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## London Calling

by *A. L. Kennedy*

I could be moving to London. Maybe. In theory. I don't know. I am currently camped out in yet another kind household's spare room – this time in Kentish Town – while an estate agent in Glasgow battles a glacial market for me and shows a trickle of viewers round the flat I own and love and currently kind of crave and yet never see. It seems my career – and I am a writer and one would assume this was a tranquil and sedentary trade – requires me to be in semi-perpetual motion with a bias towards London. For twenty years I have dragged all I care for with me in a variety of bags, but London has been a constant and, now that I'm as close as I'll ever get to being a grown-up, perhaps my constant should be a constant. Perhaps that means I won't have a heart attack before I'm fifty.

Of course, if I can't sell my Glasgow flat and then top it up with ten year's worth of savings, then I can't buy a London base beyond a Murphy bed and a head square's worth of floorboards. If I can sell it, then I can move to the far north of the Piccadilly Line and maybe get a bit of garden and another room for the never-endingly breeding heaps of books.

But, for now, I live in spare rooms when I can stand the disturbance of having other people around and in Holiday Inns when I really need to work. Holiday Inns always look the same and constitute what could well be my only true home. I really need to work at the moment, but I can't afford to keep on staying

in Holiday Inns, because I am supposed to be economizing, because I could be moving to London. Maybe. In theory. I don't know.

And meanwhile Londoners greet the idea that I'm coming south to a hell mouth of homicidal drivers, ten quid coffees, greenish grey air and drought with the relief people usually reserve for friends who have finally dumped adulterous partners or suddenly recovered from psychotic breaks. They hadn't liked to tell me, but they never understood how I could bear to live anywhere else. They invite me to dinner and stroke my arm and give me advice about areas in which I could not ever afford to buy anything more than a lock-up garage with a missing roof.

And meanwhile my Scottish friends sigh because such things are inevitable and maybe I've held out long enough and everything does roll downhill eventually, but shouldn't I keep a place in Glasgow for escapes and proper healthcare and civilized behaviour and, if they become independent, won't I worry that I might not get a passport? And underneath it all is the sense that my country has moved on since the days of Moira Anderson and kitsch self-loathing, but nevertheless every flight to other climes is in some way a judgement on the failures of a small nation. We're Scottish, we wait to be judged.

And meanwhile – because I'm Scottish and also phobic about commitment – I entertain every possible doubt about doing anything at all, beyond giving up and letting myself fall back into another couple of decades of compromise and living out of bags and wasting time and effort and always somehow managing to be here when I ought to be *there* and vice versa. To sell up, to be temporarily homeless with my world in storage and to roam about N22 with cash and a fondness for nice bathrooms... To keep a Scottish flat I like, but won't use any more than I do now and also have a tiny patch of London that's mine all mine and slightly

cripples my finances... To make any kind of decision. It all seems impossible.

But London has always been impossible and yet possible and has always called me. This isn't because it's a big city or even a capital city, or because young Scots in my day were taught that passing for English and heading for the metropolis were the best anybody could hope for. London – parochial, dirty, racist, class-obsessed, self-obsessed London – was the true home of another identity, a nationality that transcended nations and could allow me to be free. This London is, of course, a dream and yet it's a dream that has shaped my life.

And the dream started early, when I was still at school and first in love with the theatre. Dundee, where I was born, didn't really have a theatre. The rep had burned down again, but the town was saving up to build a new one. For me, London's theatres were where I really began to change into someone who could actually be a writer, make stories, build books, breathe through actors and govern their motions. Our generally high levels of despair and social division meant the saving was taking a while. I kept alert for the touring productions that would visit odd little spaces for one or two nights. I did my own saving to attend whenever I could and poured over my weekly copy of *The Stage* as if opening it marked my solemn rededication to a holy order. I allowed myself to be consumed by a passion every bit as illuminating and tormenting as the more usual teenage desires. I didn't really know what I wanted, but I wanted it a lot. Looking back, I think that I managed to combine an egocentric desire to be heard and to make things with a desire to escape the smother of small town expectations and cruelties and the effects of a school that hoped to prepare me for marriage to a Tory professional, but which would settle for my choosing a life of classical learning and withered charms in some moderately classsy Oxbridge senior

common room.

Whatever I wanted for myself, I knew it wasn't that.

When I watched those touring shows I found a taste of what I did want. Wildcat, Borderline and 7:84 Scotland were regular visitors – all left-leaning, unmistakably Scottish theatre companies which have since been lost. Their work sounded completely different from the anglicized BBC and the faux-middle class STV. They sounded like breaking rules and being at home in your own skin. And they were funny. I was a child of English and unhappy parents who'd moved up from Working to Middle Class and were therefore uneasy in many areas. They passed on their unease. For our household, funny was risky, out loud was risky and nothing could be trusted to be our own. For me, the sound and sight of people simply being themselves, albeit onstage, was exhilarating. I chose to find a kind of truth in the layers of fakery and pretending which make up live drama. For me, a good performance rattled received values and pronunciations and was always partly about being who we are. In Shakespeare, in Chekhov, in David Anderson, in David Hare – it didn't matter who wrote the words or when, if they were good and treated well, they were a way of being present with something fully alive. They were a way of realising that I could be more alive and more in general. This was something I could want enough to try and reach it.

The plays I saw moved beyond Scotland to address British and international concerns. One evening they might debunk the heathery myths that were all I had ever been told about my country, one night they might offer a satirical musical about the Falklands War, or present a piece by Dario Fo. Like many Scots who grew up before the 1980s, I had a very weak grip on my cultural identity. I had been led to assume that Scotland was a land of (sometimes brave) failures, drunk football thugs and angry

people who were sustained by being simply *not English*. The arts in general and theatre in particular – disreputable, funny, human and never-the-same-twice theatre – were reshaping my preconceptions, but I still accepted that the best of anything would always eventually roll downhill to London.

This meant, I believed, that the top-quality theatre must be impossibly far away south in a foreign country. I knew Scotland had theatres of innovation and significance and I am unashamed to state that I formed a school Theatre-Goers' Club, simply so that I could afford to indulge my addiction. But London must surely have the real thing. I could stand in my Dundee street at night and wish very hard and believe the West End rocked me a little, tugged at the pavement softly as if it was answering all my need. It couldn't be that my adoration was unrequited, or that every stage wasn't constantly raging with brilliance.

I can remember watching *The Three Sisters* on television – such cultural excursions still happened on terrestrial channels back then – and I ached every time they repeated 'To Moscow.' Flirty, classy, cosmopolitan Chekhov – who hadn't always been that way and knew about small-town blues – had caught that hunger to be elsewhere, to engineer situations within which one could grow to be somebody else, somebody at all, learn to operate at an adequate size and volume, have dignity and fulfilment. By the end of my time at university I was mostly a writer and definitely Scottish, but still lost. London was my Moscow – it had Drury Lane and Covent Garden, what was then the brand new Barbican Centre. It had theatres like the Old Vic, the Donmar Warehouse and the Royal Court where premiers had happened and would again, venues mentioned in the play scripts I read and re-read, trying to be there on nights long gone with casts I couldn't quite imagine and audiences past recalling. It was all still unreachable, impossible. And yet, schooled to believe myself one of many

plucky losers, impossibility seemed my natural habitat.

