

READER'S

美国读者文摘精华

DIGEST



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自由降落

蔡丽文 选 编

李运兴 齐世和 李永华 译注



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蔡丽文选编 李运兴 齐世和
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编 者 的 话

美国《读者文摘》(Readers' Digest)是一本极有影响的刊物,它在世界各地以十八种语言出版,一月一期,每期发行二千八百万册,其发行量之大,读者之广,在国外刊物中首屈一指。它选文内容广泛,既有最新世界大事,又有当今热门话题,涉及政治、经济、军事、文学艺术、名人掌故、社会动态、科技发展、生活知识、风土人情等等,可以说是包罗万象、应有尽有。由于它内容新、紧跟时代,因而在语言使用上也富有时代感和新鲜感,从而为学英语者提供了极好的读物。学习者可以大量接触新的语言材料,增长知识,扩大词汇,增强语感,加深理解,提高阅读能力。

正是为了这一目的,我们从1990年和1991年出版的各期《读者文摘》中选出一些精彩文章,另编成册,以飨读者。

为了便于读者学习,每篇选文都附有注解和译文,仅供参考。

本书选文分别由李运兴、齐世和、李永华译注,全书由蔡丽文审校。

由于时间仓促,错误在所难免,请读者批评指正。

编 者

1991年9月

目 录

1、The Last Days of Vincent van Gogh	1
凡·高的最后时日	164
2、Called to Service: The Collin Powell Story	7
应召赴疆场: 科林·鲍威尔的故事	168
3、Unforgettable Mohammed Ali Jinnah	15
难忘的穆罕默德·阿里·真纳	174
4、Mr. Dickens's Famous Story	22
狄更斯先生的名作	179
5、My Father, Lin Yutang	27
我的父亲林语堂	183
6、Who Killed Sue Snow?	53
是谁杀害了休·斯诺?	201
7、Hostage to a Madman!	61
狂人的人质	207
8、The Haunted Man	66
一个负疚的人	211
9、Captured by Convicts!	72
被囚犯扣压之后!	215
10、A Daughter's Search, A Mother's Dream	80
女儿的寻觅, 母亲的梦	221
11、"Hello, Young Lovers"	87
“你们好, 年轻的情侣”	226
12、The Vision Behind the Patriot	89
爱国者导弹背后的眼睛	228
13、Mexico's New Revolution	96
墨西哥的新革命	233
14、The Fascinating World of the Unborn	101

未出生婴儿的奇妙世界	236
15. What's Right About Being Left-Handed . . .	106
左撇子好在哪里	240
16. When to Keep Your Mouth Shut	110
何时缄默不语为好	243
17. How to Relax in a Crowd	115
怎样在众人面前使自己放松	246
18. Parenting's Best-Kept Secret:	
Reading to Your Children	120
教育孩子的最大秘诀: 读书给他们听 . . .	250
19. How to Raise Happy Kids	125
怎样培养快活的孩子	254
20. Free Fall	131
自由降落	258

1 THE LAST DAYS OF Vincent van Gogh

BY ROBERT WERNICK

IT WAS May 17, 1890. Vincent van Gogh¹ had just arrived in Paris from the south of France. His brother, Theodorus (Theo), was there to welcome him to his new home in the cite Pigalle at the foot of Montmartre. For years Vincent had been sending canvases to his brother. And now here they were in Theo's apartment, scores of them crowding every square inch of wall and floor space. It was the first time that so many of Vincent's paintings had been assembled in one place, and it was a magnificent sight.

Viewing his handiwork that day, Vincent radiated joy and confidence. Theo's new bride, Jo, had heard many tales about her brother-in-law, and found him "strong, with broad shoulders, a healthy color, a gay expression, his entire appearance indicating firm decision." But it did not take her long to learn what Vincent already knew in his heart, that this was a momentary flash of happiness. Seven years earlier he had written Theo, "Not only did I begin painting late in life, but it may be that I shall not live for many years, between six and ten, for instance." Now he was 37 years old, and he felt his time was running out.

