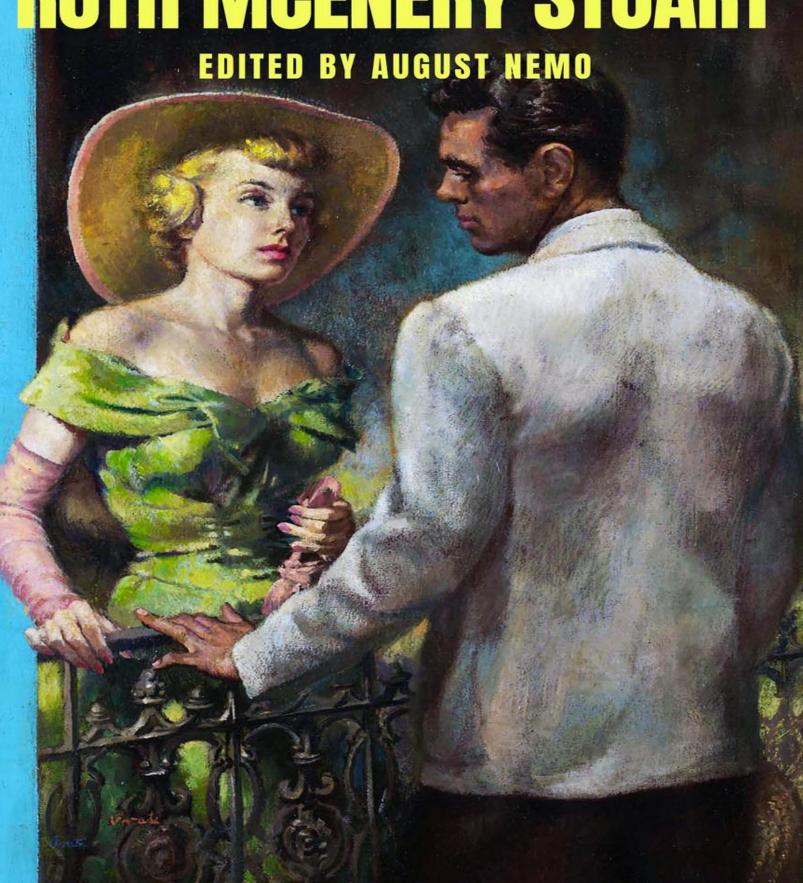
# 7 BEST SHORT STORIES BY RUTH MCENERY STUART EDITED BY AUGUST NEMO



### TACET BOOKS

# 7 BEST SHORT STORIES

# Ruth McEnery Stuart

August Nemo

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### The Author

She was born Mary Routh McEnery Stuart, child of James and Mary Routh (Stirling) McEnery in Marksville, Louisiana. (She changed the spelling of her name to "Ruth" after she began her career in literature.) Stuart's true date of birth is not known with certainty. In addition to the date shown here in 1849, Stuart's date of birth is also shown as 19 February 1852 on her marriage certificate. When she was three, Stuart moved to New Orleans, Louisiana. Stuart taught school there until she married Arkansas farmer Alfred Oden Stuart on 6 August 1879. Alfred Oden Stuart was a widower with eleven children; he died in 1883 and she returned to New Orleans. Ruth and Alfred Oden Stuart had one son, but he died in 1904.

Stuart first published in February 1888 in the New Princeton Review. She sold a second story to Harpers New Monthly Magazine shortly thereafter; in the early 1890s she moved to New York City. Stuart was active in her literary career from 1888 until 1917, producing some 75 works. Between 1891-97 she produced "20 books, short stories, sketches, and reprinted verses she had originally published in magazines". She was known not just for her writing, but also for oral performances of her work. Her most famous work is said to be Sonny (1896). She was also occasionally a subeditor at Harpers.

Stuart has been characterized as belonging to the school of "American local color writing that emphasizes regional characteristics in landscape, way of life, and language." Stuart's treatment of blacks forms a significant portion of her corpus and, if potentially troublesome today, "contemporary critics acclaimed her as providing an

authentic representation of African Americans." Her work is said to be of the same school as Kate Chopin.

Stuart died in New York City in 1917 and was buried in New Orleans.

