

THE MISER

"As some lone miser, visiting his store,  
Bends at his treasure, counts, recounts it o'er;"  
Goldsmith

A miser is a person to whom money has ceased to be a means to an end but has become the end of living itself. He is one who starves the mind and body and spirit in the midst of plenty. Perhaps the most pathetic individuals who ever require the services of an undertaker are dead misers. Certainly during their lifetime <sup>miser</sup> ~~they~~ are among the most warped and stricken creatures inhabiting God's globe.

People instinctively shun a known miser so that his life is <sup>perforce</sup> lonely and barren of human companionship. This is the way he apparently wants it. ~~The~~ <sup>Certainly the</sup> little gluttonies of life are not for him: the occasional mild drunk, the week-end with an amiable blonde, that expensive new Debussy album by Maggie Teyte that one shouldn't have bought. He denies himself everything that makes life bearable to a person of normal tastes and appetites...

One wonders what fractures of personality or scars of heredity or childhood make up a miser. Our psychologist would probably adjust his pincenez and pontificate about the basic sense of insecurity that spurs him on. The final irony is that this fanatic drive for security--if that is what it is--usually finishes him off. Malnutrition is the occupational disease of the well-heeled miser... I believe miserliness to be a form of mental illness where the normal <sup>instinct of</sup> ~~urge for~~ self-preservation runs amuck and becomes <sup>debauched</sup> ~~transformed~~ into a suicidal urge for the final security of death. There ought to be a law...

By miser I do not mean the revolting niggard that walks a mile to read <sup>somebody else's</sup> ~~the~~ Chicago Tribune. He is merely "tight"--and deserves nothing more than a kick in the coccyx for walking even ten paces to read the Trib. These "tight" individuals are fundamentally just plain selfish, in a mean, greedy, snuffling

sort of way, and are just as liable to go on a fine, free-spending, beard-growing drunk the following week.

Your true miser doesn't even want to read a newspaper—free or not. He prefers to live in a bleak, covetous little world of his own, completely insulated from depressions, wars or other disasters except insofar as these events may interfere with <sup>the acquisition and</sup> his worship of his God, Money! <sup>modern</sup> He distrusts his fellow men and all his institutions. Banks will never do. <sup>Perhaps some misers are started by bank failures...</sup> He must invariably have his money near him, so that he can run it through his fingers or walk barefoot on it or whatever it is misers do when they are alone.

His devotion to it is not primarily selfish—that is, to ultimately satisfy some <sup>understandable</sup> ~~physical~~ personal appetite—but is in a sense peculiarly selfless. He will mortify the flesh, even unto death, in his worship of the object of his adoration... Then one day <sup>his jaw drops and he</sup> he dies and the undertaker carts him away, <sup>scrape him up and buries him, leaving to scramble</sup> letting the relatives and tax collectors ~~to fight~~ over the remains. For it is surprising how many people, especially remote relatives, pop up to revere his memory <sup>after his death</sup> especially after the swag is found.

I have buried a number of misers and each experience so shakes me that I somehow ~~find myself wanting to~~ <sup>yearn</sup> deck myself in laurel wreaths and reel from tavern to tavern, shouting and leaping, <sup>out</sup> trying desperately to push aside this latest <sup>peek at</sup> ~~revelation~~ of the essential loneliness of ~~puny~~ Man. Instead, being a respectable small-town undertaker, I usually round up the boys and retire to a back room, numbing myself with <sup>straight</sup> poker and blended whiskey far into the night...

*your misers*



and when his wife died during the flu epidemic of World War I old Rolf quit his job in town, packed his saw-sharpening tools, and built his tarpaper shack <sup>on the outskirts of town</sup> overlooking the Sucker River. There he lived until the day of his death, ~~cultivating~~ hauling wood, catching and preserving suckers, sharpening saws, and cultivating his potato patch and his long flowing mustaches. <sup>Old Rolf's</sup> people still beat a path to his door to get their

