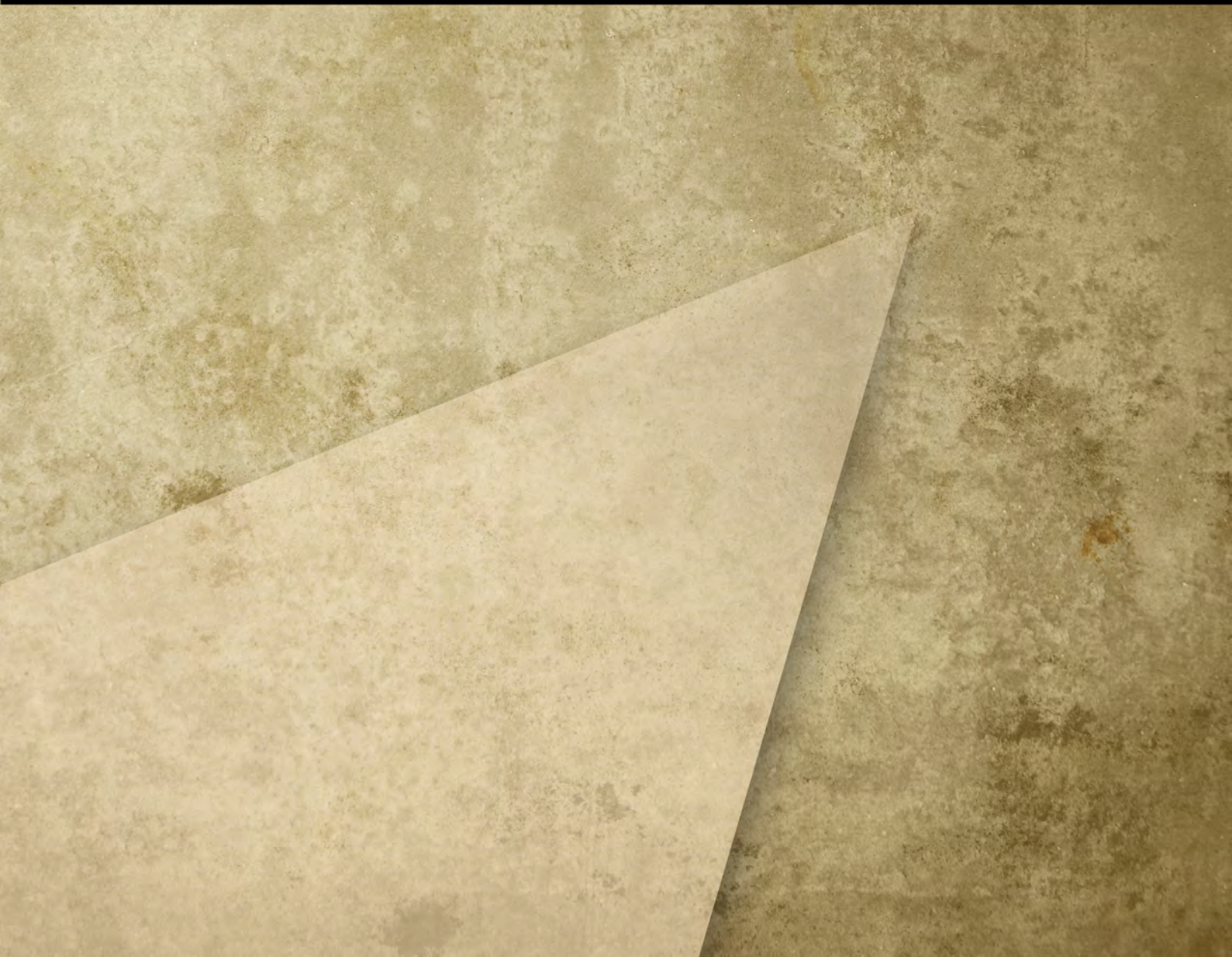


S h o r t
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S t o r i e s

R.j. hOyle



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Short Short Stories:

A collection

R.j. hOyle

Dedication

To all the creatures great and small who inspire me on a daily basis.

