



The  
Complete  
Stories  
of  
Evelyn  
Waugh

"Wonderful to behold...  
Waugh is here  
in all his glory."  
-Susan Hunt Bagshaw

*The Complete Stories of Evelyn Waugh*

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*A collection of thirty-nine stories spans the entire career of the literary master and comic genius, from his earliest character sketches and barbed portraits of the British upper class to "Brideshead Revisited" and "Black Mischief".*

# ABOUT THE STORIES

EVELYN WAUGH wrote short fiction throughout his life. His literary career—which gained critical momentum in 1928, when his first book, a biography of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and his first novel, *Decline and Fall*, were both published—actually commenced in 1926, with the publication of Waugh's first post-Oxford story.

Through the decades that followed, as Waugh produced sixteen novels and nearly a dozen nonfiction works, he continued to write short fiction. Most of his stories appeared originally in periodicals ranging from *Harper's Bazaar* to *The Atlantic* and *Good Housekeeping*. The stories were subsequently published in book form in Waugh's lifetime in such collections as *Mr. Loveday's Little Outing and Other Sad Stories*, *Tactical Exercise*, and *Basil Seal Rides Again*; an additional volume, *Charles Ryder's Schooldays*, was published posthumously.

*The Complete Stories of Evelyn Waugh*, which makes all of Waugh's short fiction available to American readers for the first time, is adapted from a scholarly edition compiled by Ann Pasternak Slater and published in Great Britain by the Everyman's Library. Following is bibliographical information regarding the initial publication of each of Evelyn Waugh's stories.

# TACTICAL EXERCISE

John Verney married Elizabeth in 1938, but it was not until the winter of 1945 that he came to hate her steadily and fiercely. There had been countless brief gusts of hate before this, for it was a thing which came easily to him. He was not what is normally described as a bad-tempered man, rather the reverse; a look of fatigue and abstraction was the only visible sign of the passion which possessed him, as others are possessed by laughter or desire, several times a day.

During the war he passed among those he served with as a phlegmatic fellow. He did not have his good or his bad days; they were all uniformly good and bad; good, in that he did what had to be done, expeditiously without ever "getting in a flap" or "going off the deep end"; bad, from the intermittent, invisible sheet-lightning of hate which flashed and flickered deep inside him at every obstruction or reverse. In his orderly room when, as a company commander, he faced the morning procession of defaulters and malingerers; in the mess when the subalterns disturbed his reading by playing the wireless; at the Staff College when the "syndicate" disagreed with his solution; at Brigade H.Q. when the staff-sergeant mislaid a file or the telephone orderly muddled a call; when the driver of his car missed a turning; later, in hospital, when the doctor seemed to look too cursorily at his wound and the nurses stood gossiping jauntily at the beds of more likeable patients instead of doing their duty to him—in all the annoyances of army life which others dismissed with an oath and a shrug, John Verney's eyelids drooped wearily, a tiny grenade of hate exploded and the fragments rang and ricocheted round the steel walls of his mind.

There had been less to annoy him before the war. He had some money and the hope of a career in politics. Before marriage he served his apprenticeship to the Liberal party in two hopeless by-elections. The Central Office then rewarded him with a constituency in outer London which offered a fair chance in the next General Election. In the eighteen months before the war he nursed this constituency from his flat in Belgravia and travelled frequently on the continent to study political conditions. These studies convinced him that war was inevitable; he denounced the Munich agreement pungently and secured a commission in the territorial army.

Into this peacetime life Elizabeth fitted unobtrusively. She was his cousin. In 1938 she had reached the age of twenty-six, four years his junior, without falling in love. She was a calm, handsome young woman, an only child, with some money of her own and more to come. As a girl, in her first season, an injudicious remark, let slip and overheard, got her the reputation of cleverness. Those who knew her best ruthlessly called her "deep."

