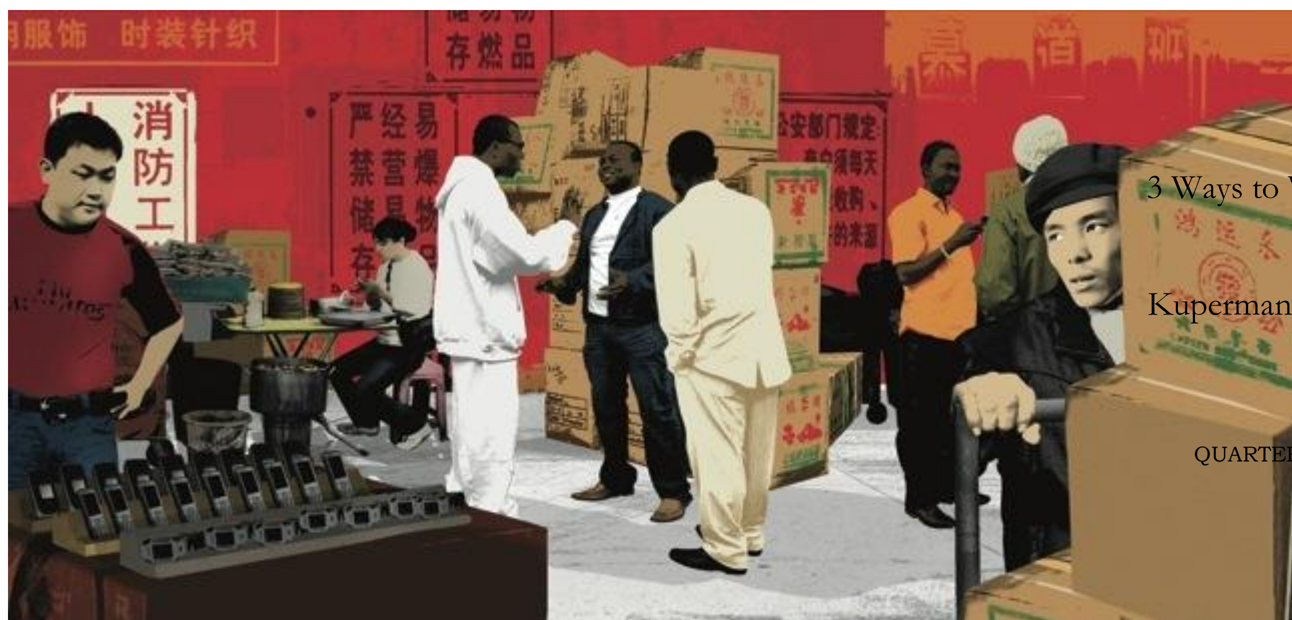
# *Q U A R T E R L Y* PRESS REVIEW

FOR ADVANCED EFL LEARNERS

AUTUMN 2011





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Free subscription: http://pressreview.atw.hu

Correspondence: tarisz@hotmail.com

# A Diary of 9/11

by *Rhett Miller*

I turned 31 on September 6, 2001. At the time, my girlfriend, Erica, and I shared a studio apartment in New York City, three blocks south of the World Trade Center. We spent my birthday on the West Coast, a beautiful day in Los Angeles. A couple of days later, I went to KFK Jewelers on West Third. The jewelers agreed to custom-design an engagement ring and mail it to me in NYC. Erica and I were headed there the next day.

Which was September 10, 2001. Sometime on the following day, I started keeping a journal.

**88 Greenwich Street, NY 9/11**

Went to bed at three last night after writing a song, "Lovebird" and making love with Erica. About 9 a.m., heard two loud explosions. Didn't fully awaken us. Phones started ringing. Mom on my cell (I missed it) and a college friend of Erica's on the landline. It's all very confused at first. It's not unusual to hear construction in the morning, and I think I muttered a sleepy complaint about the loud noise.

Me to Erica: Babe, I think a plane just crashed into the World Trade. I'm going to go up to the terrace and check it out.

She says: You're getting up? Can't I keep sleeping?

Me: I think this is a big deal.

Terrace is locked. A girl getting on the elevator says we can go stand in the stairwell. There's an opening with a view. A half-dozen people already there. Australian couple. He has a video camera. Good view. Girl in red-checked shirt on cell with her mom: I'm fine, I'm looking at it right now.

Flames shoot out either side of both towers. Flames shoot out of the building that houses the Amish Market, where we grocery shop. Bodies drop from a hundred floors up. One lands on the median, right in our line of sight. Firefighters and paramedics surround it, roll it on a stretcher, and carry it off.

I feel the beginning of something that's hard to put into words. A mechanism that I developed during my adolescence, surviving in a broken home. I am distancing myself. I know it's real. And I know it's bad. But I'm not going to think, right now, about what it means.

I call my mom. She suggests we leave town immediately. I tell her she's overreacting. For some stupid reason, I am thinking about our favorite local deli, Café World. How all the hubbub is going to make them sell out of sandwiches.

We go back to the apartment and turn on the TV. I'm on autopilot. I make a bowl of cereal and set it down on the table. A brown cloud full of debris engulfs our building. Our 14th-floor windows shake. The floor shakes. The brown cloud moves from the outside of the window in. The TV tells us that the south tower has collapsed. Our windows face south, away from the WT towers. My heart freezes. My asshole tightens. Erica starts screaming: We've got to get out of here.

We run to the door. The middle-aged couple across the hall is standing in their doorway.

Erica is screaming at the woman: What do we do?

The woman is screaming: I don't know.

I check for my wallet and my keys before I realize that the only thing that matters is getting the hell out of there. We run out of the apartment. Erica wears little khaki shorts and a black Cancún T-shirt. I wear jeans and a white T. We are both wearing Birkenstocks. Bad running shoes. We make it down to the lobby, which is sardine-packed. Bloody, soot-covered people stream in. We go up to the second floor, where the smoke and soot are a little less thick.

I ask the assembled crowd: What's the downside to going back up to our apartment? A guy sitting coolly with his back to the wall says: I wouldn't want to be trapped up there if the building catches on fire. He's got a point. A British guy says: Let's go down to the gym in the basement. He takes off. Comes back a minute later and says there's one stairway available to us and that it empties out onto the street 10 feet from an entrance to the basement. We gather our resolve and take off. The door opens out onto Rector. Normally, we'd be able to see the WTC from here. The air is thick and brown, rubbish and wreckage are all we see. It's tricky terrain to navigate. Twisted metal, broken glass, scraps of burnt paper. We round the corner, pause at the basement door, look at each other and make a silent decision: Let's just get the fuck out of here.

There's no one else on the street.

I try twice to look back at the tower that still stands, but the cloud is too thick. We run. In our stupid Birks. Down to where the street dead-ends. South. Other people running. Now more in earnest. I wonder why. As I pass a cop (he's wearing a face mask), he yells: The second tower just collapsed, get the hell out of here!

It occurs to me that if I had opened the outside door at the bottom of the stairwell two minutes later, we probably wouldn't have survived.

We keep running until we get to the water. Smoking fragments of glass and metal rain down on our heads. Erica and I hold hands while we run. I pull her across the street and we use the FDR as cover, running beneath it so debris doesn't land in our hair. I sneak two looks back. The smoke, the faces, the bloody people running and screaming.

Breathing feels like chewing and swallowing. We don't stop running until we get well beyond the Brooklyn Bridge, and the breeze off the water has cleared out the air. I'm wondering about our building. Did the windows hold? Are the others trapped in the basement?

We wander until we hit Houston Street, take a left. Sirens and ambulances and screaming cops.

After we discover that our friend on Mulberry Street isn't home, a stranger lets us into her apartment. Erica has to use the bathroom. I do too. Wash the soot out of my eyes.

Call my mom, who starts crying, which starts me crying. Erica calls her folks. We don't know where to go. So, reflexively almost, we go to Buffa's for eggs and bacon. Sweet old waitress is very nice and concerned. Radio on, real loud. President saying: We will hunt them down and punish them. Palestinian teenagers on TV, laughing and waving flags.

Stop at grocery store to get tampons and toothbrushes. The line wraps all the way around the store. I also buy this notebook.

**298 Mulberry Street, NY 9/12**

We spend the night on our friend's living-room floor. I dream in the morning of the falling businessman with the flailing arms. He swims through the air toward me. When he's right in front of me he says: I'm dead.

Over and over, this happens.

We go to the one open clothes store in the area. We walk in and, almost immediately, the Middle Eastern owners come through, announcing: We're closed, we're closed. I am holding a pair of Converse sneakers (navy), some socks, and a pair of boxers (that end up being the biggest Medium I've ever seen). I still intend to pick up some shorts, T-shirts, etc. I almost start crying, tell him that all I have is the clothes I'm wearing. He looks horror-stricken. "Of course," he says. "You take your time." We go across the street to Chase Manhattan Bank and I take out $300. I give half to Erica, who has no wallet. Walking out of the bank, I realize I've left my notebook on the counter in the clothes store. I take off running. When the only thing you have in the world is a red spiral with 12 pages of journal entry and a pair of Cons, those things take on an extraordinary significance. The store owners let me in to retrieve my red notebook. Back outside, I drop it into the shopping bag and notice, for the first time, the name of the store: Ground Zero.

Six weeks ago, Erica's parents came into the city to celebrate their 35th wedding anniversary. One night, we got high on the roof of our apartment, looking over at the WTC, and discussed crises, catastrophes, and disasters. Erica's mom, who fled Hungary as a young girl and lived her whole childhood as a refugee, got a little emotional, making the point that our generation would be ill-equipped to deal with a catastrophe of any magnitude. "I mean, I don't think you'd have any idea what to do," she'd said.

Erica's brother has a place in the Hudson Valley. We go to Grand Central by way of the 6 train. Hardly anybody is out, especially on the subway. We take the 3:12 to Beacon. As we speed through the tunnels and emerge alongside the Hudson, I keep repeating, in my head, the line I intend to utter once we are up around the Cloisters: *I feel so much better now that we're out of the city*. And I do say these words, as I planned, but I don't feel any better.

I'm leaving New York without my guitar. I have no guitar. No backpack, no cell phone, no organizer, no CD player, no CDs, no tape recorder. How little these things feel now, things that seemed crucial to my existence a day ago.

Later that night, as we lie on the guest-room bed, Erica whispers: I keep seeing those people fall. I wonder if they jumped or they … She trails off and falls asleep, making soft *ugh* noises occasionally as she drifts down.

Before I'm able to fall asleep, I hear some friends, also refugees, in the room below us having sex. I'm surprised to be reminded of humanity's finer points.

**Whiskey Hill Road, Wallkill, NY 9/13**

Morning in the Hudson Valley. The wind has blown the algae to the edges of the pond. Crickets and cicadas. Poncho the dog sleeps in the foot-deep yellow flowers. I contemplate fishing, but can't stomach the thought of catching something and having to put my hand around its squirming body and wrestle the hook from its face.

I can't breathe through my nose. Erica wakes up coughing, hacking. Thick congestion rumbling in her throat.

I try to put on my sandals, but I can't, because of the places where they rubbed into the flesh on the top of my left foot and my toes.

Barefoot, Erica and I walk to the edge of the pond and stand there for a long time in silence.

I didn't write a word about the engagement ring in the journal. I was afraid Erica would see it. And I didn't want the ring to be wrapped up in tragedy. I was able to get in touch with the jewelers

before they'd mailed it to our New York address, which was lucky, because the mail from that time was in limbo for months. We returned to 88 Greenwich a week later to collect whatever belongings we could gather in five minutes. We never lived in Manhattan again. We got married, had two kids, and now live in a quiet spot in the Hudson Valley. We don't discuss the events of that day much anymore. ♦

# After the Fall

by *Tom Littlewood*

From an interview of Juliane Koepcke by Tom Littlewood. On Christmas Eve, 1971, seventeen-year-old Koepcke was on a flight with her mother when a thunderstorm destroyed the plane, killing the ninety-two other passengers. She spent eleven days in the Peruvian rainforest before being rescued. In 2000 the Werner Herzog documentary Wings of Hope, about Koepcke's experience, aired on German public television.

TOM LITTLEWOOD: *How did the trouble begin?*
JULIANE KOEPCKE: The clouds became thicker. My mother started getting nervous and said, "I don't like this." The clouds became darker and darker and the flight became more turbulent. Then we were in the midst of pitch-black clouds and a proper storm with thunder and lightning.

LITTLEWOOD: *Were the other passengers as nervous as your mother?*
KOEPCKE: The other passengers were still calm. They weren't happy about it, but you couldn't really feel that. It was pitch-black all around us and there was constant lightning. Then I saw a glistening light on the right wing, and my mother said: "Now it's over." The motor was hit by lightning. After that, everything went super-fast. I found out only later that turboprop Electra aircraft weren't designed for this kind of heavy turbulence. Their wings

are too stiff. The bolt that hit the plane probably caused it to break up in midair, because it definitely didn't explode.

LITTLEWOOD: *When your mother said, "Now it's over," did that comment mean anything to you at all?*
KOEPCKE: No, I didn't really have the chance to think about it. There's one thing I remember: I heard the incredibly loud motor and people screaming and then the plane fell extremely steeply. And then it was calm – incredibly calm compared with the noise before that. I could hear only the wind in my ears. I was still attached to my seat. My mother and the man sitting by the aisle had both been propelled out of theirs. I was free-falling, that's what I registered for sure. I was in a tailspin. I saw the forest beneath me – like "green cauliflower, like broccoli," is how I described it later on. Then I lost consciousness and regained it only the next day.

LITTLEWOOD: *What did you feel while all of this happened?*
KOEPCKE: I wasn't scared; I didn't have time for that. Even while I was falling, I wasn't afraid. I just realized that the seat belt was putting pressure on my stomach and my head was upside down. But that's about it – it was probably only fractions of a second. Or maybe I blocked it out. Either way, I don't remember it. The crash was around 1:30 P.M., and the next morning around 9:00 I looked at my wristwatch. Then I realized I was on the ground, and I knew right away what had happened. I had a serious concussion, so I couldn't sit up. My eye was swollen. My glasses – which I'd had since I was fourteen because I'm nearsighted – were gone. I was lying underneath my seat, and I wasn't strapped in anymore. I knew that I had survived a plane crash. I didn't really think about myself. I was more concerned about where my mother was. That's the first thing I remember. I had probably woken up and lost consciousness a couple of times before that, due to the concussion. I must have released myself from the seat, because I was definitely strapped in when I fell. It must have turned and buffered the crash, otherwise I wouldn't have survived. With a lot of effort I could get up only on my knees, then everything turned black again. I couldn't see very well with only one eye, and I found out later that the crash and the difference in pressure inside and outside of the plane had made the capillaries in my eyes pop. That's why the whites of my eyes were blood red. I probably looked like a zombie. I couldn't feel it, though. I wasn't in any pain. I was just dizzy, and every once in a while everything turned black. It took half a day until I could get up and walk. I searched for a full day and then I realized there was no one there. In the afternoon on that same day, I found a little well and I remembered what my father had once told me: If you get lost in the jungle and you find water, you should follow it.

