

# 鐵蒂姨母

(英漢對照)

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## AUNT TITIE

ONCE upon a time in a small fishing village in Cornwall there lived a devout and angry clergyman named Clement Shore. He was an ex-missionary and had a face almost entirely encircled by whiskers, like a frilled ham. His wife, Mary, was small and weary, and gave birth to three daughters, Christina, Titania, and lastly Amanda, with whose birth she struggled to long and sadly, and died, exhausted by the effort. Amanda was my mother. On Christmas day 1881, grandfather Clement himself died and my Aunt Christina then aged sixteen, having arranged for what furniture there was to be sold, and the lease of the house taken over, travelled to London with several tin trunks, a fox terrier named Roland and her two younger sisters aged respectively thirteen and eleven. They were met, dismally, at Paddington by their father's spinster sister Ernesta, a grey woman of about fifty, who led them, without protest, to Lupus Street, Pimlico, where with a certain grim efficiency she ran a lodging house for bachelors. Once installed they automatically became insignificant but important cog-wheels in the smooth running machinery of the

house which was very high and respectable. The three of them shared a small bedroom with Roland, from whom they refused to be parted, and lived two years of polite slavery until in the spring of 1883, Christina suddenly married James Rogers, Ernesta Shore's first-floor-front tenant, and went with him to a small house in Camberwell, taking with her Titania and Amanda.

James Rogers was a good man and a piano tuner at the time of his marriage, later he developed into a travelling agent for his firm, so that during my childhood in the house I didn't see much of him, but he was mild tempered and kind when he did happen to be at home and only drank occasionally, and then without exuberance.

Aunt Christina was formidable, even when young and ruled him firmly until the day of his death. She was less successful however with Aunt Titania and my mother. Aunt Titania stayed the course for about a year and then eloped to Manchester with a young music hall comedian, Jumbo Potter, with whom she lived in sin for three years to the bitter shame of Aunt Christina. At the end of this liaison she went on to the stage herself in company with three other girls. They called themselves "The Four Rosebuds" and danced and sang through the music halls of England. Meanwhile my mother, Amanda, continued to live in

Camberwell, helping with the housework, ~~and~~ having very well until 1888, when Titania ~~reappeared~~ <sup>reappeared</sup> in London, swathed in the glamour of the Theatre, and invited her to a theatrical supper party at the Monico. Amanda climbed out of her bedroom window and over the yard fence in order to get there and never returned. Titania on being questioned later by Christina stated that the last she'd seen of Amanda, she was seated on the knee of an Argentine with a paper fireman's cap on her head, blowing a squeaker. Titania's recollections were naturally somewhat vague as she had been drinking a good deal and left the party early on the strength of an unpremeditated reunion with Jumbo Potter. Christina anxiously pursued her enquiries, but could discover nothing about the Argentine; nobody knew his name, he had apparently drifted into the party, entirely uninvited. Finally when two days had elapsed and she was about to go to the police, a telegram arrived from Amanda saying that she was at Ostend and that it was lovely and that nobody was to worry about her and that she was writing. A few weeks later she did write, briefly, this time from Brussels, she said she was staying with a friend, Madame Vautrin, who was very nice and there were lots of other girls in the house and it was all great fun, and nobody was to worry about her as she was very, very happy.

For ~~five~~ years after that, neither Titania nor Christina heard from her at all until suddenly, just before Christmas 1893, she appeared at Christina's house in Camberwell in a carriage and pair. She was dressed superbly and caused a great sensation in the neighbourhood. Christina received her coldly but finally melted when <sup>Mrs</sup> Amanda offered to pay off all the instalments on the new drawing-room set and gave her a cheque for twenty-five pounds as well. Titania by this time had married Jumbo Potter and Amanda gave a family Christmas dinner party at the Grosvenor Hotel where she was staying, and as a *bonne bouche* at the end of the meal, produced an Indian Prince who gave everybody jewellery. She stayed in London for six weeks and then went to Paris, still with her Prince, and spent a riotous month or two until finally she accompanied him to Marseilles where he took ship for India leaving her sobbing picturesquely on the dock with a cabuchon emerald and a return ticket for Paris. It was while she was on the platform awaiting the Paris train that she met my father, Sir Erasmus ~~name~~-Jones. He was a prosperous-looking man of about fifty, returning on leave from ~~Dennis~~ <sup>India</sup> to visit his wife and family in Exeter. However, he postponed his homecoming for three weeks in order to enjoy Paris with Amanda. Finally they parted, apparently without much heart-break, he



