

高等学校试用教材

# *Extensive Reading*

# 泛读 *For Basic English Course*

马钟元

张国英

主编

3

河北大学出版社

# 英语基础泛读教程 (三)

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河北大学出版社出版发行

(保定合作路4号河北大学院内)

河北省新华书店发行

河北省完县印刷厂印刷

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开本：787×1092 16开 印张：19 字数：130千字

1991年4月第1版 1991年4月第1次印刷

印数：1—5000册

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ISBN 7—81028—025—2/H·3

定价：6.20元

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# 前 言

《英语基础泛读教程》是受河北省高等学校外语教学研究会委托而编写的，供大专院校英语专业基础阶段使用。本书共四册，约五十万字，每学期使用一册，每册十八个单元左右，每周一单元，每单元包括阅读材料、注释和练习三个部分。每册有练习答案供教师参考。该教材旨在帮助读者扩大词汇量，提高阅读能力，读懂英语国家出版的文学原著、报刊文章、史地和科技等读物。本书一律采用中等难度原文。力求题材、体裁多样化，语言现代化、规范化。

本书在编写过程中，特别注意内容的思想性，确保内容健康、活泼。

由于编者水平有限，缺点错误在所难免，敬请读者批评指正，以便再版时改正。

在编写过程中，得到了河北省教委、河北大学及河北省有关院校外语系的大力支持和帮助，在此一并表示衷心感谢。

河北省高校外语教学研究会

英语泛读教材编写组

一九九〇年十月

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## Unit One

### 1. A Mild Attack of Locusts<sup>1</sup>

Doris Lessing<sup>2</sup>

The rains that year were good, they were coming nicely just as the crops needed them—or so Margaret understood when the men said they were not too bad. She never had an opinion of her own on matters like the weather, because one needs experience even to know about what seems a simple thing like the weather. And Margaret did not have this experience. The men were Richard, her husband, and old Stephen, Richard's father, who had been a farmer for many years, and these two might argue for hours about whether the rains were ruinous, or just maddening as usual. Margaret had been on the farm for three years. She still did not understand how they did not go bankrupt<sup>3</sup> altogether, when the men never had a good word for the weather, or the soil, or the Government. But she was beginning to learn the language. Farmer's language. And they neither went bankrupt nor got very rich. They just kept going, and managed to live.

Their crop was maize<sup>4</sup>. Their farm was three thousand acres<sup>5</sup> on the slopes that rise up towards the Zambesi flatlands, high, dry, wind-swept country, cold and dusty in winter, but now, being the wet season, steamy with the heat rising in wet soft waves off miles of greenery. Beautiful it was, with the sky blue and the air clear and shining, and the bright green folds and hollows of the country beneath, and the mountains lying sharp and bare twenty miles away across the rivers. The sky made her eyes ache, she was not used to it. One does not look so much at the sky in the city she came from. So that evening, when Richard said, 'The Government is sending out warnings that locusts<sup>6</sup> are expected, coming down from the North,' her instinct<sup>7</sup> was to look about her at the trees. Insects—swarms of them—horrible! But Richard and the old man had raised their eyes and were looking up over the mountains. 'We haven't had locusts in seven years' they said. 'They go in cycles<sup>8</sup>, locusts do.' And then, 'There goes our crop for this season.'

But they went on with the work of the farm just as usual, until one day they were coming up the road to the farmhouse for the midday break, when old Stephen stopped, raised his finger and pointed: 'Look,



look, there they are!

Margaret ran out to join them, looking at the hills. The servants came out from the kitchen. They all stood and gazed. Over the rocky line of the mountain-tops was a streak of rust-coloured<sup>9</sup> air. Locusts. There they came.

At once Richard shouted at the cook-boy. Old Stephen yelled at the house-boy. The cook-boy ran to beat the old piece of iron hanging from a tree-branch, which was used to call the labourers at moments of crisis. The house-boy ran off to the store to collect tincans, any old bit of metal. The farm was ringing with the sound of the iron gong, and they could see the labourers pouring out of their huts, pointing at the hills and shouting excitedly. Soon they had all come up to the house, and Richard and old Stephen were giving them orders—Hurry, hurry, hurry.

