



# The Mysterious Stranger and Other Stories

*Mark Twain , Howard Mittelmark (Afterword) , Edmund Reiss (Introduction)*

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**The Mysterious Stranger and Other Stories** Mark Twain , Howard Mittelmark (Afterword) , Edmund Reiss (Introduction)

Nine tales showcase Twain's wit as he skewers greed and hypocrisy—and makes a memorable, tormenting statement on evil.

The celebrated jumping frog of Calaveras County (1865)

The facts concerning the recent carnival of crime in Connecticut (1876)

The stolen white elephant (1882)

Luck (1891)

The £1,000,000 bank-note (1893)

The man that corrupted Hadleyburg (1899)

The five boons of life (1902)

Was it heaven? or hell? (1902)

The mysterious stranger (1916)

## The Mysterious Stranger and Other Stories Details

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Author : Mark Twain , Howard Mittelmark (Afterword) , Edmund Reiss (Introduction)

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# From Reader Review **The Mysterious Stranger and Other Stories** for online ebook

## **Ann says**

Mark Twain, well-known for Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn, is perhaps less well-known by the general populace for his witty and biting commentaries on human nature and society. The Mysterious Stranger is just such a story. Set in 17th century Austria, The Mysterious Stranger tells the story of three teenage boys who encounter a boy named Philip Traum, aka Satan (not THE Satan, Philip claims, but his nephew). Philip is an angel and lacks what he terms "The Moral Sense." Which makes for some interesting adventures in a heavily Catholic community. Twain really forces the reader to question commonly held ideas about religion and what it means to be a human being. A great moral and philosophical work.

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## **James says**

Still very readable and groundbreaking at the time, the themes have been consumed and improved by later authors.

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## **Matt Kovalcik says**

“There is nothing in the world like a persuasive speech to fuddle the mental apparatus and upset the convictions and debauch the emotions of an audience not practiced in the tricks and delusions of oratory.” —  
- Mark Twain, “The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg”

Crotchety, and sadly brimming with weltschmerz, the series of stories put together in this little book just drip of that world-weariness. A linear progression: over time, Mark Twain grew cynical, contemplative, and even a bit negative, but seemingly never dull. More than worth a read, but only if one is willing to read them chronologically and consider his life's path in conjunction with that of his work and its lessons; who wouldn't have grow to question the comfort and security of old age? And how could any self-respecting (baby) lawyer not both love and hate the line that begins these thoughts? Precise and true, to the point of discomfort--much like all Twain wrote.

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## **Gale says**

TALES TO TWEAK MAN'S VANITY, HIS SANITY AND HIS SOUL

This interesting anthology presents the gamut of Twains fertile genius in eight tales of varying lengths: from a few pages to a true novella. The editor has chosen both humorous and serious stories: those which satirize and even criticiuze. Tales which will entertain and make readers reflect, or cause them to react with anger and even shock.

Whatever the author's goal, his writing will evoke strong emotions.

Either way: gone is the laid-back Mississippi humor of TOM SAWYER days.

Opening with the iconic but brief "Celebrated Jumping Frog" yarn, this short story amuses us with its clever game of wits between a local boaster/con man and an equally sly stranger passing through a hick gold mining camp. Twain often develops his tales by employing one or more first-person narrators. "The Million Pound Bank Note" inspired a Hollywood movie starring Gregory Peck, though not set in the London original. Twain actually spoofs himself (as an author pestered by aspiring writers and requests for donations) in his "Connecticut Crime Carnival," wherein he does ferocious battle with his implacable con-science. New York City provides yet another setting for his genius: a savvy detective orchestrates the recovery of a "Stolen White Elephant" although the narrator suffers grievous financial loss.

But Twain's darker side predominates in this anthology; he seems to enjoy placing helpless humans into serious moral conflict--pitting them against stronger wills and evil entities. He takes an almost malicious delight in mankind's inevitable failure. His characters repeatedly struggle against temptation--making futile attempts to outwit evil--either in human form as "The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg" or the devil himself who proves to be the "Mysterious Stranger." In the former tale (which reads like a play and would make a wonderful piece if dramatized) a bitter stranger contemplates a unique and callous form of revenge for an old, perceived slight. Hell-bent on punishment by humiliation he understands all too well the human weaknesses of vanity and greed.

