

—20 BEST SHORT NOVELS

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ИНОСТРАННЫЙ ЯЗЫК: УЧИМСЯ У КЛАССИКОВ

20 лучших повестей на английском

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«Иностранный язык: учимся у классиков» – это только оригинальные тексты лучших произведений мировой литературы. Эти книги станут эффективным и увлекательным пособием для изучающих иностранный язык на хорошем «продолжающем» и «продвинутом» уровне. Они помогут эффективно расширить словарный запас, подскажут, где и как правильно употреблять устойчивые выражения и грамматические конструкции, просто подарят радость от чтения. В конце книги дана краткая информация о культуроведческих, страноведческих, исторических и географических реалиях описываемого периода, которая поможет лучше ориентироваться в тексте произведения.

Серия «Иностранный язык: учимся у классиков» адресована широкому кругу читателей, хорошо владеющих английским языком и стремящихся к его совершенствованию.

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20 Best Short Novels



Edward Bulwer Lytton

The Haunted and the Haunters;
or, The House and the Brain.....7

Wilkie Collins

Dream Woman.....33

Arthur Conan Doyle

A Study in Scarlet.....85

Joseph Conrad

Heart of Darkness.....189

Charles Dickens

A Christmas Carol.....271

Francis Scott Fitzgerald

The Diamond
as Big as the Ritz.....341

John Galsworthy

Indian Summer
of a Forsyte.....381

Washington Irving

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.....425

Jerome K. Jerome

Told after Supper.....453

James Joyce

The Dead.....481

David Herbert Lawrence

England, My England.....521

Jack London

The Call of the Wild553

Howard Phillips Lovecraft

Herbert West —

Reanimator.....625

George MacDonald

The Light Princess.....655

Herman Melville

Bartleby the Scrivener.....695

Thomas Love Peacock

Nightmare Abbey.....731

Edgar Allan Poe

The Mystery
of Marie Rogêt807

Robert Louis Stevenson

The Strange Case
of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde853

William Makepeace Thackeray

Rebecca and Rowena911

Oscar Wilde

The Canterville Ghost.....969

NOTES.....997

Edward Bulwer Lytton



The Haunted
and the Haunters;
or, The House and the Brain



* * *

A friend of mine, who is a man of letters and a philosopher, said to me one day, as if between jest and earnest, ‘Fancy! since we last met I have discovered a haunted house in the midst of London.’

‘Really haunted, — and by what? — ghosts?’

‘Well, I can’t answer that question; all I know is this: six weeks ago my wife and I were in search of a furnished apartment. Passing a quiet street, we saw on the window of one of the houses a bill, “Apartments, Furnished.” The situation suited us; we entered the house, liked the rooms, engaged them by the week, — and left them the third day. No power on earth could have reconciled my wife to stay longer; and I don’t wonder at it.’

‘What did you see?’

‘Excuse me; I have no desire to be ridiculed as a superstitious dreamer, — nor, on the other hand, could I ask you to accept on my affirmation what you would hold to be incredible without the evidence of your own senses. Let me only say this, it was not so much what we saw or heard (in which you might fairly suppose that we were the dupes of our own excited fancy, or the victims of imposture in others) that drove us away, as it was an indefinable terror which seized both of us whenever we passed by the door of a certain unfurnished room, in which we neither saw nor heard anything. And the strangest marvel of all was, that for once in my life I agreed with my wife, silly woman though she be, — and allowed, after the third night, that it was impossible to stay a fourth in that house. Accordingly, on the fourth morning I summoned the woman who kept the house and attended on us, and told her that the rooms did not quite suit us, and we would not stay out our week. She said dryly, “I know why; you have stayed longer than any other lodger. Few ever stayed a second night; none before you a third. But I take it they have been very kind to you.”’

“They, — who?” I asked, affecting to smile.

“Why, they who haunt the house, whoever they are. I don’t mind them. I remember them many years ago, when I lived in this house, not as a servant; but I know they will be the death of me some day. I don’t care, — I’m old, and must die soon anyhow; and then I shall be with them, and in this house still.’ The woman spoke with so dreary a calmness that really it was a sort of awe that prevented my conversing with her further. I paid for my week, and too happy were my wife and I to get off so cheaply.”