His creative powers were at their height. He had just filled two years with a concentrated outpouring of genius such as the world of art had rarely seen². His friend Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec had urged him to go south to the ancient city of Arles, where Lautrec was sure the bright sun and hot colors would liberate the passionate eye of the

moody young Dutchman who had amazed and irritated the artists of Paris. In no time Vincent had shaken off the gloomy tones of his early painting and mastered a style of bold, slashing strokes of pure contrasting colors. He had turned out paintings "full of sulfur," as he said, at a fantastic rate — sometimes more than one a day. He had worked side by side with the artist he admired most, Paul Gauguin, and each had stimulated the other to new and intoxicating discoveries.

In addition, Vincent was beginning to make an artistic name for himself³. Leading painters of the day — Edgar Degas, Lautrec, Georges Seurat, Camille Pissarro — were offering friendship and encouragement. A leading art critic, Albert Aurier, described Vincent as "this robust and true artist, with the brutal hands of a giant, with the nerves of a hysterical woman, with the soul of a mystic, so original and so alone. He is the only painter who perceives the coloration of things with such intensity, with such a metallic, gem-like quality."

But it was also at Arles that Vincent showed signs of madness. Over the years there has been endless speculation on the exact nature of Van Gogh's illness, ranging from epilepsy and advanced syphilis to manic depression. Recently, however, medical researchers contended that the artist was not mad at all, but suffered from Ménière's disease, a disorder of the inner ear that affects hearing and balance and causes recurrent vertigo, nausea, hearing loss and a ringing or buzzing in the ear. Whatever the reason for his instability, Vincent was always a man of extremes. He pushed his nervous and emotional endurance beyond human limits. In Arles he worked all day and often into the night, ate irregularly and inadequately, drank gallons of coffee and absinthe, smoked incessantly. "I admit all that," he once wrote to Theo, "but at the same time it is true that to attain the high yellow note I attained last summer, I really had to be pretty well keyed up." To achieve that "yellow note," he would sit all day out in the boiling cauldron of summertime Arles, "in the full sunshine without any shadow, and I enjoy it like a cicada."

Continuously existing at a fever pitch, he yawned between

euphoria and despair, exuberant self-confidence and stifling self-doubt. (Researchers say the attacks of vertigo from *Ménière's* disease are often interspersed with symptom-free periods.) On December 23, 1888, the balance snapped on the famous occasion when he cut off part of his right ear and delivered it to a prostitute in a *maison de tolérance* with the words, "Keep this object carefully." His life from then on was a series of recoveries and relapses, at unpredictable intervals⁴. The painter Paul Signac, who came to see him one day in the Arles asylum, reported that he found him perfectly sane, but before he left, Vincent had to be restrained from swallowing a bottle of turpentine.

By the spring of 1890, when he arrived at Theo's apartment, Vincent had, he hoped, put all that behind him. Perhaps, he thought, the intensity of the south had unsettled him, and he would be better under the familiar gray skies of the north.

His friend Pissarro recommended a doctor Gachet, an amateur painter himself, who had taken care of many Parisian artists. Gachet lived in Auvers-sur-Oise about 20 miles north of the city, and he would be delighted to look after Vincent. So Vincent moved to Auvers and found cheap lodgings above a café belonging to the Ravoux family, just a few steps from the doctor's house. The village quiet pleased him. "It is of a grave beauty," he wrote Theo, "the real countryside." Auvers was, and is, perched on a hill, with lovely views of the verdant Oise valley on one side and of immense wheatfields stretching to the horizon on the other.

Doctor Gachet and Vincent took to each other from the start. Vincent found him "something like another brother, so much do we resemble each other physically and mentally." Gachet was of Flemish origin; he had Vincent's bony face and flaming red hair and beard. Vincent was also convinced he shared the same tendency to melancholy and nervous instability. Vincent did two versions of a portrait of Gachet, full, he said, of the "broken-hearted expression of our time." The lean, sorrowful figure slumps in discouragement, holding his head

up with an elongated hand, a pale face with sharp features and intense eyes surrounded by the swirling blue strokes that build up his coat and an amorphous background, very much a soul adrift.

Gachet's enthusiasm for these paintings was something new and encouraging for Vincent, whose previous portraits had been mostly of uneducated people. With Gachet, a man whose house was crammed with Cézannes, Monets, Pissarros – works given him in exchange for⁵ medical consultations – he had for the first time a model he could talk to about his painting.

