

INSPECTOR GHOTE BREAKS AN EGG

Collins English Library Level 6

Inspector
GNOTT
Breaks An Egg

H.R.F. KEATING

Abridged and simplified by Sally Lowe

Illustrations by Anne Rodger

Collins: London and Glasgow

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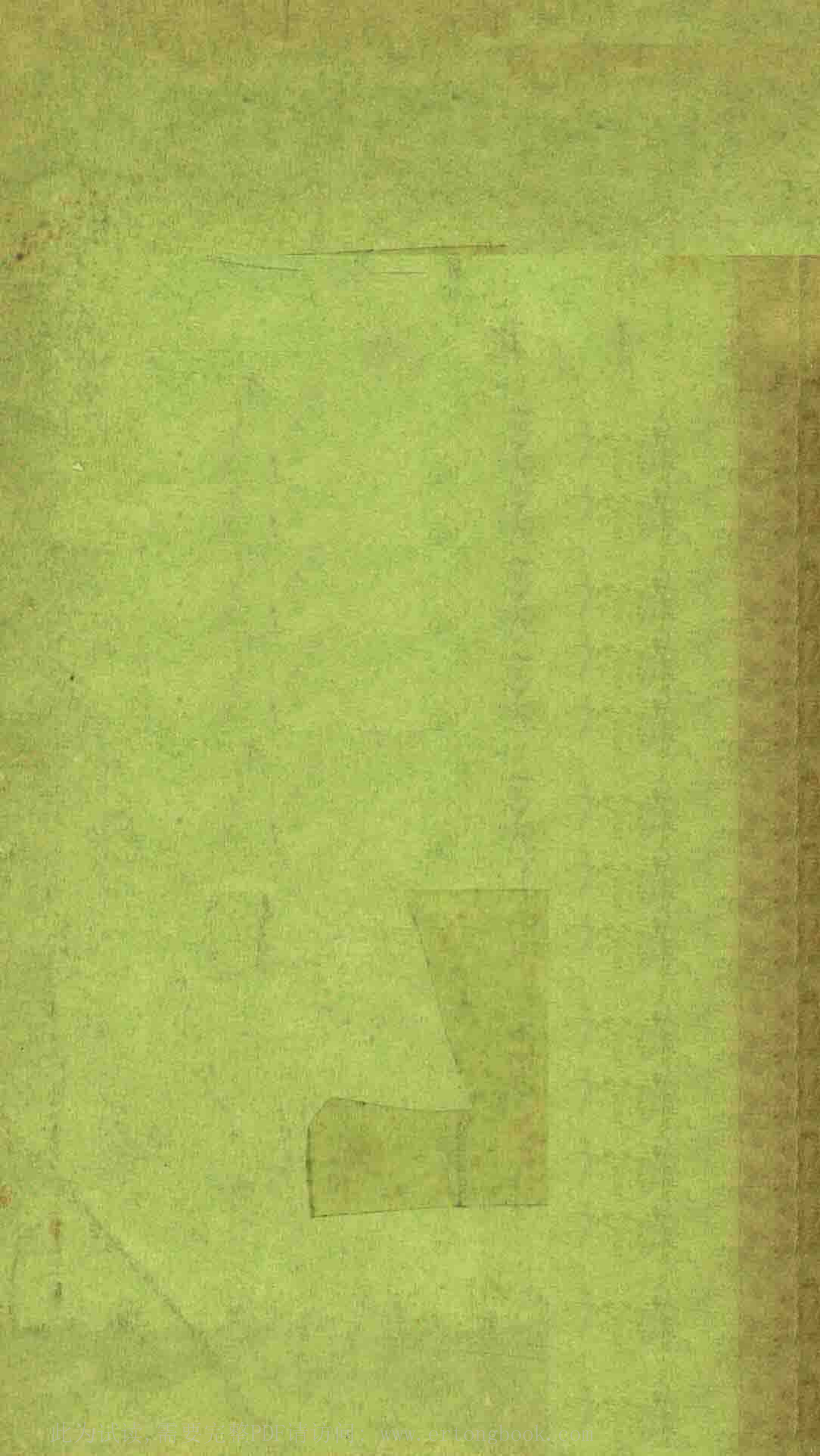
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Chapter One

As the train drew into the little station, Inspector Ghote of the Bombay Police stood up, holding his box of eggs with great care. It was pouring with rain and he was tired after the long night's travelling. But he was determined not to waste a moment before starting the difficult task ahead of him.

