

BARTLEBY the SCRIVENER

by Herman Melville

dramatised by Rob Davis

Cast

Narrator	a Solicitor
Turkey	a Scrivener
Nippers	a Scrivener
Bartleby	a Scrivener
Messenger	a Gofer

The action takes place in the Narrator's offices, and in the cell of a Prison. Stage furniture is spartan, reflecting the era. Lighting changes give the desired 'location'.

This is best played as a light comedy and is set in London, the late 1890s.

The NARRATOR is a kindly man, who tries to see the best in all. Whilst delivering his speeches to the audience, he comes downstage a few steps to emphasise that it is not a speech to another player. Thus, interactive speeches require more emphasis with the other players.

The other players solemnly go about their business whilst not in conversation with the Narrator.

Narrator	<p><i>(Sadly)</i> Bartleby was one of those beings of whom nothing – not a thing - is ascertainable.</p> <p>For myself, I am a man who, from his youth upwards, has been filled with a profound conviction that the easiest way of life is the best. I am one of those unambitious lawyers who never addresses a jury, or in any way draws down public applause; but in the cool tranquillity of a snug retreat, do a snug business among rich men's bonds and mortgages and title-deeds. All who know me consider me an eminently <i>safe</i> man.</p> <p>At the present time, preceding the advent of Bartleby, I had two persons as copyists in my employment. <i>(Indicating them)</i> First, Turkey; second, Nippers.</p> <p><i>(throughout the next two discourses, Turkey does as the Narrator describes)</i></p> <p>The former could not be described as absolutely idle; far from it. The difficulty was, he is apt to be altogether too energetic. There is a strange, inflamed, flurried, flighty recklessness of activity about him. He is, before twelve noon, incautious in dipping his pen into his inkstand. All his blots upon my documents, were therefore dropped there after twelve o'clock. Indeed, he is not only reckless and sadly given to making blots in the afternoon, but some days he went further, and was rather noisy.</p> <p>He makes an unpleasant racket with his chair; spills his sand-box; in mending his pens, impatiently splits them all to pieces, and throws them on the floor in a sudden passion; stands up and leans over his table, boxing his papers about in a most indecorous manner, very sad to behold in an elderly man like him.</p>
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	Nevertheless, as he is in many ways a most valuable person to me, and all the time before twelve o'clock, was the quickest, steadiest creature too, accomplishing a great deal of work in a style not easy to be matched — for these reasons, I am willing to overlook his eccentricities.
Turkey	<i>(interrupting)</i> With submission, sir, I consider myself your right-hand man. In the morning I but marshal and deploy my columns; but in the afternoon I put myself at their head, and gallantly charge the foe, thus! <i>(He stabs and thrusts with his ruler as if it is a cavalry-sabre)</i>
Narrator	But the blots, Turkey!
Turkey	True — but, with submission, sir, <i>(indicating his temples)</i> behold these hairs! I am getting old. Surely, sir, a blot or two of a warm afternoon is not to be severely urged against grey hairs. Old age — even if it blot the page — is honourable. With submission, sir, we both are getting old.
Narrator	<i>(Kindly)</i> This appeal to my fellow-feeling was hardly to be resisted. Nippers, the second on my list, was a whiskered, sallow, and, upon the whole, rather piratical-looking young man ¹ of about five and twenty. I always deemed him the victim of two evil powers — ambition and indigestion. <i>(Nippers, also, behaves as explained by the Narrator)</i> The ambition was evinced by a certain impatience of the duties of a mere copyist, an unwarrantable usurpation of strictly professional affairs, such as the original drawing up of legal documents. The indigestion manifests itself in an occasional nervous testiness and grinning irritability, causing the teeth to audibly grind together over mistakes committed in copying; unnecessary maledictions, hissed, rather than spoken, in the heat of business -
Nippers	<i>(hissing, and staring at his work)</i> Damn and blast!
Narrator	<i>(Throughout the next passage, Nippers is tinkering with his desk and chair, trying different position, etc, to match the text)</i> - and especially by a continual discontent with the height of the table where he worked. Though of a very ingenious mechanical turn, Nippers could never get this table to suit him. He puts chips under it, blocks of various sorts, bits of pasteboard, and at last goes so far as to attempt an exquisite adjustment by final pieces of folded blotting-paper. <i>(Sadly)</i> But no invention would satisfy him. If, for the sake of easing his back, he brings the table lid at a sharp angle well up towards his chin, and writes there like a man using the steep roof of a Dutch house for his desk — then he declares -
Nippers	<i>(Exasperated)</i> It's no use, it stops the circulation in my arms!
Narrator	- that it stopped the circulation in his arms. If now he lowers the table to his waistbands, and stoops over it in writing, then there was a sore aching in his back. In short, the truth of the matter was, Nippers knows not what he wants. But with all his failings, and the annoyances he caused me, Nippers, like his compatriot Turkey, is a very useful man to me; writes a neat, swift hand; and, when he chose, is not deficient in a gentlemanly sort of deportment. Added to this, he always dresses in a gentlemanly sort of way; and so, incidentally, reflects credit upon my chambers. It is surely fortunate for me that, owing to its peculiar cause — indigestion — the

