

Stories for lipreading



OUT OF THE AGES by Lewis Thomas

[This text is read aloud at the beginning of this video:]

Welcome to Stories for Lipreading. If you haven't used our website before, we suggest you look at our 'How to Use' page before you begin. We hope you enjoy this ghost story, which is called 'Out of the Ages' by Lewis Thomas. It has been filmed in 3 episodes. Here is Episode One.

Out of the Ages by Lewis Thomas. Episode One.

Part 1: The London Charterhouse, 1820.

"Master Bowen? Master Bowen..." John opens his eyes, blinking as they adjust to the half gloom of the Porter's Lodge.

"What is it, boy?" He asks, pulling himself upright and groggily glaring at the sheepish child standing in front of him.

"There's... there's a man at the gate, Sir. Wants let in."

"Is he a brother?"

"No, sir."

"A scholar?"

"No, sir."

"A Beak?" John reels off the list with weary certainty.

"No sir."

"Then tell him to go to hell." With that, he flops back onto the bed, ushering the boy away with a gesture.

"I tried. He wants in." The boy stands there with his candle, primed to leave.

"If we let him in, will you stop bothering me?" That should fix things, thinks John. The boy knows what happens when he bothers him too much.

"Yes, sir."

Stories for lipreading



“Good.”

John gets up and pulls on his tunic, drawing a hand across his face in the process – he makes a mental note to go the barber soon for a shave. He’s been the porter at the Charterhouse for twenty years now, after being wounded in the Mediterranean under Nelson. He has a wife and son down near Wapping where his brother keeps an inn, but he only sees them on Sundays, when he leaves the gate in the hands of the boy and walks down through the City before spending the afternoon at the inn, returning to relieve the boy after a few hours in his cups. He muses on this as he descends the stairs, swapping his groggy manner for what he thinks is a passable stab at pompous intimidation, designed to put the man waiting at the gate in his place.

“Now- I’ll tell him to sod off, and if he has a problem or gets fighty, you go and fetch a few servants. That’ll show him.”

“Yes, Sir.” The boy looks back as he says this, missing a step in the process.

He’ll make a good porter one day, thinks John - as long as he has an assistant to keep him from burning the lodge down.

As they reach the door, the Boy sets the candle down on a small table, next to which lie his mattress and the remnants of supper. Flicking open the spyhole, John can see the man waiting, hunched within a cloak and leaning on a stick.

“You want lodging?” he asks, his voice carrying to the street through the hole.

“Please,” says the man, in an accent that John can’t quite place.

“Come back on Wednesday - the Master’s hearing petitions for residence after Evensong.” He goes to shut the spyhole, only to be cut short by the man’s response.

“I don’t want to become a Brother, just a bed for the night. And a meal if you can stretch to it.”

John suddenly becomes aware of the cold - it’s a freezing night, and there’s a fine mist in the air; the sort that gets into your bones and gives you a chill if you’re not careful. He can’t believe he’s doing this, but he turns to the boy and says the fatal words –

“Go to the kitchens and find a bed for our guest- if there are any leftovers from the Brothers’ supper, have cook put something together.”

“Sir.”

The boy hurries out of the Lodge and across the courtyard, before descending into the kitchens. As the footsteps die away, John heaves the door open, ushering in the man. In the guttering light of the candle, John can see his face a bit more clearly – a white beard sits on a lined face, with two unearthly blue eyes shining out from a hood. **End**

Stories for lipreading



[Out of the Ages by Lewis Thomas. Episode Two.](#)

“What’s your name?” He asks, warily eyeing up the figure.

“Ryker- Thomas Ryker.”

The voice is sonorous, with a peculiar twisting of the vowels - from what John can hear, the man isn’t from London; somewhere in the West Country perhaps, or even abroad. Some of the Brothers who were raised in Hanover still speak with vague hints of German, cracking in their throats as they age. Still, the accent is irrelevant John reminds himself. He’s promised this man shelter, and shelter he will get.

“Right then Master... Ryker; would you care to follow me?”

He ushers Ryker out of the Lodge and into the courtyard, only to be overtaken as Ryker trots towards the kitchens, the tapping of his stick muffled by the mist.

“Oi! You don’t know where you’re going!” barks John, lengthening his stride to catch up.

Ryker looks back and laughs slightly; “I do in fact - I came here often as a boy.”

Oh God. Nostalgia. John sighs and decides to humour him - “Why?”

“I worked in the kitchens, turning the spit. They gave me a bed and an education, and I worked in return.” As he says this, Ryker constantly looks around, drinking in the building. John doesn’t know what he’s thinking, but can imagine - childhood images and moments, projected onto the old stones and relived in a body aged and sapped by the years.

After a while, they enter the warm fug of the kitchens, with steam rising from a stew pot on the fireplace and one of the cooks sitting at the table, nursing a tankard of ale and picking at his supper.

John’s in a kind mood tonight. When all of this is over, he’ll blame it on the cold.

“Give me your clothes, and I’ll have them washed.”

So, Ryker undresses in the kitchen, changing into a pair of old breeches and wrapping himself in his cloak as John disappears through to the laundry with the clothes, practically solid with grime.

The boy nips up from the bench and takes Ryker by the arm, guiding him to a straw mattress by the fire.

“We made this up for you- it’s usually Joseph’s”- he motions at the cook, who nods back with a hint of resentment- “but he’s agreed to give it up for the night.”

