

THE STORY OF THE THREE FRIARS

(Adapted to include more modern English – easier to follow)

Characters / Reader / Actors / Highlighted Parts:

- Narrator Cynthia Cielle
- Friar Francis (older man) Richard Probst
- Friar Gonsole (younger) Robert Andrews
- Friar Asmodeus and The Devil Jack Evans
- ZOOM SCREEN DIRECTIONS – AND ACTOR POSITIONS
- Stage Directions – NOT TO BE READ

Original Short Story and Concept by Eugene Field.
Play Adaptation by Robert Andrews

PROLOGUE

ZOOM SCREEN DIRECTIONS – AND ACTOR POSITIONS
Nobody on screen except Narrator. Narrator appears center screen

Narrator (moving onto the screen)

It was the year 1662. In that time many believed in witches and warlocks, goblins and sorcerers; such as had never before been seen, and with the grace of God, will never be seen again.

It was in this year that the devil had come upon the earth to tempt a holy friar, named Friar Gonsol. A very good and very holy man, albeit young in his practice. The Devil's plan was to lure this righteous man unto the path of evil.

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Narrator screen goes black and fades to a monastery, and then fades to a humble bedroom. Friar Gonsol fades onto HALF of the screen

SCENE ONE: Contempt

Friar Gonsol **(moving onto the screen)**

Ok, now what else can I do? I've given to the poor. I've helped the sick. I've aided the needy. I've fasted. I've prayed. I've read to the blind. Oh I know – I don't need all these fancy clothes. I have one habit, and that is enough to cover my body and keep me warm...
SIGH... warm enough anyway.

Fire and lava appears on other half of screen, then devil appears

Devil **(moving onto the screen – wearing red horns)**

Damn that Goody two-shoes.

(making a face of contempt)

I can't stand it that he does this and does that. **(with a sneer)** So good. Grrrr. He makes me sick.

Ahhhh.... I know. I will tempt him, and lure him from his good deeds. No common temptation will do.

This will require finesse. Now, what might bedazzle this **(again with contempt)** holy man of God.

Friar Gonsol:

(Giving a box to the homeless shelter within Zoom window)

Here you are my fine man. These clothes will help you stay warm. Here is food for you as well.

Devil: **– still wearing horns**

How can I help him to achieve his miserable end?

I know... the Friar likes to read. I will give him a book.

(rubbing his hands together) A book like no other.

Narrator:

And the devil began to compile a book of many curious things to both please and ensnare him; and to lure him away from his good deeds.

Devil: – still wearing horns

I know that temptations of the flesh would be worthless in leading the Friar down my path of evil.

(holding up a book)

This will do it. This will do it. **(laughing devilishly)**

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All screens go black – Full screen of outside of monastery. Narrator appears in corner

SCENE TWO: The Devil's Offer

Narrator:

Now presently came this thing of evil unto Friar Gonsole disguised as another friar. As he approached, the new friar made a proper, and very low bow of greeting.

Show two friars at a distance, and then Gonsole appears to the side.

Friar Gonsole: **(reflectively – aside to himself)**

This man appears to be holy, but there is a hardness to his eyes, and he smells of sulphur and brimstone below his tattered cloak and hood, which I associate with the Devil, not a friar.

Friar Gonsole to Friar Asmodeus:

My good friar. I hope the odor from you that is in my nostrils is an egg gone bad, and not the fumes from the bottomless pit!

Asmodeus fades onto other half of screen

Friar Asmodeus:

(sweetly)

no longer wearing horns, but rather a cloak like a monk

Nay, sweet friar, what you are smelling are the gifts of frankincense and myrrh that I bring you. For I am of holy orders and I have brought thee a wondrous and honorable book. Both beautiful to look upon, and filled with holy knowledge.

Narrator:

The eyes of Friar Gonsol lit up with bright sparkles, and his heart leapt with joy. More than his love of God and spiritual welfare, this friar loved books – and here appeared one that was exceedingly special.

Friar Gonsol: **eagerly**

Oh, please, I beg of you. Show me that book, that I may know the name of it, and discover the wonders of its counsel.

Friar Asmodeus **(as Friar Gonsol's eyes widen with delight)**

Here you can look. See that the cover is very old and worn. This book has seen many generations, and helped countless other Friars throughout history.

'Tis a unique book of immeasurable value;
Clearly filled with knowledge.

