

OUTSTANDING SHORT STORIES

P.G. Wodehouse, Katherine Mansfield
W. Somerset Maugham and others



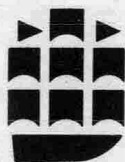
OUTSTANDING SHORT STORIES

BY

H. G. WELLS, OSCAR WILDE
P. G. WODEHOUSE, KATHERINE MANSFIELD
EDGAR ALLAN POE, ANTHONY TROLLOPE
AND W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

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"What is the matter, McAllister?" (See page 43.)

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¹The 2,000 root words of the *General Service List of English Words* of the *Interim Report on Vocabulary Selection*.

INTRODUCTION

HERBERT GEORGE WELLS (1866-1946) wrote many novels and short stories and a *Short History of the World* (1922). Much of his work had a scientific background, but he used his knowledge of science to describe astonishing and often impossible events. In *The Man who could Work Miracles* he tells us of a man whose commands were immediately obeyed by things.

OSCAR FINGALL O'FLAHERTIE WILKS WILDE (1854-1900) wrote poems, plays and novels. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a well-known novel, was published in 1891, and one of his comedies, *The Importance of being Earnest*, which is perhaps the best-known, in 1895. *The Model Millionaire* is a short story in which a very rich man is mistakenly supposed to be poor because he is dressed as a beggar for the purpose of being painted.

PELHAM GRENVILLE WODEHOUSE (born 1881) is a humorous writer. His works include novels and short stories, most of which describe humorous events in the lives of the rich. In *Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend* a nobleman who is afraid of his fierce gardener finally shows himself master in his own house.

KATHERINE MANSFIELD was the pen-name of Katherine Middleton Murry (1888-1923). Her chief works include *Bliss* (1920), *The Garden Party* (1922) and *The Dove's Nest* (1923), all short stories. The sorrows of poor children form the background to *The Doll's House*.

INTRODUCTION

EDGAR ALLAN POE (1809-1849) was born in Boston in the United States but went to school in England. Most of his short stories are connected with murder and other horrors, but *X-ing a Paragrap* shows that he could write a funny story when he wished.

ANTHONY TROLLOPE (1815-1882), after a miserable early life, became a clerk in the General Post Office. His novels are very numerous and he tells us that by 1879 he had earned about £70,000 by his writings. *The Courtship of Susan Bell* is set in America and describes how Susan's love-affair, after early difficulties, reached a happy ending.

WILLIAM SOMERSET MAUGHAM (born 1874) has written novels, short stories and plays. Several of the short stories (many of which are set in the East) have been turned into plays. Lord Mountdrago is a powerful and important nobleman whose dreams, the results of his own actions, bring him to his death.

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miracle. That lamp, in the natural course of nature, couldn't burn like that upside down, could it, Beamish? "

"You say it couldn't," said Beamish.

"And you?" said Fotheringay. "You don't mean to say——?"

"No," said Beamish unwillingly. "No, it couldn't."

"Very well," said Mr. Fotheringay. "Then here comes someone, perhaps myself, and stands here, perhaps, and says to that lamp, as I might do, collecting all my will—'Turn upside down without breaking, and go on burning steadily,' and—Hullo! "

It was enough to make anyone say "Hullo! " The impossible could be seen by them all. The lamp hung upside down in the air, burning quietly with its flame pointing down. It was as solid as ever a lamp was.

Mr. Fotheringay stood with a finger stretched out and the troubled face of one expecting a terrible crash. The cyclist, who was sitting next to the lamp, put his head down and jumped away. Everybody jumped. Miss Maybridge turned and cried out. For nearly three seconds the lamp remained as it was. A faint cry of pain came from Mr. Fotheringay. "I can't keep it up," he said, "any longer." He took a step back, and the lamp suddenly fell, broke upon the floor, and went out.

It was lucky that it had a metal container, or the whole place would have been on fire. Mr. Cox was the first to speak, and his remark meant that Mr. Fotheringay was a fool. Fotheringay himself was astonished at the thing that had happened. The conversation¹ which followed gave no explanation of the matter, and the general opinion agreed closely with Mr. Cox. Everyone accused Fotheringay of a foolish trick. His own mind was terribly puzzled, and he rather agreed with them.

¹ Conversation: Talk between two or more people.



"The lamp hung upside down in the air . . ."

He went home red-faced and hot. He watched each of the ten street lamps nervously as he passed it. It was only when he found himself in his little bedroom that he was able to think clearly and ask, "What on earth happened?"

He had taken off his shoes and was sitting on the bed with his hands in his pockets, saying for the seventeenth time, "I didn't want the thing to turn over," when he remembered that just when he said the commanding words, he had willed the thing that he said. His thoughts about the whole thing were not very clear, but he decided on another experiment.

He pointed to his candle¹ and collected his mind, though he felt that he did a foolish thing. "Be raised up," he said. But in a second that feeling disappeared. The candle was raised, hung in the air for a moment, and then fell with a crash on his table, leaving him in darkness.

