



# The Devil and Tom Walker

Short Story by WASHINGTON IRVING

## Connect to Your Life

**Money Matters** Should people pursue wealth? Why or why not? How important is wealth to you? What limits, if any, would you put on your own pursuit of wealth? Discuss your answers to these questions with a small group of classmates.

## Build Background

**The Faust Legend** The first American writer esteemed abroad, Washington Irving is known for his humorous essays and stories. In "The Devil and Tom Walker," Irving adapted the Germanic legend of Johann Faust, a 16th-century magician and alchemist who was said to have sold his soul to the devil in exchange for worldly power and wealth. For his comic retelling, Irving created an American character who strikes the same bargain and faces the same consequences in an American setting. The story takes place in the environs of Boston in the early 1700s, when the Puritans still dominated Massachusetts society.

### WORDS TO KNOW Vocabulary Preview

abode	ostentation	prowess
censurer	parsimony	repose
daunted	peculiar	resolute
dolefully	piety	singular
melancholy	propitious	surmise

## Focus Your Reading

**LITERARY ANALYSIS IMAGERY** Imagery is words and phrases that appeal to the five senses, helping you to imagine precisely what people, places, and events in a literary work are like. The majority of images are visual, serving to stimulate pictures in your mind. Consider this descriptive paragraph from Irving's story:

*... there lived near this place a meager, miserly fellow, of the name of Tom Walker. He had a wife as miserly as himself. . . . They lived in a forlorn-looking house that stood alone and had an air of starvation. A few straggling savin trees, emblems of sterility, grew near it; no smoke ever curled from its chimney; no traveler stopped at its door. A miserable horse, whose ribs were as articulate as the bars of a gridiron, stalked about a field.*

The images of the forlorn house, the straggling trees, and the starved horse show you just how miserly Tom and his wife are.

**ACTIVE READING VISUALIZING** Irving provides much description in "The Devil and Tom Walker," so an understanding of the imagery is crucial to an understanding of the story—and to an enjoyment of its humor.

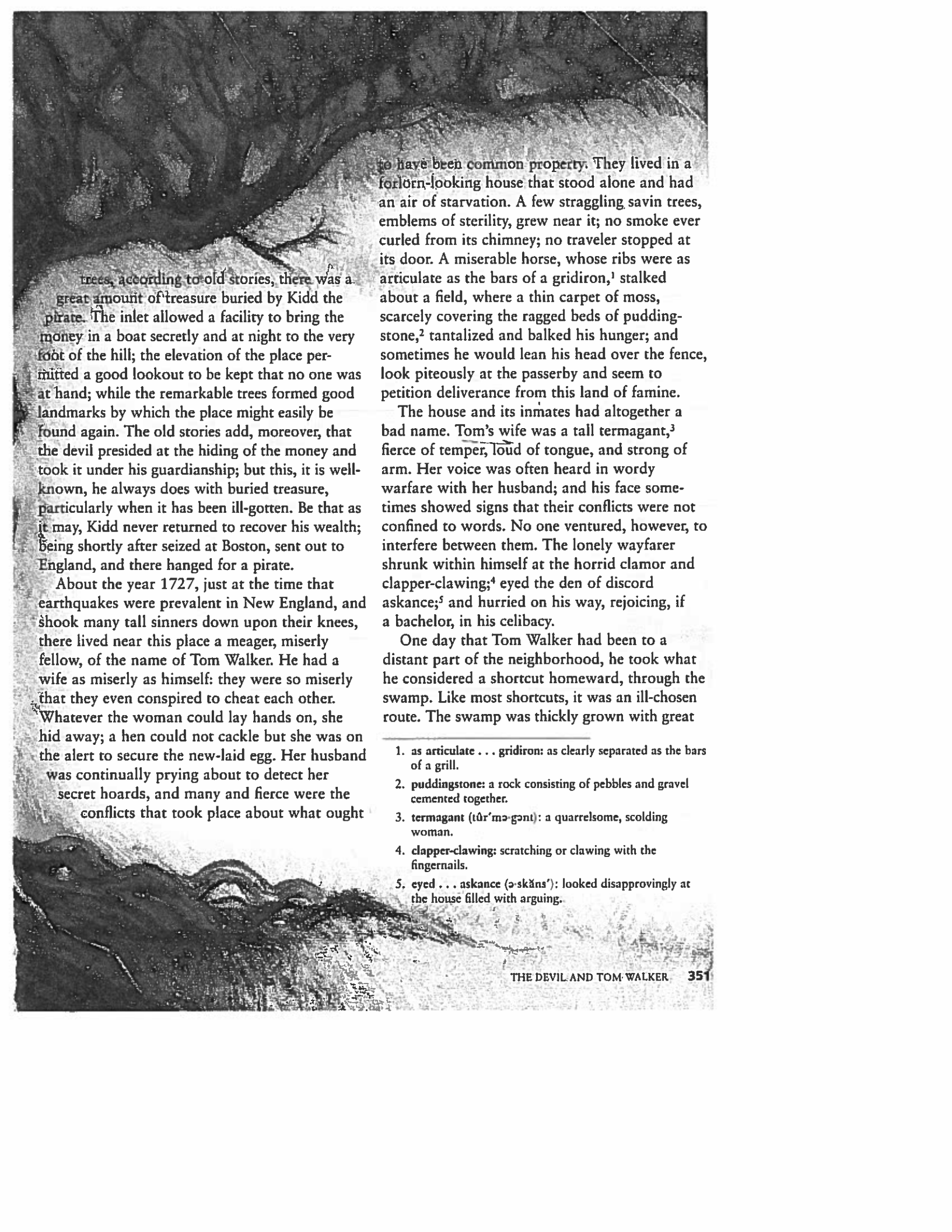
**READER'S NOTEBOOK** As you read, try to visualize, or form mental pictures of, the characters, settings, and events. Jot down some of the images that describe Tom and the character trait that each image helps you to picture.



