

TILL MY BROTHER CAME BACK

Standard English version

My twin brother Edward and I took up one abode together on a hillock in a small desert-town, Redthorp, one hundred miles roughly Northwest of our parents' house, following their shrewd proposition, that we should leave their home at such a ripe age of eighteen, and settle in one of our own; and that in a land so far from a main city the hardship of getting a house could be well allayed, and what little of it we could not afford, they would pay for. The first parting was a melancholy time for us, but we were soon gotten over the woe once all our belongings were moved into the new house, and we were heartily greeted by the folk of that town; who were generously-disposed, and made us forget all the sorrow of missing our parents.

Edward and I spent our free time, when we were at leave from our labor, conversing on the World, philosophy (the teachings of old and our own additions), our conjectures on bettering the land and the happiness of its inhabitants, and manifold subjects which we were keen on, and wherein my brother was at times wordier than myself, being so stirred by his wit to offer thoughts about these matters which he loved.

Unlike with my other brother and sister, Edward and I had always known peace at home growing up, and seldom quarreled, except when we were very young, and when at length provoked by one of our other siblings. This prosperous situation lasted into our adulthood, and even increased in its degree, so there was no-one I knew whom I would gladder abide with in a house in the town of Redthorp (still my younger sister harried me with doubts on our peace and friendship, saying I would hardly stand a week of him, though this happily did not come about).

Living in Redthorp I soon met a farmer in need of help for keeping his field (he could no longer do it alone, for his crops had grown too abundant), who wished to hire me for that purpose; so I accepted, and quit my former job to serve this man of the field.

And my brother took up a less earthy work than mine, of accounting for a company that was based some hundreds of miles far — for he had a craft for numbers and reckoning.

One day upon coming home from the field (it was so near that I walked thither and back), Edward was gleeful to announce, that for his good work he was invited by his boss to go on a business-trip to see the

company in-person, which would be wholly paid for, and would even get him a little extra wage as well. I was pleased at that occasion to hear he should be afforded so valuable an opportunity, and that he had grown so dear in his employer's eyes, which foretokened well for us both; and I spoke these feelings to him. He told me he was to leave in a week and would stay there twice that, so we spent the following seven days in especially close company; till the morning came, and we bid each other well and hugged heartfully, before he departed with his bags in hand; and thereafter I was sour-mooded for some time.

The first lonesome night I underwent felt some hours longer than it was wont to, and my sleep was a little hindered, nor the dreams of the most agreeable kind.

Three days passed in my brother's leave, and I had gotten over this heart-sickness almost fully. After laboring hard that evening with innumerable corn-sheaves, and being stricken at home with a wistful disposition, I left the house into the yard at Twilight and silently took to gazing the stars as the dimmer ones gradually appeared (the remaining blue daylight was fast-fleeting, and revealed them in its wane).

When I had been at this errand for about fifteen minutes, and was much-calmed therein though had no desire yet to cease, I thought I could hear the approach of somebody up the gravel of the driveway, and was set aback, being well-inclined to ward myself of this intruder by force. However, upon their coming into sight over the hill — though the footsteps were not familiar to me — I apprehended that it was my brother returning empty-handed, looking blithe (and wearing the same clothes that he had left in).

"Ed, you're back already!" I said, half in mirth and half sorry that he was let off so ill.

"Yeah, I am," said he while I embraced him (he was slow to respond in kind).

The stiffness of his countenance had little abated, so I supposed he was upset. Inquiring him on this, he said, in not completely clear words, that the meeting ended so unforeseeably early; that all his bags were lost, nor had he care for them in any case; that he seemed downcast because of the length of the flight hither, and the unforecast stop on the way; and,

upon another question, that he did not tell me he was coming back since it should make for my greater surprise.

We came together into the house, and he lay at once on the couch, hardly talkative, and speaking chiefly to answer my inquiries. I thought, since he was loath to speak, I should leave him alone.

He lay idle till I went to sleep on my bed.

Strangely, he rose after me in the morning (he was still resting on the couch when I found him instead of his own bed), whereas I was always the late-waker. Seeing him so troubled, I asked again how he was, whereat he got up at last, and answered blithely that he was not vexed at all, and was merely tired.

We spoke a little, once I had fixed breakfast for us, about what happened at his business meeting and during his journey thither: He said at one time that he got off the airplane in Drakeswick, and was brought to the prepaid inn-room by taxi; later he said the inn was near enough the airport that he needed only walk there. The boss was named Steven; later he called him Robert. Asking him to clarify his name, because it seemed he had gotten it mixed up, he said his name was Steven Robert.