LITTLEWOOD: *Did you come across bodies?*
KOEPCKE: Yes, once. It was the fourth day after the crash. I found a row of seats. The impact must have been so hard that it drilled them three feet into the ground. The three people strapped into these seats must have been killed right away. That was an ugly moment.

LITTLEWOOD: *How did you handle seeing these crash victims?*
KOEPCKE: I had already sensed that I'd come across dead bodies because I had heard this noise, the sound that king vultures make when they land. King vultures are big condors, the biggest vultures in South America. When I heard that sound, I knew there was a dead big animal or human somewhere nearby. I came around a crook of the stream and found the row of seats. I couldn't really see that much, only people's feet pointing up. I

poked their feet with a stick. I could tell it was a woman because she had polished toenails, and the others must have been two men, judging by their pants and shoes. I moved on after a while, but in the first moment after finding them, it was like I was paralyzed.

LITTLEWOOD: *You weren't entirely uninjured in the crash.*
KOEPCKE: I had a deep cut on my left calf, but it didn't bleed a lot. That's a common thing when people are in shock – the bleeding isn't very strong even though the cut is deep. Also, my right collarbone was broken. I could feel that the bone was overlapping. Nothing came through the skin, though. The only thing that made me nervous was this little patch on my upper arm. It wasn't any tragic wound or anything, but it was small and open and flies had laid their eggs in it. The maggots hatched underneath my skin and ate a hole into my arm. I was afraid they might have to amputate my arm. After our dog had a similar thing, it got infected. I thought, I have to get these maggots out of my arm. But that wasn't exactly easy. I had this ring that was open on one side that you could squeeze together, and I tried with that. It didn't work because the hole was so deep. So I tried with a stick, but that didn't work either. Only after ten days, when I found a boat with a motor and a barrel of diesel fuel, was I able to do the same thing we had done to our dog – pour petroleum into the wound. That brought the maggots to the surface. Not all of them, but the majority. The doctor who treated me extracted the rest.

LITTLEWOOD: *It's incredible how you managed to deal with this trauma, this horrific thing that happened to you.*
KOEPCKE: Yes, and you have to consider that I didn't have any psychological help either. Nowadays one would get that sort of help right away, but in the early Seventies things were different. Of course, I had nightmares for a long time, for years, and of course the grief about my mother's death and that of the other people came back again and again. The thought Why was I the only survivor? haunts me. It always will. ♦

# Still Crazy After All These Years

by *Ben Mallalieu*

***2007***

I always regretted not going to Matala. One snowy night in the early 1970s I was sleeping on a park bench in Munich until the police woke me up: 'If you cannot afford a hotel, you should go home,' they said in that sensible Germanic way. But it was not a decade for being sensible, and after walking aimlessly around the city for a couple of hours I spent the rest of the night shivering on the steps of a locked railway station while a bearded hippie told stories about a miraculous beach in Crete where the sun shone all winter and you could sleep in caves and live for next to nothing.

Unfortunately I was set on heading east, and by the time I returned to Europe Matala's best days were officially over. All that remained was Joni Mitchell's catchy, optimistic song, *Carey*, which celebrated drinking wine at the Mermaid café, getting beach tar on your feet and listening to scratchy rock and roll beneath a Matala moon – a eulogy for all the good times before AIDS, mortgages, Thatcherism and heroin. Whenever I heard it I wished I had gone to Matala.

It was the first famous hippie beach and respectable people got seriously upset about it, although now it is hard to understand why. Bohemians behaving badly had been a feature of many European beaches throughout the twentieth century, but this was for some reason different, something new and worse. Perhaps it was because hippies didn't seem to care about money ('worthless, sponging idlers' said the usually sensible travel writer Ernie Bradford; perhaps rich idlers were more acceptable). Maybe it was the drugs; even the better Greek governments have never approved of cannabis – too Turkish (Turkish governments don't approve of it either, for much the same reason) – and those were mad days under the Colonels.

By most accounts the hippies and the Matala locals coexisted reasonably happily; young Greeks were impressed, particularly the national servicemen stationed in southern Crete who thought it a much better lifestyle than fighting for Colonel and country, but the Mermaid Café didn't survive the seventies. The owner had built an extension to his kitchen without the correct permission – hardly a serious offence, particularly in Greece – but he was locked up and tortured, and his café was closed. The caves were fenced off with barbed wire and the party was over. They paved the streets, built a large car park and Matala became popular with package tours.

When I finally got there nearly forty years late, I was not hitchhiking any more, nor sleeping on park benches, and our hotel room had clean, white linen.

In Joni Mitchell's time, Matala amounted to a few small, single-storey houses, none particularly beautiful, two beach cafés and a grocery shop. Now, it has a few hundred buildings, none bigger than three storeys, nor particularly ugly although you would have to look hard to find any that are not rental apartments, gift shops or tavernas. Most of the package tour hotels are further up the narrow valley, out of sight from the seafront and maintaining the illusion that little has changed.

The old graffiti on the sea wall – 'Welcome to Matala George. Today is life. Tomorrow never comes' – has been repainted with more flowery, more obviously sixties-esque lettering. You can buy 'Today is life' T-shirts. But despite the package tour commercial-

ism, Matala has retained a slightly raffish, hippie air. You can even find a few recidivist old wrecks of the 'never trust anyone under thirty' variety who may have been there ever since the sixties. It is a bit like going to a pub at opening time and finding the back room full of drunks locked in from the night before. There are also some younger, fashion-statement Euro-hippies with blond dreadlocks, and American baby-boomers looking for the misspent youth they might have had if they had not accepted the graduate trainee place at General Motors or IBM; but most people are typical tourists, although not many are English and even fewer are Greek.

The side of the bay with the cliffs and caves has been left undeveloped with a grove of dusty evergreen trees I could not identify next to the beach. (Perhaps there is a preservation order on them.) I asked the waiter at the Lions Taverna what they were called. 'They are just trees,' he said, 'they don't have a name.'

The town is not at its best in the afternoon when the beach fills up with coachloads of Russians on day excursions from the big resorts along the coast. They are interested in the hippies – an episode in recent history that passed them by – and I overheard a group asking the man renting deckchairs what the village was like then, but he didn't know: he was not there either.

But the once famous Red Beach, just south of town, has changed very little, protected from development because it can only be reached by a twenty-five minute scramble over the headland – a bit of a slog on the first day, easy by the end of the week. The cliffs are the colour of rock candy, the earth covered in fine, white dust. The light is blinding, the silence almost deafening and there are moments on the walk when not much has changed since Minoan times.

The beach has only one old building, boarded up and painted with a flaking mural. In recent years, a Belgian sculptor has carved animals and ancient Egyptian patterns in the rocks. The sand is large-grained and soft to walk on with outcrops of black granite smoothed and sculpted by the sea. The water is safe, protected by cliffs on either side, and warm enough for swimming long after autumn has come and gone in England.

In the evening when the crowds had left, we sat outside the Lions Taverna on the seafront drinking Cretan wine and watching the last of the sunlight on the caves. Sunsets don't change much. The night is still full of stars, slightly obscured by the floodlights on the caves, and old rock and roll still drifts across the water from the other bars – Bob Dylan's *119th Dream*, *Shine On You Crazy Diamond*, lots of Bob Marley.

From a distance, the caves look like a natural phenomenon but, close to, you can see that they are man-made, even older than Petra, carved into the rose-red honeycomb stone in early classical times and full of echoes of former occupants, although none of them particularly fashionable: the Romans used them as catacombs; lepers lived there in the days before beautiful beaches were something special to be ruined. The heat of the sun has sunk deep into the rock keeping it warm at night and possibly all winter. I could see myself in the I 970s living in a cave with a cheesecloth curtain over the doorway and a sleeping bag on the stone bed, and I wouldn't have needed much else in those days. But you cannot sleep there anymore.

In the Lions Taverna, the paper tablecloth was decorated with a map of Crete with, just below it, a tiny island almost obscured by the metal clip holding the cloth to the table. 'Didn't St. Paul go there?' I asked as the name rang the faintest of bells. 'Oh yes,' said the taverna owner, 'that was where he was shipwrecked – he and the ninety-nine saints.' But I did not believe him as I was pretty certain that Paul had only been shipwrecked once and that was on Malta, and I would have remembered the ninety-nine saints if the

'Acts of the Apostles' had mentioned them – saints rarely come in batches of ninety-nine.

I asked what the island was like now and he pulled a face as though fearing he was about to lose another customer. 'It's like Matala was forty years ago,' he said sadly.

***2008***

Today is Saturday; I need to write that down, because my phone is dead and my watch has stopped – perhaps appropriate on an island where time and the outside world make little impression but mighty inconvenient when I have a ferry and plane to catch on Friday. I can roughly tell the time of day from the shadow of a stick in the sand, but there is no easy way of telling the day of the week other than by keeping a record.

This morning, there are no new human footprints on my part of the beach, but a cat has added my tent to its silent nightly round.

A naked old man with an impossibly long white beard dances along the shoreline, greeting the sunrise. He looks like the 'It's...' man from Monty Python but he moves with improbable fluency for someone of his age. He can sing well too, mostly snatches from old Beatles songs. His name is Wolfgang and his philosophy of life is simple: 'Everything is easy,' he says.

If you are eating, he has the initially disconcerting habit of helping himself, uninvited, to your food, but after a few days you cease to notice. I have some new friends who live in the woods and I cannot walk past their camp without being offered tea or beer or food, which is almost embarrassing until I realise that this is how life ought to be.

This is often said to be the island of Ogygia where the goddess Calypso kept Odysseus prisoner, although the supporting evidence is far from conclusive: in terms of flora, fauna and geography, it fails to tick almost any of the right boxes, but then neither do any of the other possible claimants. Ogygia is surely as mythological as the Celtic island of Tír na nOg (is the similarity of names just a coincidence?) where the hero Oisin discovered to his cost that for every day he spent there a year had gone by at home. But I am happy to think of this island as Ogygia because it is, perhaps more that any place I have ever been to, enchanted.

And it is certainly difficult to escape from: ferry connections are unreliable and you can be marooned here for days, sometimes weeks, if the wind is blowing in the wrong direction.

The permanent indigenous population numbers around thirty-five, with a similar number of outsiders from the rest of Greece and Europe. It has no hotels and fewer than a hundred apartment beds for tourists, so most summer migrants sleep on the beaches or under the trees – which was how it was on most Greek islands forty years ago, but is now usually frowned upon, not to say actively discouraged by the police.

The island is inevitably changing, but only slowly. The road has been paved in the last year, the harbour at Karave enlarged; there might even be proper electricity soon. New houses are being built on the road to Agios Ioannis, but the road stops at Sophia's Taverna, from where it is a half-mile walk over the rocks, through the trees and far away from the twenty-first century to the beach where I live under a juniper tree.

Pines and tamarisks are fine and good, and palm trees, nodding or otherwise, can be found on half the world's best beaches, but the sea juniper, *juniperus oxycedrus macrocarpa*, is the ultimate beach tree, and this tiny island has possibly the largest sea juniper forest anywhere in the world.

No other trees, not even yews or olives, look so old, with twisted limbs bleached like bone. It is as though they have sud-

denly frozen in the middle of some extravagant activity to which they will return as soon as your back is turned, like in a game of grandmother's footsteps.

Mosquito nets and hammocks are strung between the trees like cobwebs or moths' nests and decorated with flotsam and jetsam like Derek Jarman's garden at Dungeness, treading the fine line between art and litter. Rows of pots and pans line the stone and pebble walls but where are the people? They have blended into the landscape to become almost invisible, their lean bodies the colour of the sand. Close to, they look like ancient Greeks but with longer dreadlocks and a rather disconcerting 'eighteen-going-on-eight hundred' look, prematurely aged by the sun and wind but kept permanently young by the simple life, living close to nature if not to what most people would call reality. In classical times, to have glittering eyes was a sign of a god in human form. Now it is a sign of a misspent youth.

At midday, I sit outside Sophia's Taverna in the shade and catch the breeze which blows a siren-like note across the top of my beer bottle. Sophia's is one of the new buildings but it sells old-fashioned Cretan food, a choice of only two hot dishes – meat or vegetable – baked in the oven in the morning and kept warm on a hot plate until evening.

One of the taverna locals is Anthony Bijnen, a Dutchman who used to be a software developer painting in his spare time and spending his holidays on the island. Six years ago, he painted a portrait of a taverna owner in the village of Sarakiniko who liked it so much he gave him a house, saying: 'Every island should have a painter'. Anthony has been here ever since, at first painting taverna signs for a living, later establishing an international reputation as an artist with exhibitions in Athens, Amsterdam and Vienna. He has built a geodesic 'egg' which has become the island's arts centre with facilities for anyone who wants to use them.

The island also has a small group of Russian philosophers doing whatever it is that Russian philosophers do, and possibly a journalist: a copy of the island's newspaper is dated 'Sometime in November'; the front, and only, page is covered with doodles and at the bottom is written 'Sorry, there is no news today'. I sometimes wish all newspapers could be like that.

Today is Monday.

Maria is Greek, of very Minoan beauty; she studies modern dance in Paris and spends her summers here with a little dog with large ears, like a bat with four legs. Walking round the headland to Lavrakas beach, I see her standing up to her waist in the sea, bending forward and dipping her hair in the water then slowly swinging her head and body round to make Catherine wheels of water in the air. It could be a scene from an ancient fresco.

Later I meet her on a sand dune to watch the sunset. We drink ginger tea and someone plays a musical instrument with a series of metal blades like a Jew's harp attached to a wooden sound box, twanging the keys and drumming with his fingers. The island is full of noises; sounds and sweet airs. We sit in a row like Easter Island statues.

This is the most southerly of all the Greek islands, closer to Africa than Athens, and at night there is no light pollution; the sky is heavy with stars like the Blake engraving from the Book of Job, *Iam Young and Ye are very Old* (or possibly the other way round). In the starlight, Maria dances a slow duet with her favourite tree.

