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谜中谜职场小说系列

职场英语阅读第一书

远足迷踪

Awayday

Chris Faram 著

张燕译



原版引进
英汉对照

对应剑桥商务英语中、高级

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Chapter 1

Night on a mountain

Skim read the chapter once.

- How many executives are climbing the mountain?
- What are the names of the three friends?
- Where do they work?

Derbyshire, Saturday

“Climbing up the mountain...” sang Beano.

“Shut up, Beano! Stop singing.”

“Following the trail...” continued Beano.

Charlie raised his arm. “Shut up!”

Beano stopped singing. “OK, OK,” he continued.

“You don’t like my singing?”

“No,” replied Charlie.

“I am Italian, you know. All Italians sing!”

“Noooo, really?” mocked Charlie.

Beano raised his eyes to the sky in despair. Unfortunately, there was little sky to be seen, as the clouds had arrived soon after the six senior executives started climbing that afternoon. After several hours on the motorway and four hours of walking, some of them were getting tired as well as impatient and bad-tempered. Three of the group,

Charlie, Driller and Beano, had moved ahead of the others.

"Where are we, Beano? That's what I want to know," demanded Charlie, closing his coat against the wind.

"We're on the southern slopes of Kinder Scout in the Peak District in Derbyshire, and according to my GP system we're about 200 metres from our supplies," replied Beano. "Do you agree, Driller?"

"Would I dare to disagree, Beano?" said Driller with a smile. "Are you ever wrong?"

"We'll see when my sales predictions come in next month."

"I've had enough of this," said Charlie. "We've been walking uphill for hours. It's misty, we can't see a thing and we've no idea where the others are. I'm going to phone Greg."

"No, you're not."

"Just watch me."

"We promised."

"We promised to consult the unions over bonuses," replied Charlie. "And did we?"

"That's different."

"Promises are meant to be broken," said Charlie, pausing to breathe heavily.

"I wonder how the others are getting on?" said Beano, waiting a few metres in front.

Thirty executives had left London very early that morning, been divided into groups of five or six and given instructions to carry out various tasks.

"I can't even see the others in our group," grumbled Charlie.

"They can't be far behind," replied Beano. "And hey, look, the cloud has lifted." The three of them gazed up through the grey mist at the dark blue patches of sky. He signalled cheerily to the three figures some metres behind, pointing up at the sky. Beano's mood seemed to be reflected in his appearance. He was wearing an orange jacket he'd borrowed from the security guard who worked on one of the entry gates at the office. Most of what he wore during the week at work came from odd sources: the local Oxfam shop, a market stall or even another tenant in his block of flats. It all seemed very un-Italian and certainly different in style from his fellow executives.

"Of course I can buy new clothes," he had said one day, when Charlie laughed at the bright red jacket he was wearing. "But I've never seen one like this in the shops."

I wonder why not, thought Charlie.

Now Beano smiled. "There are our things up there by that rock. Race you to the top," he shouted to Charlie and Driller, some steps behind.

"We'll catch you up," shouted Driller, before turning to Charlie.

"Are you OK?" he asked quietly. Charlie made him

nervous. He was tall and thin, in his thirties. Under his coat he wore a light grey fleece top and jeans, the sort of thing he would wear on 'Dress Down Friday' when all the senior members of the company were encouraged to dress casually. Here, on the top of the hills, his clothes were out of place. He looked cold and was almost certainly feeling cold. Charlie never seemed happy at work, although when he was in the mood he could be inspired and brilliant. It was only in the bars and restaurants they frequented after work that he came to life. In the office he was moody and sometimes difficult.

Driller's anxiety in front of Charlie was not helped by the fact that Charlie was older and from a different background. Charlie came from a comfortable upper-class background, had never had to struggle for anything and had 'drifted', as he would say, into management to annoy his father, who never stopped telling everyone he met that his son was useless... a 'waste of space'.

