

THE ANCHOR BOOK OF STORIES



SELECTED BY RANDALL JARRELL

A DOUBLEDAY



ANCHOR ORIGINAL

THE ANCHOR BOOK OF
STORIES

SELECTED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY RANDALL JARRELL

DOUBLEDAY ANCHOR BOOKS

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INTRODUCTION

I

Story, the dictionary tells one, is a short form of the word *history*, and stands for *a narrative, recital, or description of what has occurred*; just as it stands for *a fictitious narrative, imaginative tale*; [Colloq.] *a lie, a falsehood*.

A story, then, tells the truth or a lie—is a wish, or a truth, or a wish modified by a truth. Children ask first of all: “Is it a *true* story?” They ask this of the storyteller, but they ask of the story what they ask of a dream: that it satisfy their wishes. The Muses are the daughters of hope and the stepdaughters of memory. The wish is the first truth about us, since it represents not that learned principle of reality which half-governs our workaday hours, but the primary principle of pleasure which governs infancy, sleep, daydreams—and, certainly, many stories. Reading stories, we cannot help remembering Groddeck’s “We have to reckon with what exists, and dreams, daydreams too, are also facts; if anyone really wants to investigate realities, he cannot do better than to start with such as these. If he neglects them, he will learn little or nothing of the world of life.” If wishes were stories, beggars would read; if stories were true, our saviors would speak to us in parables. Much of our knowledge of, our compensation for, “the world of life” comes from stories; and the stories themselves are part of “the world of life.” Shakespeare wrote:

This is an art
Which does mend nature, change it rather, but
The art itself is nature . . .

and Goethe, agreeing, said: “A work of art is just as much a work of nature as a mountain.”

In showing that dreams both satisfy our wishes and punish us for them, Freud compares the dreamer to the husband and wife in the fairy tale of *The Three Wishes*: the wife wishes for a pudding, the husband wishes it on the end of her nose, and the wife wishes it away again. A contradictory family! But it is this family—wife, husband, and pudding—which the story must satisfy: the writer is, and is writing for, a doubly- or triply-natured creature, whose needs, understandings, and ideals—whether they are called id, ego, and superego, or body, mind, and soul—contradict one another. Most of the stories that we are willing to call works of art are compounds almost as complicated as their creators; but occasionally we can see isolated, in naked innocence, one of the elements of which our stories are composed. Thomas Leaf's story (in Hardy's *Under the Greenwood Tree*) is an example:

"Once," said the delighted Leaf, in an uncertain voice, "there was a man who lived in a house! Well, this man went thinking and thinking night and day. At last, he said to himself, as I might, 'If I had only ten pound, I'd make a fortune.' At last by hook or by crook, behold he got the ten pounds!"

"Only think of that!" said Nat Callcome satirically.

"Silence!" said the tranter.

"Well, now comes the interesting part of the story! In a little time he made that ten pounds twenty. Then a little after that he doubled it, and made it forty. Well, he went on, and a good while after that he made it eighty, and on to a hundred. Well, by-and-by he made it two hundred! Well, you'd never believe it, but—he went on and made it four hundred! He went on, and what did he do? Why, he made it eight hundred! Yes, he did," continued Leaf, in the highest pitch of excitement, bringing down his fist upon his knee, with such force that he quivered with the pain; "yes, and he went on and made it A THOUSAND!"

"Hear, hear!" said the tranter. "Better than the history of England, my sonnies!"

"Thank you for your story, Thomas Leaf," said grand-

father William; and then Leaf gradually sank into nothingness again.

Every day, in books, magazines, and newspapers, over radio and television, in motion-picture theaters, we listen to Leaf's story one more time, and then sink into nothingness again. His story is, in one sense, better than the history of England—or would be if the history of England were not composed, among other things, of Leaf's story and a million like it. His story, stood on its head, is the old woman's story in *Wozzeck*. "Grandmother, tell us a story," beg the children. "All right, you little crabs," she answers.

