Spring 2021
Budapest, Magyarország

the PENNY TRUTH

KRAJCÁROS IGAZSÁG

original fiction, essays, and poetry

in English and Hungarian

próza, vers, esszé

angol és magyar nyelven

the PENNY TRUTH

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BEMUTATJUK A KRAJCÁROS IGAZSÁGOT

Kedves Olvasó!

Szeretnénk bemutatni neked új lapunkat, a **KRAJCÁROS IGAZSÁGOT**, melynek nevét Heltai Jenő 1914-ben keletkezett novellájából, a Jaguárból kölcsönöztük. Ebben az elbeszélésben szerepel egy hasonló című újság, amelybe egy magát közírónak és filléres huszárnak kiadó pap is előszeretettel ír. A mi szerkesztőségünkben sem papok, sem huszárok nincsenek – amit mi képviselünk, az Heltai fiktív lapjának szellemisége.

Heltai a századforduló utáni, az első világháború előtti Budapestről írt. Novellája a nemrég egyesült városok izgalmát és forgatagát ragadja meg. Budapest naggyá válása, az új városi környezet, a közoktatás fejlődése, az általános derűlátás és intellektuális pezsgés a magyar művészet, irodalom és tudomány virágzását jelentette. A kávéház ekkortájt nem annyira turisztikai látványosság, hanem a művészeti, tudományos és politikai események, beszélgetések és viták jellegzetes színhelye volt, igazi találkozóhely, közösségi tér.

Bár az egykori kávéházak világát nem hozhatjuk vissza, megpróbálhatjuk újragondolni annak eredeti célját. Lapunk a gondolatébresztő kritika, esszé és szépirodalom fóruma szeretne lenni, a századforduló innovatív szellemében. A kor magyar költői, filozófusai és tudósai saját törekvéseikbe szervesen be tudták építeni a nyugat-európai eszméket. Elképzeléseink hasonlóak, noha immár globális értelemben. A célunk természetesen nem az, hogy az elmúlt idők költőit és gondolkodóit másoljuk, sokkal inkább az intellektuális kalandok izgalmát igyekszünk életre hívni.

Az olvasás koncentrációt igényel, ami egyre ritkább digitális korszakunkban. Ezért ragaszkodunk a nyomtatott kiadványhoz. Reméljük, hogy a karantén végével, ahol a hirdetések és a közösségi média posztjai uralták a mindennapokat, örömet szerzünk régi vágású kísérletünkkel.

Talán úgy tűnhet, hogy reménytelenül romantikusak, sőt korszerűtlenek vagyunk, akik szeretnek mindenre reagálni. De bárhogy hívhatod megközelítésünket, ha megvetted a lapot. Célkitűzésünk, hogy Heltai nyomdokain haladjunk: „...érdekes, friss, ügyes és mindenekelőtt olcsó újságot kellene csinálni...és mindig az igazat kellene megírni, csak az igazat, becsületesen."

Tisztelettel,

A Krajcáros Igazság szerkesztősége

INTRODUCING THE PENNY TRUTH

Dear Reader:

Welcome to **THE PENNY TRUTH**! We've borrowed our name from *Jaguar*, a 1914 novella by the Hungarian writer Jenő Heltai. The story follows the adventures of a newspaper called The Penny Truth, staffed by (among others) an unfrocked priest masquerading as a society columnist and a penniless hussar. We have no clerics or cavalry officers on our masthead, but we hope to revive the spirit of Heltai's paper.

Heltai was writing about Budapest before the First World War, and his novella captures the excitement of a young city at the turn of the last century. The growth of Budapest, the introduction of new technology, and a general feeling of optimism and intellectual ferment combined to produce an unprecedented outpouring of genius in Hungarian arts, literature, and the sciences. The opulent cafes that are now Instagram fodder for foreign tourists and treacly couples were once bustling hubs of political, scientific, and artistic disputation.

Our magazine aims to revive the spirit of those grand old cafes by providing a forum for thoughtful criticism, essays, poetry, and fiction. The philosophers, writers, and scientists of fin-de-siècle Budapest were able to synthesize the native genius of the Hungarian people with new ideas from Western Europe. Our aim is much the same, although our intellectual reach is now global. We do not wish to slavishly copy the writers of a bygone era; we only hope to restore the spirit of intellectual adventure that animated their best work.

Reading a magazine requires a degree of focus that is increasingly scarce in our Internet-addled age. This is why we insist on print. As you emerge from quarantine, besieged by news bulletins and social media updates, we hope you'll find a reprieve in our old-fashioned approach.

Perhaps this strikes you as reactionary, hopelessly romantic, or outdated. If you buy a copy of our magazine, you can call us whatever you like. We only hope to follow Heltai's original blueprint: "An interesting, fresh, lively paper, above all inexpensive...and it would always have to tell the truth and nothing but the truth."

Sincerely,

The Editors

BUDAPEST, NEW MEXICO

Scott Beauchamp

"The problem with advertisements in the age of the algorithm is that they've become too responsive. Supercultivated lines of code which only give you back more of what you want. It's too solipsistic. An infinite refraction of desire. Hermetically sealed."

Babits was completely motionless, impatient for the nut of the pitch. His eye patch, studded with azure plastic constellations, sparkled in the invisible light. His shoulder-length wig had its own presence. It was one of his accomplices: His secretary. His security guard. His wig.

A blue whale tattoo, surfacing from the depths of his collar and beaching itself on his pock-marked cheek, was permanently ready to pluck out his remaining eye with its baleine mouth.

"WHAT WE NEED IS AN ADVERTISING PROGRAM AS BOUNDLESS AND SHAPELESS AS DESIRE."

"Where has the magic of advertising gone? Have we really backslid to the days of giving people what they think they want? Where did the ambition crawl off to die? In some moment of weakness, dazzled by our own predictive abilities, we gave up on the dream of telling people what they want. The actual selling of something, the seduction. People don't know what they want. They never have. It's always been our job to make them feel as if they were discovering some new erotic demand. You need us to cum. To feel the realization of your best self. To be yourself at all."

Billy paused for dramatic effect. He felt the moment land.

"Perfectibility that was nearly within their grasp, for a nominal price. Falling in love or escaping from it. A member of the coolest cult ever. Mirrored shades reflecting a highway disappearing into the sun. A party where everyone wants to fuck you. The plastic potted plant at the far end of desire. These people, customers, were barely sentient flesh-waste waiting for the word to return them to paradise. Squinting at a commercial, attempting to see the face of God."

Babits had stopped breathing. His fist tightened and his knuckles shifted.

"We need less responsiveness. Less customer participation. We need to feel the full weight of our older purpose. And do you know what the by-word of our rebirth will be?"

"Tell me."

Babits spoke without moving his mouth. A glitch, maybe. And a directive, not a question. Billy passionately stumbled into his answer.

"Chaos."

Babits leaned back in his chair, which Billy took as a sign to continue.

"Chaos manufactured by us."

"Chaos?"

Billy was able to see Babits' mouth form the question that time. A skeptical eyebrow arched out from under his eye-patch. Billy was surprised that he hadn't used the other one. Maybe his negative expressions were all trapped within the orbit of his missing eye. Maybe he curled the corner of his mouth on that side of his face when he was making a joke at someone else's expense. Maybe that ear was more perceptive to bad news. That hand more cunning.

"Randomness. Or as close as we can get. Randomness is kind of an ideal that we strive for but never actually quite reach. Patterns perpetually force themselves upon us. We even sense their presence when they're not actually there. The worst kind of patterns, the ghost patterns that haunt certain modes of thought like spirits in old churchyards. Places hold the illusion of life like ideas hold the illusion of order.

But what we need is a total exorcism of pattern. Why? Because we need to implement a total exorcism of the illusion of self. We need our customers to be as freely floating as capital. And just as empty. We're painting ourselves into a million different little corners, catering to these digitally constructed identities that we've made bespoke for people. What we need is an advertising program as boundless and shapeless as desire. One moment a person is a person who wants to watch sports. Then they're donating to radical political causes. Then they're not a person at all, but an animal. A memory. A void. The event horizon beyond which all our products disappear."

Babits held his palm up to Billy. It was the hand on the same side of his body as his eyepatch.

"I'm going to stop you right there. This is all interesting, very interesting…as poetry or a short story, maybe…But assuming this software even works…"

"The math checks out."

"…even if you were able to somehow implement it in the real world…"

"The math is right."

"…you're betraying the very core of everything, the very foundation of every progressive contemporary notion of self. Sure, the self is infinitely malleable. But there's a secret you somewhere down there doing all the manipulating. The whole moral weight of identity comes from the fact that it is a truer and more real version of yourself. It's YOU. What you're proposing is…well…it's fascist. Because in saying that people aren't really at their core anything at all, you're actually saying what people are. Do you understand? This is…a rearguard action…reactionary…disgusting…disturbing…I'm not sure if you can see, but I'm actually shaking right now thinking about it…You're a fascist, Mr. Floret. Get out of my office."

"Well, obviously I'm disappointed that I'm not able to communicate to you…"

"…out…"

"Um…I'm sorry, I'm not actually in your office…"

"You know what I mean, Mr. Floret. It's just an expression. Just words."

Billy's desktop screen went dark

for a moment. Then, in the place of Babits's office, there was a palm tree, leaves burning bronze in the sun and silhouetted against a heavy lime horizon. The palm's red leaves bounced slowly against the otherwise empty sky. For Billy, the tree symbolized the final end of something.

Twelve hours later he wanted to be put to bed.

On his phone screen, his thumb hovered over the LunaMa Tuck Me In icon. An oval ghost figure, baby blue, holding a smaller version of itself within its minimalist arms.

"People don't know what they want. They never have."

He quoted himself aloud to the empty studio apartment, a former cargo container that had been repurposed to suit the lifestyle demands of the single creative "who values freedom and style over bullshit." Some nights, after LunaMa rolled Billy's comforter up to his chin and cooed coded white noise into his ear, Billy would imagine that he was inside of the container during its previous life. A white crane loaded him onto a vast ship, as long as twenty football fields and manned by a skeleton crew of seven Filipino men hidden away deep inside the rusted innards of the floating hulk. They'd only emerge after severe storms had tilted the hull to a dangerous, red-lined degree to check inventory loss. Containers slipped overboard regularly. Burials at sea. But for the most part, it was a monotonous journey. Weather passed over in semi-predictable rhythmic cycles. Even more constant were the churning clutches of stars with names like Lyra, Boötes, and Andromeda. The ship moved imperceptibly under the time-trapped light of Scorpius while the containers huddled together in their own perfect isolation.

Instead, Billy moved his thumb to press down on the icon of his own randomizing software. He hadn't yet committed to a name, but he had an icon. It was an old fair-use image of either an ouroboros or an ensō. A pixelated circle which hadn't quite completed itself, meant to represent an infinitely recurring presence. Or void.

As soon as he pressed the icon, all seventeen screens in his apartment went dark. He heard the deadbolt on his door mechanically slide locked. The space of his apartment was transformed, its dimensions hidden in the absence of light. It was claustrophobically indefinite.

Then the space was transposed again by a series of images, each repeated on every screen at once.

A soft, early photograph image of The Rt. Rev. Samuel Cook Edsall. His kind gaze directed off-camera and seen in profile, like a Roman coin or one-eyed jack. In the refraction of Billy's screens, it looked as if Rev. Edsall was admiring himself thoughtfully. His bald head a fountain of sepia. The aura of the rare man who never questions himself and is better off for it.

Edsall's skull was displaced by a group of letterings which, for an instant, Billy didn't recognize as language. Then he did. And they scrolled down the screens.

Zamek Królewski w Warszawie – Pomnik Historii i Kultury Narodowej
Muzeum Narodowe w Krakowie
Muzeum Żup Krakowskich

It went on. A list of Polish museums.

The sandalwood delta shape of a moth on a surface nearly the same color.

Paddy Chayefsky walking through a grim neighborhood in the Bronx, nudging an empty tomato paste can into a deep pothole with the toe of his loafer. Film texture and quality suggest the early seventies. Chayefsky's mustard turtleneck is the brightest object on the bombed-out block. Pigeons rustle together on a drainpipe then fan out towards the rooftops, their collective mass trapped for a moment and unified in the tenement window reflections before disappearing into the sky.

Gjon Ndoja sinks a foul shot.

"One oh five point seven FM, bringing the best in alternative rock to the St. Louis area…"

A square painted by William Melton Halsey, struggling to sustain its living redness. Deep scalding blues scab the disintegrating surface. Something about healing acting as a counterpoint to entropy. Billy moves towards his phone screen to purchase a print but the room disappears.

The door remained locked. Billy listened inside of the darkness.

No images. No sounds. He sat down on his knees and felt his familiar heft sink down into the fuzzy gray carpet. A recreation of Smithson's Spiral Jetty.

Then a line appeared, repeating itself across multiple surfaces in Billy's apartment. White text on a black field.

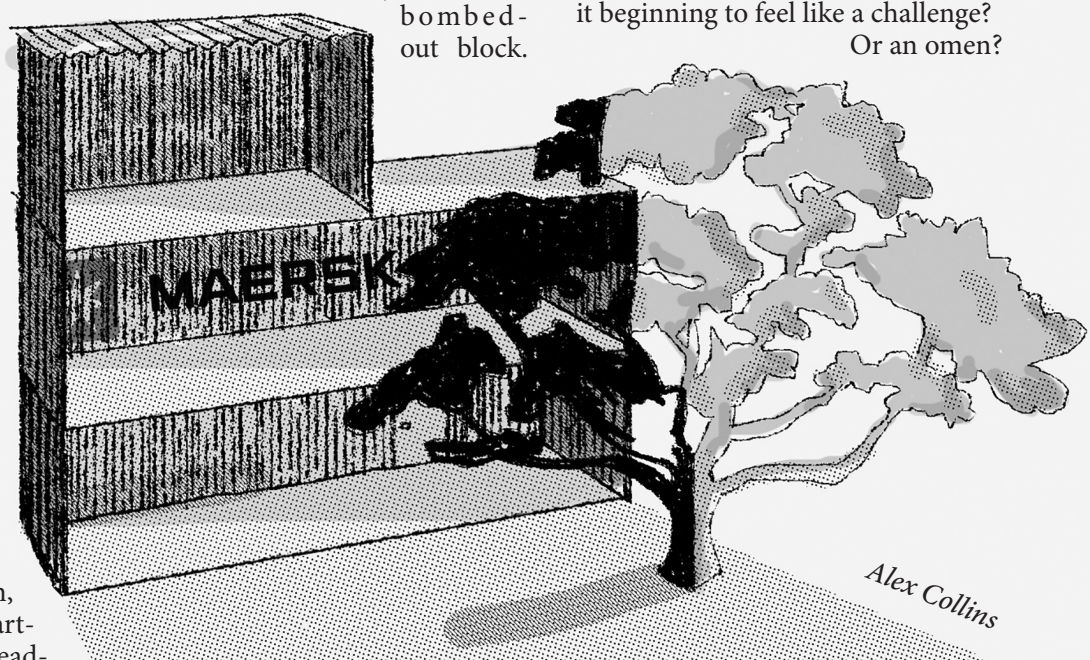
Abandoned by my words, I'm left alone.

A moment passes and then another. What's happening?

Nothing. Nothing's happening.

The automated customer service protocols kicked in immediately, just as nothing happening began to feel ominous and weighted. Who can sit in a dark room with a single line of poetry repeated across the door, the bathroom mirror, the fridge, without it beginning to feel like a challenge?

Or an omen?



Alex Collins

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The help line went directly to hold. The haunted songs of electronic music from thirty years ago. Was anyone actually making money off of this being played, Billy wondered? Or was it free? Free and pure art. An inorganic brass section repeated a hook over synthesized boss nova bass. The sounds felt hermetically sealed off from the outside world, from time. Utopian in their naïve artificiality.

"Thank you for your patience, I see you're having trouble with your system. Is there an emergency? And please remember, these calls might be monitored for quality control."

"I don't think it's an emergency," Billy answered without rising from his knees.

"You have access to food and water?" The help operator had a voice without precise geographical coordinates. The voice of a young woman, mature for her age, who felt squeezed by her village so she escaped to the nearby big city, the only city she's ever considered a city. She could have been from anywhere. Her accent had been diluted and flattened and mossed over by pop culture. Ziro. Porvoo. Ubatuba. In her voice, Billy heard a small girl who grew up by a river. She wandered to its banks barefoot on summer evenings and thought the stars reflected on its black surface were brighter than the ones in the sky. She thought that maybe the city lights would be brighter still.

"Excuse me?"

"You have access to food and water? And restroom facilities?"

"Oh yeah. I mean, assuming that I'm not locked in here for days. I have enough food for a while."

"This is good. Now, to verify. Name."

"Billy Floret."

"Good. Date of birth. Just date, no year."

"I'm a Scorpio. November 28th."

"Sagittarius. The date is correct. Town of birth?"

"Budapest, New Mexico."

"Hungary?"

"No…New Mexico. America."

"Budapest is in Hungary."

"It's one of those American town names like Paris, Texas."

"Budapest is in Hungary. Santa Fe is in New Mexico."

"I mean, I was born there. I grew up there. It's real. There's a main street called Jefferson Avenue. A steak house and an ice cream store by the high school."

"Las Cruces. Roswell. Taos."

"Bert's Ford Dealership. McDonalds. Kroger."

"Farmington. Deming. Of course Albuquerque."

"Sunrise Yoga. The Kraft Barn. Bolo Mini-Golf."

"Carlsbad. Rio Rancho. Silver City."

"But I grew up there!"

"Maybe if you just gave me your first pet's name, I can verify that way."

"Chairman Meow"

"Perfect. I have verification."

"But what city does it say I grew up in?"

"I'm sorry sir, I can't divulge that information."

"But didn't you already verify that it's me?"

"Then you should already know which city you grew up in, sir."

"What?"

"OK, now that we see what's happening over there on our end, we can schedule an override."

"Schedule?"

"We put the override on the docket."

"You can't just do it right now?"

"This is your best option sir."

"Well…how long do you expect it will take?"

"Between zero and four hours."

"So it could be fixed…now?"

"It could be."

Billy tilted his head away from the phone and stared into the darkness, looking for a sign.

Gray shapes formed patterns against the dark. Furniture. Art. Plants. The familiar topography of internal space. A domestic grotto where old gods crawl off to sleep in safety. The apartment thrummed with an empty energy.

"Is there anything else I can help you with?" With the phone held away from Billy's ear, her voice sounded more insistent. More vulnerable.

"No, that's it, thanks."

For the first hour Billy laid on his back and thought about hips, breasts, thighs. Women he'd seen but never spoken to. The heft of someone sitting on his lap. Anonymous moans.

His eyes opened. Even in the perfectly sealed darkness of his apartment, there seemed to be light. Not emanating from a source, but randomly distributed. Moving in thin waves across his face. Gathering to pool softly in his peripheral vision.

Then more letters appeared.

Abandoned by my words I'm left alone or I've become an aimless overflown drifting river and in my murky mud I drag the flotsam washed up in the flood

How can you be abandoned by your own words, Billy wondered impatiently. Breaking a promise, maybe. Or. Or you've become a river. Aimless, meandering, drifting. Either your present reality has abandoned you or you've abandoned it. And what do you take with you when you abandon the present? Artifacts of reality. Flotsam washed up in the flood. Do you take words? Maybe, but not your words.

Billy took off his shirt and let the words project onto his skin. Seventeen screens, each criss crossing his body. The word "abandoned" stretched over his chest, just missing his heart, and running down his ribs. A much smaller "aimless overflown" ran diagonal down his abdomen, creeping towards his groin. The word "flotsam" was projected upside down onto his forehead.

Billy laid in the words until they weren't symbols any longer. Until they lost referential meaning. Shapes of light, strewn across his body. In the darkness, the words which were no longer language became the scaffolding of physical space. Mute constellations. Fragmented coordinates.

Billy took off the rest of his clothes and writhed in the meaningless letters. He moaned, deep and pained, matching new sounds to each consonant. His own primitive language began emerging from the bric a brac shapes projecting themselves onto his flesh. The artifacts came alive again inside of the shipping container and inside of him.

He felt like part of a brand new pattern. He pressed his thumb into his belly button until he felt a static charge in his groin. Then the letters disappeared.

He rolled onto his side and rested his head on the palm of his hand. There were eighteen of him, all look-

ing in different directions. Mirror mode. Billy walked to his front door, now a floor-length mirror. He felt invisibly branded by the language that had abandoned him.

"God, is this me?" He asked his naked torso.

The deadbolt shifted. The door unlocked.

The screens resumed their default activities.

The mirror that he had just been staring into now showed the red palm tree, life size. Its leaves were tousled playfully. The raw sky was unmoved.

Billy put the side of his face against the cold door. The red palm burst in bright blood corona around his head. He pressed his ear hard against it and listened.

(English translation of Mihály Babits's "Jonah's Prayer" from Peter Zollman)

Scott Beauchamp is the author of Did You Kill Anyone? and the novel Severed Heads. His work has appeared in The Paris Review Daily, Bookforum, and The Dublin Review of Books.

MAGASUGRÓ

Lesi Zoltán

Utoljára egy szürke, kétrészes ruhában
és bőrszínű harisnyában utazott.
Néhány nappal korábban a bécsi
Európa Bajnokságon atlétaként
aranyat nyert a Harmadik Birodalomnak,
megdöntötte a magasugrás
világrekordját. Nekifutás előtt az apjára
gondolt, aki oly fenyegetően
tudott nézni, mint senki más.

Egy Kölnbe tartó gyorsvonaton ült
egész éjszaka. Egy pasas a fülkében a szemével
minden porcikáját megfogdosta.
Magdeburgnál megállt a vonat.

Az atléta leszállt, hogy kinyújtóztassa
elgémberedett lábait a peronon, és vegyen
néhány olcsó zsemlét. Szülei úgy nevelték,
hogy egy tisztességes lány spórolós.
Néha elképzelte, hogy nemzeti hős, akire
még a Führer is büszkén gondol.
Apja azóta irigy rá azért a kézfogásért
a berlini olimpián.

Nem is indulhatott volna a versenyen,
ha Gretel Bergmannt ki nem zárják.
Még az ötlet is abszurd, egy zsidó
nem győzhet, hogy is képzelték?

A hosszú út előtt nem volt ideje
borotválkozni. Most ideges, mert púdere sincs.
Mi lesz, ha lebukik? A kalauz tényleg
odasúgott valamit egy rendőrnek,
aki elkérte az igazolványát, majd bekísérte
az őrsre, és úgy döntött, mindenáron
kideríti az igazságot.

– Vetkőzzön le! Megvizsgálom.
– És ha ellenállok? – kérdezte a nő.
– Akkor letartóztatom engedetlenség miatt.

Az atléta egy ideig hezitált. Tizenkilenc éves,
de már mindenütt ismerik a nevét. Érmeit és
igazolványát kitette az asztalra.

Az iskolában deszkának csúfolták.
A csípője sem szélesedik, mint a többi
lánynak. A gyárban békén hagyták, rendesen
végezte a munkáját mint csomagoló.
Csak azért kezdett atletizálni, mert menekülni
akart a környezetéből, szinte csak nők
vették körül, a három nővére és az
idegbeteg anyja.

Megtanították neki, milyenek
a férfiak. Ha most tiltakozik, levetkőztetik
és megerőszakolják.

Lesi Zoltán Gyulán született 1982-ben, jelenleg Bécsben él. Eddig három verseskönyve és egy zombis mesekönyve jelent meg. Az utolsó könyve a Magasugrás (Prae, 2019) németül, szlovákul és lengyelül is megjelent.

HIGH JUMPER

By Zoltán Lesi,
Translated by Owen Good

Last time she wore a grey two-piece dress
and skin-tone tights when she travelled.
A few days earlier at the Vienna
European Championships, she took gold
as an athlete for the Third Reich,
she broke the high jump
world record. Before the run-up she thought
of her father, who gave sinister
looks like no other.

She sat all night on an express train
to Cologne. In the cabin a man's eyes
felt up every last inch of her.
The train stopped in Magdeburg.

The athlete got off to stretch
her stiff legs on the platform, and to buy
a few cheap bread rolls. Her parents had taught her
a proper lady was always thrifty.
She sometimes imagined she was a national hero who
even the Führer thought of proudly.
Her father has always envied her that handshake
since the Berlin Olympics.

She couldn't even have entered the competition
had Gretel Bergmann not been disqualified.
Even the idea of it was absurd, a Jew
couldn't win, what were they thinking?

Before the long journey, she hadn't had time
to shave. She was nervous now, she had no powder either,
what if she got caught? The ticket inspector did
whisper something to a police officer,
who asked her for her papers, then escorted her
to the station, and decided whatever the cost
he would find out the truth.

"Get undressed! I'm carrying out an examination."
"And if I resist?" asked the woman.
"Then I'll make an arrest for insubordination."

The athlete hesitated a while. She was nineteen years old,
but people knew her name all over. She set out her medals and
her papers on the table.

In school she had been nicknamed a plank.
Her hips hadn't widened like the other
girls. In the factory they let her alone in peace,
she was a good packer.
She only started athletics to escape
her environment, she was surrounded almost
completely by women, her three sisters and her
neuropathic mother.

They had taught her what men
were like. If she protested now, they would strip her
and rape her.

Zoltán Lesi was born in Gyula in 1982 and now lives in Vienna. He has published three poetry collections and a zombie storybook. His most recent work, High Jumper (Prae, 2019), has been translated into German, Slovakian, and Polish.

Owen Good is a translator living in Budapest. He is the translator of Krisztina Tóth's Pixel.

thirteen

Ildikó Noémi Nagy

Kocsis Gréta

Thirteen is a terrible age. I was an unsuccessful child model, and by thirteen my parents were starting to lose hope they'd strike it rich, or at least break even on the investments they'd made to further my career. On the brink of giving up, we still took the subway into Manhattan every week and rode up yet another elevator to see yet another modeling agency representative. I flinched at the way adults still referred to me as 'little angel.' I stared at the illuminated numbers designating the building's floors. More often than not, there was no button for the thirteenth story. Thirteen is an unlucky number, my mother explained, so they simply left it out. But how could you just ignore a number? When we stepped out on the fourteenth floor, wasn't that really the thirteenth?

If thirteen was an unlucky number, this would be a bad year for me. Couldn't I just pretend I was really fourteen years old? It would be one step further from being a kid, a baby, a 'little angel.' And I wanted desperately to be an adult. Fourteen to eighteen, it wasn't so long. I could survive four terrible teenage years.

But I couldn't deny that I was still a child, playing with My Little Pony and reading my favorite book about kid detectives, The Adventures of the Black Hand Gang, over and over again. Pretty strange name for a German to give his book, my father said. Do you know what the original Black Hand Gang was? They killed an important couple, which started a war. I didn't really care. I'd never thought of Hans Jürgen Press as German. I never thought of anyone as a nationality. We were all Americans here. Sometimes, when I announced the name of a new friend at home, my father immediately made assumptions based on the nationality he detected behind their name.

It was like he knew some secret that I did not, a ticking time bomb that was inherent in the person I could hardly wait to make my new best friend. It would be an inevitable explosion that would destroy our future friendship, because the name tied them to a culture, an event in history, a stereotype unknown to me that clashed with our own nationality.

> IF THIRTEEN WAS AN UNLUCKY NUMBER, THIS WOULD BE A BAD YEAR FOR ME.

