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Agatha Christie

古屋疑云

Peril at End House

[英] 阿加莎·克里斯蒂 著



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〔英〕阿加莎·克里斯蒂 著

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出版说明

商务印书馆创立以来,始终以“昌明教育,开启民智”为己任,致力于移译西学、沟通中外,坚持以高质量的出版物促进文化交流,以传播先进思想推动社会进步。近年来更是加大了外语学习读物的出版,如推出了“莎翁戏剧经典”丛书等。此次引进“阿加莎·克里斯蒂经典侦探作品集”系列,是我馆开发英语学习读物的又一成果。

阿加莎·克里斯蒂(Agatha Christie 1890 - 1976)是英国著名女侦探小说家、剧作家,三大推理文学宗师之一,被誉为举世公认的推理小说女王。其作品已被翻译成一百多种语言,曾多次被搬上银幕。代表作有《东方快车谋杀案》和《尼罗河谋杀案》等,在中国有大批爱好者,读者接受度很高。

这套“阿加莎·克里斯蒂经典侦探作品集”丛书,是英国柯林斯出版公司精选的阿加莎·克里斯蒂的经典作品,由英国语言和文学专家专门为世界各地母语非英语的读者改编设计,每篇小说经过适当删减,其中的词汇和语法也做了简化,是适合中等以上英语水平读者学习的英语读物。

为方便读者使用,中文注释本以脚注的形式给难词标注词性和释义;提供英汉对照的作者简介、出场人物表及文化注释;书后

所配的光盘由英国本土人士录制,声情并茂地再现精彩的故事内容。

希望这套“阿加莎·克里斯蒂经典侦探作品集”丛书,能够帮助读者在欣赏英文小说的同时学习英语、提高英语能力,成为读者英语阅读和学习的最佳选择。

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Agatha Christie

Peril at End House

Chapter 1



The Majestic Hotel

No seaside town in the south of England is, I think, as attractive as St Loo. I believe the coast of Cornwall, where it is situated, is just as fascinating as that of the south of France.

‘Don’t you agree?’ I asked my friend, Hercule Poirot.

He was smiling to himself and did not answer my question immediately. I repeated it.

‘A thousand pardons, Hastings. I was thinking of that part of the world you mentioned just now and the last winter that I spent there and of the events which occurred.’

I remembered. A murder had been committed on the Blue Train, the luxurious night train that runs between Paris and the French Riviera. Thanks to Poirot’s investigations, the killer had been found.

‘How I wish I had been with you,’ I said.

‘I, too,’ said Poirot. ‘I missed your lively imagination, Hastings. One needs some amusement.’

‘Tell me, Poirot,’ I said, ‘are you never tempted to begin your detective work again?’

‘No, this retired life suits me. What could be a greater thing to do than to retire at the height of my fame? They say of me: “That is Hercule Poirot — the great — the *detective unique*! There was never any one like him; there never will be again!” I ask no more. I am modest^①.’ He sat back with self-satisfaction.

① modest *adj.* 谦虚的

We were sitting on one of the terraces of *The Majestic*, the biggest hotel in St Loo, which stands overlooking the sea. The sky was clear and the August sun was shining. If these weather conditions continued, we would have a perfect holiday. I picked up the morning newspaper. ‘Still no news of that pilot, Seton, in his round-the-world flight,’ I said. ‘That seaplane of his, *The Albatross*, is a great invention. It makes me feel proud to be an Englishman.’ My attention then went to the political news. ‘They seem to be giving the Home Secretary^① a bad time of it.’

‘He has his troubles, that one. Ah! Yes. He needs my help...’

I stared at him. With a slight smile, Poirot took a letter from his pocket which he threw across to me. I read it with a feeling of excitement.

‘Poirot,’ I cried. ‘He begs^② you to investigate this matter for him — as a personal favour.’

‘I know that, my dear Hastings. I have read the letter myself.’

‘This will put an end to our holiday,’ I cried.

‘No, no — there is no question of that. I will write very politely that I have retired — I am finished.’

‘You are *not* finished,’ I exclaimed warmly.

Poirot smiled. ‘There speaks the good friend. And the little grey cells^③ of my brain, they still function — the order, the method — it is still there. But when I have retired, my friend, I have retired! Hercule Poirot has solved his last case.’

‘How can you be so sure that someone or something won’t

① Home Secretary (英国)内政大臣 ② beg v. 恳求 ③ grey cells (大脑)灰质细胞

persuade you?’

‘Impossible,’ he replied, ‘that anyone could change the decision of Hercule Poirot.’

‘Impossible, Poirot?’

‘You are right, mon ami^①, one should not use such a word. If a bullet^② hits the wall by my head, I would certainly investigate the matter! One is human after all!’