"Working like one possessed," Vincent completed 36 paintings in the 71 days he spent in Auvers, plus innumerable drawings. He painted in many moods, from serenity to near hysteria. He painted flowering blossoms with the tight precision of a Japanese print. He painted troubling landscapes in which everything seems a little askew. He painted the featureless little town hall of Auvers, all spread about with tricolored flags⁶ and bunting for Bastille Day,⁷ and made it look positively jolly. He painted the quiet old parish church and filled it with a volcanic force. He painted Dr. Gachet's 19-year-old daughter, Marguerite, in a shimmering white dress, at her piano. He painted old thatched cottages that reminded him of his early days in the Netherlands; he painted poppies, chestnut trees, gardens, golden wheatfields.

His spirits picked up. "I feel completely calm and in normal condition," he wrote his mother. "The doctor here says I should throw myself entirely into my work and in this way find distraction. Besides, since I gave up drinking, I do better work than before, and that much at least is gained." He began to make plans for the future. He would rent a house in Auvers. In January 1890 Theo and Jo had a baby whom they named Vincent. They brought the infant to visit his uncle, who had a great time showing him the farm animals and finding him a bird's nest. "Since you were good enough to call him after me," he afterward wrote Theo, "I should like him to have a spirit less unquiet than mine."

For despite everything, there was no quiet in Auvers. Even the arrival of the adored new nephew was disturbing to Vincent. It reminded him that for years his sole support had been the 50-franc notes Theo kept slipping into the envelope when he wrote him. The brothers always regarded this as an investment that would pay off Theo handsomely when Vincent's career came to full bloom⁸. But Vincent had only recently sold his first painting, and now there was for Theo the added responsibility of his wife and baby. It tormented Vincent to think that he was being a burden on his brother, who was also insecure and unstable. So a new note crept into his letters to Theo: "Only when I stand painting before my easel do I feel somewhat alive. This is the lot which I accept and which will not change. And the prospect grows darker; I see no happy future at all."

In a pattern familiar from the onset of his earlier attacks, Vincent became deceptively calm. "I am entirely absorbed," he wrote his mother in late July, "by that immense plain covered by fields of wheat." A few days later he produced one of the most tormented and disturbing of all his works, "Crows Over the Wheatfields." The wheatfield is a tangled mass of spasmodic diagonal yellow strokes; the sky is a hectic blue; red and green paths lead into the wilderness of grain but go nowhere. Flying across the whole canvas are black crows, figures of inexorable doom. Describing some of his last landscapes to Theo, Vincent wrote, "I did not need to go out of my way⁹ to express sadness and the extreme of loneliness."

The familiar melancholy had him in its grip. He must have sensed that this was no disease of the south; he was doomed to an unending series of recurrences. He was alone, he had lost faith in himself, in everything. In his last letter Vincent wrote Theo: "In my own work I am risking my life, and half my reason has been lost in it."

He put the letter in his pocket and picked up a revolver he had borrowed from Ravoux. He walked into the fields, pointed the gun at his chest, fired and fell to the ground. Then, finding he was only wounded, he got up and staggered home. When Vincent did not come

to dinner, Ravoux went upstairs to find him in bed. "I tried to kill myself but missed," Vincent said.

Dr. Gachet came on the run. He did not dare remove the bullet, but left his patient apparently resting, calmly smoking his pipe. Alerted by the doctor, Theo came the next morning, and the two brothers were together all day. Theo found a moment to write his wife: "Poor fellow, fate has not given him much, and he has no illusions left. Things are sometimes too hard; he feels so alone. If only we could give him a little courage to live!"

But Vincent had given up. "He himself wanted to die," Theo later wrote to his sister, Elisabeth. "When I tried to convince him we would cure him, he replied, 'The sorrow will never end.' He was very calm. Among his last words were 'I wish I could go home now.' And thus it happened. In a few moments he found the peace he had been unable to find on earth." Vincent died at 1 a.m. on July 29, 1890.

His friend the painter Emile Bernard came to Auvers for the funeral. "Many people arrived," Bernard wrote later, "mostly artists. There were also people from the neighborhood who loved him, for he was so good and so human. Outside, the sun was frightfully hot. We climbed the hill of Auvers talking of him, of the bold forward thrust he had given to art, of the great projects that always preoccupied him, of the good he had done to each of us. We arrived at the cemetery overlooking the fields ready for reaping, under a wide blue sky he might have loved still. And then he was lowered into the grave."

