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A Horseman in the Sky

Our story today is called, "A Horseman in the Sky." It was written by Ambrose Bierce. Here is Roy Depew with the story.

Narrator: Carter Druse was born in Virginia. He loved his parents, his home and the south. But he loved his country, too. And in the autumn of eighteen sixty-one, when the United States was divided by a terrible civil war, Carter Druse, a southerner, decided to join the Union Army of the north.

He told his father about his decision one morning at breakfast.

The older man looked at his only son for a moment, too shocked to speak. Then he said, "As of this moment you are a traitor to the south. Please don't tell your mother about your decision. She is sick, and we both know she has only a few weeks to live."

Carter's father paused, again looking deep into his sons eyes. "Carter," he said, "No matter what happens -- be sure you always do what you think is your duty."

Both Carter Druse and his father left the table that morning with broken hearts. And Carter soon left his home, and everyone he loved to wear the blue uniform of the Union soldier.

One sunny afternoon, a few weeks later, Carter Druse lay with his face in the dirt by the side of a road. He was on his stomach, his arms still holding his gun. Carter would not receive a medal for his actions. In fact, if his commanding officer were to see him, he would order Carter shot immediately.

For Carter was not dead or wounded. He was sleeping while on duty. Fortunately, no one could see him. He was hidden by some bushes, growing by the side of the road.

The road Carter Druse had been sent to guard was only a few miles from his father's house.

It began in a forest, down in the valley, and climbed up the side of a huge rock. Anyone standing on the top of this high rock would be able to see down into the valley. And that person would feel very dizzy, looking down. If he dropped a stone from the edge of this cliff, it would fall for six hundred meters before disappearing into the forest in the valley below.

Giant cliffs, like the one Carter lay on, surrounded the valley.

Hidden in the valleys forest were five union regiments -- thousands of Carters fellow soldiers. They had marched for thirty-six hours. Now they were resting. But at midnight they would climb that road up the rocky cliff.

Their plan was to attack by surprise an army of southerners, camped on the other side of the cliff. But if their enemy learned about the Union Army hiding in the forest, the soldiers would find themselves in a trap with no escape. That was why Carter Druse had been sent to guard the road.

It was his duty to be sure that no enemy soldier, dressed in gray, spied on the valley, where the union army was hiding.



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But Carter Druse had fallen asleep. Suddenly, as if a messenger of fate came to touch him on the shoulder, the young man opened his eyes. As he lifted his head, he saw a man on horseback standing on the huge rocky cliff that looked down into the valley.

The rider and his horse stood so still that they seemed made of stone. The man's gray uniform blended with the blue sky and the white clouds behind him. He held a gun in his right hand, and the horses reins in the other.

Carter could not see the man's face, because the rider was looking down into the valley. But the man and his horse seemed to be of heroic, almost gigantic size, standing there motionless against the sky. Carter discovered he was very much afraid, even though he knew the enemy soldier could not see him hiding in the bushes.

Suddenly the horse moved, pulling back its head from the edge of the cliff. Carter was completely awake now. He raised his gun, pushing its barrel through the bushes. And he aimed for the horseman's heart. A small squeeze of the trigger, and Carter Druse would have done his duty.

At that instant, the horseman turned his head and looked in Carters direction. He seemed to look at Carters face, into his eyes, and deep into his brave, generous heart.

Carters face became very white. His entire body began shaking. His mind began to race, and in his fantasy, the horse and rider became black figures, rising and falling in slow circles against a fiery red sky.

Carter did not pull the trigger. Instead, he let go of his gun and slowly dropped his face until it rested again in the dirt.

Brave and strong as he was, Carter almost fainted from the shock of what he had seen.

Is it so terrible to kill an enemy who might kill you and your friends? Carter knew that this man must be shot from ambush -- without warning. This man must die without a moment to prepare his soul; without even the chance to say a silent prayer.

Slowly, a hope began to form in Carter Druses mind. Perhaps the southern soldier had not seen the northern troops.

Perhaps he was only admiring the view. Perhaps he would now turn and ride carelessly away.