<sup>the pilgrimages to</sup> Like Emerson's builder of better mousetraps, <sup>Rolf</sup> ~~loggers~~ old Rolf insisted that loggers and others that wanted saws sharpened <sup>for one thing</sup> must bring them to town. ~~He~~ charged more than most <sup>saw sharpeners</sup> but he did a better <sup>sharpening</sup> job than any. ~~He~~ would rarely ~~leave his~~ And loggers and others that sought his services could <sup>never</sup> always find him in. ~~Some~~ ~~because~~ he rarely left his shack except to forage for <sup>firewood</sup> ~~wood~~ which he usually did at dusk or on his infrequent trips to town for supplies. ~~On~~ <sup>to fish in the Sucker River just before</sup> these occasions when he left his shack, he always drew the blinds and elaborately locked the door with two padlocks. A queer <sup>and secretive</sup> man was old Rolf Ohminger of the flowing mustaches.

~~As the years went on~~ crackling  
Another of his drolleries was never to invite anyone into his shack. A logger might appear <sup>at his door</sup> in the midst of a blinding thunder storm, and be obliged to wait <sup>outside</sup> in the deluge while old Rolf rattled his <sup>drive of</sup> chams and bolte,

cautiously opened the door a few inches, <sup>(thrust ~~out~~ a grimy arm and</sup> ~~took~~  
to take or  
delivered <sup>the</sup> saw in question -- and then shut the  
door in <sup>visitor's</sup> his face. But still they came back, because  
no one could sharpen saws as well as old Rolf Ohmning.

vited anyone into his shack. He met visitors at the door--people could hear him rattling chains and bolts before he appeared--took the dull saw or delivered the sharpened saw, received his payment, muttered a grave thank you--and shut the door in their face.

<sup>Unwitting</sup> ~~Casual~~ couples who occasionally <sup>wandered afield to do</sup> ~~did~~ their wrestling on the hill near his shack <sup>these lovers</sup> were known to have claimed later that they heard wild strains of violin music coming from his darkened ~~shack~~ <sup>shack</sup> late at night. <sup>Always they avoided</sup> ~~They avoid~~ <sup>repeat performances.</sup> ~~This~~ eerie music was <sup>casual</sup> ~~somehow~~ a greater deterrent to <sup>trespassers</sup> than a slaving dog. <sup>the</sup> ~~wrestlers~~ quickly found other hills upon which to conduct their matches.

*midnight*

*Somehow*

Then one autumn evening <sup>first before the war</sup> Makinen, the Finn logger, brought a circular saw to be sharpened. Repeated knocks <sup>on old Rolfs door</sup> brought no answer, so Makinen went away. Before he left he observed through a crack in a <sup>tightly</sup> drawn curtain that a light was burning. <sup>and</sup> The outside padlocks were dangling unlocked. Old Ohming must be ~~xxxx~~ <sup>Makinen</sup> inside...The next morning <sup>unlocked.</sup> he came back and still no answer. The outside locks were still the same way, <sup>ever</sup> Since this was the longest time old Ohming had been ~~ever~~ known to stay away from his shack, Makinen reported the incident to the chief of police.

"Somethings <sup>damn</sup> funny up dat ol' man Ohming's s'ack," Makinen concluded.

We found old Ohming dead in his shack, <sup>sitting up in bed,</sup> ~~sagging over one of his cans~~ <sup>hugging an old family bible.</sup> ~~I had never suspected such pity on his part...~~ of ~~salted~~ <sup>Heart</sup> ~~suckers.~~ "Heart attack," the coroner sagely observed, as he drew <sup>a</sup> ~~an old~~ blanket <sup>over</sup> ~~on~~ the body. There was ~~nearly a dozen of these cans~~ of ~~brine~~ ~~old carbide cans~~ which he had gotten from the mines. There was a kerosene lantern suspended from a rafter above the body, still lighted. We looked around...

The shack was a fantastic litter <sup>of filth and distand</sup> of odds and ends: balls of string and cord suspended from the rafters, endless <sup>old</sup> piles of newspapers, a little work bench

littered with files and saws and other tools of his trade. We saw a music stand from the side of which hung suspended a fiddle. A ~~table~~ table near the music rack was covered with piled sheets of ruled brown wrapping paper. I looked closer. Each sheet was a musical composition for violin--solos, concerti, quartets, duets--all composed by Rudolph Ohming and carefully dated. This was the strange music that lovers on the hillside heard at night...