Till then, I had mostly spent the hot, humid summers entertaining myself on the fire escape of our apartment building in Brooklyn, so when the Hungarian Club announced that they were organizing a Folk Dance Camp for kids aged 12-16 in New Jersey, my parents scraped the money together and sent me off.

My mentor was an eighteen year-old girl who had been playing Hungarian folk violin since she was little. We had the same first name. My parents wanted me to be more like her. I wanted to be more like her. The first night at camp, we all made our own name tags. Suddenly, it felt good to be among Hungarians, a secret club that understood the importance of the accent mark on the 'O' in my name, Zsófia. At school, 'back in America,' people just called me Sophie. It was easier. I saw my mentor decorating her own name tag, writing three letters of a nickname in the colors of the Hungarian flag. Z-S-Ó. I wanted to be Zsó too, easygoing, cool, grownup, more Hungarian.

Everyone's first crush at camp was Laci Magyar. He and his family taught us the dances. He was the type of boy my parents would have liked to see me marry someday. Humble and guileless, he spoke Hungarian like a native, though he was born and raised in America, just like the rest of us kids. He sat around with the adults at lunchtime, listening to them talk about the political changes in Hungary. My own parents had taken part in a fundraiser to send delegates from our Hungarian Club to Budapest, to pay for plane tickets and wreaths for some big political event that had taken place last

month. I had no idea what was so important, but the delegates had come back with fire in their eyes. Everyone was afraid shots would be fired, that blood would be shed, but all that sparked was hope.

All I was hoping for was a spark of attention from Andrew Lupei, the camp's real heartbreaker. I'm sure a dark look would have come into my father's eyes had I said Andrew's last name at home. But I wasn't home, and my father wasn't here. My father once told me: had they drawn the borders a few kilometers further back in 1920, and the Treaty of Trianon hadn't caused Hungary to lose two-thirds of its land after World War I, he wouldn't have had to grow up oppressed as a member of the Hungarian minority in Romania. Andrew was half-Hungarian, half-Romanian, his parents from the same city as my father. Here at Hungarian dance camp, he was called András, but when he went to Romanian scout camp next month, he would be Andrei. He was fifteen and the most beautiful boy I'd ever seen. Andrew wouldn't speak Hungarian and lured us into games where we'd either have to giggle and flee or else be groped and tricked into uncomfortable situations. He soon made us forget all about Laci Magyar. He was full of interesting 'facts' about life, telling us that God made such short arms for the T. Rex so the dinosaur couldn't masturbate. Maybe it was the Romanian blood, I thought. It made him bad. All he needed was a cigarette hanging from his lips and he'd be James Dean.

We practiced our dances each day in multi-layered petticoats, white stockings, and character shoes. I really wanted to impress Andrew, so I started casually telling people I was a model back in New York, and began wearing the black silk blouse my mother had bought for me at Le Château before I left. Not only did I feel like a grownup in it, it was great to dance in, light and airy, cool and smooth, a welcome contrast to the skirts that weighed down on my hips, the stifling stockings and pinching shoes. I wore it every day after, only changing my underclothes.

The best way to make a boy pay attention to you is to play hard to get. This was information I'd read in Seventeen magazine. One day, after our morning dance lessons, I sat down by the pool on a deck chair. Lunch was in half an hour; there wasn't time to change and swim, but there was time to read a story in my Black Hand Gang book. I focused all my attention on ignoring Andrew, who was telling a group of shocked girls nearby how his father had a gun at home and that they'd practiced shooting bottles behind the house. He turned in my direction and asked the others loudly:

'Why does Sophie wear the same clothes every day?'

I ignored him. He continued.

'She really stinks.'

Must. Stay. Silent.

'Sophie needs a bath.'

'My name is Zsó,' I mumbled.

'What's that, baby?'

'Zsó, my name is Zsófia,' I said, switching to Hungarian. 'And you're supposed to speak Hungarian.'

I stood to leave. He laughed. I bent down for my book. Suddenly, I felt the push of hands on my waist.

I landed face first in the pool, the surface startlingly hard. My shoes and many layers of clothing sucked the water in like a sponge. Andrew landed beside me. His hands grabbed my shoulders, pushing me down, both of us under water at the deep end. I clawed at his arms to let me up for air. I opened my eyes. The surface of the pool broke the sun into fragments of light below. He wrapped his arms and legs around me. We sunk deeper. And then he put his lips on mine. Bubbles escaped his mouth like exhaled cigarette smoke when he pulled back. He grabbed the front of my shirt and lifted me up, out. Tears, snot, and chlorine water gushed from my face. I pressed my cheek against the smooth, blue tile. My skirts were so heavy with water, the only way I could get out of the pool was if I untied the waistband. I climbed out in my stockings and pulled the skirts out beside me, like a formless cluster of seaweed. My white stockings were streaked with black. My bare arms, too. I looked like I was bleeding the color of my new silk shirt.

'Zsó, baby,' Andrew called to me in Hungarian, 'at least you're clean now!'

His hair wet, his shirt and pants plastered against his strong body, backlit by the sun, Andrew looked like an angel.

I left a trail of black dye as I walked back to the tent, shoes in one hand, my petticoats in the other. My nose and throat burned with the water I'd inhaled. It was hot inside the tent.

As hot as our apartment back home in Brooklyn. Light years away. I took off my shirt. I was missing a button. My white undershirt was stained black. Even our washing machine at home couldn't make it white again.

I REMEMBERED MY FATHER TELLING ME THAT ONCE A COUPLE'S DEATH HAD CAUSED A WAR.

I turned fourteen on December 25, 1989. I wore my slightly faded black silk shirt from Le Château. The lights on the Christmas tree blinked. I blew out the candles on my birthday cake. Tears silently streamed down my father's face when we saw the news later that night, the Romanian Prime Minister and his wife had just been shot. I remembered my father telling me that once a couple's death had caused a war. I looked in alarm at his tears. It's okay, he said, it's all over now, and everything will be just fine. He gripped my hand, staring at the TV screen. With my other hand, I touched my lips. The lips András had kissed as Andrei had tried to kill me. Thirteen was over. Something new was starting.

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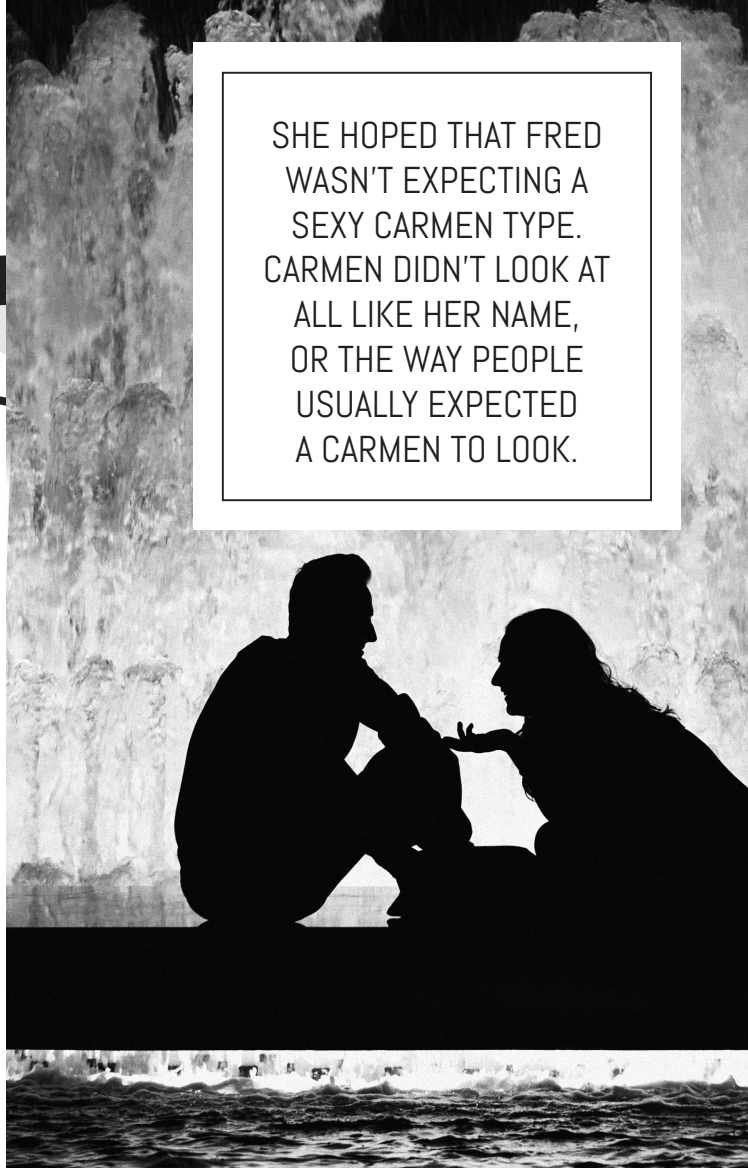
IMMEMORIAL

Diana Senechal



Alex Laniosz

SHE HOPED THAT FRED WASN'T EXPECTING A SEXY CARMEN TYPE. CARMEN DIDN'T LOOK AT ALL LIKE HER NAME, OR THE WAY PEOPLE USUALLY EXPECTED A CARMEN TO LOOK.

Carmen normally looked down on selfies and everything associated with them. The word bothered her; she wouldn't want to be associated with anything ending in a diminutive -ie, not a cookie, or a sweetie, or a cutie-pie, or a footsie. Moreover, she took pictures of anything but herself; any picture of her, she believed, should be taken by someone else. That way, it would show not just her, but another's way of seeing her.

But that afternoon, as she sat back at her computer in North Adams, Massachusetts, she received an email that would turn all of this around. Now she was sweating and scrambling for some kind of stand for her phone, so that she could take a video of herself. The music stand! Aha! It wobbled a little. The phone toppled over. She put it back. It toppled again. She went back to her computer and reread the email.

Dear Carmen Sedergren,

If you were not a friend of Eric Truce in his San Francisco years, please disregard this message. On the other hand, if I have reached the right person, as I suspect I have, please reply to confirm. As you may know, he died five years ago of complications stemming from his personal attributes. In light of the coronavirus pandemic, I am now putting together a virtual memorial, with personal statements from his friends from the different eras of his life. He mentioned you in a diary. All I request of you is that you make a one-minute video of yourself saying goodbye to him. I hope that you will take part—it would have meant a lot to him—and I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,
Fred Dubuque
(Eric's best friend in high school)

She had heard of Fred; Eric had mentioned him. She was also aware of Eric's reckless death (on a Segway, which he had just started riding). They had long been out of touch, but she had come upon the obituary a few years ago and cried off and on for a month, and occasionally afterwards, too. Yet the letter puzzled her. Why a memorial now, and what did this have to do with the coronavirus? And when did Eric keep a diary? *I'm in*, she wrote back, *but I do have a few questions for you*. While waiting, she thought she might as well make the video.

She hoped that Fred wasn't expecting a sexy Carmen type. Carmen didn't look at all like her name, or the way people usually expected a Carmen to look. They expected someone with dark hair and olive skin; she had light brown hair and freckles. They assumed that she was a good dancer; she had no rhythm or grace. She had grown up in a small town in Maine, in a childhood of chess and violin. When she learned, around age eight, that "Carmen" meant "song," she became proud of her name and decided to live up to it. She had a clear, sweet voice and was given small solos in her elementary and high school glee clubs. But because she couldn't project her voice (or, as mentioned, dance), she never had a role in a musical.

In other words, making a video wasn't going to be as easy for her as it might be for the imaginary Carmens out there. She was going to need a few takes.

She balanced the phone on the music stand, this time with success, and stood about a meter from it. She waited a few seconds, then looked abjectly into the lens. "I'm sorry we didn't get to say goodbye, Eric," she said. "Well, we did, but it was so abrupt—dammit, that won't work." She stopped the recording. That was idiotic. Their abrupt goodbye was when she helped him leave San Francisco and go back East. Why did she think she was helping at all? She thought he wanted to go back; maybe he did. But you can want things all you want, and get them, and that might not make a damn bit of difference. Eric had a downtrodden manner about him; he never said, "if only I could go back East, things would be different," but he coaxed the thought out of people. They were always looking for ways to brighten him up.

He wasn't depressed—in fact, there would have been no risk in leaving him alone in his mournfulness. It suited him well. She would ask him how he was, and he would lower his lashes and say, "Well, you know how it is, things could be better, things could be worse, but one thing I've come to realize is that I don't fit in here. I've been living in San Francisco for ten years, and I'm still a New Yorker, through and through." Then she couldn't help asking him, "But would you like to go back to New York?" Then he would get even more bashful and say, "Yes, but I would also like to have a meal every day. I can't afford both."

She relaxed her pose, leaning against the mantlepiece, and tried again. "Eric, years ago I thought I was helping you, but now I know that I wasn't." She stopped it again. It sounded self-pitying, cloying. She took a look at the video. Her left eye was half closed. She took a break and went back to the computer.

By then there was a reply from Fred Dubuque. And a long one, too.

Hi again.

In answer to your first question, this has been my desire for longer than I can even reckon. Many people wrote to the family or posted condolences online after Eric died. Even his parents were surprised by their effusiveness. At the funeral there were about ten of us. But the messages in the first month numbered over a hundred, and they kept coming in. Yours was one of the later ones, but not the last. I realized that it was our duty—mine, at the very least—to give him the memorial that he deserved. And so I talked with his mother and father, and they said I should follow my best instincts. They had done their own grieving, they said, but maybe other people hadn't yet.
What does this have to do with the coronavirus? Well, nothing directly, but I think a lot of people have more time at the computer than usual, and they're also a little less afraid of talking about death than they otherwise might be.
You asked about the diary too.
He kept it for approximately six months. I think he was trying to think back on his life. He mentioned some people who were special to him.
You were one. He said that you were an angel, that you helped him out of a disaster. Then he added that you had no idea that he was just walking from one disaster into another. I think he was being too soft on you, not because you're a bad person—I don't know you at all—but because that was his way. Soft on everyone else, hard as hell on himself. That's part of the reckless mind.

I AM NOT THE CARMEN THAT PEOPLE MIGHT IMAGINE ME TO BE. I'M AWKWARD, I'M GETTING OLD, AND MY LOVE IS A REBELLIOUS BIRD. I'M NOT GOING TO PLEASE THE CROWD HERE.

He was one hell of a complex guy, but he couldn't see complexities in things. No, that's not quite right. He saw them. He suffered them.
But when he talked about people, the whole world was good except for him. And maybe a politician or two.
Sorry, I got a little carried away there. I thought of going back and editing this email, but that would go against the integrity of my goal.
I hope that people will be unencumbered in their speech, just as he tried so hard to be unencumbered in his life.

Carmen began to write back but then realized that this was the time to make the new video. If what he wanted was the raw cut, then this couldn't possibly go wrong. She thought back on her music with Eric. They had done some recording. It had always come out best the first time. Whenever they tried to redo or fix it, something would go wrong or get worse, or he would go off on some adventure for a few weeks and then come back with stories. She learned to save that first recording no matter what. But after they lost touch, technology started changing, and she replaced her analog four-track with a digital eight-track, then the digital eight-track with a desktop studio, and somewhere along the way she lost her recordings with Eric.

She pressed record on her phone again and placed it on the stand. "Eric, I miss playing music with you. I miss your sarcastic jokes. I miss how you called me 'honeybun.'" She stopped. Who was going to hear this? Not Eric. All those other people who had their own special relationship with him, which they would be measuring against hers. She didn't even bother looking at the video. She sat down and wrote again to Fred Dubuque.

Hi Fred,

I'm really sorry, but I don't think I can contribute a video to this memorial. I just don't feel up to it. I am not the Carmen that people might imagine me to be. I'm awkward, I'm getting old, and my love is a rebellious bird. I'm not going to please the crowd here. I loved Eric, and he knew it, and that's enough.

She deleted her videos, deleted the deletes, went to the kitchen, poured herself some wine, sank into her seat, and deleted the email draft. Fred hadn't earned that kind of confession from her. Also, for all his affectations, he was unlikely to pick up on the *Carmen* reference. A waste, a waste. *But wait a second*, she said to herself. *This isn't just a waste. There's something fishy going on here. I'm not letting this go until I figure this one out. An adventure! Aha!* Eric came vividly to mind—his scruffed-up reddish hair, his wild green eyes making him look equally suited to the desert and a spaceship. She started a new email.

Hi Fred,

I was working on the video, when it occurred to me that you must be in your sixties now. Eric would be sixty-four. You and he were buddies in high school. You can't be more than a year or two apart, if that much. I

don't have age stereotypes. I'm in my late fifties, and I do Instagram and stuff like that. But don't you think we're a little bit too old to be putting together a video memorial with statements from all these people we don't know? Most of Eric's friends didn't know each other. He talked about them, but we never met each other. Isn't it a bit awkward for us to be baring our souls to each other? After all, we're the ones who will see these videos, not Eric. And not his parents either, I am guessing. They have probably had enough.
In any case, I would like to know your thoughts about this.

Sincerely,
Carmen

She decided to give the video one more try, just to prove to herself that she could pull it off. She lit a candle behind her, turned off the lights, smiled, and began: "Hi Eric. This isn't for you. This is for us. To make us feel a little younger. To remind us that even if we're no longer sexy at our age, if we ever were, we're still pretty. And sweet. And caring. You are our Segway, Eric. We ride you into the sunset. Bye, honeybun."

She played it back—about ten times—and was taken by the playfulness. She even looked entrancing. Her teeth flashed. This was the best video of her that she had ever seen. Eric might have even fallen in love with it, maybe even with her. Oh, no, he wouldn't have.

Back to the computer—and sure enough, Fred had replied.

Hi Carmen,

You may not know this about me, but I am a psychiatrist by profession. In this capacity, I am sensitive to others' insecurities. If you feel awkward making a video, I am sorry, but that is also your prerogative. I, on the other hand, have a right to continue with this project, no matter what judgments you may cast upon it.
I have received many videos already and am confident that the compilation will be a thing of beauty. If you choose not to take part, all I can do is wish you the best.

Sincerely,
Fred

Carmen did not lose a minute. She converted her video into an mp4 and sent it to him. Then she sat up for a while to listen to Ravel's Forlane, one of her pieces for grieving. And now that we, too, are relieved from the rush, let us take this moment to say something about Carmen.

She had majored in music and drama at Wesleyan—not with any plans to perform or direct, but with hopes of working somewhere in the arts. After college, she played violin in a few bands and worked at Wesleyan's music library; it was here that she decided to become a music librarian. So, three years after graduating from college, she entered library school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. But in the middle of her studies, her brother was diagnosed with an acoustic neuroma, and she took a year off to be with him. He responded well to radiation therapy, and the tumor, which was small upon discovery, disappeared over time.

Returning to library school, she began to feel dissatisfied with her straight-arrow life. She had gone from one goal to another, and while this might seem admirable to some, for her it barely patched up a yearning. Back in college, she had fallen in love with a young man who, like so many others of the era, "wasn't ready for commitment." Throughout the four years, she could set her heart on no one else. He was the one who had introduced her to the Forlane. Finally he broke to her that he was interested in someone else, and yet she couldn't bring herself to leave the Wesleyan campus, since he had taken time off during his undergraduate years and still had a year to go. One day they met in the street, greeted each other, and walked on their way. She stopped at a distant corner to look back. She saw that he had waited until he thought she was out of sight, then gone into the flower shop and come out with a rose, which she knew was not for her. Now she understood that there was no reason to stay around. They had not even dated; receiving a rose from him was about as unlikely as receiving an invitation to play violin in Myanmar. She packed up, went to library school, became a librarian, accepted a position in Massachusetts, and then, a few years later, took a break from the job and moved to San Francisco to play music.

It was there, through music, that she met Eric Truce. His music was her favorite of all her projects; he had a brooding but witty style. They would play together, usually just the two of them, and then talk for hours. He told about his hitchhiking and train-jumping adventures, his one-hour flirtation with arson, his experience as a merchant seaman, where he gambled and smoked opium and heard many a dirty joke on the dark seas. In case she didn't believe these stories, he had photos, memorabilia, postcards, letters. He kept them in a box in his closet.

YOU COULD CALL THIS A TRUCE. BETWEEN THAT UNSUNG SONG THAT WAKES YOU OUT OF YOUR SLEEP AND THAT SIMPLE SONG YOU DON'T EVEN BOTHER TO SING, BECAUSE YOU ARE LAZY AND YOU HAVE IT IN YOUR HEAD.

She found to her surprise that they understood each other. His life matched her yearning. This shy librarian had something of the daredevil in her, and he knew it. "You know what's the worst thing of all?" he said out of the blue one day. "It's that we're perfect for each other, but we can never get married. I would ruin you, Carmen. I would ruin our song." She thought he was just being Byronic, and she told him so, but he laughed. "No, Byron has nothing to say here. I've got my own distress, honeybun, and there's nothing Byronic about it."

Slowly he told her about his restless life, about how he ran away from

home as a teenager, not because of any abuse, but because he needed to run. His eyebrows would quiver when he talked like that. He would look into her eyes as though seeing a faraway world in it.

"But is there a place where you feel at home?" she asked. (What a dumb question, she thought later.)

"New York. But I also have to eat. What I mean is, I can't afford to move there and also survive. I have to do one or the other."

The rest of the story told itself. She asked him if he would go back there if he had the money. He said he would go if he had *half* the money; he'd figure out the rest. She asked if she could speak with his folks. He said she could do whatever she wanted. So she called his mom in Long Island and laid out the situation; she said,

I know Eric is a roamer and a rover, but New York is the place where he most wants to be. If I pay for his plane ticket, will you let him stay with you until he finds his own place? The mother replied that she herself would pay for the ticket; it would be such a relief to her to have Eric nearby again.

Eric's lease had run out, so in the month before his departure, he stayed with Carmen. She gave him the bedroom and slept in the living room. They played no music in this last stretch, because he had no appetite for music. But with him there, she became luminous. She cooked for them both. She helped him clean his old apartment and pack up his things. She talked with him, listened to him, stayed quiet with him.

But then he was gone, and he dropped out of touch. He wasn't an internet type, so she was left waiting for a phone call. Finally she called him. "Honeybun!" he cried out when he heard her voice. He was packing up to go to Copenhagen. He had a friend there who was going to put him up and help him find a job. Denmark was the place he had to see before he died, he said, and while he had no plans of dying soon, he couldn't take time for granted.

One year went by, then five, then ten, then more. One day she googled Eric and read his obituary. There were messages of condolence from people in New York, San Francisco, St. Petersburg (Florida), St. Petersburg (Russia), Minneapolis, Boise, Tucson, Taos, Copenhagen, Istanbul, Tashkent, and more. A few years later she received Fred Dubuque's message. Then scrambled with the video project. Then a month of silence. Then, at last, a reply from Fred.

Good evening, and thanks to everyone who contributed to this project.
First of all, I would like to thank you for putting so much time and care into your videos in memory of our beloved friend Eric Truce. Second, I would like to apologize.
I had not thought this project completely through. Your statements were genuine, open, and perhaps more revealing, in some cases, than I had expected. When I showed Eric's parents the draft of the memorial, they said that no such thing should be published, and the videos should be deleted.
At first I thought they were just afraid of computers and the internet. (They are nearing ninety, after all.) But when they made clear that the content of the videos was the issue, I tried to make a case for a softened, slightly edited version. They refused the offer. Eric's troubled life had finally come to rest, they said, and there was no need to stir it up again. Because of everything I had put into this, I had difficulty accepting their wishes, but ultimately I did.
I have deleted all of the videos. Strangely, the act of doing so brought out the mourning that I had been missing all this time. I request that, out of respect for Eric, you delete your own copies, too. Should you choose to keep them, please share them only at home, not online. But it would be better to erase the whole thing.
Best wishes to all, and may the memory of Eric Truce be blessed.

Sincerely,
Fred Dubuque

Carmen deleted her video from her computer, and then from her phone. She went back to make sure no early versions were still lingering in the phone's memory. They were all gone. But now she was curious. What had these other people said? She knew none of them; she had no idea how to ask any of them. What could have upset the parents so much, what could have persuaded Fred to give up the project?

In a way, it didn't matter. So many years had gone by since they last spoke. She poured herself some wine. She pulled out a map of the world, a map that she looked at now and then when making wishes that would never come true. "Málaga," she said aloud. "I want to go to Málaga, as soon as the pandemic is over and I can travel again." (Not that she traveled much at all.) She could be a full Carmen there. Not the Carmen that everyone had expected. A Carmen who was Carmen because that was just her name, a Carmen among Carmens. A Carmen who went shopping and walked a dog and tripped over things. A Sedergren too. Spanish and Swedish at once. But neither of these. None of this and all and any of this and why, why the distress?

I would travel the world, she said, *just to be quiet for once.* She felt a roaring, something like what Eric's must have been. But it was good to stay home. You could call this a truce. Between that unsung song that wakes you out of your sleep and that simple song you don't even bother to sing, because you are lazy and you have it in your head.

She turned off the computer and, for a short stretch, didn't care what anyone thought. The night saw her, took a picture of her, and deleted it along with everything else in the dark. The minutes passed, and she logged back in, speaking to no God in particular, and to Eric, too, *Forgive my compromise, all those things I never quite did.* Then she turned her eyes back to the screen with its fameless flickers, its anonymous beckon and kiss.

Diana Senechal (dianasenechal.com) is the 2011 winner of the Hiett Prize in the Humanities, the author of two books, and a translator of poetry and prose. She teaches English and Civilization at the Varga Katalin Gimnázium in Szolnok.

FAKABÁT

Lesi Zoltán

1938. szeptember 21-én a kölni vonaton
egy fiatalember utazott női ruhában.
A szemben ülő férfi azt hitte,
káprázik a szeme. Hogy lehet
egy fiatal lány ilyen szőrös?

Gyűlölte a rendbontókat, főleg a buzikat
meg a zsidókat. Intett is a kalauznak, hogy
intézkedjen. A női ruhás fiatalember
leszállt a magdeburgi állomáson,
hogy reggelit vegyen, mielőtt
továbbindul a vonat.

Egy fakabát megállította, és az iratait kérte.
Nem érdekelte, hogy abban az állt:
Dora Ratjen olimpikon atléta, bekísérte a
rendőrőrsre. A gyanús elem ott gyorsan
bevallotta, hogy valójában férfi.

A rendőr a feletteseitől is engedélyt
kért a kivizsgálásra. Így Dora
Ratjen hamarosan meztelenül
állt egy bizottság előtt.

Az orvos véleménye szerint
az elsődleges nemi jellegek nem
egyértelműek, de ennek ellenére Dora
férfinak bizonyult, és őrizetbe vették.
A rendőrnek később telefonáltak

a pártból: a sportminisztérium
vezetői követelték, hogy
engedjék el az atlétát,
mert női ruhában ő igenis
a Harmadik Birodalom érdekeit
szolgálja. Dora nevét később
Heinrichre változtatta.
A fakabát rövid időn belül
golyókat válogatott egy fegyvergyárban.

Lesi Zoltán Gyulán született 1982-ben, jelenleg Bécsben él. Eddig három verseskönyve és egy zombis mesekönyve jelent meg. Az utolsó könyve a Magasugrás (Prae, 2019) németül, szlovákul és lengyelül is megjelent.

COPPER

By Zoltán Lesi, Translated by Owen Good

On 21 September 1938 on the Cologne train
a young man was travelling in women's clothes.
The gentleman in the seat opposite him
couldn't believe his eyes. How could
a young girl be so bristly?