Once upon a time there was a poor little girl who had no father or mother because everyone was dead and there was no one left in the whole world. Everyone was dead, and she kept looking for someone night and day. And since there was no one on earth, she thought she'd go to heaven. The moon looked at her so friendly, but when she finally got to it, it was just a piece of rotted wood. So she went on to the sun, and when she got there, it was just a dried-up sunflower. And when she got to the stars, they were just little gold flies stuck up there as if they'd been caught in a spider web. And when she thought she'd go back to earth, it was just an upside-down pot. And she was all alone. And so she sat down and cried. And she's still sitting there, all alone.

The grandmother's story is told less often—but often enough: when we wake into the reality our dream has contradicted, we are bitter at returning against our wishes to so bad a world, and take a fierce pleasure in what remains to us, the demonstration that it is the worst of all possible worlds. And we take pleasure also—as our stories show—in repeating over and over, until we can bear it, all that we found unbearable: the child whose mother left her so often that she invented a game of throwing her doll out of her crib, exclaiming as it vanished: "Gone! gone!" was a true poet. "Does I 'member much about slavery times?" the old man says, in *Lay My Burden Down*; "well, there is no way for me to disremember unless I die." But the worst mem-

ories are joyful ones: "Every time Old Mistress thought we little black children was hungry 'tween meals she would call us up to the house to eat. Sometimes she would give us johnnycake and plenty of buttermilk to drink with it. There was a long trough for us they would scrub so clean. They would fill this trough with buttermilk and all us children would sit round the trough and drink with our mouths and hold our johnnycake with our hands. I can just see myself drinking now. It was so good. . . ." It is so good, our stories believe, simply to remember: their elementary delight in recognition, familiarity, mimesis, is another aspect of their obsession with all the likenesses of the universe, those metaphors that Proust called essential to style. Stories want to *know*: everything from the first blaze and breathlessness and fragrance to the last law and structure; but, too, stories don't want to know, don't want to care, just want to *do as they please*. (Some great books are a consequence of the writer's losing himself in his subject, others are a consequence of his losing himself in himself: Rabelais' "do what you please" is the motto of how many masterpieces, from Cervantes and Sterne on up to the present.) For stories vary from a more-than-Kantian disinterestedness, in which the self is a representative, indistinguishable integer among billions—the mere *one* or *you* or *man* that is the subject of all the verbs—to an insensate, protoplasmic egotism to which the self is the final fact, a galaxy that it is impracticable to get out of to other galaxies. Polarities like these are almost the first thing one notices about fiction. It is as much haunted by the chaos which precedes and succeeds order as by order; by the incongruities of the universe (wit, humor, the arbitrary, accidental, and absurd—all irruptions from, releases of, the Unconscious) as by its likenesses. A story may present fantasy as fact, as the sin or *hubris* that the fact of things punishes, or as a reality superior to fact. And, often, it presents it as a mixture of the three: all opposites meet in fiction.

The truths that he systematized, Freud said, had already been discovered by the poets; the tears of things, the truth of things, are there in their fictions. And yet, as he knew, the root of all stories is in Grimm, not in La Rochefoucauld;

in dreams, not in cameras and tape recorders. Turgenev was right when he said, "Truth alone, however powerful, is not art—" oxygen alone, however concentrated, is not water; and Freud was right, profoundly right, when he showed "that the dream is a compromise between the expression of and the defence against the unconscious emotions; that in it the unconscious wish is represented as being fulfilled; that there are very definite mechanisms that control this expression; that the primary process controls the dream world just as it controls the entire unconscious life of the soul, and that myth and poetical productions come into being in the same way and have the same meaning. There is only one important difference: in the myths and in the works of poets the secondary elaboration is much further developed, so that a logical and coherent entity is created."

