

Passage 1 Blackmail (Excerpts)

Arthur Hailey

讲解部分

1 The chief house officer, Ogilvie, who had declared he would appear at the Croydons' suite an hour after his cryptic telephone call, actually took twice that time. As a result the nerves of both the Duke and Duchess were excessively frayed when the muted buzzer of the outer door eventually sounded.

2 The Duchess went to the door herself. Earlier she had dispatched her maid on an invented errand and, cruelly, instructed the moon-faced male secretary—who was terrified of dogs—to exercise the Bedlington terriers. Her own tension was not lessened by the knowledge that both might return at any moment.

3 A wave of cigar smoke accompanied Ogilvie in. When he had followed her to the living room, the Duchess looked pointedly at the half-burned cigar in the fat man's mouth. "My husband and I find strong smoke offensive. Would you kindly put that out."

4 The house detective's piggy eyes surveyed her sardonically from his gross jowled face. His gaze moved on to sweep the spacious, well-appointed room, encompassing the Duke who faced them uncertainly, his back to a window.

5 “Pretty neat set-up you folks got.” Taking his time, Ogilvie removed the offending cigar, knocked off the ash and flipped the butt toward an ornamental fireplace on his right. He missed, and the butt fell upon the carpet where he ignored it.

6 The Duches’s lips tightened. She said sharply, “I imagine you did not come here to discuss decor.”

7 The obese body shook in an appreciative chuckle. “No, ma’am; can't say I did. I like nice things, though.” He lowered the level of his incongruous falsetto voice. “Like that car of yours. The one you keep here in the hotel. Jaguar, ain’t it?”

8 “Aah!” It was not a spoken word, but an emission of breath from the Duke of Croydon. His wife shot him a swift, warning glance.

9 “In what conceivable way does our car concern you?”

10 As if the question from the Duchess had been a signal, the house detective’s manner changed. He inquired abruptly, “Who else is in this place?”

11 It was the Duke who answered, “No one. We sent them out.”

12 “There’s things it pays to check.” Moving with surprising speed, the fat man walked around the suite, opening doors and inspecting the space behind them. Obviously he knew the room arrangement well. After reopening and closing the outer door, he returned, apparently satisfied, to the living room.

13 The Duchess had seated herself in a straight-backed chair. Ogilvie remained standing.

14 “Now then,” he said. “You two was in the hit-'n-run.”

15 She met his eyes directly. “What are you talking about?”

16 “Don’t play games, lady. This is for real. “He took out afresh cigar and bit off the end.” You aw the papers. There’s been plenty on radio, too.”

17 Two high points of color appeared in the paleness of the Duchess of Croydon’s cheeks. “What you are suggesting is the most disgusting, ridiculous.”

18 “I told you—Cut it out!” The words spat forth with sudden savagery, all pretense of blandness gone. Ignoring the Duke, Ogilvie waved the unlighted cigar under his adversary’s nose.” You listen to me, your high-an’-mightiness. This city’s burnin’ mad— cops, mayor, everybody else. When they find who done that last night, who killed that kid an’its mother, then hightailed it, they’ll throw the book, and never mind who it hits, or whether they got fancy titles neither. Now I know what I know, and if I do what by rights I should, there’ll be a squad of cops in here so fast you’ll hardly see’em. But I come to you first,in fairness, so’s you could tell your side of it to me. “The piggy eyes blinked, then hardened.” “if you want it the other way, just say so.”

19 The Duchess of Croydon—three centuries and a half of inbred arrogance behind her— did not yield easily. Springing to her feet, her face wrathful, gray-green eyes blazing, she faced the grossness of the house detective squarely. Her tone would have withered anyone who knew her well.” You unspeakable blackguard! How dare you!”

20 Even the self-assurance of Ogilvie flickered for an instant. But it was the Duke of Croydon who interjected,” It’s no go, old girl. I’m afraid. It was a good try.” Facing Ogilvie, he said, “What you accuse us of is true. I am to blame. I was driving the car and killed the little girl.”

内部资料，翻印必究

21 “That’s more like it,” Ogilvie said. He lit the fresh cigar. “Now we’re getting somewhere.”

22 Warily, in a gesture of surrender, the Duchess of Croydon sank back into her chair. Clasping her hands to conceal their trembling, she asked, “What is it you know?”

23 “Well now, I’ll spell it out.” The house detective took his time, leisurely puffing a cloud of blue cigar smoke, his eyes sardonically on the Duchess as if challenging her objection. But beyond wrinkling her nose in distaste, she made no comment.

24 Ogilvie pointed to the Duke. “Last night, early on, you went to Lindy’s Place in Irish Bayou. You drove there in your fancy Jaguar, and you took a lady friend. Leastways, I guess you’d call her that if you’re not too fussy.”

25 As Ogilvie glanced, grinning, at the Duchess, the Duke said sharply, “Get on with it!”

26 “Well,”—the smug fat face swung back— “the way I hear it, you won a hundred at the tables, then lost it at the bar. You were into a second hundred—with a real swinging party—when your wife here got there in a taxi.”

27 “How do you know all this?”