And off they ran again, the two white men with them, and in a few minutes Margaret could see the smoke of fires rising from all around the farm-lands. Piles of wood and grass had been prepared there. There were seven fields—patches of bared soil, yellow and ox-blood colour, and pink where the new mealies<sup>10</sup> were just showing, making a film of bright green, and around each field drifted up thick clouds of smoke. They were throwing wet leaves on to the fires now, to make the smoke black and stinging. Margaret was watching the hills. Now there was a long low cloud advancing, rust-colour still, swelling forwards and outwards as she looked. The telephone was ringing. Neighbours—quick, quick, there come the locusts. Old Smith had had his crop eaten to the ground. Quick, get your fires started. For, of course, while every farmer hoped the locusts would pass by his farm and go on to the next, it was only fair to warn each other, one must play fair.<sup>11</sup> Everywhere, fifty miles over the countryside, the smoke was rising from uncountable fires. Margaret answered the telephone, and between calls stood watching the locusts. The air was darkening, a strange darkness, for the sun was blazing—it darkness of a veld<sup>12</sup> fire, when the air gets thick with smoke and the sun is like hot sunlight falls in broken rays of thick hot orange. It was heavy, too, and hard to breathe, as before a storm. The locusts were coming fast. Now half the sky was darkened. Behind the reddish streak in front, which marked the beginning of the swarm, the main swarm showed in a thick black cloud, reaching almost to the sun itself.

Margaret was wondering what she could do to help. She did not know. Then up came old Stephen from the lands, 'We're finished,

Maargret, finished!<sup>13</sup> They can eat every leaf and blade of grass off the farm in half an hour! And it is only early afternoon! But if we can make enough smoke, make enough noise till the sun goes down, they'll settle somewhere else perhaps...' And then, 'Get the kettle going'<sup>14</sup>. It's thirsty work, this.'

So Margaret went to the kitchen, stirred up the fire, and boiled the water. Now, on the tin roof of the kitchen, she could hear the soft heavy sound of falling locusts, or a sharp scratching as they slid along the metal. Here were the first of them. From down on the fields came the beating and banging and clanging<sup>15</sup> of a hundred petrol tins and bits of metal. Stephen impatiently waited while one petrol tin was filled with tea—hot, sweet, and orange-coloured and the other with water. In the meantime, he told Margaret about how twenty years back he had been eaten out,<sup>16</sup> made bankrupt by the locust armies. And then, still talking, he picked up the petrol cans, one in each hand, and set off quickly down the road to the thirsty labourers. By now the locusts were falling like hail<sup>17</sup> on to the roof of the kitchen. It sounded like a heavy storm. Margaret looked out and saw the air dark with the insects, and she set her teeth and ran out into the swarming mass—what the men could do, she could. Overhead the air was thick—locusts everywhere. The locusts were flopping against her, and she brushed them off, heavy red-brown creatures, looking at her with their old-men's eyes while they hung on tight with hard legs. She held her breath with disgust and ran into the house. There it was even more like being in a heavy storm. The iron roof was ringing, and the sound of iron being beaten in the fields was like thunder. When she looked out, all the trees were strange and still, hidden beneath the insects, their branches weighed down to the ground. The earth seemed to be moving, locusts crawling everywhere, she could not see the lands at all, so thick was the swarm of insects. Towards the mountains it was like looking into heavy rain—even as she watched, the sun was blacked out by another wave of locusts. It was half-night, an unreal blackness. Then came a sharp crack from the bush<sup>18</sup>— a branch had broken off. Then another. A tree leaned over and settled heavily on the ground. Through the hail of insects a man came running. More tea, more water was needed. She supplied them. She kept the fires burning and filled tins with tea and water, and then it was four o'clock in the afternoon and the locusts had been pouring across overhead for a couple of hours. Up came old Stephen again, crushing locusts underfoot with every

step, locusts clinging<sup>19</sup> all over him, cursing and swearing, and hitting out at the air with his old hat. At the doorway he stopped briefly, hastily pulling at the clinging insects and throwing them off, then he plunged into the locust-free living-room.