¹ Or woman, as necessary
Bartleby the Scrivener

	<p>irritability and consequent nervousness of Nippers, is mainly observable in the morning, while in the afternoon he is comparatively mild. Since Turkey's paroxysms only come on about twelve o'clock, I never have to deal with their eccentricities at one time. Their fits relieve each other like guards. When Nippers' is on, Turkey's is off; and vice versa. This is a good natural arrangement under the circumstances.</p> <p>I have found it best, bearing in mind the differences of temperament between these two men, to allow them separation and a certain privacy by means of a screen, placed between their desks. Thus, as the noon-hour passes and their demeanours invert, they may irritate neither one another nor myself.</p> <p>As to the details and nature of our work, indeed copying law papers is proverbially a dry, husky sort of business, and my two scriveners are known to moisten their mouths very often with (<i>somewhat distastefully</i>) pale ale to be had at the numerous stalls adjacent to the Custom House and Post Office. Also, they sent the poor office boy very frequently for that peculiar ginger nut cake; flat, round, and very spicy.</p> <p>Of a cold morning when business was but dull, Turkey would gobble up scores of these cakes, as if they were mere wafers — indeed they sell them at the rate of six or eight for a penny — the scrape of his pen blending with the crunching of the crisp particles in his mouth. On one notable occasion —</p> <p><i>(Examining and doing a double take at a legal document)</i> Turkey! What is this do you suppose?</p>
Turkey	<i>(Hurrying over)</i> With submission, sir, the copy of the deed or mortgage, executed but this morning, sir.
Narrator	Look at his, will you!
Turkey	With submission, sir, I have already checked the document most assiduously for errors.
Narrator	No, you fool! Look at the seal you have placed on it!
Turkey	<i>(Taking the document and examining the seal closely)</i> Oh — sir — I cannot imagine how — <i>(he recoils in horror)</i>
Narrator	<i>(Carefully peeling off the "seal")</i> A ginger nut, sir!
Turkey	<i>(Shamed)</i> With submission, sir, I will do the work again. <i>(He takes the document and retreats to his desk.)</i>
Narrator	I came within an ace of dismissing him then. But he mollified me by making an oriental bow, and saying —
Turkey	<i>(Brightly)</i> With submission, sir, it was generous of me to find you in stationery on my own account.
Narrator	<p><i>(Giving a dry chuckle)</i> Ahem! Well, to continue.</p> <p>Now my original business — that of a conveyancer and title hunter, and drawer-up of legal documents of all sorts — was becoming considerably increased, and there was now great work for scriveners. Not only must I push the clerks already with me, but I must have additional help. In answer to my advertisement, a motionless young man attended me one morning. I can see that figure now — pallidly neat, pitifully respectable, incurably forlorn! It was Bartleby.</p> <p><i>(He turns as Bartleby enters, and they begin the interview. Bartleby is a silent, plain, emotionless person, without facial expression or intonation of voice.)</i></p> <p>Mr Bartleby, I thank you for your attendance in pursuit of this position as my additional scrivener. Do you have any reference from a previous employer?</p>
Bartleby	<i>(Tonelessly)</i> I do not.