Then Carter looked down into the valley so far below. He saw a line of men in blue uniforms and their horses, slowly leaving the protection of the forest. A foolish Union officer had permitted his soldiers to bring their horses to drink at a small stream near the forest. And there they were -- in plain sight!

Carter Druse looked back to the man and horse standing there against the sky. Again he took aim. But this time he pointed his gun at the horse. Words rang in his head -- the last words his father ever spoke to him: "No matter what happens, be sure you always do what you think is your duty."

Carter Druse was calm as he pulled the trigger of his gun.



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At that moment, a Union officer happened to look up from his hiding place near the edge of the forest. His eyes climbed to the top of the cliff that looked over the valley. Just looking at the top of the gigantic rock, so far above him, made the soldier feel dizzy.

And then the officer saw something that filled his heart with horror. A man on a horse was riding down into the valley through the air!

The rider sat straight in his saddle. His hair streamed back, waving in the wind. His left hand held his horses reins while his right hand was hidden in the cloud of the horses mane. The horse looked as if it were galloping across the earth. Its body was proud and noble.

As the frightened Union officer watched this horseman in the sky, he almost believed he was witnessing a messenger from heaven. A messenger who had come to announce the end of the world. The officers legs grew weak, and he fell. At almost the same instant, he heard a crashing sound in the trees. The sound died without an echo. And all was silent.

The officer got to his feet, still shaking. He went back to his camp. But he didnt tell anyone what he had seen. He knew no one would ever believe him.

Soon after firing his gun, Carter Druse was joined by a Union sergeant. Carter did not turn his head as the sergeant kneeled beside him.

"Did you fire?" The sergeant whispered.

"Yes."

"At what?"

"A horse. It was on that rock. It's not there now. It went over the cliff." Carters face was white. But he showed no other sign of emotion. The sergeant did not understand.

"See here, Druse," he said, after a moment silence. "Why are you making this into a mystery. I order you to report. Was there anyone on the horse?"

"Yes."

"Who? "

"My father."

Announcer: You have heard the story called, "A Horseman in the Sky." It was written by Ambrose Bierce, and adapted for Special English by Dona de Sanctis. Your storyteller was Roy Depew.

For VOA Special English, this is Shirley Griffith.



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John Henry

ANNOUNCER: Today we tell a traditional American story called a "tall tale." A tall tale is a story about a person who is larger than life. The descriptions in the story are exaggerated – much greater than in real life. Long ago, the people who settled in undeveloped areas of America first told tall tales. After a hard day's work, people gathered to tell each other stories.

Each group of workers had its own tall tale hero. An African American man named John Henry was the hero of former slaves and the people who built the railroads. He was known for his strength.

Railroads began to link the United States together in the nineteenth century. The railroads made it possible to travel from one side of the country to the other in less than a week. Before then, the same trip might have taken up to six months.

Railroad companies employed thousands of workers to create the smooth, flat pathways required by trains. John Henry was perhaps the most famous worker. He was born a slave in the southern United States. He became a free man as a result of America's Civil War. Then, he worked for the railroads.

Confirming details of John Henry's life is not possible. That is because no one knows or sure if he really lived. This is one of the things that makes his story interesting. However, John Henry is based, in part, on real events. Many people say he represents the spirit of growth in America during this period.

Now, here is Shep O'Neal with our story.

STORYTELLER: People still talk about the night John Henry was born. It was dark and cloudy. Then, lightning lit up the night sky. John Henry's birth was a big event. His parents showed him to everyone they met. John Henry was the most powerful looking baby people had ever seen. He had thick arms, wide shoulders and strong muscles. John Henry started growing when he was one day old. He continued growing until he was the strongest man who ever lived.

John Henry grew up in a world that did not let children stay children for long. One day, he was sitting on his father's knee. The boy picked up a small piece of steel and a workman's tool, a hammer. He looked at the two objects, then said, "A hammer will be the death of me."

Before John Henry was six years old, he was carrying stones for workers building a nearby railroad. By the age of ten, he worked from early in the morning until night. Often, he would stop and listen to the sound of a train far away. He told his family, "I am going to be a steel-driver some day."

