant from pocket to sac to spleen, everything shutting off, closing up forever. It was like standing by a wrecked locomotive or a steam shovel at quitting time, all valves being released or levered tight. Bones cracked; the tonnage of its own flesh, off balance, dead weight, snapped the delicate forearms, caught underneath. The meat settled, quivering.

Another cracking sound. Overhead, a gigantic tree branch broke from its heavy mooring, fell. It crashed upon the dead beast with finality.

"There." Lesperance checked his watch. "Right on time. That's the giant tree that was scheduled to fall and kill this animal originally." He glanced at the two hunters. "You want the trophy picture?"

"What?"

"We can't take a trophy back to the Future. The body has to stay right here where it would have died originally, so the insects, birds, and bacteria can get at it, as they were intended to. Everything in balance. The body stays. But we can take a picture of you standing near it."

The two men tried to think, but gave up, shaking their heads.

They let themselves be led along the metal Path. They sank wearily into the Machine cushions. They gazed back at the ruined Monster, the stagnating mound, where already strange reptilian birds and golden insects were busy at the steaming armor. A sound on the floor of the Time Machine stiffened them. Eckels sat there, shivering.

"I'm sorry," he said at last.

"Get up!" cried Travis.

Eckels got up.

"Go out on that Path alone," said Travis. He had his rifle pointed, "You're not coming back in the Machine. We're leaving you here!"

Lesperance seized Travis's arm. "Wait--"

"Stay out of this!" Travis shook his hand away. "This fool nearly killed us. But it isn't that so much, no. It's his shoes! Look at them! He ran off the Path. That ruins us! We'll forfeit! Thousands of dollars of insurance! We guarantee no one leaves the Path. He left it. Oh, the fool! I'll have to report to the government. They might revoke our license to travel. Who knows what he's done to Time, to History!"

"Take it easy, all he did was kick up some dirt."

"How do we know?" cried Travis. "We don't know anything! It's all a mystery! Get out of here, Eckels!"

Eckels fumbled his shirt. "I'll pay anything. A hundred thousand dollars!"

Travis glared at Eckels' checkbook and spat. "Go out there. The Monster's next to the Path. Stick your arms up to your elbows in his mouth. Then you can come back with us."

"That's unreasonable!"

"The Monster's dead, you idiot. The bullets! The bullets can't be left behind. They don't belong in the Past; they might change anything. Here's my knife. Dig them out!"

The jungle was alive again, full of the old tremorings and bird cries. Eckels turned slowly to regard the primeval garbage dump, that hill of nightmares and terror. After a long time, like a sleepwalker he shuffled out along the Path.

He returned, shuddering, five minutes later, his arms soaked and red to the elbows. He held out his hands. Each held a number of steel bullets. Then he fell. He lay where he fell, not moving.

"You didn't have to make him do that," said Lesperance.

"Didn't I? It's too early to tell." Travis nudged the still body. "He'll live. Next time he won't go hunting game like this. Okay." He jerked his thumb wearily at Lesperance. "Switch on. Let's go home."

1492. 1776. 1812.

They cleaned their hands and faces. They changed their caking shirts and pants. Eckels was up and around again, not speaking. Travis glared at him for a full ten minutes.

"Don't look at me," cried Eckels. "I haven't done anything."

"Who can tell?"

"Just ran off the Path, that's all, a little mud on my shoes-what do you want me to do-get down and pray?"

"We might need it. I'm warning you, Eckels, I might kill you yet. I've got my gun ready."

"I'm innocent. I've done nothing!"

1999.2000.2055.

The Machine stopped.

"Get out," said Travis.

The room was there as they had left it. But not the same as they had left it. The same man sat behind the same desk. But the same man did not quite sit behind the same desk. Travis looked around swiftly. "Everything okay here?" he snapped.

"Fine. Welcome home!"

Travis did not relax. He seemed to be looking through the one high window.

"Okay, Eckels, get out. Don't ever come back." Eckels could not move.

"You heard me," said Travis. "What're you staring at?"

