

常用英语经典2

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

常用英语经典/佚名主编.——珠海 珠海出版社 2004.7
(英语经典)

ISBN 7 - 80607 - 826 - 6

I . 常... II . 佚... III . 英语—语言读物 小说 IV . P319.4:1

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2004)第 030019 号

常用英语经典

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出版发行 珠海出版社
社 址 珠海市银桦路 566 号报业大厦三层
电 话 2639330
邮政编码 519001

印刷装订 郑州毛庄印刷厂
开 本 850 × 1168mm 1/32
印 张 90
字 数 1800 千字
版 次 2004 年 7 月第 1 版
印 数 1000 册
书 号 ISBN7 - 80607 - 826 - 6/G · 237
定 价 140.00 元(全套)
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The Little Match Girl

It was terribly cold; it snowed and was already almost dark, and evening came on the last evening of the year. In the cold and gloom a poor little girl, bareheaded and barefoot, was walking through the streets. When she left her own house she certainly had had slippers on; but of what use were they? They were very big slippers, and her mother had used them till then, so big were they. The little maid lost them as she slipped across the road, where two carriages were rattling by terribly fast. One slipper was not to be found again, and a boy had seized the other and run away with it. He said he could use it very well as a cradle, some day when he had children of his own. So now the little girl went with her little naked feet, which were quite red and blue with the cold. In an old apron she carried a number of matches, and a bundle of them in her hand. No one had bought anything of her all day, and no one had given her a farthing.

Shivering with cold and hunger she crept along, a picture of misery, poor little girl! The snowflakes covered her long fair hair, which fell in pretty curls over her neck, but she did not think of that now. In all the windows lights were shining, and there was a glorious smell of roast goose, for it was New Year's Eve. Yes, she thought of that!

In a corner formed by two houses, one of which projected beyond the other, she sat down, cowering. She had drawn up her little feet, but she was still colder, and she did not dare to go home, for she had sold no matches, and did not bring a farthing of money. From her father she would certainly receive a beating, and besides, it was cold at home, for they had nothing over them but a roof through which the wind whistled, though the largest tents had been stopped with straw and reeds.

Her little hands were almost benumbed, with the cold. Ah! a match might do her good, if she could only draw one from the bundle and rub it against the wall, and warm her hands at it. She drew one out. R-r-atch! How it sputtered and burned! It was a warm, bright flame, like a little candle, when she held her hands over it; it was a wonderful little light! It really seemed to the little girl as if she sat before a great polished stove, with bright brass feet and a brass cover. How the fire

burned !how comfortable it was !But the little flame went out ,the stove vanished when her feet were just reaching out for a little warmth ,and she had only the remains of the burned match in her hand.

A second was rebbed against the wall. It burned up ,and when the light fell upon the wall it became transparent like a thin veil ,and she could see through it into the room.On the table a snowwhite cloth was spread ,upon it stood a shining dinner service ;the roast goose smoked gloriously ,stuffed with apples and dried plums. And what was still more splendid to behold ,the goose hopped down from the dish ,and waddled along the floor with a knife and fork in its breast ,to the little girl. Then the match went out ,and only the thick ,damp ,cold wall was before her. She lighted another match. Then she was sitting under a beautiful Christmas tree ;it was greater and more ornamented than the one she had seen through the glass door last Christmas at the rich merchant 's. Thousands of candles burned upon the green branches ,and coloured pictures like those in the print shops looked down upon them. The little girl stretched forth her hand towards them ;then the match went out. The Christmas lights mounted higher. She saw them now as stars in the sky .one of them fell down ,forming a long line of fire.

" Now some one is dying , "thought the little girl ,for her old grandmother ,the only person who had loved her and who was now dead ,had told her that when a star fell down a soul mounted up to God.

She rubbed another match against the wall ;it became bright again and in the brightness the old grandmother stood clear and shining mild and lovely.

" Grandmother !" cried the child. " Oh ! take me with you ! I know you will go when the match is burned out. You will vanish like the warm fire ,the beautiful roast goose ,and the great glorious Christmas tree !"