It was only yesterday that he had had a phone call from a 'Very Important Person in Our Public Life'. He was to drop all other work for an urgent investigation.

Fifteen years ago, he was told, the wife of an ambitious young politician in this small, distant town had died suddenly. Soon afterwards the politician had married the only daughter of the Chairman of the Town Council. As a result, he had become rich. He was now, in his turn, Town Chairman, the most powerful man in the area.

The first wife had died in very suspicious circumstances. But there had been no serious investigation of her death at the time.

The Important Person added something else: recently the Chairman had foolishly stopped supporting the Government. It was then that Ghote

realised what was required of him. He was to investigate a possible murder fifteen years old, with only one suspect. That suspect had complete power in his area. And a result – one result only – was to be obtained as quickly as possible. The Town Chairman must be found guilty. Then he could be dismissed, and replaced by a Government supporter – doubtless a friend of the Important Person.

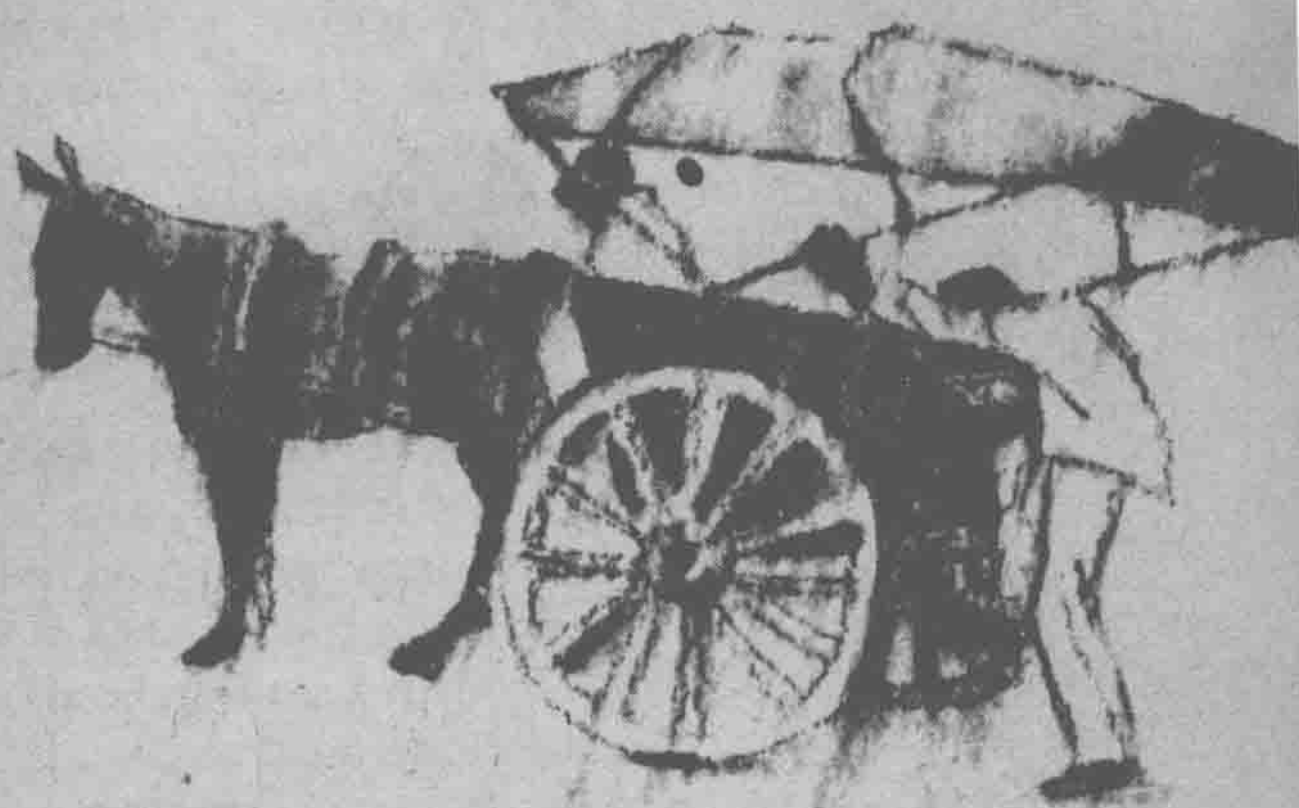
It was going to be a difficult business. And the difficulty was what accounted for Ghote arriving in the little town with the eggs. They were a dozen fresh eggs, very large. They lay in a bright orange box with bold blue lettering all across it: 'GROFAT CHICKEN FEEDS LTD'.