And then the little local bus company, which would eventually become the controversial behemoth Stagecoach, started to run overnight trips down to London. The student price was, I think, something like £16. I could manage that. My parents had divorced and money was tight for my mother. I hated to worry her with my enthusiasms and I didn't want to be a cost, but I had to do what I had to do. Within a breath of hearing the coach route existed I had worked out my itinerary – I'd go down over Friday night, see a matinee and an evening performance on the Saturday, get by with a sandwich for the day and blow maybe another tenner on a cab back to the Caledonian Road where I'd climb aboard the coach home just in time for another overnight. I'd get home, sleep away Sunday, school on Monday.

It was a little punishing, but worth it and I rarely saw a bad show. As often as I could, I would step into those plush Victorian foyers, or those charged and yet curiously airless modern auditoria and my skin would race and I would be taller and, once the lights had dipped away, there would be human beings who were – even at their worst – presented as being admirable, lyrical, astounding. This was the reverse of reality television – this was an insight into the true frailty and wonder and potential stature of my species.

And if the stage was the performance space, then sometimes it could seem the audience occupied a rehearsal space. For me, London's theatres were where I really began to change into someone who could, in a small way, follow Chekhov, actually be a writer, make stories, build books, breathe through actors and govern their motions. I could, eventually, ride the Piccadilly Line into South Kensington and have my first publishing lunch. I could earn a living doing something I loved – letting words and words and words fill me. Only the finest performances ever felt better than that and writing I could do myself at home.

But in my late teens I had no idea that was where I'd end up. I read Theatre Studies and Drama at Warwick University – near enough to Stratford for the odd outing to the RSC – and kept on looking for what I wanted. I performed, directed, puzzled and wrote, adrift in the heart of a foreign country. By the end of my time at university I was mostly a writer and definitely Scottish, but still lost. Part of my consolation was to roll downhill to London, borrow the earliest of those spare rooms and find my nation.

And my nation was there. We were there: a loose association of lost causes and would-be scribblers, heart-broken artists and more- and less-happily out-of-work actors. We were from everywhere else and hadn't fitted in. We probably still didn't, but we were at home amongst ourselves. We talked nonsense and made cups of coffee last all afternoon in little cafes on St Martin's Lane. We blagged free tickets for whatever we could get: exhibitions, concerts, readings, plays. We walked under blue spring skies between the big wedding cake buildings of South Ken, or down by the river, or along the King's Road where there'd be more elongated coffees in the Farmer's Market, or the Chelsea Bun, or Picasso's. A blend of awkwardness and self-harm and self-obsession and a lack of proper jobs meant we were all holding out for what we wanted, whatever impossible beauty that might turn out to be.

In a way I was permanently terrified.

There was never quite enough money, Thatcher seemed intent upon destroying everything that could keep life comfortable or even bearable and I didn't know if I would make it as a writer. Writing seemed to be what I most needed to do and I had been published, but that didn't mean I was earning a living, or anything like it. And I worried my next idea would be my last. I worried my next idea would be crazy. I worried I was kidding myself in every way. On the other hand, I had almost nothing and therefore

almost nothing to lose. And I was surrounded by other people who were in much the same condition. (Apart from the actors. Anything bad that happens is always much worse when it happens to an actor. This was the reverse of reality television – this was an insight into the true frailty and wonder and potential stature of my species. They suffered. A lot.) And we got each other through. For every poet who couldn't find another word, or leading man who was contemplating mini-cabbing, there was someone who was happy being chilled for a bit, or designing their continuing education, or doing something somewhere that we could all come and support. And down by the river, I could stand outside the National Theatre and know it was full of Hare and Brenton and Rudkin and people who were doing something, trying to turn a cold, hard tide. Human beings who were of the opinion that other human beings weren't worthless were reaching across to the North Bank and Westminster and telling Parliament we didn't buy the shit we were all being sold as sugar. This wasn't just about the chattering classes – whoever they are – being smugly indignant. This wasn't just about artists courting an empty-eyed media, pimping themselves and paying the rent. This was a way of knowing we weren't alone in trying to love people and keep hopes for them, something to remind us of the qualities of life. This was something genuinely sustaining and an encouragement to reach out for better. I may have been giving things the benefit of my youthful enthusiasm and my need, but back then arts and theatre still seemed to have sufficient dignity to be audible and press towards change.

In a way, it was the happiest time of my life.

And that time will always make me think of London and London will always echo with it – the dreams that we tried to reach, the dreams we only just missed, the dreams we made true.

Having searched and believed and tried so hard, I and the

inhabitants of my other country, my London, all found something we wanted. We see one another less and less, because we're busy now. I used a free university education, cheap public transport and the mercy of strangers to batter together the start of a life I love. I took advantage of possibilities that would be in many ways closed to me if I were starting out now. And so I get to write and travel and write and perform and write and travel. I get to have a high-class problem like wondering whether to have one base or two. Some of my friends from twenty years ago now have degrees, or families, or work as counsellors, or turn up in movies, or in the papers, or in galleries, or make beautiful things that no one much knows about but they are still beautiful things and we know and that's enough. We survived Thatcher, we survived Blair and now we'll survive Cameron.

And perhaps, setting many other considerations aside, that is why the ache to be in London is so strong again – and this time for real and as permanently as my peripatetic profession will allow. I live in a time when the real theatre is happening in the streets. The press has declared a new golden age for the West End, but all that's golden are the performers. The theatres are largely filled with musicals, revivals, format-changing variations on safe themes. As Scotland goes on its way, deciding what it is and what it will be in increasingly numerous and often positive directions it would be wonderful to see England do the same, to decide it is something more than the media's presentation of the feudally servile, or drunkenly violent, the pitiable list of scared tabloid negatives: Not Foreign, Not Gypsy, Not Dying of Cancer yet. And it would be wonderful to see if London can be one of the places where England remembers how many possibilities there are in Englishness and how much it has survived. It would be magnificent and life-saving if London reminded Britain that we built a welfare state from nothing but faith in a broken country

and that it worked very well. And perhaps London can be one of the places where England remembers that its entertainments weathered religious and political censorship, the closing of the playhouses, the forgetting and suppressing of songs and dances and ways of being with each other that made human beings feel they could be better in themselves and with each other. Perhaps London's theatres will remember the times when they helped push a whole culture forward, change a country and speak truth to power. When I move, I'll move in hope. If that ever happens, I'd have to see it. I'd have to be there. ♦

## Solar Threats

by *Gregg Easterbrook*

This past summer, solar flares large jolts of energy from the sun – were forecast to interrupt communication and GPS devices. Nothing happened. In 2006, U.S. government researchers predicted that the next cycle of sunspots, the magnetic regions on the sun that appear as dark spots, would be as much as 50 percent stronger than the previous one, citing a “newly developed [computer] model” boasting “more than 98 percent accuracy.” Instead, that sunspot cycle, in progress now, is on track to be the weakest in nearly a century. Recently, a scientist told CNN that storms on the sun could “bring down satellites ... interrupt our power grid,” and cause “trillions of dollars” in damage. Perhaps, but the ponies may be a better wager. And here’s a really scary prediction to worry about: London’s *Telegraph* newspaper warned in 2010 that solar activity could erase your iPod!

With the world increasingly dependent on electronics, “space weather” – variances in flares and solar wind (charged particles) emitted by the sun – is attracting more attention. Yet despite the possible vulnerability of the modern economy to solar activity, not to mention the simple magnitude of Sol and life’s reliance on it, our knowledge of the star is surprisingly rudimentary. “We are a long way from being able to predict how the sun will behave,” says Daniel Baker, a solar-study specialist who directs the Laboratory for Atmospheric and Space Physics at the University of Colorado.