*The*  
**Devil** *and*  
**Tom Walker**

Washington Irving

**A** few miles from Boston in Massachusetts, there is a deep inlet, winding several miles into the interior of the country from Charles Bay, and terminating in a thickly wooded swamp or morass. On one side of this inlet is a beautiful dark grove; on the opposite side the land rises abruptly from the water's edge into a high ridge, on which grow a few scattered oaks of great age and immense size. Under one of these gigantic



trees, according to old stories, there was a great amount of treasure buried by Kidd the pirate. The inlet allowed a facility to bring the money in a boat secretly and at night to the very foot of the hill; the elevation of the place permitted a good lookout to be kept that no one was at hand; while the remarkable trees formed good landmarks by which the place might easily be found again. The old stories add, moreover, that the devil presided at the hiding of the money and took it under his guardianship; but this, it is well-known, he always does with buried treasure, particularly when it has been ill-gotten. Be that as it may, Kidd never returned to recover his wealth; being shortly after seized at Boston, sent out to England, and there hanged for a pirate.

About the year 1727, just at the time that earthquakes were prevalent in New England, and shook many tall sinners down upon their knees, there lived near this place a meager, miserly fellow, of the name of Tom Walker. He had a wife as miserly as himself: they were so miserly that they even conspired to cheat each other. Whatever the woman could lay hands on, she hid away; a hen could not cackle but she was on the alert to secure the new-laid egg. Her husband was continually prying about to detect her secret hoards, and many and fierce were the conflicts that took place about what ought

to have been common property. They lived in a forlorn-looking house that stood alone and had an air of starvation. A few straggling savin trees, emblems of sterility, grew near it; no smoke ever curled from its chimney; no traveler stopped at its door. A miserable horse, whose ribs were as articulate as the bars of a gridiron,<sup>1</sup> stalked about a field, where a thin carpet of moss, scarcely covering the ragged beds of puddingstone,<sup>2</sup> tantalized and balked his hunger; and sometimes he would lean his head over the fence, look piteously at the passerby and seem to petition deliverance from this land of famine.

The house and its inmates had altogether a bad name. Tom's wife was a tall termagant,<sup>3</sup> fierce of temper, loud of tongue, and strong of arm. Her voice was often heard in wordy warfare with her husband; and his face sometimes showed signs that their conflicts were not confined to words. No one ventured, however, to interfere between them. The lonely wayfarer shrunk within himself at the horrid clamor and clapper-clawing;<sup>4</sup> eyed the den of discord askance;<sup>5</sup> and hurried on his way, rejoicing, if a bachelor, in his celibacy.

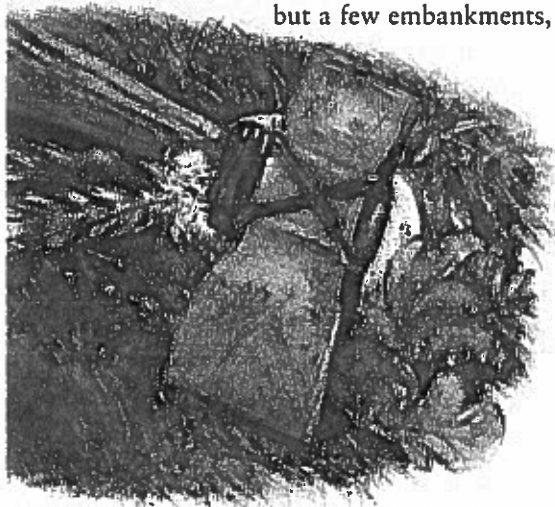
One day that Tom Walker had been to a distant part of the neighborhood, he took what he considered a shortcut homeward, through the swamp. Like most shortcuts, it was an ill-chosen route. The swamp was thickly grown with great

1. as articulate . . . gridiron: as clearly separated as the bars of a grill.
2. puddingstone: a rock consisting of pebbles and gravel cemented together.
3. termagant (tûr'mə-gənt): a quarrelsome, scolding woman.
4. clapper-clawing: scratching or clawing with the fingernails.
5. eyed . . . askance (ə-skäns'): looked disapprovingly at the house filled with arguing.

gloomy pines and hemlocks, some of them ninety feet high, which made it dark at noonday, and a retreat for all the owls of the neighborhood. It was full of pits and quagmires, partly covered with weeds and mosses, where the green surface often betrayed the traveler into a gulf of black, smothering mud; there were also dark and stagnant pools, the abodes of the tadpole, the bullfrog, and the water snake; where the trunks of pines and hemlocks lay half-drowned, half-rotting, looking like alligators sleeping in the mire.

