

假如命运折断了希望的风帆，

不要绝望，岸还在。

假如命运凋落了花瓣，

不要沉沦，春还在。

生活总有无尽的麻烦，

不要无奈，路还在。



午夜惊恐之谜

Midnight Horror

每天读点好英文
Everyday English Notes

常青藤语言教学中心 编译

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Chapter 1

绮丽海盗船

A Gorgeous Corsair



空中历险记

A Voyage in a Balloon

✿ 儒勒·凡尔纳 / Jules Verne

儒勒·凡尔纳 (Jules Verne, 1828—1905)，法国著名科幻小说家、冒险小说家。1863年，他凭总名称为《在已知和未知世界中的奇异漫游》的系列作品集一举成名，这进一步地激发了他的创作热情。他一生中共创作了66部小说，其中《格兰特船长的儿女》《海底两万里》《神秘岛》《环游地球80天》等风靡全球，成为家喻户晓的作品。他以其大量著作和突出贡献，被誉为“现代科学幻想小说之父”。

I

In the month of September, 1850, I arrived at Frankfort-on-the-Maine. My passage through the principal cities of Germany, had been brilliantly marked by aerostatic balloon; but, up to this day, no inhabitant of the Confederation had accompanied me, and the successful experiments at Paris of Messrs. Green, Godard, and Poitevin, had failed to **induce** the grave Germans to attempt aerial voyages.

Meanwhile, hardly had the news of my approaching ascension circulated throughout Frankfort, than three persons of note asked the

favour of accompanying me. Two days after, we were to **ascend** from the Place de la Comédie. I immediately occupied myself with the preparations. My balloon, of gigantic proportions, was of silk, coated with gutta percha, a substance not liable to injury from acids or gas, and of absolute impermeability. Some trifling rents were mended: the inevitable results of perilous descents.

The day of our ascension was that of the great fair of September, which attracts all the world to Frankfort. The **apparatus** for filling was composed of six hogsheads arranged around a large vat, hermetically sealed. The hydrogen gas, evolved by the contact of water with iron and sulphuric acid, passed from the first reservoirs to the second, and thence into the immense globe, which was thus gradually inflated. These preparations occupied all the morning, and about 11 o'clock, the balloon was three-quarters full; sufficiently so; for as we rise, the atmospheric layers diminish in density, and the gas, confined within the aerostat, acquiring more elasticity, might otherwise burst its envelope. My calculations had furnished me with the exact measurement of gas required to carry my companions and myself to a considerable height.

We were to ascend at noon. It was truly a magnificent spectacle, that of the impatient crowd who thronged around the reserved enclosure, inundated the entire square and adjoining streets, and covered the neighbouring houses from the basements to the slated roofs. The high winds of past days had lulled, and an overpowering heat was radiating from an unclouded sky; not a breath animated the atmosphere. In such weather, one might descend in the very spot he had left.

I carried three hundred pounds of ballast, in bags; the car, perfectly round, four feet in diameter, and three feet in height, was

conveniently attached; the cord which sustained it was symmetrically extended from the upper hemisphere of the aerostat; the compass was in its place, the barometer suspended to the iron hoop which surrounded the supporting cord, at a distance of eight feet above the car; the anchor carefully prepared, all was in readiness for our departure.

Among the persons who crowded around the enclosure, I remarked a young man with pale face and agitated features. I was struck with his appearance. He had been an assiduous spectator of my ascensions in several cities of Germany. His uneasy air and his extraordinary pre-occupation never left him; he eagerly contemplated the curious machine, which rested motionless at a few feet from the ground, and remained silent.

The clock struck twelve! This was the hour. My companions had not appeared. I sent to the dwelling of each, and learned that one had started for Hamburg, another for Vienna and the third, still more fearful, for London. Their hearts had failed them at the moment of undertaking one of those excursions, which, since the ingenious experiments of aeronauts, are deprived of all danger. As they made, as it were a part of the programme of the fete, they had feared being compelled to fulfil their agreements, and had fled at the moment of ascension. Their courage had been in inverse ratio to the square of their swiftness in retreat.

The crowd, thus partly disappointed, were shouting with anger and impatience. I did not hesitate to ascend alone. To re-establish the equilibrium between the specific gravity of the balloon and the weight to be raised, I substituted other bags of sand for my expected companions and entered the car. The twelve men who were holding the aerostat by twelve cords fastened to the equatorial circle, let them

slip between their fingers; the car rose a few feet above the ground. There was not a breath of wind, and the atmosphere, heavy as lead, seemed insurmountable.

“All is ready!” exclaimed I, “attention!”

The men arranged themselves; a last glance informed me that everything was right.

“Attention!”

There was some movement in the crowd which seemed to be invading the reserved enclosure.

