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Mr. Gray's Strange Story

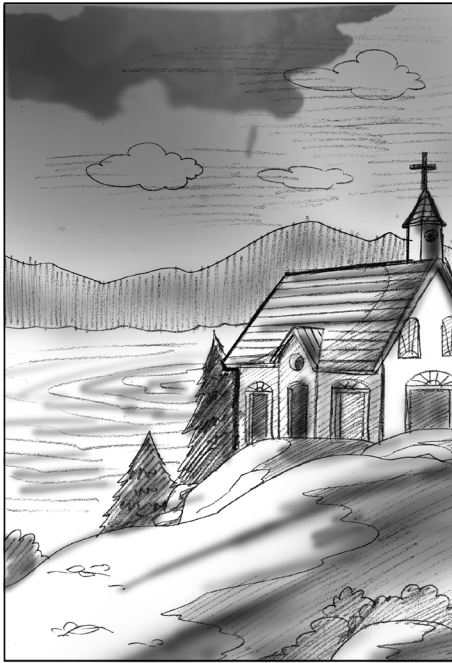
Beyond the Wall of Sleep



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F-2/16, Ansari road, Daryaganj, New Delhi-110002

☎ 23240026, 23240027 • Fax: 011-23240028

Email: info@vspublishers.com • Website: www.vspublishers.com

Regional Office : Hyderabad

5-1-707/1, Brij Bhawan (Beside Central Bank of India Lane)

Bank Street, Koti, Hyderabad - 500 095

☎ 040-24737290

E-mail: vspublishershyd@gmail.com

Branch Office : Mumbai

Jaywant Industrial Estate, 1st Floor-108, Tardeo Road

Opposite Sobo Central Mall, Mumbai – 400 034

☎ 022-23510736

E-mail: vspublishersmum@gmail.com

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Publisher's Note

It has been our constant endeavour at the **V&S Publishers** to publish all kinds of books ranging from Fiction, Non-fiction, Storybooks, Children Encyclopaedias, to Self-Help, Science Books, Dictionaries, Grammar Books, Self-Development, Management Books, etc.

However, this is for the first time that we are venturing into the vast, rich and fathomless ocean of English Literature and have come up with a set of *ten storybooks called the Greatest Classic Series* authored by some of the greatest and eminent writers of the world. There is a lot to learn from their writing style, selection of plot, development and building of theme and suspense of the story, emphasis and presentation of characters, dialogues, working towards the climax of the story, presenting the climax, and then finally concluding the story.

Each these books are of about 200 pages containing around ten popular stories or more of renowned authors like Oscar Wilde, Ernest William Hornung, Guy de Maupassant, O. Henry, Saki, Washington Irving, Thomas Hardy, Charles Dickens, Jules Verne, Jack London, Mark Twain, Edgar Allen Poe, H.G.Wells, Ambrose Bierce, Amelia Edwards, Edith Wharton, Wilkie Collins and many more. The series is called The Greatest Classic Series as all the names of the books begin with the word, 'Greatest' like the Greatest Adventurous Stories, Greatest Detective Stories, Greatest Love Stories, Greatest Ghost Stories, and so on. Besides this, three of the ten books are exclusively on the Adventures of Sherlock Holmes, one of the best detectives the world has ever known written by none other than Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

Besides the above mentioned characteristics, the books contain an introductory page before each story introducing the author, his brief life history, notable works and literary achievements. Each story has a set of word meanings on each page followed by an exercise meant exclusively aiming the school students to help them grasp the essence of the story easily and quickly.

These books are not only a boon for the school-going students, particularly studying in senior classes from the seventh standard till the twelfth, but are also a treasure trove for all those young and aspiring writers, voracious readers and lovers of English language and literature.

Each of these ten books focus on a theme, such as adventure, love, terror, humour, or supernatural happenings, and are so captivating and real to life that readers may find it difficult to choose from them and so it's better to pick the entire series.

Wishing you all a happy and enjoyable reading...