Eckels stood smelling of the air, and there was a thing to the air, a chemical taint so subtle, so slight, that only a faint cry of his subliminal senses warned him it was there. The colors, white, gray, blue, orange, in the wall, in the furniture, in the sky beyond the window, were . . . were And there was a feel. His flesh twitched. His hands twitched. He stood drinking the oddness with the pores of his body. Somewhere, someone must have been screaming one of those whistles that only a dog can hear. His body screamed silence in return. Beyond this room, beyond this wall, beyond this man who was not quite the same man seated at this desk that was not quite the same desk . . . lay an entire world of streets and people. What sort of world it was now, there was no telling. He could feel them moving there, beyond the walls, almost, like so many chess pieces blown in a dry wind

But the immediate thing was the sign painted on the office wall, the same sign he had read earlier today on first entering. Somehow, the sign had changed:

TYME SEFARI INC. SEFARIS TU ANY YEER EN THE PAST. YU NAIM THE ANIMALL. WEE TAEK YU THAIR. YU SHOOT ITT.

Eckels felt himself fall into a chair. He fumbled crazily at the thick slime on his boots. He held up a clod of dirt, trembling, "No, it can't be. Not a little thing like that. No!"

Embedded in the mud, glistening green and gold and black, was a butterfly, very beautiful and very dead.

"Not a little thing like that! Not a butterfly!" cried Eckels.

It fell to the floor, an exquisite thing, a small thing that could upset balances and knock down a line of small dominoes and then big dominoes and then gigantic dominoes, all down

the years across Time. Eckels' mind whirled. It couldn't change things. Killing one butterfly couldn't be that important! Could it?

His face was cold. His mouth trembled, asking: "Who - who won the presidential election yesterday?"

The man behind the desk laughed. "You joking? You know very well. Deutscher, of course! Who else? Not that fool weakling Keith. We got an iron man now, a man with guts!" The official stopped. "What's wrong?"

Eckels moaned. He dropped to his knees. He scrabbled at the golden butterfly with shaking fingers. "Can't we," he pleaded to the world, to himself, to the officials, to the Machine, "can't we take it back, can't we make it alive again? Can't we start over? Can't we-"

He did not move. Eyes shut, he waited, shivering. He heard Travis breathe loud in the room; he heard Travis shift his rifle, click the safety catch, and raise the weapon.

There was a sound of thunder.

Lamb to the Slaughter by Roald Dahl

The room was warm and clean, the curtains drawn, the two table lamps alight- hers and the one by the empty chair opposite. On the sideboard behind her, two tall glasses, soda water, whiskey. Fresh ice cubes in the Thermos bucket.

Mary Maloney was waiting for her husband to come home from work.

Now and again she would glance up at the clock, but without **anxiety**, merely to please herself with the thought that each minute gone by made it nearer the time when he would come. There was a slow smiling air about her, and about everything she did. The drop of a head as she bent over her sewing was curiously **tranquil**. Her skin -for this was her sixth month with child-had acquired a wonderful **translucent** quality, the mouth was soft, and the eyes, with their new **placid** look, seemed larger darker than before. When the clock said ten minutes to five, she began to listen, and a few moments later, punctually as always, she heard the tires on the gravel outside, and the car door slamming, the footsteps passing the window, the key turning in the lock. She laid aside her sewing, stood up, and went forward to kiss him as he came in.

"Hullo darling," she said.

"Hullo darling," he answered.

She took his coat and hung it in the closet. Then she walked over and made the drinks, a strongish one for him, a weak one for herself; and soon she was back again in her chair with the sewing, and he in the other, opposite, holding the tall glass with both hands, rocking it so the ice cubes tinkled against the side.

For her, this was always a blissful time of day. She knew he didn't want to speak much until the first drink was finished, and she, on her side, was content to sit quietly, enjoying his company after the long hours alone in the house. She loved to **luxuriate** in the presence of this man, and to feel - almost as a sunbather feels the sun - that warm male glow that came out of him to her when they were alone together. She loved him for the way he sat loosely in a chair, for the way he came in a door, or moved slowly across the room with long strides. She loved the intent, far look in his eyes when they rested on her, the funny shape of the mouth, and especially the way he remained silent about his tiredness, sitting still with himself until the whiskey had taken some of it away.

"Tired darling?"