He detested trouble-makers, especially gays
and Jews. He signalled to the ticket inspector to
do something. The young man in women's clothing
got off at Magdeburg station,
to buy breakfast, before
the train continued on.

A copper stopped him and asked for his papers.
It was of no interest to him that the documents said:
Dora Ratjen, Olympic athlete, he was escorted
to the police station. There, the suspect quickly
confessed that he was in fact a man.

The officer requested his superiors' permission
to carry out the investigation. And so Dora
Ratjen was soon standing naked
in front of the committee.

According to the doctor's medical opinion
the primary sexual characteristics weren't
unambiguous, but in spite of that Dora
was found to be a man, and was detained.

The officer later received a call
from the party, the ministry of sport,
where the heads demanded
the athlete be released,
as in women's attire he was indeed
performing a service in the Third Reich's
interests. Dora later had to change
her name to Heinrich.
The copper, in no time at all,
was sorting bullets in a munitions factory.

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RIFKE

Molnár T. Eszter

A konyhaablakból látta meg az anyósát. Haia aznap reggel még igen fájlalta a lábát, három pótkávét is megivott, mire elindult a dolgára, most viszont csak úgy loholt az udvaron keresztül, futtában egészen vörösre vált a képe. Rifke bosszúsan csóválta a fejét. A sakter délre ígérte a hátszínt, de nem érkezhetett meg a szállítmány, mert Haia kezében üresen libegett a cérnaszatyor. Még a kalácsért se ment el a pékhez! Azt meg biztos elfelejtette. Most mehet ő maga, pedig még bőven akad varrnivaló is. Rifke nem tette le a hámozókést, a kis Ábénak kiáltott be a szobába, hogy nyisson ajtót a nagyanyjának. A gyerek mezítláb szaladt ki, fehér ingében úgy imbolygott, mint egy szellem.

– Di Bóbe! – kiáltozta, amikor Haia belépett, és ugrált körülötte, mintha hetek óta nem látta volna.

– Ne csináld itt a balhét, Kind, mert kapsz egy frászt! – torkolta le Haia a kicsit. – Eredj inkább, öltözzél fel rendesen!

Rifke az utolsó krumplit is beledobta a fazékba, aztán leöblítette a kezét, és megigazította a kendőt a fején. Még messze volt az este, de máris sajgott a dereka. Az utóbbi időben nem sok hasznát látta az anyósának, pedig elvileg segíteni jött ide két éve, miután a vén Aizik meghalt. Neki kellett volna vinni a háztartást, hogy Rifke el tudja látni a rengeteg munkát a nagyságoséknál, mert azok a népek úgy szaggatták a fehérneműt, mintha reggeltől estig táncoltak volna. Ki tudja, talán táncoltak is. Magyar zsidók voltak azok mind, Malvinák és Etelkák.

– Te, Rifke, baj van – lépett be a konyhába Haia, amikor a gyerek végre eltűnt a szobában.

– Elfelejtette elhozni a barheszt? – kérdezte Rifke. – Mindegy, majd elmegyek érte én.

– El kell vinned a szajrét – suttogta Haia. Izgalmában közel hajolt Rifkéhez, és a fiatalasszonyt megcsapta a savanyú lehelete.

– Miről beszél maga?

– Most azonnal. El kell vinned innen. Add oda valakinek, akiben megbízol!

Rifkét hirtelen olyan szédülés fogta el, hogy meg kellett támaszkodnia. Honnan tudott Haia a szajréról? Jusub az anyja előtt sosem beszélt az árujáról, mert egyik-másik dologtól megbotránkozott volna a vallásos

> RIFKÉT HIRTELEN OLYAN SZÉDÜLÉS FOGTA EL, HOGY MEG KELLETT TÁMASZKODNIA. HONNAN TUDOTT HAIA A SZAJRÉRÓL?

asszony, viszont ami a Bodánszki-féle holmit illette, arról még Rifkével is csak stikában ejtett szót. Mindkettejüknek gyanús volt a csomag, amit a férfi náluk hagyott megőrzésre, de nem mertek tiltakozni, mert a nagykamasz fiukat, Jenőt Bodánszki tette be a téglagyárba. Jobb volt hallgatni, mint az éjszaka. Haia mégis tudott a dologról, ezt elárulta az arcára írt rémület. Sőt, valószínűleg még Rifkénél is többet tudott.

– Mi történt? – kérdezte Rifke.

– Elfogták – lehelte Haia. – Elvitték Jusubot. Nem tudom, mit hordott ide az a mesüge, de tüntesd el, különben börtönbe dugják, és nem látod soha többet.

Rifke nem mozdult. Az ujjai egészen elfehéredtek, ahogy a kredenc szélét szorította.

– De hát honnan tud maga erről? – kérdezte.

– Jusub egy balek – legyintett Haia. – Amikor az a Bodánszki idejött, én egyből láttam, hogy valamibe bele akarja rángatni. És milyen igazam lett. De Jusub nem hallgatott rám, azt hajtogatta, hogy az egy haver, meg hogy a földije. Én ugyan nem ismertem soha ilyen nevűt Sulitában! Na, de ne hadováljak itt. Te tudod, hol van?

Rifke bólintott.

– Aztán azt tudod-e, hová vidd? – faggatta tovább Haia.

– Nem vihetem sehová. Nem bízok én itt senkiben.

– A Weinbergékben sem?

– Ugyan, kérem! – csattant fel Rifke. – Azok! Ha meghallják, hogy miben vagyunk, még engem is kitesznek. Itt kell elrejtenem.

– De úgy, hogy meg ne találják!

Rifke végre elengedte a konyhaszekrény szélét. Odalépett a kályhához, kinyitotta a szenesláda tetejét, és nekilátott két kézzel kihányni a szenet a vödörbe. Egészen fekete lett a tenyere, de csak merte kifelé, sőt akkor is folytatta, amikor a vödör megtelt, tornyos kupacokat rakott szénből a konyhakőre. Végül egy mocskos vászonzsákot húzott elő.

– Ez minden? – kérdezte Haia.

Rifke kihúzta az eszcájgos fiókot, és beletömött a zsákba sótartót, kiskanalat, kést, tortalapátot, mindent, ami ezüstből volt. Közben Haia beszaladt a nagyszobába a gyertyatartóért.

– Ennyi – mondta végül Rifke, és megpróbált csomót kötni a zsák szájára.

– Várj még! – állította meg Haia. Az öregasszony levette a sort a nyakából, és az arany függővel együtt a zsákba tette. Aztán a menyére né-

zett. Rifke lehajtotta a fejét, hogy az ő láncát is ki tudja kapcsolni.

– Ezzel mi lesz? – kérdezte a padlóra mutatva.

– Elpucolom – bólintott Haia. – Te meg siess. Ha szerencsénk van, Bodánszkiékhoz mennek először, de az tajtziher, hogy utána egyből ide jönnek.

Azon a sabbaton Orinsteinék nem gyújtottak gyertyát és nem törtek kalácsot. A három csendőr nem sokkal napnyugta előtt kopogtatott be hozzájuk, és mire szétdúlták a konyhát és a lakószobákat, egészen besötétedett. Rifke nádszálegyenesen ült egy támlátlan széken a forgatag közepén, tenyere a mellette kuporgó kis Ábé fején nyugodott. Kézfejét karcolások borították, és a félhomályban is látszott, hogy a körme hol bekékült, hol beszakadt. Jenő, aki nem sokkal a csendőrök előtt ért haza, hátát a

> SZERINTEM MAGA IS LÁTJA, HOGY ITT NINCSENEK ÉKSZEREK. HA JUSUB ORGAZDA LENNE, NEM LENNE ITT ILYEN DÁLESZ.

cserépkályhának támasztva megvető arckifejezéssel követte az eseményeket. Egyedül Haia mama jajveszékelt egész idő alatt. Nem azért, mert nem bírta magában tartani az érzelmeit, de tudta, hogy a csendőrök várják, sőt elvárják az ajvékolást.

A házkutatás alapos volt és eredménytelen. Benéztek a matracok alá, a lichthofba, sőt még a kályhába is bekotortak, de nem találtak semmi értékeset. Egyikük majdnem lefoglalt egy gravírozott cigarettatárcát, de amikor rájött, hogy pléhből van, undorodva visszatette a kredencre.

– Maga a fogoly felesége? – kérdezte a vékony bajuszú, nagyorrú csendőrtiszt.

– Attól függ, ki a fogoly – felelte Rifke.

– Azt olvasom, osztrák állampolgárságú – folytatta a férfi. – Beszél magyarul?

– Hiszen hallja, hogy beszélek – mondta az asszony.

– Ne szemtelenkedjen, kérem, mert nem leszünk jóban. Mikor született?

– Azt nem tudom.

– Na, de azt csak tudja, hogy hány éves?

– Harminchárom.

– Akkor azt is tudja, hogy mikor született, nem?

– 85-ben vagy 86-ban. De az is lehet, hogy 87-ben.

Az egyik csendőr a háttérben horkantva felnevetett. A bajuszos az asztalra csapott. Ábé, aki eddig csendben szopta az ujját, most összerezzent és sírva fakadt.

– Ne csinálja itt a cirkuszt! – rivallt Rifkére a csendőr. – Foglalkozása?

– Varrónő vagyok – felelte Rifke. A csendőr tekintete önkéntelenül is a kivörösödött, nagycsontú kezére ugrott. Az asszony nem jött zavarba. – Házaknál szegek, foltozok – folytatta. – Amit itthon varrok, azzal pedig házalok.

– Aztán mit varr itt? – nézett körül megvetően a bajuszos. – Ez egy sötét lyuk, és még egy varrógépe sincs.

– Női dolgokat.

– Keszkenőt? Azt ugyan ki nem nézem magából.

– Felcsatolható betétet a havibajhoz – vágta rá dacosan Rifke. – Ha gondolja, megmutatom. Hátha vinne egyet a kedves feleségének.

A háttérben álló két csendőr kuncogni kezdett, de a bajuszos ismét az asztalra csapott.

– Térjünk a tárgyra – mondta a kelleténél valamivel hangosabban. – A férje mivel foglalkozik?

– Handlé – mondta Rifke.

– Magyarul beszéljen!

– Ószeres.

– Hol rejtegeti az ékszereket?

– Micsodát, kérem? – kérdezte Rifke őszinte döbbenettel a hangjában.

– Az ékszereket. Tudja, ugye, hogy a férjét orgazdaság miatt tartóztatták le a mai napon 13 óra 45 perckor?

– Én ezt nem tudtam, kérem – suttogta Rifke halálra váltan. – De itt valami tévedés lesz. Maga biztosan nem Orinstein Jusubra gondol.

– De bizony őrá – kiáltotta a csendőr. – Vagy hogy magyarul beszéljünk, ha egyszer Magyarországon élünk, Orinstein Józsefre. Szóval? Hol rejtegeti a lopott ékszereket?

– Engem ugyan ne kérdezzen – vonta fel a vállát Rifke. – Most kutatták át az egész lakást, és nem találták meg, úgyhogy szerintem maga is látja, hogy itt nincsenek ékszerek. Ha Jusub orgazda lenne, nem lenne itt ilyen dálesz.

Haia mama, aki eddig csendben meghúzta magát az ágy sarkán, most újra jajveszékelni kezdett.

– Nem tudunk mi semmit, ne tessék minket faggatni!

– Magát nem kérdeztem – intette le a csendőr, de beláthatta, hogy az Orinsteinekkel nem sokra megy, mert feltápászkodott az asztal mellől, leporolta a nadrágja szárát, és kifelé indult. – Most elmegyünk, de bármikor visszajöhetünk – szólt vissza az ajtóból.

– Jöjjenek – mondta Rifke –, csak hozzák haza a férjemet is.

Amikor magukra maradtak, Jenő lerogyott a fal tövében a földre. Ábé odamászott hozzá, végigsimogatta előbb a bátyját, aztán a kályha oldalát is a fal felőli oldalon, ott, ahol egy fénytelen csempe csálén kiállt a síkból. Haia feltápászkodott, és arcon csókolta Rifkét.

– Kislányom – suttogta a menye fülébe. – Nem hittem, hogy megérdemled a fiamat, de most már látom, hogy erős vagy, mint a cserzett bőr és hajlékony, mint a vipera gerince.

Rifke megtörölte a szemét.

– Ne sírjon, Haia mama – mondta halkan. – Arra nekünk nincs időnk.

Aztán, bár már bejött a sabbat, mégis kiment a konyhába, hogy visszapakolja a szenet a ládába és felsöpörjön. Közben arra gondolt, ha Jusubot kiengedik, ne ilyen rendetlen lakásba kelljen hazaérnie.

Molnár T. Eszter Budapesten született 1976-ben, jelenleg is itt él. Író, biológus. Legutóbbi regénye: Teréz, vagy a test emlékezete (2019). Stand Up! című ifjúsági regénye a Margó irodalmi díjat nyérte 2016-ben.

RIFKE

By Eszter T. Molnár, Translated by Kristen Herbert

She saw her mother-in-law through the window. Yes, Haia's leg still ached that morning. She'd drank three ersatsz coffees before going about her day, and now her face had gone completely red from dashing around the courtyard. Rifke shook her head in annoyance. The shochet had promised to have the sirloin by noon, but the delivery must not have arrived, because the mesh bag in Haia's hand was swaying emptily. And she hadn't even gone to the baker for kalach! She must have forgotten. Now Rifke would have to go herself, even though there was still plenty of sewing to do. Rifke didn't put down the paring knife, she just shouted to little Ábé in the other room to open the door for his grandmother. The kid ran out barefoot, swaying like a ghost in his white shirt.

"Di Bobe!" he exclaimed when Haia entered, and he lept around her, as if he hadn't seen her in weeks.

"Don't you make a ruckus, kid, or you'll get a smacking!" Haia growled at the child. "Go put on some real clothes!"

Rifke threw the last potato into the pot, then she rinsed off her hands and straightened the scarf on her head. Night was still far off, but her back already ached. She didn't see much use in her mother-in-law these days, even though she had supposedly come to help two years ago, after old Aizik died. She had to bring her work to Rifke's, so that her daughter-in-law could see all the chores that had to be done for these respectable households. You couldn't believe how these people shredded their undergarments, as if they'd been dancing all night. Who knows, maybe they had been out dancing. They were all Hungarian Jews, the Malvinas and the Etelkas.

"Rifke, there's a problem," Haia said as she stepped into the kitchen, after the child had finally disappeared in the bedroom.

"You forgot to bring the challah?" Rifke asked. "It's fine, I'll get it myself."

"You've got to get rid of the loot," Haia whispered. She leaned towards Rifke in her excitement, striking the young woman with her sour breath.

"What are you talking about?"

"Now, right away. You've got to get it out of here. Give it to someone you trust!"

Rifke was overcome suddenly with such dizziness that she had to grab hold of something. How did Haia know about the loot? Jusub never spoke to his mother about his wares, because the religious woman made a scene over everything. But when it came to the Bodánszki affair, he'd hardly said a word even to Rifke. They had both been suspicious of the package the man had left in their

> "RIFKE WAS OVERCOME SUDDENLY WITH SUCH DIZZINESS THAT SHE HAD TO GRAB HOLD OF SOMETHING. HOW DID HAIA KNOW ABOUT THE LOOT?"

care, but as Bodánszki had gotten their teenage boy, Jenő, into the brick factory, they couldn't refuse him. It was better to be silent. But Haia still knew about it, the horror written on her face gave it away. In fact, she probably knew more than Rifke did.

"What happened?" Rifke asked.

"They caught him," Haia breathed. "They took Jusub in. I don't know what that meshugge brought here, but you need to get rid of it, or else they'll chuck him in jail, and you won't ever see him again."

Rifke didn't move. Her fingers had turned completely white from gripping the edge of the sideboard.

"How do you know about this?" she asked.

"Jusub is a pushover," Haia said, batting her hand. "When Bodánszki came here, I could see right away that he wanted to drag him into something. And was I right. But Jusub didn't listen to me, he just kept going on about how this guy was a friend, from the same soil. And I never did know such a name in Sulița! But I won't go on blabbering. Do you know where it is?"

Rifke nodded.

"And do you know where to take it?" Haia demanded.

"I can't take it anywhere. I don't trust anyone here."

"Not even the Weinbergs?"

"Please!" Rifke shouted. "Them? If they hear about the trouble we're in, they'll turn me out. I have to hide it here."

"But you have to hide it good, so they won't find it!"

Rifke finally let go of the sideboard's edge. She went over to the tile stove, opened the lid of the coal hutch, and with both hands, she started dumping the coal from the bucket. Her palms became completely black, but she kept scooping it out, even after the bucket had become full, then she packed a towering mound of coal on the floor. When it was done, she pulled out a filthy cloth sack.

"That's everything?" Haia asked.

Rifke yanked open the drawer and stuffed the bag with salt shakers, coffee spoons, knives, pie cutters, everything that was made of silver. Haia rushed into the larger of the two rooms for the candlesticks.

"That's it," Rifke said, and she tried to tie a knot at the top of the bag.

"Wait!" Haia interrupted. The old woman took the chain from her neck, and together with its golden pendant, she dropped it in the bag. Then she looked at her daughter-in-law. Rifke lowered her head so that

she could unclasp the chain from her neck as well.

"What do we do about this?" she asked, pointing to the floor.

"I'll take care of it," Haia said, nodding. "You hurry. If we're lucky, they'll go to Bodánszki's first, but it's dead sure they'll come here right afterwards."

On that Sabbath day, the Orinsteins did not light candles, nor break bread. Not long after the sun reached the west, the three gendarmes came knocking, and by the time they had torn apart the kitchen and the two rooms, it had become very dark. Rifke was stiff as a plank amidst the commotion, seated on a stool with her hand resting on little Ábé's head as the boy crouched beside her. Her palm was covered in marks, and even in the dim light, her fingernails seemed chipped and bluish. Jenő, who had come home not long before the gendarmes arrived, leaned against the tile stove and watched the events with a hostile expression. Only Mama Haia whimpered. Not because she couldn't hold in her emotions, but because she knew that the gendarmes wait for, or rather expect, such whimpering.

> "YOU CAN SEE THERE IS NO SILVER HERE. IF JUSUB WAS A SMUGGLER, THIS PLACE WOULDN'T BE SUCH A DUMP."

The search was thorough and without result. They looked underneath the mattresses, in the lightwell, they even dug around the tile stove, but they didn't find anything valuable. One of them was about to help himself to an engraved ashtray, but when he realized it was made of tin, he put it back on the sideboard with disgust.

"You're the prisoner's wife?" asked the officer among them, the one with the thin moustache and the large nose.

"It depends on who the prisoner is," Rifke replied.

"It says here you're an Austrian citizen," the man continued. "Do you speak Hungarian?"

"You're listening to me speak it," the woman said.

"Don't talk back to me, ma'am, or we won't get along. Date of birth?"

"I don't know."

"But you must know how old you are."

"Thirty-three."

"Then you know when you were born, no?"

"In '85 or '86. But it could have also been '87."

One of the gendarmes in the background let out a snorting laugh. The officer slammed his hand against the table. Ábé, who had been sucking his thumb silently, shuddered and started to cry.

"This isn't a circus!" the officer shouted at Rifke. "Occupation?"

"I'm a seamstress," Rifke answered. The officer's gaze involuntarily jumped to her reddish, swollen hands. Rifke wasn't embarrassed. "I go to different houses and I sew or patch," she continued. "Whatever I sew at home, I sell."

"And what do you sew here?" asked the officer, looking around disdainfully. "This is a dump. And you don't even have a sewing machine."

"Feminine things."

"Handkerchiefs? You don't look like the type."

"Attachable pads for monthly issues," Rifke answered defiantly. "If you like, I'll show you. You can take one home to your lovely wife."

The two gendarmes standing in the background started sniggering. The officer slammed his hand against the table once more.

"Let's get back to the point," he said somewhat louder than necessary. "What is your husband's occupation?"

"Handleh," Rifke said.

"Speak Hungarian!"

"A pawnbroker."

"Where have you hidden the silver?"

"Excuse me?" Rifke asked, with earnest surprise in her voice.

"The silver. You know that your husband was arrested today at 13:45 for receiving stolen goods?"

"I did not know that, sir," Rifke murmured, now grave. "But there must be some kind of mistake. You surely can't be thinking of Jusub Orinstein."

"Yes, him," the officer shouted. "And if we're speaking Hungarian, as we are living in Hungary, then it's József Orinstein. So? Where have you hidden the stolen silver?"

"Don't ask me," Rifke said with a shrug. "You searched the whole flat and you didn't find it. So, I think you can see there is no silver here. If Jusub was a smuggler, this place wouldn't be such a dump."

Mama Haia, who had been sitting silently on the corner of the bed, started to whimper again.

"We don't know anything, stop interrogating us!"

"I did not ask you," the officer said, holding up his hand to silence her, though he must have seen that he was not going to get very far with the Orinsteins, because he stood up from the table, brushed the dust from his pants, and headed for the door. "We're leaving, but we could come back at any time," he called from the doorway.

"Come," Rifke said. "Just bring my husband with you."

Once they were alone, Jenő collapsed to the floor, next to the wall. Ábé crawled over to his older brother and rubbed his back, then the side of the stove that faced the wall, where one lacklustre tile was sitting crooked from the rest. Haia staggered to her feet and kissed Rifke on the cheek.

"My daughter," she whispered in her ear. "I didn't think you deserved my son, but now I see that you're strong as hide, and nimble as a viper."

Rifke dried the woman's eyes.

"Don't cry, Mama Haia," she said softly. "We don't have time."

Then, although it was already the Sabbath, she went into the kitchen to put the coal back in the hutch, and swept. As Rifke worked, she thought about Jusub, and how if they were to release him, he shouldn't come home to such a messy flat.

Eszter T. Molnár was born in 1976 in Budapest, where she now resides. She is a writer and biologist. Her latest novel Teréz, or the Body's Memory was published in 2019. She received the Margó Literary Prize in 2016 for her young adult novel Stand Up!

Kristen Herbert moved from Chicago to Hungary in 2016. Her translations of contemporary Hungarian literature have or will soon appear in Waxwing, Asymptote Translation Tuesdays, and Newfound.

the bitter stone it was

By Ottó Tolnai
Translated by Miriam Grunwald

From a blinding copper bowl
sister pearl handed out
leftover hosts
to the beggars
blind tibi blithe and me are not beggars
yet she throws us some
and we had just gotten to the
front of the line anyhow
when just then tattering chesko
shoved me right out of it
for the love of god
not that habakkuk sister
not that one
luckily sister pearl
overheard him
hideously habakukking at me
and she stopped
and caressed my face
with her wafer-serving hand
and said that
she herself
sister pearl
had personally met
the habakkuk in florence
it was made of real stone
but this stone was as bitter as the flesh
upon your face dear william
the habakukk's most
bitter prophet she said
with the bowl more blinding still
there in front of the florence habakukk
it was your mug that came to mind
dearest william
and I also found blind tibi blithe
with opal orbs as eyes
painted on the dismal temple wall
I wonder how your images
got scattered all over the world
sister pearl said

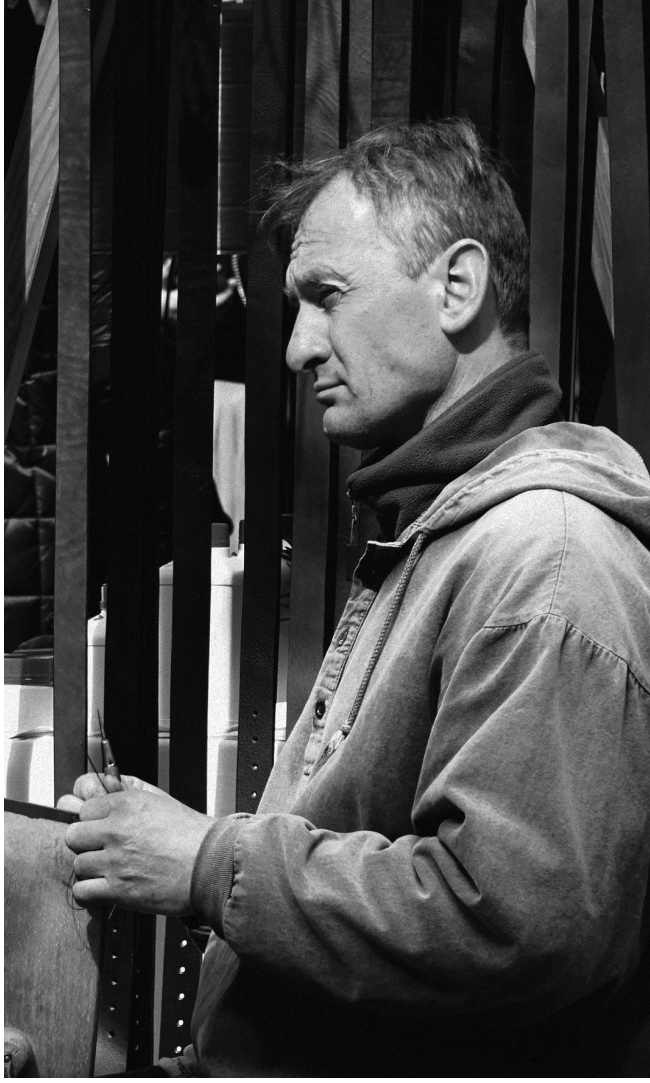
meanwhile as she
tossed some host remnants
into my bag since the bigger bits
had already been depleted
only crumbs
remained at the bottom
of the copper bowl
we will be keeping an eye
on the tattling one
from behind the calvaria
where he visits ou-lá-lá julia
at the sheriff's place
although it may be
moustached violet
that he visits as
she has been seen
drinking english bitters
with old stroppy
above the meadow
where the tisza
can be seen from a clearing
up upon the BALKAN's terrace

Ottó Tolnai was born in 1940 in Kanijža, Serbia. He has published extensive works of poetry, prose, drama, essays, and children's literature. His work has been translated into German, French, and Serbian, among other languages. He is considered one of the most important figures in contemporary Hungarian literature.

Miriam Grunwald grew up in Los Angeles and has been living in Budapest since 1994. Aside from numerous credits translating and proofreading in film, her work has been published in Hungarian Literature Online.

HÚS

Mucha Attila



Alex Laniosz

Az öreg két kézzel, hátánál fogva megmarkolta a nyulat, és kiemelte a ketrecből. Odaszólt a gyereknek, jöjjön, fogja a hátsó lábait, emelje levegőbe, az öreg a fülét markolta aztán, mint Szent Pétert, fejjel lefelé, csak most ugye az állatot, egy tál fölé emelték, az öreg óvatos, de pontos vágást ejtett a nyakán. A vér egy kis tálba folyt alá, a nyúl hörgött közben. A gyerek erősen szorította a rángatózó lábakat, befeszült az egész állat. Hamar kirugdalta magából a vért, a kutya odatolakodott, feje is vércseppes lett, amíg a tálból nyalta.

„RÁD FÉRT VOLNA HÁROM ÉV KATONASÁG!" — MORDULT VISSZA AZ ÖREG.

„Papa, nem rosszból, de nincs ennek valami emberibb módja?"

„Ha tarkón ütném, és úgy vágnám el a nyakát, akkor nem csurogna ki ennyi vére."

„És számít az?"

„Ha kifolyik az ijedt nyúl vére, édesebb marad a hús. A félelemnek keserű íze van."

„Az más."

