

THE BEST SHORT AMERICAN STORIES



50 DOLLARS IS 50 DOLLARS.

Morris and his wife Esther went to the state fair every year, and every year Morris would say, 'Esther, I'd like to ride in that helicopter. 'Esther always replied, 'I know Morris, but that helicopter ride is 50 dollars and 50 dollars is 50 dollars.'

One year Esther and Morris went to the fair, and Morris said, 'Esther I'm 85 years old. if I don't ride that helicopter, I might never get another chance.' Esther replied, 'Morris that helicopter is 50 dollars and 50 dollars is 50 dollars.' The pilot over heard the couple and said, 'folks I'll make you a deal. I'll take the both of you for a ride; if you can stay quiet for the entire ride and not say a word I won't charge you! but if you say one word, it's 50 dollars.'

Morris and Esther agreed and up they went. The pilot did all kinds of fancy maneuvers, but not a word was heard. He did his dare devil tricks over and over again, but still not a word. When they landed, the pilot turned to Morris and said, 'by golly, I did everything I could to get you to yell out, but you didn't . I'm impressed!'

Morris replied, 'well I almost said something when Esther fell out, but, you know, 50 dollars is 50 dollars!' 

THE BEST SHORT AMERICAN STORIES



MAX ADLER ON GOING TO SLEEP

Mr. Butterwick, of Roxborough, had a fit of sleeplessness one night lately, and after vainly trying to lose himself in slumber, he happened to remember that he once read in an almanac that a man could put himself to sleep by imagining that he saw a flock of sheep jumping over a fence, and by counting them as they jumped.

He determined to try the experiment, and closing his eyes, he fancied the sheep jumping, and began to count. He had reached his hundred and fortieth sheep, and was beginning to doze off, when Mrs. Butterwick suddenly said:

"Joseph!"

"Oh, what?"

"I believe that yellow hen wants to set and raise a brood."

"Oh, don't bother me with such nonsense as that now. Do keep quiet and go to sleep."

Then Butterwick started his sheep again, and commenced to count again. He got up to one hundred and twenty, and was feeling as if he would drop off at any moment, and just as his hundred and twenty-first sheep was about to take that fence, one of the twins began to cry.

"Hang that child!" he shouted at Mrs. Butterwick. "Why can't you tend to it and put it to sleep? Hush up, you little imp, or I'll spank you!"

When Mrs. Butterwick had quieted the child, Butterwick, although a little nervous and excited, concluded to try it again. Turning on the imaginary mutton, he began.

Only sixty-four sheep had slid over the fence when Butterwick's mother-in-law knocked at the door and asked if he was awake. When she learned that he was she said she believed he had forgotten to close the back shutters, and she thought she heard burglars in the yard.

Butterwick arose in wrath and went down to see about it. He ascertained that the shutters were closed as usual, and as he returned to bed he resolved that Mrs. Butterwick's mother would leave the house for good in the morning, or he would.

However, he thought he might as well give the almanac plan another trial, and setting the sheep in motion he began to count. This time he reached two hundred and forty, and would probably have got to sleep before the three hundredth sheep jumped, had not Mix's new dog in the next yard become suddenly homesick, and began to express his feelings in a series of prolonged and exasperating howls.

Butterwick was indignant. Neglecting the sheep, he leaped from bed, and began to bombard Mix's new dog with boots, soap-cups, and every loose object he could lay his hands on. He impressed the animal at last with a plaster bust of Daniel Webster, and induced the dog to retreat to the stable and think all about home in silence.

It seemed almost ridiculous to resume those sheep again, but he determined to give the almanac man one more chance, and so as they began to jump the fence he began to count, and after seeing the eighty-second safely over, he was gliding gently into the land of dreams, when Mrs. Butterwick rolled out of bed and fell on the floor with such violence that she waked the twins and started them crying, while Butterwick's mother-in-law came down-stairs, four steps at a time, to ask if they felt that earthquake.

