



Hawthorne's Short Stories (Vintage Classics)

By Nathaniel Hawthorne

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Twenty-four of the best short stories by one of the early masters of the form, in the definitive collection edited by acclaimed scholar Newton Arvin.

Nathaniel Hawthorne was one of the greatest American writers of the nineteenth century, and some of his most powerful work was in the form of fable-like tales that make rich use of allegory and symbolism. The dark beauty and moral force of his imagination are evident in such enduring masterpieces as "Young Goodman Brown," in which a young man who believes he has witnessed a satanic initiation can never see his pious neighbors the same way again; "Rappaccini's Daughter," about a lovely young girl who has been raised in isolation among dangerous poisons; and "The Birthmark," in which a scientist obsessed with perfection destroys the flaw that makes his otherwise flawless wife both beautiful and human.

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Editorial Review

From the Inside Flap

Here are the best of Hawthorne's short stories. There are twenty-four of them -- not only the most familiar, but also many that are virtually unknown to the average reader. The selection was made by Professor Newton Arvin of Smith College, a recognized authority on Hawthorne and a distinguished literary critic as well. His fine introduction admirably interprets Hawthorne's mind and art.

About the Author

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1805-64) was an American novelist and short-story writer. He was born in Salem, Massachusetts, and graduated from Bowdoin College. His first novel, *Fanshawe*, was published anonymously in 1828, followed by several collections of short stories, including *Twice-Told Tales* and *Mosses from an Old Manse*. His later novels include *The Scarlet Letter*, *The House of Seven Gables*, *The Blithedale Romance*, and *The Marble Faun*.

Newton Arvin (1900-63) was a literary critic and professor at Smith College known for his influential writings about nineteenth-century American literature. He is the author of biographies of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Walt Whitman, and his biography of Herman Melville won the National Book Award in 1951.

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The Birthmark

In the latter part of the last century there lived a man of science, an eminent proficient in every branch of natural philosophy, who not long before our story opens had made experience of a spiritual affinity more attractive than any chemical one. He had left his laboratory to the care of an assistant, cleared his fine countenance from the furnace smoke, washed the stain of acids from his fingers, and persuaded a beautiful woman to become his wife. In those days when the comparatively recent discovery of electricity and other kindred mysteries of Nature seemed to open paths into the region of miracle, it was not unusual for the love of science to rival the love of woman in its depth and absorbing energy. The higher intellect, the imagination, the spirit, and even the heart might all find their congenial aliment in pursuits which, as some of their ardent votaries believed, would ascend from one step of powerful intelligence to another, until the philosopher should lay his hand on the secret of creative force and perhaps make new worlds for himself. We know not whether Aylmer possessed this degree of faith in man's ultimate control over Nature. He had devoted himself, however, too unreservedly to scientific studies ever to be weaned from them by any second passion. His love for his young wife might prove the stronger of the two; but it could only be by intertwining itself with his love of science, and uniting the strength of the latter to his own.

Such a union accordingly took place, and was attended with truly remarkable consequences and a deeply impressive moral. One day, very soon after their marriage, Aylmer sat gazing at his wife with a trouble in his countenance that grew stronger until he spoke.

"Georgiana," said he, "has it never occurred to you that the mark upon your cheek might be removed?"

"No, indeed," said she, smiling; but perceiving the seriousness of his manner, she blushed deeply. "To tell you the truth it has been so often called a charm that I was simple enough to imagine it might be so."

"Ah, upon another face it might," replied her husband; "but never on yours. No, dearest Georgiana, you came so nearly perfect from the hand of Nature that this slightest possible defect, which we hesitate whether to term a defect or a beauty, shocks me, as being the visible mark of earthly imperfection."

"Shocks you, my husband!" cried Georgiana, deeply hurt; at first reddening with momentary anger, but then bursting into tears. "Then why did you take me from my mother's side? You cannot love what shocks you!"

To explain this conversation it must be mentioned that in the centre of Georgiana's left cheek there was a singular mark, deeply interwoven, as it were, with the texture and substance of her face. In the usual state of her complexion — a healthy though delicate bloom — the mark wore a tint of deeper crimson, which imperfectly defined its shape amid the surrounding rosiness. When she blushed it gradually became more indistinct, and finally vanished amid the triumphant rush of blood that bathed the whole cheek with its brilliant glow. But if any shifting motion caused her to turn pale there was the mark again, a crimson stain upon the snow, in what Aylmer sometimes deemed an almost fearful distinctness. Its shape bore not a little similarity to the human hand, though of the smallest pygmy size. Georgiana's lovers were wont to say that some fairy at her birth hour had laid her tiny hand upon the infant's cheek, and left this impress there in token of the magic endowments that were to give her such sway over all hearts. Many a desperate swain would have risked life for the privilege of pressing his lips to the mysterious hand. It must not be concealed, however, that the impression wrought by this fairy sign manual varied exceedingly, according to the difference of temperament of the beholders. Some fastidious persons — but they were exclusively of her own sex — affirmed that the bloody hand, as they chose to call it, quite destroyed the effect of Georgiana's beauty, and rendered her countenance even hideous. But it would be as reasonable to say that one of those small blue stains which sometimes occurred in the purest statuary marble would convert the Eve of Powers to a monster. Masculine observers, if the birthmark did not heighten their admiration, contented themselves with wishing it away, that the world might possess one living specimen of ideal loveliness without the semblance of a flaw. After his marriage, —for he thought little or nothing of the matter before,— Aylmer discovered that this was the case with himself.

Had she been less beautiful,—if Envy's self could have found aught else to sneer at,— he might have felt his affection heightened by the prettiness of this mimic hand, now vaguely portrayed, now lost, now stealing forth again and glimmering to and fro with every pulse of emotion that throbbed within her heart; but seeing her otherwise so perfect, he found this one defect grow more and more intolerable with every moment of their united lives. It was the fatal flaw of humanity which Nature, in one shape or another, stamps ineffaceably on all her productions, either to imply that they are temporary and finite, or that their perfection must be wrought by toil and pain. The crimson hand expressed the ineludible gripe in which mortality clutches the highest and purest of earthly mould, degrading them into kindred with the lowest, and even with the very brutes, like whom their visible frames return to dust. In this manner, selecting it as the symbol of his wife's liability to sin, sorrow, decay, and death, Aylmer's sombre imagination was not long in rendering the birthmark a frightful object, causing him more trouble and horror than ever Georgiana's beauty, whether of soul or sense, had given him delight.

Users Review

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Homer Smith:

Reading a guide can be one of a lot of action that everyone in the world likes. Do you like reading book thus. There are a lot of reasons why people enjoy it. First reading a e-book will give you a lot of new information. When you read a publication you will get new information simply because book is one of many ways to

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