I smiled. A little stone had just hit the terrace beside us, and Poirot picked it up. ‘Yes — one is human.’

Suddenly he rose and went down the steps that led to the garden. Just then, a girl came running towards us. I had just noticed how pretty she was, when Poirot fell. The girl and I helped him to his feet.

‘A thousand pardons,’ said Poirot. ‘Mademoiselle^③, you are most kind. It is a twisted ankle, that is all. But if you could help me, Hastings...’

With me on one side and the girl on the other, we got Poirot on to a chair. I suggested calling a doctor, but my friend said no. ‘It is nothing. Painful only for the moment. Mademoiselle, I thank you a thousand times. You were most kind. Sit down, I beg of you.’

She took a chair and joined us.

‘What about a cocktail?’ I suggested. ‘It’s just about the time.’

‘Well,’ she hesitated. ‘Thanks very much.’

‘Martini?’

‘Yes, please — dry.’

On my return, I found Poirot and the girl in conversation.

① *mon ami* 〈法语〉我的朋友 ② *bullet* *n.* 子弹 ③ *Mademoiselle* *n.* 〈法语〉小姐

‘Imagine, Hastings,’ he said, ‘that house there on the top of the cliff^① that we have admired so much belongs to Mademoiselle.’

‘Indeed?’ I said, though I couldn’t remember having expressed any admiration. ‘It looks rather lonely.’

‘It’s called *End House*,’ said the girl. ‘I love it — but it’s in very poor condition. There have been Buckleys here for two or three hundred years and I’m the last of the family.’

‘That is sad. You live there alone, Mademoiselle Buckley?’

‘Oh! I’m away a lot and when I’m at home there’s usually a crowd of friends coming and going.’

‘So modern. I was picturing you in a dark mysterious mansion, full of ghosts and dark family secrets,’ Poirot said.

‘What an imagination! No, there’s no ghost — or if there is, it’s a kind one. I’ve had three escapes from sudden death in as many days, so I *must* be lucky!’

‘Escapes from death? That sounds interesting, Mademoiselle.’

‘Oh! They were just accidents you know.’ She shook her head as a bee flew past. ‘I hate the way these bees come right past your face. That’s the second time in just a few minutes.’ Miss Buckley took off the hat she was wearing and put it down beside her. ‘Too hot!’ she laughed.

I looked at her with interest. Her untidy dark hair made her look young and delicate. The small, vivid^② face, the enormous dark-blue eyes, and something else. Was it a love of danger? There were dark shadows under her eyes.

From round the corner a red-faced man appeared. ‘Nick,’ he was saying. ‘Nick — Nick!’

① cliff *n.* 悬崖 ② vivid *adj.* 生动的

Miss Buckley rose to her feet. ‘George — here I am.’

‘Freddie’s desperate for a drink. Come on, girl,’ he said.

She introduced her friend. ‘This is Commander Challenger...?’

But to my surprise Poirot did not give his name. He rose, bowed^①, and said, ‘Of the English Navy^②? I have great admiration for the English Navy.’

This type of comment is not typical for an Englishman. Commander Challenger’s face went even redder. Nick Buckley took control of the situation and said energetically, ‘Come on, George. Let’s find Freddie and Jim.’ She smiled at Poirot. ‘I hope the ankle will be all right.’

With a nod of the head to me she put her hand through Challenger’s arm and they disappeared round the corner together.

‘So that is one of Mademoiselle’s friends,’ said Poirot thoughtfully. ‘Give me your expert opinion, Hastings. Is he what you would call a “good fellow”^③ — an honest, respectable man?’

‘He seems all right — yes.’

The girl had left her hat behind. Poirot picked it up and twirled^④ it round on his finger. ‘Has he feelings for her? What do you think, Hastings?’

‘My dear Poirot! How can I tell? Here — give me that hat. I’ll take it to her.’

Poirot gave a little laugh, then laid a finger against the side of his nose. ‘We will return the hat — to *End House* — and so we will see the charming Miss Nick again. She is a pretty girl — eh?’

‘Well — you saw for yourself. Why ask me?’

① bow *v.* 鞠躬 ② Navy *n.* 海军 ③ fellow *n.* 家伙 (指男人或男孩)

④ twirl *v.* 使快速旋转

‘Because, sadly, I cannot tell. To me, nowadays, anything young is beautiful. But you are more modern than I am. She has sex appeal?’

‘The answer is very much a yes. Why are you so interested in the lady?’

‘*Mon ami*, I am much more interested in her hat. But look, my dear old imbecile^①— it is not necessary to employ the grey cells — the eyes are all that is needed. Look, look!’

And at last I saw what he had been trying to show me. His finger was stuck neatly through a hole in the edge of the hat.

‘Did you observe the way Mademoiselle Nick moved suddenly when a bee flew past? She said it was the second time in a few minutes.’