Tom had long been picking his way cautiously through this treacherous forest; stepping from tuft to tuft of rushes and roots, which afforded precarious footholds among deep sloughs; or pacing carefully, like a cat, along the prostrate trunks of trees; startled now and then by the sudden screaming of the bittern,<sup>6</sup> or the quacking of wild duck rising on the wind from some solitary pool. At length he arrived at a firm piece of ground, which ran out like a peninsula into the deep bosom of the swamp. It had been one of the strongholds of the Indians during their wars with the first colonists. Here they had thrown up a kind of fort, which they had looked upon as almost impregnable, and had used as a place of refuge for their squaws and children.

Nothing remained of the old Indian fort but a few embankments,



WORDS **abode** (ə-bōd') *n.* a dwelling place; home  
TO **melancholy** (mə-lən-kōl'ē) *adj.* gloomy; sad  
KNOW **repose** (rī-pōz') *v.* to rest or relax

gradually sinking to the level of the surrounding earth, and already overgrown in part by oaks and other forest trees, the foliage of which formed a contrast to the dark pines and hemlocks of the swamp.

It was late in the dusk of evening when Tom Walker reached the old fort, and he paused there awhile to rest himself. Anyone but he would have felt unwilling to linger in this lonely, melancholy place, for the common people had a bad opinion of it, from the stories handed down from the time of the Indian wars, when it was asserted that the savages held incantations<sup>7</sup> here, and made sacrifices to the evil spirit.

Tom Walker, however, was not a man to be troubled with any fears of the kind. He reposed himself for some time on the trunk of a fallen hemlock, listening to the boding cry of the tree toad, and delving with his walking staff into a mound of black mold at his feet. As he turned up the soil unconsciously, his staff struck against something hard. He raked it out of the vegetable mold, and lo! a cloven skull, with an Indian tomahawk buried deep in it, lay before him. The rust on the weapon showed the time that had elapsed since this death-blow had been given. It was a dreary memento of the fierce struggle that had taken place in this last foothold of the Indian warriors.

"Humph!" said Tom Walker, as he gave it a kick to shake the dirt from it.

"Let that skull alone!" said a gruff voice. Tom lifted up his eyes, and beheld a great black man seated directly opposite him, on the stump of a tree. He was exceedingly surprised, having neither heard nor seen anyone approach; and he was still more perplexed on observing, as well as the gathering gloom would permit, that the stranger was neither Negro nor Indian. It is true he was dressed in a rude half-Indian garb, and

6. **bittern**: a wading bird with mottled, brownish plumage and a deep, booming cry.

7. **incantations**: verbal charms or spells recited to produce a magic effect.

had a red belt or sash swathed round his body; but his face was neither black nor copper-color, but swarthy and dingy, and begrimed with soot, as if he had been accustomed to toil among fires and forges. He had a shock of coarse black hair, that stood out from his head in all directions, and bore an ax on his shoulder.

He scowled for a moment at Tom with a pair of great red eyes.

“What are you doing on my grounds?” said the black man, with a hoarse, growling voice.

“Your grounds!” said Tom, with a sneer, “no more your grounds than mine; they belong to Deacon Peabody.”

“Deacon Peabody be d—d,” said the stranger, “as I flatter myself he will be, if he does not look more to his own sins and less to those of his neighbors. Look yonder, and see how Deacon Peabody is faring.”

Tom looked in the direction that the stranger pointed, and beheld one of the great trees, fair and flourishing without, but rotten at the core, and saw that it had been nearly hewn through, so that the first high wind was likely to blow it down. On the bark of the tree was scored the name of Deacon Peabody, an eminent man, who had waxed wealthy by driving shrewd bargains with the Indians. He now looked around, and found most of the tall trees marked with the name of some great man of the colony, and all more or less scored by the ax. The one on which he had been seated, and which had evidently just been hewn down, bore the name of Crowninshield; and he recollected a mighty rich man of that name, who made a vulgar display of wealth, which it was whispered he had acquired by buccaneering.<sup>8</sup>

“He’s just ready for burning!” said the black man, with a growl of triumph. “You see, I am likely to have a good stock of firewood for winter.”

“But what right have you,” said Tom, “to cut down Deacon Peabody’s timber?”

8. buccaneering: robbing ships at sea; piracy.



“The right of a prior claim,” said the other. “This woodland belonged to me long before one of your white-faced race put foot upon the soil.”

“And pray, who are you, if I may be so bold?” said Tom.

—“Oh, I go by various names. I am the wild huntsman in some countries; the black miner in others. In this neighborhood I am he to whom the red men consecrated this spot, and in honor of whom they now and then roasted a white man, by way of sweet-smelling sacrifice. Since the red men have been exterminated by you white savages, I amuse myself by presiding at the persecutions of Quakers and Anabaptists;<sup>9</sup> I am the great patron and prompter of slave dealers,

and the grand master of the Salem witches.”

“The upshot of all which is that, if I mistake not,” said Tom, sturdily, “you are he commonly called Old Scratch.”<sup>10</sup>

“The same, at your service!” replied the black man, with a half-civil nod.

