



# Bartleby, the Scrivener

*Herman Melville*

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## **Bartleby, the Scrivener** Herman Melville

The narrator, an elderly, unnamed Manhattan lawyer with a comfortable business, relates the story of the strangest man he has known: Bartleby. At the start of his story the lawyer already employs two scriveners to copy legal documents by hand: Nippers and Turkey. An increase in business leads him to advertise for a third, and he hires the forlorn-looking Bartleby in the hope that his calmness will soothe the irascible temperaments of the other two.

At first, Bartleby produces a large volume of high-quality work. But one day, when asked to help proofread a document, Bartleby answers with what soon becomes his perpetual response to every request—"I would prefer not to." To the dismay of the lawyer and to the irritation of the other employees, Bartleby performs fewer and fewer tasks, and eventually none. The narrator makes several futile attempts to reason with him and to learn something about him; and when he stops by the office unexpectedly, he discovers that Bartleby has started living there.

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