II

A baby asleep but about to be waked by hunger sometimes makes little sucking motions: he is dreaming that he is being fed, and manages by virtue of the dream to stay asleep. He may even smile a little in satisfaction. But the smile cannot last for long—the dream fails, and he wakes. This is, in a sense, the first story; the child in his "impotent omnipotence" is like us readers, us writers, in ours.

A story is a chain of events. Since the stories that we know are told by men, the events of the story happen to human or anthropomorphic beings—gods, beasts, and devils; and are related in such a way that the story seems to begin at one place and to end at a very different place, without any essential interruption in its progress. The poet or storyteller, so to speak, writes numbers on a blackboard, draws a line under them, and adds them into their true but unsuspected sum. Stories, because of their nature or—it is to say the same thing—of ours, are always capable of generalization: a story about a dog Kashtanka is true for all values of dogs and men.

Stories can be as short as a sentence. Bion's saying, *The boys throw stones at the frogs in sport, but the frogs die not in sport but in earnest*, is a story; and when one finds

it in Aesop, blown up into a fable five or six sentences long, it has become a poorer story. Blake's *Prudence is a rich, ugly old maid courted by Incapacity* has a story inside it, waiting to flower in a glass of water. And there is a story four sentences long that not even Rilke was able to improve: *Now King David was old and stricken in years; and they covered him with clothes, but he got no heat. Wherefore his servants said unto him, Let there be sought for my lord the king a young virgin: and let her stand before the king, and let her cherish him, and let her lie in thy bosom, that my lord the king may get heat. So they sought for a fair damsel throughout all the coasts of Israel, and found Abishag a Shunamite, and brought her to the king. And the damsel was very fair, and cherished the king, and ministered to him: but the king knew her not. . . .* The enlisted men at Fort Benning buried their dog Calculus under a marker that read, *He made better dogs of us all*; and I read in the paper, a few days ago: *A Sunday-school teacher, mother of four children, shot to death her eight-year-old daughter as she slept today, state police reported. Hilda Kristle, 43, of Stony Run, told police that her youngest daughter, Suzanne, "had a heavy heart and often went about the house sighing."*

When we try to make, out of these stories life gives us, works of art of comparable concision, we almost always put them into verse. Blake writes about a chimney sweep:

A little black thing among the snow
Crying "'weep! 'weep!" in notes of woe!
"Where are thy father & mother, say?"—
"They are both gone up to the church to pray

"Because I was happy upon the heath,
And smil'd among the winter's snow,
They clothèd me in the clothes of death,
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.

"And because I am happy & dance & sing,
They think they have done me no injury,
And are gone to praise God & his Priest & King,
Who make up a Heaven of our misery—"

and he has written enough. Stephen Crane says in fifty words:

In the desert
I saw a creature naked, bestial,
Who, squatting upon the ground,
Held his heart in his hands
And ate of it.
I said, "Is it good, friend?"
"It is bitter—bitter," he answered;
"But I like it
Because it is bitter,
And because it is my heart."

These are the bones of stories, and we shiver at them. The poems in this book have more of the flesh of ordinary fiction. A truly representative book of stories would include many more poems: during much of the past people put into verse the stories that they intended to be literature.

But it is hard to put together any representative collection of stories. It is like starting a zoo in a closet: the giraffe alone takes up more space than one has for the collection. *Remembrance of Things Past* is a story, just as Saint-Simon's memoirs are a great many stories. One can represent the memoirs with the death of Monseigneur, but not even the death of Bergotte, the death of the narrator's grandmother, can do that for *Remembrance of Things Past*. Almost everything in the world, one realizes after a while, is too long to go into a short book of stories—a book of short stories. So, even, are all those indeterminate masterpieces that the nineteenth century called short stories and that we call short novels or novelettes: Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, *Hadji Murad*, *Master and Man*; Flaubert's *A Simple Heart*; Mann's *Death in Venice*; Leskov's *The Lady Macbeth of the Mzinsk District*; Keller's *The Three Righteous Comb-Makers*; James's *The Aspern Papers*; Colette's *Julie de Carneilhan*; Kleist's *Michael Kohlhaas*; Joyce's *The Dead*; Turgenev's *A Lear of the Steppes*; Hofmannstahl's *Andreas*; Kafka's *Metamorphosis*; Faulkner's *Spotted Horses*; Porter's *Old Mortality*; Dostoevsky's *The Eternal*

Husband; Melville's *Bartleby the Scrivener*, *Benito Cereno*; Chekhov's *Ward No. 6*, *Peasants*, *In the Ravine*.

