

精品美文欣赏

A Cup of Comfort for Courage

一杯安慰送勇者

Stories that celebrate everyday
heroism, strength, and triumph

勇者无畏



青島出版社

QINGDAO PUBLISHING HOUSE

A Cup of Comfort for

江苏工业学院图书馆
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主编 Colleen Sell
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序

这是一本使人心灵受到震撼,发人深省并催人奋进的短篇故事集。这里记录了一段段真实而感人的故事,刻画了一个个平凡而伟大的主人公。他们凭借着坚韧不拔的勇气和毅力面对挫折,迎接挑战,不但改变着自己的命运,而且感染着每一个分享他们故事的人。

你会记住那个从肆虐洪水中勇敢挽回无数生命的高中男孩、那个从熊熊烈火中救出两个婴儿的伟大母亲、那个将宝贵生命献给贫民窟孩子的中年妇女、还有那个冲破生理极限只为实现梦想的残疾人……他们是一些平凡得不能再平凡的人,而在他们身上却蕴含着潜在的无可比拟的勇气。

罗伯特·弗洛斯特曾说过:“勇气是人类最伟大的品德。”朋友们,让我们鼓起勇气面对生活的磨难,放飞梦想,勇敢追求,描绘出属于自己的壮美画卷吧。

中国海洋大学 张德玉



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Something More

The Australian summer sun beats on the thirsty bush. It burns my legs through the wind-screen as I rattle over deeply corrugated^① dirt roads. It is mid-January in the central highlands of Tasmania, and I am here alone, recently single, recently in my thirties, and in need of physical and spiritual challenge. Over the next four weeks I will go into some of the remotest areas of the state, to walk and camp in the wilderness. In a few days I will join a handful of others on an eleven-day rafting trip down 125 kilometers (approximately 80 miles) of the Franklin River, in the inaccessible wilderness of Tasmania's^② southwest. But right now, this adventurer fears she may be lost. I long for the sight of a paved road.

As I drive, my thoughts collide with one another and I am uncomfortably alone with them. The last year has been hell, and I am raw from many losses. I am a

pilgrim here, searching for physical hardship, for risk to plunge into. I want hard mountains, drenching^③ rain, and big, frightening rapids to shock away my numbness. I am here to feel alive again.

After many long, hot hours, I reach the west coast. Painted with dust and melting under the late afternoon sun, I pull into the tiny coastal town of Strahan, never before so happy to see cars and buildings. Some frontier woman I am.

I check into my hostel, kick open the door to my bunkroom, and blink in the darkness of the musty^④ room.

Then I see her. Smiling, staring directly at me as though I am expected, she is perched like a doll on the edge of a sagging bunk bed. The sight of her face stops me at the threshold for a few moments. I am very surprised to see this stranger. She is terribly old. Her tiny, frail form reminds me of my late mother. Her smile is a bit unsettling.

"My name is Vonny Helberg," she says. "But you can call me Gran Vonny. Everyone does."

Beside her on the bed lies a fractured range of odds and ends^⑤, spilling from a well-traveled vinyl suitcase. Tiny crocheted flowers, shreds of notes and papers, tubes of antiseptic^⑥ cream, bandages.

"Hello," I say.

Polite conversation ensues as I search for swimming gear, uncomfortable in the presence of my un-

likely roommate. I feel an overwhelming responsibility to take care of her. *What on earth is this tiny old woman doing here in a youth hostel?*

I find my gear, smile a goodbye, and head out to explore. But I cannot shake the image of that expectant smile.

When I return later that night, she is asleep. I creep up to my bunk and ease my exhausted body into the sleeping bag, fading into sweet oblivion.

Sometime later, I am disturbed by the entry of two female backpackers. Perfumed with excesses of the local brew, they fall spectacularly^⑦ over chairs and packs, swearing in German while trying to insert themselves in bed. Gran Vonny stirs. I feel anxious. *Shut up*, I think. *Don't you know there's an elderly woman in here trying to get some sleep?*

This is absurd. Damn it. This was supposed to be a girl's own adventure. Instead, I am in a room with an old woman I feel responsible for. I don't even know her! It's all too close to the home I'm here to escape from.

I fall asleep, dreaming dreams of my mother in her final weeks, pale and aged in her hospital bed.

When I awake, the only sign of the old lady is her neat bags on the bunk. The German girls snore softly, faces crammed into pillows beneath tangled, sun-streaked locks. Their slumbering exhalation^⑧ of last night's beer drives me out of the dorm and into the

communal kitchen. Gran Vonny is there, writing in a small book. We smile our good mornings.