"Yes," he said. "I'm tired," And as he spoke, he did an unusual thing. He lifted his glass and drained it in one swallow although there was still half of it, at least half of it left. She wasn't really watching him, but she knew what he had done because she heard the ice cubes falling back against the bottom of the empty glass when he lowered his arm. He paused a moment,

leaning forward in the chair, then he got up and went slowly over to fetch himself another.

"I'll get it!" she cried, jumping up.

"Sit down," he said.

When he came back, she noticed that the new drink was dark amber with the quantity of whiskey in it.

"Darling, shall I get your slippers?"

"No."

She watched him as he began to sip the dark yellow drink, and she could see little oily swirls in the liquid because it was so strong.

"I think it's a shame," she said, "that when a policeman gets to be as senior as you, they keep him walking about on his feet all day long."

He didn't answer, so she bent her head again and went on with her sewing; but each time he lifted the drink to his lips, she heard the ice cubes clinking against the side of the glass.

"Darling," she said. "Would you like me to get you some cheese? I haven't made any supper because it's Thursday."

"No," he said.

"If you're too tired to eat out," she went on, "it's still not too late. There's plenty of meat and stuff in the freezer, and you can have it right here and not even move out of the chair."

Her eyes waited on him for an answer, a smile, a little nod, but he made no sign.

"Anyway," she went on, "I'll get you some cheese and crackers first."

"I don't want it," he said.

She moved **uneasily** in her chair, the large eyes still watching his face. "But you must eat! I'll fix it anyway, and then you can have it or not, as you like."

She stood up and placed her sewing on the table by the lamp.

"Sit down," he said. "Just for a minute, sit down."

It wasn't till then that she began to get frightened.

"Go on," he said. "Sit down."

She lowered herself back slowly into the chair, watching him all the time with those large, **bewildered** eyes. He had finished the second drink and was staring down into the glass, frowning.

"Listen," he said. "I've got something to tell you."

"What is it, darling? What's the matter?"

He had now become absolutely **motionless**, and he kept his head down so that the light from the lamp beside him fell across the upper part of his face, leaving the chin and mouth in shadow. She noticed there was a little muscle moving near the corner of his left eye.

"This is going to be a bit of a shock to you, I'm afraid," he said. "But I've thought about it a good deal and I've decided the only thing to do is tell you right away. I hope you won't blame me too much."

And he told her. It didn't take long, four or five minutes at most, and she stayed very still through it all, watching him with a kind of **dazed** horror as he went further and further away from her with each word.

"So there it is," he added. "And I know it's kind of a bad time to be telling you, but there simply wasn't any other way. Of course I'll give you money and see you're looked after. But there needn't really be any fuss. I hope not anyway. It wouldn't be very good for my job."

Her first **instinct** was not to believe any of it, to **reject** it all. It occurred to her that perhaps he hadn't even spoken, that she herself had imagined the whole thing. Maybe, if she went about her business and acted as though she hadn't been listening, then later, when she sort of woke up again, she might find none of it had ever happened.

"I'll get the supper," she managed to whisper, and this time he didn't stop her.

When she walked across the room she couldn't feel her feet touching the floor. She couldn't feel anything at all- except a slight **nausea** and a desire to vomit. Everything was automatic now - down the steps to the cellar, the light switch, the deep freeze, the hand inside the cabinet taking hold of the first object it met. She lifted it out, and looked at it. It was wrapped in paper, so she took off the paper and looked at it again.

A leg of lamb.

All right then, they would have lamb for supper. She carried it upstairs, holding the thin bone-end of it with both her hands, and as she went through the living-room, she saw him

standing over by the window with his back to her, and she stopped.

"For God's sake," he said, hearing her, but not turning round. "Don't make supper for me. I'm going out."

At that point, Mary Maloney simply walked up behind him and without any pause she swung the big frozen leg of lamb high in the air and brought it down as hard as she could on the back of his head.

She might just as well have hit him with a steel club.

She stepped back a pace, waiting, and the funny thing was that he remained standing there for at least four or five seconds, gently swaying. Then he crashed to the carpet.

The violence of the crash, the noise, the small table overturning, helped bring her out of her shock. She came out slowly, feeling cold and surprised, and she stood for a while blinking at the body, still holding the ridiculous piece of meat tight with both hands.

