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FIVE AMERICAN ADVENTURES

THE GREAT STONE FACE

by Nathaniel Hawthorne

OLD TIMES ON THE MISSISSIPPI

by Mark Twain

OLD YELLER

by Fred Gipson

THE HUMAN COMEDY

by William Saroyan

ON BORROWED TIME

by Paul Osborn

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CLIFTON FADIMAN

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FIVE AMERICAN ADVENTURES

Contents

THE GREAT STONE FACE—*Nathaniel Hawthorne* 1

AFTERWORD 22

STUDY QUESTIONS 23

OLD TIMES ON THE MISSISSIPPI—*Mark Twain* 25

AFTERWORD 108

STUDY QUESTIONS 111

OLD YELLER—*Fred Gipson* 113

AFTERWORD 201

STUDY QUESTIONS 204

THE HUMAN COMEDY—*William Saroyan* 207

AFTERWORD 371

STUDY QUESTIONS 374

ON BORROWED TIME—*Paul Osborn* 379

AFTERWORD 450

STUDY QUESTIONS 454

Prefaces and Afterwords by Clifton Fadiman

Study Questions by Allan A. Glatthorn

The Great Stone Face

by Nathaniel Hawthorne



NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE was one of the greatest of nineteenth century American writers. He is most famous for his novels, particularly *The Scarlet Letter*, which some of you may have already read. But his short stories, especially those which introduce a haunting note of the supernatural, will always be admired. He has written more powerful tales than "The Great Stone Face"; yet, for more than a century, this little story has fascinated people, particularly young people. This may seem strange, because it deals with a subject we all pay respect to but don't often find interesting in books—plain, simple goodness.

This story deals with goodness indirectly, in an allegorical way. In an allegory the author treats abstract ideas, usually moral ones, but he clothes these ideas in the guise of persons or, sometimes, situations. If you have read any of Aesop's fables, you have already read some allegories. Similarly, "The Great Stone Face" is an allegory, and not a difficult one to understand. Once Hawthorne wrote to a friend, "Upon my honor I am not quite sure that I entirely comprehend my own meaning in some of these . . . allegories." But there is little doubt of the meaning lying only half-concealed in "The Great Stone Face," although each reader will phrase that meaning a little differently.

To some of you, the tale may seem a bit remote and unreal; if so, consider that maybe that was the effect Hawthorne intended. Unreal or not, it is a fact that the title comes from a real natural object. In New Hampshire there is a range of mountains known as the Franconia Range. On Profile Mountain there is a famous natural rock formation which does resemble a human face if seen from a certain angle. Hawthorne must have brooded over this strange natural wonder until his imagination took fire—and "The Great Stone Face" was produced.

One afternoon, when the sun was going down, a mother and her little boy sat at the door of their cottage talking about the Great Stone Face. They had but to lift their eyes, and there it was plainly to be seen, though miles away, with the sunshine brightening all its features.

And what was the Great Stone Face?

Embosomed amongst a family of lofty mountains, there was a valley so spacious that it contained many thousand inhabitants. Some of these good people dwelt in log huts, with the black forest all around them, on the steep and difficult hillsides. Others had their homes in comfortable farmhouses, and cultivated the rich soil on the gentle slopes or level surfaces of the valley. Others, again, were congregated into populous villages, where some wild, highland rivulet, tumbling down from its birthplace in the upper mountain region, had been caught and tamed by human cunning, and compelled to turn the machinery of cotton factories. The inhabitants of this valley, in short, were numerous and of many modes of life. But all of them, grown people and children, had a kind of familiarity with the Great Stone Face, although some possessed the gift of distinguishing this grand natural phenomenon more perfectly than many of their neighbors.

The Great Stone Face, then, was a work of Nature in her mood of majestic playfulness, formed on the perpendicular side of a mountain by some immense rocks which had been thrown together in such a position, as, when viewed at a proper distance, precisely to resemble the features of the human countenance.

