

# Selected English Short Stories

## 英国短篇小说选读

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Book II

英国短篇小说选读

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上海外国语学院英语系  
《英国短篇小说选读》编注组

上海译文出版社

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## 前言

本书收集了格雷厄姆·格林、迪伦·托马斯、艾伦·西利托、多丽丝·莱辛等十四位英国当代作家的十四篇短篇小说。全书按作者出生先后编排。这些作品在主题、素材、语言运用、写作技巧等方面都不同于上册的一些作家的作品。总的来说，语言趋向于简单平易，不倾向采用复杂曲折的故事情节，而往往是从生活的一些侧面和个人的片断经历来突出人的个性特征、内心矛盾以及人与人、人与社会之间的关系。当代作家采用的一个手法是利用“意象”作为一种象征，用以说明主题或抒发作者对某些社会现象的观点及看法。了解这些大致的趋向有利于读者对当代作品的理解。本书编写体例及注释原则与上册同。

本书由秦小孟同志负责组织并进行全面审阅。参加注释的有：吴熊元、阮式云、李敏芬、吕佩英、颜一德、李佩莹、严振云、袁鹤鹏、王美君、许余龙、张定铨等同志。

限于水平，本书无论在选材或注释中如有缺点和错误，希读者批评指正。

上海外国语学院英语系  
《英国短篇小说选读》编注组  
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# The Size of a Pocket Handkerchief

Viola Meynell

## 【作者简介】

维奥拉·迈纳尔 (Viola Meynell, 1886—), 英国诗人、小说家和短篇小说作家, 生于伦敦。父亲是编辑, 曾为一天主教期刊工作了十八年。母亲是著名诗人和小品文作者。1922年迈纳尔与约翰·达林结婚, 现住伦敦。她的部分诗歌编入了1912年出版的 *Eyes of Youth: A Book of Verse*, 吉尔伯特·基恩·切斯特顿曾为这一诗集写了前言。迈纳尔的诗作经常登载在《新政治家》周刊和《观察家》周刊上, 并收集在 *The Frozen Ocean and Other Poems* (1931) 中。她还编撰了 *The Poet's Walk: A Nature Anthology* (1936)。1927年 *A Girl Adoring* 问世, 这是以迈纳尔家庭生活为蓝本的一部小说, 显示了作者崇高的情操。最值得注意的作品则是她于1929年出版的 *A Memoir*, 这是有关她母亲的回忆录。

## 【内容提要】

黑尔是辛普森的好友和近邻。在辛普森生活上遇到困难时, 黑尔曾不止一次地帮助他。甚至在辛普森妻子生病而他本人又不在家的情况下, 黑尔送辛普森的妻子去医院。一次, 黑尔得知有人要出售一块好田, 他当着辛普森在场时毫不隐讳地说他准备购买这块田。辛普森听到后, 为了解决自己生活上的拮据状况, 竟然抢先私下把田买下。对此, 黑尔感到

十分气恼，认为辛普森太不够朋友。他几次想当面把辛普森痛骂一顿，但不是因为拉不下脸，就是没有合适的机会而未能实现。最后，两人终于在篱笆边劈面碰上了。可是目睹辛普森一副可怜的样子，黑尔终于觉得为了那块手帕大小的田而伤了朋友间的和气太不值得。黑尔知道了辛普森的苦衷后，原谅了他。两人分手时，黑尔还对辛普森的妻子表示关怀。本文选自 *English Short Stories of Today (third series)*。

## THE SIZE OF A POCKET HANDKERCHIEF

If Hale had learnt it from anyone else—if a third person had come to him and said: Have you heard Simpson has bought that bit of land? he would have said: That's a lie—or *if it isn't he's the dirtiest scoundrel unhung*<sup>1</sup>. But Simpson had himself told him: 'By the by, I've bought that field of Short's,' hoping no doubt to make it sound the most natural thing in the world; and *what with the surprise and the unlikelihood of face-to-face abuse between two friends, there had been a few moments' time-lag before Hale's reaction got under way*<sup>2</sup>. Those moments had lost him his chance. He had only uttered an ominous: 'So that's what you've done is it?' when they were interrupted. Fortune had favoured Simpson—an additional injustice, and he must be thanking his lucky stars. Or—yes, there was no doubt of it, Simpson had chosen a moment when interruption was secure. But let him wait.