‘You excite my curiosity,’ said I; ‘nothing I should like better than to sleep in a haunted house. Pray give me the address of the one which you left so ignominiously.’

My friend gave me the address; and when we parted, I walked straight towards the house thus indicated.

It is situated on the north side of Oxford Street, in a dull but respectable thoroughfare. I found the house shut up, — no bill at the window, and no response to my knock. As I was turning away, a beer-boy, collecting pewter pots at the neighboring areas, said to me, ‘Do you want any one at that house, sir?’

‘Yes, I heard it was to be let.’

‘Let! — why, the woman who kept it is dead, — has been dead these three weeks, and no one can be found to stay there, though Mr. J— offered ever so much. He offered mother, who chars for him, £1 a week just to open and shut the windows, and she would not.’

‘Would not! — and why?’

‘The house is haunted; and the old woman who kept it was found dead in her bed, with her eyes wide open. They say the devil strangled her.’

‘Pooh! You speak of Mr. J—. Is he the owner of the house?’

‘Yes.’

‘Where does he live?’

‘In G— Street, No.—.’

‘What is he? In any business?’

‘No, sir, — nothing particular; a single gentleman.’

I gave the pot-boy the gratuity earned by his liberal information, and proceeded to Mr. J—, in G— Street, which was close by the street that boasted the haunted house. I was lucky enough to find Mr. J— at home, — an elderly man with intelligent countenance and prepossessing manners.

I communicated my name and my business frankly. I said I heard the house was considered to be haunted, — that I had a strong desire to examine a house with so equivocal a reputation; that I should be greatly obliged if he would allow me to hire it, though only for a night. I was willing to pay for that privilege whatever he might be inclined to ask. ‘Sir,’ said Mr. J—, with great courtesy, ‘the house is at your service, for as short or as long a time as you please. Rent is out of the question, — the obligation will be on my side should you be able to discover the cause of the strange phenomena which at present deprive it of all value. I cannot let it, for I cannot even get a servant to keep it in order or answer the door. Unluckily the house is haunted, if I may use that expression, not only by night, but by day; though at night the disturbances are of a more unpleasant and sometimes of a more alarming character. The poor old woman who died in it three weeks ago was a pauper whom I took out of a workhouse; for in her childhood she had been known to some of my family, and had once been in such good circumstances that she had rented that house of my uncle. She was a woman of superior education and strong mind, and was the only person I could ever induce to remain in the house. Indeed, since her death, which was sudden, and the coroner’s inquest, which gave it a notoriety in the neighborhood, I have so despaired of finding any person to take charge of the house, much more a tenant, that I would willingly let it rent free for a year to any one who would pay its rates and taxes.’

‘How long is it since the house acquired this sinister character?’

‘That I can scarcely tell you, but very many years since. The old woman I spoke of, said it was haunted when she rented it between thirty and forty years ago. The fact is, that my life has been spent in the East Indies, and in the civil service of the Company. I returned to England last year, on inheriting the fortune of an uncle, among whose possessions was the house in question. I found it shut up and uninhabited. I was told that it was haunted, that no one would inhabit it. I smiled at what seemed to me so idle a story. I spent some money in repairing it, added to its old-fashioned furniture a few modern articles, — advertised it, and obtained a lodger for a year. He was a colonel on half-pay. He came in with his family, a son and a daughter, and four or five servants: they all left the house the next day; and, although each of them declared that he had seen something different from that which had scared the others, a something still was equally terrible to all. I really could not in conscience sue, nor even blame, the colonel for breach of agreement.

Then I put in the old woman I have spoken of, and she was empowered to let the house in apartments. I never had one lodger who stayed more than three days. I do not tell you their stories, — to no two lodgers have there been exactly the same phenomena repeated. It is better that you should judge for yourself, than enter the house with an imagination influenced by previous narratives; only be prepared to see and to hear something or other, and take whatever precautions you yourself please.'