‘The crops are finished. Nothing left,’ he said.

But the men were still beating the iron bars and shouting, and Margaret asked, ‘Why do you go on with it, then?’

‘The main swarm isn’t settling. They are heavy with eggs. They are looking for a place to settle and lay their eggs. What’s most important is to stop the main body from settling on our farm. If they get a chance to lay their eggs, we are going to have everything eaten by hoppers<sup>20</sup> later on.’ He picked a locust off his shirt and split it down with his thumbnail—it was stuffed inside with eggs. ‘Imagine that multiplied by millions. Have you ever seen a swarm of hoppers on the march? Well, you’re lucky.’

Margaret thought an adult swarm was bad enough. Outside now the light on the earth was a pale thin yellow, darkened with moving shadow, the clouds of moving insect thickened and lightened like rain driven by the wind. Old Stephen said, ‘They’ve got the wind behind them, that’s something.’<sup>21</sup>

‘Is it very bad?’ asked Margaret fearfully, and the old man said emphatically<sup>22</sup>, ‘We’re finished. This swarm may pass over, but once they’ve started, they’ll be coming down from the North now, one swarm after another. And then there are the hoppers—it might go on for two or three years.’

Margaret sat down helplessly, and thought, ‘Well if it’s the end, it’s the end. What now? We’ll all three have to go back to town...’ But then she took a quick look at Stephen, the old man who had farmed forty years in this country, and she knew nothing would make him go and become a clerk in the city. Yet her heart ached for him, he looked so tired, the worry-lines deep from nose to mouth. Poor old man... He had lifted up a locust that had somehow got into his pocket, and was holding it in the air by one leg. ‘You’ve got the strength of a steel-spring in those legs of yours,’ he was telling the locust, good-humouredly. Then, although he had been fighting locusts, squashing locusts, yelling at locusts, sweeping them in great heaps into the fires to burn for the last three hours, nevertheless he took this one to the door, and carefully threw it out to join its fellows as if he would rather not harm a hair

every of its head. This comforted Margaret, all at once she felt happier, without knowing why. She remembered it was not the first time in the last three years that the men had announced their final and complete ruin.

'Get me a drink, lass<sup>23</sup>,' he then said, and she set the bottle of whisky by him.

In the meantime, out in the wild storm of insects, her husband was banging the iron gong, feeding the fires with leaves the insects clinging to him all over. She shuddered. 'How can you bear to let them touch you?' she asked. He looked at her, disapproving. She felt suitably humble—just as she had when he had first taken a good look at her city self,<sup>24</sup> hair waved and golden, nails red and pointed. Now she was a proper farmer's wife, in sensible shoes and a solid skirt. She might even get used to letting locusts settle on her—in time.

After drinking down a whisky or two, old Stephen went back into the battle, walking now through glistening<sup>25</sup> brown waves of locusts.

Five o'clock. The sun would set in an hour. Then the swarm would settle. Overhead it was still as thick as before. The trees were rough heaps of glistening brown.

Margaret began to cry. It was all so hopeless—if they didn't have a bad season, they had locusts; if they didn't have locusts, they had potato-worms or veld fires. Always something. The dry rustling<sup>26</sup> of the locust armies was like a big forest in the storm; when they settled on the roof it was like the beating of rain. The ground was invisible in a smooth brown rolling wave—it was like being drowned in locusts, pushed under by the hateful brown flood. It seemed as if the roof might fall in under the weight of them, as if the door might give in under their pressure and the rooms fill with them—and it was getting so dark...she looked up. The air was thinner, blue spaces showed in the dark moving clouds. The blue spaces were cold and thin; the sun must be setting. Through the fog of insects she saw figures approaching. First old Stephen, marching bravely along, then her husband, his cheeks drawn in<sup>27</sup> with tiredness. Behind them came the servants. All of them were covered with crawling insects. The sound of the iron being beaten had stopped. She could hear nothing except the constant rustling of millions of wings.

The two men slapped off the insects and came in.

'Well,' said Richard, kissing her on the cheek, 'the main swarm

has gone over.'

