



Little Annie's Ramble
Hawthorne, Nathaniel

Published: 1837

Categorie(s): Fiction, Short Stories

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About Hawthorne:

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born on July 4, 1804, in Salem, Massachusetts, where his birthplace is now a museum. William Hathorne, who emigrated from England in 1630, was the first of Hawthorne's ancestors to arrive in the colonies. After arriving, William persecuted Quakers. William's son John Hathorne was one of the judges who oversaw the Salem Witch Trials. (One theory is that having learned about this, the author added the "w" to his surname in his early twenties, shortly after graduating from college.) Hawthorne's father, Nathaniel Hathorne, Sr., was a sea captain who died in 1808 of yellow fever, when Hawthorne was only four years old, in Raymond, Maine. Hawthorne attended Bowdoin College at the expense of an uncle from 1821 to 1824, befriending classmates Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and future president Franklin Pierce. While there he joined the Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity. Until the publication of his *Twice-Told Tales* in 1837, Hawthorne wrote in the comparative obscurity of what he called his "owl's nest" in the family home. As he looked back on this period of his life, he wrote: "I have not lived, but only dreamed about living." And yet it was this period of brooding and writing that had formed, as Malcolm Cowley was to describe it, "the central fact in Hawthorne's career," his "term of apprenticeship" that would eventually result in the "richly meditated fiction." Hawthorne was hired in 1839 as a weigher and gauger at the Boston Custom House. He had become engaged in the previous year to the illustrator and transcendentalist Sophia Peabody. Seeking a possible home for himself and Sophia, he joined the transcendentalist utopian community at Brook Farm in 1841; later that year, however, he left when he became dissatisfied with farming and the experiment. (His Brook Farm adventure would prove an inspiration for his novel *The Blithedale Romance*.) He married Sophia in 1842; they moved to The Old Manse in Concord, Massachusetts, where they lived for three years. There he wrote most of the tales collected in *Mosses from an Old Manse*. Hawthorne and his wife then moved to Salem and later to the Berkshires, returning in 1852 to Concord and a new home The Wayside, previously owned by the Alcotts. Their neighbors in Concord included Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Like Hawthorne, Sophia was a reclusive person. She was bedridden with headaches until her sister introduced her to Hawthorne, after which her headaches seem to have abated. The Hawthornes enjoyed a long marriage, often taking walks in the park. Sophia greatly admired her husband's work. In one of her journals, she writes: "I am always so dazzled and bewildered with

the richness, the depth, the... jewels of beauty in his productions that I am always looking forward to a second reading where I can ponder and muse and fully take in the miraculous wealth of thoughts." In 1846, Hawthorne was appointed surveyor (determining the quantity and value of imported goods) at the Salem Custom House. Like his earlier appointment to the custom house in Boston, this employment was vulnerable to the politics of the spoils system. A Democrat, Hawthorne lost this job due to the change of administration in Washington after the presidential election of 1848. Hawthorne's career as a novelist was boosted by *The Scarlet Letter* in 1850, in which the preface refers to his three-year tenure in the Custom House at Salem. *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) and *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) followed in quick succession. In 1852, he wrote the campaign biography of his old friend Franklin Pierce. With Pierce's election as president, Hawthorne was rewarded in 1853 with the position of United States consul in Liverpool. In 1857, his appointment ended and the Hawthorne family toured France and Italy. They returned to *The Wayside* in 1860, and that year saw the publication of *The Marble Faun*. Failing health (which biographer Edward Miller speculates was stomach cancer) prevented him from completing several more romances. Hawthorne died in his sleep on May 19, 1864, in Plymouth, New Hampshire while on a tour of the White Mountains with Pierce. He was buried in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, Concord, Massachusetts. Wife Sophia and daughter Una were originally buried in England. However, in June 2006, they were re-interred in plots adjacent to Nathaniel. Nathaniel and Sophia Hawthorne had three children: Una, Julian, and Rose. Una was a victim of mental illness and died young. Julian moved out west, served a jail term for embezzlement and wrote a book about his father. Rose married George Parsons Lathrop and they became Roman Catholics. After George's death, Rose became a Dominican nun. She founded the Dominican Sisters of Hawthorne to care for victims of incurable cancer. Source: Wikipedia

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- *The Blithedale Romance* (1852)
- *The Marble Faun* (1860)
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Ding-dong! Ding-dong! Ding-dong!