Such was the opening of this interview, according to the old story; though it has almost too familiar an air to be credited. One would think that to meet with such a singular personage, in this wild,

lonely place, would have shaken any man’s nerves; but Tom was a hard-minded fellow, not easily daunted, and he had lived so long with a termagant wife that he did not even fear the devil.

It is said that after this commencement they had a long and earnest conversation together, as Tom returned homeward. The black man told him of great sums of money buried by Kidd the pirate, under the oak trees on the high ridge, not far from the morass. All these were under his command, and protected by his power, so that none could find them but such as propitiated his favor. These he offered to place within Tom Walker’s reach, having conceived an especial kindness for him; but they were to be had only on certain conditions. What these conditions were may be easily surmised, though Tom never disclosed them publicly. They must have been very hard, for he required time to think of them, and he was not a man to stick at trifles when money was in view. When they had reached the edge of the swamp, the stranger paused. “What proof have I that all you have been telling me is true?” said Tom. “There’s my signature,” said the black man, pressing his finger on Tom’s forehead. So saying, he turned off among the thickets of the swamp, and seemed, as Tom said, to go down, down, down, into the earth, until nothing but his head and shoulders could be seen, and so on, until he totally disappeared.

When Tom reached home, he found the black print of a finger burnt, as it were, into his forehead, which nothing could obliterate.

The first news his wife had to tell him was the sudden death of Absalom Crowninshield, the rich buccaneer. It was announced in the papers

9. presiding . . . Anabaptists: exercising authority over the oppression of Christian groups that the Puritans considered radical.

10. Old Scratch: a nickname for the devil.

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WORDS  
TO  
KNOW

singular (sɪŋˈɡjʊ-lər) *adj.* unusual or remarkable; unique  
daunted (dɔnˈtɪd) *adj.* intimidated or frightened daunt *v.*  
surmise (sər-mɪzˈ) *v.* to guess

with the usual flourish that “a great man had fallen in Israel.”<sup>11</sup>

Tom recollected the tree which his black friend had just hewn down and which was ready for burning. “Let the freebooter<sup>12</sup> roast,” said Tom; “who cares!” He now felt convinced that all he had heard and seen was no illusion.

He was not prone to let his wife into his confidence; but as this was an uneasy secret, he willingly shared it with her. All her avarice was awakened at the mention of hidden gold, and she urged her husband to comply with the black man’s terms, and secure what would make them wealthy for life. However Tom might have felt disposed to sell himself to the devil, he was determined not to do so to oblige his wife; so he flatly refused, out of the mere spirit of contradiction. Many and bitter were the quarrels they had on the subject; but the more she talked, the more resolute was Tom not to be damned to please her.

At length she determined to drive the bargain on her own account, and if she succeeded, to keep all the gain to herself. Being of the same fearless temper as her husband, she set off for the old Indian fort toward the close of a summer’s day. She was many hours absent. When she came back, she was reserved and sullen in her replies. She spoke something of a black man, whom she met about twilight hewing at the root of a tall tree. He was sulky, however, and would not come to terms; she was to go again with a propitiatory offering, but what it was she forbore to say.

The next evening she set off again for the swamp, with her apron heavily laden. Tom waited and waited for her, but in vain; midnight came, but she did not make her appearance; morning, noon, night returned, but still she did not come. Tom now grew uneasy for her safety, especially as he found she had carried off in her apron the silver teapot and spoons, and every portable article of value. Another night elapsed,

another morning came; but no wife. In a word, she was never heard of more.

What was her real fate nobody knows, in consequence of so many pretending to know. It is one of those facts which have become confounded by a variety of historians. Some asserted that she lost her way among the tangled mazes of the swamp, and sank into some pit or slough; others, more uncharitable, hinted that she had eloped with the household booty and made off to some other province; while others surmised that the tempter had decoyed her into a dismal quagmire, on the top of which her hat was found lying. In confirmation of this, it was said a great black man, with an ax on his shoulder, was seen late that very evening coming out of the swamp, carrying a bundle tied in a check apron, with an air of surly triumph.

The most current and probable story, however, observes that Tom Walker grew so anxious about the fate of his wife and his property that he set out at length to seek them both at the Indian fort. During a long summer’s afternoon he searched about the gloomy place, but no wife was to be seen. He called her name repeatedly, but she was nowhere to be heard. The bittern alone responded to his voice, as they flew screaming by; or the bullfrog croaked dolefully from a neighboring pool. At length, it is said, just in the brown hour of twilight, when the owls began to hoot, and the bats to flit about, his attention was attracted by the clamor of carrion crows<sup>13</sup> hovering about a cypress tree. He looked up, and beheld a bundle tied in a check apron, and hanging in the branches of the tree, with a great vulture perched hard by, as if

