



Library podcast

Thrilling Tales, A Storytime for Grownups presents: “The Open Window” by Saki, “The Romance of a Busy Broker by O Henry, “John Mortonson's Funeral” by Ambrose Bierce, “The Story Teller” by Saki, and “Revolt of the Gods” by Ambrose Bierce

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[00:00:44] Welcome, everybody, to Thrilling Tales: A Storytime for Grownups. Thrilling Tales happens on the first and third Monday of every month. Oh, my name is David Wright, I'm a librarian here, I work in the fiction department up on the third floor. “The Open Window” by H.H. Monro, better known as Saki. My aunt will be down presently, Mr Nuttall said, a very self-possessed young lady of fifteen. In the meantime, you must try to put up with me. Frampton Nuttall endeavoured to say the correct something which should duly flatter the niece of the moment without unduly discounting the aunt that was to come. Privately, he doubted more than ever whether these formal visits on a succession of total strangers would do much towards helping the nerve cure which he was supposed to be undergoing.

[00:01:46] I know how it will be. His sister had said when he was preparing to migrate to this rural retreat, you will bury yourself down there and not speak to a living soul, and your nerves will be worse than ever for the moping. I shall just give you letters of introduction to all the people I know there. Some of them, as far as I can remember, were quite nice.

[00:02:06] Frampton wondered whether Mrs Stapleton, the lady to whom he was presenting one of the letters of introduction, came into the nice division. Do you know many of the people round here? Asked the niece, when she judged that they had had sufficient silent communion.

[00:02:23] Hardly a soul, said Frampton. My sister was staying here at the rectory. You know, some four years ago. And she gave me letters of introduction to some of the people here.

[00:02:37] He made the last statement in a tone of distinct regret. Well, then, you know practically nothing about my aunt. Pursued the self-possessed young lady. Only her name and address, admitted the caller. He was wondering whether Mrs Stapleton was in the married or widowed state, and undefinable. Something about the room seemed to suggest masculine habitation. Her great tragedy happened just three years ago, said the child, that would be since your sister's time, her tragedy?

[00:03:11] Asked Frampton's. Somehow in this restful country spot, tragedies seemed out of place. You may wonder why we keep that window wide open on an October afternoon, said the niece, indicating a large French window that opened onto a lawn. It is quite warm for this time of the year, said Fountain. But has that window got anything to do with the tragedy?

[00:03:36] Out through that window three years ago to a day, her husband and her two young brothers went off for their day's shooting.

[00:03:45] They never came back in crossing the moor to their favorite sniper shooting ground. They were all three engulfed in a treacherous piece of bog. It had been that dreadful wet summer, you know, in places that were safe in other years, gave way suddenly without warning. Their bodies were never recovered. That was the dreadful part of it. Hear the child's voice lost its self-possessed note and became falteringly human. Poor aunt always thinks that they will come back someday. They and that little brown spaniel that was lost with them and walk in at that window, just as they used to do. That is why the window is kept open every evening till it is quite dusk.

[00:04:35] Poor dear aunt, she's often told me how they went out her husband with his white waterproof coat over his arm. And Ronney. Her youngest brother singing Bertie Wadia, bound, as he always did, to tease her, because she said it got on our nerves.

[00:04:51] You know, sometimes on still quiet evenings like this, I almost get a creepy feeling that they will all walk in through that window.

[00:05:04] She broke off with a little shudder. It was a relief to Frampton when they aren't bustled into the room with a world of apologies for being late in making her appearance up.

[00:05:14] I hope Vira has been amusing you. She said. She has been very interesting, said Frampton. I hope you don't mind the open window, said Mrs. Appleton briskly. My husband and brothers were home be home directly from shooting, and they always come in this way. They've been out for snipe on the marshes today, so he'll make a fine mess on my poor carpets. So like you men folk, isn't it? She rattled on cheerfully about the shooting and the scarcity of birds and the prospects for duck in the winter to Frampton. It was all purely horrible.

[00:05:48] He made a desperate but only partially successful effort to turn the talk on to a less ghastly topic. He was conscious that his hostess was giving him only a fragment of her attention, and her eyes were constantly straying past him to the open window and the long beyond.

[00:06:05] It was certainly an unfortunate coincidence that he should have paid his visit on this tragic anniversary.