Researchers think they have a good idea of what happens inside the sun. Hydrogen, the lightest element and the sun’s primary constituent, fuses to become helium, releasing energy. Eventually, long after humanity has gone extinct or evolved into some other form, Sol’s hydrogen will be consumed. Then the helium will begin to fuse into medium-weight elements. An eon after that, the medium-weight elements will begin to fuse into metals. Ultimately Sol will explode, scattering heavy elements into the cosmos. It’s thought that all the heavy elements of the universe were forged within stars that later exploded, supernovas having been more common when the firmament was young. The Earth, your body – both are composed of elements made inside ancient stars that exploded.

Scientists are confident that the sun is in its “main sequence”: it has burned at about the same heat for perhaps a billion years, and it’s likely to stay at about the same rheostat setting for another billion years or so. The numbers involved are staggering. The sun consumes about 600 million tons of hydrogen per second. At that rate, the mass of the Earth would be gone in 70,000 years. Yet Sol so far has exhausted only a small percentage of its energy potential. Though 93 million miles away, the sun shines so fiercely that it dazzles the eyes and makes the skin sting in summertime. And that’s after almost all of its output simply radiates off into the void: for every one unit of solar energy that impacts the Earth, 1.6 billion units do not. Life on Earth depends on the sun’s table scraps.

Though science may have a clear idea of the life cycle of stars, details are elusive. Exactly why sunspots form and disappear continues to engage speculation. They have some relation to the titanic magnetism that fluctuates through the sun, but the exact relationship is uncertain, hence the poor track record of prediction. The solar winds vary, and occasionally a “coronal mass

ejection” sends a hunk of Sol hurtling outward into the solar atmosphere. But here, too, details are uncertain.

In the short time that researchers have been monitoring the sun closely, its luminosity has shown almost no variance, which would suggest that the roughly one degree Fahrenheit of global warming observed in the past century has been caused by something other than Sol ramping up. On the other hand, NASA’s recently launched Kepler spacecraft has begun inspecting “nearby” sun-like stars, and is finding that their output changes more than expected, says Daniel Baker. So solar variation might play some role in climate trends. Solar wind and other forces from the sun also affect the temperature and density of the Earth’s upper atmosphere, and that may influence the climate. But if you hear a talk-radio host say the sun is accelerating global warming, remember: even if that turns out to be true, nothing can be done about the output of our star.

Knowledge of the sun is expected to improve: NASA’s Solar Dynamics Observatory, launched in 2010, is already producing dramatic photography of the sun, and returning data on solar magnetism. Several solar probes and telescopes will launch in the coming decade, including a NASA probe that will draw closer to the sun than any previous mission. “Ideally, we should have a network of solar satellites similar to the network of weather satellites,” Baker says, “with many satellites around the sun, and also in positions both ahead of and behind Earth’s orbit within the solar system.” Considering that the Solar Dynamics Observatory cost nearly \$1 billion, a full array of sun monitors in space could easily run \$10 billion, if not more. But then, NASA spent anywhere from \$40 billion to \$100 billion on the International Space Station, with no tangible benefit to taxpayers. Improved understanding of the sun, by contrast, would clearly be in the public interest.

At least the sun seems unlikely to explode anytime soon. Standard conjecture regarding the inner processes of stars holds that they emit cornucopian amounts of neutrinos, which are subatomic particles. A generation ago, when the first neutrino-detectors were built, they didn’t find anything close to the expected number of neutrinos from the sun. This led the late science-fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke, who is credited with the concept of the telecommunications satellite, to speculate that Sol was about to explode, and the human experiment to reach an untimely end.

Today, researchers believe that prior assumptions about solar neutrinos were in error. The sun seems fine. It’s not about to explode. Probably. We think. ♦



## The Trial of the Last Nazi

by *Lawrence Douglas*

NOVEMBER 30, 2009

At 7:00 A.M. the city is quiet, the sky still dark, but the plaza in the Nymphenburger Strasse teems with TV and radio trucks, their generators humming. Hundreds of journalists and spectators stand waiting outside the courthouse, bundled against the cold. A rumor circulates that press accreditations have been issued far in excess of what the courtroom can accommodate, and the jostling begins. A policeman shouts unintelligible instructions as reporters grouse about the staggering absence of organization. Instead of cordons and an orderly queue, the police inexplicably have created a crude funnel, its mouth leading to a single doorway. A sign marks off the Demjanjuk Sammelzone – the DEMJANJUK COLLECTION ZONE.

The fact that a crowd including Jews and a number of Holocaust survivors is being shoved in the direction of a single narrow portal creates resonances that can't be ignored. Perhaps the Germans themselves find reassurance in the disorganization. The SS was terrifyingly efficient. Not so the Munich police. Incompetence signals benevolence. *See, we have changed.*

After four hours of delay, screenings, and pat-downs, I finally enter *Gerichtssaal* 101, the largest and most secure courtroom in Munich. A windowless octagon with a tented ceiling of poured concrete, it is part air-raid bunker, part drab Lutheran chapel. Curiously, one sees no flags, either national or municipal, no scales-

of-justice iconography, to indicate a court of law. There is nothing adorning the walls but a simple wooden cross.

And yet the atmosphere in the room is festive, as journalists from around the globe hustle to interview Nazi-hunting luminaries and leading members of the European Jewish community. Serge Kiarsfeld, the Frenchman who helped net and prosecute Klaus Barbie, chats with Efraim Zuroff, director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Jerusalem office. Holding forth to a pack of reporters is Michel Friedman, TV pundit and former president of the European Jewish Congress, wearing a black suit, shirt, tie, and an out-of-season tan.

The trial has been vaunted by the German daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung* as the "last great Nazi war-crimes trial," a designation that misleads on almost every count. The defendant stands accused of assisting the SS in the murder of some 28,000 Jews at the Sobibor death camp, but not of being a Nazi. Nor does the trial involve war crimes, since the systematic extermination of unarmed men, women, and children had nothing to do with the purposes of war. Then there is the question of greatness. Compared with the Nuremberg trials, the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem, and the French trials of Barbie and Maurice Papon, the proceeding against Demjanjuk – a peon at the bottom of the exterminatory hierarchy – appears extraordinarily inconsequential. And given that the defendant is a seemingly frail near nonagenarian and that sixty-six years have elapsed since his alleged crimes, the most remarkable aspect of the trial is the fact that it is being staged at all. And yet in putting Demjanjuk on trial, Germany has assumed a radical risk. An acquittal would be a highly visible and final demonstration of the utter failures of the German legal system to do justice to Nazi-era crimes. But whatever this trial is, it is likely to be the last Holocaust case to galvanize international attention.

In *Gerichtssaal* 101 the chatter dies down as a back door opens. Flanked by two medical orderlies and a court-appointed doctor, Demjanjuk is maneuvered into the courtroom in a wheelchair. A sky-blue blanket is drawn to his chin, a blue baseball cap covers his brow. Cameras flash. It is not a sight to dignify jurisprudence: a helpless old man scowling before an onslaught of publicity. More shocking still is his re-entry into the courtroom a few hours later, after the midday break, Gone is the wheelchair, and in its place is an ambulance gurney. Demjanjuk lies flat on this back, a blanket drawn – so it appears from my vantage point – over his head.

Journalists viewing this apparition scribble in their notebooks as a lawyer representing relatives of persons murdered at Sobibor jumps to his feet and gestures at the gurney. “Excuse me, I’d like to know why he’s lying like that.”