For Driller, getting on in life and work was a constant struggle. His father had died when he was sixteen, and he'd had to turn his back on university in order to help his mother and younger sister. He had continued to read and study on his own at home, but it was only when his sister had left school, started working and could contribute to the family that he was able to go back to college. His sheer determination had attracted the attention of the course

tutor, who reckoned that Driller's reliability and persistence were valuable qualities in an ever-changing business world. He had learned quickly and found solutions when others only seemed to see problems. A placement with the local branch of Barclays bank, suggested by his tutor, had led to a contract as trainee manager. He was there two years before being 'invited' to apply for a position at ICC, one of the bank's clients and one of the largest and most successful chemical companies in the UK.

"Am I OK?" snapped Charlie. "Of course I'm not OK. I don't know why I agreed to come on this ridiculous outing. "

"It's supposed to be fun. "

"Getting up at 5 a. m. , travelling 200 miles in a coach to be dropped in the middle of nowhere and then told to find tents and camping stuff on the top of a mountain... you call that *fun*?"

"You agreed, Charlie," said Driller.

"Did I? I quote: 'International Chemicals is offering you the chance to spend a challenging weekend with your fellow executives in some of the finest scenery in the country' ..."

"All expenses paid!" interrupted Driller.

"Driller, what expenses do you expect we'll have up here, I ask you? I continue: 'Please state reasons for not wishing to profit from this opportunity to see more of our English countryside and bond with your ICC colleagues',

signed Greg Blight, Director, Human Resources. And you can be sure Greg Blight is not struggling over the rocks with a 20-kilo pack on his back. ”

“By the way, Charlie, what on earth *have* you got in your rucksack?” asked Beano, as they joined him at the top. “Six bottles of champagne?”

“I wish I had,” grumbled Charlie.

“Well, whether you did or didn’t agree with Greg Blight,” continued Driller, “we’re here now. ”

And there at last was the open, bleak summit of Kinder Scout, the highest point in the Peak District. All around them they could see oddshaped rocks sticking up from the rough grass and soft earth. The rocks were dark and curiously rounded, as if shaped by the wind that never seemed to stop blowing. They were at 630 metres, a modest hill by European standards, but here the absence of green vegetation and the grey sky all around made it seem as high and as remote as any mountain in the Spanish Pyrenees. As the others came up to join them, they could see Beano looking through a pile of bags on the ground.

“Right... so... where are the tents?” said Beano, after about a minute.

“What do you mean? What’s all that stuff, then?” asked Charlie.

“Two groundsheets,” said Beano, “and three sleeping bags. ”

“What? Where are the tents? ... Do you mean to

say...?" Charlie's voice tailed off in disbelief. The others, Ronnie, James and Robert, climbing up more slowly behind them, stopped in their tracks as they realised what was being said.

"Yes, I'm afraid so," said Beano. "We are tentless on the top of a mountain."

The highly paid, fun-loving executives of the global company International Chemicals fell silent, gazed up at the darkening clouds and thought about their comfortable executive flats in London's Docklands and their shiny executive cars, and sighed.

Chapter 2

Survival of the fittest

Skim read the chapter once.

- What's Greg Blight's job?
- How long has he been working in that job?
- Who is Greg listening to?

The CEO's apartment, Saturday afternoon

"Thanks for dropping in, Greg."

"That's all right, Mr Hammer, I had nothing on."

"Ralf. Please call me Ralf. We're not in the office now," replied Ralf Hammer, chief executive of ICC, raising a quizzical eyebrow as if to say: "You're doing nothing on a Saturday afternoon... that's a bit sad."

"Well, there's football this afternoon," replied Greg, correctly interpreting Ralf's look.

"Playing or watching?" asked Ralf.

"What do you think?"

Ralf had a pretty good idea that Greg would not be kicking a ball around the park that afternoon. He got up and walked to a door behind Greg and opened it. There was a faint rustle, before Ralf reappeared with a Siberian cat in his arms. "He hates to be outside when he knows

I'm here." The cat's grey eyes took in the spacious flat overlooking the Thames and the strange MI6 building on the other side of the river. This was Ralf's home when he wasn't travelling the world for work or visiting his wife in Canada. The state of the thick dark-blue carpets and the cream-coloured walls suggested that not much had been done to the flat since Ralf had moved in some eighteen months ago. It was new then and it still felt new.

