

SFLEP-MACMILLAN CLASSICS READERS

—— 轻松读经典丛书 ——

(英语课程标准七级之三)

Precious Bane

珍贵的毒药

MARY WEBB

原著 玛丽·韦布

普鲁·萨恩答应她的哥哥吉迪恩，从今往后啥事都顺着他，她答应在农场干活直到他发财。他将买幢豪华的宅子，把简西斯·贝吉尔戴娶过门。作为交换，吉迪恩将出钱给普鲁整形，治好兔唇。

普鲁爱上了织布工凯斯特·伍德伊夫斯。她要是长得漂亮，他或许也会爱上她。

普鲁不知吉迪恩对金钱——这珍贵的毒药——如此的贪婪，否则也不会由于自己的许诺而追悔莫及了。



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Retold by Florence Bell

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注释 张 春



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出版说明

为了促进我国中学生的英语学习,培养他们的文化素养和文学修养,上海外语教育出版社经过长时间的酝酿和市场调研,决定将英国麦克米伦出版公司的一套文学名著简写本引荐给我国的中学生。

麦克米伦出版公司是从20世纪初开始陆续出版这套文学名著简写本的。为了满足世界各地英语为非母语国家、也包括英语国家不同程度的中学生的阅读需要,他们请专家对一些大家耳熟能详的世界文学名著进行了改写,在保留原著的故事情节和原著者的创作风格的同时,适当地降低了语言的难度,至今已经推出了200多本。若干年过去了,这些书仍然受到世界各地读者的欢迎。

外教社从麦克米伦出版公司的这套文学名著简写本中精心挑选了40本,汇成一套“轻松读经典丛书”,难易程度跨越“英语课程标准”的3级—8级。这套丛书选编了英、美、法等国文学大师的经典之作,包括莎士比亚、狄更斯、马克·吐温、哈代、大仲马等著名作家的作品。为了让中学生在阅读过程中更好地把握原书的精髓和作家的创作历程,外教社还特地对读物中的语言难点做了注释;并加入了一篇关于作家、作品的背景介绍。

我们衷心希望“轻松读经典丛书”能够有助于提高我国中学生的文学欣赏水平,陶冶他们的道德情操,增强他们的英语阅读能力,成为开启中学生英语文学名著阅读之门的金钥匙。

外教社编辑部

2002年11月

简 介

玛丽·韦布(1881—1927),英国女小说家,其著名作品为《珍贵的毒药》(1924)。M·韦布曾在南港市一所学校求学。1912年与教师H·韦布结婚,大部分时间住在什罗普郡,她的小说也都以该地为背景。M·韦布的小说以抒情见长,以浓烈的笔触烘托出什罗普郡的山山水水及生活在那儿的人们。她在小说中流露出的对大自然的爱和笼罩在主人公头上的厄运让人想起19世纪后期的作家托马斯·哈代。M·韦布的创作风格独特,是位极富创意的作家,但她的小说未能达到哈代作品丰满成熟的悲剧境界。

其他作品有《金箭》(1916),《躲入山洞》(1917),《多默森林中的房子》(1920)等。她的诗歌集——《诗51首》在她逝世后于1946年出版。

这个故事讲的是大约两百年前英国西部的乡村生活。说的是普鲁·萨恩和她哥哥追求爱情与幸福的故事。那时的乡下人生活很艰难,没机器帮他们干活,年纪轻轻便常常因饥寒而死。

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Introduction

I am an old woman now, but I am very happy. I often sit by the fire and think of the days when I was young. I can remember very clearly. Before I die, I want to write down everything I remember.

I want to write down the truth about my family—the Sarns. People told lies about my family. I want to write down the truth. And I want to write about the Beguildys—father, mother and daughter. I want to tell how their lives were joined with ours. Many people said that Mister Beguildy was a wicked man. Perhaps he was. But the learning¹ he gave me was a blessing, not a curse². It was because of my learning that I came to know Kester. But it is not yet the time to speak of Kester.

Now we live near the mountains. From my window, I can see the wide sky and the high-flying clouds. When I was young, it was different. Then I lived in the house of Sarn. There were high trees round the house. We could only see the sky reflected³ in the waters of Sarn Mere.

1 learning: 学问 2 curse: 诅咒 3 reflect: 映出

1

A Funeral at Sarn

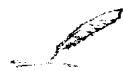
I begin my story in 1811. That was the year my brother Gideon Sarn was seventeen. I, Prudence Sarn, was two years younger.