"Look here!" the chief spoke, rummaging in a tall, old-fashioned writing desk. He drew out a canvas bound bookkeeping ledger. In it, in old Rudolph's careful handwriting, appeared to be noted every penny old Rudolph had spent since he had moved to his shack years before...

Most of the purchases were for salt and flour and kerosene, a few for sugar and coffee, a very few for clothing, and a small amount for annual taxes on his plot of ground. Nothing more? What did he live on? The answer was obvious: potatoes and suckers... Here was a <sup>that</sup> man/moved Thoreau's brief stay at Walden Pond into the realm of a bacchanalian orgy.

"What'n hell are these?" the coroner saying, drawing a sheaf of brown wrapping paper from a wooden shelf. What were they indeed! The sheets were covered with involved mathematical equations, some so long that old Rudolph had to paste two or more sheets together to accommodate his figures. We started at each other. Old Rudolph Ohming--the composer and mathematician. Was he a madman or a genius? Alas, we ~~xxxx~~ shall never know. Later on the public administrator of Rudolph's estate had all the papers--music and equations--burned before I could raise a finger to stop him.

"What estate?" you ask. Let me tell you. Before we left, that day we found the body, we rummaged around to try to find the names of some relatives. No letters or addresses were found. "Here!" the chief said, flipping the pages of an old leather-bound family bible. "Hell, it's written in Arabic!" he said.

littered with files and saws and other <sup>marks</sup> ~~tools~~ of his trade.  
And that fearful stench! What caused that? Ah, yes...  
a dozen-odd old carbide cans, <sup>sitting</sup> ~~loaded~~ <sup>around the room,</sup> ~~loaded~~ <sup>and festering</sup>  
brine and <sup>the bloated bodies of</sup> ~~deceased~~ <sup>suckers</sup>

"Open that damn door!" I called to the  
prowling coroner, being ~~also~~ driven at the same  
time to light a funeral cigar I had absently accepted  
from a mourner  
the day before.



littered with files and saws and other tools of his trade. <sup>in one corner</sup> We saw a music stand from the side of which hung suspended a fiddle <sup>and a bow.</sup> A ~~table~~ table near the music rack was covered with <sup>piles of</sup> piled sheets of ruled brown wrapping paper. I

Even with my dim musical education, I perceived that the sheets were looked closer. Each sheet was a musical composition for violin--solos, <sup>string trios,</sup> concerti, quartets, duets--all composed by <sup>complete</sup> Rudolph Ohming and carefully dated, dated and signed by Rolf. I recall <sup>that one</sup> composition, entitled in Danish, <sup>which would be freely</sup> This was the strange music that, <sup>stray</sup> lovers on the hillside heard at night...

"Look here!" the chief spoke, rummaging in a tall, old-fashioned writing desk. He drew out a canvas bound bookkeeping ledger. In it, in old Rudolph's careful handwriting, appeared to be noted every penny old Rudolph had spent since he had moved to his shack years before...

Most of the purchases were for salt and flour and kerosene <sup>and more salt,</sup> a few for sugar and coffee, a very few for clothing, and a small amount for annual taxes on his plot of ground. Nothing more? What did he live on? The

answer was obvious: potatoes and suckers... Here was a man <sup>and moved his comparatively</sup> moved a brief stay at Walden Pond into the realm of <sup>a prolonged spendthrift's</sup> a bacchanalian orgy...

"What'n hell are these?" the coroner <sup>said,</sup> saying, drawing a sheaf of brown wrapping paper from a wooden shelf. <sup>Perhaps Einstein could have given us the answer...</sup> What were they indeed! The sheets were

covered with involved mathematical equations, some so long that old Rudolph <sup>had</sup> had to paste two or more sheets together to accommodate his figures. We <sup>started</sup> started at each other. Old Rudolph Ohming--<sup>Rolf</sup> the composer and mathematician... Was he a madman or a genius? Alas, we ~~may~~ shall never know. <sup>For</sup> Later on the public administrator of <sup>old Rolf's</sup> Rudolph's estate had all the <sup>old newspapers--along with the</sup> papers, music and equations--burned before I could raise a finger to stop him.