All right, she told herself. So I've killed him.

It was extraordinary, now, how clear her mind became all of a sudden. She began thinking very fast. As the wife of a detective, she knew quite well what the penalty would be. That was fine. It made no difference to her. In fact, it would be a relief. On the other hand, what about the child? What were the laws about murderers with unborn children? Did they kill them both - mother and child? Or did they wait until the tenth month? What did they do?

Mary Maloney didn't know. And she certainly wasn't prepared to take a chance.

She carried the meat into the kitchen, placed it in a pan, turned the oven on high, and shoved it inside. Then she washed her hands and ran upstairs to the bedroom. She sat down before the mirror, tidied her hair, touched up her lips and face. She tried a smile. It came out rather peculiar. She tried again.

"Hullo Sam," she said brightly, aloud.

The voice sounded peculiar too.

"I want some potatoes please, Sam. Yes, and I think a can of peas."

That was better. Both the smile and the voice were coming out better now. She rehearsed it several times more. Then she ran downstairs, took her coat, went out the back door, down the garden, into the street.

It wasn't six o'clock yet and the lights were still on in the grocery shop.

"Hullo Sam," she said brightly, smiling at the man behind the counter.

"Why, good evening, Mrs. Maloney. How're you?"

"I want some potatoes please, Sam. Yes, and I think a can of peas."

The man turned and reached up behind him on the shelf for the peas.

"Patrick's decided he's tired and doesn't want to eat out tonight," she told him. "We usually go out Thursdays, you know, and now he's caught me without any vegetables in the house."

"Then how about meat, Mrs. Maloney?"

"No, I've got meat, thanks. I got a nice leg of lamb from the freezer."

"Oh."

"I don't know much like cooking it frozen, Sam, but I'm taking a chance on it this time. You think it'll be all right?"

"Personally," the grocer said, "I don't believe it makes any difference. You want these Idaho potatoes?"

"Oh yes, that'll be fine. Two of those."

"Anything else?" The grocer cocked his head on one side, looking at her pleasantly. "How about afterwards? What you going to give him for afterwards?"

"Well - what would you suggest, Sam?"

The man glanced around his shop. "How about a nice big slice of cheesecake? I know he likes that."

"Perfect," she said. "He loves it."

And when it was all wrapped and she had paid, she put on her brightest smile and said, "Thank you, Sam. Goodnight."

"Goodnight, Mrs. Maloney. And thank you."

And now, she told herself as she hurried back, all she was doing now, she was returning home to her husband and he was waiting for his supper; and she must cook it good, and make it as tasty as possible because the poor man was tired; and if, when she entered the

house, she happened to find anything unusual, or tragic, or terrible, then naturally it would be a shock and she'd become frantic with grief and horror. Mind you, she wasn't expecting to find anything. She was just going home with the vegetables. Mrs. Patrick Maloney going home with the vegetables on Thursday evening to cook supper for her husband.

That's the way, she told herself. Do everything right and natural. Keep things absolutely natural and there'll be no need for any acting at all.

Therefore, when she entered the kitchen by the back door, she was humming a little tune to herself and smiling.

"Patrick!" she called. "How are you, darling?"

She put the parcel down on the table and went through into the living room; and when she saw him lying there on the floor with his legs doubled up and one arm twisted back underneath his body, it really was rather a shock. All the old love and longing for him welled up inside her, and she ran over to him, knelt down beside him, and began to cry her heart out. It was easy. No acting was necessary.

A few minutes later, she got up and went to the phone. She knew the number of the police station, and when the man at the other end answered, she cried to him, "Quick! Come quick! Patrick's dead!"

"Who's speaking?"

"Mrs. Maloney. Mrs. Patrick Maloney."

"You mean Patrick Maloney's dead?"

"I think so," she sobbed. "He's lying on the floor and I think he's dead."

"Be right over," the man said.

The car came very quickly, and when she opened the front door, two policeman walked in. She knew them both - she knew nearly all the men at that precinct - and she fell right into a chair, then went over to join the other one, who was called O'Malley, kneeling by the body.

"Is he dead?" she cried.

"I'm afraid he is. What happened?"