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Ambrose Gwinnett Bierce



Born on June 24, 1842

Died on sometime after December 26, 1913

Notable Works: *The Fiend's Delight*, *The Devil's Dictionary*, *The Cynic's Word Book*, *Collected Works* and a number of ghost stories and realistic and short war stories, such as: 'An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge', 'The Boarded Window', 'Killed at Resaca', and 'Chickamauga'. He also published several volumes of poetry like the *Fantastic Fables*. He published a column called 'Prattle' and became one of the first regular columnists and editorialists to be employed on William Randolph Hearst's newspaper, the *San Francisco Examiner*,

Honours: At least three films have been made of Bierce's story, 'An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge'. A silent film version, *The Bridge*, was made in 1929. A French version called *La Rivière du Hibou*, directed by Robert Enrico, was released in 1962 and another version, directed by Brian James Egen, was released in 2005.

Early life

Ambrose Gwinnett Bierce, an American editorialist, journalist, short story writer, fabulist and satirist was born on June 24, 1842. Bierce was born at Horse Cave Creek in Meigs County, Ohio to Marcus Aurelius Bierce and Laura Sherwood Bierce. His parents were a poor, but literary couple who instilled in him a deep love for books and writing. The boy grew up in Kosciusko County, Indiana, attending high school at the county seat, Warsaw.

Military Career

At the outset of the American Civil War, Bierce enlisted in the Union Army's 9th Indiana Infantry Regiment. He participated in the Operations in Western Virginia campaign (1861), and was present at the "first battle" at Philippi. He received newspaper attention for his daring rescue, under fire, of a gravely wounded comrade at the Battle of Rich Mountain. In February 1862, he was commissioned First Lieutenant, and served on the staff of General William Babcock Hazen as a topographical engineer, making maps of likely battlefields.

Bierce fought at the Battle of Shiloh (April 1862), a terrifying experience that became a source for several later short stories and the memoir, 'What I Saw of Shiloh'. Bierce received the rank of *brevet major* before resigning from the Army.

Journalistic Career

Bierce remained in San Francisco for many years, eventually becoming famous as a contributor and/or editor for a number of local newspapers and periodicals, including

The San Francisco News Letter, The Argonaut, the Overland Monthly, The Californian and The Wasp. A selection of his crime reporting from *The San Francisco News Letter* was included in The Library of America anthology *True Crime*.

Literary Works and Achievements

Bierce was considered a **master of pure English** by his contemporaries, and virtually everything that came from his pen was notable for its judicious wording and economy of style. He wrote in a variety of literary genres.

Bierce lived and wrote in England from 1872 to 1875, contributing to *Fun* magazine. His first book, *The Fiend's Delight*, a compilation of his articles, was published in London in 1873 by John Camden Hotten under the pseudonym, "Dod Grile. Returning to the United States, he again took up residence in San Francisco. From 1879 to 1880, he travelled to Rockerville and Deadwood in the Dakota Territory, to try his hand as local manager for a New York mining company, but when the company failed he, returned to San Francisco and resumed his career in journalism.

In 1887, he published a column called 'Prattle' and became one of the first regular columnists and editorialists to be employed on William Randolph Hearst's newspaper, the *San Francisco Examiner*, eventually becoming one of the most prominent and influential among the writers and journalists of the West Coast. He remained associated with Hearst Newspapers until 1906.

His short stories are held among the best of the 19th century, providing a popular following based on his roots. He wrote realistically of the terrible things he had seen in the war in such stories as "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge", "The Boarded Window", "Killed at Resaca", and "Chickamauga". In addition to his ghost and war stories, he also published several volumes of poetry. His *Fantastic Fables* anticipated the ironic style of grotesquerie that became a more common genre in the 20th century.

One of Bierce's most famous works is his much-quoted book, *The Devil's Dictionary*, originally an occasional newspaper item which was first published in book form in 1906 as *The Cynic's Word Book*. It consists of satirical definitions of English words and political double-talk. Bierce's twelve-volume, *Collected Works* were published in 1909, the seventh volume of which consists solely of *The Devil's Dictionary*, the title Bierce himself preferred to *The Cynic's Word Book*.

