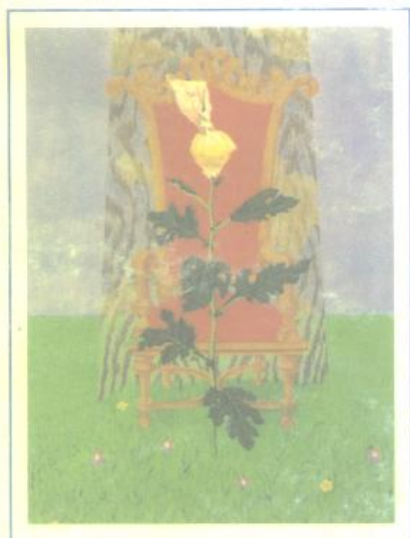


The Three Strangers
and
Other Stories

三个不速之客及其他故事

T. 哈代 著

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[英] T. 哈代 著

Heinemann

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INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

Series Editor: John Milne

The Heinemann Guided Readers provide a choice of enjoyable reading material for learners of English. The series is published at five levels – Starter, Beginner, Elementary, Intermediate and Upper. At **Intermediate Level**, the control of content and language has the following main features:

Information Control

Information which is vital to the understanding of the story is presented in an easily assimilated manner and is repeated when necessary. Difficult allusion and metaphor are avoided and cultural backgrounds are made explicit.

Structure Control

Most of the structures used in the Readers will be familiar to students who have completed an elementary course of English. Other grammatical features may occur, but their use is made clear through context and reinforcement. This ensures that the reading, as well as being enjoyable, provides a continual learning situation for the students. Sentences are limited in most cases to a maximum of three clauses and within sentences there is a balanced use of adverbial and adjectival phrases. Great care is taken with pronoun reference.

Vocabulary Control

There is a basic vocabulary of approximately 1,600 words. Help is given to the students in the form of illustrations, which are closely related to the text.

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A Note About These Stories

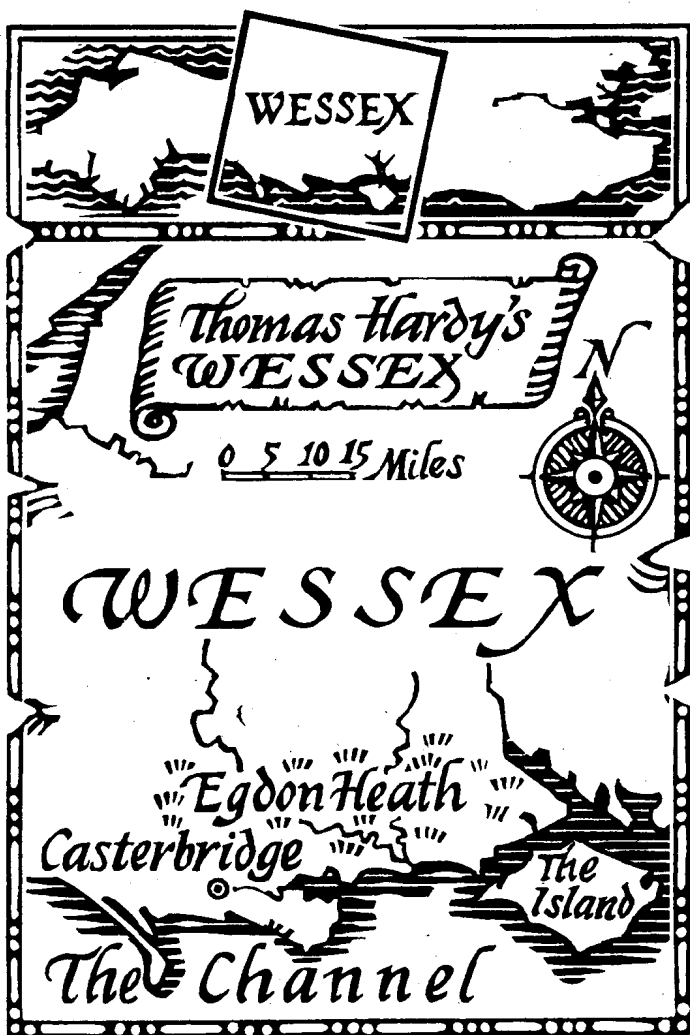
Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) wrote many stories about farmers and country people who lived near Egdon Heath in Wessex. Wessex was Hardy's name for the county of Dorset in the south-west of England.

Country people in the nineteenth century were often poor and their lives were hard. Egdon Heath was a wild and lonely place and it was difficult to live there. The people worked on farms doing many different jobs. Dairy farmers kept cows for their milk. The women who milked the cows in the morning and at night were called milkmaids. Shepherds and shepherdesses looked after the sheep that lived on the hills.

People were often called by the name of their occupation. Shepherd Fennel looked after sheep. Farmer Lodge owned farm buildings and land.

Country people had many different customs and beliefs. There were not many doctors in country areas. When people became sick they often asked an old man or old woman for help. These old people knew how to make medicines from plants and flowers. Country people believed these old people were magicians or witches. They believed these old people could do bad things as well as cure them.