The situation was too awful for words. Butterwick regarded it for a minute with speechless indignation, and then seizing a pillow he went over to the sofa in the back sitting-room and lay down on the lounge.

He fell asleep in ten minutes without the assistance of the almanac, but he dreamed all night that he was being butted around the equator by a Cotswold ram, and he awoke in the morning with a sore back and a terrible headache and a conviction that sheep are good enough for wool and chops, but not worth a cent as a narcotic.

THE BEST SHORT AMERICAN STORIES



LEWIS ON MEAN MEN

At 9 o'clock yesterday morning an old woman sat in the Michigan Central station wiping the tears from her eyes. It was nobody's business in particular to inquire whether she had fallen heir to a million dollars or was traveling through life with a broken heart but one certain man did step forward after a time and made some inquiries. Then he moved among the crowd and said:

"Gentlemen, here is a poor old woman who wants to get to Columbus. Let's take up a collection."

In the course of four or five minutes a purse of \$3 was made up, but when he had counted it the man said:

"Gentlemen, let's chip in enough more to buy her a new dress. I'm a poor man, but here's a quarter for the old lady."

The purse was now increased to nearly \$7, and the woman had just pocketed the money when a man stepped forward and said to the collector of the purse:

"Why, Banks, is this you?"

"Of course it is."

"And that woman is your own wife?"

"Well, Mr. Knickerbocker," replied the man as he buttoned his coat, "it's a mighty mean man who won't chip in a quarter to buy his own wife a dress and help her off on a visit!"



THE BEST SHORT AMERICAN STORIES



THE KICKING MULE

One morning Farmer Johnson was riding his kicking mule to market when he met Jim Boggs, against whom he had an old and concealed grudge. The Farmer knew Boggs' weakness lay in bragging and betting; therefore he saluted him accordingly.

"How are you, Jim? Fine morning."

"Hearty, Sir," replied Jim. "Fine weather. Nice mule that you are riding. Will he do to bet on?"

"Bet on? Guess he will. I tell you, Jim Boggs, he's the best mule in the county."

"Great thunder! Is that so?" Jim asked excitedly.

"Solid truth, every word of it. Tell you confidentially, I am taking him down for betting purposes. I bet he can kick a fly off any man without its hurting him."

"Now look here, Mr. Johnson," said Jim, "I am not a betting character, but I'll bet you something on that myself."

"Jim, there's no use - don't bet," said the Farmer. "I don't want to win your money."

"Don't be alarmed, Mister. I'll take such bets as them every time."

"Well, if you are determined to bet, Jim, I will risk a small stake - say five dollars."

"All right, Mr. Johnson - you're my man. But who'll he kick the fly off? There is no one here but you and I. You try it."

"No," says Johnson; "I have to be at the mule's head to order him."

Oh, yaas," says Jim. "Then probably I'm the man. Waal, I'll do it, but you are to bet ten against my five if I risk it."

"All right," said Farmer Johnson. "now there's a fly on your shoulder. Stand still." And the Farmer adjusted the mule.

"Whist, Jervey!" said the Farmer.

The mule raised his heels with such velocity and force that Boggs rose in the air like a bird and alighted on all fours in a muddy ditch, bang up against a rail fence.

Rising in a towering passion, he exclaimed:

"Yaas, that is smart! I knew your darned mule couldn't do it. You had all that put up. I wouldn't be kicked like that for fifty dollars. Now you can just fork them stakes right over."

"No, sir," said the Farmer; "Jervey did just what I said he would. I said he would kick a fly off a man without its hurting him, and he did. You see the mule is not hurt by the operation. However, if you are not satisfied, we will try again as often as you wish."

Jim brushed the mud off, looked solemnly at the mule, and then, putting his hand thoughtfully to his brow, remarked:

"No, Mr. Johnson. I don't think the mule is hurt; but I didn't understand the bet. You can keep the money."