And there are many more sorts of stories than there are sizes. Epics; ballads; historical or biographical or autobiographical narratives, letters, diaries; myths, fairy tales, fables; dreams, daydreams; humorous or indecent or religious anecdotes; all those stories that might be called specialized or special case—science fiction, ghost stories, detective stories, Westerns, True Confessions, children's stories, and the rest; and, finally, "serious fiction"—Proust and Chekhov and Kafka, *Moby-Dick*, *Great Expectations*, *A Sportsman's Notebook*. Most of this book is "serious fiction," some of it (Frost, Brecht, Blake, Wordsworth) serious fiction in verse; but there is a letter of Tolstoy's, a piece of history and autobiography from Saint-Simon; and there are gipsy and German fairy tales, Hebrew and Chinese parables, and two episodes from the journal of an imaginary Danish poet, the other self of the poet Rainer Maria Rilke. For there are all kinds of beings, and all kinds of things happen to them; and when you add to these what are as essential to the writer, the things that don't actually happen, the beings that don't actually exist, it is no wonder that stories are as varied as they are.

There are two extremes: stories in which nothing happens, and stories in which everything is a happening. The Muse of fiction believes that people "don't go to the North Pole" but go to work, go home, get married, die; but she believes at the same time that absolutely anything can occur—concludes, with Gogol: "Say what you like, but such things do happen—not often, but they do happen." Our lives, even our stories, approach at one extreme the lives of Prior's Jack and Joan:

If human things went Ill or Well;
If changing Empires rose or fell;
The Morning past, the Evening came,
And found this couple still the same.
They Walked and Eat, good folks: What then?
Why then they Walk'd and Eat again:
They soundly slept the Night away:

They did just Nothing all the day . . .
Nor Good, nor Bad, nor Fools, nor Wise;
They wou'd not learn, nor cou'd advise:
Without Love, Hatred, Joy, or Fear,
They led—a kind of—as it were;
Nor Wish'd, nor Car'd, nor Laugh'd, nor Cry'd:
And so They liv'd; and so They dy'd.

Billions have lived, and left not even a name behind, and while they were alive nobody knew their names either. These live out their lives “among the rocks and winding scars/Where deep and low the hamlets lie/Each with its little patch of sky/And little lot of stars”; soundly sleep the Night away in the old houses of Oblomov's native village, where everybody did just Nothing all the day; rise—in Gogol's Akaky Akakyevich Bashmachkin, in the Old-World Landowners—to a quite biblical pathos and grandeur; are relatives of that Darling, that *dushechka*, who for so many solitary years “had no opinions of any sort. She saw the objects about her and understood what she saw, but could not form any opinion about them”; sit and, “musing with close lips and lifted eyes/Have smiled with self-contempt to live so wise/And run so smoothly such a length of lies”; walk slowly, staring about them—or else just walk—through the pages of Turgenev, Sterne, Keller, Rabelais, Twain, Cervantes, and how many others; and in Chuang T'zu disappear into the mists of time, looming before us in primordial grandeur: “In the days of Ho Hsu the people did nothing in particular when at rest, and went nowhere in particular when they moved. Having food, they rejoiced; having full bellies, they strolled about. Such were the capacities of the people.”