[00:06:12] The doctors agree in ordering the complete rest, an absence of mental excitement and avoidance of anything in the nature of violent physical exercise, announced Frampton, who labored under the tolerably widespread delusion that total strangers and chance acquaintances are hungry for the least detail of one's ailments and infirmities, their cause and cure on the matter of diet.

[00:06:38] They were not so much in agreement, he continued. No, said Mrs. Stapleton in a voice which only replaced a yawn at the last moment. Then she suddenly brightened into alert attention. But not to what Frampton was saying.

[00:06:57] Here they are at last! She cried. Just in time for tea. And don't they look as if they were muddy up to the eyes?

[00:07:05] Frampton's shivered slightly and turned towards the knees with a look intended to convey sympathetic comprehension.

[00:07:13] The child was staring out through the open window with dazed horror in her eyes and a chill shock of nameless fear. Frampton's swung round in his seat and looked in the same direction. In the deepening twilight. Three figures were walking across the lawn towards the window. They all carried guns under their arms, and one of them was additionally burdened with a white coat hung over his shoulders. A tired brown spaniel kept close at their heels. Noiselessly. They neared the house. And then a horse. Young voice chanted out of the dusk. I said, Bertie, why are you bound? Frampton grabbed wildly at his stick and hat. The hall door. The gravel drive and the front gate were dimly noted stages in his headlong retreat. A cyclist coming along the road had to run into the hedge to avoid an imminent collision. Here we are, my dear, said the bearer of the white mackintosh, coming in through the window, fairly muddy. But most of it's dry. Who was that? Who bolted out as we came up? A most extraordinary man. Mr Nuttall said Mrs Stapleton could only talk about his illnesses and dashed off without a word of goodbye or apology when you arrived. One would think you'd seen a ghost.

[00:08:31] I expect it was the spaniel, said the niece calmly.

[00:08:36] He told me he had a horror of dogs.

[00:08:39] He was once hunted into a cemetery somewhere on the banks of the Ganges by a pack of pariah dogs, and he had to spend the night in a newly dug grave, with creatures snarling and grinning and foaming just above him. It's enough to make anyone lose their nerve.

[00:08:58] Romance at short notice was her specialty. Our second story in this festival of short shorts is "The Romance of a Busy Broker by O Henry.

[00:09:20] Pitcher, confidential clerk in the office of Harvey Maxwell broker allowed a look of mild interest and surprise to visit his usually expressionless countenance when his employer briskly entered at half past nine in company with his young lady stenographer with a snappy. Good morning, pitcher. Maxwell dashed at his desk as though he were intending to leap over it, and then plunged into the great heap of letters and telegrams waiting there for him. The young lady had been Maxwell's tomography for a year. She was beautiful in a way that was decidedly unstinted graphic. She four went to the pump of the alluring pompadour. She wore no chains, bracelets or lockets. She had not the air of being about to accept an invitation to luncheon.

[00:10:09] Her dress was gray and plain, but it fitted her figure with fidelity and discretion. In her neat black turbin hat was the gold green wing of a macaw.

[00:10:21] On this morning, she was softly and shyly radiant. Her eyes were dreamily bright, her cheeks genuine peach blow. Her expression, a happy one tinged with reminiscence. Pitchers still mildly curious, noticed a difference in her ways this morning, instead of going straight into the adjoining room where her desk was. She lingered, slightly irresolute in the outer office. Once she moved over by Maxwell's desk, near enough for him to be aware of her presence, the machine sitting at that desk was no longer a man.

[00:10:56] It was a busy New York broker, moved by buzzing wheels and uncoiled springs. Well, what is it? Anything? Asked Maxwell sharply. His opened mail lay like a bank of stage snow on his crowded desk. His keen grey eye, impersonal and brusque, flashed upon her half impatiently. Nothing, answered the stenographer, moving away with a little smile. Mr. Pitcher! She said to the confidential clerk. Did Mr. Maxwell say anything yesterday about engaging another stenographer? He did. Answered Pitcher. He told me to get another one. I notified the agency yesterday afternoon to send over a few samples this morning. It's nine forty five o'clock, and not a single picture. Had a piece of pineapple chewing gum shown up yet. I will do the work as usual, then, said the young lady, until someone comes to fill the place. And she went to her desk at once and hung the black turbin hat with a gold green Macall wing, and it's a custom place. He who has been denied the spectacle of a busy Manhattan broker during a rush of business, is handicapped for the profession of anthropology.