Theo was grief-stricken and fell gravely ill. Prior to his death on January 25, 1891, while being nursed in the Netherlands, he was told that his brother had at last had an exhibition, hastily improvised by Emile Bernard. "On this cold Christmas day," reported an Amsterdam daily, the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, "some Dutchmen gathered in the tiny rooms of an unoccupied apartment in Montmartre, there to admire some 100 paintings. Their enthusiasm was tempered by sorrow: the artistic treasures were the legacy of an artist who had disappeared too soon."

More formal recognition was soon to come. Some of Vincent's paintings were exhibited in Brussels in February 1891, and in Paris in March. That April Bernard arranged an exhibition of 16 Van Goghs in a small Paris gallery. From that day to this, an unending succession of shows, books, articles and films have carried the name of Vincent van Gogh to the far corners of the world. Theo's son, Vincent, lived long enough to see the inauguration of the Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh in Amsterdam in 1971, consecrating his uncle's place as the best-known and best-loved artist of modern times.

注 释:

1. Vincent van Gogh, 文森特·凡·高。译文中著名画家译名均按《英汉美术词典》译出。2. such + as 分句结构, 修饰 outpouring of genius。3. make a name for oneself: 成名。4. at intervals: 每隔一定时间。5. in exchange for ... : 做为对……的交换。6. tricolored flags: 三色旗, 指法国国旗, 由蓝、白、红三色竖条组成。7. Bastille Day: 即法国国庆日 —— 7 月 14 日, 1789 年该日巴士底狱在法国大革命中被攻克。8. come to full bloom: (花) 盛开。9. go out of one's way to do sth = to make an extra effort to do sth, 特意去做某事。

2 Called to Service: The Colin Powell Story

BY CARL T. ROWAN

IN THE CRITICAL HOURS following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, U.S. Army Gen. Colin Powell spent much of the night in the Pentagon war room, monitoring uneasily the southward movement of Iraqi tanks and other forces. He went home to sleep but

was awakened frequently by deputies reporting that Iraq's Saddam Hussein seemed bent on¹ also seizing the oil fields of Saudi Arabia.

Next morning, Powell and Defense Secretary Dick Cheney briefed an irate President George Bush, who declared that Iraq's aggression had to be halted immediately, that Saudi Arabia had to be protected and that the Iraqis had to be forced out of Kuwait.

Was the military prepared to do this?

General Powell responded by laying out in stark detail the strength of Iraq's vast military machine – 1,000,000 men, Exocet and modified Scud missiles, rockets armed with mustard and nerve gases. Then he assured the President that the U.S. military could stop Saddam, but only with an all-out commitment. The U.S. had to amass enough military might to make Hussein realize that he was flirting with a war in which Iraq's infrastructure and war-making potential would be obliterated.

President Bush went before the American people and the television cameras of the world to announce the U.S. commitment to stop Iraq, and hours later Cheney and Powell held a press conference in which they announced what soon became the fastest, greatest mobilization and deployment of weapons and men in world history – Operation Desert Shield – the buildup to Operation Desert Storm that opened the war against Iraq last January.

This informed, hard-nosed straightforward approach to his job over a 33-year career in the military is what brought Colin Powell to the highest military post in the United States. No armed forces officer ever traveled so far, so fast, a remarkable feat considering where it all began for Powell 54 years ago.

Slow Start. Born in Harlem during the Depression, Colin Luther Powell was the son of poor Jamaican immigrants. His father worked as a shipping clerk, his mother as a seamstress. "Strive for a good education," they lectured their son. "Make something of your life." But even into high school, Powell confesses, he "horsed around² a lot," and his grades were not good.

Then at The City College of New York, he enrolled in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps – and found his calling. "In my second year of ROTC," he notes, "*I realized, Hey, this is fun, and you do it well.*" In fact, he did it so well that he graduated as "cadet colonel," the highest rank. That was 1958. Commissioned a second lieutenant in the Army, Powell went to West Germany.

In 1960, returning to duty at Fort Devens, Massachusetts, First Lieutenant Powell met Alma Vivian Johnson on a blind date³. The two were married in the summer of 1962, after Powell received word he would be going to Vietnam. When the couple's first child was born in 1963, he was leading a combat unit near the North Vietnamese border. It took more than two weeks to get word to him that his son, Michael, had been born.