"What estate?" you ask. Let me tell you. Before we left, that day we found the body <sup>clutch</sup> we rummaged around to try to find the names of some relatives. "I'll get the family ~~book~~ bible," the chief said. "Here!" he finally No letters or addresses <sup>were</sup> found. "Here!" the chief said, flipping the pages <sup>he had wrested from the hands of old Rolf.</sup> of an old leather-bound family bible. "Hell, it's written in Arabic!" he said.

into the chest of Horace... I described later that Horace was a town in Denmark.

out of

"Let me see," I said, being something of a dull student of ~~Scandinavian~~ Scandinavian languages. <sup>"It's probably Danish."</sup> Yes, it was written in Danish, <sup>all right.</sup> It was Mrs. Ohming's family bible and would not help us find old Ohming's relatives--but might give us a lead. <sup>--"woops!" I exclaimed as</sup> The heavy bible slipped from my hands, ~~and~~ the pages <sup>fluttering idly</sup> fluttered as the large book fell to the floor.

"My Gawd!" the chief said, kneeling and recovering a ~~one~~ hundred dollar bill which had <sup>wuffed</sup> fluttered from the bible's pages. <sup>All of us knelt and</sup> we suddenly became devoted students of the bible. <sup>Our conversion was touching...</sup> Before we left we found slightly over seven thousand dollars in currency in the bible. <sup>old</sup> Old Rolf had <sup>to mark for his favorite passages.</sup> apparently used hundred dollar bills as book marks. Personally, <sup>am inclined to use old</sup> I see unpaid water bills...

<sup>Rolf</sup> Old Ohming was buried--in grand style, you may rest assured. <sup>but I felt that somehow both he and I had earned giving</sup> No ~~one~~ came to his funeral. <sup>That's when I discovered how long his mustache really was...</sup> No authentic relatives were ever found and his estate finally reverted to the State of Michigan. "You ~~mean~~ mean the entire seven thousand dollars?" you ask. Hell no--I mean the entire thirty-odd thousand dollars left after all of us got our whack...

You see, when the men came to clean out the shack, <sup>preparatory to selling it,</sup> they first had to get rid of the revolting carbide cans <sup>full</sup> of suckers. So they dug a deep hole, held their noses, and poured the suckers down the hole. On a hunch I saw to it that <sup>dismally</sup> the administrator and I <sup>last-minute hunch I</sup> were present. <sup>After watching the revolting spectacle I swore</sup> On the seventh can a metal object <sup>should be</sup> tumbled out that surely wasn't a sucker. <sup>The suckers were bad enough but they didn't chank...</sup> The men reluctantly fished it out <sup>scowled and</sup> of the hole. You guessed it--it was an air-tight metal container which yielded <sup>quite. "Fish it out!" I yelled.</sup> over ten thousand dollars in cash and securities... The rest of the suckers ~~was~~ were sifted with loving care--it made such a pretty picture I just wished and wished I had my Brownie--and <sup>produced to the</sup> yielded nearly fifteen thousand dollars more, <sup>in two different containers.</sup>

Even refused to let the ladies twin his mustache. I felt hot cornered, so I felt hot cornered to help my future numbers to myself.

then in

Where did he get all the dough? I don't know.  
I guess he must have been a miser all his life.

^ We could never find out his background -- his  
apparent education and all the rest. He was a <sup>true</sup> miser

of course; although his preoccupation with music  
however ~~whether primitive or not~~ and mathematics <sup>was</sup> unusual. Most misers find

no time for anything ~~that does~~ but making more  
money and ~~delighting~~ <sup>then gloating over</sup> it. Old Rolf Ohmring, "The

Sucker King," was a trifle different <sup>when</sup> -- a sort of poet among misers.

9 ← Sometimes I wake up in the still of the night <sup>and</sup> can't stifle

~~laughter~~ refrain from an ironical giggle ~~every~~

<sup>when I think</sup> of how close <sup>we</sup> the administrator came  
to paying a farmer ten dollars to cart <sup>away</sup> those

damned cans of suckers...

Moral:

One can forgive him for almost everything but the suckers. Did I say suckers?