

Classic American Short Stories

Ambrose Bierce An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge

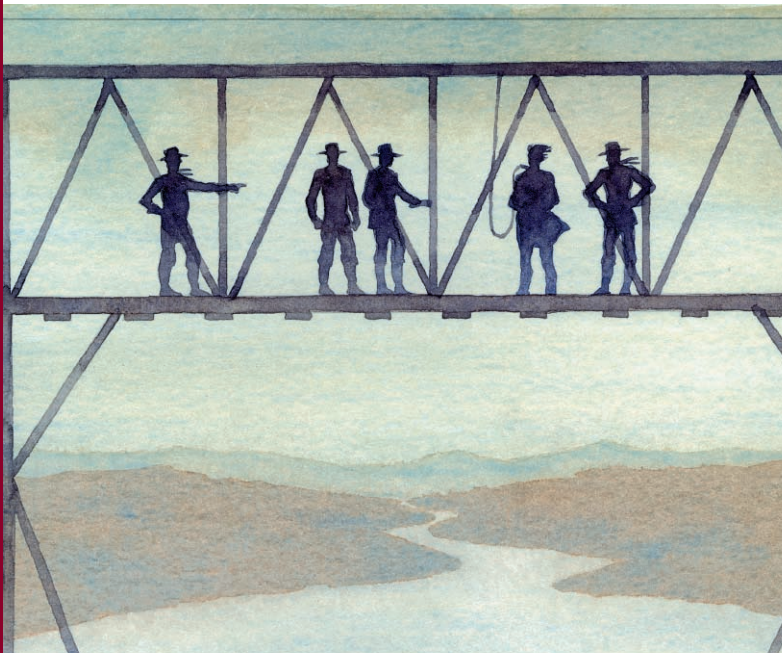
Stephen Crane The Veteran

Mark Twain The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County

O. Henry The Last Leaf and other stories • **Jack London** Brown Wolf

Read by **William Roberts**

**CLASSIC
FICTION**



Ambrose Bierce (1842-c1914)

An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge

- | | | |
|---|--|------|
| 1 | A man stood upon a railway bridge in northern Alabama... | 7:37 |
| 2 | Peyton Fahrquhar was a well to do planter... | 3:14 |
| 3 | As Peyton Fahrquhar fell straight downward... | 7:23 |
| 4 | Fahrquhar dived – dived as deeply as he could. | 7:30 |

Stephen Crane (1871-1900)

The Veteran

- | | | |
|---|--|-------|
| 5 | Out of the low window could be seen three hickory trees... | 12:01 |
|---|--|-------|

Mark Twain (1835-1910)

The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County

- | | | |
|---|---|------|
| 6 | In compliance with the request of a friend of mine... | 7:52 |
| 7 | 'Well, thish-yer Smiley had rat-tarriers, and chicken cocks...' | 6:18 |

O. Henry (1862-1910)

After Twenty Years

- | | | |
|---|---|------|
| 8 | The policeman on the beat moved up the avenue impressively... | 8:32 |
|---|---|------|

A Retrieved Information		
9	A guard came to the prison shoe-shop...	6:58
10	One afternoon, Jimmy Valentine and his suitcase...	4:39
11	On Monday night after Jimmy wrote this letter...	6:49
O. Henry (cont.)		
While the Auto Waits		
12	Promptly at the beginning of twilight...	7:21
13	'Sometimes,' continued the girl...	5:46
The Last Leaf		
14	In a little district west of Washington Square...	8:29
15	Old Behrmann was a painter who lived on the ground floor...	7:39
Makes the Whole World Kin		
16	The burglar stepped inside the window quickly...	10:25
Jack London (1876-1916)		
Brown Wolf		
17	She had delayed, because of the dew-wet grass...	6:39
18	Now Irvine was a man of impulse, a poet...	7:14
19	Up from below came another sound...	6:15
20	Skiff Miller turned to the dog...	7:30
21	Skiff Miller continued to debate with himself...	9:10

Total time: 2:35:30

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Ambrose Bierce (1842-c1914) is one of the most singular figures in American literature. Born in Horse Cave Creek, Ohio, he fought in the Civil War and though he reached the rank of major, he was embittered by his experience. He began his writing career as a journalist in California, becoming recognised as part of a Western writing circle which included Mark Twain.

It was there that he established his reputation as a short-story writer. In *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*, one of his most famous stories, he drew on his personal memories of the Civil War, yet added that twist of uneasiness which was so characteristic of his work.

He travelled to England in 1872, but returned to California where he wrote for Randolph Hearst's *'Examiner'*. By the 1890s, having published various volumes of short stories, he was ready for another change, and became the Washington correspondent for the Hearst papers.

But his bitterness, his anarchic imagination, and his restlessness took over, and in 1913 he went to Mexico, where the civil war was in progress, and mysteriously, disappeared.

Stephen Crane (1871-1900) is remembered particularly for his great war novel *The Red Badge of Courage* which, though written some 30 years after the American Civil War, caught the atmosphere and dread of a young participant. Born in Newark, New Jersey, the son of a Methodist minister, Crane became a journalist in New York before writing his first novel *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. The subject touched too raw a nerve, and his initial success came with *The Red Badge of Courage* and its principal character, the youthful Henry Fleming, who encounters the reality of war for the first time. Fleming's apparent cowardice provides the poignant background to his reappearance in the short

story *The Veteran* – another example of a mature work to come from so young a pen.