for England, and she for Warsaw, whither she had been invited by a Russian girl she had met in Brussels, Nadia Kolenska. Nadia had been living luxuriously in Warsaw for a year as the guest of a young attaché to the French Embassy. Upon arrival in Warsaw, Amanda was provided with a charming suite of rooms and several admirers, and was enjoying herself greatly when to her profound irritation, she discovered she was going to have a child.

She and Nadia, I believe, did everything they could think of to get rid of it but without success, and so Amanda decided to continue to enjoy life for as long as she could and then return to England. Unfortunately, however, she left it rather late, and on a frozen morning in January, I was born in a railway carriage somewhere between Warsaw and Berlin. The reason for my abrupt arrival several weeks earlier than was expected was the sudden jolting of the train while my mother was on her way back from the lavatory to her compartment. She fell violently over a valise that someone had left in the corridor, and two hours later, much to everyone's embarrassment and discomfort, I was born and laid in the luggage rack wrapped in a plaid travelling rug.

A week later Aunt Christina arrived in Berlin in response to a telegram, just in time to see my mother die in a hospital ward. With her usual prompt effi-



ciency collected all my mother's personal effects, which were considerable, and having ascertained that there were no savings in any bank, took me back to England with her and ensconced me in her own bedroom in her new house, Number 17, Cranberry Avenue, Kennington.

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My life until my Uncle James Rogers' death in 1904 was as eventful for me as it is for most children who are learning to walk and talk and become aware of things. A few incidents remain in my memory. Notably, a meeting with my Aunt Titania when I was about three. She smelt strongly of scent and her hair was bright yellow. She bounced me gaily on her knee until I was sick, after which, she seemed to lose interest in me. I remember also, when I was a little older, my Uncle Jim came into my room late at night. I awoke just in time to see him go over to the mantelpiece and throw two green china vases onto the floor. I cried a lot because I was frightened. Aunt Christina cried too and finally soothed me to sleep again by singing hymns softly and saying prayers.

When I was five I was sent to a kindergarten on weekdays, and a Sunday School on Sunday afternoons. A Miss Brace kept the kindergarten. She wore skirt

blouses with puffed sleeves, and tartan skirts. Her hair was done up over a pad. Twice a week we had drawing lessons and were allowed to use coloured chalks. I didn't care for any of the other children, and disliked the little girls particularly because they used to squabble during playtime, and pull each other's hair, and cry at the least thing.

I enjoyed the Sunday School much more because we used to stand in a circle and sing hymns, and the teacher had a large illustrated Bible which had a picture of God the Father throwing a hen out of Heaven, and another one of Jesus, with his apostles, sitting at a large table and eating rolls. Everybody had beards and white nightgowns, and looked very funny.

When I was nine, Uncle Jim died. All the blinds in the house were pulled down, and we walked about softly as though he were only asleep and we were afraid of waking him. Iris, the servant, who had only been with us for two weeks, trailed up and down the stairs miserably with weebone tears streaking her face. Perhaps she cried as a natural compliment to bereavement, however remote from herself or perhaps she was merely frightened. Even the cat seemed depressed and lay under the sofa for hours at a time in a sort of coma. Aunt Christina took me in to see Uncle Jim lying in bed covered with a sheet up to

his chin. His eyes were closed, and his face was yellow like tallow, his nose looked as though someone had pinched it. Aunt Christina walked firmly up to the bed, and having straightened the end of the sheet, bent down and kissed him on the forehead so suddenly that I'm sure he would have jumped if he had been alive. Then she looked across at me and said that his spirit had gone to heaven. Outside in the street a barrel organ was playing and there were some children yelling a little way off, but these sounds seemed faint and unreal as though I were listening to them from inside a box.