[00:12:05] The poet sings of the crowded hour of glorious life. The brokers hour is not only crowded, but the minutes and seconds are hanging to all the straps and packing both front and rear platforms. And this day was Harvey Maxwell's busy day. The ticker began to reel out jerkily in fitful coils of tape. The desk telephone had a chronic attack of buzzing. Men began to throng into the office and call at him over the railing jovially, sharply, viciously, excitedly. Messenger boys ran in and out with messages and telegrams. The clerks in the office jumped about like sailors during a storm. Even pitcher's face relaxed into something resembling animation on the exchange. There were hurricanes and landslides and snow storms and glaciers and volcanoes, and those elemental disturbances were reproduced in miniature in brokers offices. Maxwell shoved his chair against the wall and transacted business after the manner of a toad dancer. He jumped from ticker to phone, from desk to door with a trained agility of a harlequin in the midst of this growing and important stress. The broker became

suddenly aware of a high ruled fringe of golden hair under a knotting canopy of velvet and ostrich tips and imitation sealskin sac and a string of beads as large as hickory nuts ending near the floor with a silver heart.

[00:13:26] There was a self-possessed young lady connected with these accessories, and pitcher was there to construe her lady from the stenographer's agency to see about the position, said Pitcher.

[00:13:37] Maxwell turned half around with his hands full of papers and ticker-tape. What position? He asked, with a frown. Position of stenographer's, said Pitcher.

[00:13:44] You told me yesterday to call him up and have one. Send one over this morning.

[00:13:48] You are losing your mind, pitcher, said Maxwell. Why should I have given you any such instructions? Ms. Leslie has given perfect satisfaction during the year she's been here. The place is hers as long as she chooses to retain it. There's no place open here, ma'am. COUNTERMAN that order with the agency pitcher. And don't bring any more of them in here. The Silver Heart left the office swinging and banging itself independently against office furniture as it indignantly departed, Pitcher seized a moment to remark to the bookkeeper that the old man's home to get more absent minded and forgetful every day of the world, the rush and pace of business grew fiercer and faster on the floor. They were pounding half a dozen stocks in which Maxwell's customers were heavy investors. Orders to buy and sell were coming and going as swift as the flight of swallows. Some of his own holdings were imperiled and the man was working like some high gear, delicate, strong machine strung to full tension, going at full speed, accurate, never hesitating with a proper word and decision and act ready and pumped as clockwork. Stocks and bonds. Loans and mortgages. Margins and securities. Here was a world of finance.

[00:14:57] And there was no room in it for the human world or the world of nature. When the luncheon hour drew near, there came a slight lull in the uproar. Maxwell stood by his desk with his hands full of telegrams and memoranda, with a fountain pen over his right ear and his hair hanging and disorderly strings over his forehead. His window was open for the beloved janitor. This spring turned on a little warmth through the waking registers of the earth, and through the window came a wandering, perhaps a lost odor, a delicate, sweet odor of lilac that fixed the broker for a moment.

[00:15:36] Immovable for this odor belong to Miss Leslie. It was her own, and hers only. The odor brought her vividly, almost tangibly before him. The world of finance dwindled suddenly to a speck and she was in the next room 20 steps away. By George I'll do it now, said Maxwell half aloud. I'll ask her now. I wonder. I didn't do it long ago. He dashed into the inner office with the haste of a short. Trying to cover, he charged upon the desk of the stenographer. She looked up at him with a smile. A soft pink crept over her cheek, and her eyes were kind and frank. Maxwell leaned one elbow on her desk. He still clutched fluttering papers with both hands, and the pen was above his ear. Miss Leslie, he began hurriedly, I have got a moment to spare, and I want to say something in that moment. Will you be my wife?

[00:16:30] I haven't had time to make love to you in the ordinary way, but I really do love you. I talk quick, please. The fellows are clubbing the stuffing out of Union Pacific.

[00:16:40] What are you talking about? Exclaimed the young lady. She rose to her feet and gazed upon him round eyed Douglas.

[00:16:48] Don't you understand? Said Maxwell RESTFULLY. I want you to marry me. I love you, Miss Leslie. I wanted to tell you I snatched a minute when things that slackened up a bit. They're calling me on the phone now. Tell him to wait a minute. Pitcher, won't you miss Leslie?