Steel-drivers helped create pathways for the railroad lines. These laborers had the job of cutting holes in rock. They did this by hitting thick steel drills, or spikes.

By the time John Henry was a young man, he was one of the best steel-drivers in the country. He could work for hours without missing a beat. People said he worked so fast that his hammer moved like lightning.

STORYTELLER: John Henry was almost two meters tall. He weighed more than ninety kilograms. He had a beautiful deep voice, and played an instrument called a banjo. John Henry married another steel-driver, a woman named Polly Ann. They had a son.



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John Henry went to work as a steel-driver for the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad, or C-and-O. The company asked him to lead workers on a project to extend the railroad into the Allegheny Mountains. The workers made good progress on the project until they started working near Big Bend Mountain in West Virginia.

The company's owners said the mountain was too big to build a railroad around it. So the workers were told they had to force their drills through it. This meant creating a tunnel more than one-and-one half kilometers long.

The project required about one thousand laborers and lasted three years. Pay was low and the work was difficult. The workers had to breathe thick black smoke and dust. Hundreds of men became sick. Many died.

John Henry was the strongest and fastest man involved in the project. He used a hammer that weighed more than six kilograms. Some people say he was able to cut a path of three to six meters a day.

That July was the hottest month ever in West Virginia. Many workers became tired and weak in the heat. John Henry was concerned his friends might lose their jobs. So, he picked up their hammers and began doing their work.

One week, he did his own work and that of several other steel-drivers. He worked day and night, rarely stopping to eat. The men thanked John Henry for his help. He just smiled and said, "A man ain't nothing but a man. He has just got to do his best."

The extreme heat continued for weeks. One day, a salesman came to the work area with a new drilling machine powered by steam. He said it could drill holes faster than twelve men working together. The railroad company planned to buy the machine if it worked as well as the salesman said.

The supervisor of the workers dismissed the salesman's claims. He said, "I have the best steel-driver in the country. His name is John Henry, and he can beat more than twenty men working together." The salesman disputed the statements. He said the company could have the machine without cost if John Henry was faster.

The supervisor called to John Henry. He said, "This man does not believe that you can drill faster. How about a race?"

John Henry looked at the machine and saw images of the future. He saw machines taking the place of America's best laborers. He saw himself and his friends unemployed and standing by a road, asking for food. He saw men losing their families and their rights as human beings.

John Henry told the supervisor he would never let the machine take his job. His friends all cheered. However, John Henry's wife Polly Ann was not happy.

"Competing against the machine will be the death of you," she said. "You have a wife and a child. If anything happens to you, we will not ever smile again."



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John Henry lifted his son into the air. He told his wife, "A man ain't nothing but a man. But, a man always has to do his best. Tomorrow, I will take my hammer and drive that steel faster than any machine."

STORYTELLER: On the day of the big event, many people came to Big Bend Mountain to watch. John Henry and the salesman stood side by side. Even early in the day, the sun was burning hot.

The competition began. John Henry kissed his hammer and started working. At first, the steam-powered drill worked two times faster than he did. Then, he started working with a hammer in each hand. He worked faster and faster. In the mountain, the heat and dust were so thick that most men would have had trouble breathing. The crowd shouted as clouds of dust came from inside the mountain.

The salesman was afraid when he heard what sounded like the mountain breaking. However, it was only the sound of John Henry at work.

Polly Ann and her son cheered when the machine was pulled from the tunnel. It had broken down. Polly Ann urged John Henry to come out. But he kept working, faster and faster. He dug deep into the darkness, hitting the steel so hard that his body began to fail him. He became weak, and his heart burst.

John Henry fell to the ground. There was a terrible silence. Polly Ann did not move because she knew what happened. John Henry's blood spilled over the ground. But he still held one of the hammers.

"I beat them," he said. His wife cried out, "Don't go, John Henry." "Bring me a cool drink of water," he said. Then he took his last breath.

Friends carried his body from the mountain. They buried him near the house where he was born. Crowds went there after they heard about John Henry's death.