Az öreg az élettelen testet hátsó lábainál fogva felhurkolta két madzagdarabra, amik az eresz alól lógtak le ebből a célból. Fogta a kést, körbevágta a hátsó comb tövénél a szőrt, óvatosan, nehogy az inakat átmetssze, kivágta az ágyékrészt, majd a lábainál a szőr alá nyúlt, és óvatosan nyúzni kezdte a bundát. A nyakszirtnél megállt, levágta a nyúl fejét, és az üres bundát, csüngő fejjel a végén, egy bádog kannába dobta.

Felhasította a hasfalát. A belsőségek kiömlöttek a kannába, amit a gyerek tartott alá. A tüdőt, a májat külön tálba válogatta, hagymásan szokták megsütni. A combjuknál átvágta a csontot, a kipucolt nyúltestet hideg vízzel leöblítette és egy másik tálba tette. A nyulat estére megfőzi a gyerek, anyja tanította neki a receptet, citromos-sáfrányos nyúlbecsinált lesz knédlivel.

A madzagon csak a két hátsó, szőrös lábfej maradt lógva.

Aztán fogta az öreg a kést, felkapott a földről egy koszos rongydarabot, megtörölgette benne a véres pengét, majd ugyanazzal a lendülettel, ahogy találta, elhajította a rongyot, betopogott a házba, és a kést az evőeszközös fiókba tette. A gyerek fogta a tálakat, utána sietett, közben harsányan tiltakozott:

„Ennyi erővel a fiókba is belefoshatnánk. Ez már itt nem a kőkorszak."

„Rád fért volna három év katonaság!" — mordult vissza az öreg.

„Látom. Magán is segített."

Végül is nem tudtak megegyezni abban, mi baj történik akkor, ha a véres, szőrös kést mosogatás nélkül az emberfia csak úgy visszateszi a fiókba, pedig az öreg hiába magyarázta, hisz' megtörölgette abban a darab rongyban.

A gyerek csak kötötte az ebet a karóhoz, de az öreg ehelyett felállt a heverőről, amin eddig pihent, morgott valamit az orra alatt, hogy annak idején ez nem így ment, nem úgy volt az, hogy a gyerekek visszaszóltak a felnőtteknek, kussban hallgattak azok mind, örültek, ha szép szót kaptak.

És annak idején valóban sok minden máshogy ment, de ma már most van, mondta a gyerek, de ezt az öreg már nem is hallotta, kicsoszogott közben a házból, fogta a biciklijét, az utcára tolta és a kocsma felé indult.

A kocsmában legalább csönd van, nyugalom.

Mucha Attila Pereden, Szlovakiában született 1985-ben. Első kötete, a Konyha, sör, főzés 2016-ban jelent meg. Prózáit többek közt az Új Szóban, a Műútban és az Élet és Irodalomban közölte.

TREZOR

Várady Szabolcs

Az országútról mennek a hegy felé,
volt egy hetük, el kell búcsúzni tőle.
Az utca erdő, egy kis ház a végén,
zene dől ki az ablakon belőle.

Ami volt, megvan, őrzi egy trezor,
örökre ott van, te sem veheted ki.
Akit szerettél egyszer, nem lehet
visszaható hatállyal nem szeretni.

Várady Szabolcs költő 1943-ban született Budapesten. Az Európa Könyvkiadó egykori szerkesztője, a Digitális Irodalmi Akadémia tagja.

MEAT

Attila Mucha // Translated by Timea Balogh

The old man grabbed the rabbit by its back and lifted it out of the cage with both hands. He called the kid over to hold its back legs and raise them up in the air. Then the old man grabbed its ears and turned it upside down, the way Saint Peter was crucified. They held the rabbit over a little bowl, and the old man drew a careful but exact cut along its neck.

WHEN ALL THE BLOOD SPILLS OUT, THE MEAT STAYS SWEETER. FEAR HAS A BITTER TASTE.

The blood poured into the bowl while the rabbit choked audibly. The kid clutched its twitching legs tight while the animal's body strained.

It kicked the blood out of itself quickly. The dog pushed its way over, and its head became speckled with blood as it licked the bowl.

"Papa, sorry, but isn't there a more humane way to do this?"

"If I whacked the back of its neck and then cut its throat, less blood would spill out."

"And why does that matter?"

"When all the blood spills out, the meat stays sweeter. Fear has a bitter taste."

"I see."

The old man looped string around the corpse's two back legs, which hung from the eaves for just this reason. He grabbed the knife, cut the fur out around the joints near the back thigh bones—careful not to slice through the tendons—cut out the groin, too, and then reached under the hide near its legs and began to skin it slowly.

He stopped at the spot where the spine met the skull, cut off the rabbit's head, and threw its empty coat with the head still clinging to it into a tin can.

He split open the abdomen, and its innards spilled out into the can the kid held beneath it. Because they liked to roast them with onions, he put the lungs and the liver in a bowl separate from the other innards.

He chopped off the leg bones, rinsed the skinned and gutted rabbit with cold water, and put it in another bowl. The kid would cook the rabbit that night. His mom had taught him the recipe: lemon-saffron rabbit stew with potato dumplings.

Only the two furry back feet remained on the rope.

Then the old man grabbed the knife, picked up a rag from the ground, wiped the bloody blade on it, and tossed the rag away, just as he'd found it. He limped into the house and put the knife back in the silverware drawer. The kid grabbed the bowls and ran after the old man, yelling,

"Why not just shit in the drawer then, too? This isn't the Stone Age."

"You could've used three years in the military!" The old man growled.

"I can see they were of use to you."

In the end, they couldn't agree on what the problem was with a man putting a bloody, hairy knife back in the drawer without washing it first, even though the old man explained many times over that he'd wiped it clean with the rag first.

The kid stuck to his guns while the old man got up from the ottoman where he'd been sitting, and grumbled under his breath that back in his day this wasn't how things went, children didn't talk back to adults, they all shut their mouths and were happy if they were spoken to nicely.

And back in his day things truly were different, but today's today, said the kid. The old man didn't hear him though, because he shuffled out of the house, grabbed his bike, rolled it out onto the street, and headed toward the pub.

"YOU COULD'VE USED THREE YEARS IN THE MILITARY!" THE OLD MAN GROWLED.

At least the pub was quiet and peaceful.

Attila Mucha was born in Tešedíkovo, Slovakia in 1985 and writes in Hungarian. His first book, Konyha, sör, főzés (Kitchen, Beer, Brewing), was published in 2016, and his fiction has appeared in many Hungarian literary journals, including ÚjSzó, Műút, and Élet és Irodalom.

Timea Balogh grew up in Las Vegas and returned to her hometown of Budapest over a year ago. Her original fiction and translations have appeared in Prairie Schooner, The Offing, The Washington Square Review, Passages North, and Asymptote, among many others.

VAULT

Szabolcs Várady
translated by Kristen Herbert

From the highway they approached the hill,
they had spent a week, and had to part.
The street forest, a small house at the end,
its music spilling from the windows.

What was will be, remains inside,
forever there, what you can't take out.
Whom you once loved, you cannot by some
retroactive force, have never loved.

Szabolcs Várady was born in Budapest in 1943. He served as an editor at the Európa Publishing House and is currently a member of the Hungarian Digital Literary Academy.

CREATION

By Ádám Nádasdy
Translated by Anna Bentley

A faulty one, you said, and picked me out
from among the items coming along
the conveyor belt at a steady pace.
You held me up to the light, peered at me
with expert, narrowed eyes,
turned me in your delicate fingertips,
poked me a little, then tapped your
nail against me, even dripped some kind of acid
on me (though I have to give it to you,
this last you did with real care,
giving your glass rod the tiniest twitch)
but everything was in order, the texture, the colour.
You even sniffed me, but nothing, not there either.
A faulty one, you said, and put me back
among all the identical finished products.

Ádám Nádasdy is a distinguished Hungarian linguist, poet and literary translator. Professor Emeritus of English Linguistics at Budapest's Eötvös Lóránd University, he is known for his modern translations of Shakespeare and Dante, his articles on the Hungarian language, and his lectures on translation.

Anna Bentley is from Great Britain and has been living in Budapest since 2000. Her translation of Ervin Lázár's children's classic Arnica the Duck Princess was published by Pushkin Children's Press in 2019.

TEREMTÉS

Nádasdy Ádám

Hibás darab, mondtad, és kiemeltél
a futószalagról egyenletes
ütemben jövő darabok közül,
föltartottál a fény felé, szakértő,
keskenyre húzott szemmel nézegettél,
forgattál ujjaid finom begyével,
megnyomkodtál kicsit, aztán körömmel
kocogtattál, sőt valami savat
is cseppentettél rám (bár meg kell adni,
ez utóbbit igen figyelmesen,
üvegrudaddal épp csak birizgálva),
de minden stimmelt, textúrára, színre.
Még meg is szagoltál, de semmi, ott se.
Hibás darab, mondtad, és visszatettél
a sok egyforma késztermék közé.

Nádasdy Ádám nyelvész, költő, műfordító. Az Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem emeritus nyelvészprofesszora. Számos vers-, próza- és esszékötetet publikált, újrafordította Dante Isteni színjátékát és Shakespeare több drámáját.

THE TIGERS OF TOMSK

Mark Baczoni

There are tigers in Siberia. Which is not exactly where you'd expect to find them, but there they are. They are *Siberian* tigers, and Siberian tigers have no stripes.

What, you may well ask, are these tigers *doing* in Siberia? Not much, actually. They mostly sit around and bitch about the weather. Devour the odd villager now and then.

But how did these tigers *get* to Siberia, your follow-up question may very well be. For this, I have an answer: like everybody else, they were exiled there.

You see, originally, these Siberian tigers were not Siberian tigers at all. They lived in Moscow and St. Petersburg (mostly), the sparkling literary life of the big cities at the turn of the century making them an ideal habitat for tigers. They thrived in the big cities and fit nicely into the best intellectual and social circles of the day. One or two even knew Tolstoy.

THEY THRIVED IN THE BIG CITIES AND FIT NICELY INTO THE BEST INTELLECTUAL AND SOCIAL CIRCLES OF THE DAY. ONE OR TWO EVEN KNEW TOLSTOY.

They were sought after in the movies, as pets, companions, rugs, and occasionally (when a dog simply *wouldn't* do), guardians of the house (or palace, or dacha). Tigers had a long and illustrious past in Russia—it was even rumoured that the first tigers had come over with Pushkin's great-grandfather.

But then came the Revolution and everything went topsy-turvy. The tigers, perceived by the Bolsheviks as lackeys of the bourgeois-capitalist class, rapidly fell from favor; some were sent to the Front in a desperate rear-guard action against the Germans before Brest-Litovsk, some emigrated to Paris and plotted revenge, others had to take menial jobs in circuses, growling without conviction at the new Bolshevik clowns.

But life, as it so often does, carried on for the living, and the tigers of Russia (for they weren't Siberian yet!) eked out a precarious living on the margins of society. Until, that is, one fateful day during the late thirties when one of their number had a bad day, and—in a moment of costly ignorance—roared a little *too* convincingly at Yezhov's nephew (who was only four!) in his front row seat at the Moscow State Circus. The boy—moved to tears—told Yezhov, Yezhov told Stalin, and then the tigers' troubles began in earnest.

Alex Collins

Stalin took immediate action. He decided to collectivise the tigers' stripes. The USSR, after all, was a centrally planned economy, and who were these tigers to be hoarding stripes left over from the bad old Tsarist regime, making an exhibition of themselves and even profiting (!) from them?

And besides, everybody knew that there was something distinctly un-Orthodox, un-Russian, about these African parvenus who had so overwhelmingly sided with the Whites, the Mensheviks, and those other losers.

The tigers resisted, as best they could. They called in some favours; Bulgakov phoned Stalin on their behalf. Some were shot (more rugs); the rest deported and stripped of their stripes, which ended up in a large warehouse in Yaroslavl, lying largely untouched until the War, when they were traded with the Americans under the Lend-Lease scheme for a dozen trucks, two jeeps, and a crate of Western pornography.

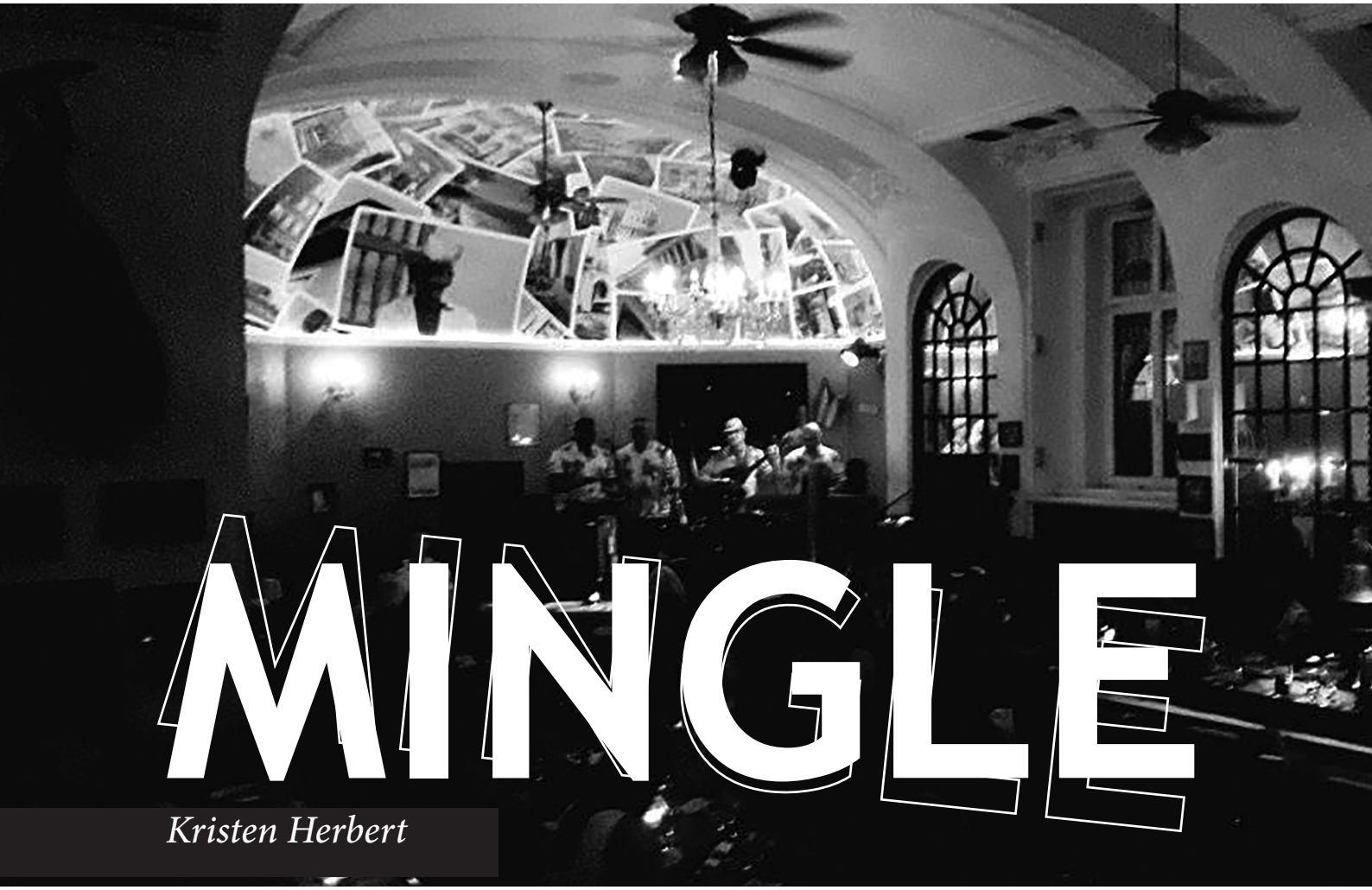
The tigers themselves, stripeless and emasculated, were exiled to Siberia, banned from the big towns and forced to perform hard labour under harsh conditions.

Things improved somewhat after the death of Stalin, but slowly. Tigers were, on an individual basis, allowed back into public life, and the privileged ones even got a stripe or two from the State, to be worn on special occasions. One even managed to defect to the United States and found fame late in life as the voice of Battlecat, He-Man's trusty mount.

After the fall of Communism, many more tigers emigrated, some—claiming Semitic heritage in Ethiopia—to Israel, where they were immediately conscripted into the army; some to Europe; a few to unfortunate ends in Asia.

The ones that remain, in Tomsk, Omsk, and Seversk, stripeless, defunct, moribund, living off their tiny state pensions and reminiscing about the glory days, are very much a breed on the brink of extinction.

Mark Baczoni was born in Budapest and raised in London. He read History and History of Art at Cambridge and now writes and translates from Hungarian. His first UK novel-length translation, János Székely's Temptation, was recently published by Pushkin Press.



MINGLE

Kristen Herbert

Kajlević had arranged the AirBnB at Rákóczi square, ten minutes from the heart of the party district. The flat was on the fourth floor, the balcony looked over the metro station. The owner was a friend, so they didn't have to fill out any forms, just paid the man in cash.

Once the man left, they had a two-bedroom loft to themselves.

Dezső went into the bathroom, stood in front of the enormous porcelain sink, tried to decide if he should wear a white shirt or a salmon one. Adrián unlocked the liquor cabinet underneath the giant, sun-set colored letters spelling BUDAPEST. Áron flopped onto the couch, started playing with the stereo system as Adrián poured himself a tall glass of Chivas Regal.

"Who gets the loft?" Áron asked, after he discovered the button on the remote that dimmed the lights.

"Dezső," Adrián answered.

Dezső stepped into the room, doused in Adrián's cologne.

"Why do I get the loft?" he demanded.

"Because you're not going to need a room," Áron answered. He made the lights so bright that they all squinted. "Or maybe we should give Adrián the loft. He won't be such a whore this weekend."

"Shut up," Adrián said, slamming his glass onto the table.

"Seriously, Adrián. Kajlević wants us back next week?" Áron asked.

Adrián had spilled whiskey on the counter and was trying to mop it up with a Kleenex. "You're going back next week. I'm staying in Budapest," he muttered.

"Why?"

"Don't let Dezső touch the money, or Kajlević will be on my back."

Áron turned down the lights again so that Adrián's drink gave off a metallic glow.

"What does he keep asking you to do here, anyways?" Áron said.

Adrián unscrewed the lid, poured himself a little bit more whiskey, then set the bottle on the counter. He took a long, thoughtful sip, enough for Dezső to burst in again, struggling with the oversized buckle on his belt.

"We're not going to Catch22 again, are we?" he asked.

Áron groaned, covered his face with his hands.

"We're going to Mingle," Adrián answered. "I've said this three times."

• • • • • • • •

Miriam Grunwald

Adrián and Dezső stepped up in line to let the bouncers pat them down while Áron slipped in behind them and sidestepped the obligatory coat room. They followed him through the building's brick skeleton, past foosball tables and arcade machines, onto the main dance floor, then up a back set of stairs.

Once they reached the upper level, they didn't talk to each other, just ordered their drinks and then split ways. Áron disappeared in the crowd on the upper dance floor. Dezső stayed beside the bar, and Adrián hung around the tables.

He was waiting for a group, mostly girls, young enough not to be too skeptical, late teens or early twenties.

He'd been watching this group for some time. University kids, ten or twelve of them. Three guys, the rest girls, all chattering in English. Only a couple of them were holding drinks, still sober and fresh, the lights flashing purple, blue, and green shapes across their faces.

Adrián took out his phone and scrolled, with occasional glances towards the door, as if he were waiting for someone to meet him. He was acutely aware of the rules of this game, how vital it was to never seem too insistent, to enter with everyday questions, appearing interested in the answers, but never harping on any topics or drilling into the facts. He'd forget details and miss obvious connections, only to weave them in later when the other person had relaxed, and was no longer paying attention.

The group split. The guys went to the dance floor with a couple of the girls, and the language switched from English to Hungarian. Adrián straightened up, put away his phone. He downed the rest of his drink, then stepped behind them.

"What are you girls doing in this shit bar?" he asked.

The girls erupted in laughter. Adrián smiled, quickly scouting their faces.

"This is the first time I've heard Hungarian all night," he said. "I was starting to worry I was alone here."

"You're not," a tall, blonde girl said. She leaned into her hip, put her elbow on the table. The heavy-set girl behind her laughed. A mousy one in front smiled benignly. He was set on the brunette in the tight white t-shirt, standing a little farther back from the others, acting like she wasn't looking at him, but catching his eyes whenever he glanced in her direction.

"Seriously, what are you girls doing here?" he asked.

"We're with Erasmus," said a girl behind him. A tall, athletic type, hair tied up in a high ponytail and swishing whenever she turned her head. Her heels made her slim black dress that much shorter, stretched the sinews in her sturdy ankles.

"Erasmus?" he asked. "Haven't you had enough of Hungary already?"

The girls laughed again. The athlete rolled her eyes.

"We're here *with* Erasmus students," she corrected. "Showing them around Budapest."

"Then why'd you bring them here?" Adrián shot back.

"Why are you here if you don't like it?" the blonde girl asked.

"Me?" he replied. "I'm working."

"Working?" asked the athlete.

"That's right," he said, leaning against the table next to her, glancing quickly at the brunette, who avoided his eyes again. "Where are you girls studying?"

"Corvinus," the blonde girl answered. She pointed to the heavy-set one, then the brunette in the back. "Except them. They're at ELTE."

Adrián made a face, like he was impressed.

"You dance?" the athlete asked.

He just laughed.

"We're going," she said. "You can join."

"Have fun," he answered.

And they left. Except for the brunette. The mousy girl hung around briefly, then made some excuse about finding the bathroom, vanished in the hallway plastered with hundreds of stickers. *Life is porno. Love not guns. Subvert the patriarchal paradigm. Fuck the police!*

Adrián twirled around his empty glass, like he was thinking over what he wanted to say.

HE WAS ACUTELY AWARE OF THE RULES OF THIS GAME, HOW VITAL IT WAS TO NEVER SEEM TOO INSISTENT

"I'm going to get another one," he finally shouted. "You want something?"

She shrugged, blushing a little.

He followed the line of her tight black jeans to the floor, where her eyes were focused. He leaned against the table again, sort of in her direction. "Then take a look at what they have," he said, leading her towards the bar. He made a point of removing his credit card and told her, "Get whatever you want. Work's paying."

She bit her lip, studied the menu silently.

"A mojito," she finally answered.

Adrián waved at the bartender,

who was shaving cucumbers into ribbons, making little tents out of mint leaves. He rolled his eyes. The girl laughed.

"What are you studying?" he asked.

"History," she answered.

"Like a certain time?"

"The Interwar Period," she said.

"The what?" he asked.

She sort of laughed, but before she could say anything, the bartender came back with their drinks. Adrián pushed the mojito towards her, then leaned in to shout, "What's your name?"

"Laura," she answered.

"Adrián. Should we get a table?"

She shrugged. He led the way, scanning the room for Áron and Dezső.

"Can you believe it," he said, once they sat down, "I walk in the door, and someone tries selling me molly. And I'm old. I bet they've been asking you girls all night."

"No one's tried selling me anything," she shouted. She hesitated, then added, "You don't look old."

"Feels like it," he said grimly. "Really though, your friends do that kind of thing?"

"Molly?" she asked.

"Anything," he said.

She shook her head. He glanced at the part of the group that had split off. They had formed a circle around a blonde guy who was now twerking to Miley Cyrus.

"What about your Erasmus friends?" he asked.

"Some of them," she said with a shrug. She stirred the mint down into her drink.

"How'd you meet?" he yelled.

"We're roommates," she answered.

"Jesus, all of them?"

She laughed, rolled her eyes. "Just those two," she said, and she pointed out the heavy-set girl, the mousy one. "And one of the Erasmus girls."

"Yeah?" he shouted. "And what are your plans afterwards? You girls are staying here, or you're going somewhere else?"

She shrugged. "I don't know, I'm following them."

"We've got a flat at Rákóczi square. If you girls want to come over for a drink afterwards," he said. "My friend's a bit of a cunt, so you'll have to bear with us."

"Yeah?" she asked. "What's your number?"

"I don't have a phone," he lied.

As soon as he said it, his phone lit up in his pocket.

"Sorry, one second," he muttered, and he took a step away from her.

"What?" he hissed into the receiver.

"I haven't heard anything from Áron," Dezső answered. "Where are you?"

Adrián glanced towards the bar, where Dezső was standing with his back to him.

"Turn around," he answered, and he hung up. He offered the girl a pained smile, slid his phone back into his pocket. "I can't give out my number."

HE'D LEARNED NEVER TO GIVE HIS NUMBER TO ANYONE IF HE DIDN'T HAVE TO. HE'D HAD TO THROW THE LAST SIM CARD INTO THE RIVER AFTER A GIRL HAD CALLED THE POLICE ON HIM.

"Why not?" she asked, twisting her straw.

"It's a work phone," he answered. "The number's tracked."

"Tracked?" she asked, raising her eyebrows.

He was about to lose her.

"You got me," he said. "We said we're splitting, but she keeps checking my phone."

Laura's face flushed. "She looks at your phone?"

"Yeah," he said. And he glanced away from her, like he needed to break eye contact. "But if we're splitting, what else am I supposed to do?"

"That sucks," Laura said. "You should never look at people's phones."

"Right?" he answered.

The phone was tracked. Of course, the credit card was too, but Kajlević had a friend at the bank, and when it came to credit cards, he didn't ask questions. Adrián's current phone number was registered under his own name and the address of a bakery in the eighth district which had closed three years ago. He'd learned never to give his number to anyone if he didn't have to. He'd had to throw the last SIM card into the river after a girl had called the police on him.

"What about Facebook?" she asked. "Are you on?"

"Facebook? No."

"Then how am I supposed to get in touch with you?" she said.

"Rákóczi tér 17.," he shouted. "Ring the bell for Petreházy."

"Alright," she answered. "Maybe we'll stop by."

He grinned. Then he polished off the rest of his drink, glanced at the pulp of mint leaves at the bottom. "Another?" he asked.

"I've hardly started," she laughed.

"I'll be right back," he promised.

He joined Dezső at the counter, just as another group of girls filed in behind them, shouting and laughing at the top of the narrow, concrete stairs. One of their leather bags pushed against his back. In the bathroom to the right, he could hear someone retching.

"The Erasmus kids," he muttered. "Text Áron."

"Why don't you?" Dezső asked.

Adrián glanced at Laura. She stirred her drink, watching the dance floor absently.

"I'm busy," he said.

Dezső glared at him.

"You said you wanted to help," Adrián reminded.

"I've already called Áron," Dezső said. "He's not picking up."

"Then look around," Adrián answered.

The rest of the girls were at the table when he came back. The athlete and the blonde were clutching drinks, their foreheads beaded with sweat.

"What's the matter, you don't dance?" the athlete asked him.

"I'm doing you a favor," he said.

"Come on, anyone can dance," the blonde told him.

"That is not true," he replied.

"Laura said you're having a party?" the blonde girl asked.

"No, not a party. Just if you girls want to come over for a drink," he said.

"Where?" the blonde girl asked.

"Rákóczi square. Ten minutes from here."

The girls looked at each other.

"Can we bring our other friends?" the blonde girl asked.

"Bring whoever you want," Adrián said. "But my English is terrible. *Szorri.*"

"We'll help you," the blonde girl teased. She stopped what she was about to say, frowned at something behind him.