When people got married, when babies were born, or when people died, there would be special celebrations. Special food and drink was prepared. And there would be singing and dancing.



THE THREE STRANGERS

The high slopes of Egdon Heath are bleak¹ and lonely. They have not changed for hundreds of years. Sheep wander² there and shepherds live in small cottages.

Higher Crowstairs was a shepherd's cottage on the highest part of Egdon Heath. Two narrow paths crossed near to the cottage but very few travellers walked along them.

There were no trees around Higher Crowstairs Cottage. In winter, rain and snow and wind beat against the mud walls of the little cottage.

One night in March, many years ago, the rain was falling heavily. Water dripped from the thatched roof³ into a row⁴ of buckets, set out to catch the rain. Wind blew the rain straight against the cottage walls. The little cottage looked wet and miserable.

But inside the cottage, there was warmth and light. Shepherd Fennel and his wife were having a party. They were celebrating⁵ the birth of their second child.

The guests had arrived before the rain began to fall. Now, at eight o'clock, there were nineteen people in the little room.

The room was lighted by six candles. A big wood fire blazed and crackled in the hearth⁶.

Everyone was happy. All the guests knew each other and they all loved parties. The women were wearing their brightest dresses and the men were dressed in their best clothes.

Two musicians were among the guests and the young people were dancing to their music. The other guests were eating and drinking with enjoyment. Mrs Fennel was beginning to worry if they would have enough food and drink.

At that moment, a stranger was walking towards the cottage.

The Three Strangers

The moon was full and the man could be seen clearly in the moonlight.

The man was coming along the path from the far-away town. He was tall and thin. He was not well dressed, but he did not look like a poor farm worker.

As the man came near to the cottage, the rain fell more heavily. The man saw a shed in the shepherd's little garden and walked towards it.

The stranger stood there, listening to the sound of music and the noise of the dancers' feet.

The music stopped and the man made a decision. He left the shed and walked up to the cottage door. He knelt down quickly to drink from one of the buckets. Then he turned and looked back along the path. There was no one to be seen. He turned to the cottage door again and knocked loudly.

'Walk in!' cried the cheerful⁷ voice of Shepherd Fennel.

The door opened and everyone stared at the stranger in surprise.

The man looked round the room. His dark eyes shone brightly. Then he took off his hat and spoke in a deep, musical voice.

'The rain is very heavy, friends,' the stranger said. 'I'd like to come in and rest. Is that all right?'

'You're welcome, stranger,' the cheerful shepherd replied. 'You've come at a happy time.'

'What are you celebrating?' the stranger asked.

'The birth of a child,' Mr Fennel said, smiling at his wife. 'We're drinking our best mead⁸ tonight.'

The shepherd held out a huge mug⁹ of mead and the stranger drank from it thankfully.

'It's late to be out on these hills, isn't it?' said one of the guests.

'Yes, it's late, master¹⁰, as you say,' the stranger replied. He turned to the shepherd's wife.



He knelt down quickly to drink from one of the buckets.

'Can I sit near the fire, ma'am?' the stranger asked. 'As you see, my clothes are wet.'

Mrs Fennel nodded her head in greeting, but she stared at the stranger's poor clothes and old boots.

The man sat down by the fire and stretched out his long legs.

'Do you come from around here?' the shepherd's wife asked the man.

'No, ma'am. I'm from up country – from the north.'

'I thought so,' the woman said. 'By the way you speak, I can tell you come from near my home.'

'But I don't think you will have heard of me, ma'am,' the stranger said quickly. 'You're much younger than me.'

Mrs Fennel smiled and asked no more questions.

The stranger sat quietly in the warmth of the fire and then he spoke.

'There's one thing that would make me happy and that's a little tobacco,' he said.

'Give me your pipe', stranger, and I'll fill it for you,' the shepherd said.

'I've lost my pipe somewhere on the road,' the stranger replied.

The kind shepherd filled a new pipe with tobacco and handed it to the stranger.

'I'll fill your tobacco box too,' Mr Fennel said.

The stranger looked through his pockets.

'You've lost your tobacco box too?' the shepherd asked in surprise.

'I'm afraid I have,' the stranger answered. 'Give me a little tobacco in a piece of paper.'

Then, lighting his pipe from a candle, the stranger sat back in his corner. He smoked his pipe in silence.

The guests had forgotten the stranger now and they were getting ready for the next dance. But, as the music was about to begin, there was another knock at the door.

The stranger by the fireside leant closer to the fire. His face was now in darkness.

'Walk in!' cried the shepherd, for the second time.

The door opened and a large cheerful man walked into the room. He, too, was a stranger.

The second stranger was older than the first. His face was round and red and his hair was going grey.

The big man, who was wearing dark grey clothes, shook the rainwater from his hat. He opened his long coat.

'I must ask you for shelter, friends,' the big man said. 'I'll be wet to the skin before I get to Casterbridge.'