Show a big hefty book on the screen.

This book contains, pictures, symbols and text describing wondrous acts of those similar to yourself.

This book could be looked upon as guidebook of how to get to Heaven. Even the fine paper upon which it is printed is heavenly.

Friar Gonsole:

And lo, appearing on its pages are written the names of they that have possessed it in the past,
Many famous people, priests, friars and kings
And... Oh.... **(gasping)** There is an autograph and dedication that shows that this book had been presented by Venus di Medici to Apollo at Rhodes.

Narrator:

When Friar Gonsol saw the book; how it was titled and imprinted and adorned and bound, he knew it to be of vast worth and the desire to possess it overcame all other thoughts. He asked of Friar Asmodeus how to do so.

Aside (Surely thou knowest by this time that Friar Asmodeus is the Devil... In case you are still wondering)

Friar Gonsole: Please dear friend Friar Asmodeus might I please borrow this book for a short time. Even a week would be an extravagant priviledge.

Friar Asmodeus:

My good Friar Gonsole, the book shall be yours without price. **(pause)**
I ask only that you promise to do me a small service as I shall specify at some point in the future.

Friar Gonsole **(aside to himself)**

With such a demand, I know that this odiferous Friar is none but the devil; but I sorely want that book. I will hear what he has to say.

Friar Gonsole to Friar Asmodeus:

Speak on my good man.

Friar Asmodeus: I have to leave right now, but I will give thought to your task. Please come to the red oak meadow tonight, and we will talk more. **(moves off the screen)**

Friar Gonsole:

Dare I ask Him? **(bowing his head as if to pray)** “Dearest Lord, I ask Thee for guidance. I would like that book only to better serve You that I might comprehend Your word.”

(turning from the pulpit - sneering) Yes. I will have that book. I am smarter than the Devil. **(moves off the screen)**

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All screens fade to black.

SCENE THREE: A Second Suitor

Narrator appears full screen

Narrator **(Francis, Gonsole, Narrator moving onto the screen)**

As the day went on, Friar Gonsole became more and more doubtful, and visited Friar Francis, another holy man. One whom by continual fastings and devotions had made himself an example of piety unto all men.

And to this holy brother did Friar Gonsol tell the entire story of his temptation and told fully of the wondrous book and of its treasured pages.

Fade to a friar’s office.

Start with Friar Francis fading onto screen

Friar Francis

The Devil is very clever. He has surely set this trap for your feet. Have a care, my brother, that you do not fall into the pit which he has created for your!

It is a good thing that you have come to me with this thing, otherwise a great misfortune might have fallen upon you.

Friar Gonsole fades onto other half of screen

Friar Gonsole:

Brother Francis. You are a gift from God to make yourself to me at a moments notice, and at this very moment of my crisis.

Friar Francis

Now listen to my words carefully. Have no more to do with this Friar Asmodeus; send him to me, or better yet, set up a meeting for another day, and I will go in your place.

Friar Gonsole:

Nay, nay. This evil temptation has been provided for me – for a special test! People will think me a weak and cowardly man were I to send thee in my stead to bear the tasks and temptations designed for the testing of my virtue.

Friar Francis

Dear Gonsole, your thoughts are true, but you are a younger brother than I, and firm though your resolution may be now, you are more likely than I to be tricked and bedazzled by his diabolical words and promises. So let me know where you are meeting this devil with the book; I burn to meet him and to steal this treasure from his blasphemous grasp.

Friar Gonsole: **suspiciously**

Nay, nay. I am strong, and while having a moment of weakness, I must prove my mettle that I am a worthy Man of God.

Friar Francis: **(scoldingly)**

Zoom background – a senior friar's study

Ah, I see that you have little faith in my strength to combat the fiend. Your trust in me should be greater, for I have done you many a kindly office.

You know, I am thinking that you have been seduced by the book! Unhappy brother, can it be that you are vain enough to desire this frivolous bauble, that you would seek the devil's companionship and work with him to obtain this trophy? I charge thee, Brother Gonsol, open your eyes and see the slipper slope on which you are standing.

Friar Gonsol:

Brother. Thy words are sound, but my mind is torn. What shall I do? Oh, what shall I do?

Friar Francis

Come, now, hesitate no longer. Tell me where that devil may be found - - I want to see this wonderful book - - *not that I care for the book, certainly not*, Just that I am very anxious to bring this evil devil to justice !