"I can't find Áron anywhere," Adrián heard Dezső mutter. "Have you seen him?"

"No," Adrián answered, without turning around.

The girls then turned their backs to him, started laughing and shouting about people he didn't know. Jörg and Dawid and Jesus. Adrián kept glancing at Laura, who kept glancing back at him.

"You smoke?" he finally asked her, when the others had drifted away from the table. She shook her head.

"I'm going out," he shouted. "It's too hot in here."

He hesitated, in case she'd follow him.

She didn't.

"I still can't find him," Dezső said, when they collided in the hallway.

"He probably went out for a smoke," Adrián answered.

"He did," Dezső said. "Like an hour ago."

Adrián checked his phone.

"Alright," he answered. "We'll look in a second."

He'd planned on making out with Laura on the fire escape if she'd smoked, or had at least been willing to come with him. Now he was leading Dezső towards the exit sign. The heavy metal door was already cracked open.

They leaned against the railing, lit their cigarettes, glanced up at the bright moon, the silhouette of the brick chimney across from them. Then Dezső looked down.

"Jesus," he muttered. Adrián followed his gaze, then dropped his cigarette.

On the flight below them, where the stairs turned, Áron was lying on his back, washed out by the storm light. His mouth was open, eyes wide, blood staining the metal and his white shirt.

Adrián raced down the grated steps.

"Should I call an ambulance?" Dezső asked as Adrián touched Áron's wrist. The man's arm was already stiff. He couldn't find a pulse.

"What did you leave in the room?" Adrián demanded as Dezső creeped hesitantly down the stairs, sat one step above, and hugged his knees.

"Just my bag," Dezső answered. "We're not going to leave him here, are we?"

Adrián took a deep breath, scrolled blindly through his contacts. "I bet Zoli can put us up for the night," he muttered. He glanced towards the door, at the outline of light. Then he dug through Áron's bloody jacket, found a pack of cigarettes and a lighter, no Ziploc bag, no phone, and no wallet.

He looked down into the alley below them, where a car was sitting idle at the entrance, its parking lights glowing, painting dim stripes over the puddled asphalt.

"Let's go back inside," Adrián told Dezső.

They hurried back up the stairs. The athlete almost ran into him when they stepped into the bar.

"Rákóczi tér 17., that's it, right?" she asked, phone in hand.

"Forget it," he answered. He pushed passed her to grab his coat from one of the stools, then stumbled towards the dance floor.

"We should get a cab if they're still out there," Dezső said behind him.

"Yeah," Adrián answered. "You take care of that."

The music was pulsing through his head. He leaned against the wall, listened to Dezső shout into the phone. "No, Akácfa street. The club. I don't know, the big club on Akácfa street."

"Mingle," Adrián said, as he reopened his contacts.

"Mingle. Yes, that's it—"

The Erasmus kids were in a circle again. A lanky guy in glasses was doing the limbo under their outstretched arms. Next to the tables, the athlete was gesticulating angrily in his direction.

The dial tone buzzed in his ear.

"Zoli," he shouted, as cheerful as he could manage. "Yeah, we're in Pest. Just a little bullshit at the hotel. We were wondering if we could stay the night. No, just a friend and I. Yes, everything's fine. Great. Look, we're taking a cab. Thirty minutes. Thanks, Zoli. Okay. Okay. Ciao—"

Dezső nodded to him. The strobes flashed in his eyes, painted his wrists blue and green. He opened his last chat with Kajlević.

we need to talk tomorrow, he typed.

The response popped up instantly. *call me now*

can't, Adrián wrote.

Then he covered his face. His chest throbbed with the beat.

"Are we going?" Dezső asked.

"Yeah," Adrián muttered, and he straightened up, blinking. "Let's go."

Kristen Herbert moved from Chicago to Hungary in 2016. Her translations of contemporary Hungarian literature have or will soon appear in Waxwing, Asymptote Translation Tuesdays, and Newfound.

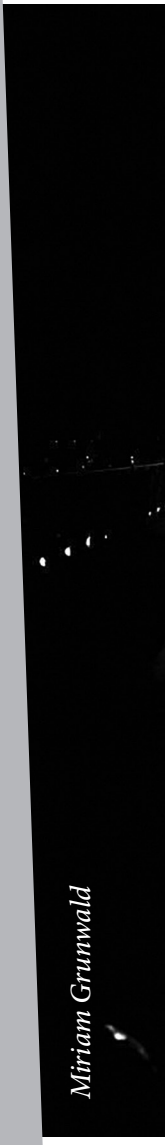
Miriam Grunwald

ARS POETICA

By Ádám Nádasdy
Translated by Anna Bentley

The candy floss man, it's like what he does:
points his stick into the perfectly empty,
slightly battered, spinning tub
and waits. Hopes. Keeping everything crossed
that the usual will happen, will succeed.
And, suddenly, from nothing, a strand
clings to the stick—the children watch
wide-eyed—then another one,
and he can start to turn it gently,
the other strands are coming now, looking for where
they can stick onto the ones already there—
the candy floss man relaxes a bit
hums a little, shifts his weight, looks up,
the ravelled mass grows and grows, now he can
decide what he wants, lanky-long
or wide and squat; grins spill across
the children's faces, out of nothing he
has summoned this sweet, frozen air.

It's not always like this: sometimes he stands
concentrating, the candy floss man,
holding the stick out into the tub,
poking a bit, wiggling it
but nothing. The tub rumbles on,
the light catching, flashing on its dents
The children exchange glances and
he just chews on his moustache.



Miriam Grunwald

ARS POETICA

Nádasdy Ádám

A vattacukorárus, az csinál ilyet:
a hurkapálcáját a teljesen üres,
kissé ütődött, forgó üstbe tartja,
és vár. Remél. Összeszorul mindene,
hogy sikerüljön az, ami szokott.
A pálca végén egyszercsak megtapad
egy szál a semmiből, tágrameredt
szemmel nézik a gyerekek, aztán még egy,
el lehet kezdeni forgatni finoman,
jön már a többi szál, helyet keres,
hogy hol tapadhatna a már meglevőkhöz -
kicsit lazít a vattacukros ember,
dúdol egy keveset, lábat vált, fölnéz,
egyre nagyobb a gombolyag, ő dönti el,
most már, hogy mit akar, hogy hosszúkásat,
vagy lapos-széleset; a gyerekek
arcán elömlik a vigyor, megszületett
a semmiből az édes, fagyott levegő.

Nem mindig van ez így: néha csak áll,
koncentrálva, a vattacukros ember,
nyújtja a hurkapálcát az edénybe,
tuszkolja is kicsit, remegteti,
de semmi. Zörögve szalad az üst,
a horpadásain meg-megcsillan
a fény. A gyerekek egymásra néznek,
ő meg csak rágja a bajuszát.

HOT GOODS

Will Collins

He liked to walk across the Liberty Bridge to work, even though it meant he had to leave his apartment early. To his right, he could see the Whale, a giant wave of glass that stood out among the older apartments and churches on the Pest side of the river. In '27, the Whale had been joined by the Bubble - *a buborék* to the locals - an obese white tent to handle the overflow of foreign visitors from Danube cruises during the summer season. It reappeared whenever Budapest was dealing with an influx of tourists. The city fathers had decided that if the riverfront was to be marred by a bulbous decontamination tent, better to put it next to a modernist mess of steel and glass than the neo-Gothic grandeur of Parliament or one of the city's stately old apartment buildings.

Even with the Bubble, the view from the bridge was spectacular. To his left, Pest shone white in the afternoon sun. At his back, on the Buda side of the river, Liberty Hill was speckled orange and red with autumn foliage. An ostentatiously yellow bus passed him heading in that direction, filled with short-termers pointing and laughing and taking pictures. If you stayed in Budapest less than two weeks, you would never see the inside of a city tram or metro car. A parallel transportation network took you from decontamination to Parliament to the Széchenyi baths—the only baths still open to tourists—to St. Stephen's Basilica to the airport or the train station or the embarkation point on your river cruise.

He was familiar with the yellow buses because they frequently delivered customers to the restaurant where he waited tables. The *Csodaszarvas*, or Magic Stag, was on the riverfront to his north facing Buda, thus sparing its guests the sight of the Bubble while they enjoyed their goulash and dumplings. Its name was borrowed from Hungarian mythology and the interior was decorated like a rustic Magyar hunting lodge, but the most prominent languages on the menu were English, German, and Chinese. After a few too many pálinkas, the maitre d' had told him that the muskets and stag antlers had been acquired from a now-defunct ski lodge near Zakopane, right in the middle of the Slovak-Polish Exclusion Zone. When one of the cooks had asked how the owner managed to get hot goods across the border, the maitre d' winked broadly and muttered something about friends in high places.

WHEN ONE OF THE COOKS HAD ASKED HOW THE OWNER MANAGED TO GET HOT GOODS ACROSS THE BORDER, THE MAITRE D' WINKED BROADLY AND MUTTERED SOMETHING ABOUT FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES.

It had been difficult for the waiter to find a job in Budapest, but after '27, the government had become more amenable to guest workers. It helped that he was from Uzhhorod—Ungvár to the Hungarians—and had a grandmother who was ethnically Magyar and used to vote by mail in the parliamentary elections. His Hungarian was passable, but his English was excellent—a product of a childhood stuck indoors playing *Broken Sword Online*—and Russian guests could understand his Ukrainian, although sometimes they pretended not to. And anyway, bad Hungarian was no barrier to working at the *Csodaszarvas*. Even the Hungarian guests spoke English in the precise, clipped tones of private schools, expensive tutors, and jobs in the upper echelons of business or government.

He had left the bridge and was now walking north along the river beside an old tramline that had been commandeered by the yellow network because it afforded such scenic views. His orange pass restricted him to certain stops on the city's regular public transit system. He also had to keep his phone on him at all times, a battered old Huawei with a cracked screen. If he was stopped without his phone or in a restricted neighborhood, he would be fined and maybe sent back to Uzhhorod. He did not want to go back to Uzhhorod. Next summer, he was hoping to make it to Salzburg, where a cousin who managed a small pension said he could get him a job.

He reached the restaurant and slipped in through a side entrance. He scrubbed his hands raw, had his temperature taken and pupils checked, and then changed into his black hussar uniform, complete with epaulets and gold lace sewn around the button holes. He did not need to get anyone drunk to find out where the uniforms came from. The owner was proud of his business acumen and bragged that he had bought

them for cheap from a defunct traveling theater company that used to perform in Hungarian villages in Slovakia, Romania, and Ukraine. The theater director had to sell everything off after the riots and the border closures. His grandmother had told him it was a bad time for Hungarians outside Hungary. She no longer spoke her first language on the streets of Uzhhorod. One of the other waiters was from Transylvania, and he had said it was a bad idea to speak Hungarian there, too.

The maitre d' kept him busy. There were two tables of Germans, who were polite, and a table of Belarussians, who complained about the wine and kept asking if they could smoke indoors. There was also a large group of Americans, which was fairly unusual these days. They mainly arrived on specially-chartered Danube cruises that started in Vilshofen or Ingolstadt, places they could get to with a minimum of hassle. Vienna was still relatively open, but the Americans were carefully chaperoned when they got off in Bratislava or Esztergom or Budapest. The boats no longer continued south to Belgrade. These days, nothing made it past Kalocsa without special clearance.

Restaurant work had a way of confirming national stereotypes. Americans were loud and friendly. They always asked for a pitcher of water with dinner. They liked to order a second bottle of wine because, "After all, it's a holiday." Towards the end of the meal, there would be whispered arguments about how much to tip. Each group had a different formula. "It would be 20% back home, and I'll shave off a few thousand because we're abroad, but he really was very pleasant and his English was so *good*, honey. What's the exchange rate again?" The end result was always the same: furtive, slightly-embarrassed glances in his direction after the check had been delivered, the dry rustle of bills under the table, and broad smiles and overly-loud thank yous as they stumbled off into the night.

This group had commandeered three tables in the corner under a brace of pistols and a particularly menacing pair of antlers. They had many questions. Could he recommend an authentic Hungarian dish? Would he bring more bread for the table? They weren't wine drinkers—perhaps he could suggest something? An older man with a snowy white beard asked him questions about pálinka for three minutes before ordering a Johnny Walker.

Just as he turned away, a girl on the fringes of the group caught his eye. She had short blonde hair and a pearly white smile that could only be the product of expensive American dentistry. She asked for a glass of mineral water for her aunt, who had a delicate stomach. He was oddly touched by her thoughtfulness. She tried to say thank you in Hungarian, but it came out sounding like "koh-soh-noam" instead of "köszönöm." He never told guests he was Ukrainian but was seized by the sudden urge to tell her the truth. He smiled brightly and made a mental note not to forget the mineral water.

The meal progressed in fits and starts. The Americans were great sharers. Everyone ordered a different dish and insisted that their dinner companions try what they were having. They asked for more bread, more water, more wine. By the second bottle, they were asking about the Bubble and the yellow network and how the Poles were faring and all the rest. He gave the carefully-rehearsed answers the maitre d' had drilled into him when he first started working at the *Csodaszarvas*. Restaurants on the yellow network had to be careful not to alarm foreign guests.

"It really has gotten absurd," the man with the snowy white beard told him. "We had to go through decontamination last spring to visit the Canadian side of Niagara Falls. Can you imagine?" The short-haired girl gave him a sympathetic smile. He made sure to bring her aunt another glass of mineral water.

The dessert menus provoked a round of good-natured arguments. "Really dear, you'll gain 10 pounds from this cruise." "Oh come on, Suzanne. We're on holiday." The holiday argument settled things. Would anyone like an espresso with dessert? "You'll be up past midnight, dear." No espressos, then. Point to Suzanne.

On his way back from checking on the Belarussians he nearly collided with the blonde girl, who had just emerged from under the petrified doe's head that marked the entrance to the women's restroom. She smiled brightly and thanked him for being so attentive to her aunt, who really wasn't cut out for traveling and had gotten terribly sick on the river cruise. She asked him how to say "good night" in Hungarian, and he tried to ignore the maitre d' sniggering at him as he slowly repeated "szép estét" several times.

After he cleared the dessert plates away and delivered the check, he pretended to polish glasses behind the bar while the Americans argued over the tip. His shift was ending early tonight and he was telling himself to forget about foreign girls and think about Salzburg. He saw the blonde glance in his direction and whisper something urgently to the man with the snowy white beard, who threw up his hands in mock surrender. Suzanne collected contributions from across the table. He waved to the Americans as they drifted out of the restaurant, straining to catch the blonde girl's eye. She favored him with one last impossibly bright smile before disappearing into the night. He noticed the stray earring on the floor when he went to collect the bill.

He immediately recognized the pearl earring as belonging to the girl because he had spent most of the meal glancing in her direction. He didn't know much about women's jewelry,

IF YOU STAYED IN BUDAPEST LESS THAN TWO WEEKS, YOU WOULD NEVER SEE THE INSIDE OF A CITY TRAM OR METRO CAR.

but it looked expensive. He pocketed it quickly and collected the tip, which was generous even by American standards. He was sure this was her doing.

He felt the earring in his pocket like a lead weight. As he cleared the table, he recalled the interminable lectures about pathogens clinging to everyday objects and the reminders to turn any hot items into the restaurant for decontamination, after which they could, in theory, be reclaimed by their owners. He also knew how the system worked in practice. Things were lost or stolen or destroyed by over-zealous lab techs.

HE SHOULD HAVE BEEN THINKING ABOUT SALZBURG AND PATHOGENS AND THE RULES, BUT REALLY HE WAS THINKING ABOUT GIRLS.

He should have been thinking about Salzburg and pathogens and the rules, but really he was thinking about girls. He never had a girlfriend in Uzhhorod. The recruiters had told him that Budapest was a party city, that he would meet women from all over the world, that he would go out every night, but they hadn't mentioned the too-small apartment he shared with four other men in an anonymous suburb, the sixty hour weeks that left him too tired to do anything but sleep, or the guest worker passes that restricted him to a few grimy bars far from the river.

The Americans, being American, had made sure that everyone in the dining room overheard their itinerary. They were staying for an extra week at a hotel on the Buda side of the river. He knew where the hotel was because it was expensive and catered almost exclusively to foreigners.

He thought about how to get to the hotel. Public transportation was out of the question. His pass did not give him access to the right tram or metro stations, and on the metro they would check for passes. The trams usually didn't have ticket inspectors, but they did have cameras. The community health official who was brought in to lecture the waiters and cooks had told them that the cameras could even identify faces beneath masks and head scarves.

He could walk. He would head north and cross the Széchenyi bridge back over to Buda, which would put him a few blocks away from the hotel. There were cameras all over the downtown neighborhoods, but he would take his chances. He told himself that the public health official was lying, that the cameras couldn't see under the surgical mask he was required to wear in public, that Hungarian technology was always a generation behind what they used in Beijing. He had lived in Budapest long enough to appreciate the yawning gap between how the Hungarians said their system worked and how it worked in practice.

He ripped off his hussar uniform and stuffed it into his locker, tearing one of the buttons loose in the process. The owner would take it out of his pay but he didn't care. He hesitated for a moment and put his phone in, too. If he was stopped, he would say he forgot it at work. Maybe they'd let him off with a warning.

The decontamination procedures dragged on. He took a few deep breaths and told himself to relax. Even an elevated heart rate could land you in quarantine. As he changed into his own clothes he considered his route. If he left now and walked briskly, he could make the hotel by 10:30. The person at the front desk would be solicitous of wealthy American guests. Solicitous enough not to insist on following the proper protocols, he hoped.

Under any other circumstances, the walk across the Széchenyi Bridge would have been pleasant. The cameras were unobtrusive, but he still noticed them. To his right, Parliament was illuminated against the night sky. Tourists with designer face masks and bright yellow passes on lanyards hanging from their necks were snapping photos. A policeman reprimanded a young girl, first in Hungarian and then in English, for climbing onto the bridge's steel frame for a better angle.

As he left the bridge and made his way across Clark Ádám Tér, a billboard gazed down at him reprovingly. It bore the insignia of the Visegrad Health Commission and a reminder in Hungarian to follow public health guidelines, along with smaller text in Polish, Czech, Slovakian, and English. He glanced up at it one last time before turning north towards the hotel.

Now he was in real danger. The walk across the bridge could be excused as the sort of thing a guest worker might do to get a look at Parliament. But the hotel's neighborhood was restricted to tourists, service employees with special passes, and well-heeled locals. He stared at the pavement and kept walking. He was now out of sight of the river and felt terribly alone.

After a few blocks he saw his destination, which had been a monastery until it was sold to a luxury hotel developer. A large group was ambling into the lobby. He saw a flash of blonde hair and quickened his pace. He did not see the two community health officers until it was too late.

"Elkérhetném a személyi igazolványát?"

They repeated their question, this time more insistently, but he could only stare at the badges on their uniforms, which bore the staff and snake of Asklepios over a Hungarian flag. He remembered the staff and the snake because they were Greek, and the Greeks had once lived in Ukraine, or at least the parts of Ukraine close to the Black Sea. He had taken a virtual tour of a history museum in Odessa and learned about the Greek myths in primary school.

He was thinking of the pension in Salzburg as they took him into custody. His cousin would be very disappointed. He was always complaining about how hard it was to find good help.

Will Collins writes from Eger, Hungary.

I SIGNED TO PROTEST THE BLURRING.

A writer explains her decision to sign the controversial Harper's Magazine open letter on freedom of speech

Diana Senechal

Politics will never be pure. The day will never come when, across the board, people approach issues with reasoned arguments and an open mind; we have too much stake in being right and in disparaging the other side in ways large and small. Yet the arguments have grown so strident, through a combination of urgency, internet noise, and other factors, that even those who depart slightly from the "correct" position may be shamed, labeled, ostracized, Twitter-bullied, unpublished, or fired by those who deem them wrong. This is why I signed "A Letter on Justice and Open Debate," published online in *Harper's* on July 7, 2020, and in print in the magazine's October issue. To me, such shaming and punishment derives from faulty logic and miserable ethics: namely, "If you say X, you must be a Y, and if you are a Y, then you deserve no respect." Logic is no arcane habit: it allows us to make essential distinctions and thus underlies any viable ethical system.

Signed by over 150 writers, journalists, artists, scholars, and others—including Thomas Chatterton Williams (one of the original drafters), Salman Rushdie, Margaret Atwood, Wynton Marsalis, and Helen Vendler—the letter speaks against "the intolerant climate that has set in on all sides." "We uphold the value of robust and even caustic counter-speech from all quarters," it affirms. "But it is now all too common to hear calls for swift and severe retribution in response to perceived transgressions of speech and thought. More troubling still, institutional leaders, in a spirit of panicked damage control, are delivering hasty and disproportionate punishments instead of considered reforms." The letter alludes to a number of examples without naming names: "Editors are fired for running controversial pieces; books are withdrawn for alleged inauthenticity; journalists are barred from writing on certain topics; professors are investigated for quoting works of literature in class; a researcher is fired for circulating a peer-reviewed academic study; and the heads of organizations are ousted for what are sometimes just clumsy mistakes."

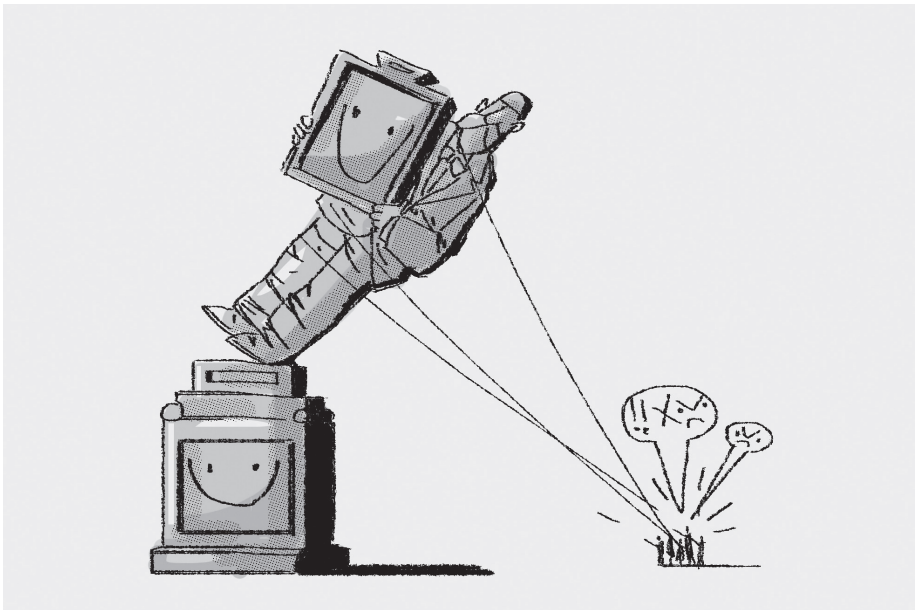
OPPONENTS ARE NOT THE SAME AS ENEMIES.

The letter points to a dynamic in which ad-hoc groups demand punishment for some offender (or take the punishment into their own hands), and institutions comply with the demand (and sometimes punish the offender before the demand even arises). The "hasty and disproportionate punishments" appear, on the surface, to remove the problem at the root, but instead they contribute to an atmosphere where one misstep, one unacceptable word, can lead to a lost job, rescinded college acceptance, cancelled publication contract, or ruined reputation. This affects not only those directly threatened, but everyone taking part in discussions of contemporary issues. Some critics of the letter derided the idea of luminaries complaining about being silenced. The letter, however, is not a personal complaint, but a response to a larger situation.

With 153 signatories, the letter inevitably lends itself to more than one interpretation. My focus here—as I speak for myself alone—is not on the particular cases to which the letter alludes, but on the pattern that connects them: the tendency to rush to judgments and punishments, and the logical fallacies inherent in this rush. Let us look at the two fallacies in the formula "If you say X, you must be a Y, and if you are a Y, then you deserve no respect."

There are many reasons why it might not be true that "if you say X, you must be a Y." In the United States, protesters now chant the slogan "defund the police" or "abolish the police" at marches and rallies. Some say that they are just calling for a redistribution of funds; others insist that they want to scrap the police force entirely. Let us have X be the statement "I do not believe in abolishing the police" and Y be "compromising, mealy-mouthed incrementalist." According to some, if you do not support the complete annihilation of the police force and its replacement with other services, you do not believe in true change at all; rather, you defend the status quo and its entire apparatus. This judgment is not necessarily accurate. Many point out that the police force, while profoundly troubled, is indispensable—and that its replacement by private security guards and social services will leave many needs unmet. Poor communities, they say, will be the hardest hit, since they will be unable to afford private security. This is an eminently reasonable argument, not "mealy-mouthed incrementalism."

Moreover, any worthy movement



Alex Collins

can benefit from some challenge. Some of those who take up the slogans "defund the police" and "abolish the police"—or who claim that they mean something other than what they say—may in fact have little idea what should happen and how. Those who are serious about the slogans will need to consider the specifics sooner or later—and can make their proposals stronger by considering all the possible caveats. Those who oppose abolishing the police may have insights that will actually help bring radical changes about. Opponents are not the same as enemies.

Now suppose, in contrast, that the person who opposes the abolition of the police is an all-out, unabashed racist who believes in keeping people of color in their place. This is profoundly different from the previous cases considered here. Among those who oppose abolishing the police, there will be some who oppose the goal of a racially just society, just as there are those who support it wholeheartedly. If we lose the capacity to distinguish between them—and instead jump on people just for saying that they oppose the abolition of the police force—we may ignore true dangers to civil society and alienate some of its strongest and most dedicated supporters.

Thus, when hearing someone say, "I do not support the abolition of the police," one should ask: What does this person mean, and why? Curiosity, not rushed conclusions or recriminations, should inform the response.

Let us now proceed to the second fallacy: "If you are a Y, then you deserve no respect." Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that the person opposing the abolition of the police is, in fact, an incrementalist of sorts. Since there are many kinds of incrementalists, let us first consider someone who believes that necessary social changes need careful planning and implementation, and that this takes time. This person does not cling to the status quo; rather, she claims that any lasting change requires a foundation, as well as a clear understanding of what has come before. She would recommend studying the police situation closely, considering many viewpoints, and composing a plan of action that will address the problems at hand without creating new ones. As irritating as this attitude may be to those who want swift change, it reflects courage and experience, not cowardice.

But let us suppose that we are actually dealing with a dyed-in-the-wool centrist and incrementalist, someone who distrusts radical, swift changes overall. Let us suppose that this centrist position breaks no laws and violates no institutional policies at this time. Those who consider this stance and person heinous, and who wish to mete out punishment, end up taking the law into their own hands, creating their own ad hoc legislation and judgment. They can do so by writing and signing a petition that demands that the person be fired, unpublished, or what have you—but if they take this step, others can and will do the same to their own pariahs. The rule of law disappears, and the rule of feelings takes over. Anyone who offends me personally, anyone whose actions leave me feeling unsafe, will face consequences, simply because my group and I say so.

The principle of self-willed revenge opposes that of human dignity. Dignity presumes that there is more to a person than anyone can see at a given time. Judgments must take place, but because they are inevitably limited and faulty, they are given a form, time, and place. Governments and institutions set down standards of fairness so that no one has to answer for crimes that have not been established as such. In a fair system—or rather, a system that strives for fairness—your disagreement with someone does not give you the right to hurt him. Only when this person's opinions and actions violate the law (or institutional rules) does punishment of some kind become viable.