And she hastily rubbed the whole bundle of matches ,for she wished to hold her grandmother fast. And the matches burned with such a glow that it became brighter than in the middle of the day ;grandmother had never been so large or so beautiful. She took the little girl in her arms ,and both flew in brightness and joy above the earth ,very ,very high ,and up there was neither cold ,nor hunger ,nor care—they were with God !

But in the corner ,leaning against the wall ,sat in the cold morning hours the poor girl with red cheeks and smiling mouth ,frozen to death

on the last evening of the Old Year. The New Year's sun rose upon a little corpse! The child sat there, stiff and cold, with the matches of which one bundle was burned. "She wanted to warm herself," the people said. No one imagined what a beautiful thing she had seen, and in what glory she had gone in with her grandmother to the New Year's joy.



The Ugly Duckling

It was glorious out in the country. It was summer ,and the corn-fields were yellow ,and the oats were green ;the hay had been put up in stacks in the green meadows ,and the stork went about on his long red legs ,and chattered Egyptian ,for this language he had learned from his mother. All around the fields and meadows were great forests ,and in the midst of these forests lay deep lakes. Yes ,it was really glorious out in the country. In the midst of the sunshine there lay an old manor ,surrounded by deep canals ,and from the wall down to the water grew great burdocks ,so high that little children could stand upright under the loftiest of them. It was just as wild there as in the deepest wood. Here sat a Duck upon her nest ,for she had to hatch her young ones ,but she was almost tired out before the little ones came ,and then she so seldom had visitors. The other ducks liked better to swim about in the canals than to run up to sit down under a burdock ,and gossip with her.

At last one egg - shell after another burst open. " Piep ! piep !" it cried ,and in all the eggs there were little creatures that stuck out their heads.

" Rap ! rap !" she said ,and they all came rapping out as fast as they could ,looking all round them under the green leaves ,and the mother let them look as much as they chose ,for green is good for the eyes.

" How wide the world is !" said the young ones ,for they certainly had much more room now than when they were in the eggs.

" Do you think this is all the world ?" asked the mother. " That extends far across the other side of the garden ,quite into the parson 's field ,but I have never been there yet. I hope you are all together ," she continued ,and stood up. " No ,I have not all. The largest egg still lies there ,How long is that to last ? I am really tired of it. " And she sat down again.

" Well ,how goes it ?" asked an old Duck who had come to pay her a visit.

" It lasts a long time with that one egg ," said the Duck who sat there. " It will not burst. Now ,only look at the others ,are they not the prettiest ducklings one could possibly see ? They are all like their

father :the bad fellow never comes to see me. "

" Let me see the egg which will not burst , "said the old visitor. " Believe me ,it is a turkey 's egg.I was once cheated in that way ,and had much anxiety and trouble ,with the young ones ,for they are afraid of the water.I could not get them to venture in.I quacked and clucked ,but it was no use.Let me see the egg ,Yes ,that 's a turkey 's egg !Let it lie there ,and teach the other children to swim. "

" I think I will sit on it a little longer , " said the Duck. " I 've sat so long now that I can sit a few days more. "

" Just as you please , " said the old Duck ,and she went away.

At last the great egg burst. Piep ! Piep ! said the little one ,and crept forth.It was very large and very ugly.The Duck looked at it.

" It 's a very large duckling , " said she ; " none of the others look like that :can it really be a trukey chick ? Now we shall soon find it out.It must go into the water ,even if I have to kick it in myself. "

The next day the weather was splendidly bright ,and the sun shone on all the green burdocks.The Mother - Duck went down to the water with all her little ones.Splash ,she jumped into the water. " Quack ! Quack ! " she said ,and one duckling after another plunged in.The water closed over their heads ,but they came up in an instant ,and swam capitally ; their legs went of themselves ,and there they were all in the water.The ugly grey Duckling swam with them.

" No it 's not a turkey. " said she ; look how well it can use its legs , and how upright it holds itself.It is my own child ! On the whole it 's quite pretty ,if one looks at it rightly.Quack ! Quack ! Come with me ,and I 'll lead you out into the great world ,and present you in the poultry - yard ,but keep close to me ,so that no one may tread on you ,and take care of the cat ! "

And so they came into the poultry - yard.There was a terrible riot going on there ,for two families were quarrelling about an eel 's head , and the cat got it after all.