A team of three doctors briefly confer, then one announces that the defendant has said he’s uncomfortable sitting.

“If the accused claims sitting is no longer possible, would it be possible at least to raise him?” the lawyer asks.

The doctor confers with Demjanjuk, who appears to reject the suggestion.

This brings Cornelius Nestler, a professor of criminal law and the lead lawyer for the victims’ families, to his feet. Nestler is keenly aware that this trial is more than a colloquy over evidence and law; it is a competition over what images will be transmitted around the world. “The picture this projects is most disconcerting.”

Eventually a compromise is reached: the defendant may remain on the gurney but propped at a 45-degree angle. For the rest of this first day of what will turn out to be a punishingly lengthy proceeding, Demjanjuk puts on a grotesque pantomime, a performance that lends new meaning to the term “show trial.” His

mouth opens in a silent grimace; he grips his forehead; he struggles to moisten parched lips. Journalists exchange glances. The consensus is that he is faking it; the defense is overplaying the pity card.

In the coming weeks, Demjanjuk will remain inert, baseball cap pulled low over his brow, eyes hidden behind dark glasses. But the frowns of pain, the silent moans, will cease. Someone, it seems, has given him the message to tone it down.

#### IVAN THE TERRIBLE

The road backward from *Gerichtssaal* 101 toward some original point of complicity is long and serpentine, traversing the twentieth century’s dreariest blood-lands. The legal drama began in 1977, when the litigation department of what became the Justice Department’s Office of Special Investigations (OSI) filed a motion to strip one John Demjanjuk of Seven Hills, Ohio, of his U.S. citizenship. The Ukrainian-born Demjanjuk had emigrated to the United States in 1952, settling in suburban Cleveland, where he found work as a machinist at a Ford plant. On gaining citizenship in 1958, he legally changed his name from Ivan to John, then went about constructing a typical midcentury American life: raising a family, becoming active in the local Ukrainian church, winning a reputation as an affable neighbor – “the kind of a guy who would stop to help you fix a flat on the road,” someone who knew him remarked.

U.S. officials first learned of Demjanjuk in the mid-1970s, when a Soviet organization established to promote “helpful” cultural exchanges turned over a list of possible Ukrainian Nazi collaborators living in America. This information suggested that Demjanjuk, after he was taken prisoner by the Wehrmacht during the German invasion of the Soviet Union, had worked for the SS as a guard at Sobibor, an extermination facility set up in Poland in

the spring of 1942. The crucial piece of evidence was a copy of an ID card issued at Trawniki, an SS facility designed to prepare specially recruited Soviet prisoners of war for service as SS auxiliaries. Approximately 5,000 Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, and, most of all, Ukrainians passed through Trawniki in its three years of operation, on their way to “supervisory” duties in the elimination of Poland’s Jews. Trawniki ID No. 1393 had been issued to *Demjanjuk, Ivan*. The ID included a photo of what was unmistakably a youthful Demjanjuk and indicated his service as a *Wachmann* – guard – at Sobibor.

Sobibor was a tiny camp, staffed by twenty to thirty SS men and one hundred to one hundred and fifty Trawniki-trained guards. This small group oversaw the murder of a quarter million Jews. Most of the handful of Sobibor’s survivors – only a few dozen – later settled in Israel, prompting the OSI to ask the Israeli police’s assistance in identifying the former guard. The goal was not to bring criminal charges against Demjanjuk, since American courts lacked jurisdiction. But Section 340 of the Immigration and Nationality Act made it possible to revoke citizenship obtained through “willful misrepresentation”; OSI officials hoped to denaturalize Demjanjuk and deport him to a country that could try him.

To the surprise of the Israeli police, the Sobibor survivors failed to pick out Demjanjuk’s Trawniki photo – yet several Treblinka survivors, enlisted to assist a completely unrelated investigation, reacted strongly to it. Here, they declared, was none other than the notorious operator of the Treblinka gas chamber, a guard whose unusual viciousness had earned him the sobriquet Ivan Grozny: Ivan the Terrible, Israeli investigators were initially skeptical, since the Trawniki card clearly placed Demjanjuk at Sobibor. But when more and more Treblinka survivors identified him as Ivan the Terrible, the investigators became convinced. And so on

February 27, 1986, Demjanjuk – his American citizenship revoked and an extradition petition accepted – found himself on an El Al 747 bound for Israel.

Like the earlier proceeding against Eichmann, Demjanjuk’s trial was staged in a public theater hastily converted into a courtroom and broadcast live on TV, the way Eichmann’s had been on radio. As Marx observed, history has a way of repeating itself, appearing first as tragedy, then as farce. So it was with the trial of Ivan the Terrible that began in Jerusalem in 1987, which similarly aimed to use the courtroom as a way of teaching the larger history of the Holocaust. This aim succeeded in the case of Eichmann, as the dour defendant had been an efficient and tireless facilitator of a continent-wide campaign of genocide. In the case of Demjanjuk, who presented himself as a burly buffoon, an affable oaf who entertained his jail guards with bits of mangled Hebrew, this effort went terribly astray. His defense was simple: the Israelis had the wrong man. On the stand, he insisted that he never trained in Trawniki and never served as a guard, but had survived the last years of the war in a German labor camp. He was a pathetic witness on his own behalf, his story riddled with improbable gaps and contradictions. His lawyers – paid by an American real estate agent with ties to Holocaust-denial groups – committed numerous blunders, none more calamitous than the decision to challenge the authenticity of the Trawniki ID. Whereas the prosecution’s document experts attested persuasively to the card’s authenticity, the defense’s expert collapsed under cross-examination and later tried to kill herself for having lied about her credentials.

Yet it was the three-judge tribunal, presided over by a sitting member of Israel’s Supreme Court, that committed the worst missteps. In an astonishing gesture, the court couched its task in terms more fitting for a public memorial than a legal verdict, pledging to “erect in our judgment, according to the totality of the

evidence before us, a monument to [the victims'] souls, to the holy congregations that were lost and are no more." As for the evidentiary basis of that judgment, the tribunal explained away the troubling fact that only Sobibor was listed on the defendant's Trawniki card by speculating that Demjanjuk might have worked at both camps, shuttling back and forth between them – though it found no record of such simultaneous service. The idea that there could have been "two *Wachmanns* from Trawniki, one in Treblinka and one in Sobibor, both Ukrainians named Ivan ... both with protruding ears, both the same age and both becoming bald in the same way," was simply too "farfetched." The court convicted Demjanjuk and sentenced him to death.

No one had been executed in Israel since Eichmann in 1962; in fact, the death penalty had long been abolished for all but the most extreme crimes, such as genocide. Demjanjuk's appeal dragged on for years, and the delay benefited him, as the unraveling of the Soviet Union freed up evidence long hidden behind the Iron Curtain. This information supported a conclusion the trial court had refused to take seriously. It now appeared that there had been two Ukrainian Ivans, one at Sobibor and one at Treblinka. This evidence named Ivan the Terrible as one Ivan Marchenko, a Treblinka guard last seen fighting with Yugoslavian partisans in the Balkans.