Today is Tuesday.

Lili and Sara are Spanish students who live under the next door tree and remind me of two friends I knew from when I was travelling forty years ago. In the morning we go for a walk led by a gentle, young Greek with long, black hair and beard. We would never have found the path without him – a hard climb under a hot sun and a two hundred metre scramble down the side of a

ravine. Journey's end is Potamos, surely one of the most beautiful beaches in the world, with half a mile of the best golden sand gently shelving into safe, clear water. Apart from us, it is entirely deserted.

After one of the best and most refreshing swims of my life, I hang my hammock between the branches of a sea juniper and fall asleep listening to the waves, the cicadas, the bees in the thyme, the occasional bleat and tonk of a goat and Lili and Sara laughing in the sea.

Today is now. Tomorrow never comes. ♦

# Three Ways to Win the Lottery

by *Nathaniel Rich*

The news on July 2, 2010 – much like the news of the preceding eighteen months – was dreadful. The unemployment rate was approaching 10 percent, the Dow was down for the seventh consecutive day, and home sales were declining at a record rate. But on the bottom of the front page of the *Corpus Christi Caller* local section, there was an article with happier news: bishop native wins millions for 4th time. A sixtythree-year-old woman named Joan R. Ginther had won $10 million, the top prize in the Texas Lottery's Extreme Payout scratch-off game. Ginther's cumulative winnings now totaled $20.4 million.

Three of her golden tickets had been purchased in Bishop, Texas, a small, poor town about forty minutes southwest of Corpus Christi and two hours north of the Mexican border. The fourth ticket was bought in neighboring Kingsville. "She's obviously been born under a lucky star," said a Texas Lottery Commission spokesman, who added that they did not suspect any foul play. Ginther could not be reached for comment.

After the Associated Press picked it up, Ginther's story was syndicated by hundreds of newspapers worldwide, under headlines like lottery queen and luckiest woman on earth. Websites devoted to the paranormal, the occult, and Christianity concluded that Ginther was a master of visualization techniques; that the constellations had been in perfect alignment; that the woman must have prayed really hard.

A four-time lottery winner did seem unlikely, but how unlikely was it really? The AP interviewed mathematicians. Their findings: the odds of such a thing occurring were one in eighteen septillion. This is what eighteen septillion looks like:

18,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000

There are one septillion stars in the universe, and one septillion grains of sand on Earth. With one in-eighteen-septillion odds, it can be expected that a person should have Ginther's good luck about once every quadrillion years. Since the sun will envelop our planet in just five billion years, it is unlikely that another earthling will repeat her success.

The AP story included several peculiar details about Ginther. Though her first winning ticket came in 1993, in a standard pick six lottery drawing, the last three came more than a decade later, in two-year intervals. She won $2 million in the spring of 2006, $3 million in the spring of 2008, and $10 million in the early summer of 2010. These last three were all scratch-off tickets. The article also mentioned that Ginther does not, in fact, live in Texas. Though she was born in Bishop, she has lived for many years in Las Vegas. Finally, it noted that before retiring, she had been a math professor, with a Ph.D. from Stanford. She specialized in statistics.

Ginther was called a "mystery woman," but it was left at that. Other stories soon claimed the public's attention. On July 23 a black bear in Larkspur, Colorado, broke into a Toyota Corolla, sat in the driver's seat, defecated, honked the horn, then "drove" the car 125 feet until it crashed into a thicket. The next week a lobsterman in Narragansett Bay caught a yellow lobster – a one in-thirty-million phenomenon. And in mid-August, four sisters from the Chicago suburbs gave birth in four days; their obstetrician called the births "very unusual but wonderful at the same time." The Luckiest Woman on Earth was old news. Americans moved on.

But not all of us. I found myself trying to visualize eighteen Earths' worth of sand, and eighteen universes of stars. There are limits even to miracles.

I called a statistics professor, who said that Ginther's odds of winning were significantly higher than one in eighteen septillion, but that what was even more likely, from a statistical standpoint, was that some sort of fraud had been perpetrated. A professor at the Institute for the Study of Gambling & Commercial Gaming at the University of Nevada, Reno, said, "When something this unlikely happens in a casino, you arrest 'em first and ask questions later." "She must have some kind of scam working," a casino surveillance expert in Las Vegas told me. "They need to lock her up. She would be on my blacklist." I asked the director of another state lottery whether he believed that the Texas Lottery suspected no foul play. "You can bet on two things," he told me. "One, they're doing a serious investigation. Two, they ain't going to let anyone find out about it."

I drove to South Texas the next morning. I spoke with dozens of people in Bishop and in neighboring towns. I later interviewed every lottery expert I could find in the state: former Lottery employees, mathematicians, and a woman in the Dallas suburbs who has devoted the last eighteen years of her life to studying the Texas Lottery. I learned that there are only three possible explanations for what happened in Bishop. All three are exceedingly unlikely.

**I. The Inside Job**

Of all forms of lottery games, scratch-offs are the most vulnerable to fraud. The most common example is the so-called Retailer Scam. One made headlines just a few months ago when a customer tried to redeem a $10,000 scratchoff ticket at a Baltimore liquor store. The clerk, Melissa Stone, told the customer that the ticket was not a winner. The next day, Stone tried to collect the money herself at the Lottery headquarters, only to be arrested for grand theft. The customer, it turns out, had been an undercover cop.

Far more devastating to a lottery is the employee who leaks inside information. Many lottery commissions safeguard against this possibility by making sure that the crucial information – which ticket is a winner, and where it is being sold – is not centrally located. This is not how it works in Texas.

The majority of Texas Lottery's tickets are manufactured by a company called Scientific Games, which creates an encrypted file listing every winning scratch-off ticket. High-level employees at Scientific Games can access this file, but they don't know where in the state those tickets will be sold. There is a second company, however, called Gtech Holdings, that serves as the Lottery's distributor. Gtech receives the tickets and the encrypted file from Scientific Games, and then ships the tickets to the state's nearly 17,000 vendors. Gtech, therefore, has access to both sets of information – which tickets are winners, and where they are going to be sold.

If a person wanted to scam the Texas Lottery, she would likely have to know an employee at the Gtech shipping facility in Austin with access to the encrypted file and the shipping schedule. In Ginther's case, she would have to wait until a winning ticket was slated to show up in Bishop – it would look too suspicious for her to travel around the state cherry-picking jackpots.

The possibility would remain, however, that a townsperson might buy the winning ticket before Ginther was able to get to Bishop. To ensure that this didn't happen, a third person would have to be enlisted as an accomplice: the store owner. The store owner would refuse to sell the packs that included the winning ticket.

When Ginther arrived, she would buy every available ticket from the store owner.

The original AP article about Joan Ginther was illustrated with a photograph of Sun Bae, the owner of the Times Market. Asked about Ginther, Bae had told the reporter, "She is a very generous woman. She's helped so many people."

Bae is one of these people. She has seen a significant increase in business since Ginther purchased two of her winning tickets at the Times Market. Even before Ginther's most recent win, Bae's store had become one of the top retailers in Nueces County. Of the top one hundred lottery retailers in Nueces, ninety-eight are in Corpus Christi (population 428,000) and its adjacent suburb, Robstown. The other two are in Bishop. Lottery tickets are the town's best-known commodity.

Bishop is very poor, and it is dying. There is no grocery store, one high school, and two bars (one for Hispanics, one for Anglos). Young people leave as soon as they finish high school. For decades the town's major employer was Celanese, a chemical company that makes pain-relief medication. In the past ten years the plant has laid off more than three hundred workers. The old Main Street is desolate, a two-block stretch of boarded-up brick buildings with faded signs. Houses in Bishop burn down with unsettling regularity. ("We're a close-knit community," one woman joked bitterly. "When your house burns down, everyone comes by to watch.") Half the fire hydrants don't work. Now that the old downtown businesses – Murphy's grocery store, the Bishop Drug

Company, and El Nuevo Mundo clothing store – are gone, the people of Bishop congregate mainly at the gas stations.

The Times Market is the only one unaffiliated with a national franchise. From the outside it doesn't appear particularly prosperous. The e in market has fallen off the marquee. Stray cats wander through the parking lot. The front window is decorated with a large poster from the Texas Lottery: winning ticket sold here!

In Bishop the Times Market is known as Bob's Corner because the man who works the counter is Bob Solis, a cheerful forty-seven-year-old with a squinty smile. He has worked at Times Market since Sun Bae moved to town and opened the store six years ago. He believes that it is charmed.

"This is the luckiest store. Every day we have a winner. I had a lady come in from Houston. She had her house on the market, but nobody had called her. When she drove up to the store, she got two calls from people wanting to buy her house."

Bae was not around, but Solis spoke highly of her. "She's the best boss I've ever had. We all get along. We treat this as a family store." He explained that he didn't know much about Joan Ginther, that she only bought her tickets from Sun Bae, who worked the late shift. I asked whether he had ever met Ginther. He hesitated, his eyes looking out to the parking lot. Then he acknowledged that he had seen her a couple of times. Whenever she comes in, he said, all the customers in the store gather around her. They don't dare interfere, but they quietly watch to see which tickets she buys. Then they buy the same ones.

In response to the rest of my questions about Ginther – Why does she come to this specific store? Does she have a special system? Why does she keep buying tickets after winning so many times? – Solis would say little beyond, "Nobody knows. She's a very, very lucky lady. And she's very, very private." The only person she speaks to, he added, is Bae.

Bae is an extraordinarily slender, middle-aged Korean woman with a fluttery, anxious quality to her movements. She seemed alarmed when I introduced myself. As I questioned her, she backed down the aisles of the store as if seeking cover behind the racks of snack mix and canned spaghetti sauce. Her responses were evasive, ambiguous, and hard to interpret. I began to wonder whether her English skills declined in the presence of reporters. She was almost impossible to understand.

"You have a very lucky store," I told her.

She glared at me. After a few moments of awkward silence, she complained that she was tired of speaking with the press. "We already talked everything. Why you need something more? I don't want to talk to you about her. I don't want to talk." She vanished into a back room.

"She must have something on her mind," said Solis, shrugging.

Other people in Bishop were more forthcoming about Ginther. "This is a small town," said Ricardo Lopez, who is a close friend of Bob Solis. "As soon as any shit happens, everyone hears about it." He told me that Ginther comes to Bishop twice a year and stays for about a month at the Days Inn. It is the only motel in town, just a couple hundred yards away from the Times Market. She spends most of her days at the Times Market. She often buys a large stack of $1 or $2 scratch-off tickets and hands them out to anyone who walks in the store.

Ricardo contradicted Solis with a wave of his hand. "She's there all day long," he said. "She mills around, talking to people. People go there in the hope that she's handing out tickets. She says, 'Hi, my name is Joan. Would you like a ticket? I'm a millionaire and I buy tickets and hand them out to people to see if they have any luck, too.' "

Almost everyone I met in Bishop had a story about Ginther's generosity. Ginther hands out lottery tickets to strangers. She visits the home for seniors in Kingsville and gives tickets to the patients and the nurses. She brings tickets to everyone at the community center. She sends tickets to soldiers in Iraq. She tips gas station clerks fifty dollars when she buys tickets. She gives one poor man in town money to buy groceries. She paid for an extension to the house of her best friend, Anna-Linda Morales. She pays people to scratch tickets for her. Ginther saw a woman leaving a car dealership in Kingsville in tears; the woman's credit check hadn't gone through. "Let's go back in," said Ginther. She asked the dealer what was wrong.

"Credit's no good," said the dealer.

"Give her the keys," said Ginther. "I'll pay for it."

A few years ago, Quala Hicks, the manager of the Citgo at the northern edge of town, lost all her possessions in an apartment fire. In July, shortly after Ginther won her fourth jackpot, she appeared at the Citgo. "I want to give you something," Ginther said, holding out an envelope. It contained five hundred dollars in cash. When Hicks opened it, she started to cry.

A few people even claimed that, outside the Times Market, Ginther sets out milk in saucers for the stray cats.

Several locals, however, were willing to acknowledge that something suspicious was going on.

At The Bar (the one frequented by the town's Latino population), which sells $2 cans of beer and nothing else, bartender Janie Wilder admitted that she found Ginther's buying habits odd. "I think she has some kind of strategy." She explained that Ginther routinely bought out all the high-stakes scratch-off tickets in town.

"She knows when the new tickets are in," Hicks said. She has watched Ginther buy entire packs of $50 tickets at her store (there are twenty tickets to a pack). "She's got a feeling. I would like to know her secret."

"She's a mystery lady," said Jessica Gonzalez, who works the counter at the Shell station. "I guess I'd be a mystery, too, if I was rich like her."

Until it closed earlier this year, JP's Diner was a tiny, family-run restaurant at the edge of Bishop, opposite a large grain elevator that, with its series of enormous metal columns and intersecting pipes, looks like an alien settlement. I met a woman at the diner who was willing to talk about Ginther's habits but didn't want her real name printed. Pia, as I'll call her, was worried that she might get in trouble in town were she quoted as saying anything negative about Ginther or Bae.

"They made a deal," said Pia.

The deal, she explained, is this: Whenever a new shipment of highstakes scratch-off tickets arrives at the store, Bae hides them and calls Ginther. If anyone asks for tickets before Ginther can get there, the clerk claims that they are sold out.

"I heard rumors from old ladies in the town who were complaining about this," said Pia. "But you know how rumors are. Then I saw it for myself."

In June 2010, around the time Ginther purchased her most recent jackpot winner, Pia stopped at the Times Market to fill up on gas. It was the middle of the day. She noticed Ginther's car right away. ("She parks at the gas pumps so she can make a clean getaway.") When Pia entered the store, Ginther was standing near the register. She had a fanny pack around her waist. It was stuffed with rolls of cash bound in rubber bands. She was holding a plastic bag from the HEB Federal Credit Union, a regional bank. She walked to the other side of the counter, as if she were going to the restroom, and then handed off the money to Bae. In exchange Ginther received several bundles of high-stakes tickets, which she

placed into the plastic bag. Ginther walked outside, put the bag in the trunk of her car, and drove back to her room at the Days Inn.

"When I saw it myself," said Pia, "I was shocked. I was hurt too. My money is the same as hers. Why can't I buy a ticket? When she gets the best ones, it's no wonder that she wins."

"Do other people complain?"

"Yes," Pia said, though not to Bae. "They don't want to get involved. But I hear them complaining: 'We want the new ones. What about us?' When I saw what was going on, I said to myself that I wouldn't go there anymore, because she gets the best ones that come in."