“Let go!”

The balloon slowly ascended; but I experienced a shock which threw me to the bottom of the car. When I rose, I found myself face to face with an unexpected voyager—the pale young man.

“Monsieur, I salute you!” said he to me.

“By what right?”

“Am I here? By the right of your inability to turn me out.”

I was confounded. His assurance disconcerted me; and I had nothing to say in reply. I looked at him, but he paid no regard to my astonishment. He continued:

“My weight will disturb your equilibrium, Monsieur : will you permit me?”

And without waiting for my assent, he lightened the balloon by two bags of sand which he emptied into the air.

“Monsieur,” said I, taking the only possible course, “you are here, well! you choose to remain, well! But to me alone belongs the management of the aerostat.”

“Monsieur,” replied he, “your urbanity is entirely French; it is of the same country with myself! I press in imagination the hand which you refuse me. Take your measures—act as it may seem good to you;

I will wait till you have ended.”

“To.”

“To converse with you.”

The barometer had fallen to twenty-six inches; we had attained a height of about six hundred metres, and were over the city; which satisfied me of our complete quiescence, for I could not judge by our motionless flags. Nothing betrays the **horizontal** voyage of a balloon; it is the mass of air surrounding it which moves. A kind of wavering heat bathed the objects extended at our feet, and gave their outlines an indistinctness to be regretted. The needle of the compass indicated a slight tendency to float towards the south.

I looked again at my companion. He was a man of thirty, simply clad; the bold outlines of his features betokened indomitable energy; he appeared very muscular. Absorbed in the emotion of this silent suspension, he remained immovable, seeking to distinguish the objects which passed beneath his view.

“Vexatious mist!” said he, at the expiration of a few moments.

I made no reply.

“What would you? I could not pay for my voyage; I was obliged to take you by surprise.”

“No one has asked you to descend!”

“A similar occurrence,” he resumed, “happened to the Counts of Laurencin and Dampierre, when they ascended at Lyons, on the 15th of January, 1784. A young merchant, named Fontaine, scaled the railing, at the risk of upsetting the equipage. He accomplished the voyage, and nobody was killed!”

“Once on the earth, we will converse!” said I, piqued at the tone of lightness with which he spoke.

“Bah! do not talk of returning!”

“Do you think then that I shall delay my descent?”

“Descent!” said he, with surprise. “Let us ascend!”

And before I could prevent him, two bags of sand were thrown out, without even being emptied.

“Monsieur!” said I, angrily.

“I know your skill,” replied he, composedly; “your brilliant ascensions have made some noise in the world. Experience is the sister of practice, but it is also first cousin to theory, and I have long and deeply studied the aerostatic art. It has affected my brain,” added he, sadly, falling into a mute torpor.

The balloon, after having risen, remained stationary; the unknown consulted the barometer, and said:

“Here we are at 800 metres! Men resemble insects! See, I think it is from this height that we should always look at them, to judge correctly of their moral proportions! The Place de la Comédie is transformed to an immense ant-hill. Look at the crowd piled up on the quays. The Zeil diminishes. We are above the church of Dom. The Maine is now only a white line dividing the city, and this bridge, the Maine-Brucke, looks like a white thread thrown between the two banks of the river.”

The atmosphere grew cooler.

“There is nothing I will not do for you, my host,” said my companion. “If you are cold, I will take off my clothes and lend them to you.”

“Thanks!”

“Necessity makes laws. Give me your hand, I am your countryman. You shall be instructed by my company, and my conversation shall compensate you for the annoyance I have caused you.”

I seated myself, without replying, at the opposite extremity of the car. The young man had drawn from his great coat a voluminous portfolio; it was a work on aerostation.

“I possess,” said he, “a most curious collection of engraving, and caricatures appertaining to our aerial mania. This precious discovery has been at once admired and ridiculed. Fortunately we have passed the period when the Mongolfiers sought to make factitious clouds with the vapour of water; and of the gas affecting electric properties, which they produced by the combustion of clamp straw with chopped wool.”

“Would you detract from the merit of these inventions?” replied I. “Was it not well done to have proved by experiment the possibility of rising in the air?”

“Who denies the glory of the first aerial navigators? Immense courage was necessary to ascend by means of those fragile envelopes which contained only warm air. Besides, has not aerostatic science made great progress since the ascensions of Blanchard? Look, Monsieur.”

He took from his collection an engraving.