Briefly, she told her story about going out to the grocer and coming back to find him on the floor. While she was talking, crying and talking, Noonan discovered a small patch of congealed blood on the dead man's head. He showed it to O'Malley who got up at once and

hurried to the phone.

Soon, other men began to come into the house. First a doctor, then two detectives, one of whom she knew by name. Later, a police photographer arrived and took pictures, and a man who knew about fingerprints. There was a great deal of whispering and muttering beside the corpse, and the detectives kept asking her a lot of questions. But they always treated her kindly. She told her story again, this time right from the beginning, when Patrick had come in, and she was sewing, and he was tired, so tired he hadn't wanted to go out for supper. She told how she'd put the meat in the oven - "it's there now, cooking" - and how she'd stopped out to the grocer for vegetables, and come back to find him lying on the floor.

"Which grocer?" one of the detectives asked.

She told him, and he turned and whispered something to the other detective who immediately went outside into the street.

In fifteen minutes he was back with a page of notes, and there was more whispering, and through her sobbing she heard a few of the whispered phrases-"...acted quite normal...very cheerful...wanted to give him a good supper...peas...cheesecake...impossible that she..."

After a while, the photographer and the doctor departed and two other men came in and took the corpse away on a stretcher. Then the fingerprint man went away. The two detectives remained, and so did the two policeman. They were exceptionally nice to her, and Jack Noonan asked if she wouldn't rather go somewhere else, to her sister's house perhaps, or to his own wife who would take care of her and put her up for the night.

No, she said. She didn't feel she could move even a yard at the moment. Would they mind awfully if she stayed just where she was until she felt better. She didn't feel too good at the moment, she really didn't.

Then hadn't she better lie down on the bed? Jack Noonan asked.

No, she said. She'd like to stay right where she was, in this chair. A little later, perhaps, when she felt better, she would move.

So they left her there while they went about their business, searching the house. Occasionally one of the detectives asked her another question. Sometimes Jack Noonan spoke at her gently as he passed by. Her husband, he told her, had been killed by a blow on the back of the head administered with a heavy blunt instrument, almost certainly a large piece of metal. They were looking for the weapon. The murderer may have taken it with him, but on the other hand he may have thrown it away or hidden it somewhere on the premises.

"It's the old story," he said. "Get the weapon, and you've got the man."

Later, one of the detectives came up and sat beside her. Did she know, he asked, of anything in the house that could've been used as the weapon? Would she mind having a look around to see if anything was missing—a very big spanner, for example, or a heavy metal vase.

They didn't have any heavy metal vases, she said.

"Or a big spanner?"

She didn't think they had a big spanner. But there might be some things like that in the garage.

The search went on. She knew that there were other policemen in the garden all around the house. She could hear their footsteps on the gravel outside, and sometimes she saw a flash of a torch through a chink in the curtains. It began to get late, nearly nine she noticed by the clock on the mantle. The four men searching the rooms seemed to be growing weary, a trifle exasperated.

"Jack," she said, the next time Sergeant Noonan went by. "Would you mind giving me a drink?"

"Sure I'll give you a drink. You mean this whiskey?"

"Yes please. But just a small one. It might make me feel better."

He handed her the glass.

"Why don't you have one yourself," she said. "You must be awfully tired. Please do. You've been very good to me."

"Well," he answered. "It's not strictly allowed, but I might take just a drop to keep me going."

One by one the others came in and were persuaded to take a little nip of whiskey. They stood around rather awkwardly with the drinks in their hands, uncomfortable in her presence, trying to say consoling things to her. Sergeant Noonan wandered into the kitchen, come out quickly and said, "Look, Mrs. Maloney. You know that oven of yours is still on, and the meat still inside."

"Oh dear me!" she cried. "So it is!"

"I better turn it off for you, hadn't I?"

"Will you do that, Jack. Thank you so much."

When the sergeant returned the second time, she looked at him with her large, dark tearful eyes. "Jack Noonan," she said.

"Yes?"

"Would you do me a small favor - you and these others?"

"We can try, Mrs. Maloney."

"Well," she said. "Here you all are, and good friends of dear Patrick's too, and helping to catch the man who killed him. You must be terrible hungry by now because it's long past your suppertime, and I know Patrick would never forgive me, God bless his soul, if I allowed you to remain in his house without offering you decent hospitality. Why don't you eat up that lamb that's in the oven? It'll be cooked just right by now."