Soon, the steam drill and other machines replaced the steel-drivers. Many laborers left their families, looking for work. They took the only jobs they could find. As they worked, some sang about John Henry.

ANNOUNCER: You have just heard the story of John Henry. It was adapted for Special English by George Grow. Your storyteller was Shep O'Neal. Join us again next week for another AMERICAN STORY, in Special English on the Voice of America. This is Faith Lapidus.



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Luck

Our story today is called "Luck." It was written by Mark Twain. Here is Shep O'Neal with the story.

Storyteller: I was at a dinner in London given in honor of one of the most celebrated English military men of his time. I do not want to tell you his real name and titles. I will just call him Lieutenant General Lord Arthur Scoresby.

I cannot describe my excitement when I saw this great and famous man. There he sat, the man himself, in person, all covered with medals. I could not take my eyes off him. He seemed to show the true mark of greatness. His fame had no effect on him. The hundreds of eyes watching him, the worship of so many people did not seem to make any difference to him.

Next to me sat a clergyman, who was an old friend of mine. He was not always a clergyman. During the first half of his life he was a teacher in the military school at Woolwich. There was a strange look in his eye as he leaned toward me and whispered – "Privately – he is a complete fool." He meant, of course, the hero of our dinner.

This came as a shock to me. I looked hard at him. I could not have been more surprised if he has said the same thing about Napoleon, or Socrates, or Solomon. But I was sure of two things about the clergyman. He always spoke the truth. And, his judgment of men was good. Therefore, I wanted to find out more about our hero as soon as I could.

Some days later I got a chance to talk with the clergyman, and he told me more. These are his exact words:

About forty years ago, I was an instructor in the military academy at Woolwich, when young Scoresby was given his first examination. I felt extremely sorry for him. Everybody answered the questions well, intelligently, while he – why, dear me – he did not know anything, so to speak. He was a nice, pleasant young man. It was painful to see him stand there and give answers that were miracles of stupidity.

I knew of course that when examined again he would fail and be thrown out. So, I said to myself, it would be a simple, harmless act to help him as much as I could.

I took him aside and found he knew a little about Julius Caesar's history. But, he did not know anything else. So, I went to work and tested him and worked him like a slave. I made him work, over and over again, on a few questions about Caesar, which I knew he would be asked.

If you will believe me, he came through very well on the day of the examination. He got high praise too, while others who knew a thousand times more than he were sharply criticized. By some strange, lucky accident, he was asked no questions but those I made him study. Such an accident does not happen more than once in a hundred years.

Well, all through his studies, I stood by him, with the feeling a mother has for a disabled child. And he always saved himself by some miracle.

I thought that what in the end would destroy him would be the mathematics examination. I decided to make his end as painless as possible. So, I pushed facts into his stupid head for hours. Finally, I let him



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go to the examination to experience what I was sure would be his dismissal from school. Well, sir, try to imagine the result. I was shocked out of my mind. He took first prize! And he got the highest praise.

I felt guilty day and night – what I was doing was not right. But I only wanted to make his dismissal a little less painful for him. I never dreamed it would lead to such strange, laughable results.

I thought that sooner or later one thing was sure to happen: The first real test once he was through school would ruin him.

Then, the Crimean War broke out. I felt that sad for him that there had to be a war. Peace would have given this donkey a chance to escape from ever being found out as being so stupid. Nervously, I waited for the worst to happen. It did. He was appointed an officer. A captain, of all things! Who could have dreamed that they would place such a responsibility on such weak shoulders as his.

I said to myself that I was responsible to the country for this. I must go with him and protect the nation against him as far as I could. So, I joined up with him. And anyway we went to the field.

And there – oh dear, it was terrible. Mistakes, fearful mistakes – why, he never did anything that was right – nothing but mistakes. But, you see, nobody knew the secret of how stupid he really was. Everybody misunderstood his actions. They saw his stupid mistakes as works of great intelligence. They did, honestly!

His smallest mistakes made a man in his right mind cry, and shout and scream too – to himself, of course. And what kept me in a continual fear was the fact that every mistake he made increased his glory and fame. I kept saying to myself that when at last they found out about him, it will be like the sun falling out of the sky.