I went to the funeral with Aunt Christina and Aunt Titania in a closed carriage which smelt strongly of horses and leather. On the way Aunt Titania wanted to smoke a cigarette but Aunt Christina was very angry and wouldn't let her. I sat with my back to the horse and watched them arguing about it, sitting side by side joggling slightly as the carriage wheels bumped over the road. Finally Aunt Christina sniffed loudly and shut her mouth in a thin line and refused to say another word, whereupon Aunt Titania leaned a little forward and looked grandly out of the window until we reached the Cemetery. I stood under a tree with her while the actual burial was going on and she gave me some peppermints out of her muff. When we got home again we all had tea and Iris

made some dripping toast, but the atmosphere was strained. After tea, I went down to the kitchen to help Iris with the washing up and we listened to the voices upstairs getting angrier and angrier until finally the front door slammed so loudly that all the crockery shook on the dresser. Presently we heard Aunt Christina playing hymns and I didn't see Aunt Titania again for many years.

Soon after this I went to a day school in Stockwell, it wasn't very far away and I used to go there in a 'bus and walk home. There was an enormous horse chestnut tree just inside the school gate and we used to collect the chestnuts and put them on strings and play conkers. They were rich shiny brown when we first picked them up, like the piano in our front room, but afterwards the shine wore off and they weren't nearly so nice. I hated the headmaster who was stout and had a very hearty laugh. He insisted on everybody playing football and used to keep goal himself, shouting loudly as he jumped about. One of the under masters was freckled and kind and used to pinch my behind in the locker room when I was changing. Much as I disliked school, I disliked coming home in the evenings still more, my heart used to sink as I stood outside the front door and watched Aunt Christina wobbling towards me through the coloured glass. She generally let me in without saying a word

and I used to go straight upstairs to my bedroom and read ~~and do~~ my home-work until supper time, because his left at six and there was nobody to talk to. Aunt Christina always said grace before and after meals, and regularly, when we'd cleared away the supper things and piled them up in the kitchen, she used to play hymns and make me sing them with her. Sundays were particularly awful because I had to go to Church morning and evening, as well as to Sunday School in the afternoons. The Vicar was very skinny and while I listened to his throaty voice screeching out the sermon I used to amuse myself by counting how many times his Adam's Apple bobbed up and down behind his white collar. The woman who always sat next to us had bad feet and the whole pew smelt of her.

I used to ask Aunt Christina about my mother, but all she'd say was that Satan had got her because she was wicked, and whenever I asked about my father she said he was dead and that she had never known him.

At the beginning of 1906 when I was eleven, things became even ~~stranger~~. Aunt Christina bought a whole lot of modelling wax and made a figure of Jesus lying down, then she put red ink on it to look like blood, but it soaked in. It wasn't a very good figure anyhow; the face was horrid and the arms much too long, but she used to kiss it and croon over it. Once she tried to

make me kiss it but I wouldn't, so she turned me out into the yard. I layed all night in the snow and caught cold. After that she wouldn't speak to me for days, I was unhappy and made plans about running away, but I hadn't any money and there was nowhere to run.

One evening in April, I came home from school and she was in bed with a terrible headache; the next morning when I went in to her room, she was gasping and saying she couldn't breathe, so I ran out and fetched a doctor. He said she had pneumonia and that we must have a nurse so we did, and the nurse rattled about the house and licked her tongue against her teeth a good deal and washed everything she could. Three days later Mr. Wendell, the Vicar, came and stayed up in Aunt Christina's room for a time, and a short while after he'd gone the nurse came running downstairs and said I was to fetch the doctor. Just as I was leaving the house to fetch him, I met him at the gate on his way in. He went upstairs quickly and an hour later he and the nurse came down and told me that my aunt had passed away.

