

PRESTWICK HOUSE LITERARY TOUCHSTONE CLASSICS

# CLASSIC AMERICAN —SHORT STORIES—



UNABRIDGED WITH GLOSSARY AND NOTES

# CLASSIC AMERICAN — SHORT STORIES —



EDITED BY PAUL D. MOLIKEN



## Prestwick House

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# Notes

## What is a literary classic and why are these classic works important to the world?

A literary classic is a work of the highest excellence that has something important to say about life and/or the human condition and says it with great artistry. A classic, through its enduring presence, has withstood the test of time and is not bound by time, place, or customs. It speaks to us today as forcefully as it spoke to people one hundred or more years ago, and as forcefully as it will speak to people of future generations. For this reason, a classic is said to have universality.

This anthology contains a unique cross-section of American short stories, written between 1835 and 1919. They span the entire genre, going from simple irony to an exploration of the nature of evil. Many of America's greatest writers are included, and the stylistic and thematic differences among them offer readers a large diversity of plot, theme, setting, and character development.

The sly wit of Mark Twain's country bumpkins in "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" is sure to provoke laughter and an appreciation for Twain's uncanny ear for dialect. O. Henry's poverty-stricken couple in "The Gift of the Magi" experience a twist of fate that only love can bring, and when it occurs on Christmas Eve, it is that much more rewarding. One of Edgar Allan Poe's most famous stories, "The Cask of Amontillado," with the murderous insanity of its narrator, the primal fear it arouses, and its ironic humor has enthralled readers for many years. Naturalism and anthropomorphism are important elements in Jack London's "To Build a Fire," as the story's foolish Yukon traveler pushes his dog toward their opposite fates after ignoring wiser men's advice.

Herman Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener," filled with ambiguity and uncertainty over the main character's motivation, offers great relevance to modern society's desire for individuality and success in the business world. Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat," another realistic tale of survival or death, captivates the imagination by placing readers inside a dingy struggling to survive against the might of the sea. "Desirée's Baby," Kate Chopin's story

about female independence and the breaking of racial stereotypes, shocked the America of the 1890s, and its characters seem even more relevant in today's more understanding society.

Sherwood Anderson's "Hands," with both its directness and its hints at hidden issues, influenced future generations of writers, including Ernest Hemingway, who for a while considered Anderson a mentor. Nathaniel Hawthorne's allegory, "Young Goodman Brown," provides a clear depiction of how temptation and wickedness have the potential to overcome basic human goodness. Bret Harte's "The Outcasts of Poker Flat," a story of wonderfully diverse characters who simply do not fit into society's expectations and who exhibit both unexpected strengths and surprising weaknesses, rounds out the anthology.

These ten classics demonstrate the vast sweep of American short stories. They represent some of our greatest literary achievements.



# Y O U N G   G O O D M A N   B R O W N

By  
*Nathaniel Hawthorne*

## BIOGRAPHY

Considered one of the greatest American writers, Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864), is a direct product of his New England background. His father was a sea captain who died when the boy was only four. Reared in a reclusive setting, Hawthorne became an avid reader, as recorded by the huge number of books he borrowed from the local lending library in Salem, Massachusetts. His uncle sent him to Bowdoin College, where Hawthorne became good friends with the future president Franklin Pierce and future poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Hawthorne destroyed most of his early writings; however, by the time he was 33, his writing style and content had matured. Critics credit Hawthorne with making the short story acceptable literature in America, especially after his *Twice Told Tales* was published in 1837.

Haunted by his Puritan past, including a grandfather who was a judge at the Salem Witch Trials, Hawthorne wrote many of his novels and short stories, including *The Scarlet Letter*, *The House of the Seven Gables*, and “Young Goodman Brown” with deeply Puritan backgrounds. His contributions to American literature include his meticulous style, intriguing themes, complex symbolism, and psychological insights into human nature.

## READING POINTERS FOR SHARPER INSIGHTS

As you read “Young Goodman Brown,” take note of the following:

### Theme:

Note how Young Goodman Brown learns that all people are sinners and what happens to him after gaining this knowledge.

### Atmosphere:

Hawthorne’s use of vocabulary gives “Young Goodman Brown” a strong sense of darkness and gloom.

### Symbols:

- Forest – a place of evil or temptation
- Faith – both Brown’s wife, who is pure and sweet, and his religious faith
- Young Goodman – an implication of naïveté, piety, goodness, and righteousness
- Pink ribbon – child-like innocence and femininity

### Unique Elements in Hawthorne’s Story:

- Hawthorne uses religious language that eventually leads to the Devil’s meeting (*catechism, covenant, ecclesiastical council, hymn, congregation, converts, altar, etc.*).
- The story itself implies that his narrative might be a dream. Whether Young Goodman Brown actually goes into the forest or dreams he does, the effect is the same.
- During the journey, Goodman Brown gradually loses his innocence by gaining the knowledge that all mankind is sinful, which destroys the rest of his life.