POST CARD STORIES

A Traveler's Tale

One day, a tiger lay across a mountain road and demanded a toll from everyone that approached. A long line formed, and a penniless fox stood in back of the line. He carried a bag of rabbit skins he planned to sell at the market.

When his turn came, he asked the tiger, "May I please pass? I promise to pay you on my way back."

The tiger sneered and roared, "Nooooooo."

"Please sir, if I give you one of my rabbit skins, it's worth five times the amount of the toll. I promise to give you twice as much money on my way back."

The tiger sat and thought.

Finally, he said, "How about this, you leave me all but two of your rabbit skins, and I'll let you pass."

The fox licked his paw and said, "Okay, it's a deal."

So, the fox pulled out two skins and handed the bag to the tiger. The tiger put the bag on top of the pile of other goodies he had taken in lieu of cash, and the fox moved on.

Later in the day, the tiger decided he was weary of working, so he sat in the shade of a tree to count up his money and reexamine his barter pile. He opened the fox's bag and found a wad of damp paper towels in the bag, but no rabbit skins.

Moral: Don't get skinned -- check your bags.

Snakes

A blue snake slithered under a house. In a room above, a woman yelled at a man, and he yelled back.

Huh, he thought. *I'm glad I'm not married—it sounds awful.*

Then he saw a pretty yellow girl snake curled up in the corner.

"Oh, Hi," he said.

"Yes-s-s-s?" she responded.

"Do you live here?" he asked.

"What do you think?" she said as she wiggled her way outside.

The blue snake felt sad. He liked the looks of the yellow snake, so, he waited for her. She came back with a rat in her mouth, and he said, "Gosh, that looks yummy!"

"No share-siesss," she hissed.

Disappointed, the blue snake went into the yard, found a dead bug, and swallowed it. He went back under the house. The yellow snake was gone.

The blue snake waited two days for her to return. She never did.

So, he left and found another house to slip under. There, in the corner, was a red snake.

"Oh, my, you are a *real* pretty thing," he said.

"*Humph*, she said, the yellow snake told me about you." Then she spat into his right eye.

"Ow!" he cried, "Why'd ya do that?"

"Go get us dinner!" she said.

He shrieked, "I can't ever! My eye is blinded-ed!"

"Marry me," she said.

"Okay, but you hunt," he said.

"Fine," she said.

Then, she left.

He waited, but she never returned. Eventually, he starved to death.

Moral: Love is blind and stupid.

Game On

A tortoise walked up a short foothill beneath a tall mountain. He was hot and tired, so he sat under the shade of a tree.

He looked up at the cloudy blue sky and said, "I wonder how long it will take me to climb all the way up and onto the clouds over the mountain?"

A crow in the tree heard him, and said, "Silly shell-thing, you can't climb air and clouds."

"Why not?" asked the tortoise. "It's space. Just like space on the ground."

The crow snapped, "It's called gravity dummy. You can't walk on air."

The tortoise peered at the crow. "But you fly in it."

"Different story, Bubba. I've got wings. I can beat gravity."

"Really?" said the tortoise as he slyly noticed a kestrel flying near the top. "Can you beat me up the mountain?"

"Of course I can," preened the crow.

"Let's try then."

"Why?" asked the crow.

"If you win, you get my shell. That way you can walk on the ground and find the good bits without the fox getting to you."

"What do you get?"

"Just some fun," replied the tortoise.

"Fine," said the crow.

So, the two went up the mountain. Near the top, the kestrel grabbed and killed the crow. Four days later, the tortoise reached the peak. As he reached for the clouds above, he fell off the mountain and died.

Moral: Only bet what you can risk losing.

The Old Man and the Fish

(If Told by Earnest Hemingway)

There was a fish. It was a long, silver ocean fish. It had scales the color of pearls. The fish played in the ocean.

There was a man. One day, he was in a blue boat. The boat had old, grey sails. It was hot. There were no clouds. The man in the blue boat took a drink. His sunburned face was red and peeling. He took another drink. Then, he saw the fish.

