

# 7 BEST SHORT STORIES BY ARTHUR MORRISON

EDITED BY AUGUST NEMO





TACET BOOKS

7 *best*  
*short stories by*  
*Arthur Morrison*

EDITED BY  
August Nemo



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# The Author

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ARTHUR MORRISON, HIMSELF born in the East End, began his writing career in 1889 as subeditor of the journal of the People's Palace, an institution designed to bring culture into the London slums. In 1890 he became a freelance journalist and in 1892 a regular contributor to William Ernest Henley's National Observer, in which most of the stories in Morrison's first major work, *Tales of Mean Streets* (1894), originally appeared. *A Child of the Jago* (1896) and *To London Town* (1899) completed this East End trilogy. Morrison published another powerful novel of slum life, *The Hole in the Wall*, in 1902. His realistic novels and stories are sober in tone, but the characters are portrayed with a Dickensian colourfulness.

His attitude toward the people he described was paternalist, rather than radical, and he opposed socialism and the trades-union movement. He also wrote detective fiction that featured the lawyer-detective Martin Hewitt, published primarily in the Strand magazine (1894-96); it was the most successful rival to Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes.

An authority on and collector of Chinese and Japanese art, Morrison also published the authoritative *Painters of Japan* (1911).

## That Brute Simmos

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SIMMONS'S INFAMOUS behaviour toward his wife is still matter for profound wonderment among the neighbours. The other women had all along regarded him as a model husband, and certainly Mrs. Simmons was a most conscientious wife. She toiled and slaved for that man, as any woman in the whole street would have maintained, far more than any husband had a right to expect. And now this was what she got for it. Perhaps he had suddenly gone mad.

Before she married Simmons, Mrs. Simmons had been the widowed Mrs. Ford. Ford had got a berth as donkeyman on a tramp steamer, and that steamer had gone down with all hands off the Cape: a judgment, the widow woman feared, for long years of contumacy, which had culminated in the wickedness of taking to the sea, and taking to it as a donkeyman—an immeasurable fall for a capable engine-fitter. Twelve years as Mrs. Ford had left her still childless, and childless she remained as Mrs. Simmons.

As for Simmons, he, it was held, was fortunate in that capable wife. He was a moderately good carpenter and joiner, but no man of the world, and he wanted one. Nobody could tell what might not have happened to Tommy Simmons if there had been no Mrs. Simmons to take care of him. He was a meek and quiet man, with a boyish face and sparse, limp whiskers. He had no vices (even his pipe departed him after his marriage), and Mrs. Simmons had ingrafted on him divers exotic virtues. He went solemnly to chapel every Sunday, under a tall hat, and put a penny—one returned to him for the purpose out of his week's wages—in the plate. Then, Mrs. Simmons overseeing, he took off

his best clothes, and brushed them with solicitude and pains. On Saturday afternoons he cleaned the knives, the forks, the boots, the kettles, and the windows, patiently and conscientiously; on Tuesday evenings he took the clothes to the mangling; and on Saturday nights he attended Mrs. Simmons in her marketing, to carry the parcels.

Mrs. Simmons's own virtues were native and numerous. She was a wonderful manager. Every penny of Tommy's thirty-six or thirty-eight shillings a week was bestowed to the greatest advantage, and Tommy never ventured to guess how much of it she saved. Her cleanliness in housewifery was distracting to behold. She met Simmons at the front door whenever he came home, and then and there he changed his boots for slippers, balancing himself painfully on alternate feet on the cold flags. This was because she scrubbed the passage and door-step turn about with the wife of the downstairs family, and because the stair-carpet was her own. She vigilantly supervised her husband all through the process of "cleaning himself" after work, so as to come between her walls and the possibility of random splashes; and if, in spite of her diligence, a spot remained to tell the tale, she was at pains to impress the fact on Simmons's memory, and to set forth at length all the circumstances of his ungrateful selfishness. In the beginning she had always escorted him to the ready-made clothes shop, and had selected and paid for his clothes, for the reason that men are such perfect fools, and shopkeepers do as they like with them. But she presently improved on that. She found a man selling cheap remnants at a street-corner, and straightway she conceived the idea of making Simmons's clothes herself. Decision was one of her virtues, and a suit of uproarious check tweeds was begun that afternoon from the pattern furnished by an old one. More: it was finished by Sunday, when Simmons, overcome by astonishment at the feat, was endued in it, and pushed off