Narrator	<p><i>(Taken aback)</i> Well, then, we must take you on trust, and see if after a short while you may find to suit us, and we to suit you. Come along, you may sit there at that desk and chair in the corner, and we shall see the manner of your work.</p> <p><i>(He seats Bartleby at the corner desk, and finding that Nippers and Turkey are staring at the newcomer in open curiosity, removes the screen which separates their desks and moves it so that it screens Bartleby instead.)</i></p> <p>We must naturally discuss terms of employment. The hours of work are -</p>
Bartleby	<i>(Immediately interrupting)</i> I accept them.
Narrator	- eight in the morning to six of the evening, with thirty -
Bartleby	I accept the terms of employment.
Narrator	<i>(Taken aback)</i> You do not wish to know the details?
Bartleby	I do not. I accept them all.
Narrator	<p><i>(Returning downstage, during which time the staff go about their work)</i> At first Bartleby did an extraordinary quantity of writing. As if long famishing for something to copy, he seemed to gorge himself on my documents. There was no pause for digestion. He ran a day and night line, copying by sun-light and by candle-light. I should have been quite delighted with his application, had he been cheerfully industrious. But he wrote on silently, palely, mechanically.</p> <p>It is, of course, an indispensable part of a scrivener's business to verify the accuracy of his copy, word by word. Where there are two or more scribes in an office, they assist each other in this examination, one reading from the copy, the other holding the original. It is a very dull, wearisome, and lethargic affair.</p> <p>Now and then, in the haste of business, it had been my habit to assist in comparing some brief document myself, calling Turkey or Nippers for this purpose. One object I had in placing Bartleby so handy to me behind the screen, was to avail myself of his services on such trivial occasions.</p> <p>It was on the third day, I think, of his being with me, that, being much hurried to complete a small affair I had in hand, I abruptly called to Bartleby</p> <p>Bartleby!</p> <p><i>(He sits with his head bent over the original on the desk, his right hand sideways, extended with the copy, so that immediately upon emerging from his retreat, Bartleby can get it. However Bartleby does not move from his desk behind the screen)</i></p> <p><i>(Louder)</i> Bartleby! I need you to come and check this document with me!</p>
Bartleby	<i>(From behind the screen)</i> I would prefer not to.
Narrator	<i>(Stunned)</i> Bartleby – would you please come here at once and help me check this document?
Bartleby	<i>(From behind the screen)</i> I would prefer not to.
Narrator	<i>(Astounded)</i> You would prefer not to? What do you mean? Are you moon-struck? I want you to help me compare this sheet here — take it! <i>(Flourishes the sheet impatiently)</i>
Bartleby	<i>(Unagitated, calmly)</i> I would prefer not to.
Narrator	<p><i>(After an extended pause, he returns his gaze to the audience)</i></p> <p>Doubtless I should have violently dismissed him from the premises!</p>

	<p>But my business hurried me. I concluded to forget the matter for the present, reserving it for my future leisure.</p> <p>A few days after this, Bartleby concluded three lengthy documents, being triplicates of a week's testimony taken before me in my High Court of Chancery. It became necessary to examine them. It was an important suit, and great accuracy was imperative. Having all things arranged I called Turkey and Nippers to the ready, meaning to place the copies in the hands of my three clerks, while I should read from the original.</p> <p>Accordingly Turkey and Nippers had taken their seats in a row (<i>they do so, as the Narrator continues</i>), each with his document in hand, when I called to Bartleby to join this interesting group.</p> <p>(<i>Sharply</i>) Bartleby!</p>
Bartleby	(<i>He peers over the top edge of the screen, but says nothing</i>)
Narrator	Bartleby! Quick, I am waiting.
Bartleby	(<i>He rises, and stands at the edge of his screen, looking round it</i>) What is wanted?
Narrator	The copies, the copies. We are going to examine them. There!
Bartleby	(<i>Quite neutrally</i>) I would prefer not to.
Narrator	Why do you refuse?"
Bartleby	I would prefer not to.
Narrator	These are your own copies we are about to examine. It is labour saving to you, because one examination will answer for your three papers. It is common usage. Every copyist is bound to help examine his copy. Is it not so? Will you not speak? (<i>There is a short silence</i>) Answer!
Bartleby	I would prefer not to.
Narrator	You are decided, then, not to comply with my request — a request made according to common usage and common sense? (<i>Bartleby does not reply</i>) Turkey, what do you think of this? Am I not right?"
Turkey	With submission, sir, I think that you are.
Narrator	Nippers, what do you think of it?"
Nippers	(<i>Vehemently</i>) I think I should kick him out of the office!
Narrator	You hear what they say, Bartleby; come forth and do your duty. (<i>again turning to the audience</i>) But he made no reply. I pondered a moment in sore perplexity. But once more business hurried me. I determined again to postpone the consideration of this dilemma to my future leisure. With a little trouble we made out to examine the papers without Bartleby, who meanwhile Bartleby sat in his hermitage, oblivious to every thing but his own peculiar business there. (<i>Nippers and Turkey resume their seats and duties</i>) Some days passed, the scrivener being employed upon another lengthy work. His late remarkable conduct led me to regard his ways narrowly. I observed that he never went to dinner; (<i>puzzled</i>) indeed that he never went anywhere. As yet I had never of my personal knowledge known him to be outside of my office. He was a perpetual sentry in the corner.