'For God's sake,' said Margaret angrily, still halfcrying, 'what's here is bad enough, isn't it?' For although the evening air was no longer black and thick, but a clear blue, with a pattern of insects cutting this way and that across it, everything else—trees, buildings, bushes, earth, was gone under the moving brown masses.

'If it doesn't rain in the night and keep them here—if it doesn't rain and weight them down with water, they'll be off in the morning at sunrise.'

'We're sure to have some hoppers. But not the main swarm, that's something.'

Margaret wiped her eyes, pretended she had not been crying, and brought them some supper, for the servants were too tired to move. She sent them down to their huts to rest.

She served the supper and sat listening. There is not one maize-plant left, she heard. Not one. The men would get the planters out in the fields as soon as the locusts had gone. They would have to start all over again.

'But what's the use of that?' Margaret wondered, if the whole farm was going to be crawling with hoppers? But she listened while they discussed the new Government paper which said how to defeat hoppers. You must have men out all the time moving over the farm to watch for movement in the grass. When you find a group of hoppers—small lively black things—then you dig small ditches around them, or spray them with poison from pumps supplied by the Government. The Government wanted them to co-operate in a world plan for getting rid of this plague<sup>28</sup> for ever. You should attack locusts at the source, that means kill the hoppers. The men were talking as if they were planning a war, and Margaret listened, amazed.

In the night it was quiet, there was no sign of the armies settled outside, except sometimes a branch broke or a tree could be heard crashing down.

Margaret slept badly in the bed beside Richard, who was sleeping deeply, exhausted<sup>29</sup> with the afternoon's fight. In the morning she woke to see yellow sunshine lying across the bed, clear sunshine, with an occasional dark patch of shadow moving over it. She went to the window. Old Stephen was in front of her. There he stood outside, gazing down over the bush. And she gazed, astonished—and fascinated<sup>30</sup>

—much against her will. For it looked as if every tree, every bush, all the earth, were lit with pale flames. The locusts were fanning their wings to free them from the wetness of the night dews. There was a flashing of reddish gold light everywhere.

She went out to join the old man, stepping carefully among the insects. They stood and watched. Overhead the sky was blue, blue and clear.

‘Pretty,’ said old Stephen with satisfaction.

Well, thought Margaret, we may be ruined, we may be bankrupt, but not everyone has seen an army of locusts fanning their wings at dawn.

Over the slopes, in the distance, a faint red streak showed in the sky, thickened and spread. ‘There they go,’ said old Stephen. ‘There goes the main army, off South.’

And now from the trees, from the earth all round them, the locusts were taking wing<sup>31</sup>. They were like small aircraft, getting into place for the take-off, trying their wings to see if they were dry enough. Off they went. A reddish brown steam was rising off the miles of bush, off the lands, the earth. Again the sunlight darkened.

And as the hidden branches lifted, the weight on them lightening, there was nothing left but the black bones of branches, trees. No green left, nothing. All morning they watched, the three of them, as the brown surface thinned and broke and dissolved, flying up to join the main army, now a brownish red line in the Southern sky. The lands which had been covered with a light layer of green, the new tender mealie plants, were naked and bare. All the trees stripped. A ruined landscape. No green, no green anywhere.

By midday the reddish cloud had gone. Only an occasional locust dropped down. On the ground were the bodies of the dead and wounded. The African labourers were sweeping these up with branches and collecting them in tins.

‘Have you ever eaten sun-dried locust?’ asked old Stephen. ‘That time, twenty years ago, when I went broke,<sup>32</sup> I lived on mealie meal<sup>33</sup> and dried locusts for three months. They aren’t bad at all—rather like smoked fish, in fact.’

Margaret preferred not even to think of it.

After the midday meal the men went off to the lands. Everything had to be planted again. With a bit of luck another swarm would not come travelling down just this way. But they hoped it would rain very soon, to

bring out some new grass, because the cattle would die otherwise—there was not a blade of grass left on the farm. As for Margaret, she was trying to get used to the idea of three or four years of locusts. Locusts were going to be like bad weather, from now on, always ready to appear. She felt like someone who had managed to live through a war—if this bare and leafless countryside was not ruin, well, what then was ruin?

