

企鹅文学经典



英语简易读物

4

如梦方醒

The Old Jest

詹妮弗·约翰斯顿 著

JENNIFER JOHNSTON



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GLOSSARIES

binoculars	双筒望远镜
blushed	(因羞愧或尴尬而)红脸(blush 的过去式)
hymns	赞美诗, 圣歌
point	崎, 岬, 突出水中之尖地
hut	小屋
seagull	海鸥
stockbroker	证券经纪人
immature	未成熟的
traitor	叛徒
horse-racing	赛马
disturbed	不安的(disturb 的过去分词)
communist	共产党员
tram	电车
faith	信仰, 信任
beating	跳动(beat 的现在分词)
informers	告发者, 检举者
witch	女巫
footprint	足迹, 脚印
tramp	漂泊者

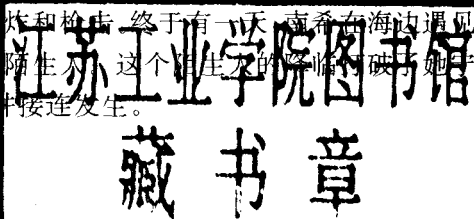
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如梦方醒

The Old Jest

一九二〇年夏末的都柏林。

十八岁的南希正在热恋中，年轻的她一天天成熟了起来。她常常躲进一间海滨小屋中写日记，吐露内心的情愫。这里的世界是这样的安宁，但在都柏林的报纸上却充斥着爆炸和枪击。终于有一天，南希在海边遇见了一个神秘的陌生人。这个陌生人的降临，打破了她宁静的生活，事件接连发生。



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The Old Jest

JENNIFER JOHNSTON

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The Old Jest



1 August 1920

An extremely important day.

The house sits sideways to the sea and faces south, so all the rooms are filled with sun. The sun is shining everywhere, not just here on the east coast but all over Ireland. I have never been to England, but we read in the newspaper that the sun is shining there too.

The morning trains from Dublin are filled with people coming to sit on the beach. They stay near the station and don't interfere with us at all. In the evening they all go back to the city.

It is my eighteenth birthday.

I feel this to be a very important moment in my life. I have left school, and that part of my life is now over. Today I want to start to become a person. My life is in front of me. It is empty like the pages of this book I am writing in. I want to record what is happening for the future. It is so easy to forget. I have noticed that from watching Aunt 'Mary and especially Grandfather. But he is extremely old and his mind is not what it was.

The war goes on and on. Even in this small village many people have died. Some were killed in France and now others are dying in the fighting here. Barney Carney was shot last week coming out of a dancehall, by the new British soldiers they call the 'Black and Tans'. Terrible things are happening, but at least I am alive.

Aunt Mary gave me tennis equipment for my birthday. She would like me to be a social success, but she is prepared for disappointment. Bridie, our servant, is giving me a cake, which I'm not supposed to know about. Grandfather is too old to give presents. I got seven cards from old school friends and a box of chocolates from Jimmy the gardener.

I have no parents. This makes other people either sad or slightly

embarrassed, but I have never had any, so I am used to the situation. Aunt Mary is both mother and father to me, and I am very happy with this arrangement.

There are photographs of my mother all over the house. Like Aunt Mary she always seems to be smiling. I sleep in the same bed that she slept in as a girl. She gave me life eighteen years ago and I killed her. Life is not very fair.

There has never been any sign of my father in my life. No one ever mentions his name or tells funny stories about him. His face never appears in any photo. Do I look like him? Is he alive or dead? Good or bad? Sad or happy? No one seems to care. Since I was ten years old I have looked for him. I still stare at strange men sometimes, though I know I shouldn't. I am just curious to know what sort of man could disappear so completely.

At least I know where my mother is. She is buried beside our church, on a hill above the village. My uncle Gabriel is there too, beside my mother. Grandfather insisted on bringing back what remained of his body from France. My grandmother is up there too, waiting for Grandfather to join her.



'I met Harry in the village,' said Aunt Mary, as she walked with Nancy out into the garden. 'I persuaded him to come for lunch. He's in the kitchen now, telling Bridie.'

'Oh,' was all that Nancy could say.

Dear, dear Harry!

Grandfather sat in his wheelchair under a large black and white umbrella, which protected him from the sun. He was holding a pair of **binoculars**. When he stopped speaking, he raised the binoculars and looked down at the railway line, which ran between the house and the sea. Nothing moved on the line or in the field beside it.

'Did you have a nice sleep, dear?'



Grandfather sat in his wheelchair under a large black and white umbrella, which protected him from the sun.

Aunt Mary kissed the top of Grandfather's hat. He did not seem to notice.

'Drinks,' she said, her hand resting for a moment on the old man's shoulder. She turned and went into the house. Nancy sat down next to her grandfather.

'There won't be a train for hours, Grandfather.'

He gave a little knowing laugh. 'I see other things than trains,' he said mysteriously.

From down the hill came the sound of a piano. Nancy could see Maeve sitting with her back to the window of her little house. She was playing Chopin.

Aunt Mary and Harry came out of the house. Harry held a bottle of champagne in one hand.

'I understand that you're having a party,' said Harry. 'Wasn't I lucky to meet Mary in the village?'

Harry opened the champagne as Bridie came out from the kitchen. For a moment they all stood, looking at Nancy. Bridie spoke first.

'God is good.' She drank a whole glass. Everyone laughed.

'Happy birthday, Nancy.' Harry came towards her. She bent her head. 'I shall kiss you.'

She turned her face away and the kiss landed on her hot cheek.

'Your face is very hot,' he said innocently. 'What have you been doing?'

She **blushed** even more and lowered her head towards her glass.

'That's Maeve playing the piano, isn't it?' Harry stood very close to Nancy as he asked this question. The sleeve of his shirt touched her bare arm.