Writing Style

Despite his reputation as a searing critic, Bierce was known to encourage younger writers, including poet George Sterling and fiction writer W. C. Morrow. Bierce had a distinctive style of writing, especially in his stories. His style often embraces **an abrupt beginning, dark imagery, vague references to time, limited descriptions, impossible events and the theme of war.**

Disappearance

In October 1913, the 71-year old Bierce, departed to Washington, D.C., for a tour of his old Civil War battlefields. By December, he had proceeded through Louisiana and Texas, crossing by way of El Paso into Mexico, which was in the throes of revolution. Bierce travelled to Mexico to gain a first-hand experience of the Mexican Revolution. While traveling with the rebel troops, he disappeared without a trace.

Trivia

Ambrose Gwinnett Bierce was the tenth of the thirteen children that his parents had, and his father gave all of them names beginning with the letter, “A”.



The Baby Tramp

—Ambrose Bierce

Blackburg

IF you had seen little Jo standing at the street corner in the rain, you would hardly have admired him. It was apparently an ordinary autumn rainstorm, but the water which fell upon Jo (who was hardly old enough to be either just or unjust, and so perhaps did not come under the law of impartial distribution) appeared to have some property peculiar to itself: one would have said it was dark and adhesive -- sticky. But that could hardly be so, even in Blackburg, where things certainly did occur that were a good deal out of the common.

For example, ten or twelve years before, a shower of small frogs had fallen, as is credibly attested by a *contemporaneous* chronicle, the record concluding with a somewhat *obscure* statement to the effect that the chronicler considered it good growing-weather for Frenchmen.

Some years later, Blackburg had a fall of crimson snow; it is cold in Blackburg when winter is on, and the snows are frequent and deep. There can be no doubt of it -- the snow in this instance was of the colour of blood and melted into water of the same hue, if water it was, not blood. The phenomenon had attracted wide attention, and science had as many explanations as there were scientists who knew nothing about it. But the men of Blackburg--men who for many years had lived right there where the red snow fell, and might be supposed to know a good deal about the matter--shook their heads and said something would come of it.

And something did, for the next summer was made memorable by the *prevalence* of a mysterious disease--epidemic, endemic, or the Lord knows what, though the physicians didn't--which carried away a full half of the population. Most of the other half carried themselves away and were slow to return, but finally came back, and were now increasing and multiplying as before, but Blackburg had not since been altogether the same.

Of quite another kind, though equally 'out of the common,' was the incident of Hetty Parlow's ghost. Hetty Parlow's maiden name had been Brownon, and in Blackburg that meant more than one would think.

Peculiar – Strange
Contemporaneous –
Originating
Obscure – Not
known about
Prevalence –
Occurrence



The Brownons had from time *immemorial*--from the very earliest of the old colonial days--been the leading family of the town. It was the richest and it was the best, and Blackburg would have shed the last drop of its plebeian blood in defence of the Brownon fair fame. As few of the family's members had ever been known to live permanently away from Blackburg, although most of them were educated elsewhere and nearly all had travelled, there was quite a number of them. The men held most of the public offices, and the women were foremost in all good works. Of the latter, Hetty was most beloved by reason of the sweetness of her *disposition*, the purity of her character and her singular personal beauty. She married in Boston a young scape-grace named Parlow, and like a good Brownon brought him to Blackburg forthwith and made a man and a town councillor of him. They had a child which they named Joseph and dearly loved, as was then the fashion among parents in that region. Then they died of the mysterious disorder already mentioned, and at the age of one whole year Joseph set up as an orphan.

Unfortunately for Joseph, the disease which had cut off his parents did not stop at that; it went on and *extirpated* nearly the whole Brownon contingent and its allies by marriage; and those who fled did not return. The tradition was broken, the Brownon estates passed into alien hands, and the only Brownons remaining in that place were underground in Oak Hill Cemetery, where, indeed, was a colony of them powerful enough to resist the *encroachment* of surrounding tribes and hold the best part of the grounds. But about the ghost:

One night, about three years after the death of Hetty Parlow, a number of the young people of Blackburg were passing Oak Hill Cemetery in a wagon--if you have been there you will remember that the road to Greenton runs alongside it on the south. They had been attending a May Day festival at Greenton; and that serves to fix the date. Altogether there may have been a dozen, and a jolly party they were, considering the legacy of gloom left by the town's recent sombre experiences. As they passed the cemetery, the man driving suddenly reined in his team with an exclamation of surprise. It was sufficiently surprising, no doubt, for just ahead, and almost at the roadside, though inside the cemetery, stood the ghost of Hetty Parlow. There could be no doubt of it, for she had been personally known to every youth and maiden in the party. That established the thing's identity; its character as ghost was signified by all the customary signs--the shroud, the long,

Immemorial –
Ancient

Disposition –
Personality

Extirpated – To
destroy totally

Encroachment –
Infringement

undone hair, the 'far-away look'--everything. This disquieting *apparition* was stretching out its arms towards the west, as if in supplication for the evening star, which, certainly, was an alluring object, though obviously out of reach. As they all sat silent (so the story goes) every member of that party of merrymakers--they had merry made on coffee and lemonade only--distinctly heard that ghost call the name 'Joey, Joey!' A moment later nothing was there. Of course, one does not have to believe all that.

Now, at that moment, as was afterward ascertained, Joey was wandering about in the sagebrush on the opposite side of the continent, near Winnemucca, in the State of Nevada. He had been taken to that town by some good persons distantly related to his dead father, and by them adopted and tenderly cared for. But on that evening, the poor child had strayed from home and was lost in the desert.

His after history is involved in obscurity and has gaps which *conjecture* alone can fill. It is known that he was found by a family of Piute Indians, who kept the little wretch with them for a time and then sold him--actually sold him for money to a woman on one of the east-bound trains, at a station a long way from Winnemucca. The woman professed to have made all manner of inquiries, but all in vain; so, being childless and a widow, she adopted him herself. At this point of his career Jo seemed to be getting a long way from the condition of orphanage; the interposition of a *multitude* of parents between himself and that woeful state promised him a long immunity from its disadvantages.

Mrs. Darnell, his newest mother, lived in Cleveland, Ohio. But her adopted son did not long remain with her. He was seen one afternoon by a policeman, new to that beat, deliberately toddling away from her house, and being questioned answered that he was 'a doin' home.' He must have travelled by rail, somehow, for three days later he was in the town of Whiteville, which, as you know, is a long way from Blackburg. His clothing was in pretty fair condition, but he was sinfully dirty. Unable to give any account of himself, he was arrested as a vagrant and sentenced to imprisonment in the Infants' Sheltering Home--where he was washed. Jo ran away from the Infants' Sheltering Home at Whiteville--just took to the woods one day, and the Home knew him no more forever.

We find him next, or rather get back to him, standing forlorn in the cold autumn rain at a suburban street corner in

Apparition - Person/
Thing
Shroud - Covering
Disquieting -
Disturbing
Conjecture -
Speculation
Multitude - Gathering

Blackburg; and it seems right to explain now that the raindrops falling upon him there were really not dark and gummy; they only failed to make his face and hands less so. Jo was indeed fearfully and wonderfully *besmired*, as by the hand of an artist. And the *forlorn* little tramp had no shoes; his feet were bare, red, and swollen, and when he walked he limped with both legs. As to clothing--ah, you would hardly have had the skill to name any single garment that he wore, or say by what magic he kept it upon him. That he was cold all over and all through did not admit of a doubt; he knew it himself. Anyone would have been cold there that evening; but, for that reason, no one else was there. How Jo came to be there himself, he could not for the flickering little life of him have told, even if gifted with a vocabulary exceeding a hundred words. From the way he stared about him one could have seen that he had not the faintest notion of where (nor why) he was.

Yet he was not altogether a fool in his day and generation; being cold and hungry, and still able to walk a little by bending his knees very much indeed and putting his feet down toes first, he decided to enter one of the houses which flanked the street at long intervals and looked so bright and warm. But when he attempted to act upon that very sensible decision a burly dog came browsing out and disputed his right. Inexpressibly frightened, and believing, no doubt (with some reason, too), that brutes without meant brutality within, he hobbled away from all the houses, and with grey, wet fields to right of him and grey, wet fields to left of him--with the rain half blinding him and the night coming in mist and darkness, held his way along the road that leads to Greenton. That is to say, the road leads those to Greenton who succeed in passing the Oak Hill Cemetery. A considerable number every year do not.

