



# Stories from the Five Towns

ARNOLD BENNETT

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OXFORD BOOKWORMS

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## NEWS OF THE ENGAGEMENT

My mother never came to meet me at Bursley station when I arrived in the Five Towns from London. She always had other things to do; she was getting ready for me. So I always walked alone up Trafalgar Road, between the factories and past the football field. And so tonight, I had time to think. I had some very important news for my mother, and I didn't know how to tell her.



*I always walked alone up Trafalgar Road.*

I wrote to my mother every week, to tell her what I was doing. She knew the names of all my friends. I often wrote

about Agnes and her family. But it's difficult to write in a letter: 'I think Agnes likes me,' 'I'm in love with her,' 'I'm sure she likes me,' 'I think she loves me,' 'I'm going to ask her to marry me.' You can't do that. Well, I couldn't do it. And on the 20th December I asked Agnes to marry me, and Agnes said yes. But my mother didn't know anything about it. And now, on the 22nd December, I was coming to spend Christmas with my mother.

My mother was a widow. I was her only son – and now I was engaged and she didn't know. I was afraid she was going to be a little unhappy, and I was ready for a difficult evening.

I walked up to the front door, but before I put my hand up to ring, the door opened and there was my mother. She put her arms around me.

'Well, Philip! How are you?'

And I said, 'Oh! I'm all right, mother. How are you?'

She smiled at me. She looked excited and younger than her forty-five years. There was something strange in her smile. I thought: 'She *knows* I'm going to get married. How does she know?'

But I said nothing. You have to be careful with mothers.

'I'll tell her at supper,' I decided.

I went upstairs to my bedroom. When I came down, my mother was busy in the kitchen. I went into the dining-room, and here I had a surprise. There were three chairs around the table, and three plates and three glasses.

So Agnes *was* coming! I didn't know how my mother knew, but she did know. She and my wonderful Agnes were planning a surprise for me. Agnes was coming to Bursley for Christmas!

There was a ring at the door. 'It's Agnes!' I thought, and running to the door, I opened it.

It was Mr Nixon.

Mr Nixon was an old friend of the family. He was a large, strong man of about forty-nine or fifty. He was very helpful to my mother after my father's death.

‘Good evening, young man,’ he said. ‘It’s good to see you back in Bursley.’

‘Mr Nixon has come for supper, Philip,’ said my mother.

Mr Nixon often came to supper during my visits to Bursley, but never on the first night. I liked him, but I wasn’t very happy to see him tonight because I wanted to talk to my mother. I couldn’t talk to her about Agnes with Mr Nixon sitting at the table.

We started our supper. We talked about this and that, but nobody ate very much. I was thinking about what to say to my mother when Mr Nixon went home. At the end of the meal I told my mother that I must go to the post office. I had an important letter to post.

‘Can’t it wait until tomorrow, my pet?’ my mother asked.

‘It can’t,’ I said.

My letter, of course, was to Agnes. A letter to Agnes could not wait until tomorrow! I walked over to the dining-room door.

‘A letter to a lady?’ asked Mr Nixon, laughing.

‘Yes,’ I replied.

I walked to the post office and posted my letter. When I got back home, I was sorry to see that Mr Nixon was still there. He was alone in the sitting-room, smoking.

‘Where’s mother?’ I asked.

‘She’s just gone out of the room,’ he said. ‘Come and sit down. Have a cigarette. I’d like to talk to you, Philip.’

I took a cigarette and sat down. I hoped the talk was not going to be a long one.

‘Well, my boy,’ he said. ‘Would you like me as a stepfather?’

For a second I could not move or speak.

‘What?’ I said. ‘You mean ... you and my mother ...?’

‘Yes, my boy, I do. I asked her yesterday, and she said yes. I’ve wanted to ask her for a long time – I think she knew that. Did she tell you in her letters? No? It’s difficult to write