Pia added that Ginther had the same arrangement at the market in Kingsville where she won her other jackpot. "She's a good customer, and she has all the money," she said. "So they protect her."

Several people mentioned that Ginther had been in town quite recently. Ricardo Lopez, for instance, said she was in Bishop just a week before I arrived. He was irritated because he had shown up at the Times Market just as she was leaving.

"I missed her by a few seconds," he said, shaking his head. "I'm just not lucky."

The next morning I returned to the Times Market. Bob Solis was at the register. His smile quickly morphed into an uneasy, defensive glower. He refused to make eye contact. I told him that, contrary to what he had told me the previous day, I'd heard Ginther had been to the Times Market just a week earlier. That she came for a month at a time and spent her days at the Times Market.

"I've never seen her," said Solis. "I'm here in the daytime. She comes at night."

"Wait – now you're saying you've never even *seen* her?"

"I've never seen her," said Solis.

**II. The Code Cracker**

Of all forms of lottery games, scratch-off tickets leave the least to chance. Winning tickets are not, in fact, distributed randomly through the entire set. If they were, that would leave open the possibility that all the jackpots might appear in the very first batch of tickets shipped to stores. The winning tickets might be claimed within a week, rather than the months over which major scratch-off series usually play out. The Texas Lottery would be out some $30 million in prize money without having sold nearly enough tickets to cover the payouts.

To avoid this scenario, the Texas Lottery divides its print run into six batches, or pools. For the highstakes games, each pool of half a million tickets contains one sixth of the prize money. When a game goes on sale, the first pool is shipped off to stores. Successive pools aren't released until the preceding one is close to selling out. This system guarantees that the lottery never loses.

There are theories that the lottery goes even further than this to ensure profitability. Dawn Nettles, a sixty-year-old woman who lives in suburban Dallas, has been obsessively monitoring the Texas Lottery for her biweekly newsletter, the *Lotto Report*, since 1993. She has recorded the names and addresses of every winner of Lotto Texas, Cash Five, Pick 3, Daily 4, Texas Two Step, and the nearly 1,400 scratch-off games that have been issued by the Lottery. She keeps track of unclaimed tickets, prize amounts, ticket runs, redeem dates, and sales figures, and is in regular contact with high-level members of the Lottery Commission. Nettles files open-records requests with the commission on a weekly basis. Her work as a watchdog has led to reforms in the way the Lottery conducts its business, as well as to numerous lawsuits.

Each issue of *Lotto Report* is ten pages long, with three dense columns of data.

Most high-stakes scratch-off games advertise a print run of three million tickets, three of which are grand-prize winners. Nettles is convinced that the Texas Lottery tries to hold one, if not two, of the three grand prizes for the later batches: "Every time there's a big, high-dollar ticket out there, with a big, high-dollar prize, one jackpot comes in real fast. But the other two don't come in until the game's almost over." This makes sense from a business perspective. Nobody buys lottery tickets for the secondary prizes.

In each of Ginther's wins, the first jackpot came out early in the print run. And in each case, Ginther claimed the second jackpot more than halfway through the run.

Joan (pronounced "Jo-Ann") Rae Ginther was born in 1947, on April Fools' Day. Her father, who died in 2007, was for thirty years Bishop's town doctor, a hero in the community. He had treated almost everyone I met in the town. There has not been a doctor in Bishop since he retired: people there have to drive to a clinic six miles away in Kingsville.

Ginther attended college at the University of Texas at Austin, where she majored in mathematics. After graduating in 1969, she was admitted to Stanford's School of Education. At the time, Stanford's mathematics-education program was the best in the country, if not the world. It combined the coursework of both the mathematics and the education Ph.D. programs.

Ginther studied under Edward Begle, the founder and director of the School Mathematics Study Group (SMSG), a think tank financed by the National Science Foundation and charged with creating and implementing a new mathematics curriculum for U.S. schools – what became known as the "new math." Ginther collaborated with Begle on two papers written for SMSG. But a person who knew Ginther in the School of Education told me that, although Ginther was a good student, her heart wasn't in it. Unlike many of her peers, she "didn't seem like someone who wanted to use her skills and education to change the world."

After graduation, Ginther joined the faculty of a new community college, Evergreen Valley, in San Jose. She worked there into the Eighties, continuing her research into mathematics education. She co-wrote a prealgebra textbook in 1986. No one in Bishop could tell me what she was doing between then and 2006, when she won her first scratch-off jackpot.

Lottery commissions use an algorithm to determine the placement of jackpots within each ticket run. This kind of algorithm is called a pseudorandom-number generator. The "pseudo" derives from the fact that true randomness is not something that can be achieved by computers. The algorithm works by issuing a series of seemingly random numbers in a predictable sequence. The series might be very long, but it's not infinite. As Gerald Busald, a professor of mathematics at San Antonio College, explained to me, "If you can get into the sequence, the numbers are not random anymore. There's no way to get around that that I know of."

This is why Busald was amazed to discover, in 2005, that the Texas Lottery was planning to replace the old ping-pong-ball method with computerized random-number generators for all its Lotto games. Testifying before the Texas Lottery Commission, Busald argued that random-numbergenerator algorithms would undermine the integrity of the game. He drew the Commission's attention to two cautionary tales.

The first: In 1995, Ronald Harris, an electrical engineer for the Nevada State Gaming Control Board, studied a random-number generator that casinos in Vegas used to supply numbers for Keno – a computerized game of chance that is similar to lotto. After

Harris learned that the same software had been installed in Atlantic City casinos, he and a friend flew to New Jersey and checked into Bally's Park Place Hotel. The friend went to the Keno lounge; Harris sat in the hotel room watching a closed-circuit TV channel on which hotel guests could see the Keno numbers as they were drawn. As the numbers appeared, Harris punched them into his laptop. Once he figured out where in the sequence the number generator was, he told his friend what numbers to bet on. The friend entered a perfect Keno card and won $100,000, the largest Keno jackpot ever awarded in Atlantic City. Casino officials were suspicious. They followed the friend to his room and found Harris there. They ran a check and discovered that Harris worked for Nevada Gaming.

The second occurred in 1998, after the Arizona Lottery began using a computerized system for the Pick 3 game. A Chandler woman named Ruth Wennerlund always picked the same three digits, 9-0-7 (her son was born on September 7). After a month under the new system she noticed something peculiar: the number 9 had never been drawn. She called the Arizona Lottery to complain. They told her that she was merely unlucky. A few days later the Lottery realized their error and announced that a glitch in their random-number generator had prevented any 9s from being chosen. The thousands of people who had played tickets with the number 9 were offered refunds – but only if they had kept their losing ticket stubs.

Gerald Busald's testimony persuaded the Texas Lottery Commission to abandon their plan to adopt a computerized system. They stayed with the ping-pong balls. It was more expensive than running a computer program, but given the demonstrable unrandomness of pseudorandom-number generators, they worried about risking their customers' trust.

Scratch-off tickets, however, were unaffected by this decision. They have always been generated by computers. They have to be, of course. If it weren't for pseudorandom-number-generating algorithms, scratch-off tickets wouldn't exist.

Gtech, for its part, is worried about staying ahead of number crunchers who might try to figure out their algorithms. When *Wired* published the story of a statistician named Mohan Srivastava, who could tell which tickets issued by the Ontario Lottery were winners by looking for certain patterns in the numbers printed outside the scratch-off field, Gtech executive Ross Dalton responded, "Every lottery knows that it's one scandal away from being shut down."

To beat the lottery's algorithm, one would have to use a strategy similar to the one employed by card counters in casinos. An expert counter cannot predict what cards he will draw, but he does know that when the odds are higher he will be dealt a good hand. If the odds are favorable, he increases his bets. Ginther would have had to analyze the results of all the previous high-stakes scratch-off games to determine where in the sequence of tickets the jackpots usually appeared. She could easily have gathered this information from Dawn Nettles's website or from the Texas Lottery itself, through information requests.

But it would take more than figuring out *when* the winning ticket was going to come up. She would also have to determine *where* in Texas that ticket would be shipped. This part of the equation is more straightforward. Gtech processes its shipments in the same sequence for every order. If you knew how the winners were distributed within a given pool, and matched that to where those tickets wound up, you could figure out Gtech's normal shipping order, and where the winners would be distributed around the state.

Once she discovered a pattern, Ginther would have had to wait until a winning ticket was scheduled to show up in a sparsely populated region – the less competition for that winning ticket, the better. It would be crucial to pick a place that she had reason to visit, such as Bishop and the surrounding towns.

It would also be helpful if the store owner held the tickets for her.

**III. Dumb Luck**

Of all forms of lottery games, scratch-off tickets are by far the most popular. In Texas, three quarters of all tickets sold are scratchoffs, and for years, the Texas Lottery has been on the vanguard of highstakes scratch-off games. It introduced the country's first $20 instant ticket in 2003; $30 and $50 tickets soon followed. According to a study commissioned by the Lottery in 2006, the more education a person has, the fewer dollars he or she spends on the lottery, and the demographic differences are even starker when it comes to scratch-off games. "Scratch-off tickets are to the lottery what crack is to cocaine," said a Democratic state senator from El Paso when the $50 tickets were introduced. At the same time, the state has become increasingly dependent on scratch-off games. They now account for seventy-five cents of every lottery dollar taken in.

It may be true that a person who plays the lottery four times in her life has one-in-eighteen-septillion odds of winning four high-stakes jackpots. But once a person plays more than four times, her odds begin to increase. There are more than one hundred million-dollar jackpots awarded in the United States annually. The majority of lottery winners continue to play the lottery after their first win, and play heavily. There are stories of repeat winners just about every year. In 2006 Valerie Wilson of Long Island won her second million-dollar prize. In 2009 Bob and Diane Jaracz of Nashua, New Hampshire, won their second million-dollar jackpot in four years. And in 2010 Ernest Pullen of Bonne Terre, Missouri, won a $1 million pot and a $2 million pot within four months.

It still seems outlandish that someone could win four jackpots, but there is a persistent rumor in Bishop that Ginther hasn't won four jackpots – she's won three.

"Her dad – he's the one who won the lotto," said Ricardo Lopez, referring to her first jackpot in 1993. It was a pick-six, her only non-scratch-off winner. "Her dad won it. He was my doctor. But he was elderly, retired, and he couldn't spend it. So he gave the ticket to his daughter and she claimed it. She wasn't into buying tickets then."

"That's what I heard," said Josie Perez. "The father bought it. She came back and claimed it."

"She was in the Virgin Islands, on vacation," said Pia. "Her parents called her about the ticket and she came back to claim it."

People in Bishop estimate that she buys about three thousand tickets a year. If she has been buying tickets at that rate since 1993, when her father won the lottery, she's bought more than 50,000 tickets. This is generous – no one I spoke to remembered her buying tickets regularly in town for more than the past five or six years. But if she indeed has purchased 50,000 tickets over the past seventeen years (at a cost of approximately $1 million), the odds of her winning three times is one in eight thousand.

This scenario would still make Ginther the luckiest gambler in the world – and one of the most profligate. If she had instead bet that $1 million on the roulette wheel, both her odds of winning (37 to 1) and her payout ($35 million rather than $20.4 million) would have been significantly better. It would also mean that, as soon as her father won his jackpot, she forgot everything she

knew about statistics and started sinking vast sums into the lottery. Perhaps when she's not buying tickets in Texas, she's at a blackjack table in Las Vegas. (She has a condo on Paradise Road, across the street from the Riviera casino.)

"I think she's addicted," said Dawn Nettles. "She moved to the gambling capital of the world. I bet she spends all her time in casinos. I'll bet you she will eventually be broke to where she can't buy them. I'll bet you she loses it all."

Almost nobody in Bishop believed that Ginther was anything other than outrageously fortunate. Skepticism on this subject was considered apostasy, and not just against the lottery. If Ginther had cheated, it meant that the lottery wasn't governed strictly by chance (or by a higher power). If anything, Ginther's success confirmed the common belief in the benefits of positive thinking. The locals proposed various theories to support their conviction: Ginther was a churchgoing woman, they told me over and over. She gave money to the needy. She was a good daughter. Her success was a form of cosmic compensation for her father's lifelong devotion to Bishop's sick and elderly.

The implication of this line of argument was clear: Without the belief that a life could be transformed by a single stroke of luck, there would be nothing left to hope for. And Bishop is full of people who are waiting for their luck to change. The suggestion that a reversal of fortunes is impossible is greeted with hostility. If Ginther can win four times, the thinking goes, why shouldn't I be able to win just once?

Before I left Bishop I stopped at the City Office, where I met Anna-Linda Morales, the woman many people in town described as Ginther's best friend. She works in the water department. She said she would pass along my information to Ginther. (I had previously tried to contact Ginther; I never received a response.) When I asked whether Ginther had visited Bishop recently, Morales demurred. Then I asked whether Ginther was in fact in Bishop at that very moment.

"No," said Morales, then she caught herself. "I'm not saying." It occurred to me that Ginther might that minute be holed up at the Days Inn, waiting for the nosy reporter to leave town.

Morales refused to speak any further about her friend, but she and another woman in her office, Cynthia, did talk to me at length about Bishop. Just last May, the town celebrated its centennial. In the office there was a display case containing a 1960 article from the *Bishop News* about a local boy who had become a leading athlete at Baylor. There were also photographs of the library, the W. L. Johnson Dry Goods Store, and the brick schoolhouse. They are all gone now. Another photograph was titled, "Busy day during harvest at the First State Bank of Bishop." Men in cowboy hats wait in line to withdraw cash from the bank tellers.

"A lot more people in Bishop back then," said Cynthia with a sigh, and Morales mentioned that her husband had been laid off from the Celanese plant ten years earlier. The somber mood lifted, however, when I asked the two women whether they bought lottery tickets. I might as well have asked whether they ate food or took showers. They burst into laughter. When they realized that I wasn't trying to make a joke, they got quiet.

"Doesn't everybody buy tickets?" said Cynthia, confused.

"Everybody buys tickets," said Anna-Linda, reassuring me. "Everybody." ♦

*Side by...* *...by side*

# Kuperman Awaits Ecstasy

by *Joseph Epstein*

DRIVING TO THE LOOP to bring his tax stuff to Schapiro, his accountant for nearly forty years, Milton Kuperman, at the lengthy stoplight at Thorndale and Sheridan, had the appalling thought that his death, which couldn't be all that far off, would matter to no one, not a soul. A widower, Kuperman would be eighty in August. His only child, his daughter Rivian, lived in Los Angeles, and saw him once a year; and that, when you got right down to it, was generally less than a visit and more like someone checking in dutifully to pay her respects.