"How long have you been in Human Resources, Greg?"

Greg replied, with a smile, "Eight years. Six in Personnel and two in Human Resources — same department, different name!"

"Noticed any changes in the staff over the last few years?" said Ralf, as he pushed a coffee cup across the low table between them. "Sugar?"

"Er... no thanks." *Why the hesitation?* thought Greg. Mustn't show signs of hesitation or uncertainty. Nevertheless, he took a moment to stir his coffee and wonder what was behind the question. It felt like a test. He had attended numerous meetings with the CEO on matters where Human Resources were involved: staff appraisals, departmental shuffles, recruitment policies, union negotiations and those other occasions concerning personnel, but he had rarely been alone with him. He knew very little about Ralf Hammer apart from the few lines in the company brochure:

Ralf Hammer, Manchester and Chicago Business Schools, marketing department British Telecom, head of marketing BP, headhunted by Exxon. Returned to the UK to take over similar responsibilities in ICI before joining ICC a year ago as CEO.

There had been apprehension in the company when he arrived last October, as his reputation was well known in the business press. 'Headhunted to be a head roller' was the word around at that time, although, apart from the sudden disappearance of a sales manager who left rather unexpectedly, there was little so far to suggest that ICC was in for a difficult period.

Greg knew Ralf was married to a Canadian publisher who by all accounts spent most of her time in Toronto. There was a daughter but little was known about her. Greg looked discreetly around as he sipped his coffee. There were no family photos on the desk.

"Changes?" repeated Greg. "The market for our products is getting more and more difficult. We're up against tough competition..."

"That's not your concern, I would've thought," interrupted the CEO, with a frown.

Greg forced himself to continue. "Nobody's moving."

"Moving?"

"Moving out... or even looking. They're all keeping their heads down."

"Is that such a bad thing? We like to keep staff, don't

we?"

"Not if they get lazy and complacent."

"And are they?" asked Ralf, innocently.

"I've seen signs."

"Signs?"

"I monitor the interests of senior staff." Greg permitted himself a small smile. "You understand, information technology can be helpful if 'encouraged'."

Ralf said nothing.

Greg felt obliged to fill the silence. "It's not so difficult, technically, to check on outside communications."

"I see. Just how senior is 'senior staff'?"

"Just below CEO level."

"That's a comfort," said Ralf with a cold smile.

"And this tougher, competitive environment, does that bother you?" he asked, staring at Greg.

Greg knew he was being judged. As director of HR he had a lot of power, the power to hire and fire, but he also knew he too could be fired and escorted off the premises at very short notice.

"The tougher the better. People show their character in testing circumstances. The survival of the fittest and all that. And that's my job..."

"To catch them when they fall?"

"Oh no, to create the conditions to bring out the best in our staff."

Ralf Hammer sat back in his armchair, playing with

his mobile phone, letting his eyes wander over the American pop-art prints sharing wall space with the 50-inch Panasonic plasma TV.

“There are difficult times in front of us,” he said, switching his gaze sharply on to his HR director.

Greg said nothing.

“You know?” prompted Ralf.

“It’s not hard to know.”

“Really?” asked Ralf innocently. He was pretty sure that no one except himself could know the difficulties facing ICC. “Is it common knowledge?”

“No. No, it’s not.”

“Then?”

Greg took a deep breath. “I may be wrong. There are signs. Look at yourself. You haven’t put the phone down since I got here. You’re tense, you’re restless and...”

“And?”

“And the share prices have slipped.”

There was a long silence. Somewhere in the distance Greg could hear a siren. Ralf Hammer looked at him, nodding slowly, a small smile forming on his mouth but not in his eyes. “I’m holding the phone because I’ve stopped smoking, but you’re right, I am tense. I am worried. Tell me about your guys. How motivated are they? And by the way, aren’t they away somewhere?”

“They’re in the Peak District... Derbyshire.”

“Yes, I know where the Peak District is. What are