It was the Important Person's idea.

"As few people as possible must know why you are in the town," he had said. "You will therefore go as a salesman. It so happens that a young nephew of mine has started to produce a new kind of chicken feed which will greatly increase the size of eggs. He will supply you with one of his samples. It will be exactly what you need."

Privately, Ghote doubted whether anyone would be deceived. But he did not try to explain this to the Important Person. After all, one had a duty to look after one's family.

Once out of the train, Ghote looked for transport to the town. There were no taxis, only a tonga: a broken-down old horse-drawn carriage.



So the ride into town was slow and uncomfortable. Rain poured in through holes in the roof, and Ghote was feeling wet and miserable when he reached the main street. It was a wide, muddy street. A few carts and bicycles picked their way between cows, children and hungry dogs.

But Ghote cheered up a little when he saw the police-station. It was smart and newly-painted. Policemen were policemen everywhere.

He got out of the tonga, and was about to enter the police-station when he heard his name called. He turned and saw a large, modern car. A man in a white cap was leaning out of its back window. Ghote immediately recognised him from photographs he had studied before leaving Bombay: it was Vinayak Savarkar, the Town Chairman – and the chief suspect.

He spoke again. "It is Inspector Ghote? From Bombay, all the way?"

Ghote looked at him in astonishment and fury. How on earth did the Chairman know who he was?

"You are wondering how I know that you are the famous Inspector Ghote?" the Chairman asked, smiling. "It is very simple. A certain Important Person may send his spies to this town. But he forgets that I, too, can send my spies to him. No sooner had Inspector Ghote got on the train last night than a good friend of mine telephoned me. So when the train arrives and I see the station tonga coming, I know who is here."

"Very well," Ghote said. "I have come on orders to investigate the death of your first wife.

And I mean to carry out that investigation."

"Now, then, Inspector Ghote," said the Chairman, "shall I tell you why I made sure I saw you as soon as you arrived? I did it to give you good advice. In this town it is what I say that goes. I am boss, see? I am telling you, every damn one of the officials in this town owes his place to me. So ask who you want, ask what you want – you will not be learning one damn thing. See?"

He smiled again – a cold, hard smile. "Now," he went on cheerfully, "I am a reasonable man, Inspector. I know you have a job to do, and you must do it. So you stay in the town. Enjoy yourself. Go to the cinema. Eat at the best restaurants. No need to pay anywhere. The owners are all very good friends of mine. And if it is a girl that you want, go to Francis Street. Any house: they are all mine. Then when you have enjoyed yourself for a week or ten days, return to Bombay and tell them it's no good. All right?"

The head went back in at the car window. The window began to rise.

"No," Ghote shouted. "No. It is not all right."

The window was lowered again.

"But listen, Inspector, also," the Chairman said. "It is not top men only that are my friends. There are bad men too that I know. Men who would not hesitate to attack an innocent man in the street at night and beat him unconscious."

Ghote stood up very straight. "I am a police officer," he said.

That and no more.

But as the Chairman drove away, and Ghote

entered the police-station, he felt very thoughtful. Savarkar clearly had the power to make his investigation extremely difficult.