[00:17:01] This demographer acted very queerly at first she seemed overcome with amazement, then tears flowed from her wondering eyes, and then she smiled Summerlee through them, and one of her arms slid tenderly about the broker's neck. I know how, she said softly. It's this old business that has driven everything else out of your head for the time. I was frightened at first. Don't you remember, Harvey? We were married last evening at eight o'clock in the little church around the corner.

[00:17:41] The end.

[00:17:48] And another one story number three. This is called "John Mortonson's Funeral" and it's by Ambrose Bierce.

[00:18:03] John Mortonson was dead. His lines in the tragedy, man, had all been spoken and he had left the stage.

[00:18:11] The body rested in a fine mahogany coffin, fitted with a plate of glass. All the arrangements for the funeral had been so well attended to that had the deceased known, he doubtless would have approved the face as it showed under the glass was not disagreeable to look upon. It bore a faint smile, and, as the death had been painless, had not been distorted beyond the repairing power of the undertaker. At two o'clock of the afternoon, the friends were to assemble, to pay their last tribute of respect to one who had no further need of friends or respect. The surviving members of the family came severally every few minutes to the casket, and wept above the placid features beneath the glass.

[00:18:54] This did them no good. It did no good to John Mortonson. But in the presence of death, reason and philosophy are silent.

[00:19:02] As the hour of two approached, the friends began to arrive, and after offering such consolation to the stricken relatives as the proprieties of the occasion required, solemnly seated themselves about the room with an augmented consciousness of their importance in the scheme funereal. Then the minister came, and then that overshadowing presence, the lesser lights went into eclipse. His entrance was followed by that of the widow whose lamentations filled the room. She approached the casket, and after leaning her face against the cold glass for a moment, was gently led

to a seat near her daughter. Mournfully and below, the man of God began his eulogy of the dead, and his doleful voice mingled with the sobbing, which was its purpose to stimulate and sustain.

[00:19:50] Rose and fell, seemed to come and go like the sound of a sullen sea. The gloomy day grew darker as he spoke. A curtain of cloud under spread the sky, and a few drops of rain fell audibly. It seemed as if all nature were weeping for John Mortenson. When the minister had finished his eulogy with prayer, a hymn was sung and the pallbearers took their places beside the beer. As the last notes of the hymn died away, the widow ran to the coffin, cast herself upon it and sobbed hysterically. Gradually, however, she yielded to dissuasion, becoming more composed and as the minister was in the act of leading her away. Her eyes saw the face of the dead beneath the glass. She threw up her arms, and with a shriek, fell backward, insensible. The mourners sprang forward to the coffin.

[00:20:49] The friends followed, and as the clock on the mantel solemnly struck, three all were staring down upon the face of John Mortonson, deceased.

[00:20:58] They turned away, sick and faint.

[00:21:01] One man trying in his terror to escape the awful sight, stumbled against the coffin so heavily as to knock away one of its frail supports. The coffin fell to the floor. The glass was shattered to bits by the concussion.

[00:21:17] From the opening crawled.

[00:21:19] John Mortonson's cat, which lazily leapt to the floor, sat up tranquilly, wiped its crimson muzzle with a for Paul, and then walked with dignity from the room.

[00:21:45] Story number four.

[00:21:49] This one is called "The Story Teller" and it's by Saki.

[00:21:57] It was a hot afternoon and the railway carriage was correspondingly sultry and the next stop was Temple Combe, nearly an hour ahead.

[00:22:06] The occupants of the carriage were a small girl and a smaller girl and a small boy. An aunt belonging to the children occupied one corner seat and the further corner seat in the opposite side was occupied by a bachelor who was a stranger to their party. But the small girls and the small boy emphatically occupied the compartment. Both the aunt and the children were conversational and limited, persistent way, reminding one of the attentions of a housefly that refuses to be discouraged.

[00:22:38] Most of the aunts remarks seemed to begin with DoN'T, and nearly all of the children's remarks began with why The Bachelor said Nothing out loud.

[00:22:47] Don't O! Don't! Exclaimed the end, as the small boy began smacking the cushions of the seat, producing a cloud of dust at each blow.

[00:22:55] Come and look out of the window, she added. The child moved reluctantly to the window. Why are those sheep being driven out of that field? He asked. I expect they're being driven to another field where there is more grass, said the aunt weakly.