28 “I’ll tell you, Duke—I’ve been in this town and this hotel a long time. I got friends all over. I oblige them; they do the same for me, like letting me know what gives, an’ where. There ain’t much, out of the way, which people who stay in this hotel do, I don’t get to hear about. Most of ’em never know I know, or know me. They think they got their little secret tucked away, and so they have—except like now.”

29 The Duke said coldly, “I see.”

30 “One thing I’d like to know. I got a curious nature, ma’am. How’d you figure where he was?”

31 The Duchess said, “You know so much. I suppose it doesn’t matter. My husband has a habit of making notes while he is telephoning. Afterward he often forgets to destroy them.”

内部资料，翻印必究

32 The house detective clucked his tongue reprovingly. “A little careless habit like that, Duke—look at the mess it gets you in. Well, here’s what I figure about the rest. You and your wife took off home, you drivin’, though the way things turned out it might have been better if she’d have drove.”

33 “My wife doesn’t drive.”

34 Ogilvie nodded understandingly. “Explains that one. Anyway, I reckon you were licked up, but good..”

35 The Duchess interrupted, “Then you don’t know! You don’t know anything for sure! You can’t possibly prove..”

36 “Lady, I can prove all I need to.”

37 The Duke cautioned, “Better let him finish, old girl.”

38 “That’s right,” Ogilvie said. “Just sit and listen. Last night I seen you come in—through the basement, so’s not to use the lobby. Looked right shaken, too, the pair of you. Just come in myself, and I got to wondering why. Like I said, I got a curious nature.”

39 The Duchess breathed, “Go on.”

40 “Late last night the word was out about the hit-’n-run. On a hunch I went over the garage and took a quiet look-see at your car. You maybe don’t know—it’s away in a corner, behind a pillar where the jockeys don’t see it when they’re comin’ by.”

41 The Duke licked his lips. “I suppose that doesn’t matter now.”

42 “You might have something there,” Ogilvie conceded. “Anyway, what I found made me do some scouting—across at police headquarters where they know me too.” He paused to puff again at the cigar as his listeners waited silently. When the cigar tip was glowing he inspected it, then continued, “Over there they got three things to go on. They got a headlight trim ring which must have come off when the kid and the woman was hit. They got some headlight glass, and lookin’ at the kid’s clothin’, they reckon there’ll be a brush trace.”

43 “A what?”

44 “You rub clothes against something hard, Duchess, specially if it’s shiny like a car fender, say, an’ it leaves a mark the same way as fingerprints. The police lab kin pick it up like they do prints—dust it, an’ it shows.”

45 “That’s interesting, “the Duke said, as if speaking of something unconnected with himself. “I didn’t know that.”

46 “Not many do. In this case, though, I reckon it don't make a lot o’ difference. On your car you got a busted headlight, and the trim ring’s gone. Ain’t any doubt they’d match up, even without the brush trace an’ the blood. Oh yeah, I shoulda told you. There's plenty of blood, though it don't show too much on the black paint.”

自学部分

47 “Oh, my God!” A hand to her face, the Duchess turned away.

48 Her husband asked, “What do you propose to do?”

49 The fat man rubbed his hands together, looking down at his thick, fleshy fingers. “Like I said, I come to hear your side of it.”

50 The Duke said despairingly, “What can I possibly say? You know what happened.” He made an attempt to square his shoulders which did not succeed. “You’d better call the police and get it over.”

51 “Well now, there's no call for being hasty.” The incongruous falsetto voice took on a musing note. “What's done's been done. Rushing any place ain't gonna bring back the kid nor its mother neither. Besides, what they'd do to you across at the headquarters, Duke, you wouldn't like. No sir, you wouldn't like it at all.”

52 The other two slowly raised their eyes.

53 “I was hoping.” Ogilvie said, “that you folks could suggest something.”

54 The Duke said uncertainly, “I don't understand.”

55 “I understand,” the Duchess of Croydon said. “You want money, don't you? You came here to blackmail us.”

内部资料，翻印必究

56 If she expected her words to shock,they did not succeed.The house detective shrugged."Whatever names you call things,ma'am,don't matter to me.All I come for was to help you people out of trouble.But I got to live too."

57"You'd accept money to keep silent about what you know?"

58 "I reckon I might."

59 "But from what you say,"the Duchess pointed out,her poise for the moment recovered,"it would do no good.The car would be discovered in any case."

60 "I guess you'd have to take that chance.But there's some reason sit might not be. Something I ain't told you yet."

61 "Tell us now,please."

62 Ogilvie said,"T ain't figured this out myself completely.But when you hit that kid you was going away from town,not to it."

63"We'd made a mistake in the route,"the Duchess said."Somehow we'd become turned around.It's easily done in New Orleans,with the streets winding as they do. Afterward,using side streets,we went back."

64"I thought it might be that,"Ogilvie nodded understandingly."But the police ain't figured it that way.They're looking for somebody who was headed out.That's why, right now,they're workin' on the suburbs and the outside towns.They may get around to searchin' downtown,but it won't be yet."

65 "How long before they do?"

66 "Maybe three,four days.They got a lot of other places to look fist."

67 "How could that help us—the delay?"