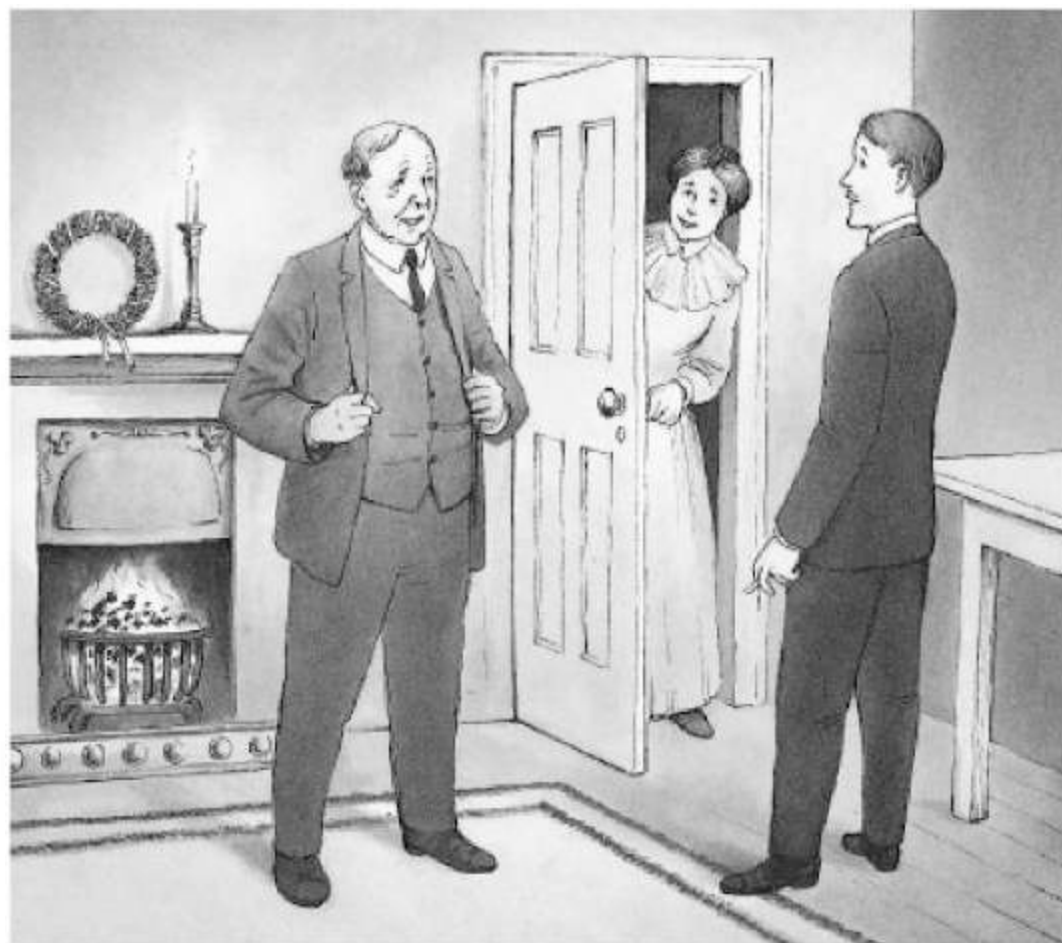
in a letter, of course. She couldn't really write, "My dear Philip, an old friend, Mr Nixon, is falling in love with me and I think I'm falling in love with him. I think he'll ask me to marry him soon." I don't think your mother could write that, could she?'

I laughed.

'Shake hands,' I said. 'This is wonderful news.'

After a moment my mother came in, a little red in the face.

'The boy's very happy, Sarah,' said Mr Nixon.



*After a moment my mother came in.*

I said nothing about my own plans that evening. It was something new to me that my mother could fall in love, and that a man could fall in love with her. It was something new to me that she was lonely in our old house and that perhaps she wanted a new life. Perhaps, like all sons, I thought only about myself and my life. So I decided to say nothing about

my news, and that evening my mother came first for me. I could tell her about Agnes tomorrow. We live and learn.

## THE BURGLARY

Lady Dain said: 'Jee, if that portrait stays there much longer, I shall go mad. I can't eat any more with it up there!' She looked up at the big portrait on the wall opposite the breakfast table.

Sir Jehoshaphat said nothing.

Lady Dain did not like the portrait. Nobody in the Five Towns liked the portrait. But the portrait was by Cressage, the finest portrait painter in England, and a portrait by Cressage cost a thousand pounds or more.



*'I can't eat any more with it up there!'*

Sir Jehoshaphat Dain was perhaps the cleverest and most successful businessman in the Five Towns. His business, called Dain Brothers, had one of the biggest pottery factories in England, and their cups and plates went all over the world. Sir Jehoshaphat was rich, because he sold his pottery



very cheaply, and paid his workers very little. But Sir Jee liked to be important, so he used some of his money to pay for schools and hospitals for the people of the Five Towns.

The people of the Five Towns often laughed at Sir Jee, but they also wanted to say thank you for the schools and hospitals. They decided to give him a portrait for a present. So Cressage painted the portrait and many people in London thought it was very good. 'A wonderfully clever portrait of a successful businessman from a small town; a little man who has made a lot of money and who thinks he is very important,' said one newspaper.

It was not a kind portrait and many of the people of the Five Towns laughed when they saw it. But Sir Jehoshaphat had to take his present, and to say thank you for it. Now it was on his wall in his home, Sneyd Castle, and after sixteen months Lady Dain was tired of looking at it.

'Don't be stupid, wife,' said Sir Jee. 'I'm not taking that portrait down, or selling it – not even for ten thousand pounds. I want to keep it.'

But that wasn't true. Sir Jee hated the portrait more than his wife did. And he was thinking of a secret plan to get rid of it.

'Are you going into town this morning?' asked his wife.

'Yes,' he answered. 'I'm in court today.'

He was one of the town magistrates. While he travelled into town, he thought about his plan for the portrait. It was a wild and dangerous plan, but he thought it was just possible.



That morning, the police were very angry with Sir Jee. A man was in court, and the police said he was a burglar. They wanted him to go to prison for five years or more. But Sir Jee did not agree. He said there was no proof that William Smith was a burglar. The other magistrate was very surprised at this and the police were very cross, but William Smith left the court a free man. Before he left, Sir Jee asked to see him

in his office.

‘Smith,’ said Sir Jee, looking at him carefully, ‘you were a lucky man this morning, you know.’

Smith was a small, thin man, with untidy hair and dirty clothes.

‘Yes, I was lucky,’ he answered. ‘And what do you want from me?’

‘I hope I can help you,’ said Sir Jee.

‘I don’t know if I want help, but I never say no to money.’

‘Sit down,’ said Sir Jee.

William Smith sat down at Sir Jee’s desk. ‘Well?’ he asked.

