

The Two Countrymen

From the book "Children's Classics in Dramatic Form" by Augusta Stevenson
Suggested by an Oriental legend; source unknown

Characters:

First Countryman

Second Countryman

First City Wag

Second City Wag

Merchant

SCENE I

TIME: Evening

PLACE: A large city; a quiet corner with a high wall back.

(Great crowds of people are seen in the streets. The Two Countrymen have just arrived. They find a quiet corner where they place their blankets and baskets of gourds which they carry.)

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: I fear something most dreadful must have happened in that street. See what crowds of people pass that way!

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: Perhaps there is a fire. And yet—*(He stops, showing he is puzzled.)*

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: *(Anxiously.)* What troubles thee?

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: Look thou into that other street! It, too, is full of people, and yet none are gone from here.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: Some awful accident hath called them from all parts of the city. We must find out what it may be.

(A Merchant passes.)

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: *(To Merchant.)* I pray thee stop, citizen.

(The Merchant stops.)

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: Canst thou tell us what dreadful thing hath befallen this city?

MERCHANT: What do you mean?

(Two City Wags pass; they stop to listen.)

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: Whither do they go, these vast multitudes? What dreadful thing go they to see?

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: Perhaps they flee from some monster just come out of the sea?

MERCHANT: It is ever thus—always the great crowds surging through the streets. *(The Merchant goes.)*

SECOND WAG: *(To Countrymen, winking aside at First Wag.)* This is your first visit to a city, I take it?

BOTH COUNTRYMEN: *(Bowing.)* It is, good sirs.

FIRST WAG: *(Winking aside at Second Wag.)* You know what happens to strangers in our city, of course?

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: *(Anxiously.)* No, good sir.

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: *(Anxiously.)* Pray tell us what it may be.

FIRST WAG: 'T is said they become so dazed by the noise of the city and the rush of such countless numbers, they forget who they are.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: Eh? Forget who they are?

FIRST WAG: *(Nodding.)* Aye. *(He winks aside at Second Wag.)* You have heard of this, dear friend?

SECOND WAG: *(Winking aside.)* To be sure; 't is quite common.

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: Forget their own faces?

SECOND WAG: Aye, their faces. At least, they are not certain as to whose faces theirs may be.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: Then we dare not leave this corner!

FIRST WAG: I would not advise it.

SECOND WAG: It would be most unsafe, at least for tonight.

FIRST WAG: Of course there is this danger, when you awake in the morning you may not know whether you are yourselves.

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: Would that I had never left my farm!

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: Would that I had never left my wife!

SECOND WAG: Do not despair; there is a way out of your troubles.

BOTH COUNTRYMEN: Tell us, we pray thee!

SECOND WAG: Each of you must take a gourd from his basket there and tie it around his ankle. Then, in the morning, when you awake, you will each know that it is yourself and none other.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: *(To Second Countryman, joyfully.)* Dost thou hear? By our gourds we shall know!

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: *(Joyfully.)* I hear! Thanks and yet again more thanks to thee, good sir!

(The Wags turn to go.)

FIRST WAG: May you know yourselves in the morning for what you truly are! *(They go, laughing aside. Each Countryman ties a gourd around his ankle, wraps his blanket round him, and lies down. They sleep. Pause.)*

(Enter the Wags softly, each carrying a small flag. They remove the gourds from Countrymen's ankles and hide them under their blankets. They then tie the flags around Countrymen's ankles and go, greatly pleased with their joke.)

SCENE II

TIME: The next morning

PLACE: Same as Scene I

(The Wags are seen peeping around the corner.)

FIRST WAG: *(Softly.)* They are sound asleep.

SECOND WAG: *(Softly.)* Then come.

(They enter and throw the two baskets of gourds over the wall. They then retire around the corner, peeping as before.)

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: *(Waking; shaking Second Countryman.)* Wake up! Wake up!

(Each yawns; stretches; throws off his blanket; arises.)

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: *(Remembering.)* Ah, the gourds!

(Each looks at his ankle, then at the other's ankle.)

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: How's this!

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: Did we not tie gourds around our ankles?

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: *(Nodding.)* Why, surely we did.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: *(Looking about.)* Did we not have two baskets of gourds with us?

