



Twisted



Tale





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PREFACE

Students of English as a second/other language often ask for good reading material on the adult level, graded to their abilities and interests. It is hoped that *Twisted Tales* will help fill their needs.

The title of this revised edition suggests the curious nature of the seven stories here presented. Some are classics, such as Poe's "The Purloined Letter" and Maupassant's "The Necklace"; others are by contemporary authors.

Each story has been adapted in length and grammatical complexity in order to maximize the student's comprehension and enjoyment. Reading-comprehension and vocabulary-building exercises for each story are included in the back of the book. The selections may be read in whatever order is desired.

The stories were rewritten within a 2,000-word vocabulary, chosen on the basis of Michael West's *General Service List of English Words* and the Thorndike-Lorge word study. New words are indicated by an asterisk, with definitions appearing in the Glossary. The Glossary also includes explanations of proper nouns and common words used in a peculiar fashion in the book.

Twisted Tales was created for the Collier Macmillan English Program by the Materials Development Staff of English Language Services, Inc., under the co-direction of Edwin T. Cornelius, Jr., and Willard D. Sheeler. The abridgement and first rewriting of *Twisted Tales* are the work of Mary Raitt; Helena Newman controlled the vocabulary and added the exercises and the Glossary. Earle W. Brockman, Jr., was advisory editor.

The illustrations are by Nelson Levine.

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The Hasty Act

Marc Brandel

I didn't get into this thing on purpose. I'm not tough; I'm a *coward. I'm not ashamed to say it. And I'm not ashamed to say that I'm frightened and confused. I don't know what to do. The only thing I can do now is wait. Wait for the telephone or the doorbell to ring. Wait for whoever he is.

Yet I can't see how I deserved to get into this trouble. It wasn't really my fault. It could have happened to anyone. . . .

It started this morning, or rather at noon—all because it was raining. If it hadn't been raining, I would have gone to Chester's *Restaurant as usual. But it's a long way to Chester's from my office, so I put on my raincoat and ran across the street to Pierre's instead. Pierre's is expensive, a place where I can't afford to have lunch very often.

Well, I left my raincoat in the coatroom in the hall, followed the manager to a table, and ordered a drink. I had two; that was my real mistake, I suppose. It probably influenced what happened then, because the drinks made me feel freer and braver than I usually do.

Just as I finished lunch I saw her. She was the kind of girl who works for a very expensive fashion magazine, with a beautiful hat, and long white gloves. She was too nice-looking. Her hair was too golden, her face was too perfect, her clothes were too expensive. She walked straight toward me and smiled charmingly.

"Hello," she called. "Where have you been lately?"

I looked behind me. There was nothing there but the wall. She was talking to me! I stood up.

"Hello," I said. She was even more beautiful close up.

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I pushed a chair toward her, and she sat down.

"I can stay only a moment," she said. "But it's so wonderful to see you again." She took my hand and pressed it between her cool white-gloved ones.

I had never seen her before in my life. I should have told her that at once, of course, but I didn't meet girls like this every day. I pressed her hand.

"Peter's with me," she said, smiling.

I looked up. She was right. There was a young man standing behind her.

"Peter," she said, "You remember Jim."

I was surprised, because the strange thing is that, although my name is Charles, there had been a time years ago in school when some people had called me Jim.

"Sure," the young man said. "Sure. How are you, Jim?" He gave me his hand in a friendly way, and I took it. I didn't like him at all. He was a large young man in a gray suit. But something was wrong. He was too handsome; his suit was too expensive, his hair too short, his tie too loose.

"Hello," I said.

He leaned over the table. "I'm sorry we have to go, Alice," he said to the girl, and then, turning to me, "We've got to get back to the Waldorf and pack our bags. We're leaving for the West tonight."

That's what I mean about him. He didn't have to tell me that he could afford to stay at the Waldorf. He could have said just "the hotel" and left it at that.

I stood up. "Well, it was nice seeing you both," I began, trying to get away. But when I'd left the table I found I was still with them. Peter put his hand on my shoulder as we started for the door.

"Where have you been all this time, Jim?"