" See ,that 's how it goes in the world ! " said the Mother - Duck ;and she whetted her geak ,for she ,too ,wanted the eel 's head. " Only use your legs , " she said. " See that you can bustle about ,and bow your heads before the old Duck yonder.She 's the grandest of all here ,she 's of Spanish blood—that 's why she 's so fat ;and do you see ,she has a red rag round her leg ;that 's something particularly fine ,and the greatest distinction a duck can enjoy :it signifies that one does not want to

lose her and that she 's to be recognized by man and beast. Shake yourselves—don't turn in your toes ;a well - brought - up duck turns its toes quite out ,just like fater and mother ,so ! Now bend your necks and say ' Rap !' "

And they did so ,but the other ducks round about looked at them ,and said quite boldly.

" Look there ! now we 're to have these hanging on as if there were not enough of us already ! And—Fie ! —How that Duckling yonder looks ;we won't stand him !" And one duck flew up immediately ,and bit it in the neck.

" Let it alone , " saie the mother , " it does no harm to any one. "

" Yes ,but it 's too large and peculiar , " said the Duck who had bitten it , and therefore it must be buffeted. "

" Those are pretty children that the mother has there , " said the old Duck with the rag round her leg. " They 're all pretty but that one ;that was a failure. I wish she could alter it. "

" That cannot be done , my lady , " replied the Mother - Duck , " it is not pretty ,but it has a really good disposition ,and swims as well as any other ;I may even say it swims better. I think it will grow up pretty ,and become smaller in time ;it has lain too long in the egg ,and therefore is not properly shaped. " And then she pinched it in the neck ,and smoothed its feathers. " Moreover ,it is a drake , " she said , " and therefore it is not of so much consequence. I think he will be very strong ,he will make his way all right. "

" The othr ducklings are graceful enough , " said the old Duck. " make yourself at home ,and if you find an eel 's head ,you may bring it to me. "

And now they were at home. But the poor Duckling which had crept last out of the egg ,and looked so ugly ,was bitten and pushed and jeered at as much by the ducks as by the chickens.

" It is too big ! " they all said. And the turkey - cock ,who had been born with spurs ,and therefore thought himself an emperor ,blew himself up like a ship in full sail ,and bore straight down upon it ;then he gobbled ,and grew quite red in the face. The poor Duckling did not know where it should stand or walk ;it was quite melancholy because it looked ugly ,and was scoffed at by the whole yard.

So it went on the first day ,and afterwards it became worse and worse. The poor Duckling was hunted about by every one ,even its brothers and sisters were quite angry with it ,and said , " If the cat would on-

ly catch you you ugly creature!" And the mother said "If you were only far away!" And the ducks bit it, and the chickens beat it, and the girl who had to feed the poultry kicked at it with her foot.

Then it ran and flew over the fence, and the little birds in the bushes flew up in fear.

"That is because I am so ugly!" thought the Duckling; and it shut its eyes, but flew on farther; thus it came out into the great moor, where the wild ducks lived. Here it lay the whole night long, and it was weary and downcast.

Towards morning the wild ducks flew up, and looked at their new companion.

"What sort of a one are you?" they asked, and the Duckling turned in every direction and bowed as well as it could.

"You are remarkably ugly!" said the Wild Ducks. "But that is very indifferent to us, so long as you do not marry into our family." Poor thing! it certainly did not think of marrying, and only hoped to obtain leave to lie among the reeds and drink some of the swamp water.

Thus it lay two whole days; then came thither two wild geese, or, properly speaking, two wild ganders. It was not long since each had crept out of an egg, and that's why they were so saucy.

"Listen, comrade," said one of them. "You're so ugly that I like you. Will you go with us, and become a bird of passage? Near here, in another moor, there are a few sweet lovely wild geese, all unmarried, and all able to say 'Pap!' You've a chance of making your fortune, ugly as you are!"

"Piff! paff!" resounded through the air; and the two ganders fell down dead in the swamp, and the water became blood-red. "Piff! paff!" it sounded again, and whole flocks of wild geese rose up from the reeds. And then there was another report. A great hunt was going on. The hunters were lying in wait all round the moor, and some were every sitting up in the branches of the trees, which spread far over the reeds. The blue smoke rose up like clouds among the dark trees, and was wafted far away across the water; and the hunting dogs came—splash, splash!—into the swamp, and the rushes and the reeds bent down on every side. That was a fright for the poor Duckling! It turned its head, and put it under its wing, but at that moment a frightful great dog stood close by the Duckling. His tongue hung far out of his mouth and his eyes gleamed horrible and ugly; he thrust out his nose close against the Duckling,

showed his sharp teeth ,and—splash , splash ! —on the went ,without seizing it.