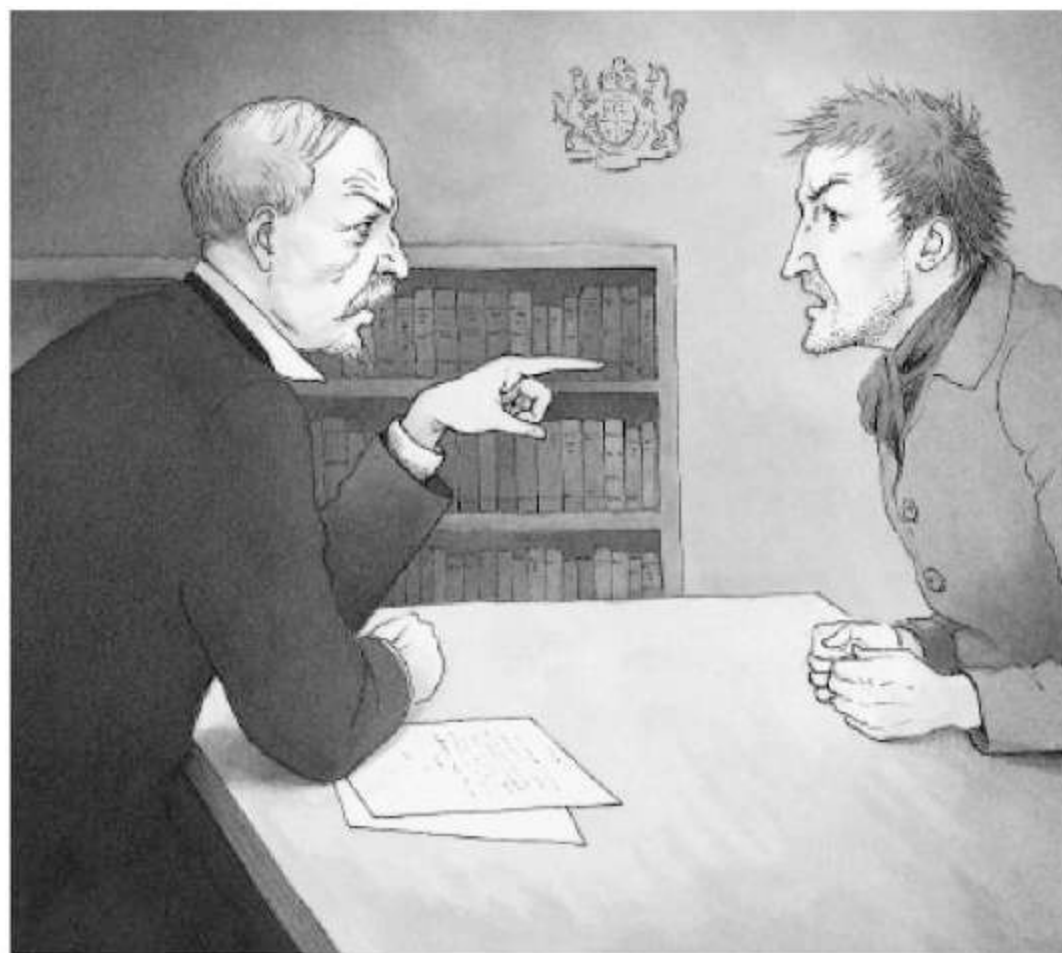
‘I want you to steal something from my house. But it won’t be a crime.’

‘What?’ Smith was very surprised.

‘In my house, Sneyd Castle, there is a portrait of myself. I want someone to steal it.’

‘Steal it?’

‘Yes.’



*'I want you to steal something from my house.'*

'How much will you pay me for doing it?'

'Pay you?' said Sir Jee. 'It's a Cressage! You'll get two thousand pounds for it in America.'

And Sir Jee told Smith the story of the portrait and why he wanted to get rid of it. Smith thought for a minute and then said:

'All right, I'll do it, just to help you.'

'When can you do it? Tonight?'

'No,' said Smith. 'I'm busy tonight.'

'Well, tomorrow night.'

'I'm busy tomorrow, too.'

'You're a busy man,' said Sir Jee.

'Well, business is business, you know,' said Smith. 'I can do it the day after tomorrow.'

'But that's Christmas Eve.'

‘Well, it’s either that or Christmas Day. I’m busy again after that.’

‘Not in the Five Towns, I hope,’ said Sir Jee.

‘No. There’s nothing left in the Five Towns.’

So they agreed on Christmas Eve.

‘Now,’ said Sir Jee, ‘I’ll describe the rooms in Sneyd Castle to you. Then you’ll know where—’

William Smith looked at him and laughed loudly. ‘Describe the rooms to me? Do you think I’m stupid? I’m a businessman – know Sneyd Castle better than you do.’



On the afternoon of 24th December, when Sir Jehoshaphat came home to Sneyd Castle, his wife was packing suitcases. The Dains were going to their son’s house for Christmas. Their son John had a new wife and a new baby, and he wanted to spend Christmas in his new home with all the family.



*'Oh, Jee!' she cried. 'You are difficult.'*

Sir Jee said nothing to his wife immediately. He watched her for a while and then later, during tea, he said suddenly:

'I can't come to John's house this afternoon.'

'Oh, Jee!' she cried. 'You *are* difficult. Why didn't you tell me before?'

He didn't answer the question. 'I'll come over tomorrow morning – perhaps in time for church.'

'There's no food in the house. And the servants are all going away on holiday. There's nobody to cook for you. I'll stay with you if you like.'

'No, I'll be all right.'