The town-crier has rung his bell at a distant corner, and little Annie stands on her father's doorsteps trying to hear what the man with the loud voice is talking about. Let me listen too. Oh, he is telling the people that an elephant and a lion and a royal tiger and a horse with horns, and other strange beasts from foreign countries, have come to town and will receive all visitors who choose to wait upon them. Perhaps little Annie would like to go? Yes, and I can see that the pretty child is weary of this wide and pleasant street with the green trees flinging their shade across the quiet sunshine and the pavements and the sidewalks all as clean as if the housemaid had just swept them with her broom. She feels that impulse to go strolling away—that longing after the mystery of the great world—which many children feel, and which I felt in my childhood. Little Annie shall take a ramble with me. See! I do but hold out my hand, and like some bright bird in the sunny air, with her blue silk frock fluttering upward from her white pantalets, she comes bounding on tiptoe across the street.

Smooth back your brown curls, Annie, and let me tie on your bonnet, and we will set forth. What a strange couple to go on their rambles together! One walks in black attire, with a measured step and a heavy brow and his thoughtful eyes bent down, while the gay little girl trips lightly along as if she were forced to keep hold of my hand lest her feet should dance away from the earth. Yet there is sympathy between us. If I pride myself on anything, it is because I have a smile that children love; and, on the other hand, there are few grown ladies that could entice me from the side of little Annie, for I delight to let my mind go hand in hand with the mind of a sinless child. So come, Annie; but if I moralize as we go, do not listen to me: only look about you and be merry.

Now we turn the corner. Here are hacks with two horses and stage-coaches with four thundering to meet each other, and trucks and carts moving at a slower pace, being heavily laden with barrels from the wharves; and here are rattling gigs which perhaps will be smashed to pieces before our eyes. Hitherward, also, comes a man trundling a wheelbarrow along the pavement. Is not little Annie afraid of such a tumult? No; she does not even shrink closer to my side, but passes on with fearless confidence, a happy child amidst a great throng of grown people who pay the same reverence to her infancy that they would to extreme old age. Nobody jostles her: all turn aside to make way for little Annie; and, what is most singular, she appears conscious of her claim to such respect. Now her eyes brighten with pleasure. A street-musician has seated

himself on the steps of yonder church and pours forth his strains to the busy town—a melody that has gone astray among the tramp of footsteps, the buzz of voices and the war of passing wheels. Who heeds the poor organ-grinder? None but myself and little Annie, whose feet begin to move in unison with the lively tune, as if she were loth that music should be wasted without a dance. But where would Annie find a partner? Some have the gout in their toes or the rheumatism in their joints; some are stiff with age, some feeble with disease; some are so lean that their bones would rattle, and others of such ponderous size that their agility would crack the flagstones; but many, many have leaden feet because their hearts are far heavier than lead. It is a sad thought that I have chanced upon. What a company of dancers should we be! For I too am a gentleman of sober footsteps, and therefore, little Annie, let us walk sedately on.

It is a question with me whether this giddy child or my sage self have most pleasure in looking at the shop-windows. We love the silks of sunny hue that glow within the darkened premises of the spruce dry-goods men; we are pleasantly dazzled by the burnished silver and the chased gold, the rings of wedlock and the costly love-ornaments, glistening at the window of the jeweller; but Annie, more than I, seeks for a glimpse of her passing figure in the dusty looking-glasses at the hardware-stores. All that is bright and gay attracts us both.

Here is a shop to which the recollections of my boyhood as well as present partialities give a peculiar magic. How delightful to let the fancy revel on the dainties of a confectioner—those pies with such white and flaky paste, their contents being a mystery, whether rich mince with whole plums intermixed, or piquant apple delicately rose-flavored; those cakes, heart-shaped or round, piled in a lofty pyramid; those sweet little circlets sweetly named kisses; those dark majestic masses fit to be bridal-loaves at the wedding of an heiress, mountains in size, their summits deeply snow-covered with sugar! Then the mighty treasures of sugar-plums, white and crimson and yellow, in large glass vases, and candy of all varieties, and those little cockles—or whatever they are called—much prized by children for their sweetness, and more for the mottoes which they enclose, by love-sick maids and bachelors! Oh, my mouth waters, little Annie, and so doth yours, but we will not be tempted except to an imaginary feast; so let us hasten onward devouring the vision of a plum-cake.

Here are pleasures, as some people would say, of a more exalted kind, in the window of a bookseller. Is Annie a literary lady? Yes; she is deeply

read in Peter Parley's tomes and has an increasing love for fairy-tales, though seldom met with nowadays, and she will subscribe next year to the *Juvenile Miscellany*. But, truth to tell, she is apt to turn away from the printed page and keep gazing at the pretty pictures, such as the gay-colored ones which make this shop-window the continual loitering-place of children. What would Annie think if, in the book which I mean to send her on New Year's day, she should find her sweet little self bound up in silk or morocco with gilt edges, there to remain till she become a woman grown with children of her own to read about their mother's childhood? That would be very queer.