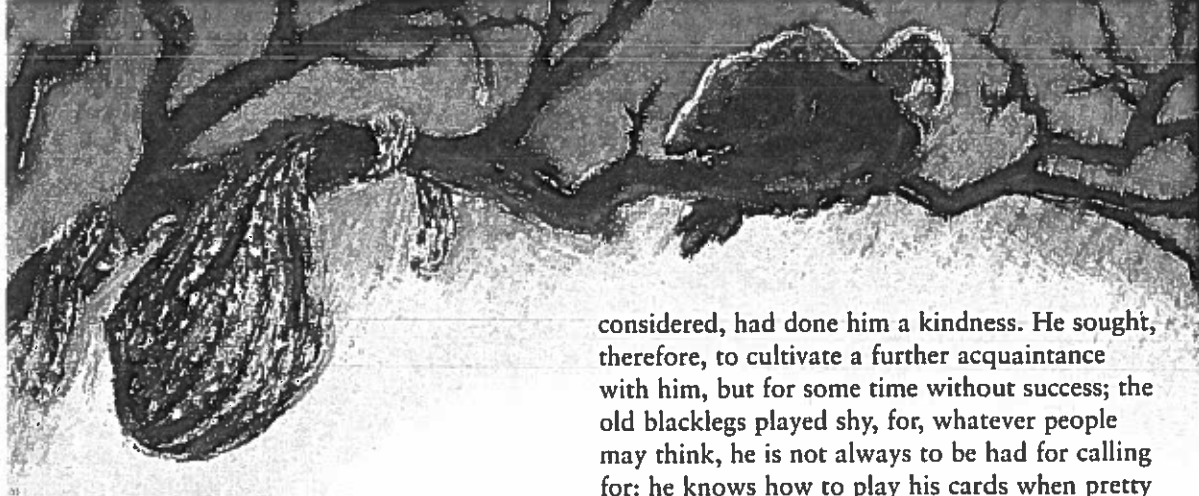
11. a great man . . . Israel: a biblical reference—“Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?” (2 Samuel 3:38)—used, with unconscious irony, by the papers to mean that an important member of God’s people on earth has passed away.

12. freebooter: pirate.

13. carrion crows: crows that feed on dead or decaying flesh.

WORDS  
TO  
KNOW

**resolute** (rəz’ə-lōōt’) *adj.* firm or determined; unwavering  
**dolefully** (dōl’fē-lē) *adv.* mournfully



keeping watch upon it. He leaped with joy; for he recognized his wife's apron and supposed it to contain the household valuables. "Let us get hold of the property," said he consolingly to himself, "and we will endeavor to do without the woman."

As he scrambled up the tree, the vulture spread its wide wings, and sailed off screaming into the deep shadows of the forest. Tom seized the checked apron, but, woeful sight! found nothing but a heart and liver tied up in it!

Such, according to this most authentic old story, was all that was to be found of Tom's wife. She had probably attempted to deal with the black man as she had been accustomed to deal with her husband; but though a female scold is generally considered a match for the devil, yet in this instance she appears to have had the worst of it. She must have died game, however; for it is said Tom noticed many prints of cloven feet stamped upon the tree, and found handfuls of hair that looked as if they had been plucked from the coarse black shock of the woodman. Tom knew his wife's proness by experience. He shrugged his shoulders, as he looked at the signs of a fierce clapper-clawing. "Egad," said he to himself, "Old Scratch must have had a tough time of it!"

Tom consoled himself for the loss of his property with the loss of his wife, for he was a man of fortitude. He even felt something like gratitude towards the black woodman, who, he

considered, had done him a kindness. He sought, therefore, to cultivate a further acquaintance with him, but for some time without success; the old blacklegs played shy, for, whatever people may think, he is not always to be had for calling for: he knows how to play his cards when pretty sure of his game.

At length, it is said, when delay had whetted Tom's eagerness to the quick, and prepared him to agree to anything rather than not gain the promised treasure, he met the black man one evening in his usual woodsman's dress, with his ax on his shoulder, sauntering along the swamp, and humming a tune. He affected to receive Tom's advances with great indifference, made brief replies, and went on humming his tune.

By degrees, however, Tom brought him to business, and they began to haggle about the terms on which the former was to have the pirate's treasure. There was one condition which need not be mentioned, being generally understood in all cases where the devil grants favors; but there were others about which, though of less importance, he was inflexibly obstinate. He insisted that the money found through his means should be employed in his service. He proposed, therefore, that Tom should employ it in the black traffic; that is to say, that he should fit out a slave ship. This, however, Tom resolutely refused: he was bad enough in all conscience; but the devil himself could not tempt him to turn slave trader.

Finding Tom so squeamish on this point, he did not insist upon it, but proposed, instead, that he should turn usurer;<sup>14</sup> the devil being extremely

14. **usurer** (yōō'zhār-ər): one who lends money, especially at an unusually or unlawfully high rate of interest.

WORDS  
TO  
KNOW

**pro**ness (prou'Ys) *n.* superior strength, courage, or daring, especially in battle



anxious for the increase of usurers, looking upon them as his peculiar people.

To this no objections were made, for it was just to Tom's taste.

"You shall open a broker's shop in Boston next month," said the black man.

"I'll do it tomorrow, if you wish," said Tom Walker.

"You shall lend money at two percent a month."

"Egad, I'll charge four!" replied Tom Walker.

"You shall extort bonds, foreclose mortgages, drive the merchants to bankruptcy—"

"I'll drive them to the d—l," cried Tom Walker.

"You are the usurer for my money!" said blacklegs with delight. "When will you want the rhino<sup>15</sup>?"

"This very night."

"Done!" said the devil.

"Done!" said Tom Walker. So they shook hands and struck a bargain.