Thus condemned to social failure, she languished in the ballrooms of Pont Street for another year and then settled down to a life of concert-going and shopping with her mother, until she surprised her small circle of friends by marrying John Verney. Courtship and consummation were tepid, cousinly, harmonious. They agreed, in face of the coming war, to remain childless. No one knew what Elizabeth felt or thought about anything. Her judgments were mainly negative, deep or dull as you cared to take them. She had none of the appearance of a woman likely to inflame great hate.

John Verney was discharged from the Army early in 1945 with an M.C. and one leg, for the future, two inches shorter than the other. He found Elizabeth living in Hampstead with her parents, his uncle and aunt. She had kept him informed by letter of the changes in her condition but, preoccupied, he had not clearly imagined them. Their flat had been requisitioned by a government office; their furniture and books sent to a repository and totally lost, partly burned by a bomb, partly pillaged by

firemen. Elizabeth, who was a linguist, had gone to work in a clandestine branch of the Foreign Office.

Her parents' house had once been a substantial Georgian villa overlooking the Heath. John Verney arrived there early in the morning after a crowded night's journey from Liverpool. The wrought-iron railings and gates had been rudely torn away by the salvage collectors, and in the front garden, once so neat, weeds and shrubs grew in a rank jungle trampled at night by courting soldiers. The back garden was a single, small bomb-crater; heaped clay, statuary and the bricks and glass of ruined greenhouses; dry stalks of willow-herb stood breast high over the mounds. All the windows were gone from the back of the house, replaced by shutters of card and board, which put the main rooms in perpetual darkness. "Welcome to Chaos and Old Night," said his uncle genially.

There were no servants; the old had fled, the young had been conscribed for service. Elizabeth made him some tea before leaving for her office.

Here he lived, lucky, Elizabeth told him, to have a home. Furniture was unprocurable, furnished flats commanded a price beyond their income, which was now taxed to a bare wage. They might have found something in the country, but Elizabeth, being childless, could not get release from her work. Moreover, he had his constituency.

This, too, was transformed. A factory, wired round like a prisoner-of-war camp, stood in the public gardens. The streets surrounding it, once the trim houses of potential Liberals, had been bombed, patched, confiscated, and filled with an immigrant proletarian population. Every day he received a heap of complaining letters from constituents exiled in provincial boardinghouses. He had hoped that his decoration and his limp might earn him sympathy, but he found the new inhabitants indifferent to the fortunes of war. Instead they showed a sceptical curiosity about Social Security. "They're nothing but a lot of reds," said the Liberal agent.

"You mean I shan't get in?"

"Well, we'll give them a good fight. The Tories are putting up a Battle-of-Britain pilot. I'm afraid he'll get most of what's left of the middle-class vote."

In the event John Verney came bottom of the poll, badly. A rancorous Jewish schoolteacher was elected. The Central Office paid his deposit, but the election had cost him dear. And when it was over there was absolutely nothing for John Verney to do.

He remained in Hampstead, helped his aunt make the beds after Elizabeth had gone to her office, limped to the greengrocer and fishmonger and stood, full of hate, in the queues; helped Elizabeth wash up at night. They ate in the kitchen, where his aunt cooked deliciously the scanty rations. His uncle went three days a week to help pack parcels for Java.

Elizabeth, the deep one, never spoke of her work, which, in fact, was concerned with setting up hostile and oppressive governments in Eastern Europe. One evening at a restaurant, a man came and spoke to her, a tall young man whose sallow, aquiline face was full of intellect and humour. "That's the head of my department," she said. "He's so amusing."

"Looks like a Jew."

"I believe he is. He's a strong Conservative and hates the work," she added hastily, for since his defeat in the election John had become fiercely anti-Semitic.

"There is absolutely no need to work for the State now," he said. "The war's over."

"Our work is just beginning. They won't let any of us go. You must understand what conditions are in this country."

It often fell to Elizabeth to explain "conditions" to him. Strand by strand, knot by knot, through the coalless winter, she exposed the vast net of government control which had been woven in his

absence. He had been reared in traditional Liberalism and the system revolted him. More than this, it had him caught, personally, tripped up, tied, tangled; wherever he wanted to go, whatever he wanted to do or have done, he found himself baffled and frustrated. And as Elizabeth explained she found herself defending. This regulation was necessary to avoid that ill; such a country was suffering, as Britain was not, for having neglected such a precaution; and so on, calmly and reasonably.