Friar Gonsol: **convinced of ulterior motives**

Merciful Heavens. **Agahst** I think that your desire for the book has encouraged you to go, more than a holy battle with the devil."

Friar Francis **Innocently**

I am offended. You speak wrongly. You are mistaking pious zeal for sinful selfishness. I want to see how this devil walks to and fro, using a sweet and precious book for the temptation of holy men. How can a holy book be used as an instrument by the prince of darkness for such dastardly deeds?

Friar Gonsole:

You are wise, but your words only convince me more that I must do battle with this devil for that book. So now I shall go to encounter the fiend!

Friar Francis

Then by the saints I shall go with thee! Tarry while I gather my belongings.

(leaving the screen)

Friar Gonsole: <THINKING> Nay... (looking both ways, and exiting the screen quickly) I will go.

Friar Francis (returning to the screen, looking for Gonsole) Alas, he is gone. I will indeed help him get this book.

All screens fade to black

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SCENE FOUR: Confrontation

Four corners of images but no people yet.

Village left bottom – Village right bottom – Narrator top right – Fire and Brimstone top left

Friar Gonsole (coming on screen, saying his line, and then disappearing)

I shall now go to meet with this so called Friar Asmodeus.

Friar Francis: (coming on screen, saying his line, and then disappearing)

I am not as energetic, my legs are not as long, and my younger counterpart is surely a faster runner, but I will find him. Fortunately, it's not a difficult thing to follow a friar through the village.

Narrator: (Appearing on screen, and staying)

Now let it be known, that Friar Francis did follow close upon his heels, for though his legs were not so long, he was smart and observant. He followed Friar Gonsole with little task.

Friar Gonsole: (coming on screen, saying his line, and then disappearing)

I will meet with Asmodeus, who does not know that I know his true identity. I will get the book and he will be left with nothing but humiliation.

Friar Francis: (coming on screen, saying his line, and then disappearing)

A book as special as this is not for a younger man. Only I have the experience to take advantage of the wisdom contained within. How dare he to take this opportunity from me.

All goes black except for narrator and Devil

Asmodeus: – again wearing horns Appears in the center of lava.

Narrator: Still on screen in the corner

Lava and village fade to the Red Oak Meadow

Devil still on screen, in the Meadow

As it turned out, the devil was already in the clearing where he had set the appointment, and in his hand he had the book. He was surprised when he observed the two friars coming at him. One from the east, one from the west.

Friar Gonsole: coming onto screen – shouting sternly

Fades into meadow

I warn thee, Devil. I give you one chance to give me that book otherwise I will take you by thy horns and hoofs and rub your ribs together! The book shall be mine.

Friar Francis: coming onto screen – defensively

Fades into meadow

NO! Don't listen to him Devil, for I am coming to wrestle with thee and I alone shall have it. Stand your ground.

Asmodeus:

With such advances, the entire church may be on their way. No way I can defeat them all. I'll stay no longer for their coming. I shall take my book and go. (leaving the screen)

Fades from meadow back into the lava, then fades to black

All other screens go black except Narrator, who now goes to full screen

EPILOGUE

Narrator:

Now many people at that time saw the devil fleeing before the two friars, so that, esteeming it to be a sign of special grace, these people did ever thereafter acknowledge the friars to be saints, and unto this day you shall hear of St. Gonsol and St. Francis.

Unto this day, too, doth the devil, with that same book with which he tempted the friars; beset and ensnare men of every age and in all places. Against whom may Heaven fortify us to do battle speedily and with successful issuance.

Credits roll against a background of flaming lava

About Eugene Field

Eugene Field Sr. (September 2, 1850 – November 4, 1895) was an American writer, best known for his [children's poetry](#) and humorous essays. He was known as the "poet of childhood".