How different from the later times, the other pages, in which people “wear the hairs off their legs” “counting the grains of rice for a rice-pudding”! How different from the other extreme: the world of Svidrigaylov, Raskolnikov, Stavrogin, where everything that occurs is either a dream told as if it were reality, or reality told as if it were a dream, and where the story is charged up to the point at which the lightning blazes out in some nightmare, revelation, atrocity,

and the drained narrative can begin to charge itself again! In this world, and in the world of *The Devil*, *The Kreutzer Sonata*, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, everything is the preparation for, or consummation of, an Event; everyone is an echo of "the prehistoric, unforgettable Other One, who is never equalled by anyone later." This is the world of Hoffmannstahl's *A Tale of the Cavalry*, where even the cow being dragged to the shambles, "shrinking from the smell of blood and the fresh hide of a calf nailed to the doorpost, planted its hooves firm on the ground, drew the reddish haze of the sunset in through dilated nostrils, and, before the lad could drag her across the road with stick and rope, tore away with piteous eyes a mouthful of the hay which the sergeant had tied on the front of his saddle." It is the world of Nijinsky's diary: "One evening I went for a walk up the hill, and stopped on the mountain . . . 'the mountain of Sinai.' I was cold. I had walked far. Feeling that I should kneel, I quickly knelt and then felt that I should put my hand on the snow. After doing this, I suddenly felt a pain and cried with it, pulling my hand away. I looked at a star, which did not say good evening to me. It did not twinkle at me. I got frightened and wanted to run, but could not because my knees were rooted to the snow. I started to cry, but no one heard my weeping. No one came to my rescue. After several minutes I turned and saw a house. It was closed and the windows shuttered . . . I felt frightened and shouted at the top of my voice: 'Death!' I do not know why, but felt that one must shout 'Death!' After that I felt warmer . . . I walked on the snow which crunched beneath my feet. I liked the snow and listened to its crunching. I loved listening to my footsteps; they were full of life. Looking at the sky, I saw the stars which were twinkling at me and felt merriment in them. I was happy and no longer felt cold . . . I started to go down a dark road, walking quickly, but was stopped by a tree which saved me. I was on the edge of a precipice. I thanked the tree. It felt me because I caught hold of it; it received my warmth and I received the warmth of the tree. I do not know who most needed the warmth. I walked on and suddenly stopped, seeing a precipice without a tree. I under-

stood that God had stopped me because He loves me, and therefore said: 'If it is Thy will, I will fall down the precipice. If it is Thy will, I will be saved.'"

This is what I would call pure narrative; one must go to writers like Tolstoy and Rilke and Kafka to equal it. In the unfinished stories of Kafka's notebook, some fragment a page long can carry us over a whole abyss of events: "I was sitting in the box, and beside me was my wife. The play being performed was an exciting one, it was about jealousy; at that moment in the midst of a brilliantly lit hall surrounded by pillars, a man was just raising his dagger against his wife, who was slowly retreating to the exit. Tense, we leaned forward over the balustrade; I felt my wife's curls against my temple. Then we started back, for something moved on the balustrade; what we had taken for the plush upholstery of the balustrade was the back of a tall thin man, not an inch broader than the balustrade, who had been lying flat on his face there and was now slowly turning over as though trying to find a more comfortable position. Trembling, my wife clung to me. His face was quite close to me, narrower than my hand, meticulously clean as that of a waxwork figure, and with a pointed black beard. 'Why do you come and frighten us?' I exclaimed. 'What are you up to here?' 'Excuse me!' the man said, 'I am an admirer of your wife's. To feel her elbows on my body makes me happy.' 'Emil, I implore you, protect me!' my wife exclaimed. 'I too am called Emil,' the man said, supporting his head on one hand and lying there as though on a sofa. 'Come to me, dear sweet little woman.' 'You cad,' I said, 'another word and you'll find yourself lying down there in the pit,' and as though certain that this word was bound to come, I tried to push him over, but it was not so easy, he seemed to be a solid part of the balustrade, it was as though he were built into it, I tried to roll him off, but I couldn't do it, he only laughed and said: 'Stop that, you silly little man, don't wear out your strength prematurely, the struggle is only beginning and it will end, as may well be said, with your wife's granting my desire.' 'Never!' my wife exclaimed, and then, turning to me: 'Oh, please, do push him down now.' 'I can't,' I exclaimed, 'you