This information did not entirely exculpate Demjanjuk; if anything, it only strengthened the possibility that he had served at Sobibor. But it did suggest that Israel was about to execute the wrong man as Ivan the Terrible of Treblinka. In July 1993, the Israeli Supreme Court voided Demjanjuk's conviction, and nearly seven years after his extradition, he found himself back in Cleveland; in 1998, his U.S. citizenship was reinstated. The OSI meanwhile was doubly embarrassed by the collapse of the Israeli case and by a U.S. court's finding that it had suppressed evidence dur-

ing extradition casting doubts on the case against Ivan the Terrible. Driven to vindicate itself, the OSI brought a fresh round of denaturalization proceedings against Demjanjuk, this time based on the Sobibor evidence. This effort succeeded in 2002, but now the United States could find no country willing to accept the stateless former Ukrainian. Years passed, while Demjanjuk exhausted his legal remedies and his money. Finally, German prosecutors expressed a willingness to bring charges, and on May 11, 2009, Demjanjuk was put onto a government jet and flown to Munich.

Compared with American court proceedings, a German criminal trial is extremely informal. There is no written transcript. Evidentiary rules are minimal. Hearsay is admissible, and so is a history of past convictions. Almost wholly lacking are the TV-style theatrics that inform American court lore. There are no passionate opening statements and folksy summations designed to sway a jury, for the simple reason that there is no jury. Trials of any significance are decided by a body that consists of three judges and two *Schoffen*, or lay deliberators. The presiding judge in the Demjanjuk trial, Ralph Alt, is a tall, glisteningly bald, and tidily bearded jurist in his early sixties. Soft-spoken and scholarly, with a passion for chess, Alt has the reputation of being a thorough, intelligent jurist, but he lacks previous experience with Nazi-era cases. Perhaps as a consequence, he remains intent on treating the proceeding like any other criminal case before an ordinary German court, an approach that, as the coming months will reveal, will permit the defense to all but derail the trial.

As the presiding judge, Alt largely controls the flow of information before the court and assumes much of the burden of examining witnesses. The prosecution's primary duty, the drafting of the indictment, is completed by the time the trial starts, and once

the lead prosecutor finishes reading the indictment, a task he performs while seated and in a near monotone, he will barely utter another word in court.

The Demjanjuk indictment, though flatly presented, nonetheless contains a highly unorthodox legal argument that is for the most part based on the research and work of a jurist named Thomas Walther. A wild-haired sixty-six-year-old whose gaze holds a touch of Dennis Hopper – like monomania, Walther was, until five years ago, a municipal court judge facing a cushy retirement. But after stepping down as a judge, he stunned his colleagues by taking a job as an investigator with Germany's Central Office for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes. His motivations were of the deeply personal nature one often finds among Germany's immediate postwar generation. In 1939, Walther's father, who ran a construction firm, had hidden two Jewish families in an overgrown garden and helped them escape Germany. "I hoped to leave a similar example for my children," he told me.

After joining the Central Office in 2006, Walther turned his attention to the Demjanjuk file, which was collecting dust in the Office's Ludwigsburg headquarters. According to this file, largely the fruit of the OSI's investigations, Demjanjuk was born in 1920 in Dubovi Makharyntsi, a tiny village in western Ukraine. He worked for a time as a tractor driver on a Soviet collective farm. Drafted into the Red Army, he was taken prisoner by the Wehrmacht in May 1942 and sent to a POW camp in eastern Poland. None of these facts were, or are, in dispute. From here, however, the file tells a story very different from the one Demjanjuk has been repeating for decades. Soon after his capture, Demjanjuk was selected by the SS to train at Trawniki, where recruits received instruction in the use of weapons and the techniques of herding and guarding concentration-camp prisoners, as well as in the barked orders of command German – *Achtung! Raus! Mach schnell!*

His training completed, Demjanjuk was posted to the Majdanek concentration camp, near Lublin. On March 27, 1943, he was transferred to Sobibor, where he remained until mid-September 1943; thereafter, he was assigned to Flossenburg, a concentration camp in Bavaria, where he served until the end of the war.

Although no Sobibor survivor has ever been able to identify Demjanjuk, the fact that he served there seems irrefutable when coupled with the evidence of his service at Majdanek and Flossenburg, which is solidly documented. SS records from Majdanek describe an episode of misconduct in which *Wachmann* Demjanjuk left the grounds without permission during a typhus lockdown, an infraction that earned him twenty-five lashes. And an examination of records from Demjanjuk's postwar years as a Displaced Person in Landshut, northeast of Munich, has turned up a surviving Flossenburg guard named Alexander Nagorny, also a Trawniki man, who served with Demjanjuk – and who later testifies at trial.

Still, German prosecutors long balked at the idea of bringing charges against Demjanjuk, and even the present indictment conspicuously avoids charging him with any crimes associated with his lengthier and better documented service at Majdanek and Flossenburg. The reason is simple: mere service as a concentration-camp guard has never been deemed a crime under German law. Waither's breakthrough argument, which he developed with a colleague, Kirsten Goetze, and which became the basis for the indictment, is equally simple. Sobibor, Waither and Goetze insisted, was and is different. Unlike other camps – such as Majdanek and Flossenburg – where inmates served as slave laborers, Sobibor was purely an extermination facility, whose sole purpose was to murder Jews. Even in the case of Auschwitz, which had been a hybrid facility – part death camp, part labor camp – it would be hard to say, absent actual proof, what exactly a guard's specific responsibilities had been. But not so with Sobibor, Everyone who

served there *had* to be involved in the killing process. The numbers are telling. Of the 1.2 million persons sent to Auschwitz, about 100,000 survived; of the approximately 1.3 million Jews sent to the extermination facilities of Treblinka, Belzec, and Sobibor, no more than 125 lived. It shouldn't matter, then, that prosecutors lack evidence about Demjanjuk's specific behavior at Sobibor. The fact alone that he served as a *Wachmann* at a death camp should suffice to prove guilt. Sobibor guards were accessories to murder because facilitating murder was their job description.

It is an elegant theory, and yet in the six-decade history of the Federal Republic, no court has come close to adopting it. As one expert, Christiaan Ruter, ruefully notes at the trial's outset, "It is entirely bewildering how anyone familiar with the German legal system could expect a conviction of Demjanjuk with this evidence." Politically and culturally, Germany is the model of national self-reckoning, its monstrous past the subject of countless memorials, films, symposia, and other public discussions. But its courts have a pitifully thin record of bringing Nazi perpetrators to justice. The obstacles to prosecutorial success have been formidable: former Nazis continued to occupy positions of prominence in the judiciary; German jurists barred all prosecutions for crimes against humanity and genocide, speciously arguing that because these incriminations were not formally recognized until after the war, their application to Nazi crimes would be *ex post facto*. And so the most serious offense that any Nazi-era criminal could be charged with was murder.

Regarding murder, German law long drew a bizarre distinction between perpetrator (*Täter*) and accessory (*Gehilfe*). The physical act of killing – pulling the trigger, for instance – did not itself guarantee designation as a perpetrator. Only if one killed, or authorized killing, out of base motives and demonstrated "individual initiative" in doing so did one qualify. In effect, the German penal

code made the Holocaust, insofar as it represented murder, the work of only three men – Hitler, Himmler, and Heydrich – and transformed every death-camp functionary into a mere accessory. To be found guilty as a perpetrator, a camp official had to have been an *Exzestater*, one who killed without orders to do so; or, to put it another way, one who killed in violation of the law *in effect under the Nazis*. In judging those who operated the machinery of death, postwar German courts actually employed SS standards of legality, designating as perpetrators only those individuals who could have been condemned by the SS's own tribunals.