Granted, it is perfectly legal to write or sign a petition demanding someone's ouster, or—in workplaces with "at will" employment agreements—to fire anyone for any legal reason. The Minneapolis protesters who booed Mayor Jacob Frey out of a rally on June 6—when he said, under repeated questioning, that he did not support the full abolition of the police—were not committing any crime. But they were essentially creating spontaneous rules, both for themselves and for the mayor: according to these rules, they had the right to shout him out of the rally

IN SHORT, EVERYONE, NO MATTER HOW OBNOXIOUS, DESERVES A FAIR HEARING, WHETHER IN COURT, THE WORKPLACE, OR ELSEWHERE.

because he did not agree with every single one of their demands. These ad hoc rules go against the spirit of liberal society, since they allow for no divergence or disagreement.

Now let us suppose that our "centrist" actually opposes the aims of the protesters—that just as he wants to keep the police force intact, so he wants to preserve and protect the existing system. Someone like this could legitimately be called an enemy of those demanding the abolition of the police, since he opposes not only their methods, but their underlying goals and principles. Let us suppose that this person, while averse to white nationalism and other far-right tendencies, believes that a revolution will bring chaos and violence rather than positive change. In other words—while he will not say this outright—he believes that the police should stop the protests and restore order. Does this person deserve any kind of respect? Is it possible to treat him with dignity, when his worldview strips others of their own?

OUR LIKES AND DISLIKES, AGREEMENTS AND DISAGREEMENTS, SHOULD NOT DETERMINE WHETHER OR NOT WE TREAT OTHERS AS HUMANS.

Depending on this person's position, and the degree to which he acts on his convictions, he may already be violating others' civil rights, insofar as they have the right to protest. If he is violating no one's rights, but still expressing and representing views that others find reprehensible, the situation becomes trickier. Legalities aside, does this person deserve respect? Let us assume that "respect" here means, at the very minimum, "fair treatment under the law," since other kinds of respect are more elusive and difficult to attain. Yes, he deserves that kind of respect, since the alternative would harm everyone.

Laws and institutional rules are full of unfairness—in terms of how they are made, how people are judged, and what resources they have to defend themselves—but without the principles of rule of law and democratic, deliberative legislation, injustices would be far more severe and rampant. To respect someone under the law is to accord that person the same fair treatment that one would accord anyone else.

At the very least, our centrist deserves the chance to have his case evaluated—since one case is different from another, and it is easy, in the passion of a mass movement, to lump them all together. The views themselves—to the extent that he has expressed them—can be criticized, refuted, condemned—but condemnation and punishment of the person do not necessarily follow. His views may or may not interfere with his capacity to do his job, within the framework of the institution that has hired him. Suppose an investigation finds that there is no basis for removing him from his job. Do individuals and groups have an ethical right and obligation to condemn him personally—that is, not only his ideas, but his character—on Twitter and elsewhere?

Once in a while a person earns condemnation—through repeated harmful actions and words, and an underlying contempt for others. Anything short of that merits criticism but not condemnation. Even justified condemnation is fallible, since no one has complete information about another person. So everything rests on one's ability to make careful distinctions.

In short, everyone, no matter how obnoxious, deserves a fair hearing, whether in court, in the workplace, or elsewhere. The right to a fair hearing presumes that not all cases are alike and that those passing judgment always lack perfect knowledge of the accused. No matter what the situation, there is more to a person than others know; thus the person should be considered innocent until proven guilty. This does not mean that scoundrels, hate-mongers, and other aggressors deserve clemency. It only means that the judges should stay aware of their own imperfections: the gaps in their knowledge and understanding.

Thus the statement "If you are a Y, then you deserve no respect" proves false for the simple reason that everyone deserves respect of the most basic kind: fair treatment under the law, in civil discourse, and in public and institutional life. This means that no one should be presumed guilty (of incriminating ideologies) or subjected to capricious punishment (public humiliation, firing, censorship). Our likes and dislikes, agreements and disagreements, should not determine whether or not we treat others as humans. Inevitably we will feel more sympathy for some than for others, and grow closer to some than to others, but those are our personal inclinations, not ultimate judgments.

In sum, the statement "If you say X, you must be a Y, and if you are a Y, then you deserve no respect" commits a double fault: it jumps to conclusions, and it presumes authority that surpasses democratic deliberation and fair application of the law. In jumping to conclusions, it shuts out not only the other person, but the imagination and understanding.

I could have said the above in a tweet and left it at that. But besides not having a Twitter account, I know that this would not have been enough. Humans are prone to jumping to conclusions; often we realize our mistakes too late. Literature and physics classes help us recognize this, but it takes a lifetime to put this understanding into practice. Taking time with this argument, I also take time to think about how I have treated others and what assumptions I have made about them. Snap judgments, especially when performed by groups, obstruct such introspection. I signed the letter because I, like many others, believe that the current shouting matches, accusations, and retributions harm not only the individuals involved, but a larger field of discourse and action. Language can help us see and understand the world, or it can blur our understanding tragically. I signed to protest the blurring.

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EUROPE'S LONELIEST MINARET

Will Collins

One of the northernmost relics of the Ottoman Empire can be found two hours northeast of Budapest, past several nondescript towns and the Kékes, a prominent green bump that is only accorded the title mountain as a courtesy. By Hungarian standards, Eger is a town of middling proportions, home to a university, an archbishop, and a thriving wine industry that has colonized the surrounding hills with vineyards. The town has led a charmed life. Most of its historic buildings, including a half-restored castle and the pastel apartments and churches of the baroque downtown quarter, are still intact.

Just off the main square and a little to the east of the castle battlements, a lonely minaret rises from the town's skyline. The mosque it once belonged to is long gone, converted into a church when the city was restored to Christendom. But for a few hundred forints, you can retrace the *muezzin's* footsteps up a steep spiral staircase to the top of the tower, where the Islamic call to prayer once echoed through the streets of Eger five times a day.

The minaret is the most visible reminder of Eger's cosmopolitan history, but other traces can be found if you know where to look. North of the city center, a Serbian Orthodox Church is visible from the minaret's balcony and the castle battlements. "Török," or Turk, is a family name here, along with several other names that denote foreign origins. Locals say the women of Eger are especially beautiful because of their Turkish blood.

In 1552, an Ottoman army was repulsed from Eger after a bloody siege, one of the few setbacks in an otherwise remorseless Turkish advance into Central Europe. The battle and its aftermath have since entered into Hungary's national mythology. A 19th century author, Géza Gárdonyi, immortalized the castle's defenders in *Egri Csillagok*, which literally means "Stars of Eger" but is floridly translated into English as "Eclipse of the Crescent Moon." Every August, the castle courtyard hosts historical reenactments and a stage production of Gárdonyi's book.

Today, the castle, the siege, and the book are an important part of Hungarian history. But Gárdonyi's myth-making was part of a broader cultural shift, in which suppressed, forgotten, or newly-created national identities asserted themselves against an older feudal and imperial order. This shift culminated in the wars, pogroms, and revolutions of the 20th century, which redrew Eastern Europe's borders along ethnic and linguistic lines. Vast multicultural empires and their dynastic rulers—the Habsburgs, the Ottomans, the Romanovs, the Hohenzollerns—were replaced by nation-states.

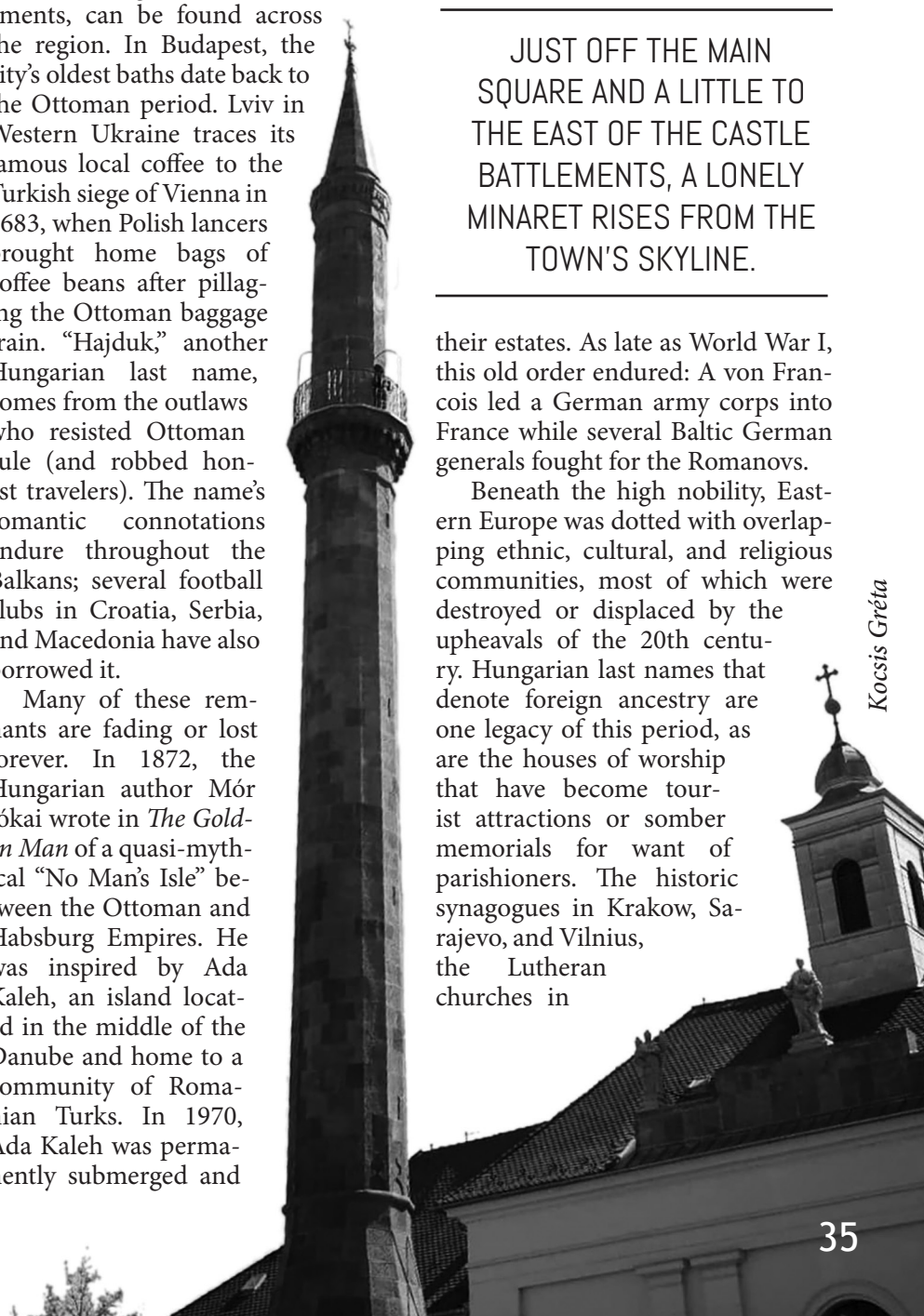
Remnants of this cosmopolitan era, including its Islamic elements, can be found across the region. In Budapest, the city's oldest baths date back to the Ottoman period. Lviv in Western Ukraine traces its famous local coffee to the Turkish siege of Vienna in 1683, when Polish lancers brought home bags of coffee beans after pillaging the Ottoman baggage train. "Hajduk," another Hungarian last name, comes from the outlaws who resisted Ottoman rule (and robbed honest travelers). The name's romantic connotations endure throughout the Balkans; several football clubs in Croatia, Serbia, and Macedonia have also borrowed it.

Many of these remnants are fading or lost forever. In 1872, the Hungarian author Mór Jókai wrote in *The Golden Man* of a quasi-mythical "No Man's Isle" between the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires. He was inspired by Ada Kaleh, an island located in the middle of the Danube and home to a community of Romanian Turks. In 1970, Ada Kaleh was permanently submerged and its population displaced by the construction of the Iron Gates dam.

What traces remain of this bygone era are salutary reminders that cosmopolitanism and tolerance are not modern inventions. Eastern Europe before World War I was hardly a multicultural utopia, but the region was home to an astonishing array of peoples and religions. It was a deeply stratified society, dominated by aristocrats who married across borders and were often more comfortable speaking French or German or English than the language of the peasants who toiled on their estates. As late as World War I, this old order endured: A von Francois led a German army corps into France while several Baltic German generals fought for the Romanovs.

JUST OFF THE MAIN SQUARE AND A LITTLE TO THE EAST OF THE CASTLE BATTLEMENTS, A LONELY MINARET RISES FROM THE TOWN'S SKYLINE.

Beneath the high nobility, Eastern Europe was dotted with overlapping ethnic, cultural, and religious communities, most of which were destroyed or displaced by the upheavals of the 20th century. Hungarian last names that denote foreign ancestry are one legacy of this period, as are the houses of worship that have become tourist attractions or somber memorials for want of parishioners. The historic synagogues in Krakow, Sarajevo, and Vilnius, the Lutheran churches in



Kocsis Gréta

Transylvania, the minaret in Eger—all of these buildings are reminders of Eastern Europe's cosmopolitan story.

In 2016, a Turkish cleric returned to Eger to sound the traditional Islamic call to prayer from the minaret balcony for the first time in hundreds of years. Still, the minaret is likely to remain a lonely outpost at these northern latitudes. When Eger was retaken from the Turks, the victorious Christians had the foresight to preserve the tower, despite its connection to a long and brutal foreign occupation. The contrasting fate of the town synagogue, which was demolished after World War II because the local Jewish community had been eradicated, is instructive.

For all its faults, Eastern Europe at the turn of the 20th century was a genuinely multicultural society. In 1914, Hungarians were a bare majority in the Kingdom of Hungary. On the eve of World War II, Poland was only 68% Polish. The entire region, wrote the Polish poet Tadeusz Borowski, was an "incredible, almost comical melting-pot of peoples and nationalities sizzling dangerously in the very heart of Europe."

Eventually, the pot boiled over. The wars, revolutions, and pogroms of the 20th century reshaped borders

FOR ALL ITS FAULTS, EASTERN EUROPE AT THE TURN OF THE 20TH CENTURY WAS A GENUINELY MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY. IN 1914, HUNGARIANS WERE A BARE MAJORITY IN HUNGARY.

and destroyed ethnic and religious enclaves across the region. In many places, crumbling architecture is all that remains of the old order. That this destruction was accomplished in the space of a few generations is worth remembering. Religious and ethnic pluralism are fragile things. In Eastern Europe, they vanished almost overnight.

Will Collins writes from Eger, Hungary.

A SZÍV
Nádasdy Ádám

A szív rendkívül ronda volt:
puha, világos, alumínium,
és rózsaszín selyempapírba volt tekerve.
"Mi ez?" kérdezte az enyhén kövérkés —
mire a másik azt morogta: "Szív.
Én csináltam. A politechnikán."
Ez érdekes, gondolta a kövérkés,
hogy az istenbe tudta megcsinálni?
Mert mindig egymás mellett dolgoztak,
már ha azt nevezhetjük dolgozásnak,
ami ott zajlott szerda délelőtt:
le voltak zavarva az alagsorba,
lakatosmunkára, és többnyire utálták,
mert kilógott az ideológia,
istenem, fizikai munka, tökös szimbólumok!
Egy izzadó, beszart pártember lihegését
hallgatták szerda délelőttönként;
húsz satupad volt, alagsori raktár
(úgy mondta Dezső bácsi: savasraktár).
A lányok ilyenkor varrást tanultak.
"De mire jó ez?" kérdezte az enyhén,
vagy talán egyáltalán nem kövérkés,
csak vastagságra hajlamos barát,
mire a másik, aki meg *von Haus aus*
sovány volt, a mázlista szemét,
csak vállvonogatott, "Hát mi, baszod.
Hamutartó." Nem volt a szavak embere.
Ez tök állat, gondolta a kövérkés,
ez benn maradt suli után, hogy megcsinálja,
hát normális ez, ezt a rondaságot?
Mert egyébként nem mozdultak el
egymás mellől, volt két satupad, ami
oldalt esett, azt vették be maguknak.
Lett volna hely középen is, a húsz satura
tizenhat fiú esett, olyan volt, mint egy régi,
reálgimnáziumi fiúosztály.
Az enyhén kövérkés meg a sovány
zavarban is volt, elnémulva reszeltek,
férfias légkör, doszt káromkodás,
"Fasz vagy, fiam," mondta a párttag,
akit kiemelésként tehettek ide,
mert diplomája, ugye, hát, izé.
A szív lapos volt, szar vékony lemezből,
mint egy kis tálca vagy alacsony doboz,
szóval volumenében *hamutartoid,*
csak a szélei, ugye, önálló fülekként
voltak fölhajtva, a szív-alak mentén,
és egymáshoz nyomogatva, hogy a hamu
ki ne peregjen közülük, mint foghíjas
kerítésen. Hát, kösz, mondta a kövérkés,
ügyes vagy. Itt-ott vágott a széle.
Évekig használta, az ágya mellett,
és azt hazudta: ő maga csinálta.

Nádasdy Ádám nyelvész, költő, műfordító. Az Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem emeritus nyelvészprofesszora. Számos vers-, próza- és esszékötetet publikált, újrafordította Dante Isteni színjátékát és Shakespeare több drámáját.

WRITING IN THE TIME OF COVID

Jennifer Walker

Miriam Grunwald

On the 29th of February, 2020 I had my tarot read by the Devil. I was dressed as Justice, wearing a toga, looking at the world through a transparent golden blind, and balancing a pair of antique scales on my lap. I don't believe in the tarot, but I felt tension in the air as the Devil pulled a card: the inverted wheel of fortune. *Your life is going to be thrown into chaos. Something will come up that you can't control.*

I threw a tarot-themed surrealist party the week the virus entered the country, unaware that the wheel was already spinning.

Our lives hit the brakes hard as Covid-19 put our plans on hold for the foreseeable future. We not only faced an unknown, invisible threat to our survival that hung in the contaminated breath of others, but as we locked our doors and moved our worlds online, Covid threatened what it meant for us to feel human. Isolation has the power to break us, as by nature we are social creatures, but when survival meant treating everyone as a potential risk, our very social fabric became endangered. We became numb, but not because of the virus itself, but because of the world the virus threatened to create as we scrambled for alternatives to stay connected.

I did have hope in humanity, not only in our ability to survive but in our ability to innovate. Adapting to change is part of the human condition; it's where breakthroughs happen. I also had faith in our ability to band together in our communities and come out stronger than before. Even though it felt artificial to live through a digital realm, in a way I believe it became a salvation for our humanity. In order to meet our natural needs, we had to turn to the unnatural medium of living through a screen.

It's human to seek community - a tribe to connect with, whether that tribe connects us by blood or by passion. It took me years to find that community in Budapest, but like a set of dominos, once I tapped into one contact the rest fell into place. Soon I co-ran story and poetry readings held monthly on Friday nights and co-founded a literary journal. I also found my literary confidants in the dilapidated basement of the Painter's Palace, an alternative artistic collective in a crumbling, unheated basement hidden below the old apartments of the Palace District, where we wrote out stories amidst the drying oil paintings, scattered charcoal sketches, fraying Persian carpets, and dried-up candle wax patching the stone floors. Even after the Painter's Palace temporarily closed and moved locations, we kept writing. First in an abandoned escape room game in a basement overrun with mice, where we'd occasionally get raided by the police, then we'd move to a friend's apartment on Népszínház utca. The place may have changed, but the getting together to write became a habit, a ritual that reminded me I was a writer and that I wasn't alone.

The last night we saw each other in the person was just another Monday in March. We gathered around a coffee table scribbling. We emptied bottles of *La Fiesta*, a cheap sticky wine we bought from the tobacconist's down the street, from eclectic glasses and chipped mugs as we wrote limericks about the coronavirus.

It was all jokes until I browsed my phone while the others smoked cigarettes on the icy gangway: Italy was in quarantine.

Two days later, they closed the bars and the borders. All the routines, rituals, and habits I had were disrupted. As we all fell down Maslow's pyramid, we found ourselves at the bottom layer, where our needs were the basics of survival. Gathering food meant trips to supermarkets, decked out in DIY PPE because the masks had sold out. There was no more yeast on the shelves, toilet paper became a luxury commodity, and I read stories about con men bulk-buying hand sanitizer in batches to sell at a marked up price.

I watched the numbers of the infected climb up on the news. During those weeks I stopped creating.

I soon found out many of us stopped creating.

It's hard to create when your whole world around you feels like it's about to fall apart. The dreams you had, all your plans, aspirations, small pleasures, the things taken for granted—gone. It made me feel less alone when friends told me over Facebook messenger they struggled to write or create. Although I couldn't hear their physical voices or see the look in their eyes as they typed, I could sense the desperation in their words. I missed them and wanted more than just characters on a screen. I wanted to hug them, touch them, be in a room with them. Luckily, we had the technology to see each other,

speak to each other, and even meet in groups.

Normally, I found the digital world becomes isolating as we are reduced to avatars. Back in the pre-Covid era, I found I could escape this loneliness through shared ideas and stories over a drink together—it made me feel human again. Covid-19 exiled me into the online world, and the fear of being forgotten soon became real. I could only live through an online persona that didn't feel authentic. Even when it came to my writing, I needed other people for it to come to life. I'd audition characters as I people-watched in cafes. My creativity flowed when surrounded by the background noise of chatter and clinking coffee cups. Although writing is a solitary activity, it's one rooted in our humanity. Even writing alone in a cafe, we feel a part of something, maybe a collective unconsciousness, or we just like having people around us. There is a reason coffee houses and similar creative hubs have been incubators of great stories and ideas. But then they closed indefinitely.

There was solace though: community. Even if we had to substitute our real world interactions with online ones, even when gazing at each other through pixels and rendered audio, there was enough to keep the community alive. Survival is not thriving, but it's better than the alternative.

Knowing others suffered the same anxieties and inability to create like I did eased the panic. There was some selfish comfort in not being the only one numbed. The comfort in not feeling alone is a cliché for a reason, and we found we could pull through together with a little innovation. We couldn't meet in person, but we could from behind a screen.

We moved our lives online. A year ago it would have felt ridiculous, unnatural, but a year ago things were different. It still felt unnatural, but survival meant adapting to the then-changing world, and that Darwinian instinct kicked in. Some writers in my community set up a creative writing group, dubbed "Writing in the Time of Corona." We'd meet on Google Hangouts for prompts we'd scribble in live time. Our webcams were switched on, many of us had our mics muted, but still the sounds of pens scratching and keyboards typing could be heard in the background. Stories were somber, often about love or relationships falling apart. A desire to be touched or be with others again in real life. We'd listen to familiar voices read out their work through the crackling connections, sometimes losing the odd word or two as the internet connection became strained. It was a virtual café where we gathered to write and share ideas. We realized that moving our lives online didn't limit our creativity. In fact, the ability to exchange ideas again and have an audience ignited them once more.

> ISOLATION HAS THE POWER TO BREAK US, AS BY NATURE WE ARE SOCIAL CREATURES, BUT WHEN SURVIVAL MEANT TREATING EVERYONE AS A POTENTIAL RISK, OUR VERY SOCIAL FABRIC BECAME ENDANGERED.

We could no longer gather our audiences in a bookshop or a café, but we could get them on Zoom. Our living rooms and kitchens don't have the timeless atmosphere of a old café, where you can run your hands across marble tables in a place other writers have written before. Instead, they continuously remind us of the grind of daily life with dirty dishes piled up in the sink hidden out of sight from the webcam, but at least we could still tell stories. We could be together. But the circumstances allowed us to expand our circle in a way brick and mortar-held events couldn't: we heard poetry live from New York and Riga, and saw familiar faces now gone from Budapest listening. The spirit was definitely alive.

An audience mostly based in Hungary listened to flash fiction read in Latvian followed by its English translation. The pandemic held an opportunity for a kind of literary globalization. Although our lingua franca is English, there was still room for indigenous languages. Translators served as mediums to connect the two worlds. For the first time I felt it was possible to explore new platforms and expand into communities we didn't even think about before.

But habit and the desire for normalcy are also part of human nature. Coincidentally, as the temperatures rose, the risk decreased, in Hungary at least. Although our friends in the States and the UK were still enduring the first wave, the number of infected began to drop in our corner of Europe. The bars opened up and people prematurely celebrated living in a "post-pandemic world." As the risk dropped, the urgency to survive also declined. My magazine cancelled its Zoom account and printed hard copies of its latest issue. We launched a live party in a bookshop garden. Things appeared normal, but we embraced some of the digital innovations we picked up as a relic from the height of lockdown. The live launch flickered unstably over Facebook Live, allowing our new international audience to tune in, as well as those of us still at risk or in love with someone still at risk from a virus that had not yet gone.

It's hard to create a community when we live on different tiers of the pyramid, and there is a risk of some of us getting left behind. It's human nature, evolution for the strong to survive and the weak to be abandoned. However, I am adapting to this new world. I am writing again, and still link up with the others in a virtual world, while they meet in person to write together. I'll join in online to passively write along with the broadcast, but as for my own survival within the community, my future is still in doubt. Will I have to wait until there is a vaccine? Some studies say the antibodies for the virus seldom last, making herd immunity possibly unreachable. How can you even think about what the future holds when it's painful to look ahead beyond the next week?

Zoom is not a medium for human interaction. Its rooms are ephemeral. They go away when you click "End Meeting." Technology moves fast, but human nature does not. We either need to fear for our lives and legacies to embrace it in full, or just need time

for our humanity to catch up. Luckily we are adaptive creatures. Humans are not only adaptive as individuals, but as a community. Yes, events may go back offline, but even technophobes by nature are experimenting with Facebook Live to include those more vulnerable and those far away. I think our communities will become a hybrid, blending the best of meeting together in person with a digital inclusivity that holds no geographical barriers.

Until then, we have to do what we can to be connected. We will still gather together in a place – even if that place only exists in pixels or a hybrid of the two – to write and share stories.

This dystopian reality we've lived in, and may continue to live in until a vaccine arrives, gives us a sense of an age that is ours. We are faced with an uncomfortable mirror of reality, stuck inside with our futures on pause, that made us rethink our creativity. As we survive in a world that's uncertain, we create new possibilities. I am still optimistic about some kind of positive change. Maybe virtual globalization will burst with art and spur collaboration with other kindred spirits across the world in an exchange of ideas in a creative melting pot. Maybe new ideas will flow more freely than before. Perhaps our creative writing prompts, our collective anxieties, and our desperation to feel close to one another will bleed into our writing. Maybe one day we'll feel more comfortable blending the latest technology with our art. We've tasted the unknown, and I still have hope that it'll make us stronger. Resilience, survival, adaptability, and a sense of community are what make us human.

Jennifer Walker is an Anglo-Hungarian writer and former nuclear physicist. An editor of Panel Magazine and a writer of guidebooks, she has written for National Geographic, CNN, BBC, and The Independent, among others.