Little Annie is weary of pictures and pulls me onward by the hand, till suddenly we pause at the most wondrous shop in all the town. Oh, my stars! Is this a toyshop, or is it fairy-land? For here are gilded chariots in which the king and queen of the fairies might ride side by side, while their courtiers on these small horses should gallop in triumphal procession before and behind the royal pair. Here, too, are dishes of chinaware fit to be the dining-set of those same princely personages when they make a regal banquet in the stateliest hall of their palace—full five feet high—and behold their nobles feasting adown the long perspective of the table. Betwixt the king and queen should sit my little Annie, the prettiest fairy of them all. Here stands a turbaned Turk threatening us with his sabre, like an ugly heathen as he is, and next a Chinese mandarin who nods his head at Annie and myself. Here we may review a whole army of horse and foot in red-and-blue uniforms, with drums, fifes, trumpets, and all kinds of noiseless music; they have halted on the shelf of this window after their weary march from Liliput. But what cares Annie for soldiers? No conquering queen is she—neither a Semiramis nor a Catharine; her whole heart is set upon that doll who gazes at us with such a fashionable stare. This is the little girl's true plaything. Though made of wood, a doll is a visionary and ethereal personage endowed by childish fancy with a peculiar life; the mimic lady is a heroine of romance, an actor and a sufferer in a thousand shadowy scenes, the chief inhabitant of that wild world with which children ape the real one. Little Annie does not understand what I am saying, but looks wishfully at the proud lady in the window. We will invite her home with us as we return.—Meantime, good-bye, Dame Doll! A toy yourself, you look forth from your window upon many ladies that are also toys, though they walk and speak, and upon a crowd in pursuit of toys, though they wear grave visages. Oh, with your never-closing eyes, had you but an intellect

to moralize on all that flits before them, what a wise doll would you be!—Come, little Annie, we shall find toys enough, go where we may.

Now we elbow our way among the throng again. It is curious in the most crowded part of a town to meet with living creatures that had their birthplace in some far solitude, but have acquired a second nature in the wilderness of men. Look up, Annie, at that canary-bird hanging out of the window in his cage. Poor little fellow! His golden feathers are all tarnished in this smoky sunshine; he would have glistened twice as brightly among the summer islands, but still he has become a citizen in all his tastes and habits, and would not sing half so well without the uproar that drowns his music. What a pity that he does not know how miserable he is! There is a parrot, too, calling out, "Pretty Poll! Pretty Poll!" as we pass by. Foolish bird, to be talking about her prettiness to strangers, especially as she is not a pretty Poll, though gaudily dressed in green and yellow! If she had said "Pretty Annie!" there would have been some sense in it. See that gray squirrel at the door of the fruit-shop whirling round and round so merrily within his wire wheel! Being condemned to the treadmill, he makes it an amusement. Admirable philosophy!

Here comes a big, rough dog—a countryman's dog—in search of his master, smelling at everybody's heels and touching little Annie's hand with his cold nose, but hurrying away, though she would fain have patted him.—Success to your search, Fidelity!—And there sits a great yellow cat upon a window-sill, a very corpulent and comfortable cat, gazing at this transitory world with owl's eyes, and making pithy comments, doubtless, or what appear such, to the silly beast.—Oh, sage puss, make room for me beside you, and we will be a pair of philosophers.

Here we see something to remind us of the town-crier and his ding-dong-bell. Look! look at that great cloth spread out in the air, pictured all over with wild beasts, as if they had met together to choose a king, according to their custom in the days of Æsop. But they are choosing neither a king nor a President, else we should hear a most horrible snarling! They have come from the deep woods and the wild mountains and the desert sands and the polar snows only to do homage to my little Annie. As we enter among them the great elephant makes us a bow in the best style of elephantine courtesy, bending lowly down his mountain bulk, with trunk abased and leg thrust out behind. Annie returns the salute, much to the gratification of the elephant, who is certainly the best-bred monster in the caravan. The lion and the lioness are busy with two beef-bones. The royal tiger, the beautiful, the untamable, keeps pacing his narrow cage with a haughty step, unmindful of the spectators or

recalling the fierce deeds of his former life, when he was wont to leap forth upon such inferior animals from the jungles of Bengal.