"There is only one thing to do," he said to himself. "I must act so quickly that even he is not prepared for me."

Chapter Two

The police-station was as clean and smart inside as outside. Everything that could be polished had been polished till it shone brightly; the policemen were dressed perfectly.

Ghote was taken immediately to see the policeman in charge, Superintendent Chavan. He was as perfectly dressed as his men.

"Sit down, my dear Inspector," he smiled. "I cannot tell you how pleased I am to see you."

"And I am pleased to be here," Ghote said, "in such a smart, well-run police-station."

The Superintendent looked proud.

"I like to think I know how a station should be run, even though we are many kilometres from you chaps in Bombay," he said.

"It looks so well run that I am a little surprised it was thought necessary to send me here at all,"



Ghote replied.

Superintendent Chavan tapped thoughtfully on the table.

"Perhaps you have not altogether understood, my dear Inspector," he said slowly, "what it is like to live in a small town like this. We have to recognise that a certain person is boss."

"He may be boss," said Ghote, "but he is not above the law."

"Certainly not," replied the Superintendent. "However, there are serious problems. Picture this town, my dear Inspector. We are a little society. Our professional men, our men of wealth: there are not so many of us here."

"And so you all know each other well?"

"Exactly. So you see, it was not easy for me to investigate a possible crime, perhaps committed by a leading figure in our little group."

"You would be up against great difficulties questioning your own friends," Ghote said. "And they would do their best to stop you from making things difficult for their friend."

"I could not have put it better myself, Inspector. So that is why I am glad you are able to take over the investigation. I felt unable to achieve anything myself."

"It will not be easy work for me," began Ghote.

"No, Inspector, I know it will not. But be sure of one thing. Any help I can give as one police officer to another I will give."

Ghote sat up straighter. At least the police were with him. He felt a strong sense of companionship with the Superintendent.

"Thank you," he said. "There is much you could do. First, can you find the case diary from fifteen years ago? And there will be reports and other material also. I shall need to read them all. A really thorough check would almost certainly show that something had been missed."

"I can see I should have seen to this already," said the Superintendent. "But I will make certain everything is ready for you first thing tomorrow."

"No," said Ghote, rising to his feet. "I wish to begin work now."

"Very well, my dear fellow," said the Superintendent, standing up. "If you are insisting, I will see what can be done."

"Thank you," Ghote said. "And perhaps you could provide a strong light in the office you give me. I expect I shall be working all night."

All the rest of that day, and much of the night that followed, Ghote worked. He read not only the case diary, but countless reports, statements and official forms. And he learnt a great deal from them.

There was, for example, the question of what had been done with the body of the first Mrs Savarkar. The town pathologist's report appeared incomplete. The organs should have been removed from the body and sent to Bombay for chemical examination. But Ghote could find no reference to them, either in this report or anywhere else.

Then there were the records of the Coroner's

Committee. According to these, permission had been given for the body to be burned 'according to the religious beliefs' of Mr and Mrs Savarkar.

Ghote learnt, too, that Mrs Savarkar had died after terrible stomach pains. He found details of her last meal. And he discovered that Vinayak Savarkar had suddenly visited Bombay shortly before his wife was taken ill.

Ghote also found out a good deal about Vinayak Savarkar's past. He had come to the town some twenty-five years ago, with no money or possessions. Soon he was in the building business in a small way, and year by year his business grew. Suddenly he was the most powerful man in the town after the then Town Chairman, who had a great deal of land. When Savarkar and the Chairman became business partners, both had grown richer.

The Town Chairman had only one child, a daughter, who would be very wealthy. What more suitable than a marriage between Savarkar and this daughter? But Savarkar was already married. Ghote found a reported remark of the Chairman: 'If only you were free to marry my daughter, my dear Vinayak'. The first Mrs Savarkar died soon afterwards. What importance should Ghote give to this remark?

These and a hundred and one other questions arose from Ghote's study of the papers. By about 3 a.m. he felt that he had learnt all there was to be learnt from them. He had, he thought, at least two lines to follow that might give results, even after all these years.