Kuperman was also without grandchildren. Married to a successful patent attorney and unable to have children of their own, Rivian and her husband many years ago adopted a child from Chile, a boy they named Eric – Eric Cohen – who hadn't, as his daughter used to say, "worked out". By this she meant that, from his adolescence until now, a man in his later twenties, Eric was a drug addict, in and out of one clinic, sanatorium, hospital and half-way house after another.

Richard Cohen, his son-in-law, was a more powerful moneymaker than Kuperman, and so the inheritance that he planned to leave his daughter – somewhere in the range of three million dollars – didn't figure to change their life much; it would probably present nothing more than a complicated tax problem. At

# Kuperman katarzisra vár

fordította *Tárnok Attila*

MIKÖZBEN AUTÓVAL A BELVÁROSBA tartott az adópapírjaival Schapiróhoz, aki csaknem negyven éve intézte a könyvelését, és hosszasan várakozott a piros lámpánál a Thorndale Street és a Sheridan Road kereszteződésében, Milton Kuperman agyában az a riasztó gondolat öltött testet, hogy halála, amely nem lehet már olyan messze, senkinek nem okoz majd szomorúságot. Özvegyember, augusztusban lenne nyolcvanéves. Egyetlen gyermeke, Rivian nevű lánya Los Angelesben él, évente egyszer látogatja meg, és ha a dolgok mélyére nézünk, az is csupán egy udvariassági látogatás: benéz, hogy a tiszteletét tegye.

Kupermannek nem volt unokája. Rivian egy sikeres ügyvédhez ment feleségül, és mivel nem született gyerekük, évekkel ezelőtt örökbe fogadtak egy chilei fiút, Ericet – Eric Cohent –, ő azonban, mint Rivian mondta, „nem vált be". A gyerek kora kamaszkorától kezdve egészen a mai napig – már majdnem harminc – drogfüggő: szanatóriumok, klinikák, kórházak, intézetek egész sorát járta végig.

A veje, Richard Cohen, Kupermannél sikeresebb üzletember lett, így az örökség, amit Kuperman a lányára hagyhat – nagyjából három millió dollár – nem sokat változtat majd a házaspár életén, valószínűleg alig éri meg a bosszúságot, amit az örökösödési adó jelent. Zavarodott pillanataiban Kuperman arra gon-

odd, perverse moments, Kuperman thought of leaving his money to his adopted grandson, whom he barely knew. Let him smoke it or shoot it up, inhale it or stuff it up his nose, who knew what. At least someone would get some pleasure out of the rewards of Kuperman's lifetime of work.

Kuperman had spent the better part of his life in the auction business. He had found a niche, as his son-in-law had put it. He bought up the inventories of failed businesses – known as close-outs in the trade – and sold them, along with other items he had acquired, at auction. A good part of his success was owing to his always keeping very liquid; an even larger part had to do with his talent for knowing what goods he could move. "You make your money in buying, not selling," he used regularly to tell his nephew Stuart Siegel, his wife's sister Florence's son, who worked for him. "Buy right and the rest will take care of itself." Whether it be throw pillows, costume jewellery, outdated ties, or whoopee cushions, if Kuperman could get it for the right price, and he usually could, he could turn a profit.

"What's the point, Milt?" said Schapiro. "What're you still knocking yourself out for? You've got more money than you can possibly use. What do you need the aggravation for?"

"I've come to like aggravation," Kuperman replied. "Within reason. It's part of life, part of the game."

"What'd you need the game for? Enjoy life. Watch the sunset. Gaze at the stars. Do you want them to drag you out of your business feet first?"

"Someone's going to drag me out of someplace feet first, so it might as well be from my place of business. Besides, if I retire, what do you suggest I do? Chase golf balls with the rest of the morons? Maybe I should take courses in Chinese stamp collecting or the history of Peru at *Loch in Kop* University downtown?"

"Milton, my friend, there's got to be more to life than close-

dolt, hogy mindenét az örökbefogadott fiúra hagyja, akit egyébként alig ismert, szívja el, lője be magának, vagy szippantsa be, tudja a jó ég. Legalább valaki örömét leli élete munkájának gyümölcsében.

Kuperman élete jó részét aukciókon töltötte. Itt elemében volt, ahogy a veje fogalmazott. Csődbement vállalkozások raktárkészleteit vásárolta fel és adta tovább egyéb árukkal, amelyeket az aukciókon szedett össze. Sikerét egyrészt likviditásának köszönhette, de nagyobbrészt pusztán ráérzett, hogy mi fog mozogni.

– A beszerzéssel lehet pénzt keresni, nem az értékesítéssel – szokta mondani Stuart Siegelnek, az unokaöccsének, sógornője fiának, aki vele dolgozott. – A beszerzésre ügyelj, minden más magától elrendeződik!

Legyen az díszpárna, bizsu, divatjamúlt nyakkendő vagy fotelhuzat, ha Kuperman jó áron szerezte be, és általában jó áron szerezte be, haszonra tett szert.

– Mi a csudának, Milt? – kérdezte tőle Schapiro. – Minek strapálod magad? Több pénzed van, mint amennyit el tudnál költeni. Mért veszel újabb terheket a nyakadba?

– Megszoktam a terheket – válaszolta Kuperman. – Módjával. Az életem része. A verseny ezzel jár.

– Minek versenyezni? Élvezd az életed! Bámuld a naplementét, a csillagokat! Azt akarod, hogy a munkából vigyenek a temetőbe?

– Úgyis eltemetnek egyszer, miért ne vállalkozhatnék addig. Aztán mihez kezdenék, ha nyugdíjba megyek? Golflabdákat kergessek a többi marhával? Vagy vénségemre iratkozzak be a belvárosi egyetemre, és tanulmányozzam Peru történetét, vagy gyűjtsek kínai bélyegeket?

– Milton, drága barátom, csak érdekel valami más is az életben, mint a csődeljárások.

outs."

Kuperman knew Schapiro had his best interests in mind. He liked Lou Schapiro – little Louie Schapiro as he first knew him at Humboldt Grammar School and later at Roosevelt High, the shortest kid in class who went on to win the gold medal in the state CPA exam at the age of twenty. But Schapiro didn't – couldn't possibly – know what was in his, Kuperman's, heart.

"Of course there is, Lou, but what concerns me is what is left of me if you take my work away. I'm not sure that there's anything left."

"Whaddya mean? You read. You're a thoughtful guy. So quit working and just think, at your own pace, with no pressure on you at all. Maybe travel a little. Does that sound so bad?"

Kuperman could have turned the tables and asked Schapiro why he didn't retire. But then Lou had a son in the business, and he himself now came in only three days a week, chiefly to take care of old clients like Kuperman, who would have felt strange with their business in the hands of anyone else.

As for Kuperman's capacity for leisure, true, he was a reader, mostly of biography, especially of the biography of scientists. Had he gone to college, he would have liked to have studied engineering. Growing up when he did, engineers and inventors – Ford, Edison, even Charles Lindbergh held a few patents – were the great heroes of the age. But that wasn't any longer a possibility. One of the saddest things about growing older, Kuperman long ago concluded, was the closing off of one possibility after another.

Kuperman's only concession to retirement was to begin going into the office later in the morning: at ten o'clock instead of his usual time of 8.30. He continued to wake at 5.30 am as always. Although he said he didn't believe in the current exercise fad – "I'm a fatalist," he liked to say. "When you're number's up, it's

Kuperman tudta, hogy Schapirót a legjobb szándék vezérli. Szerette őt, a kicsi Louie Schapirót, ahogy először megismerte a Humboldt Általános Iskolában, aztán a Roosevelt Gimnáziumban. A legalacsonyabb srác volt az osztályban. Húszéves korában arany fokozatot szerzett az állami könyvvitelvizsgán. De Schapirónak fogalma sem lehetett róla, mi szunnyad Kuperman lelkében.

– Persze, Lou, persze. De nem vagyok biztos benne, hogy marad belőlem valami, ha abbahagyom a munkát.

– Hová gondolsz? Olvasol, gondolkodó ember vagy. Hagyd a csudába a munkát, és csak töprengj, a magad tempójában, minden külső nyomás nélkül! Esetleg utazgass! Olyan rosszul hangzik ez?

Kuperman fordíthatott volna a beszélgetés irányán, és megkérdezhette volna, vajon Schapiro miért nem megy nyugdíjba. De Schapiro fia is részt vett a vállalkozásban, és Lou csak hetente háromszor jött be az irodába, főként azért, hogy vigye az olyan régi ügyfelek könyvelését, mint Kuperman, akik idegenkedtek volna attól, hogy valaki másra bízzák a vállalkozásuk adatait.

Szabadidejében Kuperman valóban olvasott, többnyire tudósok életrajzait. Ha járt volna egyetemre, mérnöknek tanult volna. Annak idején a mérnökök és a feltalálók voltak a kor hősei. Ford, Edison, még Charles Lindbergh is, aki csak néhány dolgot szabadalmaztatott. De ilyen lehetőségek már nem nyíltak manapság. Az öregedésben az a szomorú, Kuperman erre már rég rájött, hogy az ember lehetőségei sorra bezárulnak.

Kuperman annyi engedményt tett a nyugállomány irányában, hogy reggel később ment be az irodába, csak tízkor, a korábbi félkilenc helyett, de továbbra is fél hatkor ébredt. Jóllehet nem hitt a manapság divatos sportőrületben – fatalista vagyok, szokta mondani, ha a te számodat hívják, sorra kerülsz, nincs mese –,

up" – Kuperman did use the early part of the morning for walks around the neighbourhood. In the bad weather, he walked in the mall off McCormick Boulevard near his apartment on Touhy Avenue off Kedzie at Winston Towers.

On his third lap, in front of Foot Locker, near J.C. Penney, on a grey Tuesday morning, he met Faye Perelman, the furrier's wife, who used to play cards with Miriam, Kuperman's wife. She was with another woman, petite, with red hair, whom she introduced as Judith Neeley. Faye asked Kuperman how things were with him, said that her and her husband's health was good, they had a lot to be thankful for, and mentioned that Judith, who lost her husband last year, lived on the same floor as the Perelmans, two buildings down from Kuperman's own building at Winston Towers.

"Judy taught high school," Faye said. "She was a music teacher at New Trier."

"That's nice," said Kuperman, not listening very intently.

"Interested in music, are you, Mr Kuperman?" Mrs Neeley said, showing a bright and winning smile.

"Well, not all that much, maybe," he answered, and even here he was lying, for Kuperman went to no concerts, kept no phonograph, and listened exclusively to the news on his car radio. He had vaguely heard of something called CDs, but had not actually seen one. When Miriam was alive, she dragged him to musical comedies. And though he went along, he didn't quite see the point of sitting uncomfortably in a seat at the Schubert Theatre, on Monroe, while young men and women, with great expenditures of false energy, were belting out the lyrics to *Pajama Game* and other such nonsense. He vaguely recalled the line, "Seven-and-a-half cents doesn't buy a heck of a lot..." Pure *Narrishkeit*, nonsense.

"Without music," she said, "life for me wouldn't have much

az üressé vált reggeli órákban sétákat tett a környéken. Rossz idő esetén a McCormick Boulevard üzleti negyedében őgyelgett, a lakásához közel eső Touhy sugárúton, a Kedzie Road és a Winston torony környékén.

Egy szürke kedd reggelen, amikor már harmadszor ment el a Foot Locker sportcipőbolt előtt, a J. C. Penney mellett találkozott Faye Perelmannel, a szőrmekereskedő feleségével, aki annak idején összejárt kártyázni Miriammal, Kuperman feleségével. Perelmanné egy apró termetű, vörös hajú asszonnyal sétált, be is mutatta Kupermannek: Judith Neeley. Faye Kuperman hogyléte felől érdeklődött, és elmondta, hogy ő is és a férje is jó egészségnek örvendenek, hála istennek! Judith tavaly vesztette el a férjét, Perelmannék emeletén lakik, két háznyira Kupermantől a Winston torony irányában.

– Judy középiskolai tanár volt – mondta Faye. – A New Trierben tanított zenét.

– Nahát – mondta Kuperman, de nemigen figyelt oda.

– Ön bizonyára szereti a zenét, Mr. Kuperman – mondta Mrs. Neeley meggyőző mosollyal.

– Nos, nem annyira, mint kegyed – válaszolt a férfi, de még ez sem fedte a teljes igazságot, hisz Kuperman nem járt hangversenyekre, nem volt lemezjátszója, és az autórádión kizárólag hírműsorokat hallgatott. Halványan derengett neki a kifejezés, hogy CD-lemez, de sohasem látott még olyat. Míg Miriam élt, néha elcipelte férjét egy zenés vígjátékra, és ő, bár engedelmeskedett, értelmetlennek találta, hogy kényelmetlenül üljön a Monroe Street-i Shubert Színházban, mialatt a színpadon fiatal színészek rengeteg energiát pocsékolnak arra, hogy előadják a *Pizsamajáték*ot és más efféle zöldségeket. Halványan felrémlett benne egy dallam: „Hét és fél cent nem sokra elég..." *Narrishkeit*, nonszensz.

– Zene nélkül – mondta az asszony – az élet számomra ér-

point."

"Really?" Kuperman asked.

"Absolutely," she said.

Kuperman looked at his watch. Faye Perelman remarked that they had better keep moving. Judith Neeley put out her hand, which Kuperman shook before heading off in the other direction.

Driving down to his warehouse, on Ashland Avenue near Belmont, Kuperman thought about Mrs Neeley. Not a Jewish name, Neeley. Irish, he thought. Of course, Neeley was her married name. Handsome woman, though, looked to be in her late sixties. He liked her manner; there was a note of seriousness about her he found appealing.

Kuperman had been a widower for a little more than four years. His wife had had liver cancer, and lived three years before it finally swept her away. As a husband, he was a good provider, but the fact was that his life was never concentrated in his marriage. He was most alive at his business. He loved his wife, or thought he did. But did he miss Miriam? At first, yes, a lot, but by now days, whole weeks, went by when he didn't think about her. His best guess was that, had he died first, he would not have been constantly in her thoughts, either. We forget the dead and the living forget us when we die. That was all right, that was the deal, that was the way the world worked.

After hesitating for more than a week, Kuperman decided to call Judith Neeley. He wasn't sure why. At his age, the blood didn't run as fast as once it did. He was no lady killer. He didn't think of himself as lonely. During the day he made his business calls, worked with his nephew Stuart at the warehouse, made his own dinner or brought home Chinese, read the *Trib*, watched news shows on television, and was usually in bed before ten o'clock. His health had held up. He figured he had nothing to complain about.

telmetlen.