It seemed as if an enormous giant, or a Titan,¹ had sculptured his own likeness on the precipice. There was the broad arch of the forehead, a hundred feet in height; the nose, with its long bridge; and the vast lips which, if they could have spoken, would have rolled their thunder accents from one end of the valley to the other. True it is that, if the spectator approached too near, he lost the outline of the gigantic visage and could discern only a heap of ponderous and gigantic rocks, piled in chaotic ruin one upon another. Retracing his steps, however, the wondrous features would again be seen; and the further he withdrew from them, the more like a human face, with all its original divinity intact, did they appear; until, as it grew dim in the distance, with the clouds and glorified vapor of the mountains clustering about it, the Great Stone Face seemed positively to be alive.

It was a happy lot for children to grow up to manhood or womanhood with the Great Stone Face before their eyes, for all the features were noble, and the expression was at once grand and sweet, as if it were the glow of a vast, warm heart that embraced all mankind in its affections and had room for more. It was an education only to look at it. According to the belief of many people, the valley owed much of its fertility to this benign aspect that was continually beaming over it, illuminating the clouds and infusing its tenderness into the sunshine.

As we began with saying, a mother and her little boy sat at their cottage door gazing at the Great Stone Face and talking about it. The child's name was Ernest.

"Mother," said he, while the titanic visage smiled on him, "I wish that it could speak, for it looks so very kindly that its voice must needs be pleasant. If I were to see a man with such a face, I should love him dearly."

"If an old prophecy should come to pass," answered his mother, "we may see a man, some time or other, with exactly such a face as that."

"What prophecy do you mean, dear Mother?" eagerly inquired Ernest. "Pray tell me all about it!"

So his mother told him a story that her own mother had told to her, when she herself was younger than little Ernest—a story, not of things that were past, but of what was yet to come; a story,

¹ *Titan* (tī'tăn): in Greek mythology, one of the older gods, possessing tremendous size and power.

nevertheless, so very old, that even the Indians, who formerly inhabited this valley, had heard it from their forefathers, to whom, as they affirmed, it had been murmured by the mountain streams and whispered by the wind among the treetops.

The purport¹ was that, at some future day, a child should be born hereabouts who was destined to become the greatest and noblest personage of his time, and whose countenance, in manhood, should bear an exact resemblance to the Great Stone Face.

Not a few old-fashioned people, and young ones likewise, in the ardor of their hopes, still cherished an enduring faith in this old prophecy. But others, who had seen more of the world, had watched and waited till they were weary and had beheld no man with such a face, nor any man that proved to be much greater or nobler than his neighbors, concluded it to be nothing but an idle tale. At all events, the great man of the prophecy had not yet appeared.

“Oh, Mother, dear Mother!” cried Ernest, clapping his hands above his head, “I do hope that I shall live to see him!”

His mother was an affectionate and thoughtful woman and felt that it was wisest not to discourage the generous hopes of her little boy. So she only said to him, “Perhaps you may.”

And Ernest never forgot the story that his mother told him. It was always in his mind, whenever he looked upon the Great Stone Face.

He spent his childhood in the log cottage where he was born and was dutiful to his mother and helpful to her in many things, assisting her much with his little hands and more with his loving heart. In this manner, from a happy yet often pensive² child, he grew up to be a mild, quiet, unobtrusive³ boy, sunbrowned with labor in the field, but with more intelligence brightening his aspect than is seen in many lads who have been taught at famous schools. Yet Ernest had had no teacher, save only that the Great Stone Face became one to him. When the toil of the day was over, he would gaze at it for hours until he began to imagine that those vast features recognized him and gave him a smile of kindness and encouragement, responsive to his own look of veneration.⁴ We must not take upon us to affirm that this was a mistake, although

¹ *purport* (pûr'pôrt): meaning or message. ² *pensive* (pě'n'siv): sadly thoughtful. ³ *unobtrusive* (ŭn'ôb-trôô'siv): not pushing forward; modest. ⁴ *reverence* (vē'n'ēr-ā'shŭn): reverence.

the Face may have looked no more kindly at Ernest than at all the world besides. But the secret was that the boy's tender and confiding simplicity discerned what other people could not see; and thus the love, which was meant for all, became his peculiar portion.