## Sonny's Christenin'

Yas, sir, wife an' me, we've turned 'Piscopals—all on account o' Sonny. He seemed to prefer that religion, an' of co'se we wouldn't have the family divided, so we're a-goin' to be ez good 'Piscopals ez we can.

I reckon it'll come a little bit awkward at first. Seem like I never will git so thet I can sass back in church 'thout feelin' sort o' impident—but I reckon I'll chirp up an' come to it, in time.

I never was much of a hand to sound the amens, even in our own Methodist meetin's. Sir? How old is he? Oh, Sonny's purty nigh six—but he showed a pref'ence for the 'Piscopal Church long fo' he could talk.

When he wasn't no mo' 'n three year old we commenced atakin him round to church wherever they held meetin's, —'Piscopals, Methodists or Presbyterians,—so's he could see an' hear for hisself. I ca'yed him to a baptizin' over to Chinquepin Crik, once-t, when he was three. I thought I'd let him see it done an' maybe it might make a good impression; but no, sir! The Baptists didn't suit him! Cried ever' time one was douced, an' I had to fetch him away. In our Methodist meetin's he seemed to git worked up an' pervoked, some way. An' the Presbyterians, he didn't take no stock in them at all. Ricollect, one Sunday the preacher, he preached a mighty powerful disco'se on the doctrine o' lost infants not 'lected to salvation—an' Sonny? Why, he slep' right thoo it.

The first any way lively interest he ever seemed to take in religious services was at the 'Piscopals, Easter Sunday. When he seen the lilies an' the candles he thess clapped his little hands, an' time the folks commenced answerin' back

he was tickled all but to death, an' started answerin' hisself —on'y, of co'se he'd answer sort o' hit an' miss.

I see then thet Sonny was a natu'al-born 'Piscopal, an' we might ez well make up our minds to it—an' I told HER so, too. They say some is born so. But we thought we'd let him alone an' let nature take its co'se for a while—not pressin' him one way or another. He never had showed no disposition to be christened, an' ever sence the doctor tried to vaccinate him he seemed to git the notion that christenin' an' vaccination was mo' or less the same thing; an' sence that time, he's been mo' opposed to it than ever.

Sir? Oh no, sir. He didn't vaccinate him; he thess tried to do it; but Sonny, he wouldn't begin to allow it. We all tried to indoose 'im. I offered him everything on the farm ef he'd thess roll up his little sleeve an' let the doctor look at his arm—promised him thet he wouldn't tech a needle to it tell he said the word. But he wouldn't. He 'lowed thet me an' his mamma could git vaccinated ef we wanted to, but he wouldn't.

Then we showed him our marks where we had been vaccinated when we was little, an' told him how it had kep' us clair o' havin' the smallpock all our lives.

Well, sir, it didn't make no diff'ence whether we'd been did befo' or not, he 'lowed thet he wanted to see us vaccinated ag'in.

An' so, of co'se, thinkin' it might encour'ge him, we thess had it did over—tryin' to coax him to consent after each one, an' makin' pertend like we enjoyed it.

Then, nothin' would do but the nigger, Dicey, had to be did, an' then he 'lowed thet he wanted the cat did, an' I tried to strike a bargain with him thet if Kitty got vaccinated he would. But he wouldn't comp'omise. He thess let on thet Kit

had to be did whe'r or no. So I ast the doctor ef it would likely kill the cat, an' he said he reckoned not, though it might sicken her a little. So I told him to go ahead. Well, sir, befo' Sonny got thoo, he had had that cat an' both dogs vaccinated—but let it tech hisself he would not.

I was mighty sorry not to have it did, 'cause they was a nigger thet had the smallpock down to Cedar Branch, fifteen mile away, an' he didn't die, neither. He got well. An' they say when they git well they're more fatal to a neighborhood 'n when they die.

That was fo' months ago now, but to this day ever' time the wind blows from you'west I feel oneasy, an' try to entice Sonny to play on the far side o' the house.

Well, sir, in about ten days after that we was the down-inthe- mouthest crowd on that farm, man an' beast, thet you ever see. Ever' last one o' them vaccinations took, sir, an' took severe, from the cat up.

But I reckon we're all safe-t guarded now. They ain't nothin' on the place thet can fetch it to Sonny, an' I trust, with care, he may never be exposed.