But the men ate their supper with good appetites.

‘It could have been worse,’ was what they said. ‘It could be much worse.’

## NOTES

### 1. About the story;

A farmer's life in Southern Africa is often hard and lonely. It takes a long time to build up a successful farm, and years of effort can be ruined in no time by sun, wind, or rain, by insects or disease. When this happens, there is nothing to do but start all over again.

This battle against nature is never won or lost. It goes on for ever. In *A Mild Attack of Locusts* we are shown how three people on a farm lose all their crops in a single day. Like their neighbours, they have been ruined, but they will fight back because they have been ruined before—and will be ruined again.

### 2. About the author;

Doris Lessing was born in 1919 on a farm southern Rhodesia. She lived here and in the Republic of South Africa until the age of thirty, when she moved to England.

Much of her writing is about life in southern Africa, often a life of poverty on lonely farms or in small villages. Many of Doris Lessing's finest stories can be found in *Collected African Stories*. Among her most famous novels are: *The Grass Is Singing* and *The Golden Notebook*.

### 3. go bankrupt, lose all their money

### 4. maize, a grain crop, bright yellow in colour and grown in most warm countries

### 5. acre; a unit of measurement, one acre is about the size of a foot-ball pitch

### 6. locusts, winged insects which fly in great swarms and destroy crops and vegetables

### 7. instinct; natural reaction

8. they go in cycles; they return at regular intervals
9. rust-coloured; brownish red
10. mealies; (South African)maize
11. play fair; act fairly (as the danger is the same for all the farmers)
12. veld; open country (in South Africa)
13. we're finished; we're ruined
14. get the kettle going; make some tea
15. clanging; ringing sound of metal against metal
16. he had been eaten out; all his crops had been destroyed
17. hail; rain in the form of ice
18. bush; open land around the farm
19. clinging; sticking
20. hoppers; young locusts
21. that's something; that's fortunate (because the locusts will move on more quickly).
22. emphatically; firmly
23. lass; (a friendly, slightly old-fashioned word) girl
24. her city self; the person she had been before she began to live on the farm
25. glistening; shining
26. rustling; a light sound, like that of leaves in the wind
27. drawn in; pulled in
28. plague; danger (literally, a dangerous disease passed on to man by rats)
29. exhausted; extremely tired
30. fascinated; deeply interested
31. taking wing; beginning to fly away
32. went broke; lost all the money
33. mealimeal; maize flour

## EXERCISES

### I. MULTIPLE CHOICE:

1. Margaret never had an opinion of her own on matters like the weather because \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Richard and Stephen were experienced farmers
  - b. she was younger than Richard and Stephen
  - c. she did not have this experience



- d. she didn't have the chance to say anything about it
2. Locusts went in cycles. That means locusts \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. poured into the fields every three years
  - b. came to the fields on hot seasons
  - c. came to the fields by millions
  - d. came at regular interval
3. Stephen's men kept the fires burning and went on making a noise so that \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. they could drive the locusts away and force them to settle somewhere else
  - b. the air got thick with smoke and the sunlight fell in broken rays of thick hot orange
  - c. the locusts would fall on the roof of the kitchen and have a rest
  - d. they could smoke them and then eat them
4. Before Margaret got married, she \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. was a secretary
  - b. had been very rich
  - c. lived in the country
  - d. lived in the city
5. Margaret slept badly that night because she \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. was exhausted in the fight against the grasshoppers that afternoon
  - b. hit and killed a large swarm of hoppers in the field
  - c. smelled too much smoke of fires rising from the farm lands
  - d. was thinking of some ways to help Stephen in wiping out the locusts
6. The ways suggested by the Government paper to defeat hoppers were \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. to have men out all the time moving over the farm to watch for movement in the grass
  - b. to dig ditches around the hoppers when they were found
  - c. to spray the hoppers with poison from pumps
  - d. all of the above
7. After the crop had been completely destroyed, and when the locusts had gone, what the men were going to do was to \_\_\_\_\_.