Jo did not.

They found him there the next morning, very wet, very cold, but no longer hungry. He had apparently entered the cemetery gate--hoping, perhaps, that it led to a house where there was no dog--and gone blundering about in the darkness, falling over many a grave, no doubt, until he had tired of it all and given up. The little body lay upon one side, with one *soiled* cheek upon one soiled hand, the other hand *tucked* away among the rags to make it warm, the other cheek washed clean and white at last, as for a kiss from one of God's

Besmired - To soil/Tarnish

Forlorn - Lonely and sad

Flickering - To move waveringly

Brutality - The state of being ruthless, cruel, harsh

Browsing - To inspect something leisurely and casually

great angels. It was observed--though nothing was thought of it at the time, the body being as yet *unidentified*--that the little fellow was lying upon the grave of Hetty Parlow. The grave, however, had not opened to receive him. That is a circumstance which, without actual *irreverence*, one may wish had been ordered otherwise. Food For Thought



Food For Thought

Why did Hetty Parlow's ghost wander in and around the oak hill Cemetery? Why did the merry-makers hear the name, 'Joey, Joey?' Do you believe that a mother, is always a mother, whether dead or alive? How do you relate this statement with this story?

Soiled – Stained
Unidentified – Anonymous
Tucked – To gather up and fold,
Irreverence – A disrespectful act or remark

An Understanding

Q. 1. Where is the town of Blackburg? What happens in winter there? How did the Brownon family and their descendants die?

Ans. _____

Q. 2. Who was little Joey or Jo? Where was he when his parents got killed? How was his life after the death of his parents?

Ans. _____

Q. 3. Who was Hetty Parlow? how did she die? What relationship did she have with Joey or Jo?

Ans. _____

Q. 4. Who was Mrs. Darnell and how did Joey die? Where was his dead-body found?

Ans. _____

Howard Phillips Lovecraft



Born on August 20, 1890

Died on March 15, 1937

Notable Works: *Cthulhu Mythos* story cycle, *Necronomicon*, a fictional grimoire, *Weird Tales*, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, *At the Mountains of Madness* and ghost stories, such as: “The Mound”, the “Winged Death”, “The Diary of Alonzo Typer” and many more.

Early Life

Howard Phillips Lovecraft, popularly known as **H. P. Lovecraft** was born on August 20, 1890. He was an American author of horror, fantasy and science fiction. Lovecraft’s guiding aesthetic and philosophical principle was what he termed “cosmicism” or “cosmic horror”, the idea that life is incomprehensible to human minds. As such, his stories express a profound indifference to human beliefs and affairs.

After his father’s hospitalization, Lovecraft was raised by his mother, his two aunts (Lillian Delora Phillips and Annie Emeline Phillips), and his maternal grandfather, Whipple Van Buren Phillips, an American businessman. All five resided together in the family home. Lovecraft was a prodigy, reciting poetry at the age of three and writing complete poems by six. His grandfather encouraged his reading, providing him with classics such as *The Arabian Nights*, *Bulfinch’s Age of Fable*, and children’s versions of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. His grandfather also stirred the boy’s interest in the weird by telling him his own original tales of Gothic horror.

Lovecraft was frequently ill as a child and so he barely attended school until he was eight years old. He read voraciously during this period and was particularly interested in chemistry and astronomy. He produced several hectographed publications with a limited circulation beginning in 1899 with *The Scientific Gazette*. Four years later, he returned to public school at Hope High School (Rhode Island). During his early life, Lovecraft suffered from night terrors, a rare parasomnia disorder; he believed himself to be assaulted at night by horrific “night gaunts.” Much of his later works are therefore thought to have been directly inspired by these terrors.

A few weeks after his mother’s death, Lovecraft attended an amateur journalist convention in Boston, Massachusetts, where he met Sonia Greene, whom he married in 1924. The couple relocated to Brooklyn. However, a few years later, Lovecraft and his wife, started living separately, and he returned to Providence to live with his aunts during their remaining years.