Gideon was already a fully-grown young man, nearly as big as Father. They were both tall and dark. They were both strong men and quick-tempered¹ too.

Mother was a little woman who hated quarrels. Mother often cried and she cried most when she looked at me. For I, Prue Sarn, had a hare-lip². I was marked from birth with the Devil's curse. When I was a child, it did not trouble me. But as I grew older, I saw people looking at me and whispering to each other. Then I grew sad and ashamed.

One fine Sunday in June, the bells were ringing and calling the people to church. That Sunday, Father and Mother had to look after the bees and could not come with us to church. Gideon and I were sent to church, dressed in our best clothes. Always, when we returned, Father would ask us questions about the

1 quick-tempered: 性情急躁的 2 hare-lip: 兔唇, 唇裂



sermon¹. If we could not answer, we would be punished.

But Gideon was not worried. He persuaded me not to go to church. Instead, we met Jancis, Wizard² Beguildy's daughter, and played with her down by the Mere.

Jancis Beguildy was as pretty as a flower, with white skin, long, golden hair and a mouth like a rose. And although she was a wizard's child, no one called her a witch³. For she did not have a hare-lip, like me.

When we got home, Father was eating his supper.

'Well, what was the sermon about?' he asked.

'Burning and hell-fire⁴,' Gideon answered quickly.

'And what did Parson say?'

Then Gideon made up a story that no one could believe. Father's face grew angrier and angrier. At last he shouted out, 'Liar! There was no sermon at all. Parson visited us here at Sarn. Many people were sick. No one was in church.'

'You did not go to church!' Father shouted, 'and you've lied to me and tried to make a fool of me, your own father!'

Father stood up, his face angry and red. He reached for the horse-whip⁵.

'Now I'm going to give you a beating you will

1 sermon: 布道 2 Wizard: 男巫 3 witch: 女巫 4 hell-fire: 地狱之火
5 horse-whip: 马鞭

never forget!’

But as Father came across the kitchen, Gideon ran at him. He hit Father hard in the stomach with his head. Father fell down heavily onto the stone floor.

Father lay on his back completely still.

Father's breathing was so loud that the sound filled the whole house. Mother loosened his clothes and poured water on his face, but it did not help Father. The awful sound went on and on. Mother cried out, ‘Sarn! Sarn! Oh, Sarn, my husband!’

Mother tried to make Father drink some brandy, but his lips were tight shut. Then the sound changed. Then it stopped. There was a dreadful silence.

Gideon stood in the middle of the room. When all was quiet he said, ‘He's dead, Mother. I'll go and tell the bees or they'll fly away.’

Mother and I sat there, crying. After a while, Gideon came back. He helped us put Father's body on a mattress¹.

‘Go to bed, Mother,’ Gideon said. ‘I've shut up the animals and everything's safe. I told the bees. They're happy that I am master now.’

We buried Father at night. Gideon was the chief mourner². He wore a tall black hat and black gloves. He carried a stick with black ribbons³ on it.

We put the coffin⁴ on a waggon all covered with

1 mattress: 床垫 2 mourner: 送葬者 3 ribbon: 条带

4 coffin: 棺材



flowers. The waggon was pulled to Sarn church by oxen. The light from our burning torches¹ was reflected in the water of Sarn Mere. As we walked behind the waggon, the church bells rang out clearly through the summer's night.

The coffin was placed on the ground on one side of the open grave. On the other side, there was a table covered with a white cloth. On the table, there was a big mug full of Mother's home-made wine. One by one, everyone came forward, drank some wine from the mug and said, 'I drink to the peace of him that's gone.'

There was another small mug of wine and some bread on the table, but no one touched them.

Then Sexton² stepped forward.

'Is there a Sin Eater³?' he asked.

'Alas, no!' Mother cried out. 'There's no Sin Eater for poor Sarn.'

It was our custom when a man was buried for a poor man to be the Sin Eater. The poor man would be paid to drink the wine and taste the bread. When he did this, the dead man's sins became his own.

'Alas, there is no Sin Eater for my poor Sarn!' Mother cried again.

There was silence. And then a strange and terrible thing happened. Gideon stepped up to the table and said, 'There is a Sin Eater.'

'Who? I see no one,' Sexton said.

1 torch: 火把 2 Sexton: 教堂司事 3 Sin Eater: (旧时受雇
佣吃掉置于死者身边的食物而代死者承受罪过的人)

‘I’ll be the Sin Eater,’ Gideon said. He took up the mug, looked at Mother and said, ‘Will you give the farm and all to me if I am the Sin Eater, Mother?’