A few days' time saw Tom Walker seated behind his desk in a countinghouse<sup>16</sup> in Boston.

His reputation for a ready-moneyed man, who would lend money out for a good consideration, soon spread abroad. Everybody remembers the time of Governor Belcher, when money was particularly scarce. It was a time of paper credit. The country had been deluged with government bills; the famous Land Bank<sup>17</sup> had been established; there had been a rage for speculating; the people had run mad with schemes for new settlements; for building cities in the wilderness; land-jobbers<sup>18</sup> went about with maps of grants, and townships, and Eldorados<sup>19</sup> lying nobody knew where, but which everybody was ready to purchase. In a word, the great speculating fever, which breaks out every now and then in the country, had raged to an alarming degree, and everybody was dreaming of making sudden fortunes from nothing. As usual the fever had

subsided; the dream had gone off, and the imaginary fortunes with it; the patients were left in doleful plight, and the whole country resounded with the consequent cry of "hard times."

At this propitious time of public distress did Tom Walker set up as usurer in Boston. His door was soon thronged by customers. The needy and adventurous, the gambling speculator, the dreaming land-jobber, the thriftless tradesman, the merchant with cracked credit; in short, everyone driven to raise money by desperate means and desperate sacrifices hurried to Tom Walker.

Thus Tom was the universal friend of the needy and acted like a "friend in need"; that is to say, he always exacted good pay and good security. In proportion to the distress of the applicant was the hardness of his terms. He accumulated bonds and mortgages; gradually squeezed his customers closer and closer; and sent them at length, dry as a sponge, from his door.

In this way he made money hand over hand, became a rich and mighty man, and exalted his cocked hat upon 'Change.<sup>20</sup> He built himself, as usual, a vast house, out of ostentation; but left the greater part of it unfinished and unfurnished,

15. **rhino**: a slang term for money.

16. **countinghouse**: an office in which a business firm conducts its bookkeeping, correspondence, and similar activities.

17. **Land Bank**: Boston merchants organized the Land Bank in 1739. Landowners could take out mortgages on their property and then repay the loans with cash or manufactured goods. When the Land Bank was outlawed in 1741, many colonists lost money.

18. **land-jobbers**: people who buy and sell land for profit.

19. **Eldorados**: places of fabulous wealth or great opportunity. Early Spanish explorers sought a legendary country named El Dorado, which was rumored to be rich with gold.

20. **exalted . . . 'Change**: proudly raised himself to a position of importance as a trader on the stock exchange.

WORDS TO KNOW **peculiar** (pĭ-kyōōl'yer) *adj.* belonging particularly or primarily to one person, group, or kind  
**propitious** (prə-pĭsh'əs) *adj.* helpful or advantageous; favorable  
**ostentation** (ōs'tĕn-tā'shen) *n.* display meant to impress others; boastful showiness

out of parsimony. He even set up a carriage in the fullness of his vainglory,<sup>21</sup> though he nearly starved the horses which drew it; and as the ungreased wheels groaned and screeched on the axletrees, you would have thought you heard the souls of the poor debtors he was squeezing.

As Tom waxed old, however, he grew thoughtful. Having secured the good things of this world, he began to feel anxious about those of the next. He thought with regret on the bargain he had made with his black friend, and set his wits to work to cheat him out of the conditions. He became, therefore, all of a sudden, a violent churchgoer. He prayed loudly and strenuously, as if heaven were to be taken by force of lungs. Indeed, one might always tell when he had sinned most during the week, by the clamor of his Sunday devotion. The quiet Christians who had been modestly and steadfastly traveling Zionward<sup>22</sup> were struck with self-reproach at seeing themselves so suddenly outstripped in their career by this new-made convert. Tom was as rigid in religious as in money matters; he was a stern supervisor and censurer of his neighbors, and seemed to think every sin entered up to their account became a credit on his own side of the page. He even talked of the expediency of reviving the persecution of Quakers and Anabaptists. In a word, Tom's zeal became as notorious as his riches.

Still, in spite of all this strenuous attention to forms, Tom had a lurking dread that the devil, after all, would have his due.<sup>23</sup> That he might not be taken unawares, therefore, it is said he always carried a small Bible in his coat pocket. He had also a great folio Bible on his counting-house desk, and would frequently be found reading it when people called on business; on such occasions he would lay his green spectacles in the book, to mark the place, while he turned round to drive some usurious bargain.

Some say that Tom grew a little crackbrained

## Tom's zeal became as notorious as his riches.

in his old days, and that fancying his end approaching, he had his horse new shod, saddled and bridled, and buried with his feet uppermost; because he supposed that at the last day the world would be turned upside down; in which case he should find his horse standing ready for mounting, and he was determined at the worst to give his old friend a run for it. This, however, is probably a mere old wives' fable. If he really did take such a precaution, it was totally superfluous; at least so says the authentic old legend, which closes his story in the following manner:

One hot summer afternoon in the dog days, just as a terrible black thundergust was coming up, Tom sat in his countinghouse, in his white linen cap and India silk morning gown. He was on the point of foreclosing a mortgage, by which he would complete the ruin of an unlucky land speculator for whom he had professed the greatest friendship. The poor land-jobber begged him to grant a few months' indulgence. Tom had grown testy and irritated, and refused another day.