‘But a bee couldn’t make a hole like that.’

‘Exactly, Hastings! *But a bullet could!* A bullet like *this*.’

He showed me a small object in the palm of his hand. ‘A used bullet, *mon ami*. This was what hit the terrace when we were talking, not a little stone!’

‘You mean...’

‘I mean that one inch of a difference and that hole would not be through the hat but through the head. Now do you see why I am interested, Hastings? You were right, my friend, when you told me not to use the word “impossible”. Ah! that would-be^② murderer^③ made a bad mistake when he shot at his victim within yards of Hercule Poirot! You see now why we must go to *End House* and talk with Mademoiselle Buckley? *Three near escapes from death in three days*. That is what she said. We must act quickly, Hastings. The peril^④ is very close at hand.’

① imbecile *n.* 愚蠢的人 ② would-be *adj.* 想要成为的 ③ murderer *n.* 谋杀犯 ④ peril *n.* 危险

Chapter 2

End House



‘Poirot,’ I said later. ‘I have been thinking.’

‘An admirable exercise, my friend. Continue it.’

We were at lunch.

‘This shot must have been fired quite close to us. And yet we did not hear it. It is strange.’

‘No, it is not. Some sounds — you get used to them so soon that you hardly notice they are there. All this morning, my friend, speedboats have been making trips in the bay. You complained at first — soon, you did not even notice. But you could fire a machine gun^① almost and not notice it when one of those boats is on the sea.’

‘Yes, that’s true,’ I agreed.

‘Ah!’ said Poirot. ‘Mademoiselle Buckley and her friends. They are to lunch here, it seems, therefore I must return the hat. But it doesn’t matter. The situation, all on its own, is serious enough to require a visit.’

He hurried across and gave the hat to Miss Buckley with a bow just as she, Commander Challenger, another man and another woman were sitting down.

My friend was silent during our meal and as soon as the other lunch party had left the room, he rose to his feet. They were just getting comfortable in the lounge when Poirot marched up and spoke to Nick Buckley. ‘Mademoiselle, may I have a little

① machine gun 机关枪

word?’

She moved a few steps aside. Almost immediately I saw an expression of surprise pass over her face at the words Poirot was saying. In the meantime, Challenger offered me a cigarette. I thought that I was more his kind of man than the tall, fair young man he had been lunching with. The woman in the group was an unusual type — she had fair, almost colourless hair and her face was completely white, yet attractive. Her eyes were very light grey with large pupils^①. Suddenly she spoke. ‘Sit down — till your friend has finished with Nick.’

She seemed to me the most tired person I had ever met. Tired in mind, as though she had found everything in the world to be empty and valueless.

‘Miss Buckley very kindly helped my friend when he twisted his ankle this morning,’ I explained as I accepted her offer.

She looked at me thoughtfully. ‘Nothing wrong with his ankle now, is there?’

I felt myself turning pink.

‘Oh, well. I’m glad to hear Nick didn’t invent the whole thing. She’s one of my oldest friends, but Nick is such a liar, isn’t she, Jim? That story about the brakes of the car — Jim says it wasn’t true at all.’

The fair man in a soft voice said, ‘I know something about cars.’ He half turned his head. Outside was a long, red car. It looked new.

‘Is that yours?’ I asked.

He nodded. ‘Yes.’

Poirot joined us at that moment. I rose; he gave a quick bow to the party, and we left the room.

① pupil *n.* 瞳孔

‘It is arranged. We are to call on Mademoiselle at *End House* at half past six.’

* * *

We started out from the hotel at six o'clock.

‘It seems incredible,’ I remarked, as we descended the steps of the terrace. ‘To shoot^① anyone in a hotel garden. Only a mad man would do such a thing.’

‘I disagree. To begin with, the garden is deserted. It is usual to sit on the terrace overlooking the bay — only *I* sit overlooking the garden. And even then, I saw nothing. There are many large bushes^② and trees, you observe. Anyone could hide himself while he waited for Mademoiselle to pass this way from her house. And she *would* come this way. To come round by the road from *End House* would be much longer!’

‘All the same,’ I said, ‘the risk was enormous. He might have been seen — and you can’t make shooting look like an accident.’

‘Not like an *accident* — no.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Nothing — a little idea. But let us not think about that for a moment. Think instead of this: the motive^③ for Mademoiselle’s death cannot be obvious. If it *were* — then it would be too great a risk to take. People would say, “Where was X when the shot was fired?” No, the would-be murderer cannot be obvious. And that, Hastings, is why I am afraid! Yes, these “accidents” — I want to hear about them!’

He turned back abruptly^④. ‘It is still early. We will go by

① shoot *v.* 射杀 ② bush *n.* 灌木 ③ motive *n.* 动机 ④ abruptly *adv.* 突然地