"Swim, damn you, fish, swim!" He yelled, and he threw his empty bottle on the deck of the boat.

The fish swam. It swam fast. But the man's boat was faster. The man raised his harpoon. It was sharp. It was long. He stabbed the fish. He caught the fish. He dragged the fish into the boat. The man's back hurt. His heart ached. The half-dead fish lay at the bottom of the boat. The fish rolled in the swill and mess of the man's vomit and the spills of the day's chum.

The man stared at the fish. The fish stared at the man.

The fish asked, "Why sir, why did you do this to me?" And then it begged, "Please sir, please let me go."

The man choked on a laugh. The sun sat still above them. The wind sent the tattered sails into a flutter. The man knew the fish would kill him if he did not kill the fish. He knew that it was that way with all fish. He had to kill them all. KILL THEM ALL!

The man opened another bottle. He drank the whole bottle. When the man passed out in the swill and the chum in the bottom of the boat, the fish jumped out and saved himself. But later, a shark a mile away smelled the fish's wounds. The shark hunted him down and ate him.

The man turned onto his face and drowned in the effluence in the bottom of the boat.

Somewhere on the long green land, a lady sang a sad song for him. Her eyes were bright with yearning, and her hair hung long and black.

The seagulls ate the old man's corpse, and no one ever saw the fish or the old man again.

Moral: Never get drunk when you go fishing. (And too, that is why *not* every writer should write a children's story.)

Shard

That night, a piece of his skull lay in my lap—I grabbed your hand. We stared for the breadth of time. Oh, if we could have sailed back a minute or more, found the fiery source—stopped it—quelled it. Later, as the days and months wore on, we gnawed on this worry, this query of—*what if*. We fretted and fussed, tore the thought apart. Then, with care and caution, we pieced it back together again.

And again.

Our incessant dissection and resurrection filled us. Infiltrated us. It burrowed into the sinew of our bodies. We never thought to let the worry go. As time passed, it morphed and moved, turned vaporous and thick. An obliterating shadow from an unanswerable question: *what more could we have done?*

Earlier, when he had emerged in the balcony above, the room filled with buzzing, cheering, applause. You were enthralled! Gay hearts fluttered in the warm air, a night of bright, dancing promises of green fields, shining stars, a turn and a turn once again to songs of *hurrah*, a glimpse of shimmering portents—a tantalizing hope far from the fields of blood-soaked regret.

We paused. I crumpled my skirts around the fragile bit as it lay light as an ash flake from a fire. But, as we gazed, the weight of the horror began to crush us. This jagged chip was shorn from the tortured brow of the one who had penned the land into long nights of shivering worry and the divisive, incessant growls of unvanquished hunger. For long nights, his neck bowed low in weary submission as the mangled earth erupted into crimson crops from scores of broken, inverted seeds.

His fractured relic now lay nestled in the quilted folds below my waistline. Nothing more than a mere shard from a broken pot -- a stone shaving cleaved from a mason's chisel.

Fluted, muffled, blurred images swirled around us. A whirlpool of action and reaction suffused the air. We were locked in the center, riveted in place. Frozen, we watched as a thin sepia stain seeped from its sides.

So small—I almost lost it in the pattern of my billowing skirts. If it had not hit my hand before sliding to my lap, I might never have noticed because when we heard the clap of deadly thunder, I almost leapt up and dislodged it. If so, then it would have been cast to the floor, and sentenced to the inglorious fate of a dustbin's dark echo.

You pulled out your silk kerchief, scooped it up, and tucked it into the pocket closest to your heart. We left the theatre, lost and mute.

At home, we succumbed to fevers. We debated whom to tell, what to do. Then, in hollow despair, we shuttered it away inside a felt-lined box.

We never told, we never slipped, and we locked it away . . . forever.

A Note About the Author

R.j. hOyle has written a novellete ("The End of the Rainbow"), a number of short stories (in realist, science fiction, fantasy, and other genres), as well as, short nonfiction pieces. Also, hOyle blogs when the time and the spirit allows. Find more information at the links below.

More of R.j. hOyle's work can be found at:



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