He continued to climb up, over the dead bodies of his superiors. Then, in the hottest moment of one battle down went our colonel. My heart jumped into my mouth, for Scoresby was the next in line to take his place. Now, we are in for it, I said...

The battle grew hotter. The English and their allies were steadily retreating all over the field. Our regiment occupied a position that was extremely important. One mistake now would bring total disaster. And what did Scoresby do this time – he just mistook his left hand for his right hand...that was all. An order came for him to fall back and support our right. Instead, he moved forward and went over the hill to the left. We were over the hill before this insane movement could be discovered and stopped. And what did we find? A large and unsuspected Russian army waiting! And what happened – were we all killed? That is exactly what would have happened in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred. But no – those surprised Russians thought that no one regiment by itself would come around there at such a time.

It must be the whole British army, they thought. They turned tail, away they went over the hill and down into the field in wild disorder, and we after them. In no time, there was the greatest turn around you ever saw. The allies turned defeat into a sweeping and shining victory.

The allied commander looked on, his head spinning with wonder, surprise and joy. He sent right off for Scoresby, and put his arms around him and hugged him on the field in front of all the armies. Scoresby became famous that day as a great military leader – honored throughout the world. That honor will never disappear while history books last.



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He is just as nice and pleasant as ever, but he still does not know enough to come in out of the rain. He is the stupidest man in the universe.

Until now, nobody knew it but Scoresby and myself. He has been followed, day by day, year by year, by a strange luck. He has been a shining soldier in all our wars for years. He has filled his whole military life with mistakes. Every one of them brought him another honorary title. Look at his chest, flooded with British and foreign medals. Well, sir, every one of them is the record of some great stupidity or other. They are proof that the best thing that can happen to a man is to be born lucky. I say again, as I did at the dinner, Scoresby's a complete fool.

Announcer: You have just heard the story "Luck." It was written by Mark Twain and adapted for Special English by Harold Berman. Your narrator was Shep O'Neal. Listen again next week at this same time for another American Story told in Special English on the Voice of America. This is Susan Clark.



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One Thousand Dollars

Our story today is called "One Thousand Dollars." It was written by O. Henry. Here is Steve Ember with the story.

"One thousand dollars," said the lawyer Tolman, in a severe and serious voice. "And here is the money."

Young Gillian touched the thin package of fifty-dollar bills and laughed.

"It's such an unusual amount," he explained, kindly, to the lawyer. "If it had been ten thousand a man might celebrate with a lot of fireworks. Even fifty dollars would have been less trouble."

"You heard the reading of your uncle's will after he died," continued the lawyer Tolman. "I do not know if you paid much attention to its details. I must remind you of one. You are required to provide us with a report of how you used this one thousand dollars as soon as you have spent it. I trust that you will obey the wishes of your late uncle."

"You may depend on it," said the young man respectfully.

Gillian went to his club. He searched for a man he called Old Bryson.

Old Bryson was a calm, anti-social man, about forty years old. He was in a corner reading a book. When he saw Gillian coming near he took a noisy, deep breath, laid down his book and took off his glasses.

"I have a funny story to tell you," said Gillian.

"I wish you would tell it to someone in the billiard room," said Old Bryson. "You know how I hate your stories."

"This is a better one than usual," said Gillian, rolling a cigarette, and I'm glad to tell it to you. It's too sad and funny to go with the rattling of billiard balls.

I've just come from a meeting with my late uncle's lawyers. He leaves me an even thousand dollars. Now, what can a man possibly do with a thousand dollars?"

Old Bryson showed very little interest. "I thought the late Septimus Gillian was worth something like half a million."

"He was," agreed Gillian, happily. "And that's where the joke comes in. He has left a lot of his money to an organism. That is, part of it goes to the man who invents a new bacillus and the rest to establish a hospital for doing away with it again. There are one or two small, unimportant gifts on the side. The butler and the housekeeper get a seal ring and ten dollars each. His nephew gets one thousand dollars."

"Were there any others mentioned in your uncle's will?" asked Old Bryson.