"Oh ,Heaven be thanked !" sighed the Duckling . " I am so ugly ,that even the dog does not like to bite me ! "

And so it lay quite quiet ,while the shots rattled through the reeds and gun after gun was fired .

At last ,late in the day ,silence was restored ,but the poor Duckling did not dare to rise up ;it waited several hours before it looked round , and then hastened away out of the marsh as fast as it could .It ran on over field and meadow ;there was such a storm raging that it was difficult to get from one place to another .

Towards evening the Duck came to a little miserable peasant 's hut . This hut was so dilapidated that it did not know on which side it should fall ,and that 's why it remained standing .The storm whistled round the Duckling in such a way that the poor creature was obliged to sit down , to resist it ,and the tempest grew worse and worse .Then the Duckling noticed that one of the hinges of the door had given way ,and the door hung so slanting that the Duckling could slip through the opening into the room ,and it did so .

Here lived an ole woman ,with her Tom Cat and her Hen .And the Tom Cat ,whom she called Sonnie ,could arch his back and purr ,he could even give out sparks ,but for that one had to stroke his fur the wrong way . The Hen had quite little short legs ,and therefore she was called Chick-abiddy - shortshanks ;she laid good eggs ,and the woman loved her as her own child .

In the morning the strange Duckling was at once noticed ,and the Tom Cat began to purr ,and the Hen to cluck .

"What 's this ?" said the woman ,and looked all round ,but she could not see well ,and therefore she thought the Duckling was a fat duck that had strayed . " This is a rare prize ! " she said . " Now I shall have duck 's eggs . I hope it is not a drage . We must try that . "

And so the Duckling was admitted on trial for three weeks ;but no eggs came .And the Tom Cat was master of the house ,and the Hen was the lady ,and always said " We and the world ! " for they thought they were half the world ,and by far the better half . The Duckling thought one might have a different opinion ,but the Hen—would not allow it .

" Can you lay eggs ? " she asked .

" No . "

"Then you'll have the goodness to hold your tongue."

And the Tom Cat said, "Can you curve your back and purr and give out sparks?"

"No."

"Then you cannot have any opinion of your own when sensible people are speaking."

And the Duckling sat in a corner and was melancholy; then the fresh air and the sunshine streamed in, and it was seized with such a strange longing to swim on the water, that it could not help telling the Hen of it.

"What are you thinking of?" cried the Hen. "You have nothing to do, that's why you have these fancies. Purr or lay eggs, and they will pass over."

"But it is so charming to swim on the water!" said the Duckling, "so refreshing to let it close above one's head, and to dive down to the bottom."

"Yes, that must be a mighty pleasure truly," quoth the Hen. "I fancy you must have gone crazy. Ask the Cat about it,—he's the cleverest animal I know,—ask him if he likes to swim on the water, or to dive down. I won't speak about myself. Ask our mistress, the old woman; no one in the world is cleverer than she. Do you think she has any desire to swim, and to let the water close above her head?"

"You don't understand me," said the Duckling.

"We don't understand you? Then pray who is to understand you? You surely don't pretend to be cleverer than the Tom Cat and the woman—I won't say anything of myself. Don't be conceited, child, and be grateful for all the kindness you have received. Did you not get into a warm room, and have you not fallen into company from which you may learn something? But you are a chatterer, and it is not pleasant to associate with you. You may believe me, I speak for your good. I tell you disagreeable things, and by that one may always know one's true friends! Only take care that you learn to lay eggs, or to purr and give out sparks!"

"I think I will go out into the wide world," said the Duckling.

"Yes, do go," replied the Hen.

And the Duckling went away. It swam on the water, and dived, but it was slighted by every creature because of its ugliness.