For a time Mr. Fotheringay sat in the darkness, perfectly still. "It did happen," he said. "And how I'm going to explain it, I don't know." Unhappily he began to feel in his pockets for a match. He could find none, and he rose and felt on the table. "I wish I had a match," he said. He tried his coat, and there were none there, and then it came to his mind that miracles were possible even with matches. He stretched out a hand. "Let there be a match in that hand," he said. He felt some light object fall across his hand, and his fingers closed upon a match.

After several useless attempts to light this, he threw it down; and then he thought that he might have willed it to be lit. He did so, and saw it burning on the table. He caught it up quickly, and it went out. His ideas became wider, and he put the candle back in its place. "Here! You be lit," said Mr. Fotheringay, and at once the candle was burning. For a time he looked at it and then he met his own eyes in the looking glass.

¹ Candle: Long, rounded object of wax for giving a light.

"What about miracles now?" said Mr. Fotheringay, speaking to his own reflection.

The later thoughts of Mr. Fotheringay were confused. So far as he could understand, he had only to will the things. After his first experiences, he wished to make only very careful experiments. *But he lifted a sheet of paper, and turned a glass of water pink and then green, and got himself a new tooth-brush.* In the early hours of the morning he had reached the fact that his will-power must be unusual and strong. The fears of his first discovery were now mixed with pride and ideas of advantage. He heard the church clock striking one, and he undressed in order to get into bed without further delay. It did not come into his mind that he could get rid of his duties of the next day by using his powers. As he struggled to undress, he had a wonderful idea. "Let me be in bed," he said, and found himself so. "Undressed," he added, and finding the sheets cold, he said hastily, "and in a soft woollen nightshirt. Ah!" he said with immense enjoyment. "And now let me be comfortably asleep. . . ."

He awoke at his usual hour and was thoughtful all through breakfast-time. He wondered if his experiences might not be a dream. At last his mind turned again to careful experiments. For example, he had three eggs for breakfast; two were supplied by his landlady, good but from the shop; one was a much better egg, laid, cooked and served by his extraordinary will. He hurried off to work very excited. All day he could do no work because of his astonishing knowledge, but this did not matter, because he did all the work by a miracle in the last ten minutes.

As the day passed, his state of mind changed from wonder to delight, though the story of what had happened at the inn had reached his friends and led to some jokes. It was clear that he must be careful how he lifted breakable articles, but in other ways his powers promised more and more as he

thought about them. He increased his personal property by making new things for himself, but he could see that he must be careful. People might wonder how he got them.

After supper he went out along a lane to try a few miracles in private by the gas-works.

There was perhaps a lack of originality in his attempts, because, apart from his will-power, Mr. Fotheringay was not a very unusual man. He stuck his walking-stick into the ground and commanded the dry wood to grow flowers. The air was immediately full of the scent of roses, and by means of a match he saw that this beautiful miracle was indeed performed. His satisfaction was ended by advancing footsteps. He was afraid that someone would discover his powers, and he said to the stick hastily, "Go back." What he meant was "Change back"; but of course he was confused. The stick went backwards at a high speed, and there came a cry of anger and a bad word from the advancing person. "Who are you throwing rose-bushes at, you fool?" cried a voice.

"I'm sorry," said Mr. Fotheringay. He saw Winch, one of the three policemen, advancing.

"What do you mean by it?" asked the policeman. "Hullo! It's you, is it? The man who broke the lamp at the Long Dragon!"

"I don't mean anything by it," said Mr. Fotheringay. "Nothing at all."

"Why did you do it, then? Do you know that stick hurt? Why did you do it?"

For the moment Fotheringay could not think why he had done it. His silence seemed to anger Mr. Winch. "You've been attacking the police, young man, this time. That's what you've done."

"Listen, Mr. Winch," said Mr. Fotheringay, angry and confused. "I'm very sorry. The fact is——"

“Well?”

He could think of no answer but the truth. “I was working a miracle.” He tried to speak in a careless way, but he couldn’t.

“Working a——! Listen! Don’t talk nonsense. Working a miracle, indeed! Miracle! Well, that’s really funny! You’re the man who doesn’t believe in miracles. . . . The fact is, this is another of your foolish tricks. Now I tell you——”

But Mr. Fotheringay never heard what Mr. Winch was going to tell him. He realized that he had given his valuable secret to all the world. He became violently angry. He turned on the policeman quickly and fiercely. “Listen,” he said. “I’ve had enough of this. I’ll show you a foolish trick. Go to Hades!¹ Go now!”

He was alone.

Mr. Fotheringay performed no more miracles that night, nor did he trouble to see what had happened to his flowering stick. He returned to the town, afraid and very quiet, and went to his bedroom. “Good heavens!” he said, “it’s a powerful gift—an extremely powerful gift. I didn’t mean as much as that. Not really . . . I wonder what Hades is like.”

He sat on the bed taking off his shoes. He had a happy thought and moved the policeman to San Francisco, and went to bed. In the night he dreamt of the anger of Winch.

The next day Fotheringay heard two interesting pieces of news. Someone had planted a most beautiful climbing rose near Mr. Gomshott’s private house, and everyone was looking for Policeman Winch.

Mr. Fotheringay was thoughtful all that day, and performed

¹ Hades: Lower world where bad spirits are supposed to go after death.