Edward was slow to eat his bacon, eggs, and toast, though I had known him to be a swift eater, ever hurrying to free his hands to get back to some intellectual project of his. When I asked him if he were still tired, he said no; and when I inquired him whether he would work on his geometric tables (he had wished to find the measures of sundry limbs of the body, big and small, and expound their order), he said he had forgotten them, and would avoid improving them for a while.

Most of his speech was answers to my questions. I left for the field.

Upon return, I found my brother resting on the couch once more, in an afflicted disposition at my words.

"Are you upset with something?" I asked him.

"No. But I think you should leave me alone." He looked up at me from the pillow with a grim face, which frightened me enough, that I spoke no further and left him to go into the yard where the Sun still shone dully.

Later I went back inside to make supper, a soup with vegetables and meat. Edward said he was not hungry (slinking away from the dinner-table), so I ate a more abundant share, alone, and went to sleep soon, while my brother roamed the house, irritable each time I had ventured to talk to him.

I was awoken at about two in the morning, when he entered my room, opening the door softly and standing at my side some time before I made my awokenness known to him; whereat he stepped back (seeming startled, though it was I who ought to be), waited still a moment, and left speechlessly after that.

He was not in the house when I rose in the morning, yet his work began hours later; when I sought him, thinking to console him from whatever vexed him, I found him holding a spade in the front yard by my car, staring down the hill. Asked what he was doing with it, he answered with some smart word that I had become annoying with all my questions, and that, "he'd like me to keep out of his business sometimes."

I left him, disturbed. Right as I was shutting the front door, already come inside the house, I heard him swing the spade and strike the earth with it violently from where he was standing.

That evening, while I trod the dirt-road from the field to which I was employed, I received a text-message on my phone, which was a picture of a restaurant, sent from my brother; who said he was eating there right then, that his trip was going well so far, and that he was lodging at the Kingly Inn in Drakeswick, where he would retire to after his meal.

It was then that I understood wherefore my brother had behaved so uncannily since his home-coming, and what danger I was in.

I was half a mile from the house, the late evening setting in; and I durst no longer go my usual way home, especially considering for what purpose that spade should be employed in the hands of a foreign foe, as I realized had been living with me a few days.

I encompassed the hill which the house was on half-way, to the hindward side, from which the unfenced backyard might be climbed to. I walked up with as much stealth as I was able; and, getting in, at once hastened to the tool-shed, endeavoring to fetch from it the axe.

However, upon opening it, I found it had been emptied of all its long-hafted tools, only the hand-trowel and other trifling articles like it left.

This discomposed me immeasurably, but I left with the hand-shovel for the slightest protection it granted me, and began to flee. I had been too loud, it seems however (or I was discovered in another way), for in my flight down the hillock's slope I spied behind me the gleam of an axehead in the waning daylight, which was lifted in my "brother's" hands as he came out from the side of the house.

I made quick time down the hill, whereas he kept in his stead, and, evidently, had an evil scheme which he would use against me: he would wait by the house, and be ready for me if ever I should come near or become too wearied for further flight from him.

Once I was back onto the main road, and could barely see his grim expression as he stood on the porch with the axe, I strode with as much speed as I needed back toward the farm where I was hired.

After arriving, I found among the tools the deadliest, the scythe (with which I had mown corn a few times for the farmer I served). This one's blade was very long, and the snath no shorter, so I felt it should make a worthy weapon for me. Unseen, I went back to the road with it, and saw a change in my foe's design: He was advancing up the road toward me, neither slow nor swift, and bearing the axe in one hand.

I walked boldly to meet him (he had once more assumed his blithe disposition).

Upon coming near, he swung the axe for my head early (seeing the length of my weapon outdid his), which was at the closest point not a foot from the blade; however, in this motion he was no more protected, so I freely made a swing of my own with the scythe for his mid-riff; and, my brother's doppelganger being of unsound enough composition, the scythe clove him in half, felling both parts and the axe he had stolen to the ground, where he bled green blood in prodigious volume.

Still my fiend was not destroyed, however, since his upper half could yet make a demonstration of biting, though it was in vain. Then it proceeded to speak: "Do the same to your other brother when he comes back!"

He could utter no further, for I hewed off his head with the fallen axe; and his three pieces lay dead.

I shall not trouble the reader how I restored things to their order till my brother came back: Only I buried the monster that I had slain down the hill from our yard, found the tools he had taken from the shed and returned them to their proper place, and overall composed myself from these events; only long after the end of my brother's business trip telling him them.

He devised a few conjectures what that evil creature was, and how it imitated his likeness, though could not be certain of their veracity.