"Wouldn't dream of it," Sergeant Noonan said.

"Please," she begged. "Please eat it. Personally I couldn't touch a thing, certainly not what's been in the house when he was here. But it's all right for you. It'd be a favor to me if you'd eat it up. Then you can go on with your work again afterwards."

There was a good deal of hesitating among the four policemen, but they were clearly hungry, and in the end they were persuaded to go into the kitchen and help themselves. The woman stayed where she was, listening to them speaking among themselves, their voices thick and sloppy because their mouths were full of meat.

"Have some more, Charlie?"

"No. Better not finish it."

"She wants us to finish it. She said so. Be doing her a favor."

"Okay then. Give me some more."

"That's a hell of a big club the guy must've used to hit poor Patrick," one of them was saying. "The doc says his skull was smashed all to pieces just like from a sledgehammer."

"That's why it ought to be easy to find."

"Exactly what I say."

"Whoever done it, they're not going to be carrying a thing like that around with them longer

than they need."

One of them belched.

"Personally, I think it's right here on the premises."

"Probably right under our very noses. What you think, Jack?"

And in the other room, Mary Maloney began to giggle.

The Tale of the Three Brothers by J. K. Rowling

There were once three brothers who were travelling along a lonely, winding road at **twilight**. In time, the brothers reached a river, too deep to wade through, and too dangerous to swim across. However, these brothers were learned in the magical arts, and so they simply waved their wands, and made a bridge appear across the **treacherous** water. They were halfway across it, when they found their path blocked by a hooded figure.

And Death spoke to them. He was angry that he had been cheated out of three new victims, for travellers usually drowned in the river. But Death was **cunning**. He pretended to congratulate the three brothers upon their magic, and said that each had earned a prize for being clever enough to **evade** him.

So, the oldest brother, who was a combative man, asked for a wand more powerful than any in existence: a wand that must always win duels for its owner, a wand worthy of a wizard who had conquered Death! So, Death had crossed to an elder tree on the banks of the river, fashioned a wand from a branch that had hung there, and gave it to the oldest brother.

Then the second brother, who was an arrogant man, decided that he wanted to humiliate Death still further, and asked for the power to recall others from Death. So, Death picked up a stone from the riverbank and gave it to the second brother, and told him that the stone would have the power to bring back the dead.

And then Death asked the third and youngest brother what he would like. The youngest brother was the **humblest** and also the wisest of the brothers, and he did not trust Death. So he asked for something that would enable him to go forth from that place without being followed by Death. And Death, most unwillingly, handed over his own Cloak of Invisibility.

Then Death stood aside and allowed the three brothers to continue on their way and they did so, talking with wonder of the adventure they had had, and admiring Death's gifts.

In due course, the brothers separated, each for his own destination.

The first brother travelled for a week or more, and, reaching a distant village, he sought out a fellow wizard, with whom he had a **quarrel**. Naturally, with the Elder Wand as his weapon, he could not fail to win the duel that followed. Leaving his enemy dead upon the floor, the oldest brother proceeded to an inn, where he boasted of the powerful wand which he had snatched from Death himself and of how it made him invincible.

That very night, another wizard crept upon the oldest brother as he lay **wine-sodden**, upon his bed. The thief took the wand, and, for good measure, slit the oldest brother's throat.

And so, Death took the first brother for his own.

Meanwhile, the second brother journeyed to his own home, where he lived alone. Here, he took out the stone which had the power to recall the dead, and turned it thrice in his hand.

To his amazement and delight, the figure of the girl he had once hoped to marry, before her **untimely** death, appeared at once before him.

Yet she was sad and cold, separated from him as though by a veil. Though she had returned to the **mortal** world, she did not truly belong there, and suffered. Finally, the second brother, driven mad by hopeless longing, killed himself, so as to truly join her.

And so, Death took the second brother for his own.

But though Death searched for the third brother for many years, he was never able to find him. It was only when he had **attained** a great age that the youngest brother finally took off the Cloak of Invisibility, and gave it to his son. And then, he greeted Death as an old friend, went with him gladly, and, as equals, they departed this life.