In a trial involving such superannuated crimes, it is easy to forget that the devastation they caused remains the stuff of memory. German criminal procedure permits victims and their families to attach themselves to prosecutions as *Nebenklager*, or "lay accusers." Early in the Demjanjuk trial, two dozen relatives of victims murdered at Sobibor arrive in *Gerichtssaal* 101. Almost all are Dutch: during the five months of Demjanjuk's service at Sobibor in 1943, most of the Jews murdered there – at least 28,000 of them – came from the Netherlands. *Nebenklager* enjoy many rights, including the right to legal representation, and the testimony of the Dutch contingent provides the trial with its most moving moments. Rudie Cortissos, seventy years old, produces a letter that his mother wrote from Westerbork, a Dutch transit camp, in the hours before her deportation to Sobibor; tossed into the street without a stamp, the letter somehow made it to his house. When the presiding judge asks to see the letter, Cortissos breaks down, as if fearful that the court will keep it. David van Huiden testifies that his mother, stepfather, and sister were murdered at Sobibor. At the time his family was seized, he had been sent out to walk the family dog, a German shepherd. "Nobody figured a Jewish boy would be walking a German shepherd, so I wasn't stopped. Neighbors took me in." In excellent German he ends his narrative

politely, “Thank you for giving me the opportunity to say something.”

Not all the *Nebenklager* get this chance. Martin Haas, seventy-three, a professor of medicine at UC San Diego, has flown in from California to tell the court about the murder of his mother, sister, and brother. He is only partway through his story when Demjanjuk’s lawyer rises to remind the court that the afternoon session is over. Haas can resume his narrative the next morning. But the next morning the defendant is a no-show. Demjanjuk, we are informed, has woken up with a headache and a slightly elevated temperature. Court for the day is canceled.

So begins a pattern that will plague the trial. The physicians who examined Demjanjuk upon his arrival in Germany recommended a court schedule of two ninety-minute sessions per day and no more than three days per week. Yet even this abbreviated timetable is apparently too much. Again and again the proceeding will yield to the defendant’s headaches, joint aches, chest pains, vertigo, dehydration, and general unwellness. As these cancellations grow in number, so too does suspicion that the defense is stalling, in the hope that Demjanjuk will be declared unfit and the trial called off. Eventually, even the mild Judge Alt will lose patience, responding to the news that “Herr Demjanjuk doesn’t feel well today” by observing drily that “many people on trial do not feel well,” and ordering him to appear anyway. But for now he defers to the defendant. The trial is scheduled to resume in three weeks – *Gerichtssaal* 101 is needed for other cases – which means that if Martin Haas wants to finish his story, he will have to fly back again from San Diego. In the end he chooses not to, and is denied this belated chance to testify in open court.

Those called to describe their memories of the camp fare no better. Thomas Blatt and Phillip Bialowitz represent a quarter of the remaining Jewish survivors of Sobibor on the planet. On Oc-

tober 14, 1943, the camp’s inmates staged an uprising. Three hundred managed to escape, of whom fifty or so were alive at war’s end. Blatt is a famous figure in Holocaust circles, having written two books on Sobibor. We are staying in the same hotel, and on the night before he is to testify, I bump into him in the lobby, where he is sitting in a lounge chair reading a Polish book entitled *Shtetl*. I have just spent the better part of the day reading his book on the Sobibor uprising, and I invite him to dine with me in the hotel’s restaurant.

Blatt is a small man of eighty-three, with tidy features and skeptical blue eyes. He has lived in California for more than fifty years but still speaks with a heavy Yiddish accent – the same, nearly extinct accent of my grandfather, who died decades ago. A mysterious aura of history hovers about Blatt. Over dinner he tells me about the town where he grew up. “Ibicza was the only town in all Poland without a church,” he says. “There were 3,600 Jews and only 200 Poles. On Friday nights before the Sabbath the whole town smelled of kerosene because the Jews were too poor to afford soap and used kerosene to wash their hair and kill the lice.” About Demjanjuk he has little to say. “He’s an old man. If he’s convicted is not so important. Whatever happens, he cannot go back to his home in Cleveland. That is punishment enough. What’s important is for the victims to tell their story, to tell about Sobibor.” All at once he volunteers that he himself has been sleeping badly and, despite antidepressants, is often bothered by thoughts of suicide. “Then I take a shower, so hot you could cook an egg. That helps.”

The following morning the courtroom, less than full in recent days, is once again packed, security extremely tight. Blatt looks exhausted and withdrawn. The court has invited him to describe life in the camp, and furnishes an interpreter to translate its questions into English and his responses into German. But Blatt re-

fuses to use the interpreter, and his testimony emerges in a mish-mash of English, German, and Yiddish, a linguistic goulash that leaves the court bewildered. “I tell how war ist möglich so viele millions in so kurzer Zeit to murder.” “Wir arrived in Sobibor on trucks and wir sehen, es war shayn!” “Straight to the gas chambers, the Leute waren dead.” Judge Alt regards Blatt with sympathy, but Thomas Lenz, the youngest of the three judges, a supercilious figure with thickly gelled black hair, can barely control his irritation. His questions are sharp. “In your book, Mr. Blatt, you include diary entries. Was this a diary that you kept contemporaneously, or was this a diary that you later imagined?”

“Meisten my own memory gehabt” – mostly I had my own memories, an answer that clarifies nothing.

His only clear response comes in response to Alt’s question: Can he identify the defendant?

Blatt sighs. “I can’t remember the face of my own mother and father.”

It is his clearest response, and his most poignant. Yet the weakness of memory is not the problem on display. A professional survivor, Blatt has been interviewed so many times, has given so many lectures to schools and synagogues and civic centers, has appeared as a witness in so many cases and served as consultant to so many documentaries, that he can no longer distinguish between original memory and the memory of memory.

Then came the questions of Ulrich Busch, Demjanjuk’s lead lawyer. Busch is not content with challenging Blatt’s testimony. Brazenly, he attempts to draw a moral equivalence between the survivor and his client, At Sobibor the typical life span of a newly arrived Jew was about two to four hours. But a tiny fraction, Blatt among them, were selected to serve the staff and maintain the camp; these were skilled carpenters, masons, tailors, and shoemakers, and those capable of hard labor. How, Busch asks, did a

boy of fifteen manage to be chosen for work in the camp? Did he “volunteer,” just as some Ukrainians may have “volunteered” as guards?

Blatt doesn’t seem to notice the ugly cynicism in the phrasing of the question. The word Busch uses for “chosen,” “*auserwählte*,” is typically reserved for the expression “*das auserwählte Volk*” – the Chosen People. But he resists the thrust of Busch’s question. “Ich bin das selber wie the mann over there? Nur em idiot konnte das sagen” – “I’m the same as the man over there? Only an idiot could say that.”

Demjanjuk’s defense team consists of two court-appointed lawyers. Gunther Maull, a bald seventy-three-year-old with a taste for black shirts and burgundy ties, remains for the most part a passive figure, letting Busch, who has personal connections to the Demjanjuk family, do the heavy lifting. Gigantic, bearded, and frequently disheveled, Busch is an excitable man with a choleric temper. At critical junctures his face reddens in a frightening, infarction-heralding manner, as if it is he, and not his client, who is about to succumb to the stresses of the trial. The defense will inundate the court with 515 motions to dismiss or to delay. Virtually all will be denied.

Today Busch reads from a motion to dismiss on grounds of *Befangenheit* – prejudice. Motions alleging prejudice typically are brought against a specific judge for conflicts of interest. Busch’s motion, however, is directed against the *entire* German judicial system. It introduces a charge he will repeat over and over: the German legal system is trying to make good on its pathetic record of dealing with Nazis by trying a man who was neither a German nor a Nazi. New standards are being used against his client. The rules of the game are being changed.