[00:23:10] There's lots of grass in that field, protested the boy. There's nothing else but grass there, and there's lots of grass in that field. But perhaps the grass in the other field is better, suggested the aunt fatuously. Why is it better? Came the swift, inevitable question. Oh, look at those cows! Exclaimed the aunt. Nearly every field along the line had contained cows or bullocks. But she spoke as though she were drawing attention to a rarity. Why does the grass and the other feel better, persisted zero. The frown on the bachelor's face was deepening to a scowl. He was a hard, unsympathetic man. The aunt decided in her mind she was utterly unable to come to any satisfactory decision about the grass in the other field. The smaller girl created a diversion by beginning to recite on the road to Mandalay. She only knew the first line, but she put her limited knowledge to the fullest possible use. She repeated the line over and over again in a dreamy but resolute and very audible voice. It seemed to The Bachelor as though someone had had a bet with her that she could not repeat the line aloud two thousand times without stopping whoever it was had made. The wager was likely to lose his bet. Come over here and listen to a story, said the aunt. When the Bachelor had looked twice at her, and once that the communication cord, the children moved listlessly toward the Enns end of the carriage. Evidently, her reputation as a storyteller did not rank high in their estimation, in a low, confidential voice, interrupted at frequent intervals by loud, petulant questionings from her listeners.

[00:24:45] She began an enterprising and deplorably an interesting story about a little girl who was good and made friends with everyone on account of her goodness, and was finally saved from a mad bull by a number of rescuers who admired her moral character. When they have saved her, if she hadn't been good, demanded the bigger of the small girls, it was exactly the question that The Bachelor had wanted to ask. Well, yes, admitted the aunt lamely, but I don't think they would have run quite so fast if they hadn't liked her so much.

[00:25:18] It's the stupidest story I ever heard! Said the bigger of the small girls with immense conviction. I didn't listen after the first bit. It was so stupid, said Serul. The smaller girl made no actual comment on the story, but she had long ago recommence to murmuring repetition of her favorite line. You don't seem much of a success as a storyteller, said The Bachelor, suddenly from his corner. The aunt bristled in instant defense at this unexpected attack. It's a very difficult thing to tell stories that children can both understand and appreciate, she said stiffly. I don't agree with you, said The Bachelor. Perhaps you would like to tell them a story. Tell us the story. Demanded the bigger of the small girls. Once upon a time began The Bachelor. There was a little girl called Bertha who was extraordinarily good. The children's momentarily aroused interest began at once to flicker. All stories seem dreadfully alike, no matter who told them. She did all that she was told, and she was always truthful. She kept her clothes clean, eight milk puddings as though they were jam tarts, learned her

lessons perfectly, and was polite in her manners. Well, she pretty asked the bigger of the small girls. Not as pretty as any of you, said The Bachelor. But she was horribly good. There was a wave of reaction in favor of the story. The word horrible in connection with goodness' was a novelty that commended itself. It seemed to introduce a ring of truth that was absent from the Arndt's Tales of infant life. She was so good, said The Bachelor, that she won several medals for goodness, which she always wore pinned on to address.

[00:27:04] There was a a medal for obedience. Another medal for punctuality. And a third for good behavior. They were large metal medals, and they clicked against one another as she walked. No other child in the town where she lived had as many as three medals, so everybody knew that she must be an extra good child. Horribly good quoted zero. Everybody talked about her goodness, and the prince of the country got to hear about it. And he said that as she was so very good, she might be allowed once a week to walk in his park, which was just outside of the town. It was a beautiful park, and no children were ever allowed in it. So it was a great honor for Bertha to be allowed to go there. Were there any sheep in the park? Demanded zero. No, said The Bachelor. There were no sheep. Why weren't there any sheep? Came the inevitable question arising out of that answer. The aunt permitted herself a smile, which might almost have been described as a grin. There were no sheep in the park, said The Bachelor, because the prince's mother had once had a dream that her son would either be killed by a sheep or else by a clock falling on him. And for that reason, the prince never kept sheep in his park or a clock in his palace. The aunt suppressed a gasp of admiration. Was the prince killed by a sheep or a clock? Asked Zero. Well, he's still alive, so he can't tell whether the dream will come true. Said The Bachelor, unconcerned oddly anyway. There were no sheep in the park, but there were lots of little pigs running all over the place.