Lady Dain went to her son's, leaving some cold food for Sir

Jee.

Sir Jee had a cold, silent meal, in front of his portrait. He was alone in the castle and that was a good thing, he decided. There were no servants to wake up and hear William Smith at work. Sir Jee was a little afraid; perhaps it was dangerous to bring a burglar into the house. He looked again at the portrait in its big gold frame. 'Will he take the frame?' he asked himself. 'I hope he doesn't. It's very heavy. I don't think one man could carry that.' But perhaps Smith had someone to help him.

'Goodbye!' he said to his portrait, opened one of the windows for William Smith, and went to bed.

He did not sleep. He listened. At about two o'clock there were a few noises. They stopped, then started again. Smith was at work. Sir Jee got out of bed quietly, went to the window and looked out carefully. Two men were carrying something large and square across the garden. So Smith had a friend, and he was taking the portrait *and* the frame.



*Two men were carrying something large and square across the garden.*

Sir Jee went back to bed. He slept for a few hours and then went downstairs.

The portrait was on the floor with some writing across it in big white letters: 'This is no good to me.' It was the big gold frame that was missing.

And that wasn't all. Plates, knives, forks, spoons, cups – everything made of silver was also missing. There was not a single silver spoon left in the castle.

## BEGINNING THE NEW YEAR

We are slow, silent people, we of the Five Towns. Perhaps it is because we make pottery, which is slow, silent work. There are many stories about us and how slow and silent we are. These stories often surprise the rest of the world very much, but we just laugh at them. Here is an example.

Toby Hall was born in Turnhill, the smallest of the Five Towns. Last New Year's Eve he was travelling by train from Crewe to Derby, which was now his home town. He got out of the train at Knype, in the centre of the Five Towns, for a quick drink. The station was busy and he had to wait for his drink. When he returned to the train, it was already moving. Toby was not a young man; he couldn't jump on the train, so he missed it.



*The station was busy and he had to wait for his drink.*

He went to speak to the man in the station office. 'Young man,' he asked. 'When's the next train to Derby?'

'There isn't one before tomorrow.'



Toby went and had another drink.

‘I’ll go to Turnhill,’ he said to himself slowly, and he paid for his drink.

This was his first visit to the Five Towns for twenty-three years, but Knype station was still the same, and so were the times of the trains to Turnhill. The train was the same, too.

In twenty minutes he was leaving Turnhill station and walking into the town. He walked past a number of fine new buildings. In the town centre almost everything was different.

He walked on, into smaller streets, and at last came to Child Row. The old houses here were the same as always, and he looked at one small house very carefully. The light was on, so there was somebody at home.

He crossed the street to the house. It was a special house for him (Number 11 it was – and is) because twenty-four years ago it was his home.



Twenty-four years ago, Toby Hall married Miss Priscilla Bratt, a quiet woman of twenty-three. The house belonged to her. The two young people were perhaps not really in love, but they liked one another. Their only problem was the house. Priscilla often said that the house belonged to her. Toby knew that. Everybody in Turnhill knew that. She didn’t have to say it so often. Toby asked her not to, but she didn’t stop. He was happy to live in his wife’s house, but he didn’t want to hear about it every day. And after a year it was too much. One day he put some things in a bag, put on his hat, and went to the door.



*The light was on, so there was somebody at home.*

‘Where are you going?’ asked Priscilla.

He stopped for a minute, then answered, ‘America.’

And he went. It was not difficult for Priscilla. She did not think that Toby was a very good husband. She could live

without him; she had her house and some money.

Toby went to the bank and got all his money, and sailed off to New York on the *Adriatic*. From New York he went to Trenton, New Jersey, which was the Five Towns of America. Toby was a good potter, and he found work easily. After a year, he asked a friend to write to Priscilla, and tell her that he was dead. He wanted to be a free man, and it was only fair for her to be a free woman.

After a few years he returned to England. He changed his name from Hall, and started work as a potter in Derby. He did well – the money was good, and he didn't have much to spend it on. He lived quietly, working all week and going fishing at the weekends.

And now, because of a visit to Crewe, a train, and a drink, he was in Child Row, and crossing the street to Number 11. He knocked on the door.



Many doors in the Five Towns open slowly and carefully – and so did this one. It opened a few centimetres, and a woman looked out at Toby.

‘Is this Mrs Hall’s?’ he asked.

‘No. It’s not Mrs Hall’s. It’s Mrs Tansley’s.’

‘I thought ...’

The door opened a little more.

‘Is that you, Toby?’

‘It is,’ answered Toby, smiling a little.

‘Well, well!’ said the woman. ‘Well, well!’ The door opened a little more. ‘Are you coming in, Toby?’

‘Yes,’ said Toby.

And he went in.

‘Sit down,’ said his wife. ‘I thought you were dead. Someone wrote to me.’

‘Yes!’ said Toby. ‘But I’m not dead.’ He sat down in a comfortable chair by the fire. He knew the chair, and he

knew the fire. He put his hat on the table. Priscilla locked the door again and sat down herself. Her dress was black and, like Toby, she was getting a little fat.

‘Well, well,’ she said. ‘So you’ve come back.’

‘Yes.’



*‘The weather’s cold, isn’t it?’*

They were both silent for a minute.

‘The weather’s cold, isn’t it?’ he said.

‘Yes. It’s been a cold winter.’

Another silence. What were they thinking and feeling? Perhaps they weren't thinking anything very much.