THE BEST SHORT AMERICAN STORIES



M. QUAD'S SATIRE ON FOREIGN CHARITY

There were a score or more of women gathered together at Mr. Johnson's house. Mr. Johnson is a good-hearted man and a respectable citizen, though he is rather skeptical in some things. The women had just organized "The Foreign Benevolent Society," when Mr. Johnson entered the room. He was at once appealed to to donate a few dollars as a foundation to work on, and then Mrs. Graham added:

"It would be so pleasant in after-years for you to remember that you gave this society its first dollar and its first kind word."

He slowly opened his wallet, drew out a ten-dollar bill, and as the ladies smacked their lips and clapped their hands, he asked:

"Is this society organized to aid the poor of foreign countries?"

"Yes-yes-yes!" they chorused.

"And it wants money?"

"Yes-yes."

"Well, now," said Johnson, as he folded the bill in a tempting shape, "there are twenty married women here. If there are fifteen of you who can make oath that you have combed the children's hair this morning, washed the dishes, blackened the cook-stove, and made the beds, I'll donate ten dollars."

"I have," answered two of the crowd, and the rest said:

"Why, now, Mr. Johnson!"

"If fifteen of you can make oath that your husbands are not wearing socks with holes in the heels the money is yours," continued the wretch.

"Just hear him!" they exclaimed, each one looking at the other.

"If ten of you have boys without holes in the knees of their pants, this tenner goes to the society," said Johnson.

"Such a man!" they whispered.

"If there are five pairs of stockings in this room that do not need darning, I'll hand over the money," he went on.

"Mr. Johnson," said Mrs. Graham, with great dignity, "the rules of this society declare that no money shall be contributed except by members, and as you are not a member, I beg that you will withdraw and let us proceed with the routine business."

Mr. Johnson withdrew.

THE BEST SHORT AMERICAN STORIES



SATIRE ON THE COMMERCIAL TRAVELER

"Is this seat engaged?" he asked of the prettiest girl in the train car, and, finding that it wasn't, he put his sample box in the rack above and braced himself up for solid enjoyment.

"Pleasant day," said the girl, coming for him before he could get his tongue unkinked. "Most bewildering day, isn't it?"

"Y-yes, miss," stammered the traveling salesman. He was in the habit of playing pitcher in this kind of a match, and the position of catcher didn't fit him as tight as his pantaloons.

"Nice weather for traveling," continued the girl, "much nicer than when it is cold. Are you perfectly comfortable?"

"Oh, yes, thanks," murmured the drummer.

"Glad of it," resumed the girl, cheerfully. "You don't look so. Let me put my shawl under your head, won't you? Hadn't you rather sit next to the window and have me describe the landscape to you?"

"No, please," he murmured, "I am doing well enough."

"Can I buy you some peanuts or a book? Let me do something to make the trip happy! Suppose I slip my arm around your waist! Just lean forward a trifle, please, so that I can!"

"You'll - you'll have to excuse me," gasped the wretched drummer; "I don't think you really mean it."

"You look so tired," she pleaded; "wouldn't you like to rest your head on my shoulder? No one will notice. Just lay your head right down and I'll tell you stories."

"No, thanks! I won't today! I'm very comfortable," and the poor salesman looked around helplessly.

"Your scarf-pin is coming out. Let me fix it. There!" and she arrayed it deftly. "At the next station I'll get you a cup of tea, and when we arrive at our destination you'll let me call on you?" and she smiled an anxious prayer right into his pallid countenance.

"I think I'll go away and smoke," said the drummer, and hauled down his gripsack and made a bolt for the door, knee-deep in the grins showered upon him by his fellow-passengers.

"Strange!" noted the girl to a lady in front of her. "I only did with him just what he was making ready to do with me, and big and strong as he is, he couldn't stand it. I really think women have stronger stomachs than men; besides that, there isn't any smoking-car for us to fly to for refuge. I don't understand this thing."

But she settled back contentedly all the same; and at a convention of traveling salesmen, held in the smoking car that morning, it was unanimously resolved that that seat was engaged, as far as they were concerned, for the balance of the journey.