– Csakugyan? – kérdezte Kuperman.

– Teljesen – mondta az asszony.

Kuperman az órájára nézett. Faye Perelman megjegyezte, hogy menniük kell. Judith Neeley kezet nyújtott, Kuperman férfi módra kezet rázott vele, és elindult az ellenkező irányba.

A kocsiban, úton az Ashland sugárút és a Belmont Street sarkán levő raktár felé Kuperman Mrs. Neeleyről töprengett. Nem zsidó név, Neeley. Talán ír, gondolta. Persze Neeley a férje neve. Helyes asszony, a hatvanas évei vége felé járhat. Tetszett neki a modora. Volt benne valami komolyság, amit megnyerőnek talált.

Kuperman már több mint négy éve özvegy volt. A felesége májrákban szenvedett, és még három évet élt, mielőtt a betegség elvitte. Kuperman odaadó férj volt, de az élete sosem csupán a házassága körül forgott. Leginkább a vállalkozásában élte ki magát. Szerette a feleségét, legalábbis így gondolta. De hiányzik most Miriam? Eleinte igen, nagyon hiányzott, de mostanában napok, hetek telnek el úgy, hogy eszébe sem jut. Van egy olyan érzése, hogy ha ő ment volna el előbb, a felesége sem gondolna állandóan rá. Elfeledjük a halottakat, ahogy az élők is elfelejtenek minket a halálunk után. De nem baj, ez a világ rendje.

Több mint egy hét tétovázás után Kuperman úgy döntött, felhívja Judith Neeleyt, bár nem tudta, mi célból. Az ő korában a vér már nem pezseg úgy, mint régen. Nem volt szoknyavadász, és nem érezte magát magányosnak. Napközben az üzletmenetet igazgatta, a raktárban dolgozott Stuarttal, az unokaöccsével, este főzött magának vagy hazahozott valami kínai ételt, elolvasta a *Tribune*-t, megnézte a hírműsorokat a tévében és általában már tíz előtt lefeküdt. Az egészsége rendben volt, úgy érezte, nincs oka panaszra.

Valamiért Kuperman mégis feltárcsázta Judith Neeley szá-

Still, here Kuperman was dialling up the number of Judith Neeley. "Yes," she said, "of course I remember you. Faye introduced us at the mall."

Feeling like a high-school boy, Kuperman heard the hesitation in his own voice as he asked her if she would like to meet one evening for dinner or maybe a movie.

"I don't go to the movies much any more," she said. "But I have two tickets to a chamber-music concert at De Paul this Sunday. Would that interest you?"

"Yes," Kuperman heard himself say, "it would, a lot."

That Sunday, Kuperman wasn't sure what to wear before picking up Mrs Neeley. He wasn't sure, either, what a chamber-music concert was, and his nephew Stuart, who had gone to the University of Wisconsin for three years, was no help. He decided on a business suit and one of his quieter ties. He wasn't really clear about why he was putting himself through this. At least, he told himself, he didn't have to travel far to pick up this broad.

On the way to the concert, Mrs Neeley – she asked that he call her Judy – told him that her husband had been a lawyer working in a small firm with three Jewish partners. Neeley was Irish, but he had gone to Sullivan High School, where the kids were mostly Jewish, and he had become, as he liked to say, an "honorary Jew." Over the years he had acquired more Yiddish words and expressions than she. Her parents, who had departed Austria in the early 1930s, weren't happy when she married Ned Neeley; her mother warned that some day, in anger, he would throw her being Jewish in her face, but she was wrong; it never happened. Her late husband hadn't any interest in music – he used to say that his musical education ended with "Does Eat Oats and Mares Eat Oats"-and he didn't mind her going off to the Symphony and the Lyric Opera (she was a season subscriber to both) with lady friends.

mát.

– Igen – mondta az asszony. – Persze, hogy emlékszem. Faye mutatott be minket egymásnak az üzletsoron.

Kuperman úgy érezte magát, mint egy gimnazista. Elbizonytalanodott a hangja, amikor megkérdezte, hogy lenne-e az asszonynak kedve egyszer vele vacsorázni, esetleg moziba menni.

– Nem nagyon járok már moziba – mondta az asszony. – De van vasárnapra két jegyem a De Paul Egyetemen egy kamarazenei hangversenyre. Érdekli?

– Igen – hallotta Kuperman saját magát. – Nagyon érdekel.

Vasárnap Kuperman nem tudta, mit vegyen fel a találkozóra. Azt sem tudta, milyen egy kamarazenei koncert, és Stuart, az unokaöccse sem tudott sokat segíteni, pedig három évet végzett a wisconsini egyetemen. Egy hivatali öltöny és egy szolid nyakkendő mellett döntött. Nem tisztázta magában, miért csinálja ezt az egészet. Legalább, gondolta, nem kell messzire menni, hogy felvegye az öreglányt.

Útban a koncert helyszíne felé Mrs. Neeley megkérte, hogy szólítsa őt Judynak, és elmondta, hogy a férje, amíg aktív volt, ügyvédként dolgozott, három zsidóval társult. Ír származású volt, de a Sullivan Gimnáziumba járt, ahol a tanulók nagyobbik hányada zsidó volt, és így ő is, ahogy mondani szokta, tiszteletbeli zsidóvá vált. Az évek során több jiddis kifejezést sajátított el, mint a felesége. Az asszony szülei a harmincas években vándoroltak ki Ausztriából, és nem örültek, amikor a lányuk Ned Neeleyhez ment feleségül. Az anyja azzal ijesztgette, hogy majd egy napon a férje mérgében a fejéhez vágja, hogy zsidó, de tévedett, soha nem történt ilyesmi. A férjét egyáltalán nem érdekelte a zene. Számára a zenei képzés befejeződött a „Zabra kanca, zebrakence” kezdetű dallal, de nem bánta, ha a felesége a Szimfonikusok hangversenyeire vagy az operába jár a hölgybarátaival. Éves bérlete volt mindkét színházba.

Kuperman didn't say much about his own wife. Miriam had in fact been a bookkeeper in a firm he did business with, a thorough and well-manner woman, pretty, five years younger than he. After marrying Kuperman, she stopped working, raised their daughter, cooked, kept house, had her special charities – the Jewish Home for the Blind, Hadassah, a cancer foundation named after her friend Edie Weitzman-played cards. She left Kuperman alone; never gave him a hard time when he needed to work extra hours or go down to the warehouse on weekends. Kuperman never cheated on her; the thought that she might have cheated on him was not possible. Before she died, she thanked Kuperman for giving her a good life. Did she have her own unspoken yearnings? Would she have preferred another kind of life? While she was alive, Kuperman neglected to ask.

Kuperman parked his Cadillac on Belden, off Halsted. The hall for the concert also served as a chapel. There were no crucifixes on any of the walls, but the seats were pews, with red cushions added to the backs. Bright light flooded in through the tall side windows on this cool afternoon. The audience made Kuperman, at seventy-nine, feel positively young. Much osteoporosis; many people on walkers; most of the women had white hair, several of them seemed bulky; the majority of the men were bald, bent, haggard. Hard to imagine that many people in this audience were ever desirable, even when young, Kuperman thought. He had over-dressed. Only one other man, a doddering guy who looked to be in his nineties, wore a tie.

When Kuperman, seated, looked at the programme he had been handed at the door, he saw that he was about to hear something called the Vermeer Quarter. When Judith Neeley mentioned the name on the drive down, he thought she said the *Veh es Mir* Quartet. They were going to play works by Mozart, Hindemith, and Schubert. Kuperman had heard of the Mozart and

Kuperman nem sokat mesélt a feleségéről. Miriam könyvelő volt az egyik cégnél, akikkel Kupermannek üzleti ügye támadt. Alapos, jó modorú, csinos asszony volt, öt évvel fiatalabb a férjénél. Az esküvő után felhagyott a munkával, a lányukat nevelte, főzött, vezette a háztartást, kártyázott és jótékonysági ügyekkel foglalkozott: a zsidó vakok *Hadassah* nevű otthonának és az Eddie Weitzmanről, egy barátjáról elnevezett rákalapítványnak az ügyeivel. Kupermant békén hagyta. Soha nem piszkálta, ha későig kellett dolgoznia, vagy amikor be kellett mennie a raktárba a hétvégén is. Kuperman soha nem csalta meg a feleségét, és föl sem merült benne a gondolat, hogy a felesége megcsalhatja őt. Halála előtt az asszony megköszönte férjének, hogy jó életet biztosított a számára. Volt-e valami kimondatlan vágya? Nem akart volna más életmódot? Az asszony életében Kuperman elmulasztotta feltenni ezeket a kérdéseket.

A Belden és Halsted Street sarkán állította le a Cadillacet. A koncertterem egyben kápolnaként is szolgált. Nem volt feszület, de az ülések templomi padokból álltak, a háttámlánál vörös párnákkal. Ezen a hűvös délutánon sugárzó fény ömlött be a szélső magas ablakokon át. A közönség soraiban Kuperman hetvenkilenc évesen kifejezetten fiatalnak érezte magát. Sokan csontritkulásosak, sokan járókerettel, a legtöbb asszony ősz hajú, néhányuk kövér, a férfiak többsége kopasz, hajlott hátú, elgyötört. Kuperman nehezen tudta elképzelni, hogy ezek az emberek valamikor, akár fiatal korukban, kívánatosak lettek volna. Túl volt öltözve. Rajta kívül csak egy kilencven körüli totyogó férfi viselt nyakkendőt.

Kuperman leült, beletekintett a programba, amit az ajtóban nyomtak a kezébe, és így tudta meg, hogy a Vermeer vonósnégyest fogják hallani. Amikor Judith útban idefelé a nevet említette, a férfi azt hitte, *Veh es Mir* vonósnégyesről beszél. Mozart-, Hindemith- és Schubert-műveket fognak játszani. Kuperman

Schubert, but not this guy Hindemith.

Four men came out, all oddly different. When Kuperman was a kid, they used to call this kind of music "long-hair," but all of these musicians were fairly well-kempt, at least in the hair department. His attention was attracted to the man who sat up front on the left and who played the violin. His name, according to the programme, was Shmuel Ashkenasi. Heavyset, with curly hair, florid, the fiddle under his double chin, he looked, Kuperman thought, Jewish to the highest power. Kuperman remembered that in the Chicago public schools of his day they offered music lessons for twenty-five cents and you could rent the instrument. He thought vaguely that he might like to try the trumpet; his mother, though, was only interested in his playing the violin. Even at age eight he could not imagine himself carrying a violin case around Albany Park. The violin was, he thought looking at Mr Ashkenasi, the Jewish instrument par excellence.

During the Mozart, Kuperman noted people around him beginning to drop off to sleep. He tried to find some attractive women or vigorous men, but was unable to do so. Why had they come here, he wondered, all these people, at some inconvenience and expense, on a sunny Sunday afternoon? What was the attraction? Did the music offer them consolation of some sort for the things that their lives didn't offer?

The Hindemith, the second selection, was just noise to Kuperman. He fidgeted while the four men on stage seemed to saw away at the music. The Schubert, which came after a break, was more like it. Under its melodiousness, his mind wandered, but wandered pleasantly. He remembered his unit marching into Paris near the end of World War Two. He was young, without plans, all his days were in front of him. The time that it took to play the Schubert seemed to pass so much more quickly than that of the other two pieces of music, though, checking his watch, he

hallott Mozartról és Schubertről, de erről a Hindemith nevű pasasról még soha.

Négy különbözőképpen furcsa ember lépett a színpadra. Kuperman gyerekkorában a klasszikus zenészeket „loboncnak" csúfolták, de ezek a muzsikusok mind meglehetősen jól ápoltak voltak, legalábbis, ami a hajukat illeti. Kuperman figyelmét a baloldalt elöl ülő hegedűs kötötte le. A program szerint Shmuel Ashkenasi volt az illető. Testes, göndör hajú, pirospozsgás arcú, a hegedűvel a tokája alatt: ennél zsidósabb már nem is lehetne, gondolta Kuperman. Felmerült az emlékei közt, hogy az ő idejében a chicagói iskolákban huszonöt centért lehetett zenét tanulni, és a hangszereket bérelték a növendékek. Némi indíttatást érzett, hogy kipróbálja a trombitát, de az anyja ragaszkodott a hegedűhöz. Már nyolcéves korában sem tudta elképzelni, hogy egy hegedűvel megy át az Albany parkon. Ashkenazit figyelve most úgy érezte, a hegedű kimondottan zsidó hangszer.

A Mozart-darab alatt Kuperman körül a közönség néhány tagja elaludt. A sorokat pásztázva Kuperman jó megjelenésű asszonyt vagy erős férfit keresett, de hiába. Miért jött el ennyi ember, tűnődött, egy ilyen szép derűs vasárnap délután, nem sajnálva a pénzt és a fáradságot? Mi vonzotta őket ide? Esetleg a zene valamiféle vigaszt nyújt számukra, amit az életük más területén hiányolnak?

A második szám, Hindemith, Kuperman számára pusztán zörej volt. Fészkelődött a helyén, mialatt a négy zenész a színpadon fűrészelt. Schubert a szünet után már jobban tetszett. A dallamívek közben a figyelme elkalandozott, de kellemes irányba. A katonai osztaga jutott eszébe, ahogy bevonulnak Párizsba a háború vége felé. Fiatal volt, nem tervezett, előtte állt az élet. A Schubert-darabnak sokkal gyorsabban vége lett, mint a másik kettőnek, bár az órájára nézve Kuperman észlelte, hogy hoszszabb volt.

noted that it was in fact longer.

Several times during the concert Kuperman glanced over at Mrs Neeley. Her face, in profile, radiated intelligence, thoughtfulness, something blissful about it. She seemed quite beautiful when concentrating on the music. Kuperman sensed that she was hearing things he didn't. What might they have been? Whatever they were, for her they were obviously enchanting, entrancing, filled with a significance unavailable to him, though he thought he would like to be in on it.

After the concert, Kuperman asked Mrs Neeley if she'd like to have dinner. She said she was sorry but she couldn't, because she was expected at her daughter's in Highland Park that evening. Perhaps another time. Before dropping her off, he suggested they go to another concert sometime, his treat, so he could repay her for this afternoon. She said that she would try to find something interesting upcoming at Orchestra Hall and get back to him.