"My family will be ruined and brought upon the parish," said the land-jobber. "Charity begins at home," replied Tom; "I must take care of myself in these hard times."

"You have made so much money out of me," said the speculator.

21. vainglory: boastful, undeserved pride in one's accomplishments or qualities.

22. Zionward: toward heaven.

23. the devil . . . due: a reference to the proverb "Give the devil his due," used to mean "Give even a disagreeable person the credit he or she deserves." Here, of course, the expression is used literally rather than figuratively.

Tom lost his patience and his piety. "The devil take me," said he, "if I have made a farthing!"<sup>24</sup>

Just then there were three loud knocks at the street door. He stepped out to see who was there. A black man was holding a black horse, which neighed and stamped with impatience.

"Tom, you're come for," said the black fellow, gruffly. Tom shrank back, but too late. He had left his little Bible at the bottom of his coat pocket, and his big Bible on the desk buried under the mortgage he was about to foreclose; never was a sinner taken more unawares. The black man whisked him like a child into the saddle, gave the horse the lash, and away he galloped, with Tom on his back, in the midst of the thunderstorm. The clerks stuck their pens behind their ears, and stared after him from the windows. Away went Tom Walker, dashing down the streets; his white cap bobbing up and down, his morning gown fluttering in the wind, and his steed striking fire out of the pavement at every bound. When the clerks turned to look for the black man, he had disappeared.

Tom Walker never returned to foreclose the mortgage. A countryman, who lived on the border of the swamp, reported that in the height of the thundergust he had heard a great clattering of hoofs and a howling along the road, and running to the window caught sight of a figure, such as I have described, on a horse that galloped like mad across the fields, over the hills, and down into the black hemlock swamp toward the old Indian fort; and that shortly after a thunderbolt falling in that direction seemed to set the whole forest in a blaze.

The good people of Boston shook their heads and shrugged their shoulders, but had been so much accustomed to witches and goblins, and

tricks of the devil, in all kinds of shapes, from the first settlement of the colony, that they were not so much horror-struck as might have been expected. Trustees were appointed to take charge of Tom's effects. There was nothing, however, to administer upon. On searching his coffers<sup>25</sup> all his bonds and mortgages were found reduced to cinders. In place of gold and silver, his iron chest was filled with chips and shavings; two skeletons lay in his stable instead of his half-starved horses, and the very next day his great house took fire and burnt to the ground.

Such was the end of Tom Walker and his ill-gotten wealth. Let all griping money brokers lay this story to heart. The truth of it is not to be doubted. The very hole under the oak trees whence he dug Kidd's money is to be seen to this day; and the neighboring swamp and old Indian fort are often haunted in stormy nights by a figure on horseback, in morning gown and white cap, which is doubtless the troubled spirit of the usurer. In fact the story has resolved itself into a proverb so prevalent throughout New England, of "The Devil and Tom Walker." ♦



24. *farthing*: a coin worth one-fourth of a penny, formerly used throughout the British Empire.

25. *coffers*: safes or strongboxes designed to hold money or other valuable items.

WORDS  
TO  
KNOW

*piety* (pī"Y-tē) *n.* religious devotion; reverence for God

## Connect to the Literature

- 1. What Do You Think?**  
What comments do you have about the ending of this story? Share them with classmates.

### Comprehension Check

- What does Old Scratch offer Tom and what does he want in return?
- How does Tom try to get out of his bargain?
- What happens to Tom at the end?

## Think Critically

- 2.** In your opinion, could Tom Walker have escaped the consequences of his bargain with Old Scratch? Explain?
- 3. ACTIVE READING VISUALIZING** How did you visualize Tom Walker from the **images** used to describe him? What **character traits** are suggested by these images? Refer to the notes from your **READER'S NOTEBOOK**.
- 4.** Do you consider Tom Walker better or worse than the other prominent Puritans in Boston? Consider the evidence.

### THINK ABOUT

- the Puritans' treatment of Native Americans, Quakers, and Anabaptists
- what the marked trees in the swamp suggest about some respected Puritans
- why land speculators have "run mad with schemes for new settlements"
- how other Christians react to Tom's religious zeal

- 5.** What do you think was Irving's **purpose** in writing this story?

## Extend Interpretations

- 6. Critic's Corner** It has been noted that Washington Irving received critical acclaim as a writer because in his stories he managed to impart insights about human nature that were amusing without being too moralistic. Agree or disagree, basing your answer on "The Devil and Tom Walker."
- 7. The Writer's Style** Writers use a variety of elements to create humor, including ridiculous characters, absurd situations and images, exaggeration, understatement, and **situational irony**. What makes this story humorous?
- 8. Connect to Life** Driven by greed, Tom Walker literally sells his soul to gain wealth. What real person or fictional character reminds you of Tom Walker? Explain your choice.

## Literary Analysis


**IMAGERY** For the Active Reading activity on page 349, you were asked to pay close attention to Irving's **imagery**—the descriptive words and phrases a writer uses to re-create sensory experiences. Think of imagery as a multimedia presentation in your mind. The pictures, sounds, physical sensations, and sometimes tastes and smells that you imagine as you read help you interpret what is going on in a story.

**Cooperative Activity** Identify the imagery in the following passages, and discuss how it supports **characterization, plot, or theme**.