	<p><i>(More exasperated)</i></p> <p>Nothing so aggravates an earnest person as a passive resistance! Poor fellow; he means no mischief; it is plain he intends no insolence; his aspect sufficiently shows that his eccentricities are involuntary. He is useful to me. I can get along with him. If I turn him away, the chances are he will fall in with some less indulgent employer, and then he will be rudely treated, and perhaps driven forth miserably to starve.</p> <p>But the passiveness of Bartleby sometimes irritated me.</p> <p>I felt strangely goaded on to encounter him in new opposition, to squeeze some angry spark from him. But indeed I might as well have tried to strike fire with my knuckles against a bit of flint. But one afternoon the evil impulse in me mastered me, and the following little scene ensued.</p> <p><i>(Turning; to Bartleby who is hidden behind the screen)</i></p> <p>Bartleby, when those papers are all copied, I will compare them with you.</p>
Bartleby	<i>(Looking over the top of the screen)</i> I would prefer not to.
Narrator	How? Surely you do not mean to persist in that mulish way?
	<i>(Bartleby disappears back out of sight, and makes no response. Narrator strides across to Turkey and Nipper's side of the room)</i>
	He says, a second time, he won't examine his papers. What do you think of it, Turkey?
Turkey	Think of it? I think I'll just step behind his screen, and black his eyes for him!
Narrator	Calm down, Turkey, let's hear what Nippers has to say. What do you think of it, Nippers? Would I not be justified in immediately dismissing Bartleby?
Nippers	<i>(Mildly)</i> Excuse me, that is for you to decide, sir. I think his conduct quite unusual, and indeed unjust, as regards Turkey and myself. But it may only be a passing whim.
Narrator	<i>(Surprised)</i> Ah! You have strangely changed your mind then — you speak very gently of him now!
Turkey	It is all beer; gentleness is the effect of beer — Nippers and I dined together to-day. You see how gentle I am, sir. Shall I go and black his eyes?
Narrator	No, not to-day, Turkey.
	<i>(He pauses for a moment in deep thought, then appears to have a brainwave.)</i>
	Bartleby, just step round to the Post Office, won't you? It is but a three minute walk. see if there is anything for me.
Bartleby	I would prefer not to.
Narrator	You will not?
Bartleby	I prefer not.
Narrator	<i>(Returning to his desk and addressing the audience)</i>
	Shall I acknowledge it? The conclusion of this whole business was, that it soon became a fixed fact of my chambers, that a pale scrivener, by the name of Bartleby, had a desk there; that he copied for me at the usual rate of four pence per one hundred words; but he was permanently exempt from examining the work done by him, that duty being transferred to Turkey and Nippers. Moreover, said Bartleby was never on any account to be dispatched on the most trivial errand of any sort; and that even if asked to take on some simple matter, it was generally understood

	<p>that he would prefer not to — in other words, that he would refuse point-blank.</p> <p>As days passed on, I became considerably reconciled to Bartleby. His steadiness, his freedom from all dissipation, his incessant industry (except when he chose to throw himself into a standing reverie behind his screen), his great stillness, his unchanging of demeanour under all circumstances, made him a valuable acquisition. One prime thing was this — he was always there —first in the morning, continually through the day, and the last at night. I had a singular confidence in his honesty. I felt my most precious papers perfectly safe in his hands.</p> <p>Sometimes it was exceedingly difficult to bear in mind all the time those strange peculiarities, privileges, and unheard of exemptions. Now and then, in the eagerness of dispatching pressing business, I would inadvertently summon Bartleby, in a short, rapid tone, to put his finger, say, on the incipient tie of a bit of red tape with which I was about compressing some papers. Of course, from behind the screen the usual answer -</p>
Bartleby	I would prefer not to.
Narrator	<p>- was sure to come.</p> <p>Here it must be said, that according to the custom of most legal gentlemen occupying chambers in densely-populated law buildings, there were several keys to my door. One was kept by a woman residing in the attic, who weekly scrubbed and daily swept and dusted my apartments. Another was kept by Turkey for convenience sake. The third I sometimes carried in my own pocket. The fourth - I knew not who had it.</p> <p><i>(He makes as if walking down the street and approaching his premises)</i></p> <p>Now, one Sunday morning on my way to Church, and finding myself rather early, I thought I would walk round to my chambers for a while. Luckily I had my key with me; but upon applying it to the lock, I found it resisted by something inserted from the inside. Quite surprised, I called out; when to my consternation a key was turned from within; and thrusting his lean visage at me, and holding the door ajar, the apparition of Bartleby appeared, in his shirt sleeves, and otherwise in a strangely tattered dishabille, saying quietly that -</p>
Bartleby	<i>(On the other side of the door, and partially undressed, in shirt sleeves)</i> I am sorry, but I am deeply engaged.
Narrator	Will you not let me in?
Bartleby	I would prefer not to.
Narrator	You will not let me enter my own Chambers, sir?
Bartleby	Perhaps you had better walk round the block two or three times, and by that time I would probably have concluded my affairs.
Narrator	<p><i>(shocked)</i> The entrance being obstructed, I had little choice but to comply.</p> <p>Now, the appearance of Bartleby, tenanted my law-chambers of a Sunday morning, with his cadaverously gentlemanly nonchalance had such a strange effect upon me, that I slunk away from my own door, and did as desired, but not without some misgivings as to the mild effrontery of this unaccountable scrivener.</p> <p>I was full of uneasiness as to what Bartleby could possibly be doing in my office in his shirt sleeves, and in such a condition of a Sunday morning. Was anything amiss going on? Nay, that was out of the question. It was not to be thought of for a moment that Bartleby was an immoral person. But what could he be doing there? — copying? Nay again, whatever might be his eccentricities, Bartleby was an</p>