"Are you a writer?" I ask, not expecting her to be at all, but wanting to make conversation.

"Oh, yes. I'm writing about Sarah Island."

Sarah Island—one of the most brutal penal settlements in Tasmanian history, jutting from the wild waters of Macquarie Harbour, near Strahan. Convicts died in droves there, from brutal punishments, disease, and exposure. Now it's a historic site, the cells little more than crumbling ruins⁹.

"I've always wanted to write about it, about those poor convicts. I even spent the night there a few years ago." She sips hot tea. "In a tree, as a matter of fact."

My face must be registering the thought that perhaps this lady is a bit mad. Her serene smile now suggests mischief.

"The tide came in. I went over there for a week, so I could experience a little of what they did, to help the writing. I didn't take much with me. It rained terribly hard. Then a big flood tide came, so I climbed a tree for the night."

"When was this?"

"Oh... let's see... hmm, about ten years ago."

Oh, my God. She was in her seventies...

"Do you write?" She fixes me with bright eyes.

"Ah. No. Well, I do but I... I'm not a writer,"

I stumble^⑩, feeling as though I've been caught out somehow.

She's still smiling.

"I've always wanted to be a writer." I blurt it out^⑪, like a child's confession.

"Well. You probably already are one." And still she smiles.

It is clearly time to shift the heat. I begin to ask her about herself, and a remarkable tale unfolds.

Vonny has just returned from Indonesia, where she works voluntarily in the slums, treating orphans' scratches^⑫ and sores with her tubes of antiseptic cream and bandages. It's not much, she says, but the children have nothing at all. There is no support for this venture. She does it all herself, living frugally and spending everything she has to finance her mission. She has no home, no possessions. I am gob-smacked^⑬. Clearly Gran Vonny is not the frail old lady I had taken her for on first sight.

"What about family? Do you have anyone here in Tasmania?" I ask.

"No, no one. I was engaged once, many years ago. But he was killed in the war, and when you've truly loved, you don't see the point in going for anything less after that. There's been no one else."

All of this has been said so simply, as though the decision to be alone for her whole life was as simple as choosing a brand of soap. My own recently broken

heart, which had reduced me to near ashes, now seems trivial when I consider what Vonny has been through. She is so alone, yet she claims not to be lonely—she has her Indonesian children. *How can anyone be this generous*¹⁴?

I finish my breakfast and excuse myself, explaining that I am taking a flight over the Franklin River this morning, to see it from the air before I begin my rafting trip.

“You’ll see Sarah then,” says Vonny, looking wistful. “I would love to see it—and the Franklin.” Her face animates. “I protested that dam you know, back in 1983.”

I remembered the campaign. The Tasmanian government had planned to build a dam that would have flooded the entire valley, destroying one of the world’s greatest rivers. It was a fierce fight, with “greenies” on one side, camping in the wet forests for weeks on end¹⁵, enduring assaults and arrest, and the furious hydro workers on the other, enraged at the prospect of losing their jobs should the dam be stopped.

The conservation movement won, and the Franklin Dam was never built. The river was declared a World Heritage Wilderness Area, forever protected. And Vonny was part of its preservation.

As I drive to catch my flight, I imagine her among the bedraggled greenies in the forest, chatting and drinking hot tea in the rain, affixing bandages to

bruised protesters. And resisting arrest. *How many more surprises does this woman have for me?*

Soon, I am soaring above the river, looking with growing excitement at the site of my impending adventure. But I am also thinking of Vonny: Giving her life to begging children in the streets of Indonesia. Writing her stories and sleeping in trees and rainforest. Devoting her life to something real, I realize that I'm here on a joyride. A week ago I had been boasting to my friends about the dangerous adventure I was about to undertake, lapping up their admiration at my courage. In reality, I am buying my adventure, paying other people to take me through it safely and making sure I get my money's worth. It is beginning to feel hollow.

I have lived completely for myself, and still I want more. More fulfillment, more experiences, more recognition, more love. Selfless acts are a rare thing in my life. I have plenty of opinions about what is right, but I have never taken those values any further than heated discussions at dinner parties.

When I first saw Vonny I felt sorry for her—lonely old lady with nothing in her life, I'd thought. But now I admired her and felt humbled. There was no need to pity Gran Vonny.

When we land, I walk toward my car, the hollowness not quite faded. Then, on impulse, I turn and quickly go back to the wharf.

The next day Vonny and I exchange addresses.