Human nature is bitingly scrutinized and ridiculed in the title novella of 92 pages. Set in a remote Austrian village in the late 16th century, when women were burned for witchcraft and the village Astrologer was treated with respectful awe, this grim story proves frankly overlong with its protracted "lectures" by a charmingly youthful Satan--actually the nephew of the famous uncle who is active in Business the world over. The plot is frequently deliberately stalled when atheistic Satan (Twain's unabashed mouthpiece) denounces the senseless stupidity and gullibility of mankind throughout history.

Three village youths who are inseparable friends are the only ones to whom Satan appears as himself--curiously, not to win their souls this time--but to win them over to his convoluted thinking: employing both sleight of hand as well as his glib tongue. The boys are helpless before his specious logic. Delighting to present a parade of human folly and warlike instinct Satan almost predicts the invention of more powerful Weapons of Mass Destruction than Twain himself knew about. Sobering, atheistic, blatantly antagonistic and spiritually-sinister this tale is Not the Mark Twain we grew up with.

(September 26, 2013. I welcome dialogue with teachers.)

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## **Evan says**

"The Mysterious Stranger," closer in size to a novella, takes up more than half of the book. It is the real gem of this collection and for me, by far, the best piece here.

(The four stories in this Dover Thrift Edition, a very easy to find edition btw, span Twain's earliest popularity to his last days, and have greed as a common theme.)

"The Mysterious Stranger" is a very odd story. Satan (or, at least his minion nephew, a surrogate dark angel as presented here) is more or less the hero; humankind and religion come in for a deserved blistering

drubbing for the race's cruelty, ignorance and hypocrisy. The story takes place in Austria in 1590; it's told from the viewpoint of a boy (actually a grown man reminiscing), who along with his friends are dazzled by and befriended by Satan; they come to realize that Satan is more an observer and agent than a purposely malicious being - sort of the way predators are in the wild. It is only man who preaches morality and in the same breath commits malicious, sadistic cruelty with relish.

Morality, ostensibly good, brings with it judgment - and from that rationalizing all manner of righteous brutality. Those with the "moral sense" (humans) are seen as less than beasts, because beasts do not judge.

I was perplexed a bit by a writerly conundrum raised by the piece, and that's that witchcraft is sort of mocked as bogus (and Satan, nee Twain, mocks the torturers of witches), and yet Satan is, in fact, practicing witchcraft through the whole village, materializing riches and changing people's fates. There is obviously metaphysical intervention going on, so the townspeople actually have some basis for their belief, even though they really don't know it. Or there are those who do, but chose to deny it when money comes their way. It seems religion takes a back seat when cash enters the picture. Evil being the source matters not to those profiting.

The story has all the satirical strengths of Twain at his best, masterful storytelling chops and some truly weird and wonderful fantasy conceits --- interwoven with perhaps pedantic, but very powerfully stated arguments about the pettiness of humanity. His analysis of the mob mentality that leads to war sounds eerily like the post-911 era.

OK, well the more famous earlier short stories in this collection I found less satisfying.

"The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," the early work that put Twain on the map, is a bit weak now. The punchline is mild and the lead-up is a bit padded.

"The \$1,000,000 Bank Note" is pretty good. The idea of two rich guys pulling a bum off the street and betting how he will behave or survive reminds me of movies such as "Trading Places" that have similar premises. It too has prescience: the idea of being \*perceived\* as having real wealth, and the access to all privileges engendered is not so dissimilar to the phony perceptions of wealth of Enron and the dotcom era.

"The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" has an excellent premise and great ideas, about the deeply rooted corruption of a town whose corruption finally boils to its seemingly pristine surface, but I felt Twain's execution was poor and the story is woefully confusing. I have to admit I bailed on it and may have to retry it another time.

It goes against my stickler policy to mark this as "read" since I did bail on one of the stories, but I must move on...

The real four-star gem here is "Mysterious Stranger."

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## Leonardo says

Better known for the Tom Sawyer/Huckleberry Finn novels, Mark Twain was also a very talented short story writer and this collection includes stories encompassing several decades of his literary production, as well as showing the dark changes that took place in his view of humanity. "The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras Country" and "The 1,000 Bank-Note" cover the most light-hearted spectrum of Twain's work, although that does not mean that their humour is any less witty and sharp. "The Man that Corrupted

Haddleyburg" is the less fortunate piece in this anthology, and, in many ways, it serves like a more obvious version of the points that he so fiercely makes in "The Mysterious Stranger". And that last tale is certainly the jewel's in this anthology's crown. Published posthumously, this noveletta absorbs the reader with its dismal view of humanity and moral values, and even its structure is quite "modern" and slightly unsettling. Even then, Twain was acutely aware of his responsibility as a writer and as a man of humour, and this last text isn't simply a libel against humanity, but actually quite a mesmerizing text.