[00:28:32] What color? Where they. Black with white faces and white with black spots. Black all over, gray with white patches. And some were white all over. The storyteller paused to let a full idea of the park's treasures sink into the children's imaginations. Then he resumed. Bertha was rather sorry to find that there were no flowers in the park. She had promised her aunt's with tears in her eyes that she would not pick any of the kind prince's flowers and she'd meant to keep her promise. Of course, it made her feel silly to find there were no flowers to pick. Why weren't there any flowers? Because the pigs, it eaten them all, said The Bachelor promptly. The gardeners told the prince that you couldn't have pigs and flowers. So he decided to have pigs and no flowers. There was a murmur of approval at the excellence of the prince's decisions. So many people would have decided the other way. There were lots of other delightful things in the park. There were ponds with gold and blue and green fish in them, and trees with beautiful parrots that said clever things at a moment's notice and hummingbirds that hummed all the popular tunes of the day. And Bertha walked up and down and enjoyed herself immensely, and thought to herself. If I were not so extraordinarily good, I should not have been allowed to come into this beautiful park and enjoy all that there is to be seen in it. And her three medals clink against one another as she walked and helped to remind her how very good she really was.

[00:30:05] Just then, an enormous wolf came in prowling into the park to see if it could catch a fat little pig for its supper. What color was it? Asked the children, amid an immediate quickening of interest,

mud colored all over with a black tongue and pale gray eyes that gleamed with unspeakable ferocity. The first thing that it saw in the park was Bertha. Her pinafore was so spotlessly white and clean that it could be seen from a great distance. Bertha saw the wolf and saw that it was stealing towards her, and she began to wish that she'd never been allowed to come into the park. She ran as hard as she could, and the wolf came after her with huge leaps and bounds. She managed to reach a shrubbery of myrtle bushes, and she hid herself in one of the thickest of the bushes. The wolf came sniffing among the branches. Its black tongue lolling out of its mouth and its pale grey eyes clearing with rage. Bertha was terribly frightened and thought to herself, If I had not been so extraordinarily good, I should have been safe in town at this moment.

[00:31:15] However, the scent of the myrtle was so strong that the wolf could not sniff out where Bertha was hiding. And the bushes were so thick that he might have hunted about in them for a long time without catching side of her. So we thought he might as well go off and catch a little pig instead. Bertha was trembling very much at having the wolf prowling and sniffing so near her, and she trembled the middle for obedience, clicked against the medals for good conduct and punctuality. The wolf was just moving away when he heard the sound of the medals clinking, and he stopped to listen. And they Klink began in a bush quite near him.

[00:31:58] He dashed into the bush. His pale grey eyes gleaming with ferocity and triumph, and dragged Bertha out and devoured her to the last morsel.

[00:32:07] All that was left of her were her shoes and bits of clothing and the three medals for goodness. Weren't any of the little pigs killed? No. They all escaped. The story began badly, said the smaller of the small girls. But it had a beautiful ending.

[00:32:28] It's the most beautiful story I ever heard, said the bigger of the small girls with immediate decision. It's the only beautiful story I ever heard, said Zero. A dissenting opinion came from the Omed, a most improper story to tell to young children. You have undermined the effects of years of careful teaching at any rates of The Bachelor collecting his belongings preparatory to leaving the carriage. I kept him quiet for ten minutes, which was more than you were able to do. Unhappy woman, he observed to himself as he walked down the platform of Temple Combe Station. For the next six months or so, those children will assail her in public with demands for an improper story. Thank you. It is 20 minutes to 1. For those of you who can stay. I have an improper story.

[00:33:26] This is "Revolt of the Gods" by Ambrose Bierce.

[00:33:34] My father was a deodorizer of dead dogs. My mother kept the only shop for the sale of cats food in my native city. They did not live happily. The difference in social rank was a chasm which could not be bridged by the vows of marriage. It was indeed an ill assorted and most unlucky alliance, as might have been foreseen. It ended in disaster one morning after the customary squabbles at breakfast. My father rose from the table, quivering and pale with wrath, and proceeded to the parsonage and thrashed the clergyman who had performed the marriage ceremony. While the act was generally condemned and public feeling ran so high against the offender that people would

