

Stories of Mystery and Imagination

Edgar Allan Poe



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EDGAR ALLAN POE

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1500 word vocabulary



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I

'YOU ARE THE MAN'

The miracle of Rattleborough really changed the lives of people in that small town. They certainly pray a lot more than they used to. And so the miracle – whether it was right or wrong – has had an excellent result. I am the only person who knows the whole story of the event; and I am, therefore, the only person who can tell the story properly.

The events happened in the summer of 18— . Mr Barnabas Shuttleworth had lived in Rattleborough for many years. He was one of the town's wealthiest and most respectable old gentlemen. One Saturday morning, he set out on horseback for the city of P— , fifteen miles away, planning to return the same evening.

Two hours later, the horse returned without Mr Shuttleworth – and without the two bags which it had been carrying. The horse was wounded in the chest and covered with mud.

Very naturally, these unpleasant facts caused alarm in the town. And when, by early Sunday morning, the old gentleman had still not returned, his friends decided to look for him.

The man who at last decided to lead the search was, of course, Mr Shuttleworth's closest friend, Mr Charles Goodfellow. 'Old Charley Goodfellow', as everyone called him, was indeed a good fellow. He had an honest, pleasant face, a kind heart, a clear voice and a pair of bright eyes that were never afraid to look straight into anyone's face. Old Charley had nothing to hide.

Although Mr Goodfellow had lived in Rattleborough for only six or seven months, he was very popular with everyone. His name helped, of course, but apart from that, everyone respected him. Mr Shuttleworthy especially liked him, and as the two old gentlemen were next-door neighbours, they had quickly become almost as close as two brothers.

Old Charley was not at all a rich man, and so he had to be rather careful with his money. Perhaps that was partly why Mr Shuttleworthy invited him to meals so often. Mr Goodfellow was at his friend's house three or four times a day, and always at midday for dinner. And then – the amount of wine that the two old gentlemen drank was really nobody's business but their own! Old Charley's favourite wine was *Château Margaux*. Mr Shuttleworthy liked nothing better than to see his friend swallow it, as he did, glass after glass.

I was with them one day, just after dinner, when the *Château Margaux* had been flowing freely for an hour or more.

'I'll tell you something, Charley,' Mr Shuttleworthy said, hitting his friend on the back. 'You are the finest old fellow I've ever met! And since you enjoy this wine so much, I'll order a big case of it for you. Yes, sir, I'll send an order this afternoon for a double-size case of *Château Margaux*, the best on the market! I *will* – now don't say a word! I've decided, and that's the end of the matter. So look out for it. It may take a month or two, but it'll come . . . It'll come when you don't expect it.'

This generosity of the rich Mr Shuttleworthy towards his not-so-rich friend shows just how close the two men were.

Well, on that fateful Sunday morning, when Mr Shuttleworthy did not return, Old Charley Goodfellow was the most anxious man in Rattleborough. He looked as pale as death and could not stop shaking, just as if the missing man had been his own dear brother. He knew, of course, that the horse had come home alone – and without its master's two bags. He knew, too, that a pistol-shot had passed straight through the horse's chest, entering at one side and coming out at the other, but not quite killing the poor animal.

At first, Old Charley's grief was too much for him. He could not do anything or decide anything. All he could say was, 'Wait . . . We must wait – until tomorrow, or Tuesday perhaps. He will come . . .'

It is often like that, with people who have to bear some great sorrow. They do not want to do anything – except wait. Well, the people of Rattleborough rather agreed with Old Charley. They would wait for a day or two and see what happened. They would have waited for a week, probably, if Mr Shuttleworthy's nephew had not strongly disagreed.

This nephew, young Mr Pennifeather, was the missing man's only living relation. He had lived with the rich Mr Shuttleworthy for many years. But he was not a very nice man. He played cards for money, he drank too much, he liked to quarrel. If he had not been Mr Shuttleworthy's nephew, no one would have listened to him. But the town had to listen, and agree, when Mr Pennifeather demanded a search for his uncle's '*dead body*'.

Although Mr Goodfellow still seemed unwilling, most people were getting anxious. It was hard for Old Charley to fight against it, and at last he agreed to the search.

'But how do you know that your uncle is dead, sir?' Old Charley asked Mr Pennifeather. 'You seem to know a lot.'

'Yes, how *does* he know?' other people whispered.