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### **TommyLovesEli says**

Good stories, but not as good as any of his other works.

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### **Johnny Waco says**

I've always heard that Twain became increasingly bitter and misanthropic towards the end of his life, but I didn't understand how true that really was until I read *The Mysterious Stranger*. In this posthumously published novella, a sleepy Austrian village is visited by Satan, an angel who is the nephew of the more famous, evil Satan. Satan in some ways acts as a mouthpiece for Twain, objectively pointing out how the human race is defined by fear, lies, betrayal, suspicion, and cowardice; perhaps most people mean well, but like sheep, they simply follow those who seem the boldest. Sadly, the boldest are usually those who have the worst impulses. Twain presents us with the burning of an innocent woman as a witch, the abandonment of a kind family by their friends, and a drunkard beating his loyal dog until the poor animal's eye is smashed out. As Satan observes, don't use the word brutal because brutes (animals) certainly don't act this way. Towards the end, Satan has this bombshell: he doesn't exist, and neither does God--how could there be a greater power when humanity is as sickening and loathsome as it is?

All this said, vintage Twain also shows through, in some moments of (dark) humor. My favorite exchange comes when Satan, disguised as a villager, tells a fussy middle-aged woman looking for a husband that his uncle may be interested; when she asks what the uncle does, Satan replies that he has a vast empire down in the tropics! *The Mysterious Stranger*, as bleak as it is, also has some moments of grace, not letting Satan get in the last word. The boys who hear Satan's pronouncements, do some cowardly things, but their compassion and desire to do right shows through time after time. The fact that they can't understand Satan's objective judgements on humanity is to their credit--their emotions and desire to better themselves are what help them transcend the sordidness around them.

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### **Tom says**

"Bitter and anti-religious" is accurate, but as I was reading *The Mysterious Stranger* I can't say I disagreed too much with Twain. It's not like the eight shorter stories in the book are all cheery and light, though. Humorous, yes, but they certainly have some bite.

Anyway, hadn't read any Twain in years - maybe since high school - so this was a delight.

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## Mohit says

I have started to love his style of writing a lot and that is why have read so many books by him. This is again a quick read.

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## Ash says

The Mysterious Stranger and Other Tales (Signet classics) by Mark Twain (1962)

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## Lisa says

For readers who know Twain only through his often quoted witticisms and works such as *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* many of the stories in this book will come as a bit of a shock. The volume begins with the folksy "Famous Jumping Frog" and ends with the surreal novella *The Mysterious Stranger*. Between the writing of the two, Twain would suffer failure and losses which twisted his already cynical view of mankind into a nearly warped vision. Along the way he seemed to lose much of his good-humored empathy for man and his weaknesses. I do not much share the author's view on people or life, but I have over the years found his work to be thought-provoking. In the case of the very, very dark *Stranger*, as weird as it is, as twisted as I find his assessment of humankind, it is one of my favorite of his works. One I have re-read several times over the years. As for the other stories in this collection, they were, for me, a mixed bag. Too often they veer too closely to the didactic for artistic effectiveness, a complaint that might be made of *Stranger*, but it's utter oddness and darkness is haunting. "The Man Who Corrupted Hadleyburg" though leant too much towards a preachiness to really catch my imagination. However, I found the premise intriguing. "The Carnival of Crime..." again preachy, but amusing. The story of the wishes; Lord save me from becoming that jaded about life as I get older.

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## Alli says

Loved "The 1,000,000 Pound Note." Best story of the book.

Didn't know Mark Twain could get so dark about religion as he gets with "The Mysterious Stranger," published after his death. I am sure that in its time it was offensive and likely passed off as rubbish. I think he's onto some stuff there.

I mean, a lot of people do live in herd mentality, otherwise the Spanish Inquisition and Salem Witch Trials (to name a few) would not have happened. More recently, the Red Scare. The point is that people who disagree are often hushed by thinking everyone else supports it when most don't.

It's a crime, and it shouldn't happen, but everyone knows that one time they went along with the majority and regretted it. It happens.