It riled Hale beyond words that *Simpson probably thought that he, Hale, having said those few words, would now let it go at that, would let them stand for all the resentment which the situation was worth*<sup>3</sup>. The thought of Simpson congratulating

himself on the ease with which the thing had been carried off gave Hale no respite from planning just how he would be undeceived.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps he thought that injuries sometimes merely fade away. Well, he would quickly be hearing some *home-truths*<sup>5</sup>, deadly to any false hopes on the subject. And the facts, when they would be recapitulated to Simpson that evening, would need no doctoring; they were completely damning.

'In the first place you wouldn't be here at all, would you, but for me. *Directly I heard of a good holding coming up for sale I wrote and told you,*<sup>6</sup> didn't I, because I remembered our talks when we were prisoners together. I knew it was the thing for you, and I was as keen on your getting it as you were yourself, wasn't I?'

He'd say yes to that.

'*And in these three years I've smoothed out a few things for you,*<sup>7</sup> or done my best to. And I thought we were on a decent footing as between neighbours and friends.'

He might mumble: Well, aren't we?

'Then a few weeks ago *I said in your hearing*<sup>8</sup> that that bit of land between yours and mine was coming into the market and it would suit me well enough and I intended to buy it. And you've gone behind my back and bought it. I've come across some unscrupulous customers in my time, but this is as nasty a bit of work as I've met with.'

Simpson wouldn't answer that because he couldn't; it was the exact truth.

But that evening, by another stroke of ill-luck, Hale had the exasperation of still being unable to speak his mind. He saw Simpson at the Club and waited for an opportunity when they should not be overheard or disturbed. The Club was full; the two men were always at some distance. *When the*



*company thinned a little<sup>9</sup> and there was likely to be more chance of a private exchange, their eyes met across the room for a moment which gave time to develop the grim purposeful look of the one man and the unmistakably hangdog look of the other<sup>10</sup>. Hale was held in conversation; when he freed himself Simpson was gone.*

Hale pushed his way angrily to the door and opened it in the hope that Simpson had but just sneaked out. Closing the door behind him to shut in the noise of the club-room, he listened in the darkness for the sound of retreating footsteps, but all was quiet. Like someone just missing a train it was essential he should catch, he stood there so baffled that *it seemed some miraculous happening must defeat the logic of Simpson's escape<sup>11</sup>.*

He thought of following him to his house, but would not care to say what he had to say in front of his wife. He turned on his heel and went back into the club-room.

*Galling as the delay was, it yet served to allow of mature consideration of the form of the indictment.<sup>12</sup> Protests made in a hurry can leave out telling points<sup>13</sup>. And a man may commit a treacherous act and just because the right words of accusation are not found, may think his infamy is not fully realized, and may even become only half-convinced of it himself. Hale did not waste the time of waiting; he got on to more familiar terms with the injury done him,<sup>14</sup> and would have more to say than he would have had in the first place.*

'Perhaps you think I'm the only one to know you for what you are—that I'm sore because I lost it, but that no one else is taking any notice. All right, *take Chadwick, a man you like to stand well with<sup>15</sup>. I saw you and him talking and having a drink just as usual, and I daresay you're feeling set*

up<sup>16</sup> because his manner didn't show a bit of difference. *Nor it might*<sup>17</sup>—to you. Now I'll tell you what he said to me. He said "It's an eye-opener." He said "*What a low-down thing to go and do.*"<sup>18</sup>" That's in case you think it's just me kicking up a fuss."