	<p>eminently decorous person. He would be the last man to sit down to his desk in any state approaching to nudity. And he did not appear to be kind of man who would violate the sanctity of a Sunday.</p> <p>Nevertheless, my mind was not pacified; and full of a restless curiosity, at last I returned to the door. (<i>Brazenly, doing so</i>) Without hindrance I inserted my key, opened it, and entered. Bartleby was not to be seen. I looked round anxiously, peeped behind his screen; but it was very plain that he was gone.</p> <p>Upon more closely examining the place, I surmised that for an indefinite period Bartleby must have (<i>astonished</i>) ate, dressed, and slept in my office, and that too without plate, mirror, or bed. The cushioned seat of a rickety old sofa in one corner bore the faint impress of a lean, reclining form. Rolled away under his desk, I found a blanket; under the empty grate, a blacking box and brush; on a chair, a tin basin, with soap and a ragged towel; in a newspaper a few crumbs of ginger-nuts and a morsel of cheese, as if Bartleby has been making his home here, keeping a bachelor's apartment all by himself. His poverty is great; but his solitude, how horrible; and here Bartleby makes his home.</p> <p>The next morning came.</p> <p>Bartleby!</p> <p>(<i>there is no reply</i>)</p> <p>Bartleby, come here; I am not going to ask you to do any thing you would prefer not to do — I simply wish to speak to you.</p> <p>(<i>there is no reply</i>)</p> <p>(<i>Walking to his screen and looking directly over the top</i>) Bartleby. Will you tell me, Bartleby, where you were born?"</p>
Bartleby	I would prefer not to.
Narrator	Will you tell me any thing about yourself?
Bartleby	I would prefer not to.
Narrator	But what reasonable objection can you have to speak to me? I feel friendly towards you.
Bartleby	I would prefer not to.
Narrator	What is your answer, Bartleby?
Bartleby	At present I prefer to give no answer.
Narrator	<p>(<i>Resuming a downstage position</i>) Again I was compelled to dwell on what I should do. Mortified as I was at his behaviour, and resolved as I had been to dismiss him when I entered my office, nevertheless I strangely felt something superstitious knocking at my heart, and denouncing me for a villain if I dared to breathe one bitter word against him. At last, familiarly drawing my chair behind his screen, I composed myself, and said:-</p> <p>Bartleby, never mind then about revealing your history; but let me entreat you, as a friend, to comply as far as may be with the usages of this office. Say now you will help to examine papers to-morrow or next day: in short, say now that in a day or two you will begin to be a little reasonable:— say so, Bartleby.</p>
Bartleby	At present I would prefer not to be a little reasonable.
Nippers	(<i>Acidly, to Bartleby</i>) Prefer not, eh? (<i>Vehemently, to Narrator</i>) I'd prefer him, if I were you, sir; I'd give him notice, the stubborn mule! What is it, sir, pray, that he