About this time, there went a rumor throughout the valley that the great man, foretold from ages long ago, who was to bear a resemblance to the Great Stone Face, had appeared at last. It seems that, many years before, a young man had migrated from the valley and settled at a distant seaport, where, after getting together a little money, he had set up as a shopkeeper. His name—but I could never learn whether it was his real one or a nickname that had grown out of his habits and success in life—was Gathergold. Being shrewd and active and endowed by Providence with that inscrutable ¹ faculty which develops itself in what the world calls luck, he became an exceedingly rich merchant and owner of a whole fleet of bulky-bottomed ships. All the countries of the globe appeared to join hands for the mere purpose of adding heap after heap to the mountainous accumulation of this one man's wealth. The cold regions of the North, almost within the gloom and shadow of the Arctic Circle, sent him their tribute in the shape of furs; hot Africa sifted for him the golden sands of her rivers and gathered up the ivory tusks of her great elephants out of the forests; the East came bringing him the rich shawls and spices and teas and the effulgence ² of diamonds and the gleaming purity of large pearls. The ocean, not to be behindhand with the earth, yielded up her mighty whales, that Mr. Gathergold might sell their oil and make a profit on it. Be the original commodity what it might, it was gold within his grasp. It might be said of him, as of Midas ³ in the fable, that whatever he touched with his finger immediately glistened and grew yellow and was changed at once into sterling ⁴ metal, or, which suited him still better, into piles of coin. And, when Mr. Gathergold had become so very rich that it would have taken him a hundred years only to count his wealth, he bethought himself of his native valley and resolved to go back thither and end his days where he was born.

¹ *inscrutable* (in-skrōō'tā-b'l): incapable of being understood. ² *effulgence* (ĕ-fŭl'jĕns): radiance. ³ *Midas* (mī'dās): in Greek mythology, King of Phrygia, country in Asia Minor. ⁴ *sterling* (stŭr'ling): money made of sterling silver.

With this purpose in view, he sent a skillful architect to build him such a palace as should be fit for a man of this vast wealth to live in.

As I have said above, it had already been rumored in the valley that Mr. Gathergold had turned out to be the prophetic personage so long and vainly looked for and that his visage was the perfect and undeniable similitude ¹ of the Great Stone Face. People were the more ready to believe that this must needs be the fact when they beheld the splendid edifice that rose, as if by enchantment, on the site of his father's old weather-beaten farmhouse. The exterior was of marble, so dazzlingly white that it seemed as though the whole structure might melt away in the sunshine, like those humbler ones which Mr. Gathergold, in his young play-days, before his fingers were gifted with the touch of transmutation, ² had been accustomed to build of snow. It had a richly ornamented portico, supported by tall pillars, beneath which was a lofty door, studded with silver knobs, and made of a kind of variegated ³ wood that had been brought from beyond the sea. The windows, from the floor to the ceiling of each stately apartment, were composed, respectively, of but one enormous pane of glass, so transparently pure that it was said to be a finer medium than even the vacant atmosphere. Hardly anybody had been permitted to see the interior of this palace; but it was reported, and with good semblance of truth, to be far more gorgeous than the outside, inasmuch that whatever was iron or brass in other houses was silver or gold in this; and Mr. Gathergold's bedchamber, especially, made such a glittering appearance that no ordinary man would have been able to close his eyes there. But, on the other hand, Mr. Gathergold was now so inured ⁴ to wealth that perhaps he could not have closed his eyes unless where the gleam of it was certain to find its way beneath his eyelids.