THE BEST SHORT AMERICAN STORIES



PUTTING UP A STOVE PIPE, by James Montgomery Bailey
(a.k.a. the "Danbury News Man")

Putting up a stove is not so difficult in itself. It is the pipe that raises four-fifths of the mischief and all the dust. You may take down a stove with all the care in the world, and yet that pipe won't come together again as it was before. You find this out when you are standing on a chair with your arms full of pipe, and your mouth full of soot. Your wife is standing on the floor in a position that enables her to see you, the pipe and the chair, and here she gives utterance to those remarks that are calculated to hasten a man into the extremes of insanity. Her apron is pinned over her waist, and her hands rest on her hips. She has got one of your hats on her head, and your linen coat on her back, and a pair of galoshes on her feet. There is about five cents' worth of pot-black on her nose and a lot of flour on her chin, and altogether she is a spectacle that would inspire a dead man with distrust. And while you are up there trying to circumvent the awful contrariness of the pipe, and telling that you know some fool has been mixing it, she stands safely on the floor, and bombards you with such domestic mottoes as, "what's the use of swearing so?" "You know no one has touched that pipe." "You ain't got any more patience than a child." "Do be careful of that chair." And then she goes off, and reappears with an armful more of pipe, and before you are aware of it she has got that pipe so horribly mixed up that it does seem no two pieces are alike.

You join the ends and work them to and fro, and to and fro again, and then you take them apart and look at them. Then you spread one out and jam the other together, and mount them once more. But it is no go. You begin to think that the pieces are inspired with life, and ache to kick them through the window. But she doesn't lose her patience. She goes around with that awfully exasperating rigging on, with a length of pipe under each arm and a long-handled broom in her hand, and says she don't see how it is some people never have any trouble putting up a stove. Then you miss the hammer. You don't see it any where. You stare into the pipe, along the mantel, and down on the stove, and off to the floor. Your wife watches you, and is finally thoughtful enough to inquire what you are looking after, and, on learning, pulls the article from her pocket. Then you feel as if you could go outdoors, and swear a hole twelve feet square through a block of brick buildings; but she meekly observes: "Why on earth don't you speak when you want anything, and not stare around like a dummy?"

When that part of the pipe, which goes through the wall is up, she keeps it up with the broom while you are making the connection, and stares at it with an intensity that is entirely uncalled for. All the while your position is becoming more and more interesting. The pipe don't go together, of course. The soot shakes down into your eyes and mouth, the sweat rolls down your face, and tickles your chin as it drops of, and it seems as if your arms are slowly but surely drawing out of their sockets.

Here your wife comes to the rescue by inquiring if you are going to be all day doing nothing, and if you think her arms are made of cast-iron; and then the broom slips off the pipe, and in her endeavor to recover her hold, she jabs you under the chin with the handle, and the pipe comes down on your head with its load of fried soot, and then the chair tilts forward enough to discharge your feet, and you come down on the wrong end of that chair, with a force that would bankrupt a piledriver. You don't touch that stove again. You leave your wife examining the chair, and bemoaning its injuries; and go into the kitchen, and wash your skinned and bleeding hands with yellow soap. Then you go down the street after a specialty man to do the business, and your wife goes over to the neighbors with her chair, and tells them about its suffering from your abuse, and she drains the neighborhood dry of its sympathy long before you return.

THE BEST SHORT AMERICAN STORIES



UNCLE BENTLEY AND THE ROOSTERS

by Hayden Carruth

The burden of Uncle Bentley has always rested heavily on our town. Having not a shadow of business to attend to, he has made other people's business his own, and looked after it in season and out - especially out. If there is a thing which nobody wants done, to this Uncle Bentley applies his busy hand.

One warm summer Sunday we were all at church. Our pastor had taken the passage on turning the other cheek, or one akin to it, for his text, and was preaching on peace and quiet and non-resistance. He soon had us in a devout mood which must have been beautiful to see and encouraging to the good man.