permit dead dogs to lie on their property until the fragrance was deafening. Rather than employ him and the municipal authorities suffered one bloated old mastiff to utter itself from a public square and so clamorous and exhalation that passing strangers suppose themselves to be in the vicinity of a saw mill. My father was indeed unpopular during these dark days. The family's sole dependence was on my mother's emporium for cat's meat. The business was profitable in that city, which was the oldest in the world. The cat was an object of veneration. Its worship was the religion of the country. The multiplication and addition of cats was a perpetual instruction in arithmetic. Naturally, any inattention to the wants of a cat was punished with great severity in this world and the next. So my good mother numbered her patrons by the hundred, still with an unproductive husband and seventeen children. She had some difficulty in making both ends meet, and at last. The necessity of increasing the discrepancy between the cost price and the selling price of her carnal wares drove her to inexpedient, which proved eminently disastrous. She conceived the unlucky notion of retaliating by refusing to sell Cat's meat until the boycott was taken off her husband.

[00:35:36] Well, on the day when she put this resolution into practice, the shop was thronged with excited customers and others extended in turbulent, restless masses up fourth streets out of sight. Inside, there was nothing but cursing, crowding, shouting and menace. Intimidation was freely resorted to. Several of my younger brothers and sisters being threatened with cutting up for the cats. But my mother was as firm as a rock.

[00:35:59] And the day was a black one for Saadeh Bassat, the ancient and sacred city that was the scene of these events. The lockout was vigorously maintained and 750000 cats went to bed hungry.

[00:36:13] The next morning, the city was found to have been placard at during the night with a proclamation by the Federated Union of Old Maids. This ancient and powerful order averred through its supreme executive head that the boycotting of my father and the retaliatory lockout of my mother were seriously imperiling the interests of religion.

[00:36:31] The proclamation went on to state that if arbitration were not adopted by noon that day, that all the old maids of the federation would strike and strike.

[00:36:40] They did. The next act of this unhappy drama was an insurrection of cats. These sacred animals, seeing themselves doomed to starvation, held a mass meeting and marched in procession through the streets, swearing and spitting like fiends.

[00:36:57] This revolt of the gods produced such consternation that many pious persons died of fright and all business was suspended to bury them and to pass terrifying resolutions. Well, matters were now about as bad as it seemed possible for them to be. Meetings among representatives of the hostile interests were held, but no understanding was arrived at. That would hold. Every agreement was broken as soon as it was made, and each element of the discord was frantically appealing to the people.

[00:37:26] A new horror was in store.

[00:37:29] It will be remembered that my father was a deodorizer of dead dogs, but was unable to practice is useful and humble profession because no one would employ him. The dead dogs, in consequence, wreaked rascally. Then they struck from every vacant lot and public dumping ground from every hedge and ditch and gutter and sister and every crystal real.

[00:37:50] And the clobbered waters of all the canals and estuaries, from all the places in short, which from time immemorial had been pre-empted by dead dogs and consecrated to the uses of them and their heirs and successors forever. They trooped in numerous ghastly crew. Their procession was a mile in length. Midway of the town. It met with a procession of cats in full song. The cats instantly exalted their backs and magnified their tails. The dead dogs uncovered their teeth as in life, and erected such of their bristles as still adhere to the skin.

[00:38:25] The carnage that ensued was too awful for relation.

[00:38:29] The light of the sun was obscured by flying fur, and the battle was waged in the dark. Blindly and regardless, the swearing of the cats was audible miles away while the fragrance of the dead dogs desolated seven provinces, how the battle might have resulted. It is impossible to say. But when it was at its fiercest, the Federated Union of Old Maids came running down a side street and sprang into the thickness of the fray. A moment later, my mother herself bore down upon the warring hosts, brandishing a cleaver, and laid about her with great freedom and impartiality. My father joined the fight. The municipal authorities engaged and the general public converging on the battlefield from all points of the compass consumed itself in the center as it pressed in from the circumference. Last of all, the dead held a meeting in the cemetery and resolving on a general strike began to destroy vault's tombs, monuments, headstones, willows, angels and young sheep in marble, everything they could lay their hands on by nightfall. The living and the dead were alike, exterminated.

[00:39:41] And where the ancient and sacred city of Star Dasa had stood. Nothing remained but an excavation filled with dead bodies and building materials, shreds of cat and blue patches of decayed dog. The place is now a vast pool of stagnant water in the center of a desert.

[00:40:02] The stirring events of these few days constituted my industrial education and so well have I improved my advantages that I am now chief of misrule to the Dukes of Disorder, an organization numbering some 13 million American working men.

[00:40:32] This podcast was presented by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.