“I know it’s maddening, John, but you must realize it’s the same for everyone.”

“That’s what all you bureaucrats want,” he said. “Equality through slavery. The two-class state—proletarians and officials.”

Elizabeth was part and parcel of it. She worked for the State and the Jews. She was a collaborator with the new, alien, occupying power. And as the winter wore on and the gas burned feebly in the stove, and the rain blew in through the patched windows, as at length spring came and buds broke in the obscene wilderness round the house, Elizabeth in his mind became something more important. She became a symbol. For just as soldiers in far-distant camps think of their wives, with a tenderness they seldom felt at home, as the embodiment of all the good things they have left behind, wives who perhaps were scolds and drabs, but in the desert and jungle become transfigured until their trite air-letters become texts of hope, so Elizabeth grew in John Verney’s despairing mind to more than human malevolence as the archpriestess and maenad of the century of the common man.

“You aren’t looking well, John,” said his aunt. “You and Elizabeth ought to get away for a bit. She is due for leave at Easter.”

“The State is granting her a supplementary ration of her husband’s company, you mean. Are we sure she has filled in all the correct forms? Or are commissars of her rank above such things?”

Uncle and aunt laughed uneasily. John made his little jokes with such an air of weariness, with such a droop of the eyelids that they sometimes struck chill in that family circle. Elizabeth regarded him gravely and silently.

John was far from well. His leg was in constant pain so that he no longer stood in queues. He slept badly; as also, for the first time in her life, did Elizabeth. They shared a room now, for the winter rains had brought down ceilings in many parts of the shaken house and the upper rooms were thought to be unsafe. They had twin beds on the ground floor in what had once been her father’s library.

In the first days of his homecoming John had been amorous. Now he never approached her. They lay night after night six feet apart in the darkness. Once when John had been awake for two hours he turned on the lamp that stood on the table between them. Elizabeth was lying with her eyes wide open staring at the ceiling.

“I’m sorry. Did I wake you?”

“I haven’t been asleep.”

“I thought I’d read for a bit. Will it disturb you?”

“Not at all.”

She turned away. John read for an hour. He did not know whether she was awake or asleep when he turned off the light.

Often after that he longed to put on the light, but was afraid to find her awake and staring. Instead he lay, as others lie in a luxurious rapture of love, hating her.

It did not occur to him to leave her; or, rather, it did occur from time to time, but he hopelessly dismissed the thought. Her life was bound tight to his; her family was his family; their finances were intertwined and their expectations lay together in the same quarters. To leave her would be to start fresh, alone and naked in a strange world; and lame and weary at the age of thirty-eight, John Verney

had not the heart to move.

He loved no one else. He had nowhere to go, nothing to do. Moreover he suspected, of late, that it would not hurt her if he went. And, above all, the single steadfast desire left to him was to do her ill. "I wish she were dead," he said to himself as he lay awake at night. "I wish she were dead."

Sometimes they went out together. As the winter passed, John took to dining once or twice a week at his club. He assumed that on these occasions she stayed at home, but one morning it transpired that she too had dined out the evening before. He did not ask with whom, but his aunt did, and Elizabeth replied, "Just someone from the office."

"The Jew?" John asked.

"As a matter of fact, it was."

"I hope you enjoyed it."

"Quite. A beastly dinner, of course, but he's very amusing."

One night when he returned from his club, after a dismal little dinner and two crowded Tube journeys, he found Elizabeth in bed and deeply asleep. She did not stir when he entered. Unlike her normal habit, she was snoring. He stood for a minute, fascinated by this new and unlovely aspect of her, her head thrown back, her mouth open and slightly dribbling at the corner. Then he shook her. She muttered something, turned over and slept heavily and soundlessly.

Half an hour later, as he was striving to compose himself for sleep, she began to snore again. He turned on the light, looked at her more closely and noticed with surprise, which suddenly changed to joyous hope, that there was a tube of unfamiliar pills, half empty, beside her on the bed table.