Of course, Uncle Bentley was there - he always was, and forever in a front pew, with his neck craned up looking backward to see if there was anything that didn't need doing which he could do. He always tinkered with the fires in the winter and fussed with the windows in the summer, and did his worst with each. His strongest church point was ushering. Not content to usher the stranger within our gates, he would usher all of us, and always thrust us into pews with just the people we didn't want to sit with. If you failed to follow him when he took you in tow, he would stop and look back reproachfully, describing mighty indrawing curves with his arm; and if you pretended not to see him, he would give a low whistle to attract your attention, the arm working right along, like a Holland windmill. 

On this particular warm summer Sunday Uncle Bentley was in place wearing his long, full-skirted coat, a queer, dark bottle-green, purplish blue. He had ushered to his own exceeding joy, and got two men in one pew, and given them a single hymn-book, who wouldn't on week-days speak to each other. I ought to mention that we had long before made a verb of Uncle Bentley. To unalebentley was to do the wrong thing. It was a regular verb, unalebentley, unalebenteleyed, unalebentleying. Those two rampant enemies in the same pew had been unalebentleyed.

The minister was floating along smoothly on the subject of peace, when Uncle Bentley was observed to throw up his head. He had heard a sound outside. It was really nothing but one of Deacon Plummer's young roosters crowing. The Deacon lived near, and vocal offerings from his poultry were frequent and had ceased to interest any one except Uncle Bentley. Then, in the pauses between the preacher's periods we heard the flapping of wings, with sudden stoppings and startings. Those unregenerate fowls, unable to understand the good man's words, were fighting. Even this didn't interest us - we were committed to peace. But Uncle Bentley shot up like a jack-in-a-box and cantered down the aisle. Of course, his notion was that the roosters were disturbing the services, and that it was his duty to go out and stop them. We heard vigorous "Shoos!" and "Take that's!" and "Consairn yous!" and then Uncle Bentley came back looking very important, and as he stalked up the aisle he glanced around and nodded his head, saying as clearly as words, "There, where would you be without me?"

THE BEST SHORT AMERICAN STORIES



Another defiant crow floated in at the window. The next moment the rushing and beating of wings began again, and down the aisle went Uncle Bentley, the long tails of that coat fairly floating like a cloud behind him. There was further uproar outside, and again Uncle Bentley scuttled away, returning shortly to his pew, this time turning around and whispering hoarsely, "I fixed 'em!" But such was not the case, for twice more the very same thing was repeated. The last time Uncle Bentley came back he wore a calm, smug expression, as if to say, "Now I have fixed 'em!"

We should have liked it better if the roosters had fixed Uncle Bentley. But nobody paid much attention except Deacon Plummer. The thought occurred to him that perhaps Uncle Bentley had killed the fowls..but he hadn't.

However, there was no more disturbance without, and after a time the sermon closed. There was some sort of a special collection to be taken up. Of course, Uncle Bentley always insisted on taking up all the collections. He hopped up on this occasion and seized the plate with more than usual vigor. His struggles with the roosters had evidently stimulated him. He soon made the rounds and approached the table in front of the pulpit to deposit his harvest. As he did so we saw to our horror that the long tails of that ridiculous coat were violently agitated. A sickening suspicion came over us. The next moment one of those belligerent young roosters thrust a head out of either of those coat-tail pockets. One uttered a raucous crow, the other responded with a vicious peck. Uncle Bentley dropped the plate with a scattering of coin, seized a coat skirt in each hand, and drew it front. This dumped both fowls out on the floor, where they went at it hammer and tongs. What happened after this is a blur in most of our memories. All that is certain is that there was an uproar in the congregation, especially the younger portion; that the Deacon began making unsuccessful dives for his poultry; that the organist struck up "Onward, Christian Soldiers," and that the minister waved us away without a benediction amid loud shouts of, "Shoo!", "I swanny!" and, "Drat the pesky critters!" from your Uncle Bentley.

Did this debacle serve to subdue Uncle Bentley? Not in the least; he survived to do worse things.