'And what's the news?' he asked.

'News? Oh, nothing special.'

There was a picture above the fire. It was a picture of Priscilla when she was young. It surprised Toby.

'I don't remember that picture,' he said.

'What?'

'That!' He looked up at the picture.

'Oh! *That!* That's my daughter.'

'Oh!' Now Toby was surprised.

'I married Job Tansley,' said Priscilla. 'He died four years ago. She's married,' she said, looking up at her daughter's photograph. 'She married young Gibson last September.'

'Well, well!'

They were silent again.

'That's a good fire,' said Toby, looking at it.

'Yes, it is.'

'Good coal.'

'Seventy pence a tonne.'

Again they were silent.

'Is Ned Walklate still at the pub?' Toby asked.

'I think so,' said Priscilla.

'I think I'll go round and have a drink,' said Toby, standing up.

He was unlocking the door when Priscilla said:



*'You've forgotten your hat, Toby.'*

'You've forgotten your hat, Toby.'

'No,' he answered. 'I haven't forgotten it. I'm coming back.'

They looked at one another, speaking without words.

'That'll be all right,' she said. 'Well, well!'

'Yes!'

And he walked round to the pub.

## THE SILENT BROTHERS

John and Robert Hessian, brothers and bachelors, sat together after supper in their house in Oldcastle Street, Bursley. Both brothers were wearing black, because of the death of their older sister three months ago.

Maggie, the servant, came in to take the supper things off the table.

'Leave the coffee, Maggie,' said John, the elder brother, 'Mr Liversage is coming to visit.'

'Yes, Mr John,' said Maggie.

'Slate, Maggie,' said Robert.

'Yes, Mr Robert,' said Maggie.

The slate was on a table near the fire. Maggie gave it, and its pencil, to Robert.



*Maggie gave it, and its pencil, to Robert.*

Robert wrote: *Why is Liversage coming?*

And he pushed the slate across the table to John.

John wrote on the slate: *I don't know. He telephoned. He said he wanted to see us tonight.*

And he pushed the slate back to Robert.

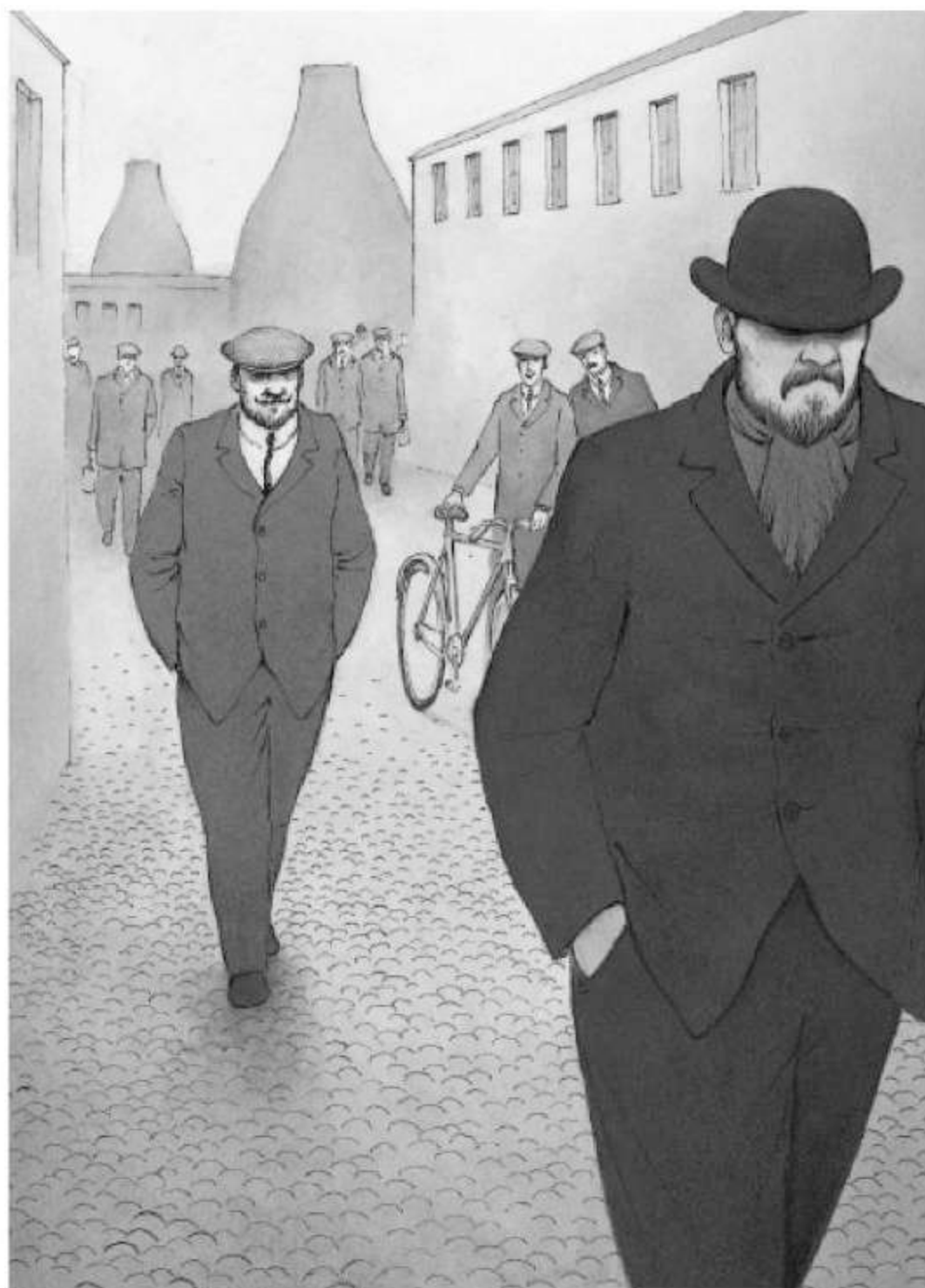
John was forty-two years old, and Robert thirty-nine. They were tall, dark men, and both were well and strong. And there was nothing wrong with their hearing.