Stories for lipreading



Looking at Joseph's expression, Ryker suspects the agreement was more coercive than the Boy lets on. Still, it's warm down here, and he has a bed and food.

"Thank you, Master..." he leaves the sentence hanging in the air, waiting for the Boy's name.

"Willis - Adam Willis. I work for Master Bowen, running errands and such."

"Well then, Master Willis - thank you."

From his vantage point opposite Ryker, the Boy notices that his torso is covered in tattoos, black and red duelling for dominance on the ancient muscle.

"What's that?" he asks, pointing at an unfamiliar alphabet.

"What they write with in the East," responds Ryker, looking up from a bowl of stew, ladled out by a grunting Joseph. "I got it in Moscow."

"And that?"

"From a land further than you can think. I saw them go around a black stone, saluting their god and stoning the devil."

"Really?"

"Aye. It's acting out their prophet."

His eyes have moved away from the Boy now, fixing on the wall as his mind passes from a kitchen in London to a sun-baked square at the end of the earth. Suddenly, he feels the boy's gaze on him once more, as he points at a pendant hanging around his neck.

"And that?" Ryker glances down - he knew the Boy would notice.

"A gift from when I was a boy."

The pendant's a gold crucifix, with a tiny ampoule at the centre. The sort of thing that went out with the Reformation and is seldom seen on the necks of bishops, let alone vagabonds.

"Who from?"

"My master."

"Why did he give it to you?"

Ryker pauses, choosing his words carefully- "He had no use for it. He felt that it was time to pass it on, and gave it to me." **End**

Stories for lipreading



Out of the Ages by Lewis Thomas. Episode Three.

Changing the subject, he starts to regale the boy with tales of far-off lands and past adventures, of fork bearded bandits and snow tipped cities. They talk until the fire draws low, bidding each other goodnight as the Boy returns to the Lodge and Ryker goes to his rest.

When they find him the next morning, he's gone cold and has a quiet smile on his face.

"Must have gone in the night..." says Joseph, lugging the body up the stairs with John.

They keep him in the Lodge while John talks to the Master, explaining the circumstances and requesting- *with the greatest humility and respect, Sir-* that Ryker, on account of his links with the Charterhouse, have his burial paid for by the Brothers.

So they take him down to one of the City churches and buy him a plot, sticking him in under a cheap stone slab. No one knows his dates, so the stone simply reads

Thomas Ryker
A Faithful Servant of Christ.

The boy watches the burial with John, as the parish priest says his platitudes and sends Ryker to paradise.

If anyone else knew about the crucifix, they would be unable to find it.

Part 2: The London Charterhouse, 1871.

"It's a new era of course..." says the Headmaster, pouring himself a brandy and settling himself in one of the Library's armchairs.

"Quite so, Sir," says Willis, charging his pipe as he sits uneasily opposite - he's often served in the Library or taken messages to the Brothers, but never sat and enjoyed the ambience. "Might I smoke?"

The Headmaster waves a hand dismissively- "Of course, man. Puff away."

"Thank you, Sir." There's a pause as Willis looks out of the window as the dying October light breaks over the rooftops. "I won't stay on once the school leaves... it's time for a new porter."

"Mm? Ah... quite. Well; you have done very well by us, Willis. There will be a place for you in the Charterhouse - should you want it."

Stories for lipreading



“Thank you, Sir.”

“How long have you been here?”

“Since I was a boy, Sir. I was taken in by John Bowen, and took over when he retired.”

“Before my time I’m afraid...”

“A lot of things were... Sir.” Willis chuckles slightly as he says this - he could get used to this Clubman lark.

“Indeed. I was reading through various books of legend last night - fascinating stuff, if you can believe it.” He says this with a tone that indicates Willis is about to be told precisely *what* is so fascinating.

Like John many years before, Willis sits back and prepares to indulge another old man. “Do go on...”

The Headmaster puffs at his pipe and sips his brandy as he launches into the stories. Monks and statesmen fly through Willis’s skull until he gets to one anecdote, which grips him in a vice.

“Of course, the monks had great treasures - plate and ornaments, all taken by Henry. But he never got one relic - a crucifix worn by the Prior, supposedly containing an ampoule with the blood of Christ. Some medieval frippery, one would assume.”

Willis feels the gold chain around his neck more than ever. “What was so special about it, Sir?”

With an indulgent chuckle, the Headmaster continues - “It supposedly granted immortality to the wearer. Apparently, Prior Houghton slipped it to a kitchen boy as he went to the gallows, asking that he live for the martyrs.”

Willis knows what happened afterwards. “Do we know what happened to the boy?”

A sigh of regret comes from the Headmaster; “Unfortunately not. We know he was called Thomas, but he disappears from history after that legend. Probably sold it and scarpered. Still - it’s a three hundred year old story, so who knows.”

If only he knew thinks Willis- *if only he knew*. They talk on as the shadows lengthen and night falls. As they depart, with the Headmaster retiring to the Master’s House and Willis to his final night in the Porter’s Lodge, they exchange a final conversation as they cross the Courtyard –

“What do you plan on doing now? You have always worn your years lightly... retirement must be a strange thought?”

Stories for lipreading



Willis thinks for a moment before responding; “Sir, I have always had a mind to travel. Perhaps to the East...”

With that, he touches an old man’s gift, and dreams of black stones and snow-capped rooftops.

End