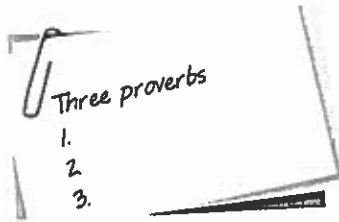
- the description of the trees marked with the names of men in the colony (page 353)
- the description of Tom's search for his wife in the forest (pages 355–356)
- the description of Tom's house, horses, and carriage (pages 357–358)
- the description of Tom's being carried off by the devil (page 359)

**NARRATOR** Another interesting element of this story is its **omniscient** (all-knowing) **narrator**, who stands outside the action of the story and reports what different characters are thinking. What seems to be the narrator's attitude toward the events of the story? What does Irving gain by using this type of narrator rather than having Tom relate the events?

## Writing Options

- 1. Reflective Essay on Wealth** Drawing on your reading of this story and on your notes for Connect to Your Life activity on page 349, draft a reflective essay on the pursuit of wealth. Place this piece in your Working Portfolio. 
- 2. Fitting Proverbs** Write a set of three proverbs—such as “Money is the root of all evil”—that help explain the lesson or moral of “The Devil and Tom Walker.”

- 3. Updated Faust Legend** Write your own version of the Faust legend, as Irving did. Create a modern character in a present-day setting who makes a bargain he or she shouldn't.



## Activities & Explorations

**Board Game** With a small group of classmates, design a board game, a video game, or a computer game based on the major events and characters in “The Devil and Tom Walker.” Use the imagery in the story to help you depict specific settings, such as Deacon Peabody’s woods. In class, show the game and explain the rules.

~ VIEWING AND REPRESENTING

## Vocabulary in Action

**EXERCISE A: ASSESSMENT PRACTICE** Review the Words to Know. Then, for each item below, write the letter of the word pair that expresses a relationship similar to that of the capitalized pair.

- 1. ABODE : COTTAGE ::**  
 (a) nest : bird      (c) vehicle : car  
 (b) nail : hammer    (d) trumpet : music
- 2. SINGULAR : ORDINARY ::**  
 (a) whole : complete    (c) warm : hot  
 (b) chapter : book    (d) flexible : rigid
- 3. PIETY : NUN ::**  
 (a) poverty : banker    (c) warmth : humidity  
 (b) dishonesty : crook    (d) simplicity : puzzle
- 4. DOLEFULLY : GRIEVE ::**  
 (a) loudly : whisper    (c) joyfully : celebrate  
 (b) humbly : brag    (d) rapidly : stroll
- 5. OSTENTATION : FLAUNT ::**  
 (a) cowardice : sneak    (c) give : generosity  
 (b) love : emotion    (d) humility : boast

### Building Vocabulary

For an in-depth lesson on analogies, see page 254.

WORDS	abode	dolefully	parsimony	propitious	resolute
TO	censurer	melancholy	peculiar	proweess	singular
KNOW	daunted	ostentation	piety	repose	surmise

**EXERCISE B: MEANING CLUES** Write the vocabulary word, not used in Exercise A, that is suggested by each description below.

1. If you don't give way, give in, or give an inch, and you never say die, this describes you.
2. Facing a vicious dog or having to perform a solo could make a person feel this way.
3. Walking five miles to buy beans at a discount is an example of this.
4. This is someone who finds fault, comes down hard, and rakes people over the coals.
5. This is what sunny skies are for picnic planners, storm clouds are for farmers in need of rain.
6. Clues help a detective do this about a suspect's guilt.
7. Listening to mournful music on a gray, cloudy day could make you feel this way.
8. Odysseus, Crazy Horse, Davy Crockett, and Hercules all had plenty of this.
9. One could tell workers to do this by saying “Take a break.”
10. This could describe an accent, a style of dressing, or a way of celebrating a holiday.



## Washington Irving

1783–1859

### Other Works

*Diedrich Knickerbocker's History of New York*  
*Tales of a Traveller*

**Literary Pioneer** Born at the end of the American Revolution and named after our first president, Washington Irving made many contributions to American literature. He set an example for humorous writing, pioneered the short story as a literary form, influenced important writers—particularly Nathaniel Hawthorne—and put America on the literary map.

**An Eye for Detail** While growing up in a large, prosperous New York family, Irving came to know American society intimately. Besides learning to appreciate literature, art, theater, and opera, he loved to explore the countryside along the Hudson River. Gifted with an eye for the pictorial, he considered painting as a career but instead used his talent to write about the American landscapes he knew so well.

**World Traveler** Ironically, this first notable American writer spent much of his life abroad. After studying law for 6 years, Irving joined the family exporting business and was sent to work in

its British office in 1815. Although the business failed, he stayed in Europe for the next 17 years, traveling extensively and serving as a U.S. diplomat.

**Creator of Classic Tales** Irving captured his European experiences in much of his writing, but American life provided him with some of his richest stories and most memorable characters. In *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (1819–1820), he created the first distinctively American tales, such as “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.” Irving spent the last years of his life at his New York estate, Sunnyside, near his beloved Hudson River.

### Author Activity

**Tales Compared** Recall or reread “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.” What do these stories have in common with “The Devil and Tom Walker”?