	prefers not to do now?"
Narrator	<i>(Gently)</i> Mr. Nippers, I'd prefer that you would withdraw for the present. <i>(Nippers, looking thunderous, exits)</i>
Turkey	With submission, sir, yesterday I was thinking about Bartleby here, and I think that if he would but prefer to take a quart of good ale every day, it would do much towards mending him, and enabling him to assist in examining his papers.
Bartleby	<i>(Alarmed)</i> I would prefer to be left alone here.
Narrator	Turkey, you will please withdraw.
Turkey	Oh, certainly, sir, if you prefer that I should. <i>(He makes a dignified exit)</i>
Narrator	The next day I noticed that Bartleby did nothing but stand at his window in his dead-wall reverie. Upon asking him why he did not write, he said:-
Bartleby	I will do no more writing.
Narrator	Why, how now? What next? Do no more writing?
Bartleby	No more.
Narrator	And what is the reason?
Bartleby	Do you not see the reason for yourself?
Narrator	<p>I looked steadfastly at him, and perceived that his eyes looked dull and glazed. Instantly it occurred to me, that his diligence in copying by his dim window for the first few weeks of his stay with me might have temporarily impaired his vision.</p> <p>Accordingly I hinted that of course he did wisely in abstaining from writing for a while; and urged him to embrace that opportunity of taking wholesome exercise in the open air. This, however, he did not do. A few days after this, my other clerks being absent, and being in a great hurry to dispatch certain letters by the mail, I thought that, having nothing else to do, Bartleby would surely be less inflexible than usual, and carry these letters to the post-office. But he blankly declined. So, much to my inconvenience, I went myself.</p> <p>Still added days went by. Whether Bartleby's eyes improved or not, I could not say. To all appearance, I thought they did. But when I asked him if they did, he vouchsafed no answer. At all events, he would do no copying. At last, in reply to my urgings, he informed me that he had permanently given up copying.</p> <p>What? Suppose your eyes should get entirely well — better than ever before — would you not copy then?</p>
Bartleby	I have given up copying.
Narrator	<p>He remained as ever, a fixture in my chamber. What was to be done? He would do nothing in the office, he had now become a millstone to me. Yet I was sorry for him.</p> <p>At length, necessities connected with my business took precedence over all other considerations. Decently as I could, I told Bartleby that in six days' time he must unconditionally leave the office. I warned him to take measures, in the interval, for procuring some other abode. I offered to assist him in this search, if he himself would but take the first step towards a removal.</p> <p>And when you finally quit me, Bartleby, I shall see that you go not away entirely unprovided. Six days from this hour, remember.</p> <p>At the expiration of that period, I peeped behind the screen, and Bartleby was still there. I buttoned up my coat, balanced myself; advanced slowly towards him, touched his shoulder, and said:-</p> <p>The time has come; you must quit this place; I am sorry for you; here is money; but you must go.</p>

Bartleby	I would prefer not to.
Narrator	<p>You must.</p> <p>Bartleby, I owe you twelve shillings on account; here are thirty-two; the odd twenty are yours. Will you take it?</p> <p><i>(there is no reply)</i></p> <p>I will leave them here then. <i>(He places coins on the table)</i> After you have removed your things from these offices, Bartleby, you will of course lock the door — since every one is now gone for the day but you — and if you please, slip your key underneath the mat, so that I may have it in the morning. I shall not see you again; so good-bye to you. If hereafter in your new place of abode I can be of any service to you, do not fail to advise me by letter. Good-bye, Bartleby, and fare you well.</p> <p>I assumed that depart he must; it was truly a beautiful thought to have assumed Bartleby's departure; but I considered the probabilities. One moment I thought my move would prove a miserable failure, and Bartleby would be found all alive at my office as usual; the next moment it seemed certain that I should see his chair empty.</p> <p>The following day when I approached my Chambers, I was earlier than usual. I stood listening for a moment. All was still. He must be gone. I tried the knob. The door was locked. Yes, my procedure had worked to a charm; he indeed must be vanished. Yet a certain melancholy mixed with this: I was almost sorry for my brilliant success. I was fumbling under the door mat for the key, which Bartleby was to have left there for me, when accidentally my knee knocked against a panel, producing a summoning sound, and in response a voice came to me from within:-</p>
Bartleby	Not yet; I am occupied.
Narrator	<p><i>(Thunderstruck)</i> Not gone!</p> <p>Bartleby, I am seriously displeased. I am pained, Bartleby. I had thought better of you. I had imagined you of such a gentlemanly disposition, that in any delicate dilemma a slight hint would suffice — in short, an assumption. But it appears I am deceived. Why, you have not even touched the money yet.</p> <p>Will you, or will you not, quit me?</p>
Bartleby	I would prefer not to quit you.
Narrator	<p><i>(Exasperated)</i> What earthly right have you to stay here? Do you pay any rent? Do you pay my taxes? Or is this property yours?</p> <p><i>(there is no response)</i></p> <p>Are you ready to go on and write now? Are your eyes recovered? Could you copy a small paper for me this morning? or help examine a few lines? or step round to the post-office? In a word, will you do any thing at all, to give a reason for your refusal to depart the premises?</p> <p><i>(there is no response)</i></p> <p>I was now in such a state of nervous resentment that I tried to fancy that in the course of the morning, at such time as might prove agreeable to him, Bartleby, of his own free accord, would emerge from his hermitage, and take up some decided line of march in the direction of the door. But no. Half-past twelve o'clock came; Turkey began to glow in the face, overturn his inkstand, and become generally</p>