When Mr Pennifeather did not answer, there were more angry words between him and Old Charley. The crowd did not take much notice of the quarrel. Everyone knew that the two men were not good friends. Mr Pennifeather, who had very few friends, had never liked Old Charley's close friendship with his uncle, and once, during a quarrel, Mr Pennifeather had knocked Old Charley down. But Old Charley had behaved very well at the time. He had got up from the floor and rubbed the dirt off his clothes. Then he had just said that he would 'remember the matter and deal with it later'. Everyone thought that that was a calm and very proper reply to the young fellow. And no doubt Old Charley, who could never remain angry for long, had soon forgotten the quarrel.

But I must go on with the story. After the discussion, then, Mr Pennifeather advised that the searchers should spread out over the country. The fields and woods between Rattleborough and the city extended for nearly fifteen miles. 'We should spread ourselves out,' Mr Pennifeather said, 'so as to search everywhere.'

Now perhaps Old Charley was growing jealous of Pennifeather. Or perhaps he really was a great deal wiser than the young man. In his clear, honest voice, Old Charley said, 'There's no need for that at all. Mr Shuttleworthy was riding along the road to P—. Why ever should he have left the road? We must look closely on both sides, especially among bushes and trees and tall grass. Don't you think that's the best plan?'

Most of the crowd did think so, and so they all left Rattleborough together, with Old Charley leading the way. And a very good leader he was. Although they did not go far from the road, Old Charley led them into many dark corners and along unknown paths. But they did not find Mr Shuttleworthy that day. They went out again on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday – still without much luck.

I mean that they did not find Mr Shuttleworthy or his body, but they did find some traces of a struggle. They were following the tracks of the gentleman's horse, and had reached a spot about four miles east of Rattleborough. There, a path left the road and ran through a wood. But it came out again and met the road on the other side of the wood. A traveller going that way would save half a mile or more of his journey.

Mr Shuttleworthy clearly had gone that way, as the horse's tracks showed. Following them along the lane, the searchers came to a pool of dirty water, and there they saw the marks of a struggle. Something big and heavy – much bigger and heavier than a man – had been pulled off the path into the water. With ropes and chains, the men searched the pool thoroughly but found nothing.

They had almost decided to leave the place when Mr Goodfellow said: 'Perhaps we ought to draw off most of the water.'

Old Charley really had plenty of sense, and as several men had brought tools, his idea seemed a good one. Ditches were dug from both sides of the pool, and the water then ran off along the path.

At the bottom of the pool, the searchers found a black silk waistcoat. Nearly everyone present knew that it was Mr Pennifeather's waistcoat, although it was torn and marked with some dark red colour. Two or three people

remembered that Mr Pennifeather had last worn the waistcoat on Saturday morning – the morning when his uncle had ridden off to P—. No one had seen it since that morning.

The matter looked serious for Mr Pennifeather, and the man could not say a word. His face had turned very pale. The two or three friends that he had moved quickly away from him. But Mr Goodfellow went and stood beside him.

‘We must not make up our minds too quickly,’ he said. ‘You all know that I have forgiven Mr Pennifeather for – for his attack on me a few months ago. Yes, indeed, I have forgiven him from the bottom of my heart. No doubt he can explain this – this unpleasant discovery. And I, certainly, will try to help him. He is my best friend’s nephew – poor Mr Shuttleworthy’s only relation. For the sake of his uncle, I – I must try to help him.’

Old Charley talked for half an hour. His kindness, his goodness, his honesty seemed to shine through every word he said. But Old Charley was not a clever man. Half his words did more harm than good to Mr Pennifeather. This was especially noticed when Old Charley said the word ‘heir’. Instead of saying ‘Mr Pennifeather’, he said ‘the nephew and heir of the good Mr Shuttleworthy’. Once, he even said ‘... the only heir to the old gentleman’s wealth’.

The honest people of Rattleborough had not thought of that before. Suppose that Mr Shuttleworthy was dead: then, if Mr Pennifeather was the only heir, he would get all the dead man’s money! Things began to look black for Mr Pennifeather. So, without wasting more time, the crowd tied him up and started back towards the town.

On the way, the searchers looked carefully among the bushes and in the ditches. At one spot Old Charley seemed to pick up something off the ground. Though he tried to hide it, by pushing it into his pocket, a few men saw him. They demanded to know what he had found, and Old Charley had to show it.

It was a Spanish knife – the only one of that kind in Rattleborough. Everyone knew that it belonged to Mr Pennifeather. Indeed, his initials, *D.P.*, were cut into the steel.

No one now had any doubts. Mr Pennifeather had murdered his uncle – so as to get the old gentleman's money. No one troubled to search any more. An hour later, Mr Pennifeather appeared before a judge in Rattleborough Court. It was not a trial, of course, but the judge had to ask some questions.