Field was born in [St. Louis, Missouri](#) at 634 S. Broadway where today his boyhood home is open to the public as The [Eugene Field House](#) and St. Louis Toy Museum.^[1] After the death of his mother in 1856, he was raised by a cousin, Mary Field French, in [Amherst, Massachusetts](#).^[2]

Field's father, attorney [Roswell Martin Field](#), was famous for his representation of [Dred Scott](#), the slave who sued for his freedom. Field filed the complaint in the [Dred Scott v. Sandford](#) case (sometimes referred to as "the lawsuit that started the Civil War") on behalf of Scott in the federal court in St. Louis, Missouri, whence it progressed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Field attended [Williams College](#) in Williamstown, Massachusetts. His father died when Eugene turned 19, and he subsequently dropped out of Williams after eight months. He then went to [Knox College](#) in [Galesburg, Illinois](#), but dropped out after a year, followed by the [University of Missouri](#) in [Columbia, Missouri](#), where his brother Roswell was also attending. Field was not a serious student and spent much of his time at school playing practical jokes. He led raids on the president's wine cellar, painted the president's house school colors, and fired the school's landmark cannons at midnight.^[1] Field tried [acting](#), studied law with little success, and also wrote for the student newspaper. He then set off for a trip through Europe but returned to the United States six months later, penniless.

Field died in Chicago of a heart attack at the age of 45.^[9] He is buried at the Church of the Holy Comforter in [Kenilworth, Illinois](#).^[10] Slason Thompson's 1901 biography of Field states that he was originally buried in [Graceland Cemetery](#) in Chicago,^[11] but his son-in-law, Senior Warden of the Church of the Holy Comforter, had him reinterred on March 7, 1926.^[12]

Several of his poems were set to music with commercial success. Many of his works were accompanied by paintings from [Maxfield Parrish](#). His former home in [St. Louis](#) is now a museum.^[13] The Eugene Field House contains many of Field's mementos, including original manuscripts, books, furniture, personal effects, and some of the toys that inspired his poems.^[1]

A memorial to him, a statue of the "Dream Lady" from his poem "Rock-a-by-Lady", was erected in 1922 at the [Lincoln Park Zoo](#) in Chicago. There is also a park and fieldhouse named in his honor in Chicago's [Albany Park](#) neighborhood. In nearby [Oak Park, Illinois](#), another park is named in his honor. A statue of Wynken, Blynken and Nod adorns Washington Park, near Field's Denver home. Another statue of Wynken, Blynken and Nod sits in the center of the town square (called "the green" by locals) in Wellsboro, Pa.

Before his death, he wrote and published an anonymous work about a 12-year-old boy being seduced by a woman in her 30s. It was titled "Only a Boy". In the 1920s, American drama critic and magazine editor [George Jean Nathan](#) recalled it as a popular forbidden work among those coming of age at the turn of the century, along with [Fanny Hill](#) and "Green Girls of Paris".^[clarification needed] It was published by [Grove Press](#) in 1968 with the real author's name.

Field has his own star on the [St. Louis Walk of Fame](#).^[14] Numerous elementary schools throughout the Midwest are named for him, e.g. Eugene Field Elementary School in [Chicago, Illinois](#); [Wheeling, Illinois](#); [Rock Island, Illinois](#); [Elmhurst, Illinois](#); [Normal, Illinois](#); [Park Ridge, Illinois](#); [Maryville, Missouri](#); [St. Joseph, Missouri](#); [Hannibal, Missouri](#); [Columbia, Missouri](#); [Mexico, Missouri](#); [Neosho, Missouri](#); [Poplar Bluff, Missouri](#); [Springfield, Missouri](#); [Webb City, Missouri](#); [Manhattan, Kansas](#); [Ottawa, Kansas](#); [Sioux Falls, South Dakota](#); [Beaumont, Texas](#); [Houston, Texas](#); [Pasadena, California](#) and [Minneapolis, Minnesota](#). There is also a Eugene Field Elementary School in [Albuquerque, New Mexico](#); [Mesa, Arizona](#); [Silverton, Oregon](#); [Littleton, Colorado](#); [Tulsa, Oklahoma](#); [Chicago, Illinois](#); [Altus, Oklahoma](#); [Oklahoma City, Oklahoma](#); [Hugo, Oklahoma](#); [Muncie, Indiana](#) (closed in 1973), [San Diego, California](#); Teaneck, New Jersey and Ottawa, Kansas. One of the branches of the [Denver Public Library](#) near Field's Denver home is named

after him. A dormitory in the Orchard Hill residential area at the [University of Massachusetts Amherst](#) also bears Field's name.

Reviewing an actor named Creston Clarke in the title role of [King Lear](#), Field commented that, "Mr. Clarke played the King all evening as though under constant fear that someone else was about to play the Ace."

There is also an apartment building in [Denver, Colorado](#)'s Poet's Row named after him.

In 2016, Field was inducted into the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame.[\[15\]](#)