	<p>obstreperous; Nippers abated down into quietude and courtesy; and Bartleby remained standing at his window in one of his profoundest dead-wall reveries. Will it be credited? Ought I to acknowledge it? That afternoon I left the office without saying one further word to him.</p> <p>Some days now passed, during which time there were unsolicited and uncharitable remarks made to me by my professional friends who visited the rooms, and saw the peculiar aspect of the unaccountable Bartleby, who would remain standing immovable in the middle of the room. And when some deeply occupied legal gentleman visitor present, seeing Bartleby wholly unemployed, would request him to run round to his office and fetch some papers for him:-</p>
Bartleby	I would prefer not to.
Narrator	<p>What shall I do? what ought I to do? what does conscience say I should do with this man, or rather ghost. Rid myself of him, I must; go, he shall. But how? You will not thrust him, such a helpless creature out of your door? No, I will not, I cannot do that. What then will you do? For all your coaxing, he will not budge. Bribes he leaves under your own paperweight on your table; in short, it is quite plain that he prefers to cling to you.</p> <p>But since he will not quit me, I must quit him. I will change my offices; I will move elsewhere; and give him fair notice, that if I find him on my new premises I will then proceed against him as a common trespasser.</p> <p>I find these chambers too far from the City Hall; the air is unwholesome. In a word, I propose to remove my offices next week, and shall no longer require your services. I tell you this now, in order that you may seek another place.</p> <p><i>(As the next speech progresses, the stage crew enter, and remove the entire set of furniture, leaving the screen until last)</i></p> <p>On the appointed day I engaged carts and men, proceeded to my chambers, and having but little furniture, every thing was removed in a few hours.</p> <p>Throughout, the scrivener remained standing behind the screen, which I finally directed to be removed, leaving him as the motionless occupant of a naked room.</p> <p>Good-bye, Bartleby; I am going — good-bye.</p> <p>Established in my new quarters, for a day or two I kept the door locked, and started at every footfall in the passages. But my fears were needless. Bartleby never came near me.</p> <p>I thought all was going well, when a perturbed looking stranger visited me.</p>
Messenger	<i>(Enters, bows slightly and shows an official-looking document)</i> Good day to you, sir. Are you, sir, the previous occupant of this address?
Narrator	<i>(Looking at the document)</i> I am.
Messenger	Then sir, you are responsible for the man you left there. He refuses to do any copying; he refuses to do anything; he says he prefers not to; and he refuses to quit the premises.
Narrator	I am very sorry, sir, but, really, this man is nothing to me — he is no relation or apprentice of mine, I have no responsibility for him.
Messenger	<i>(Alarmed)</i> In mercy's name, who is he?
Narrator	I certainly cannot inform you. I know nothing about him. Formerly I employed him as a copyist; but he has done nothing for me now for some time past.

Messenger	<i>(Resignedly)</i> I shall settle him then — good morning, sir. <i>(Exits)</i>
Narrator	Several days passed, and I heard nothing more; and though I often felt a charitable prompting to call at the place and see poor Bartleby, yet a certain squeamishness prevented me. However on arriving at my new premises soon thereafter, I found the same messenger waiting at my door in a high state of nervous excitement.
Messenger	<i>(Entering, excitedly)</i> That's the man — here he comes!
Narrator	What goes on, sir?
Messenger	You must take him away, sir, at once! We cannot stand it any longer. We have turned him out of his room, and he now persists in haunting the building generally, sitting upon the banisters of the stairs by day, and sleeping in the entry by night. Everybody is concerned; clients are leaving the offices; some fears are entertained of a mob; something you must do, and that without delay!
Narrator	I persisted that Bartleby was nothing to me, but allowed myself to be persuaded to attend him. What are you doing here, Bartleby?
Bartleby	Sitting upon the banister.
Narrator	Bartleby, are you aware that you are the cause of great tribulation to me, by persisting in occupying the entry after being dismissed from the office? <i>(no response)</i> Now one of two things must take place. Either you must do something, or something must be done to you. Now what sort of business would you like to engage in? Would you like to re-engage in copying for some one?
Bartleby	I would prefer not to make any change.
Narrator	Would you like a clerkship in a dry-goods shop?
Bartleby	There is too much confinement about that. No, I would not like a clerkship; but I am not particular.
Narrator	<i>(Astonished)</i> Too much confinement! You keep yourself confined all the time!
Bartleby	I would prefer not to take a clerkship.
Narrator	How would a bar-tender's business suit you? There is no trying of the eyesight in that.
Bartleby	I would not like it at all; though, as I said before, I am not particular.
Narrator	Well then, would you like to travel through the country collecting bills for the merchants? That would improve your health.
Bartleby	No, I would prefer to be doing something else.
Narrator	How then would going as a companion to Europe, to entertain some young gentleman with your conversation, how would that suit you?
Bartleby	Not at all. It does not strike me that there is anything definite about that. I like to be stationary. But I am not particular.
Narrator	<i>(Determinedly)</i> Stationary you shall be then. If you do not go away from these premises before night, I shall feel bound to quit the premises myself. <i>(More kindly)</i> Bartleby, will you go home with me now — not to my office, but my dwelling — and remain there till we can conclude upon some convenient arrangement for you at our leisure? Come, let us start now, right away.
Bartleby	No: at present I would prefer not to make any change at all.
Narrator	I answered nothing, distinctly perceived that I had now done all that I possibly could, both in respect to the demands of the landlord and his tenants, and with regard to my own desire and sense of duty, to benefit Bartleby. A few days later, a note from the landlord lay upon the desk. It informed me that the writer had sent for the police, and Bartleby had been removed to prison as a