In due time, the mansion was finished; next came the upholsterers, with magnificent furniture; then a whole troop of black and white servants, the harbingers ⁵ of Mr. Gathergold, who, in his own majestic person, was expected to arrive at sunset. Our

¹ *similitude* (sĭ-mĭl'ĭ-tūd): likeness. ² *touch of transmutation* (trăns'-mũ-tă'shŭn): the ability to transform, to change base materials into gold, for example. ³ *variegated* (vâr'ĭ-ĕ-găt'ĕd): marked by different colors. ⁴ *inured* (ĭn-ũrd'): accustomed. ⁵ *harbinger* (hăr'bĭn-jĕr): one who arrives ahead of someone and announces his arrival.

friend Ernest, meanwhile, had been deeply stirred by the idea that the great man, the noble man, the man of prophecy, after so many ages of delay, was at length to be made manifest to his native valley. He knew, boy as he was, that there were a thousand ways in which Mr. Gathergold, with his vast wealth, might transform himself into an angel of beneficence and assume a control over human affairs as wide and benignant¹ as the smile of the Great Stone Face. Full of faith and hope, Ernest doubted not that what the people said was true, and that now he was to behold the living likeness of those wondrous features on the mountainside. While the boy was still gazing up the valley and fancying, as he always did, that the Great Stone Face returned his gaze and looked kindly at him, the rumbling of wheels was heard, approaching swiftly along the winding road.

"Here he comes!" cried a group of people who were assembled to witness the arrival. "Here comes the great Mr. Gathergold!"

A carriage, drawn by four horses, dashed round the turn of the road. Within it, thrust partly out of the window, appeared the physiognomy² of a little old man, with a skin as yellow as if his own Midas-hand had transmuted it. He had a low forehead, small, sharp eyes, puckered about with innumerable wrinkles, and very thin lips, which he made still thinner by pressing them forcibly together.

"The very image of the Great Stone Face!" shouted the people. "Sure enough, the old prophecy is true, and here we have the great man come, at last!"

And, what greatly perplexed Ernest, they seemed actually to believe that here was the likeness which they spoke of. By the roadside there chanced to be an old beggar-woman and two little beggar-children, stragglers from some far-off region, who, as the carriage rolled onward, held out their hands and lifted up their doleful voices, most piteously beseeching charity. A yellow claw—the very same that had clawed together so much wealth—poked itself out of the coach window and dropped some copper coins upon the ground; so that, though the great man's name seems to have been Gathergold, he might just as suitably have been nicknamed Scattercopper. Still, nevertheless, with an earnest

¹ *benignant* (bê-nîg'nănt): kindly; gracious. ² *physiognomy* (fîz'î-ôg'-nô-mî): face.

shout, and evidently with as much good faith as ever, the people bellowed:

“He is the very image of the Great Stone Face!”

But Ernest turned sadly from the wrinkled shrewdness of that sordid visage and gazed up the valley, where, amid a gathering mist, gilded by the last sunbeams, he could still distinguish those glorious features which had impressed themselves into his soul. Their aspect cheered him. What did the benign lips seem to say?

“He will come! Fear not, Ernest; the man will come!”

The years went on, and Ernest ceased to be a boy. He had grown to be a young man now. He attracted little notice from the other inhabitants of the valley for they saw nothing remarkable in his way of life, save that, when the labor of the day was over, he still loved to go apart and gaze and meditate upon the Great Stone Face. According to their idea of the matter, it was a folly, indeed, but pardonable, inasmuch as Ernest was industrious, kind, and neighborly, and neglected no duty for the sake of indulging this idle habit. They knew not that the Great Stone Face had become a teacher to him and that the sentiment which was expressed in it would enlarge the young man’s heart and fill it with wider and deeper sympathies than other hearts. They knew not that thence would come a better wisdom than could be learned from books and a better life than could be molded on the defaced example of other human lives. Neither did Ernest know that the thoughts and affections which came to him so naturally, in the fields and at the fireside and wherever he communed with himself, were of a higher tone than those which all men shared with him. A simple soul—simple as when his mother first taught him the old prophecy—he beheld the marvelous features beaming down the valley and still wondered that their human counterpart was so long in making his appearance.