“Here is the first aerial voyage undertaken by Pilatre des Rosiers and the Marquis d’Arlandes, four months after the discovery of balloons. Louis XVI refused his consent to this voyage; two condemned criminals were to have first attempted aerial travelling. Pilatre des Rosiers was indignant at this injustice and, by means of artifice, succeeded in setting out. This car, which renders the management of the balloon easy, had not then been invented; a circular gallery surrounded the lower part of the aerostat. The two aeronauts stationed themselves at the extremities of this gallery. The damp straw with which it was filled encumbered their movements. A chafing-dish was suspended beneath the orifice of the balloon; when the voyagers

wished to ascend, they threw, with a long fork, straw upon this brazier, at the risk of burning the machine, and the air, growing warmer, gave to the balloon a new ascensional force.

“The two bold navigators ascended, on the 21st of November, 1783, from the gardens of La Muette, which the Dauphin had placed at their disposal. The aerostat rose majestically, passed the Isle des Cygnes, crossed the Seine at the Barriere de la Conference, and, directing its way between the dome of the Invalides and L’Ecole Militaire, approached St. Sulpice; then the aeronauts increased the fire, ascended, cleared the Boulevard, and descended beyond the Barriere d’Enfer. As it touched the ground, the collapsed, and buried Pilatre des Rosiers beneath its folds.”

“Unfortunate presage! ” said I, interested in these details, which so nearly concerned me.

“Presage of his catastrophe,” replied the unknown, with sadness. “You have experienced nothing similar? ”

“Nothing! ”

“Bah! Misfortunes often arrive without presage.” And he remained silent.

We were advancing towards the south; the magnetic needle pointed in the direction of Frankfort, which was flying beneath our feet.

“Perhaps we shall have a storm. ” said the young man.

“We will descend first.”

“Indeed! it will be better to ascend; we shall escape more surely.” and two bags of sand were thrown overboard.

The balloon rose rapidly, and stopped at twelve hundred metres. The cold was now intense, and there was a slight buzzing in my ears. Nevertheless, the rays of the sun fell hotly on the globe, and, dilating

the gas it contained, gave it a greater ascensional force. I was stupid.

“Fear nothing, ” said the young man to me. “We have three thousand five hundred toises of respirable air. You need not trouble yourself about my proceedings.”

I would have risen, but a vigorous hand detained me on my seat.

“Your name?” asked I.

“My name! how does it concern you?”

“I have the honour to ask your name.”

“I am called Erostratus or Empedocles, as you please. Are you interested in the progress of aerostatic science?”

He spoke with icy coldness, and I asked myself with whom I had to do.

“Monsieur, ” continued he, “nothing new has been invented since the days of the philosopher Charles. Four months after the discovery of aerostats, he had invented the valve, which permits the gas to escape when the balloon is too full, or when one wishes to descend; the car, which allows the machine to be easily managed; the network, which encloses the fabric of the balloon, and prevents its being too heavily pressed; the ballast, which is used in ascending and choosing the spot of descent; the coat of caoutchouc, which renders the silk impermeable; the barometer, which determines the height attained; and, finally, the hydrogen, which, fourteen times lighter than air, allows of ascension to the most distant atmospheric layers, and prevents exposure to aerial combustion. On the 1st of December, 1783, three hundred thousand spectators thronged the Tuileries. Charles ascended, and the soldiers presented arms. He travelled nine leagues in the air: managing his machine with a skill never since surpassed in aeronautic experiments. The King conferred on him a pension of two thousand livres, for in those days inventions were encouraged. For

every one was interested in the progress of science.”

The unknown was seized with a violent agitation.

“I, Monsieur, have studied; I am satisfied that the first aeronauts guided their balloons. Not to speak of Blanchard, whose assertions might be doubted, at Dijon, Guyton-Morveaux, by the aid of oars and a helm, imparted to his machines perceptible motions, a decided direction. More recently, at Paris, a watchmaker, M. Julien, has made at the Hippodrome convincing experiments; for, with the aid of a particular mechanism, an aerial apparatus of oblong form was manifestly propelled against the wind. M. Petin placed four balloons, filled with hydrogen, in juxtaposition, and, by means of sails disposed horizontally and partially furled, hoped to obtain a disturbance of the equilibrium, which, inclining the apparatus, should compel it to an oblique path. But the motive power destined to surmount the resistance of currents, —the hélice, moving in a movable medium, was unsuccessful. I have discovered the only method of guiding balloons, and not an Academy has come to my assistance, not a city has filled my subscription lists, not a government has deigned to listen to me! It is infamous!”

His gesticulations were so furious that the car experienced violent oscillations; I had much difficulty in restraining him. Meanwhile, the balloon had encountered a more rapid current. We were advancing in a southerly direction, at 1200 metres in height, almost accustomed to this new temperature.

“There is Darmstadt,” said my companion. “Do you perceive its magnificent chateau? The storm-cloud below makes the outlines of objects waver; and it requires a practised eye to recognise localities.”

“You are certain that it is Darmstadt?”

“Undoubtedly; we are six leagues from Frankfurt.”