There is some truth to this. No amount of research has ever established a single example of a German executed during the



Nazi era – or even severely punished – for asking to opt out of genocide. Yet for decades German courts trying former Nazis were exceptionally receptive to the defense of “putative necessity.” In contrast to a pure necessity defense, which must show that the defendant had no choice but to engage in the criminal act, putative necessity must show only that the defendant *believed* he lacked choice, and that this belief, even if erroneous, was reasonable under the circumstances. This defense led to the 1966 acquittal of Erich Lachmann, an SS sergeant in charge of the Trawniki guards at Sobibor. A decade later, a Hamburg court acquitted Karl Streibel, the former commandant of Trawniki, and five other SS functionaries at the camp of all criminal charges, reasoning that the evidence failed to prove that the commandant and his support staff knew the nature of the work for which their trainees were being prepared. Such rulings fuel Ulrich Busch’s outrage. He never tires of reciting a litany of Nazi perpetrators set free by German courts or never tried in the first place. How, he rails, can a system that acquitted Streibel convict Demjanjuk?

The problem with this argument isn’t that it’s wrong but that it draws a false implication. Courts, like other institutions, learn over time. Demjanjuk’s lawyers may bemoan the fact that the German legal system has decided to use his case as an occasion to self-correct, but they can hardly claim he has suffered an injustice as a consequence. The fact that others were wrongly acquitted does not grant him immunity from prosecution. Logic alone, however, doesn’t deter Busch. “Let us not forget,” he cries, “that my client already spent over six years in an Israeli prison, including four awaiting execution. And this for a case of mistaken identity!” Far from being a criminal, Busch argues, Demjanjuk was as much a victim of the Nazis as was Thomas Blatt – a statement greeted with hisses from spectators and journalists alike.

Is Busch tone-deaf, or does he relish such provocations? Freud famously told the story of a man who, charged with breaking a borrowed teakettle, insisted, “In the first place, he had returned the kettle undamaged; in the second place, it already had holes in it when he borrowed it; and in the third place, he had never borrowed it at all.” Busch’s defense has a similarly over-determined quality. During the course of the trial he argues, *seriatim*, that the trial is a political show; that his client is fully innocent; that he never trained at Trawniki; that he never served as a guard at Sobibor or, for that matter, at any other camp; and that, even if he had, he had no more choice in it than did the Jews who worked at the camp.

The claims of innocence force the court to revisit issues that have been considered *ad nauseam* over the decades, including the authenticity of Demjanjuk’s Trawniki Service Card, by now surely one of the most thoroughly examined documents in legal history. A German documents expert, Anton Dallmayer, is able to identify the typewriter responsible for the information typed on the card, an Olympia 12 manufactured in Erfurt. The ID is clearly authentic, Dallmayer testifies, a conclusion supported by his painstaking comparison of Demjanjuk’s card with three other Trawniki service IDs.

Busch offers another teakettle explanation for these similarities. Perhaps, he speculates portentously, *all four* cards are KGB forgeries.

Rebecca West described the Nuremberg trial as a “citadel of boredom,” and perhaps tedium is the invariable result when the expectation of spectacle collides with the reality of law’s dullness. The Demjanjuk trial is no different. Its beginning is a heady time: the court is packed, drama is in the air, nerves bristle. As weeks and months pass, however, the trial settles into a routine, Spectators come and go, as do journalists and tourists. A steady stream

of classes make their way into *Gerichtssaal* 101, but it isn't always clear who or what is being taught. A group of sixteen-year-olds studying to be hairdressers at a nearby vocational school spend thirty minutes in befuddled attendance, then are replaced by a class of tenth graders from a local *Gymnasium*. I ask a boy in lime-green surfer shorts what the trial is about.

"Nazis," he says, with a shrug.

Yet the boredom masks in underlying anxiety and a deepening pessimism. If the court is to convict, it must find not only that Demjanjuk was involved in the extermination process but that he acted voluntarily. This is ultimately a legal question that the court alone can answer, but it turns to a historian for help. Dieter Pohl, whose boyish sandy-brown hair and eager graduate-student demeanor belie his distinguished position at Munich's Institute for Contemporary History, has written extensively on the experience of Ukrainians during the war. Pohl testifies that by the time Demjanjuk was captured in the spring of 1942, Hitler had decided that Soviets taken prisoner should not be killed or starved to death, but instead integrated into the labor force in Germany – a decision designed in part to compensate for Jewish labor lost to genocide.

Conceivably, Pohl concedes, Demjanjuk might not have known of these improved prospects at the time of his transfer to Trawniki. Nor would he have necessarily known in advance that he was to be trained as a death-camp guard. Once he arrived at Trawniki, however, the nature of his assignment would have been clear, since the facility included a small Jewish slave-labor camp that permitted recruits to practice "pacifying" Jews. And the purpose of Sobibor itself would have been immediately obvious to an arriving *Wachmann*. According to Pohl, *all* Trawniki men were mobilized when trainloads of Jews arrived: some served guard-tower duty, while the rest manned the train ramp and ran the well-

rehearsed process of destruction. In this regard, all Trawniki men facilitated the camp's sole function – the mass killing of Jews. This point is crucial: were the defense able to demonstrate that some Trawniki men worked, say, *only* as cooks, Walther and Goetze's novel theory of wrongdoing would be weakened. But Pohl's testimony strongly supports the prosecution's contention that Sobibor guards were accessories to murder because *that was their job*.

In assessing the voluntariness of Demjanjuk's service, the court focuses on one question: Was there a meaningful opportunity to flee? Peter Black, a historian at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, has estimated that of the 5,000 Trawniki men, up to one fifth – fully one thousand men – deserted. Neither he nor Pohl can peg the desertion rate at Sobibor, since its records were largely destroyed. Nonetheless, documents from other death camps suggest that of the Trawniki men who fled and were caught, only those who deserted with their weapons faced possible execution while those who left weapons behind typically suffered less draconian punishment and were reassigned as guards. Does this tell us that Demjanjuk served voluntarily? The trial will turn on the court's answer. If it ever has the opportunity to provide one.

Among observers, lawyers, and the *Nebenlager*, doubts take root and grow. The trial, expected to last five months, pushes on for well over a year. The long gaps between court dates, the frequent cancellations due to the defendant's alleged infirmities, and most of all the endless barrage of frivolous but time-consuming motions and filibustering arguments that issue from the defense threaten to derail the proceeding altogether. Busch has transformed himself into the second coming of Slobodan Milosevic, who succeeded at dragging out his trial in The Hague to literally terminal lengths. Stall and die seems to be the strategy.

However clownish Busch appears at times, his tactics have boxed Judge Alt into an awkward position. Alt must be careful

not to let himself be provoked into actions that might open the door to an appeal. He does not always succeed. When Busch pushes a witness to explain whom exactly the Trawniki men assisted at Sobibor, Alt sardonically quips, “Presumably not the Red Cross,” as laughter ripples through the gallery. And during Busch’s summary argument – a rambling, mind-numbingly repetitious diatribe that lasts an incredible *fifteen* hours – *Nebenklager* lead lawyer Nestler briefly leaves the courtroom in disgust, leading Alt to comment, “Unfortunately, the court cannot leave out of protest.” The remark, audible to all, is incautious. The trial has brought out in the mild-mannered chess aficionado a different side, prickly and sarcastic. He wants to be done with it.

