



# The Flying Goat

*H.E. Bates*

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## **The Flying Goat** H.E. Bates

*The Flying Goat* (Jonathan Cape, 1939) features sixteen diverse stories from slapstick sketches to portraits of marital tension; one Uncle Silas tale; and three that hark back to Bates's boyhood roots.

'A Funny Thing' is an escalating bragging match between Uncle Silas and Uncle Cosmos. Cosmos is modelled on Bates's paternal grandfather, Charles Lawrence, who was "known about Rushden as a dapper and dashing figure who spent his holidays in the south of France, where he reputedly had a number of mistresses". A television adaptation starring Albert Finney was aired in 2003.

In a cautionary tale, ever-relevant today, 'Shot Actress – Full Story' is an account of the death of a former actress, and of the damaging effect of rumours. In commenting on the public's obsession with scandal and journalism, the tale reflects Bates's early newspaper work at the Northamptonshire Chronicle as well as a wider social commentary.

The *Times Literary Supplement* singled out 'The White Pony' and 'The Ox' as "faultless things, jewels as luminous and as finely cut as any Mr. Bates has turned out. In each of them the evocative strength of his countryside pictures is joined to a still and poignant emotion that seems to project a background of universal experience for a particular sorrow."

The bonus story 'Pensioned Off' is a sensitive and touching tale of a Latin teacher approaching the end of his career, reflecting on his obsolete methods of trying to teach a dying language. The story is based in part on Bates's own Latin teacher who he described as "extremely fat", so in a sweetly comic moment we hear how he fasts every Thursday so as not to become obese. Published in the *New Adelphi* (1929), and not republished since.

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