Now came the autumn. The leaves in the forest turned yellow and brown; the wind caught them so that they danced about, and up in the air

it was very cold. The clouds hung low, heavy with hail and snow - flakes, and on the fence stood the raven, crying, "Croak! Croak!" for mere cold; yes, it was enough to make one feel cold to think of this. The poor little Duckling certainly had not a good time.

One evening—the sun was just setting in his beauty—there came a whole flock of great handsome birds out of the bushes; the duckling had never before seen anything so beautiful; they were dazzlingly white, with long flexible necks; they were swans. They uttered a very peculiar cry, spread forth their glorious great wings, and flew away from that cold region to warmer lands, to open lakes.

They mounted so high, so high! and the ugly little Duckling felt quite strangely as it watched them. It turned round and round in the water like a wheel, stretched out its neck towards them, and muttered such a strange loud cry as frightened itself. Oh! it could not forget those beautiful, happy birds; and so soon as it could see them no longer, it dived down to the very bottom, and when it came up again it was quite beside itself. It knew not the name of those birds, and knew not whither they were flying; but it loved them more than it had ever loved any one. It was not at all envious of them. How could it think of wishing to possess such loveliness as they had? It would have been glad if only the ducks would have endured its company, the poor ugly creature!

And the winter grew cold, very cold! The Duckling was forced to swim about in the water, to prevent the surface from freezing entirely; but every night the hole in which it swam about became smaller and smaller. It froze so hard that the ice covering crackled again; and the Duckling was obliged to use its legs continually to prevent the hole from freezing up. At last it became exhausted, and lay quite still, and thus froze fast into the ice.

Early in the morning a peasant came by, and when he saw what had happened, he took his wooden shoe, broke the ice - crust to pieces, and carried the Duckling home to his wife. Then it came to itself again. The children wanted to play with it; but the Duckling thought they would do it an injury, and in its terror fluttered up into the milk - pan, so that the milk spurted down into the room. The woman screamed and clapped her hands, at which the Duckling flew down into the butter - tub, and then into the meal - barrel and out again. How it looked then! The woman screamed, and struck at it with the fire-tongs; the children tumbled over one another, in their efforts to catch the Duckling; and they

laughed and screamed finely ! Happily the door stood open ,and the poor creature was able to slip out between the shrubs into the newly - fallen snow ,and there it lay quite exhausted.

But it would be too melancholy if I were to tell all the misery and care which the Duckling had to endure in the hard winter. It lay out on the swamp among the reeds ,when the sun began to shine again and the larks to sing :it was a beautiful spring. Then all at once the Duckling raised its wings :they beat the air more strongly than before ,and bore it strongly away ;and before it well knew how all this happened ,it found itself in a great garden ,where the apple trees stood in blossom. where the lilac flowers smelt sweet ,and hung their long green branches down to the winding canals. Oh ,here it was so beautiful ,such a gladness of spring ! And from the thicket came three glorious white swans :they rustled their wings ,and swam lightly on the water. The Duckling knew the splendid creatures ,and felt oppressed by a peculiar sadness.

" I will fly away to them ,to the royal birds ! and they will kill me ,because I ,that am so ugly ,dare to approach them. But it is of no consequence ! Better to be killed by them than to be pursued by ducks ,and beaten by fowls ,and pushed about by the girl who takes care of the poultry - yard ,and to suffer hunger in winter !" And it flew out into the water ,and swam towards the beautiful swans ;these looked at it ,and came sailing down upon it with outspread wings. " Kill me !" said the poor creature ,and bent its head down upon the water ,expecting nothing but death. But what was this that it saw in the clear water ? It beheld its own image ;and ,lo ! it was no longer a clumsy dark grey bird ,ugly and hateful to look at ,but—a swan !

It matters nothing if one is born in a duck - yard ,if one has only lain in a swan's egg.

It felt quite glad at all the need and misfortune it had suffered ,now it realized its happiness and all the splendour that surrounded it.

And the great swans swam round it ,and stroked it with their beaks , Into the garden came little children ,who threw bread and corn into the water ,and the youngest cried , " There is new one !" and the other children shouted joyously , " Yes ,a new one has arrived !" And they clapped their hands and danced about ,and ran to their father and mother ;and bread and cake were thrown into the water ,and they all said , " The new one is the most beautiful of all ! so young and handsome !" and the old

swans bowed their heads before him.