By this time poor Mr. Gathergold was dead and buried, and the oddest part of the matter was that his wealth, which was the body and spirit of his existence, had disappeared before his death, leaving nothing of him but a living skeleton, covered over with a wrinkled yellow skin. Since the melting away of his gold, it had been very generally conceded that there was no such striking resemblance, after all, betwixt the ignoble¹ features of the ruined

¹ *ignoble* (ĩg-nō'b'l): not honorable; mean.

merchant and that majestic face upon the mountainside. So the people ceased to honor him during his lifetime and quietly consigned him to forgetfulness after his decease. Once in a while, it is true, his memory was brought up in connection with the magnificent palace which he had built, and which had long ago been turned into a hotel for the accommodation of strangers, multitudes of whom came, every summer, to visit that famous natural curiosity, the Great Stone Face. Thus, Mr. Gathergold being discredited and thrown into the shade, the man of prophecy was yet to come.

It so happened that a native-born son of the valley many years before, had enlisted as a soldier, and, after a great deal of hard fighting, had now become an illustrious commander. Whatever he may be called in history, he was known in camps and on the battlefield under the nickname of Old Blood-and-Thunder. This warworn veteran, being now infirm with age and wounds, and weary of the turmoil of a military life and of the roll of the drum and the clangor of the trumpet that had so long been ringing in his ears, had lately signified a purpose of returning to his native valley, hoping to find repose where he remembered to have left it.

The inhabitants, his old neighbors and their grown-up children, were resolved to welcome the renowned warriors with a salute of cannon and a public dinner, and all the more enthusiastically it being affirmed that now, at last, the likeness of the Great Stone Face had actually appeared. An aide-de-camp of Old Blood-and-Thunder, traveling through the valley, was said to have been struck with the resemblance. Moreover, the school-mates and early acquaintances of the general were ready to testify on oath that, to the best of their recollection, the aforesaid general had been exceedingly like the majestic image even when a boy, only that the idea had never occurred to them at that period. Great, therefore, was the excitement throughout the valley, and many people, who had never once thought of glancing at the Great Stone Face for years before, now spent their time in gazing at it for the sake of knowing exactly how General Blood-and-Thunder looked.

On the day of the great festival, Ernest, with all the other people of the valley, left their work and proceeded to the spot where the sylvan ¹ banquet was prepared. As he approached, the

¹ *sylvan* (sĭl'văn) : woodland.

loud voice of the Reverend Doctor Battleblast was heard beseeching a blessing on the good things set before them and on the distinguished friend of peace in whose honor they were assembled. The tables were arranged in a cleared space of the woods, shut in by the surrounding trees, except where a vista opened eastward and afforded a distant view of the Great Stone Face. Over the general's chair, which was a relic from the home of Washington, there was an arch of verdant boughs with the laurel profusely intermixed and surmounted by his country's banner, beneath which he had won his victories.

Our friend Ernest raised himself on his tiptoes, in hopes to get a glimpse of the celebrated guest; but there was a mighty crowd about the tables anxious to hear the toasts and speeches and to catch any word that might fall from the general in reply; and a volunteer company, doing duty as a guard, pricked ruthlessly with their bayonets at any particularly quiet person among the throng. So Ernest, being of an unobtrusive character, was thrust quite into the background where he could see no more of Old Blood-and-Thunder's physiognomy than if it had been still blazing on the battlefield. To console himself, he turned toward the Great Stone Face which, like a faithful and long-remembered friend, looked back and smiled upon him through the *vista* of the forest. Meantime, however, he could overhear the remarks of various individuals who were comparing the features of the hero with the face on the distant mountainside.

"Tis the same face, to a hair!" cried one man, cutting a caper for joy.

"Wonderfully like, that's a fact!" responded another.

"Like! Why, I call it Old Blood-and-Thunder himself in a monstrous looking glass!" cried a third. "And why not? He's the greatest man of this or any other age, beyond a doubt."

And then all three of the speakers gave a great shout which communicated electricity to the crowd and called forth a roar from a thousand voices that went reverberating ¹ for miles among the mountains, until you might have supposed that the Great Stone Face had poured its thunder-breath into the cry. All these comments and this vast enthusiasm served the more to interest our friend; nor did he think of questioning that now, at length, the mountain visage had found its human counterpart. It is true,

¹ *reverberate* (rê-vûr'bêr-ât): to echo.