Time to drive to Hobart and meet up with my group for the Franklin trip. I hug her gently, her tiny bones feeling like bird wings in my embrace. Before I leave, I press an envelope into her hand. "Something you need to do," I say.

As I drive, I wonder what this big adventure of mine is really all about. I feel changed by the past two days, challenged. Certainly, I no longer feel like the strong, brave woman I had assumed myself to be. Not like her.

Weeks later, in my apartment in the city, I open my first letter from her. She tells me all about the flight I had surprised her with, how she had seen all the beauty and history she had loved and fought for. She saw yellow rafts far below and wondered if I was in one. I was. She congratulates me for my adventurous spirit. But for all the rapids in that beautiful river, I never really had to be brave. I did learn something about courage in Tasmania, but from a tiny woman in her eighties, over cups of hot tea in the kitchen of a youth hostel.

That trip was years ago now. I've since moved to Tasmania. For a while, I worked in the wilderness, guiding bushwalks. I fell in love with the place and found my own beloved. I think I understand a little of what Vonny meant about true love now. Yet, in my life, I still strive to discover my own real courage. I'm

still challenged to make the choice to really live for something beyond myself. I'd like to think that I am closer than I was before. I'd like to think that the strength of spirit I witnessed in that tiny, extraordinary woman will inspire me to live in true, selfless courage.

We have lost contact, and I wonder whether she has died. I wish I'd told her what she did for me, thanked her for showing me what it means to be truly courageous. But perhaps, if she is in her Heaven, the convicts of Sarah Island are sitting beside her, telling her just that.

—*Maura Bedloe*

Notes:

- ① corrugated: 坑洼的, 颠簸的
- ② Tasmania: 塔斯马尼亚州(澳大利亚州名, 位于其东南部)
- ③ drenching: 湿透, 浸透
- ④ musty: 霉臭的, 发霉的, 有霉味的
- ⑤ odds and ends: 零星的杂物, 零碎的东西
- ⑥ antiseptic: 防止腐烂的
- ⑦ spectacularly: 声势浩大地, 壮观地
- ⑧ slumbering exhalation: 沉睡的呼吸声
- ⑨ crumbling ruins: 碎裂物(crumble 弄碎, 粉碎)
- ⑩ stumble: 结结巴巴地说话, 踉跄
- ⑪ blurt... out: 脱口而出
- ⑫ scratch: 擦伤, 抓破
- ⑬ gobsmacked: 目瞪口呆的, 大吃一惊的
- ⑭ generous: 宽宏大量的, 慷慨的
- ⑮ on end: 连续的



Mercy from the Flames

Christmas morning, I heard technicians dismantling the machines that had kept Sofia, my neighbor in the burn unit for twelve days, alive. I closed my eyes, wishing Sofia well on her journey. I added a prayer for me, to whatever spirits were listening, to heal my own burned face and without the skin grafts a physician had already indicated might be necessary.

Two weeks before Christmas, I'd been at home, preparing an article outline, when my electricity went out during a snowstorm. I lit several candles and sat at my kitchen table, trying to finish the outline.

I woke up in the emergency room of the local hospital.

"You've had a seizure," a doctor told me, "and burned yourself. . . badly. "

I was sent that night by ambulance to the nearest

burn unit, in a hospital about fifty miles away. I have epilepsy, and having had epileptic seizures previously, I was no stranger to emergency rooms. But I'd never seriously hurt myself before.

When I have a grand mal seizure, I lose consciousness. My limbs shake, but I'm unable to feel my body's spasms. After I have a seizure, I get an un-me feeling; I don't feel like myself. *What day is it? Where am I? How did I get here?* Then the memories come floating back, like things tossed upon the tide that return to shore with the next wave: *It's Tuesday; there's a storm and the lights go out; I light candles; I'm writing an outline for an article on local farmland protection; I stop for a moment to look at the candle-light flickering on the tablecloth.*

Now, I felt like I was in a bad dream I couldn't wake from. My head and neck were in bandages. A nurse told me I'd suffered second- and third-degree burns on the left side of my head and on my right hand. Nearly two-thirds of the left side of my face and scalp had been burned, from the tip of my nose to my ear. All my hair on that side of my head was burned off. My burned left eyelid was swollen shut. My skin smelled like a rotting hamburger. When I chewed or yawned, my left temple felt like it would come apart.

Why *me*? I have photosensitive epilepsy, and my eyes are very sensitive to sudden changes in light patterns, like blinking lights. I realized that the flickering of the candles must've triggered the seizure. Still, I