What she came up with was a Saturday evening performance of a man named Alfred Brendel playing Beethoven sonatas. Kuperman looked the word "sonata" up in the dictionary, but didn't find it very helpful. He also bought a little blue book containing musical terms. He quickly saw that any command of the subject of music was not going to be possible, at least not at his age. Mainly, he wanted to avoid embarrassing himself by saying or doing something really stupid.

The audience at Orchestra Hall was peppered with a few more younger people than the one at De Paul. Lots of old GJs, as Kuperman always referred to himself, to German Jews. People seemed rather better dressed, though still less than glittering. Does musical culture, Kuperman wondered, make its followers a trifle shabby in appearance? This world, which Judith Neeley was taking him into, was mysterious to Kuperman, who didn't much care for mysteries.

A hangverseny folyamán a férfi néhányszor oldalt pillantott Mrs. Neeleyre. Az asszony arca profilból értelmet és elmélkedő örömet sugárzott. Egészen szépnek látszott, ahogy a zenére összpontosított. Kuperman érezte, hogy az asszony olyan részleteket is hall, amelyeket ő nem érzékel. Milyen részletek lehetnek ezek, morfondírozott. Akárhogy is, az asszonyt nyilvánvalóan elvarázsolták ezek az egyéb hangok, lényeggel telítődtek, amely lényeg a férfi számára megfoghatatlan maradt, bár úgy érezte, szeretné, ha őt is megérintené.

A koncert után Kuperman megkérdezte Mrs. Neeleyt, volna-e kedve együtt vacsorázni vele. Az asszony sajnálattal visszautasította, mert elígérkezett a lányáékhoz Highland Parkba. Talán egyszer máskor. Mielőtt az asszony kiszállt a kocsiból, Kuperman felvetette, hogy elmehetnének még egy hangversenyre, ezúttal ő fizetne, hogy viszonozhassa ezt a délutánt. A nő azt mondta, keres valami érdekeset a szimfonikusokkal, és majd jelentkezik.

Egy szombat esti előadást javasolt később, egy bizonyos Alfred Brendel Beethoven-szonátákat játszott. Kuperman megnézte a „szonáta” szó jelentését a szótárban, nem sokra ment vele. Vett egy zenei alapfogalmakat tartalmazó kis kék könyvet, de hamarosan belátta, hogy a zeneértés nem elsajátítható, legalábbis nem az ő korában. Mindössze arra vágyott, hogy ne tegye magát nevetségessé azzal, hogy valami nagy butaságot mond.

A szimfonikusok koncerttermének közönsége több fiatalból állt, mint az egyetemé. Sok öreg „enzsé”-ből is, ahogy Kuperman magában utalt a saját fajtájára: a német származású zsidókra. A közönség itt jobban öltözött, de egyáltalán nem csillogott. Vajon a zenei kultúra teszi a követőit kissé kopottassá, tűnődött Kuperman. Ez a világ, amelybe Judith Neeley Kupermant, akit nem érdekelt a misztika, bevezeti, misztikusnak tűnt.

The greatest mystery of all, of course, was the music. Alfred Brendel, an Austrian, Kuperman learned in the programme notes, sat upright at his piano and played with an air of the greatest seriousness. He assumed that he was Jewish. Kuperman felt that he had previously heard some of the melodies that came booming out of Brendel's piano; or at least wisps of them. He stole glances at Judith Neeley, who had on her normally pleasant face an expression quite as serious as Brendel's. Kuperman was not bored by the music – not at all – but if you asked him what he had heard, he couldn't have told you, couldn't have hummed a note. Judith Neeley seemed in a state resembling ecstasy. In the programme notes he read that one of the sonatas had an "incomprehensible sublimity." Kuperman got only the incomprehensible part.

Judith Neeley – Kuperman for some reason found it difficult to call her or even think of her as Judy – continued to invite him along to concerts and even twice to the opera. He cared less, cared really not at all, for the latter; the improbability of the proceedings – heavyset men madly in love with vastly overweight women, whose response to being stabbed was usually to sing louder than ever – didn't seem to work for him. Studying the audience, Kuperman concluded that opera was chiefly for homosexual men and women whose dreams and fantasies obviously were not going to be realised. He didn't of course mention this to Judith.

But concerts still fascinated him. He came to like chamber music more than symphonic concerts. The blend of so many instruments when played by a symphony orchestra tended to confuse him, whereas in listening to a chamber group of from three to eight players he could tell which instruments were contributing what sounds. He sensed an order here that pleased him, though he could not say exactly why it did so. He began to tune

A legnagyobb misztérium persze a zene volt. Alfred Brendel, a műsorfüzet tanúsága szerint, Ausztriából érkezett. Egyenesen ült a zongoránál, és játéka mérhetetlen komolyságot tükrözött. Kuperman zsidónak vélte a zenészt. A zongorából előtörő dallamok ismerősnek hatottak, legalábbis egyes részletei. Kuperman időnként lopva Judith Neeleyre pillantott. Az asszony kisimult arcán Brendel komolysága tükröződött. Kupermant nem untatta a zene, egyáltalán nem, de ha megkérdezték volna, mit hallott, nem tudta volna megmondani, egy hangot sem tudott volna eldúdolni belőle. Judith Neeley elragadtatott hangulatban figyelt. A műsorfüzet az egyik szonáta „felfoghatatlan fenségét" említette. Kuperman ebből csak a felfoghatatlant észlelte.

Judith Neeley a későbbiekben többször is elhívta Kupermant hangversenyekre, kétszer az Operába is, a férfi mégsem volt képes Judithnak szólítani őt, vagy akár csak ekként gondolni rá. Az opera a férfit még kevésbe hozta lázba. Tagbaszakadt férfiak őrülten szerelmesek jelentősen túlsúlyos nőkbe, akiknek a reakciója, ha leszúrják őket, általában annyi, hogy még hangosabban énekelnek – ez az egész Kuperman fejében nem állt össze. A közönséget fürkészve arra a megállapításra jutott, hogy az opera általában olyan homoszexuális férfiaknak és nőknek szól, akiknek az álmai és vágyai nem fognak valóra válni. Természetesen Judithnak ezt nem említette.

De a zene élménye megragadta. A kamarakoncertek közelebb álltak a szívéhez, mint a szimfonikusok. A szimfonikus hangzásban túl sok hangszer szerepelt, a hangjuk Kuperman fülében egybemosódott, a kamarazenében azonban, ahol csupán néhány hangszer szólalt meg, el tudta különíteni, hogy melyik hang melyik hangszertől származik. Egyfajta rendezettséget érzékelt ilyen esetekben, bár nem tudta volna megmondani, mit érez egész pontosan. Otthon a konyhai rádióját átállította a WFMT-re, a helyi klasszikus zenei adóra, ennek hangjai mellett

his kitchen radio at home to WFMT, the local classical music station, to the accompaniment of which he ate his breakfast. But when he would hear something played that he thought he had heard before, he could never call up what it was. Along with his other inadequacies, he had, it seemed, almost no memory for this music. Hopeless, the whole damn thing seemed hopeless.

Kuperman sensed that a lot of music was about setting up anticipations and then satisfying them, but often in unpredictable ways. Sometimes his own mind seemed to him fairly sharp in the concert hall; and sometimes it wandered all over the place and, strain to do so though he did, he couldn't keep it in the room and on the music. Once, presumably listening to a Handel oratorio in a church in Oak Park, all he could think of was the hundred gross of long out-of-fashion ties he had bought that afternoon at eight cents apiece. Could he move them? At eight cents a shot, how could he go wrong? Still, a hundred gross?

He also noticed that time operated very differently with and without music. While listening to some music, time sped by much more quickly than usual; other music seemed to slow time down painfully, making twenty minutes seem longer than a poor fiscal quarter. Why? What caused this? Another mystery Kuperman couldn't pierce.

The larger meaning of music escaped him. Where, he wondered, was the payoff? What was the bottom line? Was there a meaning to it all that evaded him? One night, on the ride home after an all-Russian evening at Symphony Hall – Tchaikovsky, Mussorgsky, Prokofiev symphonies – he put the question to Judith.

"I shouldn't worry overmuch about it, Milton," she said. "Music is directed to the emotions. If you like, you can try to put into thought what the great composers wanted to suggest emotionally. I suppose that's what the good music critics try to do,

fogyasztotta el a reggelijét. De ha olyat hallott, amiről úgy gondolta, hogy már ismeri, soha nem tudott rájönni, hogy mi is az. Egyéb tökéletlenségei mellett, úgy látszik, zenei emlékezőtehetsége sincs. Az egész átkozott ügy reménytelennek látszott.

Kuperman érezte, hogy sok darab lényege abban áll, hogy várakozást kelt a hallgatóban, amit aztán előre megjósolhatatlan módon teljesít be. Néha minden figyelmét a koncertre fordította, néha azonban, bárhogy igyekezett is, nem sikerült a gondolatait a zenére és az előadóteremre korlátoznia. Egyszer egy Händel-oratórium alatt az Oak Park-i templomban csak arra tudott gondolni, hogy aznap délután vett százezer divatjamúlt nyakkendőt, nyolc centért darabját. Vajon sikerül-e értékesítenie őket? De nyolc centet adott csak darabjáért, nem fürödhet be velük. Ám mégis: mit kezd százezer darabbal?

Azt is megfigyelte, hogy másképp érzékeli az idő múlását zenével, mint anélkül. Bizonyos zenék hallgatása közben az idő sokkal gyorsabban eltelik, míg más darabok, úgy tűnt, fájdalmasan lelassítják az idő folyását: egy óra néha hosszabbnak érződik, mint egy adóév. Mi okozhatja mindezt? Megint egy rejtély, aminek nem tud a mélyére hatolni.

A zene mélyebb értelmét sem sikerült felfognia. Hol fizetődik ki ez az egész? Mi a zene végső értelme egyáltalán, tűnődött. Hordoz valamilyen jelentést, amely elkerüli az ő figyelmét? Egy orosz szerzők, Csajkovszkij, Muszorgszkij, Prokofjev darabjaiból összeállított est után hazafelé az autóban fel is tette a kérdést Judithnak.

– Ne töprengj túl sokat ezen, Milton – mondta az asszony. – A zene az érzelmekre hat. Ha akarod, megpróbálhatod gondolatokba önteni a nagyobb zeneszerzők üzenetét, gondolom, a jobb kritikusok ezt teszik, bár nem sokaknak sikerül. Én már rég fölhagytam ezzel. Azért szeretem a zenét, mert kibont önmagamból, és valami más közegbe helyez, amit nem tudnék megha-

though not all that many succeed. But I gave up on that project long ago. I love music because it allows me to get out of myself into something larger, which I find it not easy to specify. I am content to listen as carefully as I can and let the music come to me, if you know what I mean?"

Kuperman, in fact, didn't know what she meant – hadn't, really, a clue. But he decided not to press the point, lest he look as boorish as he felt.

Kuperman and Judith Neeley had been going to concerts together for roughly four months. All this while his own movements with this woman were, you might say, strictly *adagio*. He did not call her every day; some days he wanted to, just to check in, but decided doing so would be pushing things. Sex wasn't anywhere near up for negotiation, though Kuperman, obviously no longer a boy, wouldn't have minded if it were.

Judith had invited him to a Passover seder at her daughter's, the one who lived in Glencoe. Judith's other daughter and her son and their families – seven grandchildren in all – were there. Kuperman sensed he was on display, being considered for his worthiness as a companion for their mother and grandmother. He also sensed that he was failing the test. The conversation wasn't on any of his topics. Judith's family talked about recent plays, and books, and colleges, lots about colleges, since one of her grandchildren, a boy with bad skin and braces named Dylan Schwartz, was applying to colleges in the fall. (Kuperman could have gone to college on the GI Bill after the war, but was too eager to get back into the stream of life, to start making some money, once he was discharged in '45.) Kuperman decided to keep his own counsel among Judith's family, to say little and hope that his silence would pass itself off for the wisdom of the aged. More likely, he felt, they found him a *schlepper*.

One evening in May, she took him to St Paul's, an Episcopal

tározni. Megelégszem azzal, hogy olyan figyelmesen hallgatom, amennyire csak lehet, és igyekszem közelebb engedni magamhoz a hangokat, ha érted, miről beszélek.

Ami azt illeti, Kuperman nem értette Judithot, fogalma sem volt, miről beszél. De úgy döntött, nem erőlteti a dolgot, nehogy olyan ostobának látszódjon, amilyennek érezte magát.

Nagyjából négy hónapja jártak már közösen koncertekre. Ezalatt a férfi tempója, talán mondhatjuk így, *adagio* előadásmódot követett. Nem hívta az asszonyt mindennap. Néha szerette volna, de elvetette, nehogy Judith tolakodónak érezze az érdeklődését. Szexről szó sem volt, pedig Kuperman, noha nem volt már legény, nem bánta volna.

Judith meghívta őt széderre ahhoz a lányához, aki Glencoe-ban lakott. Ott volt Judith másik lánya és a fia is, családostul, összesen hét unoka. Kuperman úgy érezte magát, mint egy árubemutatón: a család látni szeretné, hogy érdemes-e az anyjuk, nagyanyjuk társaságára. Úgy vélte, nem felelt meg az elvárásaiknak. Semmi olyasmiről nem beszélgettek, amihez hozzá tudott volna szólni. Szó esett színdarabokról, könyvekről, egyetemekről, mert az egyik unoka, egy fogszabályozós és bőrbeteg gyerek, Dylan Scwartz, ősztől egyetemre fog járni. Kuperman is járhatott volna egyetemre, miután leszerelt ’45-ben, mint háborús veterán, de inkább a pénzkeresetet választotta. Judith családja körében úgy döntött, keveset szól hozzá a társalgáshoz, inkább töpreng magában, és remélte, hogy szótlanságában az idős emberek bölcs megfontoltsága ismerhető fel. Bár lehet, hogy inkább *schlepper*nek tartják.

Egy májusi estén az asszony az evanstoni, Szent Pálról elnevezett anglikán templomba vitte el, valami Máté-passió volt műsoron. Ez idő tájt Kuperman már jó néhány darabot ismert a zeneszerzőtől, Johann Sebastian Bachtól, némelyiket kedvelte, az élénk *Brandenburgi versenyt* például, amit már többször hallott, míg

church in Evanston, to hear something called the St Matthew Passion. By now Kuperman had heard a fair amount of music by its composer, J. S. Bach, some of whose things he liked – the liveliness of the Brandenburg Concertos, which he'd heard more than once, always pleased him – and others of which seemed like so much sawing away. He wasn't sure what to expect.