68"It might,"Ogilvie said."Providin' nobody twigs the car—an' seein' where it is, you might be lucky there.An'if you can get it away."

69"You mean out of the state?"70"I mean out o'the South."

71"That wouldn't be easy?"

72 "No,ma'am.Every state around—Texas,Arkansas,Mississippi,Alabama,al the rest'llbe watching for a car damaged the way yours is."

73 The Duchess considered."Is there any possibility of having repairs made first?If the work were done discreetly we could pay well."

内部资料，翻印必究

74 The house detective shook his head emphatically. "You try that, you might as well walk over to headquarters right now and give up. Every repair shop in Louisiana's been told to holler 'cops' the minute a car needing fixin' like yours comes in. They'd do it, too. You people are hot."

75 The Duchess of Croydon kept a firm, tight rein on her racing mind. It was essential, she knew, that her thinking remain calm and reasoned. In the last few minutes the conversation had become as seemingly casual as if the discussion were of some minor domestic matter and not survival itself. She intended to keep it that way. Once more, she was aware, the role of leadership had fallen to her, her husband now a tense but passive spectator of the exchange between the evil fat man and herself. No matter. What was inevitable must be accepted. The important thing was to consider all eventualities. A thought occurred to her.

76 "The piece from our car which you say the police have. What is it called?" 77 "A trim ring." 78 "Is it traceable?"

79 Ogilvie nodded affirmatively. "They can figure what kind o' car it's from—make, model, and maybe the year, or close to it. Same thing with the glass. But with your car being foreign, it'll likely take a few days."

80 "But after that," she persisted, "the police will know they're looking for a Jaguar?" 81 "I reckon that's so."

82 Today was Tuesday. From all that this man said, they had until Friday or Saturday at best. With calculated coolness the Duchess reasoned: the situation came down to one essential. Assuming the hotel man was bought off, their only chance—a slim one—lay in removing the car quickly; if it could be got north, to one of the big cities where the New Orleans tragedy and search would be unknown, repairs could be made quietly, the incriminating evidence removed. Then, even if suspicion settled on the Croydons later, nothing could be proved. But how to get the car away?

83 Undoubtedly what this oafish detective said was true: as well as Louisiana, the other states through which the car would have to pass would be alert and watchful. Every highway patrol would be on the lookout for a damaged headlight with a missing trim ring. There would probably be roadblocks. It would be hard not to fall victim to some sharp-eyed policeman.

84 But it might be done. If the car could be driven at night and concealed by day. There were plenty of places to pull off the highway and be unobserved. It would be hazardous, but no more than waiting here for certain detection. There would be back roads. They could choose an unlikely

route to avoid attention.

85 But there would be other complications...and now was the time to consider them. Traveling by secondary roads would be difficult without knowing the terrain.The Croydons did not.Nor was either of them adept at using maps.And when they stopped for petrol,as they would have to,their speech and manner would betray them,making them conspicuous.And yet..these were risks which had to be taken.

86 Or had they?

87 The Duchess faced Ogilvie."How much do you want?"

88 The abruptness took him by surprise."Well..figure you people are pretty well fixed."

89 She said coldly,"I asked how much."

90 The piggy eyes blinked."Ten thousand dollars."

91 Though it was twice what she had expected,her expression did not change."Assuming we paid this grotesque amount,what would we receive in return?"

92 The fat man seemed puzzled."Like I said,I keep quiet about what I know."

93 "And the alternative?"

94 He shrugged."I go down the lobby.I pick up a phone."

95 "No,"the statement was unequivocal."We will not pay you."

96 As the Duke of Croydon shifted uneasily,the house detective's bulbous countenance reddened."Now listen,lady.."

97 Peremptorily she cut him off."I will not listen.Instead,you will listen to me."Her eyes were riveted on his face,her handsome,high-cheek boned features set in their most imperious mold."We would achieve nothing by paying you,except possibly a few days' respite.You have made that abundantly clear."98"That's a chance you gotta...."

99 "Silence!"Her voice was a whiplash.Eyes bored into him.Swallowing,sullenly,he complied.

100 What came next,the Duchess of Croydon knew,could be the most significant thing she had ever done.There must be no mistake,no vacillation or dallying because of her own smallness of mind.When you were playing for the highest stakes,you made the highest bid.She intended to gamble on the fat man's greed.She must do so in such a way as to place the outcome beyond any doubt.

101 She declared decisively,"We will not pay you ten thousand dollars.But we will pay you

内部资料，翻印必究

twenty-five thousand dollars."102 The house detective's eyes bulged.

103 "In return for that,"she continued evenly,"you will drive our car north."104 Ogilvie continued to stare.

105 "Twenty-five thousand dollars,"she repeated."Ten thousand now.Fifteen thousand more when you meet us in Chicago."

106 Still without speaking,the fat man licked his lips.His beady eyes,as if unbelieving,were focused upon her own.The silence hung.107 Then,as she watched intently,he gave the slightest of nods.

108 The silence remained.At length Ogilvie spoke."This cigar botherin'you,Duchess?"109 As she nodded,he put it out.(from Hotel,1965)