Ten years before, the brothers had a quarrel. The quarrel was a stupid one, like many quarrels. The morning after, Robert did not answer when John said something to him. 'Well,' said John to himself. 'If he doesn't speak, I won't speak.' And then Robert thought the same thing.

Maggie was the first to see that the brothers were not speaking. Then it was their best friend, Mr Liversage, the solicitor, and some of their other friends. But nobody said anything to them. The people of Bursley thought it was funny, and wanted to know which brother would win the quarrel. So Bursley watched the two men carefully, waiting for one of them to speak. But for ten years the brothers went on living together in the same house, and neither man spoke a single word to the other.

Life without words was very difficult for the brothers, but it was also difficult for their servant. Maggie gave them the slate, because it was easier for her when the brothers wrote things down. It was difficult for their friends too.





*Every evening Bursley watched the two brothers  
while they walked home.*

They began to be a little bored when, at parties, each Hessian talked to everybody in the room – but not to his brother.

There was just one thing wrong with this beautiful quarrel. The brothers worked together in the same pottery factory, and sometimes they needed to speak on business. But they

spoke very coldly, and only inside the factory walls. And every evening Bursley watched the two brothers while they walked home, one man five metres behind the other. How stupid it was! But Bursley said nothing.

The conversation by slate that evening was just finishing, when there was a knock at the door, and Mr Powell Liversage came in. He was an old friend of the two from their schooldays. He was also a bachelor, so his evenings were free. He came to see the Hessians every Saturday night, and usually John or Robert went to see him on Wednesdays. But today was Thursday.

‘How are you?’ asked John, lighting a cigarette.

‘Well,’ replied Liversage.

‘How are you, Powell?’ asked Robert.

‘Not too bad. And you?’

He sat down and Robert gave him a cup of coffee.

‘Well,’ said Liversage, after a minute. He sounded a little uncomfortable. ‘We’ve found your sister’s will at last.’

‘You haven’t! When?’ asked John.

‘This afternoon. It was with some old papers in the bank. Did you know that she had more than twelve thousand pounds?’

‘No!’ said Robert.

The brothers knew that their sister, Mrs Mary Bott, was rich. They knew that she had no children, and they knew, of course, that they were her only brothers. When she died three months ago, nobody could find her will. And now here it was! Twelve thousand pounds between two people was a lot of money for each of them. But what did the will say?

The two men wanted to know very much, but did they ask the question? Oh no! Neither man wanted to be the first to speak. And so they sat in silence.

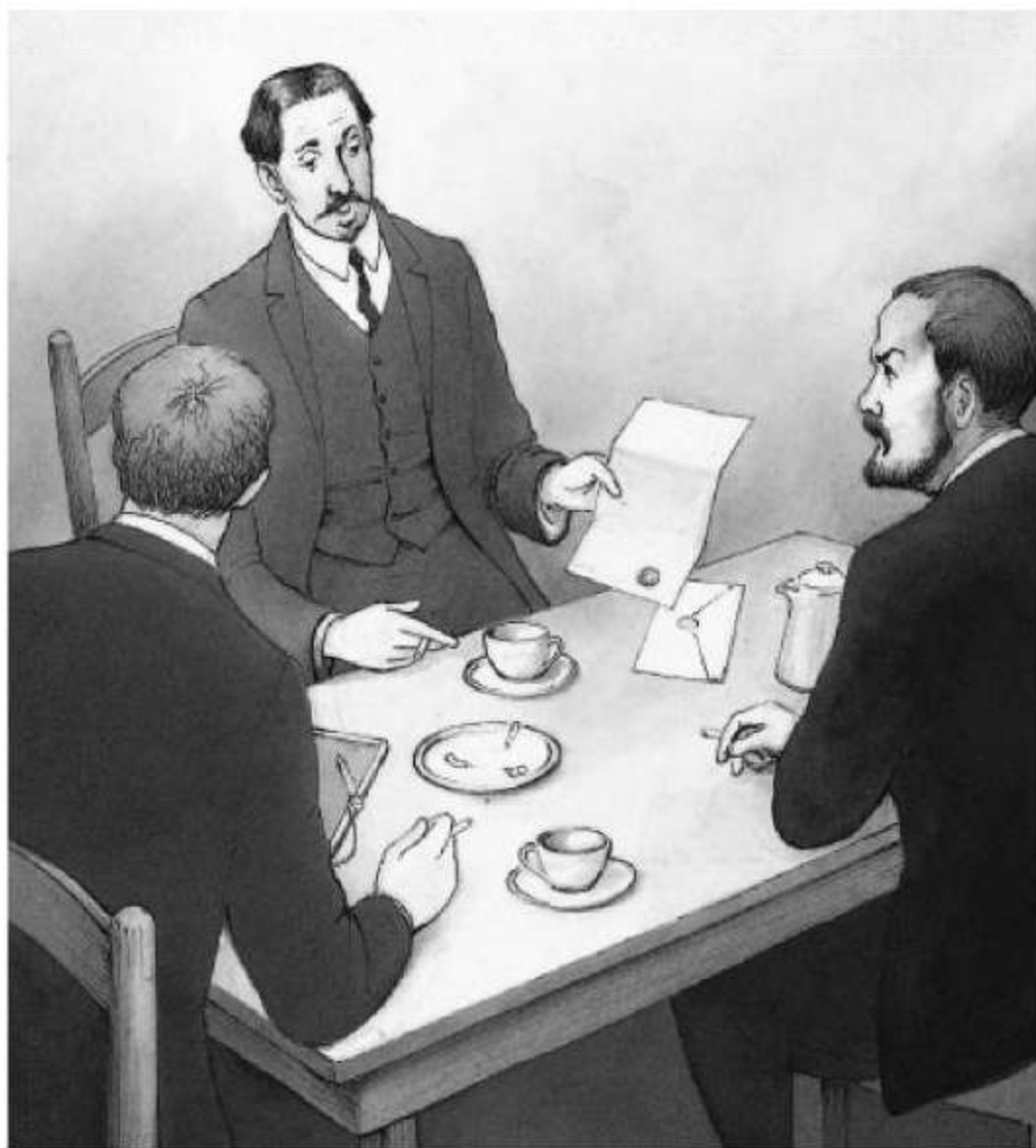
‘Do you want me to read the will to you?’ asked Liversage at last.