'You're welcome, master,' the shepherd answered, but not so cheerfully as before.

The second stranger took off his coat and hung it on a nail. He sat down at the table that had been pushed near the fire. The two strangers looked at each other and nodded their heads in greeting. The first man pushed the huge mug of mead towards the second stranger.

The man in grey picked up the mug with both hands. He drank and drank.

'Ah, that's good old mead!' the man in grey cried. He drank again.

'I love old mead like this,' he said.

'It's a trouble to make and it's expensive too,' the shepherd's wife said. But the man did not listen to her. The man put the large mug to his lips for the third time. When he put down the mug, it was empty.

The shepherd's best mead was very strong. The big man stretched out his legs. Then he opened his waistcoat¹² and made himself comfortable. The drink had made his face redder than before.

'Well, I'm happy I came in, shepherd,' the man in grey said. 'But I'm on my way to Casterbridge and I must get there tonight.'

'You're going to work there, perhaps?' the shepherd asked.



'I must ask you for shelter, friends,' the big man said.

'No, no, husband,' the shepherd's wife cried. 'You can see that he's a gentleman and does not need to work!'

But the man in grey shook his head.

'I do work and I must work,' he said. 'I must be at work early tomorrow morning in Casterbridge. Yes, whatever happens, I have a day's work to do tomorrow.'

'But before I go, I'll have some more of your strong mead, shepherd,' he went on.

'Why not?' answered the shepherd cheerfully. 'Give me the mug and I'll fill it again!'

Mrs Fennel followed her husband out of the room to where they kept the barrel of mead.

'Why give him more?' she whispered to her husband. 'The man's drunk the mug dry once and it holds enough for ten men. Who is he, anyway? I don't like the look of him at all.'

'He's our guest, my dear,' the shepherd answered. 'And we don't celebrate a birth every day.'

'But who is the man and what's his job?' asked Mrs Fennel. 'Why would he come here?'

'I don't know. I'll ask him again,' the shepherd answered.

This time, Mrs Fennel handed the stranger a small mug of mead. He drank it dry.

'What work do you do?' the shepherd asked politely. The man in grey did not answer.

But the first stranger said, 'Anyone may know my trade – I'm a wheelwright¹³.'

'And anyone may know my trade – if they are clever enough to find out,' said the stranger in grey.

'You can usually tell what a man's trade is by looking at his hands,' one of the guests said quietly.

The thin man close to the fire put his hands in his pockets. He stared in silence at the flames.

'That's true,' said the man in grey, 'but my trade's different. Instead of putting a mark on me, it puts a mark on my customers!'

There was silence. The stranger's words made everyone feel uncomfortable.

'Sing us a song, someone,' the shepherd's wife said, to break the silence¹⁴.

'A song? I'll give you a song!' the man in grey cried. And, waving one hand in the air, he began to sing.

*Oh my trade it is a strange one,
And it's a sight to see!
For men I tie and raise up high
And send them to a far country!*

And the first stranger sang the last line again in his deep, musical voice, 'And send them to a far country!'

'Now give us a second verse!' the first stranger cried.

The man in grey thought for a moment. Then he continued his song.

*The tools I use are simple ones,
And nothing strange to see.
Some rope, a post to hang it on
Are all the tools for me!*

'Why, he's the hangman¹⁵!' someone whispered. 'He's going to Casterbridge to hang poor Timothy Summers, the clock-maker. He stole a sheep. But it was to feed his hungry family. They were starving.'

The man in grey did not listen. He drank again. Then he held out his mug to the first stranger. The two men clinked their mugs together and smiled.

At that moment, there was a quiet knock at the door. Everyone looked at the door in surprise.

'Walk in!' the shepherd cried, for the third time.

The door opened slowly and a third stranger looked into the room. This man was short and fair-haired. He was well-dressed in black clothes.

'Can you tell me the way to ...' he began. But as he spoke, the man in grey started singing again.

*Tomorrow is a working day,
A working day for me.
For the man who stole the sheep is caught,
And on his soul, may God have mercy!*

As before, the first stranger repeated the last line in his deep voice, 'And on his soul, may God have mercy!'

The third man's hand was shaking. The man's legs were shaking too. His white lips were open and his eyes were staring at the hangman.

With a cry, the man turned and ran from the house.

'Who can that man be?' the shepherd asked in surprise.

All the guests had moved quietly away from the hangman. Only the man near the fireplace stayed where he was. The room was silent, except for the noise he made puffing his pipe.

The silence was suddenly broken by the far sound of a big gun. The sound came from the town of Casterbridge.

'What does it mean?' the guests asked each other.

'A prisoner has escaped from Casterbridge jail! That's what it means!' one cried.

The sound of the gun was repeated, again and again.

The first stranger spoke quietly. 'I've been told they fire a gun when a man escapes,' he said. 'But this is the first time I've ever heard it.'

'I wonder if it's my man who's escaped,' the man in grey said quietly.

'It must be. And we all know who he is, don't we, friends?' the shepherd cried. 'It's the man who came in just now. Didn't you all