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: *(Nodding.)* Surely; there in the corner.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: *(Holding up foot to which flag is tied.)* Is this a gourd or is it not a gourd?

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: Of a surety it is a flat. *(Holding up his foot with flag.)* And if this be not a gourd, keep thy silence.

(The First Countryman stares at the flag, placing his finger on his closed lips.)

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: Then it hath indeed happened!

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: What hath happened?

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: The dreadful thing foretold by the citizens. I am not !! Thou art not thou!

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: *(Trembling with fear.)* How can that be?

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: I know not. I only know that it is.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: *(Weeping.)* I cannot think I am not myself!

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: *(Weeping.)* Thou needst must think it, whether thou wouldst or no.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: Dost thou indeed think thou art some other person?

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: If I were myself, would not the gourd still be around my ankle?

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: Then who art thou? And who am I?

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: Alas! I know not.

(Enter the Wags.)

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: *(Joyfully.)* Here come those who will know whether we are ourselves!

(The Wags pretend not to know the Countrymen who are bowing before them. They pass on.)

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: Stop, good sirs!

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: A word with thee!

(The Wags stop.)

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: Dost thou not know us?

FIRST WAG: I have not that pleasure.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: Thou didst talk with us but yester-eve!

SECOND WAG: Some mistake, I fear, my good man.

(The Wags start off.)

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: *(Weeping.)* Wait! I pray thee, wait!

(The Wags stop.)

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: Canst thou not tell us who we are?

FIRST WAG: Do you not know yourselves?

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: Alas! We are not ourselves.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: Thou wouldst know us were we as we were once.

SECOND WAG: Perhaps those flags will solve the riddle.

FIRST WAG: True enough; let us look at them.

(The Countrymen remove the flags and hand them to Wags, who look at them intently.)

SECOND WAG: *(Mysteriously.)* Can it be?

FIRST WAG: It is! It is!

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: Eh?

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: Eh?

SECOND WAG: *(To Countrymen.)* Your pardon! I do crave your pardon!

FIRST WAG: *(Taking a ring from his finger; turning to Second Countryman.)* Please to accept this ring. I shall then know I am forgiven for not recognizing you at first.

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: *(Accepting ring; putting it on the first finger of his right hand.)* Why, yes, I forgive thee.

SECOND WAG: *(To First Countryman, taking off his gold chain.)* Please to accept this chain. By that I shall know I too am forgiven.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: *(Accepting chain; putting it on.)* Thou art forgiven. Now tell me what great person I have become.

SECOND WAG: *(Gravely.)* Jest with us no more!

FIRST WAG: We go now to announce your arrival to the Lord Mayor.

SECOND WAG: Presently, we will return. Await us here. *(They go, laughing aside.)*

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: Dost thou know, I have always felt that I was really a great person. Hast thou not always noticed something unusual about me?

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: I cannot say that I have. There is, however, certainly something wonderful about me. I have noticed it for a long time. Hast thou not felt it when in my company?

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: I have not.

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: *(Indignant.)* Thou hast not?

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: Never! Thou silly goose!

(The Second Countryman snatches First Countryman's chain and throws it over the wall.)

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: Mind how thou callest me names, thou booby!

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: *(Tearing off Second Countryman's ring and throwing it over the wall.)* Silly goose!

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: I will now depart for my home. I do not desire thy company.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: I likewise will return, and likewise I wish to journey alone.

(They take up their blankets and discover the gourds.)

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: Eh?

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: Eh?

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: Let us tie them around our ankles. We may then discover whether we are ourselves.

(They tie the gourds around their ankles.)

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: *(Joyfully.)* I am myself!

FIRST COUNTRYMAN: *(Joyfully.)* And I am myself!

SECOND COUNTRYMAN: Come, let us journey back together.

(They go out. Pause. Enter the Wags. They remain at entrance, not knowing Countrymen have gone.)

FIRST WAG: *(Whispering.)* Do you think the musicians should follow them?

SECOND WAG: *(Whispering.)* No, they should follow the music. What a joke it is!

(They look around and discover that the Countrymen have gone.)

FIRST WAG: *(Sadly.)* My ring!

SECOND WAG: *(Sadly.)* My chain!