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"None." said Gillian. "There *is* a Miss Hayden. My uncle was responsible for her. She lived in his house. She's a quiet thing...musical... the daughter of somebody who was unlucky enough to be his friend. I forgot to say that she was in on the ring and ten dollar joke, too. I wish I had been. Then I could have had two bottles of wine, given the ring to the waiter and had the whole business off my hands. Now tell me what a man can do with a thousand dollars."

Old Bryson rubbed his glasses and smiled. And when Old Bryson smiled, Gillian knew that he intended to be more offensive than ever.

There are many good things a man could do with a thousand dollars," said Bryson. "You?" he said with a gentle laugh. "Why, Bobby Gillian, there's only one reasonable thing you could do. You can go and buy Miss Lotta Lauriere a diamond necklace with the money and then take yourself off to Idaho and inflict your presence upon a ranch. I advise a sheep ranch, as I have a particular dislike for sheep."

"Thanks," said Gillian as he rose from his chair. "I *knew* I could depend on you, Old Bryson. You've hit on the very idea. I wanted to spend the money on one thing, because I have to turn in a report for it, and I hate itemizing."

Gillian phoned for a cab and said to the driver: "The stage entrance of the Columbine Theatre."

The theater was crowded. Miss Lotta Lauriere was preparing for her performance when her assistant spoke the name of Mr. Gillian.

"Let it in," said Miss Lauriere. "Now, what is it, Bobby? I'm going on stage in two minutes."

"It won't take two minutes for me. What do you say to a little thing in the jewelry line? I can spend one thousand dollars."

"Say, Bobby," said Miss Lauriere, "Did you see that necklace Della Stacey had on the other night? It cost two thousand two hundred dollars at Tiffany's."

Miss Lauriere was called to the stage for her performance.

Gillian slowly walked out to where his cab was waiting. "What would you do with a thousand dollars if you had it?" he asked the driver.

"Open a drinking place," said the driver, quickly. "I know a place I could take money in with both hands. I've got it worked out--if you were thinking of putting up the money."

"Oh, no," said Gillian. "I was just wondering."

Eight blocks down Broadway, Gillian got out of the cab. A blind man sat on the sidewalk selling pencils. Gillian went out and stood in front of him.

"Excuse me, but would you mind telling me what you would do if you had a thousand dollars?" asked Gillian.



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The blind man took a small book from his coat pocket and held it out. Gillian opened it and saw that it was a bank deposit book.

It showed that the blind man had a balance of one thousand seven hundred eighty-five dollars in his bank account. Gillian returned the bank book and got back into the cab.

"I forgot something," he said. "You may drive to the law offices of Tolman & Sharp."

Lawyer Tolman looked at Gillian in a hostile and questioning way.

"I beg your pardon," said Gillian, cheerfully. "But was Miss Hayden left anything by my uncle's will in addition to the ring and the ten dollars?"

"Nothing," said Mr. Tolman.

"I thank you very much, Sir," said Gillian, and went to his cab. He gave the driver the address of his late uncle's home.

Miss Hayden was writing letters in the library. The small, thin woman wore black clothes. But you would have noticed her eyes. Gillian entered the room as if the world were unimportant.

"I have just come from old Tolman's," he explained. "They have been going over the papers down there. They found a..." Gillian searched his memory for a legal term. "They found an amendment or a post-script or something to the will. It seemed that my uncle had second thoughts and willed you a thousand dollars. Tolman asked me to bring you the money. Here it is."

Gillian laid the money beside her hand on the desk. Miss Hayden turned white. "Oh!" she said. And again, "Oh!"

Gillian half turned and looked out the window. In a low voice he said, "I suppose, of course, that you know I love you."

"I am sorry," said Miss Hayden, as she picked up her money.

"There is no use?" asked Gillian, almost light-heartedly.

"I am sorry," she said again.

"May I write a note?" asked Gillian, with a smile. Miss Hayden supplied him with paper and pen, and then went back to her writing table.

Gillian wrote a report of how he spent the thousand dollars: "Paid by Robert Gillian, one thousand dollars on account of the eternal happiness, owed by Heaven to the best and dearest woman on earth."