Here we see the very same wolf—do not go near him, Annie!—the selfsame wolf that devoured little Red Riding-Hood and her grandmother. In the next cage a hyena from Egypt who has doubtless howled around the pyramids and a black bear from our own forests are fellow-prisoners and most excellent friends. Are there any two living creatures who have so few sympathies that they cannot possibly be friends? Here sits a great white bear whom common observers would call a very stupid beast, though I perceive him to be only absorbed in contemplation; he is thinking of his voyages on an iceberg, and of his comfortable home in the vicinity of the north pole, and of the little cubs whom he left rolling in the eternal snows. In fact, he is a bear of sentiment. But oh those unsentimental monkeys! The ugly, grinning, aping, chattering, ill-natured, mischievous and queer little brutes! Annie does not love the monkeys; their ugliness shocks her pure, instinctive delicacy of taste and makes her mind unquiet because it bears a wild and dark resemblance to humanity. But here is a little pony just big enough for Annie to ride, and round and round he gallops in a circle, keeping time with his trampling hoofs to a band of music. And here, with a laced coat and a cocked hat, and a riding-whip in his hand—here comes a little gentleman small enough to be king of the fairies and ugly enough to be king of the gnomes, and takes a flying leap into the saddle. Merrily, merrily plays the music, and merrily gallops the pony, and merrily rides the little old gentleman.—Come, Annie, into the street again; perchance we may see monkeys on horseback there.

Mercy on us! What a noisy world we quiet people live in! Did Annie ever read the cries of London city? With what lusty lungs doth yonder man proclaim that his wheelbarrow is full of lobsters! Here comes another, mounted on a cart and blowing a hoarse and dreadful blast from a tin horn, as much as to say, "Fresh fish!" And hark! a voice on high, like that of a muezzin from the summit of a mosque, announcing that some chimney-sweeper has emerged from smoke and soot and darksome caverns into the upper air. What cares the world for that? But, well-a-day, we hear a shrill voice of affliction—the scream of a little child, rising louder with every repetition of that smart, sharp, slapping sound produced by an open hand on tender flesh. Annie sympathizes, though without experience of such direful woe.

Lo! the town-crier again, with some new secret for the public ear. Will he tell us of an auction, or of a lost pocket-book or a show of beautiful

wax figures, or of some monstrous beast more horrible than any in the caravan? I guess the latter. See how he uplifts the bell in his right hand and shakes it slowly at first, then with a hurried motion, till the clapper seems to strike both sides at once, and the sounds are scattered forth in quick succession far and near.

Ding-dong! Ding-dong! Ding-dong!

Now he raises his clear loud voice above all the din of the town. It drowns the buzzing talk of many tongues and draws each man's mind from his own business; it rolls up and down the echoing street, and ascends to the hushed chamber of the sick, and penetrates downward to the cellar kitchen where the hot cook turns from the fire to listen. Who of all that address the public ear, whether in church or court-house or hall of state, has such an attentive audience as the town-crier! What saith the people's orator?

"Strayed from her home, a LITTLE GIRL of five years old, in a blue silk frock and white pantalets, with brown curling hair and hazel eyes. Whoever will bring her back to her afflicted mother—"

Stop, stop, town-crier! The lost is found.—Oh, my pretty Annie, we forgot to tell your mother of our ramble, and she is in despair and has sent the town-crier to bellow up and down the streets, affrighting old and young, for the loss of a little girl who has not once let go my hand? Well, let us hasten homeward; and as we go forget not to thank Heaven, my Annie, that after wandering a little way into the world you may return at the first summons with an untainted and unwearied heart, and be a happy child again. But I have gone too far astray for the town-crier to call me back.

Sweet has been the charm of childhood on my spirit throughout my ramble with little Annie. Say not that it has been a waste of precious moments, an idle matter, a babble of childish talk and a reverie of childish imaginations about topics unworthy of a grown man's notice. Has it been merely this? Not so—not so. They are not truly wise who would affirm it. As the pure breath of children revives the life of aged men, so is our moral nature revived by their free and simple thoughts, their native feeling, their airy mirth for little cause or none, their grief soon roused and soon allayed. Their influence on us is at least reciprocal with ours on them. When our infancy is almost forgotten and our boyhood long departed, though it seems but as yesterday, when life settles darkly down upon us and we doubt whether to call ourselves young any more,—then it is good to steal away from the society of bearded men, and even of gentler woman, and spend an hour or two with children. After drinking

from those fountains of still fresh existence we shall return into the crowd, as I do now, to struggle onward and do our part in life—perhaps as fervently as ever, but for a time with a kinder and purer heart and a spirit more lightly wise. All this by thy sweet magic, dear little Annie!

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