Then he felt quite ashamed ,and hid his head under his wings ,for he did not know what to do ;he was so happy ,and yet not at all proud.He thought how he had been persecuted and despised ;and now he heard them saying that he was the most beautiful of all birds.Even the elder - tree bent its branches straight down into the water before him ,and the sun shone warm and mild.Then his wings rustled ,he lifted his slender neck ,and cried rejoicingly from the depths of his heart.

"I never dreamed of so much happiness when I was still the ugly Duckling !"



The Little Sea Maid

Far out in the sea the water is as blue as the petals of the most beautiful corn-flower and as clear as the purest glass. But it is very deep, deeper than any cable will sound; many steeples must be placed one above the other to reach from the bottom to the surface of the water. And down there live the sea people.

Now you must not believe there is nothing down there but the bare sand; no, — the strangest trees and plants grow there, so pliable in their stalks and leaves that at the least motion of the water they move just as if they had life. All fishes, great and small, glide among the twigs, just as here the birds do in the trees. In the deepest spot of all lies the Sea King's castle: the walls are of coral, and the tall pointed windows of the clearest amber; mussel shells form the roof, and they open and shut according as the water flows. It looks lovely, for in each shell lie gleaming pearls, a single one of which would be a great ornament in a queen's diadem.

The Sea King below there had been a widower for many years, while his old mother kept house for him. She was a clever woman, but proud of her rank, so she wore twelve oysters on her tail, while the other great people were only allowed to wear six. Beyond this she was deserving of great praise, especially because she was very fond of her granddaughters, the little sea princesses. These were six pretty children, but the youngest was the most beautiful of all. Her skin was as clear and as fine as a rose leaf, her eyes were as blue as the deepest sea, but, like all the rest, she had no feet, for her body ended in a fish-tail.

All day long they could play in the castle, down in the halls, where living flowers grew out of the walls. The great amber windows were opened, and then the fishes swam in to them, just as the swallows fly in to us when we open our windows, but the fishes swam straight up to the princesses, ate out of their hands, and let themselves be stroked.

Outside the castle was a great garden with bright red and dark blue flowers: the fruit glowed like gold, and the flowers like flames of fire; and they continually kept moving their stalks and leaves. The earth itself was the finest sand, but blue as the flame of brimstone. A

peculiar blue radiance lay upon everything down there :one would have thought oneself high in the air ,with the canopy of heaven above and around ,rather than at the bottom of the deep sea.During a calm the sun could be seen ;it appeared like a purple flower ,from which all light streamed out.

Each of the little princesses had her own little place in the garden ,where she might dig and plant at her good pleasure.One gave her flower - bed the form of a whale ;another thought it better to make hers like a little mermaid ;but the youngest made hers quite round ,like the sun ,and had only flowers which gleamed red as the sun itself.She was a strange child ,quiet and thoughtful ;and when the other sisters made a display of the beautiful things they had received out of wrecked ships ,she would have nothing beyond the red flowers which resembled the sun ,except a pretty marble statue.This was a figure of a charming boy ,hewn out of white clear stone ,which had sunk down to the bottom of the sea from a wreck.She planted a pink weeping willow beside this statue ;the tree grew famously ,and hung its fresh branches over the statue towards the blue sandy ground ,where the shadow showed violet , and moved like the branches themselves ;it seemed as if the ends of the branches and the roots were playing together and wished to kiss each other.

There was no greater pleasure for her than to hear of the world of men above them.The old grandmother had to tell all she knew of ships and towns ,of men and animals.It seemed particularly beautiful to her that up on the earth the flowers shed fragrance ,for they had none down at the bottom of the sea ,and that the trees were green ,and that the fishes which one saw there among the trees could sing so loud and clear that it was a pleasure to hear them.What the grandmother called fishes were the little birds ;otherwise they could not have understood her , for they had never seen a bird.

"When you have completed your fifteenth year ,"said the grandmother ;"You shall have leave to rise up out of the sea ,to sit on the rocks in the moonlight ,and to see the great ships sailing by.Then you will see forests and towns !"

In the next year one of the sisters was fifteen years of age ,but each of the others was one year younger than the next ;so that the youngest had full five years to wait before she could come up from the bottom of the sea ,and find out how our world looked.But one promised to