

1. The Devil and Tom Walker

By Washington Irving

Before we begin our story, let us go back 300 years to the late 1600s. In those years, one of the most famous men in the world was Captain William Kidd. Captain Kidd was a pirate. He sailed the seas, capturing any ships he found. He and his men took money from these ships. Captain Kidd hid this money in different places.

Captain Kidd was captured by the English in Boston, Massachusetts and executed in the year 1701.

From that time on, people all over the world searched in many places for Captain Kidd's stolen money.

The people who lived in Massachusetts in the seventeen hundreds believed Captain Kidd buried some of his treasure near Boston. Not far from Boston was a small river which ran into the Atlantic Ocean. An old story said that Captain Kidd had come up this river from the ocean. Then he buried his gold and silver and jewels under a big tree.

The story said that this treasure was protected by the devil himself, who was a good friend of Captain Kidd.

In the year seventeen twenty-seven, a man named Tom Walker lived near this place. Tom Walker was not a pleasant man. He loved only one thing -- money. There was only one person worse than Tom. That was his wife. She also loved money. These two were so hungry for money that

they even stole things from each other.

One day, Tom Walker was returning home through a dark forest. He walked slowly and carefully, so that he would not fall into a pool of mud.

At last, he reached a piece of dry ground. Tom sat down on a tree that had fallen. As he rested, he dug into the earth with a stick. He knew the story that Indians had killed prisoners here as sacrifices to the Devil. But this did not trouble him. The only devil Tom was afraid of was his wife.

Tom's stick hit something hard. He dug it out of the earth. It was a human skull. In the skull was an Indian ax.

Suddenly, Tom Walker heard an angry voice: "Don't touch that skull!"

Tom looked up. He saw a giant sitting on a broken tree. Tom had never seen such a man. He wore the clothes of an Indian. His skin was almost black and covered with ashes. His eyes were big and red. His black hair stood up from his head. He carried a large ax.

The giant asked, "What are you doing on my land?" But Tom Walker was not afraid. He answered, "What do you mean? This land belongs to Mister Peabody."

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<https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/the-devil-and-tom-walker-by-washington-irving/4550729.html>)

2. A White Heron

By Sarah Orne Jewett

The forest was full of shadows as a little girl hurried through it one summer evening in June. It was already 8 o'clock and Sylvie wondered if her grandmother would be angry with her for being so late.

Every evening Sylvie left her grandmother's house at 5:30 to bring their cow home. The old animal spent her days out in the open country eating sweet grass. It was Sylvie's job to bring her home to be milked. When the cow heard Sylvie's voice calling her, she would hide among the bushes.

This evening it had taken Sylvie longer than usual to find her cow. The child hurried the cow through the dark forest, following a narrow path that led to her grandmother's home. The cow stopped at a small stream to drink. As Sylvie waited, she put her bare feet in the cold, fresh water of the stream.

She had never before been alone in the forest as late as this. The air was soft and sweet. Sylvie felt as if she were a part of the gray shadows and the silver leaves that moved in the evening breeze.

She began thinking how it was only a year ago that she came to her grandmother's farm. Before that, she had lived with her mother and father in a dirty, crowded factory town. One day, Sylvie's grandmother had visited them and had chosen Sylvie from all her brothers and sisters to be the one to help her on her farm in Vermont.

The cow finished drinking, and as the 9-year-old child hurried through the forest to the home she loved, she thought again about the noisy town where her parents still lived.

Suddenly the air was cut by a sharp whistle not far away. Sylvie knew it wasn't a friendly bird's whistle. It was the determined whistle of a person. She forgot the cow and hid in some bushes. But she was too late.

"Hello, little girl," a young man called out cheerfully. "How far is it to the main road?" Sylvie was trembling as she whispered "two miles." She came out of the bushes and looked up into the face of a tall young man carrying a gun.

The stranger began walking with Sylvie as she followed her cow through the forest. "I've been hunting for birds," he explained, "but I've lost my way. Do you think I can spend the night at your house?" Sylvie didn't answer. She was glad they were almost home. She could see her grandmother standing near the door of the farm house.

When they reached her, the stranger put down his gun and explained his problem to Sylvie's smiling grandmother.

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3. After Twenty Years

By O. Henry

The cop moved along the street, looking strong and important. This was the way he always moved. He was not thinking of how he looked. There were few people on the street to see him. It was only about ten at night, but it was cold. And there was a wind with a little rain in it.

He stopped at doors as he walked along, trying each door to be sure that it was closed for the night. Now and then he turned and looked up and down the street. He was a fine-looking cop, watchful, guarding the peace.

People in this part of the city went home early. Now and then you might see the lights of a shop or of a small restaurant. But most of the doors belonged to business places that had been closed hours ago.

Then the cop suddenly slowed his walk. Near the door of a darkened shop a man was standing. As the cop walked toward him, the man spoke quickly.

“It’s all right, officer,” he said. “I’m waiting for a friend. Twenty years ago we agreed to meet here tonight. It sounds strange to you, doesn’t it? I’ll explain if you want to be sure that everything’s all right. About twenty years ago there was a restaurant where this shop stands. ‘Big Joe’ Brady’s restaurant.”

“It was here until five years ago,” said the cop.

The man near the door had a colorless square face with bright eyes, and a little white mark near his right eye. He had a large jewel in his necktie.

“Twenty years ago tonight,” said the man, “I had dinner here with Jimmy Wells. He was my best friend and the best fellow in the world. He and I grew up together here in New York, like two brothers. I was eighteen and Jimmy was twenty. The next morning I was to start for the West. I was going to find a job and make a great success. You couldn’t have pulled Jimmy out of New York. He thought it was the only place on earth.

“We agreed that night that we would meet here again in twenty years. We thought that in twenty years we would know what kind of men we were, and what future waited for us.”

“It sounds interesting,” said the cop. “A long time between meetings, it seems to me. Have you heard from your friend since you went West?”

“Yes, for a time we did write to each other,” said the man.

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