AZ A KŐ ÉPPEN OLYAN KESERŰ VOLT
Tolnai Ottó

a vakító rézvajdlingból osztotta
az ostyahulladékot gyöngyvér nővér
a koldusoknak
mi nem vagyunk koldusok vak vigh tibikével
de olykor nekünk is dob
és már épp sorra kerültünk volna
amikor a csipogó cseszkó kilökött a sorból
ennek a habakukknak ne
nővérke ennek a habakukknak az istenért se
szerencsére gyöngyvér nővér meghallotta
hogy a cseszkó csúnyán lehabakukkozott
és megállt
és ostyás kezével megérintette arcom
és azt mondta hogy ő gyöngyvér nővér
florencban
személyesen is találkozott habakukkal
igaz kőből volt
de az a kő éppen olyan keserű volt
mint a te arcodon a hús vilmoska
a habakukk a legkeserűbb próféta
ott mondta a vajdlinggal egyre csak vakítva
ott habakukk előtt florencban
a te pofád jutott eszembe vilmoska
és megtaláltam egy sötét templomfalra festve
opálgombokkal a szeme helyén
vak vigh tibikét is
csak azt tudnám mondta gyöngyvér nővér
hogyan szóródott szét így a képmásotok
a világba
és közben az én szatyromba is dobott
egy kis ostyamorzsát
mert akkorra már a nagyobb darabok
az ostyareszli is elfogyott
csak morzsa maradt a vajdling
a vakító rézvajdling alján
a csipogót meg majd szépen kilessük
a kálvária mögött
oda jár a hullala julcsához a seriftanyára
de az is lehet a bajszos ibolyhoz pártolt
mert a hullalát az öreg kekeccel látták
angolkeserűt inni a rét felett
ahonnan a tiszát is látni a BALKÁN teraszán

Tolnai Ottó 1940-ben született Magyarkanizsán. Számos verses és prózai mű, dráma, esszé és gyerekkönyv szerzője. Más nyelvek mellett németre, franciára, és szerbre is fordították. A kortárs magyar irodalom egyik legjelentősebb alkotója.

CUKOR, ZSÍR, ÉS AZ APOKALIPSZIS

Tóbiás Krisztián

Alex Laniosz

A szlovén, tíznapos háború második napján nagyapám hozatott egy zsák cukrot és két zsák lisztet. Nagy, kék bödönben zsírt. Bespájzolt, mint negyvenegyben[1]. Sose lehessen azt tudni[2]. Zsíros kenyér és pörköltcukor teának legyen, a többit meg majd meglátjuk. Így telt el kilenc év. Spájzoltunk, raktároztunk, sorban álltunk a boltok előtt sóért, olajért, cigarettáért. Fejadagokért, amiből mindig kevesebb volt, mint amennyi fej. Pedig fej is egyre kevesebb volt. Ki a zöldhatáron Magyarba, majd onnan tovább, a boldog nyugatra, ki teherautón a Horvát határra, Boszniába, Koszovóra. Hajnali négykor biciklizünk át a zentai dohánygyárba, hogy tizenegy óra körül sorra kerüljünk és kapjunk tíz doboz cigit per kopf. Mint egy hatalmas bálterem, terült el a dohánygyár füves, sáros parkolója. Itt-ott olajfoltos pocsolyák, kereknyomok. Tranzisztoros rádión hallgattuk, hová tartanak a fejünk felett elzúgó repülők. Közben a gyerekek a szemeteskonténer körül játszottak a kidobott göngyölegekkel, a felnőttek beszélgettek. Barátok, rokonok, ismerősök. Sorra zártak be a húsgyárak és a tenyésztők egymást alul-licitálva igyekeztek eladni zsírtól fuldokló disznókat. Vettünk egyet. Nagy, kövér állat. Hús, zsír, bensőségek, házi pálinka. Nyakába döftük a kést, az meg megugrott és futott, keresztül az udvaron, a kerten, vért spriccelve nagyapám szép fehér muskátlijára, majd eldőlt, mint egy tuskó.

Feldaraboltuk, hazavittük és jött a kiszámíthatatlan időközönként ismétlődő áramszünet. A gőzölgő hús ott volt kiterítve a nappaliban, ebédlőben, konyhában. Friss hússzagban, párában úszott az egész lakás. Mint negyvenegy tavaszán Belgrád utcái. Semmi pánik, megszoktuk már, hogy rögtönözni kell. A frissen kisütött zsír közé rétegeztük a húsokat és boldogok voltunk. Most innen, az erkélyről, ahová kiűzettem a lakásból cigarettázni, nézem, ahogy autójukból ládaszám cipelik a tömbház lakói a konzerveket és egyéb tartós élelmiszereket, majd kisvártatva néhány puska is előkerül a csomagtartóból[3]. Zacskóban konfetti és papírtrombita. Szilveszter éjszakára készülődnek. Másról sem hallani, mint hogy itt a világvége, a már jó előre beharangozott Y2K[4]. Mindenki, már hónapok óta erről beszél. Lenullázódnak a közszolgáltatások vezérlői, az atomrakéták időzítői és ennyi volt. Majd a következő, talán csótány(?)civilizáció régészei előkaparnak néhány kiégett harddisket és megállapítják, mint mi a dinoszauruszok vonatkozásában, hogy azért halt ki az emberiség, mert túl kicsi volt az agyunk.

A katasztrófaelhárítás szakértői nyilatkoznak tévében, rádióban, ismeretterjesztő előadások a közösségi terekben, gyorstalpaló elsősegély-tanfolyamok. Számításokat végeztek, néhány óra alatt vége mindennek, semmi gáz, nem fog fájni. Az éttermek csak 23:00 óráig vannak nyitva, már hónapokkal ezelőtt foglalt minden asztal, az apokalipszis előtt még mindenki igyekszik egy véres steakkel megkoronázni az emberi civilizáció virágkorát és a digitális forradalomnak köszönhető bukását, majd mindenki hazamegy, leül a televízió elé és várja az elkerülhetetlent. Igaz Japánban és Ausztráliában már túlélték, lenullázódtak és még élnek, így, egyszerűen, lenullázódva, de úgyis minden az amerikai kontinensen kezdődik, indul ki és hat, akár visszamenőleg is. A nyers marhahús és a katasztrófafilmek világa innen a negyedik emeleti erkélyről mint egy hollywoodi szuperprodukció. Egy hatalmas 3D-s mozi. 3D-ben az Y2K. Kezemben kávé és cigaretta. Jarmush? Apokalipszis most. Coppola? Tiszta Hollywood. Konzervekkel és puskával készülődnek megvédeni az unalmas, egyhangú kis mindennapjaikat. Bájos. Nekem már a folyamatos változás mint a drog, igényeltetik. Hetven-nyolcvan év, ami adatott, érezni akarom, minden cseppjét, részleteiben, átlátni egészben, létezni, úgy igazából, az egészben. Megmagyarázni mindent hasonlatokkal, metaforákkal összefűzni, értelmet adni. Költészettel túlélni a valóságot. Itt az erkélyen. Mint Said Genet[5] *A paravánok*jában. Said, a szerencsétlen zsebmetsző, akit végül is hazaárulásért kivégeznek, bár azt sem tudni, kit árult el, mikor és miért. Háború van. És háborúban bármi megtörténhet, világvége esetén következmények nélkül. Itt, az erkélyen, hideg van. Meg fogok fagyni? Ha leáll a fűtés, elfogy a kávé, bármi megtörténhet. Még mielőtt elsötétülne a tévé.

Tóbiás Krisztián 1978-ban született Csókán, Jugoszláviában. Jelenleg a Balatonfüreden megjelenő Tempevölgy folyóirat főszerkesztője. Legújabb kötete: A mikulás rakétája – Turi Lilla rajzaival (FISZ, 2020).

[1] 1941. április hatodikán, Belgrád bombázásával megkezdődött a Jugoszláv királyság német megszállása.

[2] Ld. A. A. Milne: Micimackó

[3] Utólagos bejegyzés: Néhány nappal később az újságok tele voltak eladó konzervek apróhirdetéseivel.

[4] Y2K – a 2000-dik évre előrevetített számítógépes világösszeomlás rövid neve, amelynek lényege az volt, hogy a különböző számítógépek nem fogják tudni értelmezni a 2000. év rövidített megjelenését, a „00”-át, összekeverik az 1900-as év rövidítésével, és ez a világ rendszereinek összeomlását okozza. Az apokaliptikus jóslatok nem váltak be, a számítástechnikai cégek jó előre felkészültek a probléma elkerülésére, kivédésére, így 2000 problémamentesen telt el. (Forrás: Wikipédia)

[5] Jean Genet (1910–1986) – Francia drámaíró.

SUGAR, LARD, AND THE APOCALYPSE

By Krisztián Tóbiás, Translated by Kristen Herbert

After the second day of Slovenia's ten-day war, my grandfather brought in a sack of sugar and two sacks of flour. Fat in a large blue barrel. He stored it away, like in '41.[1] You can never tell.[2] Let there be bread with lard and smoked sugar for tea. We'd figure out the rest. This is how nine years passed. We stored food, we sorted it, we stood in line in front of the shop for salt, oil, and cigarettes. One portion per person, though there was always less than the number of people. Soon, however, there were fewer and fewer people. Those who passed on to Hungary, across the green border, and then onwards, to the happy West, or those in military vehicles headed towards the Croatian border, to Bosnia or Kosovo. We biked to the tobacco plant in Senta at four o'clock in the morning so that we could get in line to pick up ten boxes of cigarettes per kopf. The tobacco plant's grassy, muddy parking lot stretched out like an enormous ballroom. Oil-stained puddles here and there, tire marks from bicycles. On the transistor radio we listened for where the planes were headed as they hummed above our heads. Meanwhile kids played with tossed-out packaging beside the dumpsters as the adults chatted. Friends, relatives, acquaintances. They closed the meatpacking plants one after another, and the farmers underbid each other selling pigs drowning in their own fat. We bought one. A large, pudgy animal. Meat, fat, comradery, homemade pálinka. We stabbed the knife into its neck, then it leapt up and ran circles around the courtyard, the garden, sprinkled blood on my grandfather's pretty white geraniums, then flopped over like a log.

We cut it up, brought it back home, and then came one of those occasional, unexpected power outages. The steaming flesh was hanging up in the living room, the dining room, the kitchen. The whole flat was swimming in moisture, the fresh smell of meat. Like Belgrade's streets in the spring of '41. No panic, we'd gotten used to improvising. We packed the meat in between layers of freshly cooked fat, and we were happy. From here on the balcony, where I'd been banished to smoke my cigarette, I watched the residents of the housing complex unpack their cars, carrying in crates of preserves and other non-perishables, then a little bit later a few guns also emerged from the trunk.[3] Bagged confetti and noisemakers. Preparations for New Year's Eve. The end of the world, nobody spoke of anything else, the well-forewarned Y2K.[4] They've been discussing it for months. Everything goes to zero, the control systems of our utilities, the timers on our nuclear missiles, and it's done. Then the architects of the next civilization (cockroaches?) would dig up a few burned hard drives and decide that, as we once said of dinosaurs, humans went extinct because our brains were too small.

Disaster prevention experts spoke on television, on the radio, at conferences, gave crash courses in first aid. They made calculations. Everything would be over in just a few hours, no big deal, it won't hurt. Restaurants were only open until 23:00, and every table was reserved months ago, everyone trying to eat a bloody steak before the apocalypse, to crown humanity's golden era and, thanks to the digital revolution, its failure. Then everyone went home, sat in front of the television, and waited for the inevitable. It's true that people in Japan and Australia had already survived, they reached zero and are still here. Just like that, simple, they made it. But everything starts in America anyways, and who knows, maybe the apocalypse works retroactively. From here on the fourth floor balcony, the world of raw meat and apocalypse films looks like a Hollywood super production. An enormous 3D cinema. Y2K in 3D. Coffee and cigarette in hand. Jarmush? Apocalypse Now. Coppola? Pure Hollywood. These people try to protect their boring, routine little everyday lives with preserves and guns. Charming. I find constant change a drug, I require it. We get seventy, eighty years. I want to feel every drop of it, every detail, to see through everything, to exist, and I mean to truly exist the whole time. Explain everything with comparisons, draw things together in metaphor, give meaning. To survive reality with poetry. Here on the balcony. Like Said in Genet's[5] *The Screens*. Said, the unfortunate pickpocket, who is eventually executed for treason, though nobody knows who he betrayed, when, and why. There's a war now. And in war, anything can happen. If the world ends, whatever happens, happens without consequences. It's cold here on the balcony. Will I freeze? If the heating stops, the coffee runs out, anything can happen. Until the TV goes black.

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Kristen Herbert moved from Chicago to Hungary in 2016. Her translations of contemporary Hungarian literature have or will soon appear in Waxwing, Asymptote Translation Tuesdays, and Newfound.

[1] The German invasion of the Yugoslavian kingdom started on April 6th, 1941 with the bombing of Belgrade.
[2] See A.A. Milne: Winnie the Pooh
[3] Note: A few days later the newspapers were full of classified ads for preserves.
[4] Y2K- the abbreviation for the predicted worldwide collapse of computers in the year 2000. The essence of it was that various computers would not be able to process the year 2000's shortened code, mixing its '00' with that of 1900, and this would cause systems to collapse around the world. The apocalyptic predictions did not come about, technological companies had already been preparing well ahead of time to avoid or defend against this issue, so 2000 came without any problems.
[5] Jean Genet (1910–1986) – French playwright.

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE *to* UKRAINE

Paul Brian

The fog of sleep is broken by a frantic scampering sound, followed by a pungent smell. Is that … ? Urine. I open my eyes when small shrieks and whimpers start to pierce the air. It's around 5 am in Odessa, Ukraine. It is July, 2019.

My field of vision comes into focus and reveals a startling sight.

There's a small monkey peering at me near my bed. Someone is telling it to calm down. I'm in a youth hostel dorm with five bunk beds and a Swedish guy across the room is rubbing his eyes and looking like he just saw a ghost, or possibly just got urinated on.

"Wha … uh, what is going on?" he asks, scratching his ginger beard.

What is going on is Mr. Sprinkles, a small monkey belonging to a 31-year-old man from San Francisco. I talk to him the next day and he explains that he purchased Mr. Sprinkles at an exotic animal pet store in Odessa. He uses him to "pick up chicks."

"Yeah, it's great," the guy tells me, explaining how Mr. Sprinkles rides around on his shoulder and serves as the perfect conversation opener.

The monkey – or his foreign status – must work, because I saw him the day before with a supermodel-looking, bikini-clad blond Ukrainian woman in a youth hostel bed while Mr. Sprinkles sat demurely to the side licking his paws. The woman's son lounged in the youth hostel lobby playing on his phone. I thought they were a Russian or Ukrainian family in Odessa for the week to enjoy the seaside, but it turns out it was a little less wholesome than that.

Later at a bar I met up with an American journalist attending university in Scotland – Luka Jukic – for drinks. Luka was in Odessa at the time to live with a Russian-speaking Ukrainian family and was particularly fascinated by the country's east-west linguistic and political divide. We share an interest in the post-Soviet world, and Luka explained a lot about the politics of language and how Odessa is essentially the heart of Russian Ukraine while Lviv is the heart of Ukrainian Ukraine. It is one country, certainly, but opinions of Russian and Ukrainian identity vary greatly, and the war in the east – though generally detested by people from all walks of life – is not viewed the same way.

Kocsis Gréta

The conflict in eastern Ukraine has been going on for over six years now, although in Kyiv, Odessa, and Mykolaiv there is not much sign apart from troops disembarking from trains and the occasional convoy of military vehicles on the road. But the scars of the conflict are deep and reflect a complex national history, with Ukrainian identity strong in the West and deep Russian linguistic and cultural roots in Odessa and the East. Even though Russian is widely spoken as well as a mixed Ukrainian-Russian dialect, all schooling is now done in Ukrainian, making life somewhat confusing for the millions who speak Russian at home.

I'd been in Ukraine for only three weeks or so when I encountered Mr. Sprinkles. I arrived after about five months of teaching English in Poland, having taken a bus to Lviv and then a train to Kyiv and another to Odessa, with a visit to Vinnytsia and a monastery in central Ukraine with my Ukrainian friend Paul afterwards.

There's something sublime about traveling by railway in Ukraine: the faded red carpets, the slightly-tarnished brass handles, the utilitarian yet comfortable folding beds. The trips start to blur together with the lull and occasional side-to-side rocking of each journey. Lviv to Kyiv, Kyiv to Odessa. Beautiful golden-domed churches passed by and backyard gardens in the villages: corn, tomatoes, lettuce.

I'd originally come to Ukraine with half a mind to find where my patriarchal ancestors had lived in Volynsky Oblast in the northwest of the country, but had been charmed enough by Lviv to leave the search aside for the time being. In any case, it seemed unlikely that records from my father's Ukrainian Jewish family who left for Canada 130 years ago would have survived all the wars and upheaval. There are some chapters of my time in Ukraine that stand out — and it's not when I sang country songs by Alabama and various other bands at karaoke in Lviv; that is more of a blur. But still … there's something about:

LVIV

Lviv is a fascinating meeting point of east and west, a Ukrainian city once part of Poland and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Jews made up about one-third of the city's population, some 200,000 people, prior to

the Second World War, but only 800 or so lived to see the end of the fighting. Lviv was a creative hub that produced *Fiddler on the Roof* playwright Solomon Rabinovich (who went by the pen name Shalom Aleichem),the economist Ludwig von Mises, the science fiction author Stanislaw Lem, and the legendary Ukrainian poet, writer, and political activist Ivan Franko, as well as the fascinating Jewish-Muslim convert and theologian Leopold Weiss. He was born to a long line of rabbis but tried to run away to join the Austrian army at 14, became a journalist, and eventually converted to Islam at age 26. Adopting the name Muhammad Asad, he completed one of the most highly-respected translations of the Qur'an and was instrumental in the founding of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Lviv was certainly a place where interesting people came from.

VINNYTSIA

Ukraine's Jewish roots run deep. Vinnytsia, a city of around 372,000 in central Ukraine, was the site of the infamous photograph known as "the last Jew in Vinnytsia," which shows a Nazi soldier about to shoot a Jewish man in the head next to a mass grave. After Lviv, I visited a friend in Vinnytsia, a city that is closer to regular Ukrainian life but still has amazing architecture and buildings downtown, including some superb cafes and restaurants. I was shocked to hear what my friend makes at her job at the local university, however, reflecting the reality of extremely low salaries and scant opportunities even for educated and hardworking Ukrainians. One of the paradoxes of Ukraine is that it has first-class hotels and delicious cuisine at prices that wow Westerners and yet for its people the cheap prices aren't cheap at all. Many of the big city experiences are as out of reach for those in the smaller cities and the countryside as a stay at the Waldorf Astoria in New York would be for a McDonald's cashier from Queens.

THE MONASTERY

Afterwards, I went to see my Ukrainian friend Paul, who comes from a small town south of Vinnytsia. I was staying on a lake at the town's only hotel, run by the mayor who "owned everywhere," as Paul put it. The downstairs restaurant was full of stuffed animals, from ibexes to giraffes and bears, with a "Noah's Ark" theme. A nearby factory belched out mountains of grey smoke. The smog and endless rows of small windows were something from a Dickensian tragedy, but as Paul said, "it gives work to a lot of people here." Paul showed me around his local church, a beautiful light blue building on the outskirts of town. We were shown around by the late Father Serhiy, who I heard passed away unexpectedly several months after my time there (rest in peace). He came to meet us and did a wonderful job explaining all the icons and their theological meaning. My friend Paul, who speaks fluent English, translated for Father Serhiy, who mentioned a nearby monastery that could always use extra help. It piqued my interest, and so we went.

> THERE'S SOMETHING SUBLIME ABOUT TRAVELING BY RAILWAY IN UKRAINE: THE FADED RED CARPETS, THE SLIGHTLY-TARNISHED BRASS HANDLES, THE UTILITARIAN YET COMFORTABLE FOLDING BEDS.

We ended up staying in an Orthodox Christian monastery in central Ukraine for several days. Paul and I arrived on the Orthodox holiday of Peter and Paul. The schedule was tight, with meals served at the chime of a bell and religious services for hours. The head monk, for which I'm sure there is an official term, was very friendly and showed us his favorite place to fish down at the pond. His grandson accompanied us – he'd been married prior to becoming a monk. He had a kind smile and an impressively bushy blond beard. In church I couldn't understand the language of Russian and old Slavonic but I could appreciate the atmosphere of religious devotion, the incense, and symbolism of all the saints surrounding us. A central part of the prayers was clear: "God have mercy, God have mercy." ("Господи помилуй, Господи помилуй.").

On the second day one young man I met there, Andriiy, came over to talk to me. He'd just finished using a trimmer on the fields around some of the outbuildings. I was cutting horsetail in the workshop that I had gathered earlier with an elderly woman called Fyodora. It is used in tea and for its restorative, healing properties.

"Take a break," he said, squatting by the wall. Andriiy was tall and lanky with sun-browned skin and a buzzcut. He had scars on his head and sad brown eyes. He wore a rubber bracelet in the colors of the Ukrainian flag. His arms had thick scars that looked like they had been cut intentionally.

The day before Andriiy had said a bit to Paul and I about his experiences fighting for Ukraine's military in the east. He'd been at the monastery for two months so far. He recalled seeing starving dogs whose fleeing owners hadn't had time to unleash them.

We sat down and used his phone and a weak internet signal to translate questions, starting with our ages: I was 34, he was 27. Despite being older, I explained that I'd never been married.

It is not so good no rush, he typed out.

I laughed.

Andriiy said he had been married twice and showed me photos of his two ex-wives and his five-year-old son's birthday.

I typed out how difficult it must be for monks to take a vow of celibacy and never be with women. Andriiy's face clouded over.

I would like very much to be a monk. But I don't think I ever can be. I did very bad sins, even murder.

I asked if it was during the war and he nodded ruefully. I mimicked a salute to ask if it had been on orders from his commander. It had.

Of course it is still a sin, I acknowledged. He agreed sadly.

I also like girls very much, he typed. I concurred with him on that point.

When people think of war veter-

ans, they often imagine larger-than-life figures with square jaws. The reality tends to be more human, sadder, starker.

I wanted to lighten the mood and asked if he had a car: yes, but he'd wrecked it in an accident. Andriiy had tried "normal" life and it hadn't been his thing. Now it was time to start over.

Andriiy showed me music on his phone: "Toxicity" by System of a Down, Cradle of Filth, something about Misery and Darkness with lots of capital letters.

"I like heavy," he said.

UKRAINE

After visiting Georgia, Israel, and Palestine, I returned briefly to Ukraine on my way to Moldova and Romania. There was a feeling of familiarity as I crossed the border. For all its tragedies, including the current East-West conflict, there is something special about Ukraine: it's real, it's hospitable, and its people have little patience for nonsense. High fashion may prevail in the cities and corruption may reign in government boardrooms, but at the end of the day, Ukraine is tough and authentic. What you see is what you get. Stepping into the frosty air at the airport arrivals doors, I waited for my driver Volodymyr to pull up.

I half expected a small monkey to peek around a snow bank and start peeing.

It felt a bit like coming home.

Paul Brian is a freelance journalist focused on religion, politics, and culture. He has reported for the BBC, Reuters, Al Jazeera, and Foreign Policy magazine, and contributed to the Hill, the American Conservative, the Federalist, the Week, Roads & Kingdoms, and First Things magazine. His website is https://paulrbrian.com/.

MINDIG. ÖRÖKRE - DÉL

L. Varga Péter

OLASZORSZÁGI ÚTINAPLÓ
2018. DECEMBER 27. – 2019. JANUÁR 4.

„Dél mégiscsak – Dél." Imígy fogalmazott egy kollégám utólag dél-olaszországi roadtripem tapasztalatainak rövid összefoglalójára vonatkozóan, s a nagybetű, valamint a tautológia pontosan ki is fejezi a tájegység gazdasági, kulturális és környezeti képzeteit és valóságát, akár például az Egyesült Államokról van szó, akár – mint jelen esetben – Olaszországról. Jártam korábban Itáliában, az északi régióban, Firenzében, Toszkánában, Velencében, vonattal, a közös pont az akkori és a mostani út során Róma volt, amely minden bizonnyal Észak és Dél virtuális, egy pontba sűrűsödő, mégis kiterjedt választóvonala, magában hordozza mindkét országrész sajátosságait és jellemzőit, miközben a történelmi nagyváros szinte definiálhatatlan, de jól érzékelhető komplex érzékiségét és a mindenféle aránytalanságok egész sorát a metropoliszokra jellemző módon szervesen tartalmazza. A választóvonal, a limes képzeletbeli, de nagyon is valóságos tere a vasúti főpályaudvar, a Roma Termini, a lelkeket itt osztják el a vasúti társaságokhoz tartozó beléptetőkapuk Északnak és Délnek (esetleg Keletnek), a szerelvények – az intercity-k és a nagy sebességű vonatok – a tranzitok az igazán nem fiktív zónák közt. Ide, a Terminire futnak be a reptérről érkező, különböző árkategóriájú járatok is; mi ezúttal a praktikusság kedvéért a legdrágább Leonardo Expresst választottuk 14 euróért. Ez tudniillik a leggyorsabb, szoros menetrendnél pedig nem utolsó szempont a gyakorlatiasság.

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VILLA SAN GIOVANNI – A CSIZMA ORRA

Ennek a Calabria tartománybéli 13 ezres kis községnek, mely nemrég elnyerte a városi rangot, kifejezetten örülök – december 30. van, kizártnak tartom, hogy itt fuldokolni kelljen, mely persze attól még a legfontosabb access-point Szicíliába, ahová tartunk. Érkezésünkkor, estefelé szakad az eső, sehol senki, némi élénkség a nagyobb utakon mutatkozik, körülöttünk jobb-rosszabb állapotú lakóházak és hotelek. A miénk, a La Conca belülről példásan nett, de mintha tatarozásra és festésre kívül sehol sem telne. Kezd szórakoztatóvá válni, hogy délen nem egyértelmű, hogy a vendéglátósok értenek és meg tudnak szólalni angolul properly.

Az ablakból átlátni Szicíliába, esik, a tenger e pillanatban láthatatlan, sö-

tét enyészet, de a nyugalom tapintható. A telefon Google Mapsjén több szórakozóhelyet is találunk, amely helyi időtöltés gyanánt szóba jöhet, végül a Km Zero nevű étterem és pub mellett döntünk, nincsenek távolságok, pár perc sétával átérünk. Itt-tartózkodásunk ezen pontján már kapiskáljuk, hogy a taljánok (akik nem turisták) 9 előtt nem indulnak neki vacsorálni. Mire befutnak, az épp erre turnézó, balkán folkot játszó kis zenekar is beáll, a harmonikás kiszúr minket, hogy nem helyiek vagyunk, odajönnek a tagok ismerkedni, barátságosak és valamiért rákattannak, hogy Magyarországról érkeztünk ebbe a csizma orrában lévő kicsiny községbe, én pedig megint éreztem a pírt és a szorongást, ami a származás iránti érdeklődésre adott reakciómat kísérte. Fel vagyok készülve, hogy a műsor közben megemlítenek bennünket, így még tapsot is kapunk a helyiektől, akik egyébiránt kimondottan zamatos fehérbort készítenek. Megállapítható: nem előszilveszter zajlik a Nullkilométerben, hanem mindennapi vacsora, a helyieknél természetesnek tetszik, hogy munka után az idős néni is beugrik harapni valamit, aztán amikor szólnak neki, hogy háttal ül a színpadnak, átköltözik az asztal másik oldalára, végignézi a bulit, majd megy horpasztani. Az étterem egyik falán a helyi zsivány, Ninco Nanco portréja díszeleg. A tizenkilencedik század közepén vadnyugati revolverhősnek képzelte magát, kegyetlenségéről volt híres (ellenségei szívét kivágta), egy időben próbált jó földműves lenni, de a balhé volt a lételeme, míg le nem terítették a helyi erők. Romanticizált elmékezete ott lóg a vacsoraasztal fölött.