Gillian put the note into an envelope. He bowed to Miss Hayden and left.

His cab stopped again at the offices of Tolman & Sharp.



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"I have spent the one thousand dollars," he said cheerfully, to Tolman. "And I have come to present a report of it, as I agreed." He threw a white envelope on the lawyer's table.

Without touching the envelope, Mr. Tolman went to a door and called his partner, Sharp. Together they searched for something in a large safe. They brought out a big envelope sealed with wax. As they opened the envelope, they shook their heads together over its contents. Then Tolman became the spokesman.

"Mr. Gillian," he said, "there was an addition to your uncle's will. It was given to us privately, with instructions that it not be opened until you had provided us with a full report of your handling of the one thousand dollars received in the will.

"As you have satisfied the conditions, my partner and I have read the addition. I will explain to you the spirit of its contents.

"In the event that your use of the one thousand dollars shows that you possess any of the qualifications that deserve reward, you stand to gain much more. If your disposal of the money in question has been sensible, wise, or unselfish, it is in our power to give you bonds to the value of fifty thousand dollars. But if you have used this money in a wasteful, foolish way as you have in the past, the fifty thousand dollars is to be paid to Miriam Hayden, ward of the late Mr. Gillian, without delay.

"Now, Mr. Gillian, Mr. Sharp and I will examine your report of the one thousand dollars."

Mr. Tolman reached for the envelope. Gillian was a little quicker in taking it up. He calmly tore the report and its cover into pieces and dropped them into his pocket.

"It's all right," he said, smilingly. "There isn't a bit of need to bother you with this. I don't suppose you would understand these itemized bets, anyway. I lost the thousand dollars on the races. Good-day to you, gentlemen."

Tolman and Sharp shook their heads mournfully at each other when Gillian left. They heard him whistling happily in the hallway as he waited for the elevator.

"One Thousand Dollars" was written by O. Henry. It was adapted for Special English by Lawan Davis. The storyteller and producer was Steve Ember.



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The Boarded Window.

In 1830, only a few miles away from what is now the great city of Cincinnati, Ohio, lay a huge and almost endless forest.

The area had a few settlements established by people of the frontier. Many of them had already left the area for settlements further to the west. But among those remaining was a man who had been one of the first people to arrive there.

He lived alone in a house of logs surrounded on all sides by the great forest. He seemed a part of the darkness and silence of the forest, for no one had ever known him to smile or speak an unnecessary word. His simple needs were supplied by selling or trading the skins of wild animals in the town.

His little log house had a single door. Directly opposite was a window. The window was boarded up. No one could remember a time when it was not. And no one knew why it had been closed. I imagine there are few people living today who ever knew the secret of that window. But I am one, as you shall see.

The man's name was said to be Murlock. He appeared to be seventy years old, but he was really fifty. Something other than years had been the cause of his aging.

His hair and long, full beard were white. His gray, lifeless eyes were sunken. His face was wrinkled. He was tall and thin with drooping shoulders—like someone with many problems.

I never saw him. These details I learned from my grandfather. He told me the man's story when I was a boy. He had known him when living nearby in that early day.

One day Murlock was found in his cabin, dead. It was not a time and place for medical examiners and newspapers. I suppose it was agreed that he had died from natural causes or I should have been told, and should remember.

I know only that the body was buried near the cabin, next to the burial place of his wife. She had died so many years before him that local tradition noted very little of her existence.

That closes the final part of this true story, except for the incident that followed many years later. With a fearless spirit I went to the place and got close enough to the ruined cabin to throw a stone against it. I ran away to avoid the ghost which every well-informed boy in the area knew haunted the spot.

But there is an earlier part to this story supplied by my grandfather.

When Murlock built his cabin he was young, strong and full of hope. He began the hard work of creating a farm. He kept a gun--a rifle—for hunting to support himself.

He had married a young woman, in all ways worthy of his honest love and loyalty. She shared the dangers of life with a willing spirit and a light heart. There is no known record of her name or details about her. They loved each other and were happy.