But I set out to tell you about Sonny's diristenin' an' us turnin' 'Piscopal. Ez I said, he never seemed to want baptism, though he had heard us discuss all his life both it an' vaccination ez the two ordeels to be gone thoo with some time, an' we'd speculate ez to whether vaccination would take or not, an' all sech ez that, an' then, ez I said, after he see what the vaccination was, why he was even mo' prejudyced agin' baptism 'n ever, an' we 'lowed to let it run on tell sech a time ez he'd decide what name he'd want to take an' what denomination he'd want to bestow it on him.

Wife, she's got some 'Piscopal relations that she sort o' looks up to,—though she don't own it,—but she was raised

Methodist an' I was raised a true-blue Presbyterian. But when we professed after Sonny come we went up together at Methodist meetin'. What we was after was righteous livin', an' we didn't keer much which denomination helped us to it.

An' so, feelin' friendly all roun' that-a-way, we thought we'd leave Sonny to pick his church when he got ready, an' then they wouldn't be nothin' to undo or do over in case he went over to the 'Piscopals, which has the name of revisin' over any other church' performances—though sence we've turned 'Piscopals we've found out that ain't so.

Of co'se the preachers, they used to talk to us about it oncet in a while,—seemed to think it ought to be did,—'ceptin', of co'se, the Baptists.

Well, sir, it went along so till last week. Sonny ain't but, ez I said, thess not quite six year old, an' ther seemed to be time enough. But last week he had been playin' out o' doors bare- feeted, thess same ez he always does, an' he tramped on a pine splinter some way. Of co'se, pine, it's the safe-test splinter a person can run into a foot, on account of its carryin' its own turpentine in with it to heal up things; but any splinter thet dast to push itself up into a little pink foot is a messenger of trouble, an' we know it. An' so, when we see this one, we tried ever' way to coax him to let us take it out, but he wouldn't, of co'se. He never will, an' somehow the Lord seems to give 'em ambition to work their own way out mos' gen'ally.

But, sir, this splinter didn't seem to have no energy in it. It these lodged there, an' his little foot it commenced to swell, an' it swole an' swole tell his little toes stuck out so thet the little pig thet went to market looked like ez ef it wasn't on speakin' terms with the little pig thet stayed home, an' wife an' me we watched it, an' I reckon she prayed over it

consider'ble, an' I read a extry psalm at night befo' I went to bed, all on account o' that little foot. An' night befo' las' it was lookin' mighty angry an' swole, an' he had limped an' "ouched!" consider'ble all day, an' he was mighty fretful bed-time. So, after he went to sleep, wife she come out on the po'ch where I was settin', and she says to me, says she, her face all drawed up an' workin', says she: "Honey," says she, "I reckon we better sen' for him an' have it did." Thess so, she said it. "Sen' for who, wife?" says I, "an' have what did?" "Why, sen' for him, the 'Piscopal preacher," says she, "an' have Sonny christened. Them little toes o' hisn is ez red ez cherry tomatoes. They burnt my lips thess now like a coal o' fire an'—an' lockjaw is goin' roun' tur'ble.

"Seems to me," says she, "when he started to git sleepy, he didn't gap ez wide ez he gen'ly does—an' I'm 'feered he's agittin' it now." An', sir, with that, she thess gathered up her apron an' mopped her face in it an' give way. An' ez for me, I didn't seem to have no mo' backbone down my spinal colume 'n a feather bolster has, I was that weak.

I never ast her why she didn't sen' for our own preacher. I knowed then ez well ez ef she'd 'a' told me why she done it —all on account o' Sonny bein' so tickled over the 'Piscopals' meetin's.

It was mos' nine o'clock then, an' a dark night, an' rainin', but I never said a word—they wasn't no room round the edges o' the lump in my throat for words to come out ef they'd 'a' been one surgin' up there to say, which they wasn't—but I thess went out an' saddled my horse an' I rid into town. Stopped first at the doctor's an' sent him out, though I knowed't wouldn't do no good; Sonny wouldn't 'low him to tech it; but I sent him out anyway, to look at it, an', ef possible, console wife a little. Then I rid on to the rector's an' ast him to come out immejate an' baptize Sonny. But nex' day was his turn to preach down at Sandy Crik, an' he