We try to live good lives, but occasionally a wierdo walks by and he draws a crowd, so we follow.

I read a psychological study on this once. The scientists were trying to figure out what kind of sick person would commit the terrible crimes and genocide in the Holocaust. They arranged a voluntary test (for \$5) where you come down into the basement of a university building, you sit down, and eventually another guy shows up. You don't know it, but he's a paid actor. The researcher tells you both to pick a piece of paper from the box, one will say "teacher" and the other, "student." You hear the other guy say, "Gee, this won't

affect my heart condition, will it?" while you are pulling out "teacher." (They all say "teacher.")  
Then the test begins. You watch as the other guy (the actor) is tied up to an electric charge. They explain that you teach him a series of words or numbers; if he repeats them back wrong, you press the button that will give him a light shock. You cannot see the shocking process from your test room.  
As the test progresses, the shocks get stronger.  
You begin, he screws up, and you press the button. He grunts.  
He screws up again, he moans this time when you press it.  
The 3rd time you press the button, he yells.  
Then the 4th, you don't want to press it, but 98% of people do (!!!) even though you can tell he's in pain. The scientists tell you that you CAN NOT STOP the test!  
You proceed.  
The 5th, he's screaming.  
The 6th, he's silent.

You think you killed him. (Of course the paid actor was never hooked up to the electricity in the first place.)

90% of people finished the tests despite his screams. However, that number was reduced to 10% when another human other than the scientist was in the room with you. Apparently strength in numbers also works in this way.

So is humanity as bad as Mark Twain says it is? Well, you can at least say that we are not as humane as we think we are.

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## **Lecy says**

We're not on the Mississippi anymore, Huck... This is a novella that was published posthumously and it's not at all what I was used to from Twain. So much of his writing has character and is engaging. This was just... bitter. I will also note that I listened to the audiobook version from Tantor, read by Jonathan Kent, and the audio quality was terrible. The narration was muffled and you have to keep it on 100% volume in order to even make out the words. Ugh.

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## **Mark LaMountain says**

The short stories are just good, funny, yet dynamic Twain tales. The longer story, The Mysterious Stranger, is a masterpiece, one of the greatest pieces of literature I have ever read. The wonderful writing coupled with the explosive conclusion make this a gem. It carefully guides the reader through a journey of small mental revelations, building upon them until the beautiful realization at the end, bringing them readily to an idea that would ordinarily take a person a lifetime to arrive upon and seriously consider.

Read The Mysterious Stranger next.

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## **Jenny Clark says**

The Jumping Frog was funny and a very quick read. I just imagine it looking at the man when it looses and

going "Gribbet" like it don't care.

The 1 One Million Pound Bank Note was pretty good. I did enjoy seeing how the man reacted to getting it, and how he was treated after he had his fortune.

The Man Who Corrupted Hadlyburg was a pretty scathing satire, but it had some good points with how the people acted.

The Mysterious Stranger was good, if a bit strange at times. I have to say, that was a unique ending!

Mark Twain is a great writer, and his work ages pretty well. This particular edition had really small print however, so maybe try a different edition if that bothers you.

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## **Holly says**

My version was a collection of 4 short stories. While the first 3 were of interest, The Mysterious Stranger was downright amazing. I thought it was interesting that it was published 6 years after the author's death. Not to be taken lightly, this story is a very real portrayal of not only culture, but a good take on afterlife to be considered.

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## **Sarah Eagle says**

I quite liked the other stories, but I felt like *The Mysterious Stranger* was anticlimactic. Admittedly, expecting anything more religious an ending from MARK TWAIN is ridiculous on my part, but I was hoping he would take it in some other direction.

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## **Maria says**

The Mysterious Stranger is singularly absent of Twain's usual humor, but his wonderful ability to alter the reader's perspective in areas previously taken for granted, such as one's views on good and evil, is patently present. The "other stories" fortunately were humorous and lighthearted and went a long way to lifting the depressions of the Mysterious Stranger.

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## **Susan says**

I've read this book 3x now. This is simply another book I read while'recovering' from gallbladder surgery, etc.

This collection is a little uneven--that is to say-- some of the selections/stories weren't that enjoyable, and I usually really love anything by Mark Twain. I really liked the first story-- 'The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County', but really disliked the second--- 'The Facts Concerning The Recent Carnival Of Crime in Connecticut'.

Bottom line- this is certainly not a stellar example of Twain, but worth the read.

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