Nancy nodded.

'Wonderful,' said Harry.

Grandfather lifted his binoculars to his eyes. On the railway a single engine moved along the line.

'That's interesting.' For a moment his voice was almost young.

'What is?' asked Aunt Mary.

Grandfather let the binoculars fall on to his knees. Then he turned to Aunt Mary.

'I saw Robert on the railway line this morning.'

The music had stopped and his words seemed very loud.

'Who is Robert?' asked Harry, slightly interested.

'No, Father,' said Aunt Mary, in an annoyed voice.

'Or maybe it was yesterday.'

'That's impossible.'

'But it's true,' said Grandfather. He lifted his hand and pointed to the railway line.

Aunt Mary said nothing, pretending to be interested in a rose.

'Who's Robert?' Harry sat down beside Nancy on the step. She didn't answer. 'Nancy?'

She shook her head. 'I don't know.'

Robert Gulliver had been her father's name.

'Grandfather's crazy,' she whispered.

'Oh, come on, Nancy . . .'

'He's always seeing things. It's very boring. And he sings all these sad **hymns** about death and . . .'

'He's old.'

Aunt Mary came towards them across the grass. She waved her empty glass at them as if she had been away a long time. 'This is a happy day,' she said.

She looks tired, thought Nancy, and soon she will be old too.

Putting her glass on the table, Aunt Mary touched Grandfather's shoulder. 'Robert is dead,' she said.

For a moment there was silence. Then Maeve began to play the piano again. A fast song.

'Lunch is ready,' Bridie's voice called out through the window.



From the village to the **point** the beach was about two miles long. The movement of the waves meant that there was never silence, even on the calmest day. No one ever walked as far as the point because, although it was beautiful, it was also very lonely.

The **hut** was about half a mile beyond the point. It was probably built by some railway workers many years before. Square in shape and made out of wood, it was cleverly hidden. Nancy had found it on a wild spring day. For two hours she cleared sand from the door until she was finally able to force it open. When she saw inside, she knew that for all those years the hut had been waiting for her. She pushed the door shut again and climbed up on to the railway line. Now she had a secret. She had always found it very difficult to keep secrets. She would have to be careful.

Over the next few weeks she had cleaned the hut and tried to make it comfortable. She had cleaned the floor with sea water and brought old blankets and cushions to sit on, things to eat, books to read. She had even considered painting the walls, but had decided against it.

No one seemed to notice that she had not been spending her school holidays around the house as she had always done before. Aunt Mary was always busy with her own routines: playing tennis, seeing friends, playing cards, looking after Grandfather and worrying inside herself. She didn't have much time to think about what Nancy was doing.

Nancy knew what would happen as soon as lunch was over – even if it was her birthday. Aunt Mary would go to her room and read, the old man would fall asleep, and Harry

would desperately try and think of an excuse to go and visit Maeve.

Nancy quietly left the room while they were having coffee. As she made her way down to the beach, she felt a light wind on her face. Soon the weather would change – perhaps not today, but soon. She could smell the sea as she crossed the field. Reaching the railway, she took off her shoes and climbed on to the line.

‘Robert is dead.’

Aunt Mary’s voice had been neither sad nor happy when she had said those words. Who had Grandfather seen? Who had made him remember?

No one. Probably someone he knew a long time ago. Anyway, he was crazy. Why must he be dead? I don’t see it like that.

When she reached the hut, she went for a swim. The sand was burning hot, but the sea was ice-cold. She lay on her towel afterwards to dry in the sun, and it was almost four o’clock when she remembered Bridie’s birthday cake. She stood up and cleaned the sand from her shoulders and her legs.

Suddenly she felt as if someone was watching her.

‘Hello.’

No one was on the railway line or the beach. No one moved. A drop of rain fell on her cheek.

Swearing to herself, she stared angrily at the sky above her, and went up to the hut. She went in and dressed. Several more drops of rain fell on the roof.

She shook the towel outside the door.

‘Hello . . . Hello . . .’

A **seagull** looked sideways at Nancy. It looked too calm for there to be strangers around. Nancy hung the towel on the back of the door. More rain was falling on the roof and

on the sand. She shut the door carefully, climbed up on to the railway line and ran most of the way home.

They were in the living-room finishing their tea when she arrived. Harry was still there.

'I'm still here,' he said rather unnecessarily.

'We haven't cut the cake yet. We've been waiting for you.'

'Where did you disappear to?' asked Harry.

'She's always disappearing,' said Aunt Mary. 'She lives a secret life. But I never ask. Now let's all have some cake. You cut it, darling. The birthday girl must cut the cake.'

'And make a wish,' said Harry.

Nancy picked up the knife and cut the chocolate cake. I wish . . . wish that he doesn't want us to visit Maeve.

'It looks wonderful. Bridie is a great cook. You are lucky to have her, Mary.'

'Cake, Grandfather?'

He didn't seem to understand, but Nancy cut him a small piece and gave it to him.

'It's my birthday. Remember? Eighteen.'

He looked at her for a moment, trying to remember who she was. 'Ah!' he said finally. 'You're Helen's daughter.' A moment later he said, 'I never eat cake.'

She left the plate beside him, in case he changed his mind.

'I . . . er . . . thought . . . ' Harry spoke through a mouthful of cake. ' . . . thought that we could go and see Maeve. Just for a few minutes.'

Nancy walked over to the window and looked out at the rain. She had wasted her wish. It was always so obvious what he was going to do. Maybe that was why she had such a . . . well . . . a loving feeling for him. Because there was nothing about him to be afraid of. He might bore you to death? Not if you loved him.

Aunt Mary began clearing the cups and plates away. As she left the room, Harry went over to Nancy.