can see for yourself how I'm straining, but there's some trickery in it, it can't be done.' 'Oh dear, oh dear,' my wife lamented, 'what is to become of me?' 'Keep calm,' I said, 'I beg of you. By getting so worked up you're only making it worse, I have another plan now, I shall cut the plush open here with my knife and then drop the whole thing down and the fellow with it.' But now I could not find my knife. 'Don't you know where I have my knife?' I asked. 'Can I have left it in my overcoat?' I was almost going to dash along to the cloakroom when my wife brought me to my senses. 'Surely you're not going to leave me alone now, Emil,' she cried. 'But if I have no knife,' I shouted back. 'Take mine,' she said and began fumbling in her little bag, with trembling fingers, but then of course all she produced was a tiny little mother-of-pearl knife."

One of the things that make Kafka so marvelous a writer is his discovery of—or, rather, discovery by—a kind of narrative in which logical analysis and humor, the greatest enemies of narrative movement, have themselves become part of the movement. In narrative at its purest or most eventful we do not understand but are the narrative. When we understand completely (or laugh completely, or feel completely a lyric empathy with the beings of the world), the carrying force of the narrative is dissipated: in fiction, to understand everything is to get nowhere. Yet, walking through Combray with Proust, lying under the leaves with Turgenev and the dwarf Kasyan, who has ever wanted to get anywhere but where he already is, in the best of all possible places?

In stories-in-which-everything-is-a-happening each event is charged and about to be further charged, so that the narrative may at any moment reach a point of unbearable significance, and disintegrate into energy. In stories-in-which-nothing-happens even the climax or denouement is liable to lose what charge it has, and to become simply one more portion of the lyric, humorous, or contemplative continuum of the story: in Gogol's *The Nose* the policeman seizes the barber, the barber turns pale, "but here the incident is completely shrouded in a fog and absolutely nothing is known of what happened next"; and in *Nevsky Ave-*

nue, after Schiller, Hoffman, and Kuntz the carpenter have stripped Lieutenant Pirogov and "treated him with such an utter lack of ceremony that I cannot find words to describe this highly regrettable incident," Pirogov goes raging away, and "nothing could compare with Pirogov's anger and indignation. Siberia and the lash seemed to him the least punishment Schiller deserved. . . . But the whole thing somehow petered out most strangely: on the way to the general, he went into a pastry-cook's, ate two pastries, read something out of the *Northern Bee*, and left with his anger somewhat abated"; took a stroll along Nevsky Avenue; and ended at a party given by one of the directors of the Auditing Board, where he "so distinguished himself in the mazurka that not only the ladies but also the gentlemen were in raptures over it. What a wonderful world we live in!"

One of these extremes of narrative will remind us of the state of minimum excitation which the organism tries to re-establish—of the baby asleep, a lyric smile on his lips; the other extreme resembles the processes of continually increased excitation found in sex and play.

III

There are so many good short narratives of every kind that a book of this size leaves most of their writers unrepresented. By saying that I was saving these writers for a second book I tried to make myself feel better at having left them out of the first. For I have left out all sagas, all ballads, all myths; a dozen great narrators in verse, from Homer to Rilke; Herodotus, Plutarch, Pushkin, Hawthorne, Flaubert, Dostoevsky, Melville, James, Leskov, Keller, Kipling, Mann, Faulkner—I cannot bear to go on. Several of these have written long narratives so much better than any of their short ones that it seemed unfair to use the short, and it was impossible to use the long. Hemingway I could not get permission to reprint. Any anthology is, as the dictionary says, a bouquet—a bouquet that leaves out most of the world's flowers.

I disliked leaving out writers, but I disliked almost as much having to leave out some additional stories by some