‘Yes,’ they both answered.

Liversage took the will out of his pocket. 'Now, I didn't make this will,' he said, 'so please don't get angry with me.' This is what he read.

You are both very stupid, John and Robert, and I've often said so. Nobody understands why you quarrelled like that about Annie Emery. *Your* life is difficult, but you've also been very unkind to Annie. She's waited ten years already. So, John, if you marry Annie Emery, I shall give all my money to you. And Robert, if you marry her, I shall give it all to you. And you must be married in twelve months' time. And if neither of you marry her, then I give all my money to Miss Annie Emery, businesswoman, of Duck Bank, Bursley.

Mary Ann Bott, widow



*'There. That's all.'*

'There. That's all,' Liversage finished.

'Let me see,' said John. Liversage gave him the will and he looked at it carefully.

Robert walked around the table and looked at the paper in his brother's hand.

All three men were silent for a few minutes. Each was afraid to speak, and even afraid to look at the others.

'Well, I must go,' said Liversage, standing up.

'I say,' said Robert. 'You won't say anything about this to Annie, will you?'

'I will say nothing,' agreed Liversage. (But it was wrong of

him to say this, because Annie already knew.)

The two brothers sat and thought for a long time.

Ten years before, when Annie was a woman of twenty-three, without family, she started a business for herself, which was a bookshop. John was in love with her, but so was Robert. And the two men quarrelled. They said very unkind, very unbrotherly things, and they were both very angry. Because of this (and because they were stupid), they each decided *not* to marry Annie. Each man wanted to show the other that *he* was the better, kinder, nicer brother. And so they did not speak for ten years. And poor Annie Emery, who wanted to marry one of the two (but could not decide which) did not marry anyone.

At two o'clock in the morning, John took a penny out of his pocket.



*'Who shall go first?'*

'Who shall go first?' he asked.

Robert felt very strange. His elder brother was speaking to him for the first time for ten years. For a minute he couldn't speak. John tossed the penny and put his hand over it.

'Heads or tails?' he asked.

'Tails,' said Robert.

But it was heads.



On Friday evening John knocked on the side door of Annie Emery's shop. While he stood there, he began to feel afraid. He still wanted to marry Annie, that was true. But how could he explain the last ten years? He began to hope that Annie was not there.

But the door opened, and there she was.

'Mr Hessian!' she cried, with a bright smile.

'I was just walking down Duck Bank,' he said. 'And I thought ...'

And in fifteen seconds he was inside the house, sitting down.



asking her the next day. And in another five minutes he was asking her to marry him, then and there.

She moved away from him quickly.

‘It’s very sudden. I must think about it,’ she answered.

How happy he was! Her answer would soon be yes, he was sure.

‘Will you be at church on Sunday?’ she asked.

‘Yes.’

‘If my answer is yes, I shall wear white flowers in my hat. I prefer to give you my answer like that, without words. And if I am not at church next week, I will be the week after.’

‘I understand,’ he said. ‘And if I do see those flowers, perhaps I can come to tea?’

‘Yes. But you mustn’t speak to me when I come out of church.’

He walked home down Oldcastle Street. He was a happy man – and he felt much younger than his forty-two years.



She was not at church on Sunday. Robert was away on business most of the week, and John was alone in the house. For many hours he sat at home, thinking about the next Sunday. Robert returned home on Friday.

On Sunday morning, John was up early. He put on his new shirt, which came from the best shop in Hanbridge. Robert was also out of bed early, and he was wearing a new shirt and a new suit. They had a silent breakfast.

‘I’m going to church this morning, Maggie,’ said Robert, finishing his breakfast. ‘Where are my new shoes?’

This was a surprise. Robert did not usually go to church.