One day Murlock returned from hunting in a deep part of the forest. He found his wife sick with fever and confusion. There was no doctor or neighbor within miles. She was in no condition to be left alone



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while he went to find help. So Murlock tried to take care of his wife and return her to good health. But at the end of the third day she fell into unconsciousness and died.

From what we know about a man like Murlock, we may try to imagine some of the details of the story told by my grandfather.

When he was sure she was dead, Murlock had sense enough to remember that the dead must be prepared for burial. He made a mistake now and again while performing this special duty. He did certain things wrong. And others which he did correctly were done over and over again.

He was surprised that he did not cry — surprised and a little ashamed. Surely it is unkind not to cry for the dead.

"Tomorrow," he said out loud, "I shall have to make the coffin and dig the grave; and then I shall miss her, when she is no longer in sight. But now -- she is dead, of course, but it is all right — it must be all right, somehow. Things cannot be as bad as they seem."

He stood over the body of his wife in the disappearing light. He fixed the hair and made finishing touches to the rest. He did all of this without thinking but with care. And still through his mind ran a feeling that all was right -- that he should have her again as before, and everything would be explained.

Murlock had no experience in deep sadness. His heart could not contain it all. His imagination could not understand it. He did not know he was so hard struck. That knowledge would come later and never leave.

Deep sadness is an artist of powers that affects people in different ways. To one it comes like the stroke of an arrow, shocking all the emotions to a sharper life. To another, it comes as the blow of a crushing strike. We may believe Murlock to have been affected that way.

Soon after he had finished his work he sank into a chair by the side of the table upon which the body lay. He noted how white his wife's face looked in the deepening darkness. He laid his arms upon the table's edge and dropped his face into them, tearless and very sleepy.

At that moment a long, screaming sound came in through the open window. It was like the cry of a lost child in the far deep of the darkening forest! But the man did not move. He heard that unearthly cry upon his failing sense, again and nearer than before. Maybe it was a wild animal or maybe it was a dream. For Murlock was asleep.

Some hours later, he awoke, lifted his head from his arms and listened closely. He knew not why. There in the black darkness by the side of the body, he remembered everything without a shock. He strained his eyes to see -- he knew not what.

His senses were all alert. His breath was suspended. His blood was still as if to assist the silence. Who — what had awakened him and where was it!

Suddenly the table shook under his arms. At the same time he heard, or imagined he heard, a light, soft step and then another. The sounds were as bare feet walking upon the floor!



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He was afraid beyond the power to cry out or move. He waited—waited there in the darkness through what seemed like centuries of such fear. Fear as one may know, but yet live to tell. He tried but failed to speak the dead woman's name. He tried but failed to stretch his hand across the table to learn if she was there. His throat was powerless. His arms and hands were like lead.

Then something most frightful happened. It seemed as if a heavy body was thrown against the table with a force that pushed against his chest. At the same time he heard and felt the fall of something upon the floor. It was so violent a crash that the whole house shook. A fight followed and a confusion of sounds impossible to describe.

Murlock had risen to his feet. Extreme fear had caused him to lose control of his senses. He threw his hands upon the table. Nothing was there!

There is a point at which fear may turn to insanity; and insanity incites to action. With no definite plan and acting like a madman, Murlock ran quickly to the wall. He seized his loaded rifle and without aim fired it.

The flash from the rifle lit the room with a clear brightness. He saw a huge fierce panther dragging the dead woman toward the window. The wild animal's teeth were fixed on her throat! Then there was darkness blacker than before, and silence.

When he returned to consciousness the sun was high and the forest was filled with the sounds of singing birds. The body lay near the window, where the animal had left it when frightened away by the light and sound of the rifle.

The clothing was ruined. The long hair was in disorder. The arms and legs lay in a careless way. And a pool of blood flowed from the horribly torn throat. The ribbon he had used to tie the wrists was broken. The hands were tightly closed.

And between the teeth was a piece of the animal's ear.

"The Boarded Window" was written by Ambrose Bierce. It was adapted for Special English by Lawan Davis who was also the producer. The storyteller was Shep O'Neal.