The judge's first question was: 'Where were you, Mr Pennifeather, on the morning when your uncle disappeared?'

To everyone's surprise, Mr Pennifeather answered, 'I was hunting in the wood.'

'With a gun?'

'Yes, my own gun.'

'In which wood were you hunting?'

'Just a few miles along the road to P— . . . '

Mr Pennifeather had been quite near to the pool where his own waistcoat was discovered! The judge then asked Mr Goodfellow to describe the finding of the waistcoat and the knife.

With tears in his eyes, Old Charley told the story. And after that, he said that he had a solemn duty – not only to God but also to his fellow-men – to tell the truth.

'I have forgiven Mr Pennifeather,' he said, 'for the harm that he once did to me. I now have only the kindest feelings for him. But if this court wants the truth, then I had better tell it. It will – it will –' Old Charley had to put a handkerchief to his eyes '– break my heart!'

After a moment, he was able to go on. 'Last Friday I had dinner, as usual, with Mr Shuttleworthy. Mr Pennifeather was with us. The old gentleman told his nephew that he was going to P— the next morning. He intended to take a large amount of money, in two leather bags, to the Farmers' Bank there. Then Mr Shuttleworthy said clearly – and I clearly heard – "Nephew," he said, "when I die, you will get none of my money! Do you hear? None, sir! I am going to write a new will."

'Mr Pennifeather knows very well that that is the truth,' Old Charley added. 'And he must say so!'

Again, to everyone's surprise, the young man's answer was: 'Yes. That is true.'

While the court was sitting, the judge received a message: Mr Shuttleworthy's horse had just died from its wound. Mr Goodfellow thought it would be wise to examine the horse's body.

The judge and the crowd then left the court-house. Mr Goodfellow, who knew a lot about horses, carefully examined the animal's chest. After a long search in the wound, he found the shot which had killed the poor beast. It was a very large shot – the kind that is used for shooting big animals.

The police collected all the heavy guns in Rattleborough and tested the shot in each of them. They found that the shot was too big for all the guns – except one. It exactly fitted the gun of Mr Pennifeather.

The judge at once decided that he had heard enough. He ordered Mr Pennifeather to be kept in prison until the date of his proper trial for murder.

Mr Goodfellow, in tears, begged for the young man's freedom. 'It will be unpleasant,' he said, 'if he has to stay in prison for a month or six weeks. You can depend upon me, sir. I will look after him.'

The judge refused to agree. 'Mr Pennifeather may be guilty of murder,' he said. 'I cannot allow such a man to walk about in the streets of Rattleborough.'

Well, a month later, Mr Pennifeather was brought to trial in the city of P—. The chain of terrible facts was so unbroken and so clear that the result surprised no one. 'Guilty of murder,' the court said. And soon afterwards, the judge read the solemn words: 'You will be hanged by the neck until you are dead.'

The unhappy young man returned to the prison in P—, to wait for his punishment.

Through all this trouble, the noble behaviour of Old Charley Goodfellow had shone like a bright light. The people of Rattleborough loved and respected him even more than before. He was a popular visitor to every house in the town. He had dinner and supper with a different family almost every day. As a result of all this kindness, Old Charley could afford to spend a little money himself. He began to give little parties at his own house, and very pleasant parties they were, too. There were, of course, a few sad thoughts about Mr Shuttleworthy. People also remembered, sometimes, the terrible fate for which Mr Pennifeather was still waiting. But these thoughts did not spoil the occasions.

One fine day, Old Charley was surprised and pleased

to get this letter:

To Mr Charles Goodfellow,
Rattleborough.

City of W— ,
June 21, 18— .

Dear Sir,

About two months ago, we received an order from our good friend, Mr Barnabas Shuttleworthy. He asked us to send you a double case of best Château Margaux.

We are pleased to say that we have sent the wine today, by carriage. It should reach you the day after you receive this letter.

Please give our best wishes to Mr Shuttleworthy. We are, sir, always at your service,

Yours faithfully,
Hoggs, Frogs, Bogs, and Company
Chât. Marg.
6 Dozen Bottles.

Since the death of Mr Shuttleworthy, Old Charley had given up hope of ever getting the wine. He thought of it now — after all the trouble — as a special gift from God. He was delighted, of course. He went immediately to his friends, asking them all to come to supper the next evening. But he did not say anything about Mr Shuttleworthy's present. He just said that he himself had ordered some very fine wine from the city, and that it would arrive the next day. He would be glad if his friends helped him to drink it.