He'd probably say, Well, I didn't think you'd mind all that much (which would be a lie) and anyway it's done now.

Whether by good luck or good management Simpson's movements were untraceable the next day. Certainly good luck played its part, for on Hale going to Simpson's yard at a time when he would normally have found him feeding his calves, only the fact that Simpson had received an emergency summons from his wife prevented his being found. *Good management, on the other hand, was not absent.*<sup>19</sup> To avoid Hale consistently, considering that they lived so much along the same lines, would not have been a reasonable ambition; but Simpson could induce circumstances favourable to a postponement. He should have driven past Hale's farm on his way home that afternoon; on many a day Hale was about when he did so, and he stopped and they chatted. But today, uneasily aware that Hale might be on the look-out for him, he remembered an errand he had some time to perform, and chose to do it today, thus taking another way home—while Hale was actually waiting.

Simpson was not a man who had gone into hiding, but *while not making avoidance of Hale his main object, if he could reasonably apply himself to do a job that took him out of Hale's way he did so*<sup>20</sup>.

Hale could hardly believe that twenty-four hours after hearing of Simpson's act he should still not have spoken his mind. His indignation boiled up in him. *The offence should*

*have been stigmatized from the very start.*<sup>21</sup> But as things were, he could at least rehearse his interview with Simpson, and if he could not deliver his oration he could at any rate add to it.

'It's not such a wonderful bit of land, there's only nine acres of it, but that's not the question. You not only heard from me that I was going to buy it, but you heard me say that I wanted it for some grass. You trod on me and on my needs. I wonder where you'd stop. I don't see why you don't pinch the corn out of my barn, or the money out of my pocket if it comes to that.'

He'd say that he too wanted the field, that it's handy for him too, and what about him wanting some grass.

'So you might need some, but *I happened to be in on this first*<sup>22</sup>, and you knew nothing of it but what I told you. And when I told you I was going to buy you didn't say a word, *you only crept off on the sly*<sup>23</sup>.

He might say Why did you tell me?

'*I told you because I didn't know you had it in you to do what you did.*<sup>24</sup> I told you as one man talks to another he believes is a decent fellow.'

The next morning Hale had unfortunately to be away taking calves to market, but whatever he did *his mind ran on the talk with Simpson which the afternoon would bring about*<sup>25</sup>.

'The last thing I would remember in an ordinary way is the help I've tried to be to you since your wife was ill. *But how you've behaved serves to put me in mind of it.*<sup>26</sup> I suppose that in an ordinary neighbourly manner I've done your work for you twenty times since poor Mrs. Simpson started having her fits—I couldn't do any other. I took her to hospital when you weren't there. God knows it isn't my idea to bring up

a thing like that, I only mean I thought we were neighbours one to another.'

He'd probably say You know I was grateful to you. He'd say Until I did this I never acted in an unneighbourly manner. There wasn't much someone like me could do for you because trouble doesn't seem to come your way. *Still when you had that bad go of pneumonia twelve months ago last January*<sup>27</sup> I did some of your jobs for you and was glad to.

'That's my point. We were neighbours and friends. That's what makes this a damned low-down way to behave.'

So Hale was well-primed for the talk. He had an infallible scheme for trapping Simpson this afternoon. As regular as clockwork Simpson went to his bank at two-thirty on Friday afternoons. On his road home Simpson in his car would meet Hale in his. Hale would stop him and *say his piece at last*<sup>28</sup>.

'You're no doubt very pleased with yourself for pulling this thing off,'<sup>29</sup> but you know it won't do you much good. I met Short this morning. He said when you turned up to buy the field *he concluded I was off it*<sup>30</sup>—and you let him think so, or else he'd never have dreamed of selling to you. *You'll find it doesn't pay in the long run to get that kind of reputation.*<sup>31</sup>

He might say Yes, Short would rather sell it to you than to me—and why? Because you've made a success of things and *that always goes down well*<sup>32</sup>. You're in with more people than I am because you've got more time and more money. *To him that hath...that's the kind of thing.*<sup>33</sup>

'There's an excuse for everything nowadays. But if you think you can make excuses for what you've done you won't deceive anyone except yourself.'