Reggel pazar látvány az immár gomolyfelhős tengerre és Szicíliára az ablakból. „Olaszhon. Göndör fellegek." Az óriáskomp mindössze két és fél euró. A fedélzeten mindenki bagózik. Messina kikötővárosa Szicíliában már majdnem kinéz valahogy, de közelebbről itt is lepattogzott festék, koszos homlokzatok, amortizáció. Hihetetlen hegyek, fellegek, kék tenger, és a lepusztuló épített környezet. Az eredeti terv szerint az észak-szicíliai tengerparti út mentén, Palermón át Corleone faluig utaztunk volna, amely faluról Don Corleone a nevét kapta, de mint kiderült, január elsején, másnap semmilyen tömegközlekedés nincs e faluból vissza Palermóba vagy bárhová, nekünk pedig ekkor már Szirakúzában kell lennünk, ezért Corleonét egy huszáros vágással lemetsszük útunkról – mint kiderült, Mike, azaz Michele szicíliai jeleneteit A keresztapában amúgy sem itt, hanem a Messina melletti hegyi falvak valamelyikében forgatták anno, amit a vonatról látunk, szóval nem bánjuk. Netes kutakodásunk szerint egyebekben vagy féltucat híres maffiacsalád származik Corleonéból, vagyis sokat így sem tévedtünk volna, ha ezt az autentikus atmoszférát keressük.

Mindazonáltal nyerünk egy napot e nyesszintéssel, s megduplázzuk szirakúzai tartózkodásunkat, ami utólag igazán jó ötletnek bizonyul. Két és fél órát vonatozunk Szicília keleti partjánál délre; balról tenger, jobbról hegyek és narancs- meg citromültetvények. Koszlott falvak és városok, szomorú teregetések mindenütt. Nem lesz ez már más. (Hogy ne túlozzunk: a teregetés helyi kontextusban vélhetőleg nem szomorú.)

SZIRAKÚZA

Ciceró szerint a legnagyobb görög város, és a legszebb. A külső városrész kétarcú: megtalálhatók a szokásos déli környezet amortizált negyedei, valamint a modernebb és korszerűbb, sőt helyenként újszerű és csinos utcák, terek és épületek. Szilveszter napján külsőbb utcában szállunk meg, kétszintes lakást bérelünk bagóért; Andrea, a tulaj fölötte

HATKILÓS TINTAHAL HEVER A JÉGEN, CTHULHU MEG NEM SZÜLETETT BAMBINÓJA.

segítőkész és kedves módon rögvest elmagyarázza, hol lesz a buli éjszaka (Ortygia szigetén, a Világörökség részén: egy ideig Aiszkhülosz is dolgozott a helyi színháznál, és ide menekült Szapphó – szédítő belegondolni), és mely éttermeket keressük. A lóhússal töltött paninit ajánlja. Vegetáriánus útitársam rezzenéstelen arccal hallgatja végig és bólogat. Szirakúzában valamiért a kotyogós kávéfőző megy, nemcsak a szálláson főzhetünk vele, hanem a legtöbb kirakatban turistacsalogató portékaként értékesítik.

Este kilenctől megtelnek az éttermek Ortygia, a történelmi városrész szigetén, de csak 10 körül sikerül bejutnunk abba, amelyiket szállásadónk kifejezetten javasolta, a Vörös Holdba. Egy kapatos szicíliai bácsi minden asztalnál bemutatja énektudását. A pizza és a paszta itt is hibátlan. Az ortygiai sziget sikátorai és épületei messze vannak Nápolytól, érződik rajtuk az a valódi mediterrán jelleg, ami a méreteiből fakadóan azonnal szembeötlővé válik. Beugrók, kiskapuk, melegházzá varázsolt erkélyek, makadámon slisszanó éjjeli macskák. Archimédész otthona egyébként, működésének lenyomata és a későbbi barokk újjáépítések emlékei páratlan egyveleget alkotnak. Kissé meglepő módon szilveszter éjjel a helyiek visszafogott, mégis lendületes dorbézolását érzékeljük, újév napján azonban a turisták jelenléte válik hangsúlyossá, noha jóval az ízlésesség határain belül. Január elsején egy ortygiai kis szállóban lakunk, potom pénzért akkora lakosztályban és olyan szívélyes fogadtatásban van részünk, hogy az már-már zavarba ejtő. Emlékeztetjük magunkat, hogy a Bookingon bőséggel díjazzuk majd a fogadtatást csillagok és pontszámok formájában, és bár nyilván a turizmusból fakadó kompetitív gyakorlat hozza magával e szívélyességet, itt valóban minden mosoly a helyén. Szirakúzai tartózkodásunk tehát ennek megfelelően tartalmaz kék tengert, tajtékzó hullámverést, szikrázó langy napsütést és narancs naplementét, klasszikus régi árbócost és gigantikus horgonyszobrot, ősindás fákkal telepített lugast. Az ortygiai közterület-fenntartók a déli tapasztalatoktól eltérően a történelmi városrészt gyorsan és hatékonyan megtisztítják a szilveszteri maradványoktól.

POMPEI – VULKÁNTÚRÁK

Január másodikán 12 órás út vár ránk. Szirakúzából visszavonatozunk Messinába, és közben leszünk csak figyelmesek, tiszta, fényes időben, a pöfékelő Etnára a sziget északkeleti fertályán. A fenséges hegy teteje csupa hó és nagyság, és bár nemrég föld-

rengések sorozata és kitörésveszély végett evakuálták a körülvevő községeket, most békésnek tűnik, akár egy faluszéli házikó, melynek kéményéből barátságosan száll föl a fehér füst. Az olasz útitársak rá sem bagóznak, én magam ellenben az ablakra tapadok, akár plüssállat az autóban.

Messinából komppal vissza Villa San Giovanniba, a távolodó Szicíliát mennyei napsugárba vonja az ég, míg a tenger fölött sűrű gomolyfellegek. Egy darab paradicsomnak tűnik innen a sziget. Mégis, a tenger a valódi tisztaság. San Giovanniban sajtot, olívát, szalámit, zsömlét, gyümölcslevet vásárolunk, nehezen szakadok el a halpulttól, ahol vagy hatkilós tintahal hever a jégen, Cthulhu meg nem született bambinója.

Salernóba este hét körül érkezünk, innen nagyjából húsz kilométer Pompei, vasútra szállunk át. Szállásunk hegyvidéken, a romváros közelében található, narancsfákkal teleültetett hatalmas kerttel, nyílt rálátással az Etnánál is fenségesebb Vesuvióra, melynek kontúrja éjjel félelmes, terpeszkedő, valódi méretei azonban csak másnap reggel bontakoznak ki. Szállásadónk egy szót sem beszél angolul, ellenben rendkívül kedélyesen cseveg velünk a hangos Google Translate-en keresztül. Kicsekkoláskor elprédálok egy narancsot az egyik fáról, és értekezést tartok a gyümölcsök evolúciójáról: a fák eredetileg az épp kifejlődött színeslátó, fára mászó emlősök kedvéért fejlesztették édes húsú, lédús termésüket, cserébe a pollenek kézbesítéséért, akárcsak számos virág. A nektár és a gyümölcs mind-mind valuta gyanánt jött létre, a fennmaradás fizetőeszközeként.

Úgy hozza a sors, rossz vicc, hogy ezúttal mindenki be akart jutni Pompei egykori városába, míg szűk kétezer évvel ezelőtt mindenki kifelé igyekezett volna. A több mint nyolc kilométer összhosszúságú romvárosi utak kvázi minden szögből fantasztikus rálátást biztosítanak a szilaj Vezúvra, melyet most belep egy sűrű felhő – mikor elvonul, hósipkát kap a tűzhányó, s olykor hó látszik szállingózni, melyet hevületünkben hamunak képzelünk. Számos hatalmi helycserét követően, időszámításunk szerint 79-ben, Pliniusnak címzett levelekből vélhetőleg október 24-én a Vezúv nem bírta tovább tartani terhét, és a lávadugó, mely addig eltorlaszolta a kürtőt, égzengés közepette kirobbant a hegycsúcsból, akár a felrázott pezsgő kupakja. A helyiek és a rómaiak is tudták, hogy a hegy működő vulkán, de nem tartották veszélyesnek, és a földrengésekhez szokott lakosság az erupciót megelőző sűrű földmozgásokat nem vélte különösnek, szokatlannak vagy figyelmeztetőnek. A kitörés ereje és látványa – aligha túlzás – az atommag hasadásához lehetett hasonlatos. A város lávakőre épült, a tömbökben a mai napig látszódnak a szekérnyomok: az utakon a kocsik és az állatok közlekedtek, kétoldalt járda szolgált a gyalogos haladás számára. Bizarr és kissé sorsszerű, hogy ennek az anyagnak a keletkezésébe pusztult bele a város: ugyan nem a leömlő láva terítette be az épületeket és az embereket, hanem a hősokkba haltak bele a menekülők. A hő megolvasztotta a vakolatot (a falfestmények maradványai itt-ott láthatók csupán), a lemart kőalap, ami az építmények csontváza, e hő intenzitását mutatja. Akik a pincékbe menekültek, ott lelték halálukat: három napon át hullt a forró hamu- és kőeső, mintegy nyolc méter magasan rakódva a városra.

TESTÜK AZONBAN PONTOS VÁLYATOT HAGYOTT A FORRÓ ANYAGBAN, AMELYET A RÉGÉSZEK GIPSSZEL KIÖNTÖTTEK, ÉS ÍGY MINT AZ EGYKORI ANALÓG FÉNYKÉPEK NEGATÍVJAINAK POZITÍVJAI, ÚJRA TESTET KAPTAK A HOLTAK.

A tárlatban, a romok közt látható holttestek egy érdekes „megfordítás" eredményeként szemlélhetők. A katasztrófa elől menekülők, elesettek, különböző, kicsavart, védekező és fekvő pozíciókban lévő emberek hőhalált haltak, a hamu betemette őket, testük azonban pontos vályatot hagyott a forró anyagban, amelyet a régészek gipsszel kiöntöttek, és így mint az egykori analóg fényképek negatívjainak pozitívjai, újra testet kaptak a holtak. A törzsek, a végtagok, a fejek, az ujjak bemerevedése, az egész testtartás mint az élet hirtelen félbehagyásának mementója elképesztő pontossággal árulkodik a katasztrófa lefolyásáról és gyorsaságáról, arról a kétségbeesett tehetetlenségről, amelyet a menekülők átéltek. S miközben lábunk a lávaköves utat tapodja, és a romokat, egykori casakat, kutakat és a történelembe negatívként belevésődő testeket szemléljük, a Vezúv mint történelem előtti szemtanú és elkövető ott figyel, magasodik a közelben szótlanul és dermesztőn.

Késő délután a Circumvesuviana nevű kisvasúttal utazunk vissza Pompeiből Nápolyba. A Vezúvot megkerülve ismét éles kontrasztok rajzolódnak ki: a hegy fensége jobbról, az öböl a tengerbe bukó nappal balról, és mindeközt díszletnek a szegénység, a koszlottság, az elhasználtság lakóházi emlékművei, fullasztó graffitiszenny, amerre a szem ellát, és a teregetett színes ruhák, melyeket közönnyel lobogtat az enyhe téli szél. Kognitív disszonancia, amellyel képtelen vagyok megbirkózni, ám a nápolyi vasútállomás már ismert forgatagában szerencsére nem kell kitenni a lábunkat az utcára, az alig negyedóra múlva induló vonatot épp elérjük. A Velencébe tartó szerelvény igazi expressz, helyenként háromszáz kilométeres sebességel iszkolunk vissza északnak, alig hetven perc alatt ismét Rómában vagyunk, ahol kvázi otthonos érzés fog el bennünket.

Részlet a Mindig. Örökre - Dél című útibeszámolóból, megjelent eredetileg az Alföld folyóirat 2019/6-os számában.

L. Varga Péter 1981-ben született Székesfehérváron. Öt irodalomtudományos kötet szerzője, a Prae irodalmi és kultúratudományos folyóirat főszerkesztője, az ELTE Összehasonlító Irodalom- és Kultúratudományi Tanszékének oktatója.

ALWAYS. FOREVER - SOUTH

Péter L. Varga, Translated by Kristen Herbert

AN ITALIAN TRAVEL DIARY
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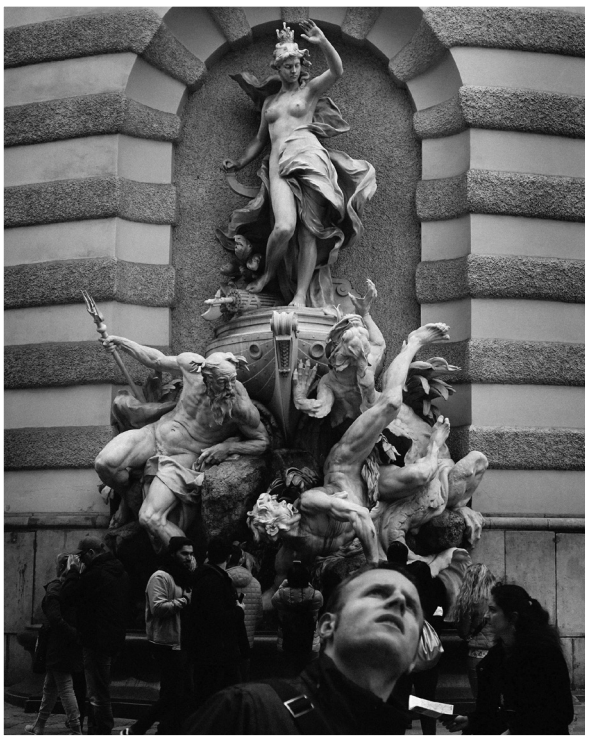

Alex Laniosz

"Well, the South is—the South." This is how my colleague responded to the short account of my southern Italian road trip, and the capital letters, as well as the tautology, precisely express the region's economic, cultural and environmental character, as if we were referring to the United States, or—in this example—Italy. I'd been to Italy before, in the northern part, travelling through Florence, Tuscany, and Venice by train, and the center point along that trip, as well as this one, was Rome, without a doubt the virtual dividing line between the North and the South, where they converge into a single, though vast, point. Rome harbors the two regions' individual characteristics, while at the same time the historical city is almost indefinable, and in an organic manner typical of metropolises, it is characterized by an atmosphere of vast and complex carnality, layers of disproportion, a city rebuilt upon itself. This dividing line, or border, is an imaginary but very real space, the central railway station, Roma Termini, the point where souls are separated by the gates of different railway companies, to the North or the South (maybe to the East), and the vehicles—the Intercity and high-speed trains—do not travel between fictive zones. Here, trains arrive from the airport into Termini according to different price categories; for the sake of practicality, we chose the most expensive for 14 euros, the Leonardo Express. Anyways, with such a tight, packed schedule, practicality is key.

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VILLA SAN GIOVANNI — THE TOE OF THE BOOT

This small community within Calabria, population of 13,000, recently awarded the status of "township," brings me particular joy—it's December 30th, and I'm certain we will not have to fight our way through crowds here, though it is still the most important access point to Sicily, our destination. When we arrive, it's late afternoon, the rain is pouring, not a soul anywhere. There is a bit of life on the larger streets, the hotels and houses surrounding us in better or worse conditions. Ours, La Conca, is impeccably neat on the inside, though it seems the exterior has never seen new paint or renovation. It's become entertaining that here in the south, it isn't a given that those working in hospitality understand or speak English "properly."

The windows look out towards Sicily. It's raining, and for the moment the sea is an indefinable, dark abyss, though the calm is palpable. We find several bars on Google Maps, which could say something about the local pastime. Finally we choose the Km Zero Pub and Restaurant, and as nothing in this town is truly far away, we arrive after a couple minutes' walk. At this point in our trip, we conclude that Italians (who aren't tourists) do not set out to dine before nine o'clock. As they fill in, the little touring Balkan folk band stands up, the harmonica player notices that we aren't locals, and the members of the band come over to talk to us, friendly and for some reason excited that we've come all the way from Hungary to this small town at the toe of the boot. Meanwhile I again feel the anxiety and embarrassment that follow questions about my nationality. We're prepared for them to mention us during their performance and we get a clap from the locals, who, I must add, make an exceptionally juicy wine. Conclusion: this isn't a sort of pre-New Year's Eve in Km Zero, but an everyday dining experience. It's considered natural that an older woman would pop in for a bite after work, and when they call

her out for sitting with her back to the stage, she moves to the other side of the table, watches the party until it ends, then she goes home to snooze. One of the restaurant's walls is decorated by the local outlaw, Ninco Nanco. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Ninco Nanco saw himself as a revolver-wielding hero from the Wild West. He was famous for his ruthlessness (he cut the hearts out of his enemies), and while he tried to settle down as a good field worker for a time, chaos was his existence, until the local police got him. A romanticized tribute to him hangs above one of the dining tables.

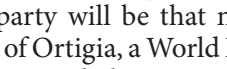
In the morning, we are offered a lavish sight through the windows. Towards Sicily, the sea is covered by clouds now white and soft. "Italy, home. Ringletted clouds." (Mihály Babits poem, "Far….far…" [Nyugat, 1908]) The enormous ferry costs a total of two and half euros. On the deck, everyone smokes cigarettes. Messina, the port city in Sicily, seems stately in the distance, though from up close we see the chipping paint, dirty facades, ruins. Unbelievable mountains, clouds, blue sea, and crumbling buildings. Our original plan was to travel along the northeastern coast of Sicily, through Palermo to Corleone, the village from which Don Corleone got his name. Later we realized that on the following day, January 1st, there would be no public transportation leaving the village for Palermo, nor anywhere else. As we needed to be in Syracuse by then, we slashed Corleone from our trip—then we learned that Mike, that is Michele, had never been in Corleone during The Godfather's Sicilian scenes. Instead, they'd filmed in one of the hillside villages next to Messina, which we can see from the train, so we don't mind. According to our Google search, some half-dozen famous mafia families originate from Corleone, so if we had sought out this authentic atmosphere, we wouldn't have been disappointed.

Despite all this we gain a day after the snip, doubling our stay in Syracuse, which later proves to be a good idea. We ride the train for two and a half hours along Sicily's eastern coast, the sea to the left; hills, orange, and lemon plots to the right. Tattered villages and towns, everywhere pitiful clotheslines. We won't see anything else on this trip. (So that we don't exaggerate: the clotheslines, in a local context, are probably not pitiful.)

SYRACUSE

According to Cicero, this is the largest Greek city and the most beautiful. The city's outskirts are two-faced: you can find the southern region's typical crumbling quarters, as well as slightly more modern areas. In some places you even find beautiful, newly renovated streets, squares, and buildings. On New Year's Eve we stay along the outskirts, renting a two-story apartment for a dime; Andrea, the owner, is quick to explain, in a kind and helpful manner, where the party will be that night (the island of Ortigia, a World Heritage site, where Aeschylus once worked in the local theater—it's also where Sappho escaped, a dizzying thought), as well as which restaurants to look for. She recommends the horsemeat panini. Deadpan, my vegetarian companion listens and nods. For some reason, the moka pot is the trend in Syracuse, not only for making coffee in our apartment, but also as a tourist knicknack in most shop windows.

From nine o'clock the restaurants fill up in Ortigia, the historic district on the island. Just around ten, we manage to get into the place that our host had recommended, The Red Moon. A tipsy Silician man shows off his singing abilities at every table. The pizza and pasta are without fault here, too. The alleyways and buildings on the island of Ortigia are far different from those in Naples, larger and more spacious, their Mediterranean character conspicuous as a result of their size. Nooks, little gates, balconies like greenhouses, cats of the night scampering across the macadam. This was once home to Archimedes, and the trace of his work, as well as the baroque reconstruction that followed, demonstrate incomparable stylistic diversity. Somewhat surprising, we sense the reserved yet passionate buzz of the locals the night of New Year's Eve, whereas the presence of tourists is more pronounced on January 1st, though their numbers are well within a comfortable range. On New Year's Day, we stay in a small Ortigian hotel, receiving such spacious quarters and warm hospitality for pennies, it's almost robbery. We assuage our guilty conscience by telling ourselves that we'll give them a generous review on Booking.com for their hospitality, with lots of stars and points, and anyways, tourism's competitive practice inspires such enthusiasm, though here every smile is genuine. Our stay in Syracuse rightfully consists of blue sea, frothing, slapping waves, soft flashes of sunlight and orange sunsets, classical ancient masts and enormous anchor statues, and groves lined with ficus trees. Unlike the rest of our experience in the south, Ortigia's sanitation workers quickly and efficiently remove the remains of New Year's Eve from the historic district.



POMPEI—VOLCANO TOUR

On January 2nd a 12-hour journey awaits us. From Syracuse we take the train back to Messina, and we become watchful of Etna's smoking top underneath the bright, clear sky, along the northeast edge of the island. The peak of the great mountain is pure snow and enormous, and while a series of earthquakes and eruption warnings emptied the nearby towns, it now seems peaceful, like a cottage on the outskirts of a village, friendly white smoke rising up from its chimney. Our fellow Italian passengers don't even glance at it, whereas I am pressed up against the glass, like a stuffed animal in the windshield.

From Messina, we take the ferry back to Villa San Giovanni. The ever more distant Sicily is illuminated by a heavenly beam of light as thick white clouds hang over the sea. From here, the island seems the size of a tomato. Still, the sea is pure. In San Giovanni we buy cheese, olives, salami, rolls, and orange juice. I find it hard to break away from the seafood counter, where some six-kilo squids are lying over ice like Cthulhu's unborn children.

We arrive in Salerno around seven o'clock, only twenty kilometers from Pompei, and we transfer at the station. Our hotel is on the hill, close to the ruined city, its enormous garden packed with orange trees, and from this clear view, Vesuvius looks even more powerful than Etna. At night

its silhouette is frightening, sprawling in size, though only the next morning do we realize its true scale. Our host doesn't speak a word of English, but he chats with exceptional eagerness via Google Translate audio. When we check out, I snatch an orange from one of the trees and appreciate the fruit's evolution: trees originally developed their sweet, fleshy yields for the benefit of climbers that had recently evolved to see color, and these creatures would in turn deliver pollen, as they do with many flowers. Nectar and fruits both came into existence as a form of currency, a sort of payment for maintaining life.

As fate would have it (pun intended), everybody now wants to get into Pompei's ancient city, whereas a little less than two thousand years ago, they would have preferred to get out. The streets of the ruined city are more than eight kilometers in total, and practically every corner offers a fantastic view of the robust mountain, which now passes into a thick cloud—when it emerges, its crater has a snowcap, and as the snow flurries, our overactive imaginations see ash. We estimate, according to a letter addressed to Pliny, that on October 24th, 79 A.D., after several changes of power within the Roman Empire, Vesuvius was no longer able to bear its burden, and the plug of lava, which had kept the vent of the volcano sealed, shot off with a peal of thunder, like the cork of a shaken champagne bottle. The Romans knew the mountain was an active volcano but they did not consider it dangerous. The residents were used to earthquakes and didn't see anything unusual or worrisome in the ground's frequent movements prior to the eruption. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the explosion's power and spectacle would have been comparable to the combustion of an atom. The town was built on volcanic rock and the tracks of cartwheels are still visible in the basalt: animals and carts travelled along the streets, with sidewalks on either end for pedestrian use. It's bizarre, and almost seems predetermined, that the town would be destroyed by the same material that built it. However, it wasn't the sprawl of lava covering the buildings and people, but rather the shock of the heat which killed those who tried to escape. The heat melted the facades (in some places you can still see the remains of the frescos perfectly) and collapsed the stone foundations. The skeletons of these buildings are a testament to this heat's intensity. Those who hid in the cellars met their fate inside: burning ash and rock rained down for three days, "snowing in" the town to about eight meters' height.

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In an exhibition case amidst the ruins, we can see bodies displayed, the result of an interesting process. Those who tried to flee the catastrophe fell in different positions before being scorched to death, lying on their backs, curled up, or covering themselves—the ash buried them, and their bodies left an immediate, exact impression in the scalding material. Archeologists filled these impressions in with concrete, and just as analog photographs are produced from negatives, the dead were given new bodies. The stiffness of the torsos, limbs, heads, and fingers, the posture of these bodies, are like a memento of the sudden departure from life, betraying the speed and scale of the catastrophe with brutal accuracy, the desperation and helplessness that these fleeing people experienced. And as our feet trudge along the volcanic rock, and we observe the ruins, ancient homes, wells, and bodies engraved as negatives into history, it seems as if Vesuvius, both the witness and perpetrator of this story, watches us from nearby, standing tall, rigid, and silent.

Late that afternoon we travel from Pompei to Naples on a small train called the Circumvesuviana. As we circle Vesuvius, drastic contrasts emerge once again: the majesty of the mountain on our right, the sun flashing over the inlet of sea on our left, all of this scenery coexisting with the poverty and deterioration reflected in the remnants of apartment buildings, the suffocating mess of graffiti wherever one looks, and the colorful clothes hanging along lines, swaying lethargically in the mild winter breeze. I can't handle this cognitive dissonance, though thankfully once we reach the familiar bustle of Naples' central station, we have no need to step out into the streets, and we make the train leaving in just under fifteen minutes. This Venice-bound engine is a true express, sometimes reaching a speed of three hundred kilometers as we race back to the north. We're in Rome again in less than seventy minutes, where we are overcome by the feeling of being at home.

Excerpted from an essay first published in Alföld magazine.

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THE HEART

By Ádám Nádasdy, Translated by Anna Bentley

The heart was peculiarly hideous:
soft, pale, aluminium,
and was wrapped in pink tissue paper.
"What is it?" asked the slightly plump one—
to which the other muttered, "A heart.
I made it. In Design."
Interesting, thought the plump one.
How the hell did he manage that?
For they always worked next to each other,
if you could call it work,
what they did on a Wednesday morning.
They were sent off down to the basement
to do metalwork, and hated it mostly,
ideology being written all over it,
Manual labour, God help us, slogans with balls!
Every Wednesday morning they listened to
the panting of a party man scared shitless, sweating:
twenty workbenches, a basement storeroom
(as Mr. D said it: basics storeroom)
in the same period the girls had sewing.
"But what's it for?" asked the slightly,
or perhaps not at all plump friend,
whose build just tended towards heaviness,
to which the other, who was congenitally
skinny, the lucky bastard,
just shrugged his shoulders, "What d'ya think?
It's an ashtray, duh." Words were not his thing.
Must be off his head, thought the plump one.
He stayed behind after school to make this,
this monstrosity. Hardly normal is it?
Because otherwise they never moved from
each other's side, two workbenches stood
by the wall, they'd taken these for their own.
There'd have been space in the middle, too,
twenty benches to sixteen boys, like
in an old grammar school science lab.
The slightly plump one and the skinny one
were unsettled, filing away in silence.
Macho atmosphere, loads of swearing.
"You're an asshole, boy," said the party member,
who had been most likely "lifted" into the job,
his diploma being ... well, you know.
The heart was flat, made of poor, thin metal
sheeting, like a small tray or a low box,
so in capacity it was *ashtrayoid*,
just the edges, you see, were folded up
as separate flaps around the edge of the heart,
and pinched together, so the ash
wouldn't trickle out between them, like
through gaps in a fence. "Ta, then," said the plump one,
"Good work." Here and there the edges were sharp.
He used it for years, kept it by his bed,
and used to claim he'd made it himself.

the PENNY TRUTH

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