	<p>vagrant. At first I was indignant; but at last almost approved. The landlord's energetic, summary disposition had led him to adopt a procedure which I do not think I would have decided upon myself; and yet as a last resort, under such peculiar circumstances, it seemed the only plan.</p> <p>However, feeling some small measure of guilt or even perhaps responsibility for the poor scrivener, I went to the Halls of Justice and stated that the individual I described was a perfectly honest man, and greatly to be compassionated, however unaccountably eccentric. I was allowed to visit him.</p> <p>Bartleby!</p>
Bartleby	I know you, and I have nothing to say to you.
Narrator	It was not I that brought you here, Bartleby. And to you, this should not be so vile a place. It does not have to be as sad a place as one might think. Look through the window (<i>pointing</i>) there is the sky, and here is the grass.
Bartleby	I know where I am.
Narrator	I hear your fare is poor; see, I will leave some small money for an improvement to your diet.
Bartleby	I prefer not to dine to-day. It would disagree with me; I am unused to dinners.
Narrator	<p>I visited again a few days later, but found no advancement in his demeanour, still he refused to eat.</p> <p>Presently, he departed this world.</p> <p><i>(Sadly; conspiratorially)</i></p> <p>Yet here I hardly know whether I should divulge one little item of rumour, which came to my ear a few months after the scrivener's decease. Upon what basis it rested, I could never ascertain; and hence, how true it is I cannot now tell. But I will briefly mention it.</p> <p>The report was this: that Bartleby had been a longstanding employee of an undertaker, and had become accustomed to the task of preparing bodies of the deceased, making them generally both presentable and fit for viewing by grieving relatives; and of course suitably attired for their final journey. After many years of taking this task with the utmost seriousness, he had found himself progressively unable to communicate with the living, and especially the relatives of the deceased; and had withdrawn himself into an inner shell, oppressed by a deep melancholy.</p> <p>When I think over this rumour, I cannot adequately express the emotions which seize me. Deceased persons! does it not sound like he became a dead man himself? Conceive a man by nature and misfortune prone to a pallid hopelessness, can any business seem more fitted to heighten it than that of continually handling these poor late souls and assorting them for the churchyard? For by the tens of thousands, they are thus interred.</p> <p>Sometimes from the body of the deceased he might have cause to remove a ring and return it to a poor widow — the finger where it originally reposed now moulders in the grave. A fine looking young man perhaps awaits his attention, brought to his untimely end by some dreadful mischance, he who neither eats nor hungers more; pardon for those who died despairing; hope for those who died unhoping; good tidings for those who died stifled by unrelieved calamities.</p> <p><i>(He gives a big sigh)</i></p>

	<p>And so, that is history of Bartleby the Scrivener, who is gone without leaving much of a ripple in the Pool of Life. And yet – <i>(very reflectively)</i> from time to time – when I am alone in my Chambers, and dwelling on some issue of import, I think of Bartleby, and wonder if he had ever considered a adopting a more active demeanour, and of drinking more deeply from the cup of what Life had to offer him? <i>(He shivers, unaccountably)</i></p>
Bartleby	<i>(Off, and after a short pause)</i> I would prefer not to.
Narrator	<p><i>(Startled – but recovers quickly)</i></p> <p>Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!</p> <p>CURTAIN</p>

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