A few months later, while leading his unit through a rice paddy, Powell stepped on a punji-stick trap. The stick pierced his left instep and came out the top of his foot. He was shipped to Hue for treatment of the wound and, within a few weeks, was back leading combat missions.

"I Want Him!" In 1963, Powell was reassigned to Fort Benning, Georgia, where he signed up for advanced study at the Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Then, in the middle of his course work, he asked to go to graduate school.

The officer in charge was blunt: "Your college record isn't good enough."

That made Powell mad. He buckled down and finished second in his Leavenworth class of 1244. But instead of graduate school, he was sent back to Vietnam

Soon after, *Army Times* carried an article about the top five students in the recent Leavenworth graduating class. When Powell's division commander saw the story, he hit the roof⁴. "I've got the No. 2 Leavenworth graduate in my division, and he's stuck in the boonies?" he shouted at his aides. "I want him on my staff!"

The commander named Major Powell his operations chief, and in

his new assignment Powell quickly made his mark. On one helicopter mission, the pilot tried to land in a small jungle clearing. Suddenly, the rotor blade hit a tree, and the chopper crashed. Ignoring fears that the gas tanks might explode, Powell pulled several GIs from the smoldering craft. He received the Soldier's Medal, one of five combat and 15 major decorations accumulated in his career.

In 1969, Powell finally saw his graduate-school dream come true. He attended The George Washington University, where he earned a Master's degree in business administration.

Then came an even bigger break. In 1972, a top Army personnel man telephoned Powell, who was working as an analyst in the Pentagon. "Colin," he said, "the Infantry Branch wants one of its people to become a White House Fellow. We want you to apply."

Restoring Discipline. As a White House Fellow — one of an elite group of special assistants in important government offices — Powell worked with Caspar Weinberger, director of the Office of Management and Budget, and with Weinberger's deputy, Frank Carlucci.

After only a year, however, Powell's dream job came to an abrupt end. Among American forces in Korea, growing use of drugs and simmering tension between black and white troops exploded into race riots. In September 1973, Powell was assigned to head a troubled unit, the 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry.

"I threw the bums out of the Army and put the drug users in jail," Powell says. "The rest, we ran four miles every morning, and by night they were too tired to get into trouble." Within months, the black and white troops were training, working and socializing together.

During the Carter Administration, Powell held top advisory posts in the Pentagon and the Department of Energy, moving up to brigadier general. Then, after Ronald Reagan took office in 1981, Powell rejoined both Weinberger, who became, Secretary of Defense, and Carlucci, Weinberger's deputy.

Presidential Summons. In June 1986, Powell left Washington behind. He had wanted an infantry command, and now he had it: com-

manding general of the V Corps, a premier unit of 75,000 troops in Frankfurt, West Germany. He was, he recalls, “probably the happiest general in the world.”

Six months later National Security Advisor John M. Poindexter resigned, and President Reagan chose Powell’s old friend Carlucci to head the National Security Council on the brink of collapse following the Iran–Contra scandal. He telephoned Powell in Frankfurt. Would Powell come back to Washington as his deputy? “No way,” said Powell.

The next night, the phone rang. Powell claims there is a special intensity to the ring when White House operators call. “I know you’ve been looking forward to this command, but we need you here,” said President Reagan.

“Mr. President,” Powell answered, “I’m a soldier, and if I can help, I’ll come.”

Powerful Medicine. Shortly after Powell returned to Washington, he and Alma faced their darkest days. Back in Germany, their only son, Michael, an Army first lieutenant, had been riding in a jeep when the driver lost control. The vehicle turned over, and the young officer’s pelvis was broken in six places. He needed 22 units of blood.

If Michael lived, doctors told the Powells, he’d probably be confined to a wheelchair. Four days later, Michael was flown to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington for extensive surgery. “You’ll make it,” his father promised. “You want to make it, so you *will* make it!”

Michael came through the operations and moved into the Powell home in Fort Myer, Virginia. Therapists came and went for weeks. But the most powerful medicine was Colin Powell, telling his son over and over: “You’ll make it.” Sixteen months after the accident, walking with a cane, Michael married his college sweetheart. They now have a son, and Michael attends law school in Washington, D.C. The Colin Powells also have two daughters, Annemarie, a college student, and Linda, an aspiring actress.