# Y O U N G   G O O D M A N †   B R O W N

By  
*Nathaniel Hawthorne*  
(1835)

**Y**OUNG GOODMAN BROWN came forth at sunset into the street at Salem† village; but put his head back, after crossing the threshold, to exchange a parting kiss with his young wife. And Faith, as the wife was aptly named, thrust her own pretty head into the street, letting the wind play with the pink ribbons of her cap while she called to Goodman Brown.

“Dearest heart,” whispered she, softly, and rather sadly, when her lips were close to his ear, “prithee put off your journey until sunrise and sleep in your own bed tonight. A lone woman is troubled with such dreams and such thoughts that she’s afeard of herself sometimes. Pray tarry with me this night, dear husband, of all nights in the year.”

“My love and my Faith,” replied young Goodman Brown, “of all nights in the year, this one night must I tarry away from thee. My journey, as thou callest it, forth and back again, must needs be done ’twixt now and sunrise. What, my sweet, pretty wife, dost thou doubt me already, and we but three months married?”

“Then God bless you!” said Faith, with the pink ribbons; “And may you find all well when you come back.”

“Amen!” cried Goodman Brown. “Say thy prayers, dear Faith, and go to bed at dusk, and no harm will come to thee.”

So they parted; and the young man pursued his way until, being about to turn the corner by the meeting-house, he looked back and saw the head of Faith still peeping after him with a melancholy air, in spite of her pink ribbons.

“Poor little Faith!” thought he, for his heart smote him. “What a wretch am I to leave her on such an errand! She talks of dreams, too. Methought as she spoke there was trouble in her face, as if a dream had warned her what work is to be done tonight. But no, no; ’twould kill her to think it. Well,

†Terms marked in the text with (†) can be looked up in the Glossary for additional information.

she's a blessed angel on earth; and after this one night I'll cling to her skirts and follow her to heaven."

With this excellent resolve for the future, Goodman Brown felt himself justified in making more haste on his present evil purpose. He had taken a dreary road, darkened by all the gloomiest trees of the forest, which barely stood aside to let the narrow path creep through, and closed immediately behind. It was all as lonely as could be; and there is this peculiarity in such a solitude, that the traveler knows not who may be concealed by the innumerable trunks and the thick boughs overhead; so that with lonely footsteps he may yet be passing through an unseen multitude.

"There may be a devilish Indian<sup>†</sup> behind every tree," said Goodman Brown to himself; and he glanced fearfully behind him as he added, "What if the devil himself should be at my very elbow!"

His head being turned back, he passed a crook of the road, and, looking forward again, beheld the figure of a man, in grave and decent attire, seated at the foot of an old tree. He arose at Goodman Brown's approach and walked onward side by side with him.

"You are late, Goodman Brown," said he. "The clock of the Old South<sup>†</sup> was striking as I came through Boston, and that is full fifteen minutes agone."

"Faith kept me back a while," replied the young man, with a tremor in his voice, caused by the sudden appearance of his companion, though not wholly unexpected.

It was now deep dusk in the forest, and deepest in that part of it where these two were journeying. As nearly as could be discerned, the second traveler was about fifty years old, apparently in the same rank of life as Goodman Brown, and bearing a considerable resemblance to him, though perhaps more in expression than features. Still they might have been taken for father and son. And yet, though the elder person was as simply clad as the younger, and as simple in manner too, he had an indescribable air of one who knew the world, and who would not have felt abashed at the governor's dinner table or in King William's court,<sup>†</sup> were it possible that his affairs should call him thither. But the only thing about him that could be fixed upon as remarkable was his staff, which bore the likeness of a great black snake,<sup>†</sup> so curiously wrought that it might almost be seen to twist and wriggle itself like a living serpent. This, of course, must have been an ocular deception, assisted by the uncertain light.

"Come, Goodman Brown," cried his fellow-traveler, "this is a dull pace for the beginning of a journey. Take my staff, if you are so soon weary."

"Friend," said the other, exchanging his slow pace for a full stop, "having kept covenant by meeting thee here,<sup>†</sup> it is my purpose now to return whence I came. I have scruples touching the matter thou wot'st of."

“Sayest thou so?” replied he of the serpent, smiling apart. “Let us walk on, nevertheless, reasoning as we go; and if I convince thee not thou shalt turn back. We are but a little way in the forest yet.”

“Too far! too far!” exclaimed the goodman, unconsciously resuming his walk. “My father never went into the woods on such an errand, nor his father before him. We have been a race of honest men and good Christians since the days of the martyrs; and shall I be the first of the name of Brown that ever took this path and kept,”

“Such company, thou wouldst say,” observed the elder person, interpreting his pause. “Well said, Goodman Brown! I have been as well acquainted with your family as with ever a one among the Puritans;† and that’s no trifle to say. I helped your grandfather, the constable, when he lashed the Quaker† woman so smartly through the streets of Salem; and it was I that brought your father a pitch-pine knot, kindled at my own hearth, to set fire to an Indian village, in King Philip’s War.† They were my good friends, both; and many a pleasant walk have we had along this path, and returned merrily after midnight. I would fain be friends with you for their sake.”