They walked to church, with John fifty metres in front of his brother. When he came into the church, Miss Emery was not there. The service was beginning when she walked in. She was wearing white flowers on her hat! There were about a hundred and fifty-five white flowers – her hat was like a





coming round the corner at the other end of Duck Bank. They met outside Annie's door.

'What are you doing here?' asked Robert angrily.

'I'm coming to see Annie,' replied John, also very angry.

'So am I!'

'Well, you're too late,' said John. 'I've asked her to marry me. And she has said yes.'

'Don't be stupid,' replied Robert. 'She's marrying me!'

'When did you ask her?' asked John.

'On Friday.'

'And did she say yes?'

'Not on Friday. But her answer was to wear white flowers at church this morning.'

'That was for me!' said John.

The quarrel went on for some time.

'Come on,' said John. 'Let's go home. We can't talk in the street. Annie will see us from her window.'

They walked home quickly. And the quarrel went on at home all afternoon. It got noisier and angrier, and at six o'clock Maggie came into the room. She told the brothers that they must stop fighting at once. She then told them that she was leaving their house for ever.



'Why did you do it, my pet?' asked Powell Liversage.

He and Annie Emery were sitting in the garden of his house in Trafalgar Road.

'Why did I do it?' asked Annie. 'Oh, they were so stupid, Powell. I know they're your friends, but really! For ten years they said nothing to me, and then, because of their sister's money, they come to see me. And Powell, they were so stupid. They really thought that I liked them. I wanted them to meet at my house because I wanted to tell them what I thought of them. But I was watching from my bedroom window when they met in the street. They started to quarrel

again, and then they went away.'

'They'll be angry with me, I'm afraid,' said Powell. 'When they find out that we're going to get married. They'll say I want to marry you for the ...'

'I don't want the money, dear,' said Annie. 'They can keep their twelve thousand pounds.'

Powell was a little sorry to hear this, but he said, 'Yes, of course, dearest,' and took Annie's hand.

Just then Powell's mother, who lived with him, came down the garden.



*'I don't want the money, dear,' said Annie.  
'They can keep their twelve thousand pounds.'*

'Powell,' she said. 'John Hessian's here. He wants to see you.'

'I must go,' said Annie. 'I'll go across the fields. Good night, Mrs Liversage. Good night, Powell.'

Liversage went into the house and found John.

'Powell,' he said. 'I've quarrelled with Robert. I can't stay at home. Can I sleep in your spare room?'

'Of course, John, of course.'

'I think I'll go to bed now, if that's all right.'

An hour later there was another knock at the door, and

Liversage opened the door to Robert Hessian.

'Hallo, Powell,' said Robert. 'Can I sleep here tonight? I've had a terrible quarrel with John, and Maggie's gone, and I can't stay in the same house as John.'

'But what—'

'Look, I can't talk. I'll go up to your spare room.'

'All right,' said Liversage.

He took Robert up the stairs, opened the door to the spare room, pushed him in, and closed the door.

What a night!



*He pushed him in and closed the door.*

## GLOSSARY

**bachelor** a man who is not married and has never been married

**burglar** a person who breaks into houses to steal things

**burglary** when someone (a burglar) breaks into a house to steal things

**castle** a big, strong building

**coal** hard, black stone from under the ground; you burn it on a fire

**court** a place where the police take criminals (e.g. burglars); the court decides if they must go to prison

**elder** (*adj*) an elder brother is the older of two brothers

**engagement** when two people agree to marry

**eve** the day before (e.g. Christmas Eve is the day before Christmas Day)

**fair** honest; behaving to people in the right way

**frame** something made of wood or metal that goes around the outside of a picture

**hate** to dislike something very strongly; opposite of 'to love'

**mad** ill in the head

**magistrate** the most important person in a court, who decides if a person goes free or not

**missing** not there, or lost

**paint** (v) to make a picture with colours

**pet** a word you say to someone you like or love very much

**portrait** a painting of a person

**potter** a person who makes pottery

**pottery** plates, cups, etc. made out of clay and then baked

**problem** something that is very difficult

**proof** things that show if something is true or not

**pub** a place where people go to drink and meet their friends

**quarrel** a very angry argument

**rid (get rid of)** to free yourself of something or someone

**servant** someone who works in another person's house

**service** the singing and prayers in a church

**slate** a flat black stone used for writing on

**solicitor** a person whose job is helping people with the law

**spare (adj)** a spare room in a house is a room for visitors to sleep in

**stepfather** your mother's second husband (not your real father)

**success** doing something well; in this story, making a lot of money in business

**tail** the side of a coin (e.g. a penny) that does not have a picture of the king's or queen's head on it

**toss** to throw a coin (e.g. a penny) in the air

**widow** a woman whose husband has died

**will (n)** a letter to say what a person wants to do with their money after they are dead



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*Before Reading*

**1 Read the back cover of the book. What can you guess about the stories? Tick one box for each sentence.**

- |  | YES                      | NO                       |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 The Five Towns are in England.           |                          |                          |
| 2 The stories happen in the early 1900s.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 The people in the stories are all happy. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 The people in the stories are all poor.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5 The Five Towns are very dangerous.       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**2 Read the introduction on the first page of the book. How much do you know now about the stories? Match the people with information.**

*Sir Jee / Philip / Toby Hall / John and Robert Hessian*

- ... are brothers.
- ... has a picture of himself.
- ... makes a journey by train.
- ... is rich.
- ... is going to tell his mother something important.
- ... don't talk to each other.
- ... is going to visit a house in Child Row.
- ... have a problem about money.