*But Simpson was to achieve yet one more lucky escape*

*before the actual encounter took place.*<sup>34</sup>

Hale drove slowly along the road at the time when Simpson's car was nearing on its way from the town. They could not avoid passing, and soon they were aware of each other's approach. *Both realized that the show-down was now inevitable.*<sup>35</sup>

Simpson put on his brake; but the charabanc immediately behind him could not overtake him until he and Hale had passed each other; they therefore passed. It would still be the natural thing for himself and Hale to draw up at the roadside. On the other hand acceptance of the charabanc incident as a reason for continuing on their way would also be normal, especially if the two occupants had nothing particular to say to each other. Either course was open. When Hale looked back it was to see that Simpson had driven on.

As if Hale's pursuit of his quarry were closing in and narrowing down, it assuredly seemed that this, the most fortuitous of his escapes, must be the last—and so it proved.

By now one thing was certain: the occasion was not going to find Hale unprepared.

*'I'm not grasping, that I know of.'*<sup>36</sup> You can ask who you like. If this bit of ground had been put up to auction and it had fallen to you, I wouldn't have had anything to say except good luck to you. I've got a use for it certainly, but *it's all in the fortunes of war*<sup>37</sup>, and if I'd lost it fairly and squarely that would have been all right by me. *What I don't like is what no man likes—and that's a stab in the back.*<sup>38</sup>

He'd say if it had been put up to auction *a fat chance I'd have had*<sup>39</sup> if you'd wanted it. As for your having a use for it, I daresay you have, but for me it'll make just that difference of being able to milk a cow or two to help my business along. That's what I need, something to help me

along. I've not been one of you lucky ones, and it's not for want of hard work. I lost my pigs the year before last, didn't I, and this year my bit of barley has failed. My home's in a muddle with my wife in and out of hospital, and I have to pay someone to come and do her work. *I've had a good deal against me.*<sup>40</sup> What I want is to get properly on my feet, and once I'd done that I cou'd carry on.

'I don't doubt all that. So could I improve my business if I played a shabby trick or two. So could any man, you're not the only one. It's just a matter of what you're willing to do. And what you'll do once you'll do again. *It doesn't make for good feeling, does it, if you're ready to knock anyone down and stand on them to make yourself taller.*'<sup>41</sup>

Up till now Hale had mostly calculated to catch Simpson in the ordinary coming and going of every day, *to fall in with him*,<sup>42</sup> in the same circumstances as those in which they were used to meet and speak. Thwarted in that, he now set out to pin him down on his home-ground.

He walked out into the pearly dawn of the March morning, along field-paths well known to his feet, *cutting corners*,<sup>43</sup> scrambling through a hedge; *he was a born time-saver*<sup>44</sup>. Not that he was a quick walker—perhaps because his eyes had plenty to do; for at the end of a walk like this he had an exact knowledge of the condition of every bit of cultivated ground, hedge, ditch or wild life, as far as the eye could see; also perhaps because *he was built on the heavy side*<sup>45</sup>. (But in some emergency, such as a driven heifer to be headed-off from escape down a side-track, or a sheep to be pounced on for examination, the slow heavy walk could be turned in an instant into a run of amazing agility.)

At length he reached the fence bordering Simpson's holding.

and there he stood and waited. He was not used to seeing Simpson at this hour of the morning, but Hale knew that his assignment in his yard for the first jobs of the day was as inflexible as that of a soldier on parade.

Hale stood with his legs slightly apart, as if his stoutness made them be so; the firm wide planting of his feet always made whatever ground, pavement or floor he stood on seem to belong to him.

He had not been there for five minutes when he saw Simpson. He was emerging from the paddock into his yard, a bucket in either hand. He did not see Hale until he heard his name called sharply.