'Have you never had a curiosity yourself to pass a night in that house?' 'Yes. I passed not a night, but three hours in broad daylight alone in that house. My curiosity is not satisfied, but it is quenched. I have no desire to renew the experiment. You cannot complain, you see, sir, that I am not sufficiently candid; and unless your interest be exceedingly eager and your nerves unusually strong, I honestly add, that I advise you *not* to pass a night in that house.'

'My interest *is* exceedingly keen,' said I; 'and though only a coward will boast of his nerves in situations wholly unfamiliar to him, yet my nerves have been seasoned in such variety of danger that I have the right to rely on them, — even in a haunted house.'

Mr. J— said very little more; he took the keys of the house out of his bureau, gave them to me, — and, thanking him cordially for his frankness, and his urbane concession to my wish, I carried off my prize.

Impatient for the experiment, as soon as I reached home, I summoned my confidential servant, — a young man of gay spirits, fearless temper, and as free from superstitious prejudice as any one I could think of.

'F—,' said I, 'you remember in Germany how disappointed we were at not finding a ghost in that old castle, which was said to be haunted by a headless apparition? Well, I have heard of a house in London which, I have reason to hope, is decidedly haunted. I mean to sleep there to-night. From what I hear, there is no doubt that something will allow itself to be seen or to be heard, — something, perhaps, excessively horrible. Do you think if I take you with me, I may rely on your presence of mind, whatever may happen?'

'Oh, sir, pray trust me,' answered F—, grinning with delight.

'Very well; then here are the keys of the house, — this is the address. Go now, — select for me any bedroom you please; and since the house has not been inhabited for weeks, make up a good fire, air the bed well, — see, of course, that there are candles as well as fuel. Take with you my revolver and my dagger, — so much for my weapons; arm

yourself equally well; and if we are not a match for a dozen ghosts, we shall be but a sorry couple of Englishmen.'

I was engaged for the rest of the day on business so urgent that I had not leisure to think much on the nocturnal adventure to which I had plighted my honor. I dined alone, and very late, and while dining, read, as is my habit. I selected one of the volumes of Macaulay's Essays. I thought to myself that I would take the book with me; there was so much of healthfulness in the style, and practical life in the subjects, that it would serve as an antidote against the influences of superstitious fancy.

Accordingly, about half-past nine, I put the book into my pocket, and strolled leisurely towards the haunted house. I took with me a favorite dog: an exceedingly sharp, bold, and vigilant bull-terrier, — a dog fond of prowling about strange, ghostly corners and passages at night in search of rats; a dog of dogs for a ghost.

It was a summer night but chilly, the sky somewhat gloomy and overcast. Still there was a moon, faint and sickly but still a moon, and if the clouds permitted, after midnight it would be brighter.

I reached the house, knocked, and my servant opened with a cheerful smile.

'All right, sir, and very comfortable.'

'Oh!' said I, rather disappointed; 'have you not seen nor heard anything remarkable?'

'Well, sir, I must own I have heard something queer.'

'What? — what?'

'The sound of feet pattering behind me; and once or twice small noises like whispers close at my ear, — nothing more.'

'You are not at all frightened?'

'I not a bit of it, sir;' and the man's bold look reassured me on one point, — namely, that happen what might, he would not desert me.

We were in the hall, the street-door closed, and my attention was now drawn to my dog. He had at first run in eagerly enough, but had sneaked back to the door, and was scratching and whining to get out. After patting him on the head, and encouraging him gently, the dog seemed to reconcile himself to the situation, and followed me and F — through the house, but keeping close at my heels instead of hurrying inquisitively in advance, which was his usual and normal habit in all strange places. We first visited the subterranean apartments, — the kitchen and other offices, and especially the cellars, in which last there