And so, at six o'clock the next evening, a large and respectable company met at Mr Goodfellow's house. I was among them. The supper itself was excellent, and we

all enjoyed it. But the Château Margaux did not arrive until nearly eight o'clock. When it came, we decided to put the huge wooden case on the table and open it. I myself helped to lift the box off the floor.

Old Charley had provided other wines for the party, and by eight o'clock he had drunk enough for any man. His face was very red when he sat down then and called loudly for silence. 'Everyone must be quiet,' he cried, 'when we see this great treasure.'

He gave me a few tools and asked me to open the case. Very naturally, I agreed – 'and with the greatest pleasure,' I said. I pushed an iron bar under the cover and hit it gently with a hammer.

The top of the box suddenly flew off. At the same moment, the body of poor Mr Shuttleworthy, covered with blood and dirt, sprang up in the box. It sat there, face to face with Mr Goodfellow, while a smell like poison filled the room. For a moment, the dead eyes looked sadly into Old Charley's face. Then the murdered man's clear but distant voice said slowly – '*You are the man!*' After that, the body fell over the side of the box, on to the table.

I can hardly describe the events that followed. Some people rushed madly to the doors and windows. A few strong men fainted with terror. But after the first wild cries of fear, everyone looked at Mr Goodfellow.

If I live for a thousand years, I will never forget the frightful look on that red, shining face of his. For two minutes, he sat quite still, as if he had been made of stone. His eyes seemed to be looking inwards – at his own miserable, murdering heart. Then they lit up suddenly, and he sprang out of his chair. He fell forward, over the dead body on the table. He began to talk very rapidly. We listened to a complete confession of the murder. Old Charley confessed the whole terrible deed, for which

poor Mr Pennifeather was then in prison and waiting to die.

Here are the chief facts of the story that we heard: — Mr Goodfellow had left Rattleborough on his own horse, just behind Mr Shuttleworthy. At the pool in the wood, Old Charley had shot his friend's horse with a pistol. Then, using the pistol as a hammer, he had killed the old gentleman. He took the two bags of money that the horse was carrying.

As the horse seemed to be dead, Old Charley had struggled to pull its body from the pool into the bushes. He had then ridden away, carrying Mr Shuttleworthy's body, to a distant part of the wood. And there, he had hidden the body in a safe place.

Old Charley himself had put the waistcoat, the knife, and the large shot in the places where they were found. In this way, everyone was certain to blame Mr Pennifeather for the murder.

Towards the end of the terrible story, the guilty voice grew weak. Old Charley finished at last, and raised himself from the table. He stretched out his hands to the wall and fell — *dead*.

I have called this event 'the miracle of Rattleborough'. In the minds of the honest people of that town, it *was* a miracle. And it has remained a miracle. Mr Goodfellow's confession came just in time to save Mr Pennifeather's life. But you will want to know, perhaps, how that confession was arranged.

I knew, for certain, that Mr Goodfellow had never forgiven young Pennifeather for knocking him down. I

was in Mr Shuttleworthy's house at the time of the quarrel. I saw the look on Old Charley's face when he got up off the floor. And I said to myself, 'That man *never* forgives and *never* forgets.' While everybody else saw only Old Charley's kindness and honesty, I was ready to see other things. Especially if he was dealing with Mr Pennifeather!

In this mystery, Old Charley made most of the discoveries himself. And the strangest one, surely, was his discovery of the shot. If you remember, he found it in the chest of the dead horse. The good people of Rattleborough had forgotten the facts about the horse's wound! But I had not forgotten them. A pistol-shot had passed *through* the animal's chest. There were, in fact, *two* wounds – one where the shot had entered the body, and one from which it had left. Old Charley must have put that large shot into the wound before he 'found' it there!

I then thought of Mr Goodfellow's pleasant little parties, where there was always plenty of good food and drink. It seemed strange that these had started only *after* Mr Shuttleworthy – and his money – had disappeared.

I made a secret search, lasting nearly two weeks, for Mr Shuttleworthy's body. Of course, I looked in places far from those to which Old Charley had led the searchers. And at last, I found the body. It was at the bottom of an old, dry well – about three miles from the pool in the wood.

The rest of my plan was quite simple. I had not forgotten Mr Shuttleworthy's promise to Old Charley, about the Château Margaux. And so, one night, I brought the old gentleman's body to an empty hut in my garden.

I got a piece of strong spring-steel, about a foot long, and pushed it down the throat of the dead man. I then put the body into an old wine box. I doubled the body