He examined it. "*24 Comprimés narcotiques, hypnotiques,*" he read, and then in large, scarlet letters, "NE PAS DEPASSER DEUX." He counted those which were left. Eleven.

With tremulous butterfly wings Hope began to flutter in his heart, became a certainty. He felt a fire kindle and spread inside him until he was deliciously suffused in every limb and organ. He lay, listening to the snores, with the pure excitement of a child on Christmas Eve. "I shall wake up tomorrow and find her dead," he told himself, as once he had felt the flaccid stocking at the foot of his bed and told himself, "Tomorrow I shall wake up and find it full." Like a child, he longed to sleep to hasten the morning and, like a child, he was wildly, ecstatically sleepless. Presently he swallowed two of the pills himself and almost at once was unconscious.

Elizabeth always rose first to make breakfast for the family. She was at the dressing table when sharply, without drowsiness, his memory stereoscopically clear about the incidents of the night before, John awoke. "You've been snoring," she said.

Disappointment was so intense that at first he could not speak. Then he said, "You snored, too, last night."

"It must be the sleeping tablet I took. I must say it gave me a good night."

"Only one?"

"Yes, two's the most that's safe."

"Where did you get them?"

"A friend at the office—the one you called the Jew. He has them prescribed by a doctor for when he's working too hard. I told him I wasn't sleeping, so he gave me half a bottle."

"Could he get me some?"

"I expect so. He can do most things like that."

So he and Elizabeth began to drug themselves regularly and passed long, vacuous nights. But often John delayed, letting the beatific pill lie beside his glass of water, while, knowing the vigil was terminable at will, he postponed the joy of unconsciousness, heard Elizabeth's snores, and hated her



sumptuously.

One evening while the plans for the holiday were still under discussion, John and Elizabeth went to the cinema. The film was a murder story of no great ingenuity but with showy scenery. A bride murdered her husband by throwing him out of a window, down a cliff. Things were made easy for her by his taking a lonely lighthouse for their honeymoon. He was very rich and she wanted his money. All she had to do was confide in the local doctor and a few neighbours that her husband frightened her by walking in his sleep; she doped his coffee, dragged him from the bed to the balcony—a feat of some strength—where she had already broken away a yard of balustrade, and rolled him over. Then she went back to bed, gave the alarm next morning, and wept over the mangled body which was presently discovered half awash on the rocks. Retribution overtook her later, but at the time the thing was a complete success.

“I wish it were as easy as that,” thought John, and in a few hours the whole tale had floated away in those lightless attics of the mind where films and dreams and funny stories lie spider-shrouded for a lifetime unless, as sometimes happens, an intruder brings them to light.

Such a thing happened a few weeks later when John and Elizabeth went for their holiday. Elizabeth found the place. It belonged to someone in her office. It was named Good Hope Fort, and stood on the Cornish coast. “It’s only just been derequisitioned,” she said: “I expect we shall find it in pretty bad condition.”

“We’re used to that,” said John. It did not occur to him that she should spend her leave anywhere but with him. She was as much part of him as his maimed and aching leg.

They arrived on a gusty April afternoon after a train journey of normal discomfort. A taxi drove them eight miles from the station, through deep Cornish lanes, past granite cottages and disused, archaic tin-workings. They reached the village which gave the house its postal address, passed through it and out along a track which suddenly emerged from its high banks into open grazing land on the cliff’s edge, high, swift clouds and sea-birds wheeling overhead, the turf at their feet alive with fluttering wild flowers, salt in the air, below them the roar of the Atlantic breaking on the rocks, a middle-distance of indigo and white tumbled waters and beyond it the serene arc of the horizon. Here was the house.

“Your father,” said John, “would now say, ‘Your castle hath a pleasant seat.’”

“Well, it has rather, hasn’t it?”