‘No, no, Gideon!’ Mother cried. ‘Don’t do it! Sin Eaters are cursed!’

‘Then I won’t drink the wine and eat the bread,’ Gideon said. ‘Father can keep his sins and go to Hell.’

‘No, no!’ Mother cried again. ‘He must rest in peace. If there’s no one else, you must do it!’

‘And you’ll give me the farm, Mother?’

‘Yes, yes, my dear. I do not care about the farm,’ Mother cried. ‘You can take it all.’

So in front of everyone, Gideon drank the wine and ate the bread.

‘Rest in peace, Father,’ Gideon said. ‘I take your sins on my own soul and they become mine.’

Then the coffin was put in the grave and the funeral was at an end.

After the funeral, everyone came back to Sarn for the funeral feast¹.

When we got home, Missis Beguildy had the fire burning brightly. She had warmed the wine and brought some more funeral cakes. So everyone had plenty to eat and drink. Missis Beguildy was a good woman. But people were afraid of her husband—he was called the Wizard of Plash.

Gideon stood in the doorway, tall and powerful. He was Master of Sarn now. Everyone could see that.

1 feast: 宴席



‘ Will you give the farm and all to me if I am
the Sin Eater, Mother? ’

‘Hay harvest starts tomorrow,’ Gideon said.

‘It’s well after twelve, young Sarn,’ said Parson. ‘It’s tomorrow now. I wish you well today and in all your tomorrows.’

‘Tomorrow, oh tomorrow!’ Jancis Beguildy said, her mouth round and red as a rose. ‘Tomorrow is a word of hope, I do believe!’ And she smiled across the room at Gideon.

Then all the people sang a holy¹ song and began to leave. Mother stood by the door, giving out the funeral cakes all wrapped in black-edged² paper.

The birds were singing and the sun was rising.

‘It’s too late for sleep now, Prue,’ Gideon said to me. ‘Let’s go down to the orchard³. I want to tell you what I have planned.’

1 holy: 神圣的 2 black-edged: 黑边的 3 orchard: 果园

2

Promises

WE sat under an old apple tree in the orchard.

‘Now, Prue,’ Gideon said. ‘You’re to listen carefully to all I say. You and me have got to work together.’

‘And Mother?’ I asked.

‘Oh, well, Mother too. But she’s old. If we two work hard together, Prue, so will she.’

‘I’m not afraid of work,’ I said.

‘Good, because there’ll be plenty of work to do,’ Gideon answered. ‘I want to make money, a lot of money. Then we’ll sell the farm. We’ll go to Lullingford and buy a big house. We’ll be rich, Prue, and I’ll be a powerful man. You’ll have dresses, china¹, anything you like. But it’ll take years and years.’

‘Why can’t we stay here, at Sarn?’ I asked sadly. ‘I don’t want to live in a big house.’

Gideon’s eyes shone with a cold, hard light. ‘But you must live with me,’ he said. ‘I shall do as much as Father did, and more. I’m a strong man,

1 china: 瓷器

Prue. And you'll always be here to help me. You will never marry. '

'Not marry, Gideon? Oh, I'm sure I'll marry. Every girl marries, don't they?' I said.

'I'm afraid no one will want to marry you, Prue,' Gideon answered.

'Not want to marry me? Why not?'

'Ask Mother,' Gideon answered. 'Maybe she can tell you why the hare crossed her path and gave you a hare-lip. '

'But forget your hare-lip now, Prue,' Gideon went on. 'When we've got a lot of gold, I'll get a doctor to cure you. It'll cost a lot. So you must work hard and do as I tell you. You must swear to work hard, Prue. Swear it on the Bible¹. And I will too. '

So Gideon went into the house to get the Bible. I sat under the tree, very sad. I thought of the husband and baby I would never have.

Gideon came back. 'Hold the Bible in your hand, Prue,' he said.

'But what about Mother?' I asked.

'Mother?' Gideon said. 'What about Mother? The farm belongs to me now. You heard Mother say so at Father's funeral. Do you think I took Father's sins for nothing? Now say after me: I promise to obey my brother, Gideon Sarn, in all things. I promise to work for him as a servant, for no money, as long as he wants it. I'll obey him in all things. I swear it on the Holy Book. Amen. '

1 Swear on the Bible: 手按《圣经》发誓