What he didn't expect was the sight of tears dribbling down Judith's face. As the chorus boomed away, Kuperman took Judith's hand in his. She did not remove it. He did not know quite how to describe, for himself, the look on her face. He could only think of an old-fashioned word – transported. This woman wasn't really here with him; the music had sent her – transported her – elsewhere. As the tears continued to flow, her face took on a radiance that made her, even in her late sixties, more beautiful than any woman he had ever seen.

That evening, after the concert, Judith invited Kuperman to come up for a cup of tea. When he had settled in one of the two chairs alongside the glass coffee table in the living room, she brought in, on a tray, two cups of tea with a dish of plain sugar cookies.

"I need to tell you something, Milton," she said, after she settled into the other chair, stirring the sugar into her tea. "Four years ago I had breast cancer, and now it has returned, but metastasised to my bones, including my spine."

Kuperman had no notion about her earlier bout with cancer. They were not in the habit of retelling their medical histories, or much else of an intimate kind, to each other. He didn't know how to respond. "I'm sorry," he said, which sounded, as he said it, as if the returning cancer were his fault.

"I've decided not to put myself through another round of chemotherapy. The last time nearly did me in. The insidious thing about cancer, as you may or may not know, is the hope – there's

más darabjait nehézkes robotolásnak tartotta. Nem tudta, ezúttal mire számítson.

Hogy Judith arcán könnycseppek gördülnek majd alá, arra nem számított. A dübörgő kórus alatt Kuperman megfogta Judith kezét. Az asszony nem vonta el a magáét. Kuperman még gondolatban sem tudta értelmezni az asszony arckifejezését, csak az a régimódi szó jutott eszébe, hogy átszellemült. Az asszony nem volt jelen. A zene valahova máshova helyezte őt szellemileg. Az arca, miközben a könnyek végigcsorogtak rajta, úgy tündökölt, hogy Kuperman még így is, közel a hetvenhez, gyönyörűbbnek látta, mint bármely nőt életében.

Azon az estén, a koncert után Judith felhívta magához Kupermant egy teára. Miután a férfi letelepedett az üveglapú kávéasztal mellett a nappaliban, az asszony két csésze teát hozott be egy tál egyszerű édes süteménnyel.

– Valamit el kell mondanom, neked, Milton – mondta, miután leült a másik székbe, és cukrot kevert a teájába. – Négy éve mellrákom volt, és most visszatért. Áttétek vannak a csontomban. A gerincemet is megtámadta.

Kuperman nem tudott az asszony betegségéről. Nem volt szokásuk egymással orvosi problémákat vagy egyéb intim részleteket megosztani. Nem tudta, mit válaszoljon.

– Sajnálom – mondta olyan hangsúllyal, mintha a visszatérő betegségről ő tehetne.

– Úgy döntöttem, nem teszem ki magam újra a kemoterápiás kezelésnek. Négy éve majd belepusztultam. Talán tudod, talán nem, a legszörnyűbb dolog a rákban, hogy reménykedsz: mindig van egy kis reménysugár, amibe a beteg kapaszkodik, és elvesztegeti az utolsó napjait ezen a világon. Ezúttal nem akarok ebbe a reménybe kapaszkodni. Az orvosok azt mondják, három-négy hónapom van még.

– Tehetek esetleg valamit? – kérdezte Kuperman. – Nem

always that slight wisp of hope on which patients bet and lose their last days on earth. I'm not taking the bet. Anyhow I'm told that I shall probably have no more than three or four months before the end."

"Is there anything I can do," Kuperman said. "Is there any place you want to see, in Europe maybe? Monuments? Great music halls? Name it, I'll take you."

"No," she said, "I want to be near my family. I want to hear lots of music. And I would like it if you would stay close by."

Kuperman was shocked and touched by this last item. He had very little notion that he meant anything to her much beyond an escort and driver to her musical entertainments.

"If that's what you want, it also happens to be what I want," he said. "I mean the last part."

"You are solid, you know," she said. "There's something very solid and real about you that's comforting to me."

"I'll do anything you want," Kuperman said. "Anything. Just ask."

"Stay near," she said.

Kuperman did not move into Judith's apartment. But he began taking his breakfasts and dinners with her. He kept a robe and pyjamas, a toothbrush and razor at her place. Some nights he slept over, holding her. They fell asleep listening to Schubert Impromptus played by a French pianist named Marçelle Meyer on a small CD player Judith kept in the bedroom. He still went to work every day; still bought his close-outs; ran his auctions. He even unloaded those eight-cent ties, for a decent profit.

Fortunately, Chicago had enough musical life for them to go to one or another kind of concert almost every night. The summer festival at Ravinia was beginning. He made a $5,000 contribution so that he could get good seats to everything Judith wanted to hear.

akarsz valahova elutazni? Európába? Felkeresni emlékműveket, híres hangversenytermeket? Mondd meg, bárhova elviszlek.

– Nem – mondta az asszony. – A családom mellett akarok maradni. Sok zenét szeretnék hallgatni, és szeretném, ha te is közel lennél hozzám.

Kupermant megrázta és meghatotta ez az utolsó kívánság. Nem gondolta, hogy többet jelent az asszonynak, mint sofőr és kísérő a koncerteken.

– Ha így szeretnéd, akkor én is így akarom – mondta. – Úgy értem, az utóbbit.

– Van benned valami szilárdság, ami biztonságot nyújt nekem – mondta az asszony.

– Mindent megteszek – válaszolta Kuperman. – Bármit, amit csak kérsz.

– Maradj mellettem – mondta az asszony.

Kuperman nem költözött be Judithhoz, de a reggelit és a vacsorát vele fogyasztotta el. Átvitt egy fürdőköpenyt, pizsamát, fogkefét, borotvát, és néha ott aludt, az asszonyt átölelve. A hálószobai CD-lejátszón leforgatott lemezre aludtak el. Egy francia zongorista, Marçelle Meyer Schubert Impromptuit játszotta. A férfi továbbra is mindennap dolgozott, felvásárolta csődbe ment cégek készleteit, aukciókra járt. A nyolccentes nyakkendőkön is túladott, tekintélyes haszonnal.

Szerencsére Chicagóban elég pezsgő a zenei élet, majdnem minden estére találtak értékes hangversenyt. Épp csak elkezdődött a Ravinia nyári fesztivál. Kuperman adományként befizetett ötezer dollárt, hogy jó helyet kapjanak, ha Judith valamelyik koncertjükre kíváncsi.

A Sheridan Roadon autóztak kifelé a városból, néha megálltak Hubbard Woodsban egy kínai étteremnél, máskor Judith készített valamit, amit a pázsiton ücsörögve költöttek el. Az után az este után, amikor az asszony a betegség kiújulását közölte a

They would drive out along Sheridan Road, stopping some nights in Hubbard Woods for Chinese food, other nights Judith would make a light cold dinner that they ate on the lawn. After the night she told him about its return into her body, she never again mentioned the word "cancer", and he didn't, either.

They sat in the little Martin Theatre at Ravinia and watched and listened to a vast quantity of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, and endless French composers whose names Kuperman couldn't quite keep straight. Judith listened to the music with a concentrated serenity that filled Kuperman with admiration. They had taken to holding hands through these Ravinia concerts. Kuperman tried to take Judith's advice and let the music come to him. He paid the strictest attention; his mind wandered less. He heard patterns, felt themes emerge and re-emerge, detected what he thought were subtle turns and twists in the music. But the mystery of it was never revealed; ecstasy, the deeper meaning of it all, escaped him.

By early August Judith's appetite had all but disappeared. She grew thin. Her energy was much less. They stayed home most nights, sat on the couch in her living room, and listened to CDs, holding hands. Kuperman made and served her tea; she might take a single bite out of a cookie. What a lottery life was, Kuperman thought, the lousy luck of the draw! A pathetic bit of wisdom to arrive at after eight decades of living, but he had no other.

Kuperman received the call from Angela, one of the practical nurses looking after Judith round the clock, that she had died on a sunny Tuesday morning. He was at work. Her children were with her at the end. Nothing he could do. He finished the day at his place of business, locking up, as usual, at 5.30.

"Jews bury quickly," he remembered his father saying to him, "they don't drag it out." The service for Judith, at Piser Chapel on

férfival, egyikük sem ejtette ki a 'rák' szót.

Az apró Martin Színházba jártak, és végtelen számú Bach-, Mozart-, Beethoven- és Brahms-darabot hallgattak végig, valamint számos további francia zeneszerzőt, akiknek a nevén Kuperman sohasem igazodott el. Judith fokozott figyelemmel hallgatta a zenét, Kupermant ez csodálattal töltötte el. Hozzászoktak, hogy a Ravinia-koncerteken egymás kezét fogják. Kuperman igyekezett megfogadni Judith tanácsát, és hagyta, hogy a zene elérjen hozzá. Erősebben koncentrált, kevésbé terelődött el a figyelme, mint korábban. Felismert bizonyos mintákat, megérezte, ha egy-egy téma visszatért, és kifinomultnak vélt fordulatokra lett figyelmes. De a misztérium megfejtéséig nem jutott el; a katarzis, a zene mélyebb értelme elkerülte őt.

Augusztus elején Judith már alig evett. Lefogyott, alig maradt ereje. Esténként többnyire otthon maradtak, a nappaliban ültek a kanapén, és lemezeket hallgattak kéz a kézben. Kuperman készítette és szolgálta fel a teát, az asszony jó, ha egyetlen harapás süteményt elfogadott. Micsoda piszkos szerencsejáték az élet, töprengett Kuperman. Ki milyen lapot húz. Szánalmasan sekélyes bölcsesség nyolcvan év után, de csak ennyi telt tőle.

Angela, az éjjel-nappal jelen levő ápolónők egyike telefonált Judith halálhírével. Derűs kedd délelőtt volt, Kuperman dolgozott. A gyerekek ott voltak az asszony ágyánál. Kupermanre semmi feladat nem hárult. A napi munkát este a szokásos időben, fél hatkor fejezte be.

– A zsidók gyorsan temetkeznek – emlékezett apja kijelentésére. – Nem nyújtják el.

Judith gyászszertartására a Church Street és a Skokie Boulevard sarkán álló Piser-templomban került sor. Judith veje, Richard Blumberg hívta fel Kupermant, hogy tájékoztassa, és megkérdezte, akar-e a család egyes tagjaihoz hasonlóan Kuperman is szólni néhány szót a szertartás keretében.

Church and Skokie Boulevard, was on a Thursday. Richard Blumberg, Judith's son-in-law, called Kuperman to inform him of the time and place of the service and asked him if he would like to join a few members of the family and say a word or two about his mother-in-law at the service. Kuperman thanked him and said he would like to say something.

The chapel for the Neeley funeral was filled, with perhaps three hundred people present. Some among them must have been Judith's former students at New Trier. Kuperman was glad that he had written out the little he planned to say. Each of Judith's daughters spoke, and three of her grandchildren, also a former student who had become a friend. They talked chiefly about what a good mother and, later, friend she had been. The former student, herself now a teacher of music at Roosevelt University, recalled what a personal inspiration Judith Neeley had been when she was in high school. Except for the rabbi, Kuperman was the last to speak.

He walked to the lectern with some nervousness, and took the two index cards on which he had written out what he intended to say out of the pocket of his dark grey suit jacket.

"My name is Milton Kuperman," he began, "and I was lucky, make that privileged, to be Judith Neeley's friend during the last year or so of her life. She was a woman of real refinement, culture, and genuine courage." Kuperman felt his eyes fog up, his throat catch, and he heard himself saying something he had not planned on saying.

"On Monday, I am going to call the Steans Institute at Ravinia and donate a million dollars for Judith Neeley scholarships to help train young musicians, in the hope that Judith and her love of music will not be forgotten."

Leaving the lectern, he felt his face flush, his ears hot. There was a buzz of talk around him as he took his seat, but he couldn't

Kuperman megköszönte a figyelmességet, és azt mondta, szeretne élni a lehetőséggel.

A templom zsúfolásig megtelt, lehettek úgy háromszázan, eljöttek néhányan Judith régi tanítványai közül is. Kuperman örült, hogy leírta azt a keveset, amit mondani szeretne. Megszólaltak Judith lányai, az unokák közül hárman, és egy volt tanítvány is, aki azóta közeli barátja lett. Főként arról beszéltek, milyen jó anya és barát volt Judith. A tanítvány, aki azóta maga is zenét tanít a Roosevelt Egyetemen, arra emlékezett, mennyire személyes inspirációt adott neki Judith Neeley mint tanár a középiskolában. A rabbi előtt Kuperman volt az utolsó megemlékező.

Lámpalázasan közelített a pulpitushoz. Sötétszürke zakója zsebéből elővette a két kis kartonlapot, amire a mondanivalóját felírta.

– Milton Kupermannek hívnak – kezdte olvasni. – Abban a szerencsében volt részem, nevezzük inkább megtiszteltetésnek, hogy Judith Neeley barátja lehettem élete utolsó évében. Kifinomult ízlésű, művelt és igazán bátor asszony volt.

Kuperman érezte, hogy a szemei elhomályosulnak, néhány pillanatra a torkán akad a szó, majd hallotta magát, amint olyasmit mond, amit nem is tervezett.

– Hétfőn fel fogom keresni a Steans Intézetet Raviniában, és egymillió dollár összegű adománnyal kezdeményezni fogom, hogy hozzanak létre egy Judith Neeley-ösztöndíjat a fiatal zenészek képzésének támogatására. Teszem ezt abban a reményben, hogy Judith és az ő rajongása a zenéért nem merül feledésbe.

Ahogy elhagyta a pulpitust, Kuperman érezte, hogy a füle hegyéig elpirul. Hangfoszlányokat hallott maga körül, de egy szót sem értett belőle. Helyet foglalt. A képzeletében egy fuvola szólama gyönyörűen beleúszott a hárfa dallamába. Vajon Mozart, tűnődött? Igen, egész biztosan Mozart. A fuvola-hárfa kettősverseny hosszú részleteit sikerült felidéznie. A zene olyan

hear any of it. Instead, in his mind he heard a beautiful joining of a flute and a harp. Mozart, he wondered? Yes, Mozart, definitely Mozart. Whole passages of the flute and harp concerto came back to him. The music filled him with pleasure of a kind he had never known before. Although Kuperman may not have been fully aware of it, he had just achieved ecstasy. ♦

örömmel töltötte el, amilyet soha azelőtt nem érzett. Jóllehet Kuperman talán nem volt vele teljesen tisztában, de elérte a katarzis állapotát. ♦