It was a small stone building on the very edge of the cliff, built a century or so ago for defensive purposes, converted to a private house in the years of peace, taken again by the Navy during the war as a signal station, now once more reverting to gentler uses. Some coils of rusty wire, a mast, the concrete foundations of a hut, gave evidence of its former masters.

They carried their things into the house and paid the taxi.

“A woman comes up every morning from the village. I said we shouldn’t want her this evening. I see she’s left us some oil for the lamps. She’s got a fire going, too, bless her, and plenty of wood. Oh, and look what I’ve got as a present from father. I promised not to tell you until we arrived. A bottle of whisky. Wasn’t it sweet of him. He’s been hoarding his ration for three months...” Elizabeth talked brightly as she began to arrange the luggage. “There’s a room for each of us. This is the only proper living room, but there’s a study in case you feel like doing any work. I believe we shall be quite comfortable...”

The living room was built with two stout bays, each with a french window opening on a balcony which overhung the sea. John opened one and the sea-wind filled the room. He stepped out, breathed deeply, and then said suddenly: “Hullo, this is dangerous.”

At one place, between the windows, the cast-iron balustrade had broken away and the stone ledge lay open over the cliff. He looked at the gap and at the foaming rocks below, momentarily puzzled. The irregular polyhedron of memory rolled uncertainly and came to rest.

He had been here before, a few weeks ago, on the gallery of the lighthouse in that swiftly forgotten film. He stood there, looking down. It was exactly thus that the waves had come swirling over the rocks, had broken and dropped back with the spray falling about them. This was the sound they had made; this was the broken ironwork and the sheer edge.

Elizabeth was still talking in the room, her voice drowned by wind and sea. John returned to the room, shut and fastened the door. In the quiet she was saying "... only got the furniture out of store last week. He left the woman from the village to arrange it. She's got some queer ideas, I must say. Just look where she put..."

"What did you say this house was called?"

"Good Hope."

"A good name."

That evening John drank a glass of his father-in-law's whisky, smoked a pipe and planned. He had been a good tactician. He made a leisurely, mental "appreciation of the situation." Object: murder.

When they rose to go to bed he asked: "You packed the tablets?"

"Yes, a new tube. But I am sure I shan't want any tonight."

"Neither shall I," said John, "the air is wonderful."

During the following days he considered the tactical problem. It was entirely simple. He had the "staff-solution" already. He considered it in the words and form he had used in the army. "... Courses open to the enemy... achievement of surprise... consolidation of success." The staff-solution was exemplary. At the beginning of the first week, he began to put it into execution.

Already, by easy stages, he had made himself known in the village. Elizabeth was a friend of the owner; he the returned hero, still a little strange in civvy street. "The first holiday my wife and I have had together for six years," he told them in the golf club and, growing more confidential at the bar, hinted that they were thinking of making up for lost time and starting a family.

On another evening he spoke of war-strain, of how in this war the civilians had had a worse time of it than the services. His wife, for instance; stuck it all through the blitz; office work all day, bombs at night. She ought to get right away, alone somewhere for a long stretch; her nerves had suffered; nothing serious, but to tell the truth he wasn't quite happy about it. As a matter of fact, he had found her walking in her sleep once or twice in London.

His companions knew of similar cases; nothing to worry about, but it wanted watching; didn't want it to develop into anything worse. Had she seen a doctor?

Not yet, John said. In fact she didn't know she had been sleep-walking. He had got her back to bed without waking her. He hoped the sea air would do her good. In fact, she seemed much better already. If she showed any more signs of the trouble when they got home, he knew a very good man to take her to.

The golf club was full of sympathy. John asked if there was a good doctor in the neighbourhood. Yes, they said, old Mackenzie in the village, a first-class man, wasted in a little place like that; not at all a stick-in-the-mud. Read the latest books; psychology and all that. They couldn't think why Old Mack had never specialized and made a name for himself.

"I think I might go and talk to Old Mack about it," said John.

"Do. You couldn't find a better fellow."

Elizabeth had a fortnight's leave. There were still three days to go when John went off to the village to consult Dr. Mackenzie. He found a grey-haired, genial bachelor in a consulting room that was more like a lawyer's office than a physician's, book-lined, dark, permeated by tobacco smoke.