Literary Works and Achievements

Lovecraft wrote some fiction as a youth but, from 1908 until 1913, his output was

primarily poetry. The United Amateur Press Association (UAPA) invited Lovecraft to join them in 1914. The UAPA incited him to contribute many poems and essays. In 1917, at the prodding of correspondents, he returned to fiction with more polished stories, such as “The Tomb” and “Dagon”. The latter was his first professionally-published work, appearing in W. Paul Cook’s *The Vagrant* (November, 1919) and *Weird Tales* in 1923. Around that time, he began to build up a huge network of correspondents. His lengthy and frequent missives would make him one of the great letter writers of the century. Lovecraft is best known for his *Cthulhu Mythos* story cycle and the *Necronomicon*, a fictional grimoire of magical rites and forbidden lore.

The period after his return to Providence — the last decade of his life — was Lovecraft’s most prolific years professionally. During that time, he produced almost all of his best-known short stories for the leading pulp publications of the day (primarily *Weird Tales*), as well as longer efforts, such as *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* and *At the Mountains of Madness*. He frequently revised work for other authors and did a large amount of ghost-writing, including “The Mound”, the “Winged Death”, “The Diary of Alonzo Typer” and for Harry Houdini’s “Under the Pyramids” (also known as “Imprisoned with the Pharaohs”).

Later Years

Back in Providence, Lovecraft lived in a spacious brown Victorian wooden house at 10 Barnes Street, until 1933. Lovecraft considered himself a “New Deal Democrat”, and was an ardent supporter of Franklin D. Roosevelt. His political views can be considered as ‘moderately socialist’. In 1936, Lovecraft was diagnosed with cancer of the small intestine and he also suffered from malnutrition. He lived in constant pain until his death on March 15, 1937, in Providence.

Trivia

Despite his best writing efforts, however, Lovecraft grew ever poorer. He was forced to move to smaller and meaner lodgings with his surviving aunt.



The White Ship

- H. P. Lovecraft

I am Basil Elton, keeper of the North Point light that my father and grandfather kept before me. Far from the shore stands the gry lighthouse, above sunken slimy rocks that are seen when the tide is low, but unseen when the tide is high. Past that beacon for a century have swept the majestic barques of the seven seas. In the days of my grandfather, there were many; in the days of my father not so many; and now there are so few that I sometimes feel strangely alone, as though I were the last man on our planet.

From far shores came those white-sailed argosies of old; from far Eastern shores where warm sunshine and sweet odours linger about strange gardens and gay temples. The old captains of the sea came often to my grandfather and told him of these things which in turn he told to my father, and my father told to me in the long autumn evenings when the wind howled *eerily* from the East. And I have read more of these things, and of many things besides, in the books men gave me when I was young and filled with wonder.

But more wonderful than the lore of old men and the lore of books is the secret lore of ocean. Blue, green, gry, white, or black; smooth, ruffled, or mountainous; that ocean is not silent. All my days have I watched it and listened to it, and I know it well. At first it told to me only the plain little tales of calm beaches and near ports, but with the years it grew more friendly and spoke of other things; of things more strange and more distant in space and time. Sometimes at twilight the gry vapors of the horizon have parted to grant me glimpses of the ways beyond; and sometimes at night the deep waters of the sea have grown clear and phosphorescent, to grant me glimpses of the ways beneath. And these glimpses have been as often of the ways that were and the ways that might be, as of the ways that are; for ocean is more ancient than the mountains, and *freighted* with the memories and the dreams of time.

Out of the South, it was that the White Ship used to come when the moon was full and high in the heavens. Out of the South it would glide very smoothly and silently over the sea. And whether the sea was rough or calm, and whether the wind was friendly

Beacon - A guiding/
Warning Signal

Barques - A cry of
a dog

Linger - To be slow
in leaving, especially
out of reluctance

Lore - Accumulated
facts, traditions,
or beliefs about a
particular subject

Ruffled - A strip
of frilled or closely
pleated fabric used for
decoration

Freighted - a load