'Simpson!'

He started, stared, put down the buckets and commenced the slow approach from which there was no escape. He had some way to come, across the width of the yard and the corner of an untidy orchard in which the hens were pecking at their early feed. If this meeting had been a sporting contest Hale was certainly *in the position of the player who had won the toss*<sup>46</sup>, for while he stood immovable at the fence Simpson had to cover the distance under his eye.

Hale had time to observe his man from head to toe. There was no mistaking the general demeanour of that figure as it approached—it was an *incongruous mixture of sheepishness and defiance*<sup>47</sup>.

Simpson was a lanky type. He gave the impression that all the tasks he did were more irksome on account of his having to stoop further to them than another man would; his loose-limbed figure was not typical of his calling. Hale realized, as he watched him, that *he was a man rarely to be seen without his sporting a sign of some minor physical disability*<sup>48</sup>

(changing according to the season as if by the vagaries of some fashion), which decorated him with a bit of bandage or a finger-stall or a scab or a scar. Today's demonstration of distress was a square inch of plaster affixed to the side of his neck but standing out a half-inch from it, while he carried his head a bit stiffly. Shaving, it seemed, took place later in the day, or perhaps he sometimes gave it a miss<sup>49</sup>. *His clothes were the rough and grubby ones of anyone doing the like kind of chores, except for the almost indefinable difference of their noncountry origin and of their having received their first layer of shabbiness in town-wear.*<sup>50</sup> (When Simpson spoke, too, his voice had a remotely cockney sound not otherwise to be heard for many a mile around.)

The fact that he had to make his approach while Hale was held at the fence could not do otherwise than make him seem like an accused person coming up for judgement; and every step he took had the subtle reluctance of someone drawing near to punishment. He had no cover. Offenders being apt to carry off their misdeeds, *a grown man does not often have to cut so sorry a figure before his friend,*<sup>51</sup> and an attempt at jauntiness on Simpson's part carried no conviction. One would not have wished to be in his shoes. *Hale may have had to wait for his feast, but it was served to him on a gold plate now.*<sup>52</sup>

'Well I daresay I know what you're here for,' Simpson said, coming to a standstill, and perhaps having a blustering hope that there was an advantage in taking the initiative. 'You want to have a word with me about me buying that bit of ground.'

'Wa—al, that's the kind of idea,' *said Hale in the drawling voice he sometimes used, with unconscious artistry, at the start*



*of a subject which was going to work up to high words*<sup>53</sup>.

'All right. I suppose I did know when I did it that you'd cut up rough,<sup>54</sup> but I've got something to say for myself all the same.'

'You would have. And you'd need to.'

Simpson had a defeated look for a moment, which imparted an unlikely dignity to him. But he rallied to his own defence.

*'Can't you take the luck of the draw?'*<sup>55</sup> I mean to say—'

'I wouldn't say much if I was you. *You'll only get deeper in.*'<sup>56</sup>

Having checked him again, Hale saw him painfully at a loss, and surprisingly now felt no pleasure on that account. It seemed too easy.

'What you can't do,' said Simpson, 'you can't put yourself in my place. I've had some bad luck. I—'

'Hold on a minute,' drawled Hale. 'Who says I can't put myself in your place?' He was temporizing. 'But you can't turn black into white, you know.'

This was a favourite oft-repeated axiom, but he found himself saying it now automatically, without the usual relish. He was not comfortable. He felt unaccountably small. He had become less conscious of himself than of the lanky man in front of him, *complete with warts, scabs, cotton-woolled neck, shifty eye and spluttering mouth so ready for its job of self-defence*<sup>57</sup>. *Somehow that figure had stolen the morning.*<sup>58</sup> The importance had shifted away from himself and lay with Simpson standing there, *the perfect illustration to his own hard-luck story*<sup>59</sup>.

'If you want to try and make me pass the sale over to you I don't see what right—'