Seated in the shabby leather armchair he developed in more precise language the story he had told in the golf club. Dr. Mackenzie listened without comment.

"It's the first time I've run up against anything like this," he concluded.

At length Dr. Mackenzie said: "You got pretty badly knocked about in the war, Mr. Verney?"

"My knee. It still gives me trouble."

"Bad time in hospital?"

"Three months. A beastly place outside Rome."

"There's always a good deal of nervous shock in an injury of that kind. It often persists when the wound is healed."

"Yes, but I don't quite understand..."

"My dear Mr. Verney, your wife asked me to say nothing about it, but I think I must tell you that she has already been here to consult me on this matter."

"About her sleep-walking? But she can't..." then John stopped.

"My dear fellow, I quite understand. She thought you didn't know. Twice lately you've been out of bed and she had to lead you back. She knows all about it."

John could find nothing to say.

"It's not the first time," Dr. Mackenzie continued, "that I've been consulted by patients who have told me their symptoms and said they had come on behalf of friends or relations. Usually it's girls who think they're in the family-way. It's an interesting feature of your case that you should want to ascribe the trouble to someone else, probably the decisive feature. I've given your wife the name of a man in London who I think will be able to help you. Meanwhile I can only advise plenty of exercise, light meals at night..."

John Verney limped back to Good Hope Fort in a state of consternation. Security had been compromised; the operation must be cancelled; initiative had been lost... all the phrases of the tactical school came to his mind, but he was still numb after this unexpected reverse. A vast and naked horror peeped at him and was thrust aside.

When he got back Elizabeth was laying the supper table. He stood on the balcony and stared at the gaping rails with eyes smarting with disappointment. It was dead calm that evening. The rising tide lapped and fell and mounted again silently among the rocks below. He stood gazing down, then he turned back into the room.

There was one large drink left in the whisky bottle. He poured it out and swallowed it. Elizabeth brought in the supper and they sat down. Gradually his mind grew a little calmer. They usually ate in silence. At last he said: "Elizabeth, why did you tell the doctor I had been walking in my sleep?"

She quietly put down the plate she had been holding and looked at him curiously. "Why?" she said gently. "Because I was worried, of course. I didn't think you knew about it."

"But have I been?"

"Oh yes, several times—in London and here. I didn't think it mattered at first, but the night before last I found you on the balcony, quite near that dreadful hole in the rails. I was really frightened. But it's going to be all right now. Dr. Mackenzie has given me the name..."

It was possible, thought John Verney; nothing was more likely. He had lived night and day for ten days thinking of that opening, of the sea and rock below, the ragged ironwork and the sharp edge of stone. He suddenly felt defeated, sick and stupid, as he had as he lay on the Italian hillside with his

smashed knee. Then as now he had felt weariness even more than pain.

“Coffee, darling.”

Suddenly he roused himself. “No,” he almost shouted. “No, no, no.”

“Darling, what is the matter? Don’t get excited. Are you feeling ill? Lie down on the sofa near the window.”

He did as he was told. He felt so weary that he could barely move from his chair.

“Do you think coffee would keep you awake, love? You look quite fit to drop already. There, lie down.”

He lay down and, like the tide slowly mounting among the rocks below, sleep rose and spread in his mind. He nodded and woke with a start.

“Shall I open the window, darling, and give you some air?”

“Elizabeth,” he said, “I feel as if I have been drugged.” Like the rocks below the window—now awash, now emerging clear from falling water; now awash again, deeper; now barely visible, mere patches on the face of gently eddying foam—his brain was softly drowning. He roused himself, as children do in nightmare, still scared, still half asleep. “I can’t be drugged,” he said loudly, “I never touched the coffee.”

“Drugs in the coffee?” said Elizabeth gently, like a nurse soothing a fractious child. “Drugs in the *coffee*? What an absurd idea. That’s the kind of thing that only happens on the films, darling.”

He did not hear her. He was fast asleep, snoring stertorously by the open window.