"Oh, around." The effect of the drinks was beginning to fade. Now I just wanted to get away before they discovered that I wasn't Jim after all. I wasn't *their* Jim, anyway. I got the ticket for my coat out of my pocket.

"Here. Let me do it." He took the ticket out of my

hand before I could stop him. I stood with Alice while he got our coats. I watched him give the tickets to the coatroom girl.

"I wish we weren't going now," Alice was saying.

"So do I," I said, smiling uncomfortably at her while Peter came back with my plain raincoat and his own expensive coat. He started to help me put mine on, but I took it and threw it over my arm.

"Good-bye," I said. "It was nice seeing you."

When I got outside, it had stopped raining, so I just carried my raincoat back to the office over my arm and hung it up beside my door. It wasn't until I was leaving at six that I put it on again. I was half way down the stairs before I noticed that there was a bundle in the pocket. It was a long envelope. It felt as though it were filled with papers. I took it out and looked at it, wondering where it had come from. There was no name on it. Then I saw that it wasn't fastened shut. I opened it and looked inside.

I almost fainted, right there. It wasn't papers—it was money! I went back up to my office. I locked the door, and then took out the money and counted it. I counted it twice. Two thousand, three hundred and sixty-five dollars!

I decided what to do at once. I remembered that Peter had gotten my coat from the coatroom. I didn't know what they had planned to do or why they had put all that money into my pocket or what I was supposed to do with it. I didn't care. All I knew was that I didn't want any part of their game. I went to the Waldorf at once.

It took me some time to find their room. I only knew their first names, but I described them carefully. I was afraid that they had gone, but they were both in the room when I walked in. Peter was packing some shirts. He looked up and smiled when he saw me.

"Well, look who's here," he said. "Hello, Jim."

I didn't smile back this time. "I don't know what you want," I said. "And I don't want to know. But in case you made a mistake about who I am, I never saw either of you before in my life. Here!" And I threw the envelope

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on the bed.

He didn't even look at it. He just stood there, with a frozen smile on his face, staring at me, his large hands hanging at his sides. He was a lot stronger and bigger than I am.

I turned and walked out of the room as fast as I could. In fact, I almost ran down the hall. I felt good. I felt I had done the best thing I could and had *gotten myself out of a questionable situation.

I went and had a good dinner, feeling better all the time. In fact, I felt good all this evening—until just an hour ago.

Then I went to hunt in my raincoat pockets for my cigarettes. But there weren't any cigarettes in the coat. I looked at the name of the store sewn inside my coat.

It wasn't my coat!

Yes, of course I called the hotel. They'd gone a few hours before. They must have gone as soon as they looked in the envelope. And they didn't leave any messages, any envelope, any address where I could reach them.

What can I do now? I sit here and worry. And wait. What will happen next?

Sometimes I try to pretend that the raincoat is mine after all. But I know that someone else has mine. He must know it too by now. He has to know it.

Because my raincoat has my name in it.

The Man Who Hated Time

Victor Canning

I could tell that he was going to ask me for money. Because my suit was new and his was old, my glass was full and his was empty, I was sorry for him. A man always wonders at such times if he himself won't have to ask for money from a stranger someday. In twenty years I would be as old as he—about sixty—and what might happen to me in twenty years?

He came over, sat down, and leaned across the table. He pulled out a watch from his pocket and laid it between us. It was a good silver watch, with those beautifully-made gold hands that you don't see any more.

"It's yours for two *pounds. Nothing wrong with it, and I got it honestly."

You could see at once that he was used to doing this by the way he ignored any talk about anything else and said what he wanted to say at once.

"I don't want it," I said. But because I was sorry for the man, as I pushed the watch back I passed a ten-shilling note with it. He was so surprised that he couldn't say anything. I ordered some food and a drink for him.

"I wish you would just buy the watch," he said while he was eating.

"Forget it," I said.

He seemed to want to tell me something. "I hate the sight of watches," he cried out suddenly, like a man remembering something that he had forgotten. "Watches started it all."

"All-what?"

"This." He pointed to his poor clothes and began to eat again.

It was raining, and I had half an hour to wait before I had to meet someone. So I stayed.

"Chris Selby was his name," the old man said. "He was an actors' agent in London. Yes, he managed really important actors at the time. He was not poor, but he could never resist the *temptation to get richer—even if it meant that he would have to go outside his own kind of business."