were two or three bottles of wine still left in a bin, covered with cobwebs, and evidently, by their appearance, undisturbed for many years. It was clear that the ghosts were not winebibbers. For the rest we discovered nothing of interest. There was a gloomy little backyard, with very high walls. The stones of this yard were very damp; and what with the damp, and what with the dust and smoke-grime on the pavement, our feet left a slight impression where we passed. And now appeared the first strange phenomenon witnessed by myself in this strange abode. I saw, just before me, the print of a foot suddenly form itself, as it were. I stopped, caught hold of my servant, and pointed to it. In advance of that footprint as suddenly dropped another. We both saw it. I advanced quickly to the place; the footprint kept advancing before me, a small footprint, — the foot of a child: the impression was too faint thoroughly to distinguish the shape, but it seemed to us both that it was the print of a naked foot. This phenomenon ceased when we arrived at the opposite wall, nor did it repeat itself on returning. We remounted the stairs, and entered the rooms on the ground-floor, a dining parlor, a small back-parlor, and a still smaller third room that had been probably appropriated to a footman, — all still as death. We then visited the drawing-rooms, which seemed fresh and new. In the front room I seated myself in an arm-chair. F— placed on the table the candlestick with which he had lighted us. I told him to shut the door. As he turned to do so a chair opposite to me moved from the wall quickly and noiselessly, and dropped itself about a yard from my own chair, immediately fronting it.

‘Why, this is better than the turning-tables,’ said I, with a half-laugh; and as I laughed, my dog put back his head and howled.

F—, coming back, had not observed the movement of the chair. He employed himself now in stilling the dog. I continued to gaze on the chair, and fancied I saw on it a pale, blue, misty outline of a human figure, but an outline so indistinct that I could only distrust my own vision. The dog now was quiet.

‘Put back that chair opposite to me,’ said I to F—; ‘put it back to the wall.’

F— obeyed. ‘Was that you, sir?’ said he, turning abruptly.

‘! — what?’

‘Why, something struck me. I felt it sharply on the shoulder, — just here.’

‘No,’ said I. ‘But we have jugglers present, and though we may not discover their tricks, we shall catch *them* before they frighten *us*.’

We did not stay long in the drawing-rooms, — in fact, they felt so damp and so chilly that I was glad to get to the fire upstairs. We locked the doors of the drawing-rooms, — a precaution which, I should observe, we had taken with all the rooms we had searched below. The bedroom my servant had selected for me was the best on the floor, — a large one, with two windows fronting the street. The four-posted bed, which took up no inconsiderable space, was opposite to the fire, which burned clear and bright; a door in the wall to the left, between the bed and the window, communicated with the room which my servant appropriated to himself. This last was a small room with a sofa-bed, and had no communication with the landing-place, — no other door but that which conducted to the bedroom I was to occupy. On either side of my fireplace was a cupboard without locks, flush with the wall, and covered with the same dull-brown paper. We examined these cupboards, — only hooks to suspend female dresses, nothing else; we sounded the walls, — evidently solid, the outer walls of the building. Having finished the survey of these apartments, warmed myself a few moments, and lighted my cigar, I then, still accompanied by F—, went forth to complete my reconnoitre. In the landing-place there was another door; it was closed firmly. ‘Sir,’ said my servant, in surprise, ‘I unlocked this door with all the others when I first came; it cannot have got locked from the inside, for—’

Before he had finished his sentence, the door, which neither of us then was touching, opened quietly of itself. We looked at each other a single instant. The same thought seized both, — some human agency might be detected here. I rushed in first, my servant followed. A small, blank, dreary room without furniture; a few empty boxes and hampers in a corner; a small window; the shutters closed; not even a fireplace; no other door but that by which we had entered; no carpet on the floor, and the floor seemed very old, uneven, worm-eaten, mended here and there, as was shown by the whiter patches on the wood; but no living being, and no visible place in which a living being could have hidden. As we stood gazing round, the door by which we had entered closed as quietly as it had before opened; we were imprisoned.

For the first time I felt a creep of indefinable horror. Not so my servant. ‘Why, they don’t think to trap us, sir; I could break that trumpety door with a kick of my foot.’

‘Try first if it will open to your hand,’ said I, shaking off the vague apprehension that had seized me, ‘while I unclosed the shutters and see what is without.’