Crane left America in 1896, reporting in Mexico and Cuba, before moving to Greece. In 1899, he came to England where he became part of the literary circle with Henry James and others, and *The Red Badge* was recognised as a masterpiece. He died of tuberculosis at the age of 29.

Mark Twain (1835-1910) was the pseudonym for Samuel Langborne Clemens. One of the most prolific and varied American novelists of his time, with *Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *Huckleberry Finn* (1884) as his lasting monuments, he was equally known as a short-story writer and humourist. He served in the Confederate Army in the Civil War, and prospected for silver in Nevada, before starting to work as a journalist in San Francisco. He first achieved fame under his pseudonym with *The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*, written in 1865. Supported by his personal charm, his career as a journalist grew rapidly. In later years, he became pessimistic, especially as various investments failed, but his reputation today rests on his acute but delightful, humorous works.

O. Henry was the pen name of William Sydney Porter (1862-1910). He was born in North Carolina. It was while serving a three-year sentence for embezzlement that he began writing short stories under his pseudonym and his natural talent for the form soon asserted itself. He produced stories in abundance, for newspapers and magazines, following the pattern of a clearly-drawn situation with a neat twist in the tail. Gradually, his stories began to appear in collections – *Cabbages and Kings* (1904), *The Four Million* (1906) and others. His enduring popularity was such that four volumes appeared posthumously. There are around 270 stories now remaining.

This selection is drawn from stories he wrote throughout his career, and illustrate his sharp observation of character and situation, often coloured by a gentle irony. *After Twenty Years*, *A Retrieved Reformation* and *Makes the Whole World Kin* all reflect Henry's familiarity with the criminal world – which he knew first-hand. *The Last Leaf* borders on sentimentality, though his touch of irony manages, just, to avoid it. And while these stories provide a vivid picture of urban America at the turn of the century, O. Henry's talent was to reflect something essentially American, which is why these 'shorts' seem to possess

something of a later character – almost into the 20s and 30s.

Jack London (1876-1916) had a difficult youth, with truancy edging him to lawlessness. His searching nature took him to writing by a circuitous route including a time on a sealing ship in the Arctic and involvement in left-wing politics before joining the Klondike gold rush in 1897 – reputedly with books by Darwin and Milton in his backpack. This provided him with the background to his great novels, *The Call of the Wild* (1903) and *White Fang* (1906) echoed in his short story *Brown Wolf*. Here, as always, he writes with sympathy about animals, yet eschews sentimentality. London became extremely successful, earning over a million dollars in his lifetime, and visited the Far East on lecture tours; but he remained an unhappy man and died at 40 under circumstances which suggest suicide.

Notes by Nicolas Soames

Cover picture: An Occurrence at Creek Bridge by Hemesh Alles

**The music on this recording is taken from the
NAXOS and MARCO POLO catalogues**

- An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*
BALAKIREV IN BOHEMIA, OVERTURE ON CZECH THEMES 8.220324
Singapore Symphony Orchestra, Choo Hoey, conductor
- The Veteran*
BALAKIREV IN BOHEMIA, OVERTURE ON CZECH THEMES 8.220324
Singapore Symphony Orchestra, Choo Hoey, conductor
- The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*
DVOŘÁK MOLTO VIVACE, STRING QUARTET NO. 14 8.550251
Moyzes Quartet
- After Twenty Years*
SOUZA MYRRHA GAVOTTE 8.223874
Razumovsky Symphony Orchestra, Keith Brion
- A Retrieved Information*
FUCHS CLARINET QUINTET 8.223282
Ensemble Villa Musica
- While the Auto Waits*
CUI BERCEUSE, SUITE MINIATURE 8.220308
Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, Kenneth Schermerhorn
- The Last Leaf*
DVOŘÁK ANDANTE, STRING QUARTET NO. 8 8.553372
Vlach Quartet Prague
- Makes The Whole World Kin*
SOUSA REVERIE 8.223874
Razumovsky Symphony Orchestra, Keith Brion
- Brown Wolf*
JANÁČEK MLADI 8.554173
Oslo Philharmonic Wind Soloists

Music programmed by Nicolas Soames

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Five great American short story writers, dating from the turn of the 19th/20th centuries, are represented here. Different in atmosphere and writing style, they nevertheless caught the mood and concerns of the day in a way that was distinctly American. Bierce's '*An Occurrence...*' leaves echoes in the imagination; the stories by Crane and London recall the themes of the Civil War and the Klondike for which they are well known. Twain's humour is to the fore in *The Notorious Jumping Frog...* And O. Henry's sharp observation makes his neat tales a joy to listen to. An attractive and accessible collection.



William Roberts has appeared extensively in TV, film and theatre, varying from *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles* and *Navy Seals* to *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *A View to A Kill*. He is also a familiar voice on radio and audiobooks, with numerous dramas and books to his credit.

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Total time
2:35:30