He told it easily and well. He had had a lot of practice telling it. It had all happened just after the First World War, a long time ago.

This Chris Selby, it seems, was a delightful man with a warm smile, a soft voice, and a poisonous nature if you got in the way of his love of money. But most people liked him because they didn't know his character.

He used to make five or six trips a year from London to Paris, seeing new plays and musical shows. He knew lots of people in Paris, and never lacked company in the evenings. Twice a year he would take his car

He always went from Dover to Calais and back the same way. Most of the men in customs knew and liked him. When you saw him for only ten minutes five or six times a year he was easy enough to like. It was people who knew him very well who learned to dislike him. Besides, he always gave the customs men free tickets to London plays.

He never had any trouble with customs, and, except for those two car trips a year, there was no need for trouble, because he never tried to *smuggle anything across the border. But when he took the car—that was different. Twice a year he used to bring back about five thousand watches.

That sounds like a lot, but it's surprising how many watches you can put into one car, especially if the floor of the car is a false one and the gas tank holds only two gallons of gas, with room for watches. Of course he had to stop for gas often, but that was a small problem when he could earn a thousand pounds from each trip.

If you or I tried to do anything like that, we'd be as



nervous as a cat in the rain, and we would probably show at once what we had done. But Chris Selby never felt nervous and he knew just how to smuggle his watches.

Well, one November day Chris Selby left London in his car, feeling angry. The watches he had brought the last time were not worth as much as Chris had expected. The trip had not been as profitable as it should have been. He was going to talk about this with the jeweler when he saw him again.

But as he drove into the Dover *docks, he did not show his anger. He gave tickets for a new play to the Customs men, and in two hours he was driving on the Paris road, his anger under control.

In Paris, he went to see the dealer, a little jeweler named Monsieur Audiat, who was helped in the store by his rather dull brothers. Monsieur Audiat was careful as well as humble. Chris Selby was his only *customer for smuggling, and Monsieur Audiat was glad to have a regular twice-a-year profit rather than business every week with a risk of being found out. Chris found Audiat and his brothers in the back of the shop. Without any polite talk about their health and in a voice *harsher than they had ever heard it before, he began to complain.

A thousand of the last shipment of watches had not worked; most of the others were poorly made; and all of them had been so badly packed that many had been broken on the way to London. He went on, telling what he thought of Audiat and his brothers, their parents, and the whole French nation.

Audiat stood there, hating Chris. He would have liked to kill him, but he did not want to destroy the source of a nice little profit. He finally explained that he had brought the bad watches from Switzerland and that he had not had time to look them over before he put them in the car. He promised that the next shipment, which was arriving the following day, would be perfectly all right.

But the next day the watches had not come. By the morning of the day after that, Selby had driven his car to

the garage in back of Audiat's shop, and the watches still had not arrived.

Selby wanted the watches to be ready for him to take to Calais on the last boat that night. He wanted to be in London the next day for the first performance of a new play. He was very angry, and swore that if the watches didn't come by night he would take his business somewhere else in the future.

He spent the day in the company of a dancer whom he felt that he could help both professionally and privately in London. He telephoned Audiat every now and then to see if the watches had come. Finally, at six o'clock in the evening, he was told that the watches had just arrived. He immediately went to Audiat's garage.

He told Audiat just how he wanted the watches to be packed in the car. Audiat promised him again that his brothers would examine them all and see that they all worked. The car would be packed by four in the morning, which would give Selby time to drive to Calais and get the first morning boat. He would be in London after lunch, and would be able to see his new play that evening.

Just after four in the evening he was in his car, singing to himself, driving fast, and smiling at the woman at the railroad gates. When he used his smile for practice, Selby didn't care what kind of woman it was. It was a cold morning and he went through the French customs quickly. He watched the men put his car on the boat and then he went below, had coffee, and slept.

At Dover all his bags were opened by the customs man. Then he walked to his car. The customs officer who was looking at the car was a man he knew well, a man about his own age. Selby gave him a big smile, and answered the usual questions. Everything went well, just as it always had: the smile, the joke, the easy manner, and the promise of a free seat at the new play if the officer would write and ask him sometime.