He asked me for Aunt Titania's address, so we looked through Aunt Christina's davenport and found it and sent her a telegram. Late that afternoon Uncle Jumbo Potter arrived and interviewed the nurse, and then took me round to the doctor's house, and he talked to him for ages while I sat in the waiting room, and looked at the people who had come to be cured; one little boy

with a bandage round his head was whimpering and his mother tried to comfort him by telling him stories. Presently Uncle Jumbo came out and took me home with him in a cab. He lived in rooms near Victoria Station. He told me that Aunt Titania wasn't living with him any more and that she was in Paris singing at a place called the Café Bardac, and that he was going to send me to her the next day. That night I went with him to Shoreditch where he was doing his turn at the Empire. I sat in his dressing-room and watched him make up and then he took me down on to the stage and let me stand at the side with the stage manager. Uncle Jumbo was a great favourite and the audience cheered and clapped the moment he walked on to the stage. He wore a very small bowler hat and loose trousers and had a large red false nose. His songs were very quick indeed until it came to the chorus, when he slowed down and let the audience join in too. The last thing he did was a dance in which his trousers kept nearly falling off all the time. At the end he had to go before the curtain and make a speech before they'd let him go. He took me upstairs with him and undressed, still very out of breath. He sat down quite naked and smoked a cigarette, and I watched the hair on his chest glistening with sweat as he breathed. He asked me if I liked his turn and I said I loved it and he said, "Damned hard lot down here, can't get a bloody smile out of 'em, pardon me." After he'd taken his make-



up off and powdered his face and dressed we went to a bar just opposite the Theatre and he drank beer with two gentlemen and a woman with a white fur, then we went home first in a tram and then a 'bus. I went to sleep in the 'bus. When we got to his rooms he gave me a glass of soda water and made up a bed for me on the sofa.

The next morning Uncle Jumbo took me back to Aunt Christina's house. The nurse was still there, and Mrs. Harrison from next door, who kissed me a lot and told me to be a brave little man and asked me if I would like to come upstairs and see my dear Auntie, but Uncle Jumbo wouldn't let me, he said he didn't hold with kids looking at corpses because it was morbid. He helped me pack my clothes and then we got a cab and drove back to his rooms. In the afternoon he went out and left me alone and I amused myself by looking at some magazines and a large album of photographs and press cuttings about Aunt Titania and Uncle Jumbo. When he came back he had a friend with him, Mrs. Rice, who he said would take me to the station, as the train went at eight o'clock and he would be in the Theatre. Mrs. Rice was pretty and laughed a lot. We all made toast, and had tea round the fire. Mrs. Rice sat on Uncle's knee for a little and he winked at me playfully over her shoulder and said, "You tell your Aunt Tittie how pretty Mrs. Rice is, won't you?" whereupon she got

up and said, "Leave off, Jumbo, you ought to be ashamed" and looked quite cross for a minute. Uncle Jumbo went off to the Theatre at 5.30; he gave me five pounds and my ticket and said he had telegraphed to Aunt Tittie to meet me at the station. He kissed me quite affectionately and said, "Fancy me being fatherly!" Then he laughed loudly, tickled Mrs. Rice under the arms, and went down the stairs whistling. When he'd gone Mrs. Rice and I went back and sat by the fire. She asked me a lot of questions about Aunt Titania but as I hadn't seen her since Uncle Jim's funeral I couldn't answer them very well. After a while she went to the cupboard and poured herself a whisky and soda, and while she was sipping it she told me all about her husband who used to beat her and one night he tied her to the bed in their rooms in Huddersfield and kept on throwing the wet sponge at her until her nightgown was soaking wet and the landlady came in and stopped him. She said she'd met Uncle Jumbo in Blackpool in the summer and that they used to go out after the show and sit on the sand dunes in the moonlight, and then her husband found out and there was an awful row, and Jumbo knocked her husband down on the pier and brought her to London on the Sunday and she hadn't seen her husband since, but she believed he was still on tour in Miss Mittens and hoped to God he'd stay