“If it be as thou sayest,” replied Goodman Brown, “I marvel they never spoke of these matters; or, verily, I marvel not, seeing that the least rumor of the sort would have driven them from New England. We are a people of prayer, and good works to boot, and abide no such wickedness.”

“Wickedness or not,” said the traveler with the twisted staff, “I have a very general acquaintance here in New England. The deacons of many a church have drunk the communion wine† with me; the selectmen of divers towns make me their chairman; and a majority of the Great and General Court† are firm supporters of my interest. The governor and I, too. But these are state secrets.”

“Can this be so?” cried Goodman Brown, with a stare of amazement at his undisturbed companion. “Howbeit, I have nothing to do with the governor and council; they have their own ways, and are no rule for a simple husbandman like me. But, were I to go on with thee, how should I meet the eye of that good old man, our minister, at Salem village? Oh, his voice would make me tremble both Sabbath day and lecture day.”†

Thus far the elder traveler had listened with due gravity; but now burst into a fit of irrepressible mirth, shaking himself so violently that his snake-like staff actually seemed to wriggle in sympathy.

“Ha! ha! ha!” shouted he again and again; then composing himself, “Well, go on, Goodman Brown, go on; but, prithee, don’t kill me with laughing.”

“Well, then, to end the matter at once,” said Goodman Brown, considerably nettled, “there is my wife, Faith. It would break her dear little heart; and I’d rather break my own.”

## Glossary

### YOUNG GOODMAN BROWN

**Goodman** – a term that was used for the head of a household; it was also applied to the husband in a family.

**Salem** – the city in Massachusetts that is primarily known for its 1692 witchcraft trials

**devilish Indian** – Native Americans were thought to be children of Satan; the Puritans regarded them as pagans.

**Old South** – a Bostonian church

**King William's court** – a reference to the King of England, William of Orange, who ruled with his wife, Mary, from 1689-1702

**great black snake** – an allusion to Satan, who tempted Eve in the form of a serpent

“**having kept covenant by meeting thee here**” – Goodman had previously made a vow that he would be there; the word *covenant* is often used to indicate an agreement with God, but in this instance, it is referring to an agreement with Satan.

**Puritans** – the religious sect that broke away from the Anglican Church in England; the Puritans landed at Plymouth Rock and settled both Plymouth and Boston.

**Quaker** – a religious group that disagreed with the Puritan beliefs; the Puritans viewed Quakers as heretics.

**King Philip's War** – King Philip is the English name given to a chief of the Wampanoag tribe; his Native American name is Metacomb. He greatly distrusted the colonists, and after a series of misunderstandings, as well as some murders, the war of 1675 began. Many soldiers, citizens, and Native Americans were killed.

**communion wine** – the drink used to symbolize the significance of Christ's death on the cross

**Great and General Court** – the name of the state legislature of Massachusetts

**Sabbath day and lecture day** – Sunday and the mid-week church meeting

**catechism** – a series of set religious questions and answers

**Goody** – also *Good Wife*, used as a title before a last name

**Corey** – a possible reference to Martha Corey, one of the accused in the Salem Witch Trials; she was a respected member of the community. However, the judge convicted her and, contrary to what Hawthorne writes, Martha Cory was hanged.

“**...my broomstick...and wolf's bane.**” – These terms are all related to sorcery and witchcraft. Smallage is a celery-type herb, cinquefoil is another edible herb, and wolf's bane is an herbal poison. When combined in a

## VOCABULARY

YOUNG GOODMAN BROWN

- abashed** – embarrassed, uncomfortable  
**anathema** – a curse or punishment; something abhorrent  
**anointed** – smeared a person's skin with a substance as part of a ritual  
**basin** – a bowl used to hold liquids  
**benevolently** – showing kindness to others  
**boughs** – the branches of a tree  
**cognizance** – the ability to use and judge information; awareness  
**covenant** – a verbal contract, agreement  
**deacons** – church officials  
**eventide** – evening  
**exhorted** – strongly recommended  
**firmament** – heaven  
**forsooth** – [*archaic*] in truth  
**hoary-bearded** – having a grey beard  
**husbandman** – a farmer  
**impious** – without holiness  
**lamentations** – loud cries of grief and concern  
**lattice** – crossed wooden strips with openings in between  
**lurid** – reddish  
**reverenced** – respected  
**sanctity** – holiness; purity of religious life  
**selectmen** – town officers  
**similitude** – similar in appearance  
**smote** – struck  
**steeds** – horses  
**thither** – towards something; there  
**unconcerted** – separated  
**verily** – honestly  
**vexed** – irritated, annoyed  
**wanton** – inconsiderate; careless  
**zenith** – the point in the sky directly above the observer

BARTLEBY, THE SCRIVENER

- abate** – to lessen  
**aberration** – an abnormality; something that is atypical  
**abridge** – to shorten  
**abrogation** – elimination; cancellation  
**acquiesced** – gave permission, gave in  
**admonitions** – criticisms