He had his hand on the car door; he was about to get in and drive away, when there was suddenly a mad noise of

whistles for a few moments and then everything stopped.

Chris Selby didn't have to be told what that meant. In those days the First World War was still fresh in everyone's memory, and when the whistles blew at eleven o'clock on *Armistice Day, everybody stopped and there was silence for two minutes in memory of the war dead. There really was a silence. Even the birds stopped calling. Chris Selby and the customs officer stood by the car and bowed their heads. You could hear the water against the dock, and that was all.

Or rather, that was *almost* all—something else was heard, too. From the car, not loud enough for anyone else to hear, it's true, but loud enough to let the customs man know where they were hidden, came the gentle sound of five thousand watches *ticking. They had all been carefully wound by the Audiat brothers, who had wanted to please Selby by making sure that this time he had watches that worked as well as watches that looked nice.

It was then that my friend stopped his story to finish his lunch. There was still something more I wanted to know. I said: "Now tell me that *you're* Chris Selby and maybe I will buy that watch you offered to me for two pounds."

But the old man shook his head. "Selby died years ago. No, I'm the customs officer he talked to. With his smile and his charm he persuaded me to forget that I had heard the watches, and I even agreed to help him when he brought his watches over twice a year in his car. Two years later we were both caught."

The Venturers

O. Henry

John Reginald Forster was bored. He was sitting in his club in New York City, where he usually came late in the afternoon to have a drink before going to dinner. He had heard everything that the other members of the club had to say, and he had no interest in conversation that evening.

One member, Billinger, who was well-known for his dull stories, approached him and said, "Say, Forster, did you ever hear that story about—"

"Often!" exclaimed Forster rudely. And he got up and left the room.

Forster got his hat and walked out to the street. Billinger would not care that he had gone. Forster felt he had to go away—somewhere. He wanted to meet someone who felt as he did.

How did Forster usually feel? He was a venturer by nature. But life in New York had prevented him from having adventures. He had gone to many places and known many things, but none of his wanderings had done any good. He knew just what he would find at the end of every street. How boring everything was! What was he to do now? He would like to lose his way; but there was no hope of even that in a city he knew so well.

At the end of an hour's walk, Forster stood on the corner of a wide avenue, looking across it at an old hotel, softly but beautifully lighted. He had to eat some time, but it was no adventure to eat in that hotel. He knew it. He knew how delightful the food was and how quick and skillful the waiters would be. The dinner would be perfect, and he was so tired of perfect things!

Suppose he were to go to some cheap or even dangerous

place far downtown? Something might happen there; there might be a question without an answer, a surprise for him. But he would need money. He began to search his pockets. If you eat in a cheap place, you must be sure to have enough cash with you to pay for the food. He felt in every one of the thirteen pockets, large and small, of his dark business suit, but he did not find a penny. He had a checkbook, and a bankbook showing more than ten thousand dollars in the Ironsides Trust Company, but he had no money at all in his pockets.

A man nearby was watching Forster with amusement. He looked like any thirty-year-old businessman waiting for a bus. But there were no buses on that avenue.

"Nothing at all?" asked the other man, coming nearer.

"Seems that way," said Forster. "Now, I thought there was a dollar in—"

"I know," said the other man with a laugh. "But it wasn't there. I had the same experience myself just a few minutes ago. I looked in my pockets and found exactly two pennies. What kind of dinner will two pennies buy?"

"You haven't had dinner, then?" asked Forster.

"No. But I would like to. Now, I'll suggest something to you. You look like a man who would take a chance. Your clothes look proper and respectable. A waiter would give you a table. And I think I can get into a good *restaurant, too. Let's go over to that hotel across the street and have dinner together. Let's choose like rich men—or, if you want to think of it that way, like rather poor gentlemen who are having an expensive dinner for a special occasion. When we have finished we will *toss one of my two pennies to see which of us will go to the head waiter and tell him the truth—that we don't have any money at all. My name is Ives."

"Fine," said Forster joyfully, happy to share in an adventure at last. "My name is Forster."

The two men were soon seated at a corner table in the hotel dining room. Ives tossed one of his pennies across the table to Forster.