#### THE END OF SOMETHING

And then, suddenly, we are there. May 12, 2011, 1:30 P.M. The three judges and two *Schoffen* file back into *Gerichtssaal* 101. After ninety-three open sessions over eighteen months, their deliberations have lasted little more than two hours – not altogether unusual for a German court, which discusses the case while the trial is ongoing. The defendant is brought before the judges in his wheelchair. He does not remove the dark glasses that have obscured his eyes for the past year and a half. Judge Alt pronounces judgment. The court finds John Demjanjuk guilty of serving as an accessory to the murder of at least 28,060 Jews at the Sobibor death camp. It condemns him to five years in prison. Then, as if in an afterthought, it releases him, pending appeal. No gavel sounds the end of the trial. The judges collect their binders and quietly exit the room.

People linger in the courtroom and the hail outside. It’s as if no one is quite prepared to bring the most convoluted and lengthy case to arise from the crimes of the Holocaust to an end. Speaking to reporters, Ulrich Busch announces his intention to lodge an

appeal. The *Nebenklager*, for their part, express satisfaction with the verdict. Their responses convey relief that the trial has finally concluded in a conviction, and melancholy that it failed to live up to the impossible expectations that burdened the proceeding.

In the hours and days to come, media coverage in Europe and America will reflect this same mix. Rabbi Marvin Hier, head of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, will call Demjanjuk’s release “an insult to his victims and the survivors,” while Deborah Lipstadt will opine, in the *New York Times*, that justice has been served – that however slowly its gears turn, turn they do. Others will speak of the “closure” the verdict represents for victims’ families, as if the success of a criminal trial might be measured by its therapeutic value. For their part, German prosecutors will eagerly announce their intention to use the fresh precedent to reopen dozens of cases against camp guards and officials even as they privately express doubt that any will go to trial.

Lost in the commentary is any recognition that in its modest, Solomonic verdict, Alt’s court has managed something no German court had since the founding of the Federal Republic. “Mass murder and complicity in mass murder’ was a charge that could and should be leveled against every single SS man who had ever done duty in any of the extermination camps”: Hannah Arendt wrote these words in the 1960s, and no German court paid heed – until now. It took until 2011 for the judicial system to digest the simple, terrible logic of the exterminatory process. That this belated understanding should coincide with the passing of the generation of the perpetrators is as ironic as it is unsurprising.

Some years ago I lived for a while in Berlin, and within a hundred yards of my apartment were three separate monuments to Nazi atrocity: a brass cobblestone memorializing a Berlin Jew deported to Auschwitz; a sculpture, called *Treblinka*, of what appeared to be a stack of waffles but was, on closer inspection, a pile

of stylized corpses; and a plaque, affixed to an attractive apartment house, informing passersby that in this lovely building thousands of innocent persons were condemned to death during the Third Reich. With such efforts of commemoration, Germany has addressed the task known as *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* – confronting the past.

A Holocaust trial confronts the past in the living form of a defendant: Demjanjuk, old man, historical relic, and persistent dissembler. Outside *Gerichtssaal* 101, many observers express a fervent wish that he had chosen to speak – not to confess, not even to apologize to the families of those who died there, but simply to acknowledge the enormity of the dreadful events in which he had participated. “My dream,” says Thomas Walther, “would be for Demjanjuk to stand up and say, ‘It was so.’” The same wish is voiced by Hardy Langer, a lawyer for the *Nebenklager*, who in his closing argument spoke straight to the defendant: “Find the strength to give us a detailed account of what you experienced,” he beseeched. “Demjanjuk, use this last chance to break your silence!”

But Demjanjuk has stubbornly demurred. Throughout his trial, the defendant presented himself as an inert mass – “Ivan the Recumbent,” journalists dubbed him, “Ivan the Corpse.” Several days after his release pending appeal, Demjanjuk is photographed strolling the grounds of a Bavarian nursing home, no wheelchair in sight, but his silence remains implacable. His only direct statement came early in the proceeding, when he irritably snapped at a film crew outside the court, “What’s up? I’m not Hitler.” At trial’s end, asked by his judges whether he desired to make a final statement, Demjanjuk muttered a single word to his Ukrainian interpreter: *Ne*.

*Ne*. As Shakespeare understood, silence is the criminal’s last retort, his dying blow against the righteous. *What you know, you*

*know: From this time forth I never will speak word.* Now history shuts the door, and that last chance vanishes. It was never Demjanjuk’s chance, anyway, but ours, and it will not be answered. The last trial closes, an end without an ending. ♦

## The Sloth

by *Adam Marek*

We were all in love with this thing – me, Gabi and Sol. Something about its creaky movements and its accidental smile was so endearing. To us this happy little sucker was as glad of our attentions as we were to give them.

Yes, it was kind of gross too, this sloth. It was the rainy season. Algae had blossomed on its thick fur in such quantities that our hands were covered in the stuff. The animal was lighter than you would imagine and weak for its size. It put up little resistance as we strapped on the harness, driving several dozen moths from its shaggy recesses. These pale insects stumbled drunkenly over our mosquito bites.

‘I found a sloth skeleton once,’ Sol said. ‘It was still hanging in the tree. It must have died up there, with its wrists locked around the branch, and just hung about while its bones were picked clean.’ One of the moths was so thirsty for the sweat on Sol’s cheek that it did not flee when he wiped his hand across his face, disintegrating the insect across the dark field of his stubble.

‘This is the first I’ve ever seen,’ Gabi said. The sloth’s grin was infectious, and Gabi couldn’t stop staring at its face and giggling. The creature had its long arms around her neck, its shag-pile belly staining her shirt green. She held it close to her body while I clipped the monitor strap around its neck.

‘It’s my first, too,’ I said. ‘It smells funky.’ Gabi bent her head closer to its neck and took a sniff.

‘It just smells like the forest,’ she said. And I guess that was it exactly. This dopey tree-hugger was a living manifestation of the rainforest, of the thick mulch on which we had been walking for days, of toadstools and rancid smelling orchids, gibbons and cicadas – the whole sweaty playground.

The first blast of helium that Sol pumped into the balloon startled a thousand things. Brittle feet scratched across table-top leaves, paws thumped an erratic heartbeat across the forest floor. High above, in the Sol turned the release valve again, huffing life into the great white lung.

‘Are you using the biggest one?’ I asked.

‘This thing’s much lighter than it looks,’ I said, stroking the top of the sloth’s head. ‘We don’t want it to go too fast.’ The sloth was now exploring Gabi’s neck with its short snout, and she was giggling.

‘The next size down is a forty-litre,’ Sol said. ‘It won’t be big enough. I’ll just fill this one about eighty percent.’

The balloon was now taller than Sol. He held its narrow throat in one hand and, even with his arm fully extended, the side of it pushed against his face.

‘Let me help with that,’ I said. I took the balloon from him and he turned the helium canister valve to slow the inflation, watching the pressure needle climb.

‘You’re bleeding again.’ I pointed at the bandage wrapped around Sol’s hand. Two days ago a tamarin we had been working on had bitten him, its little teeth puncturing the soft flesh between thumb and forefinger. The bandage was bunched up in this valley and bright with fresh blood.

‘I’ve changed it twice already,’ he said. ‘Damn thing won’t stop.’

‘Maybe we should go back to camp today instead,’ Gabi said. ‘You might need that thumb in the future.’

Sol shook his head.

Gabi took the sloth's arms from around her neck and sat the thing in her lap. It seemed quite happy to be there.

canopy, a hornbill quitted its perch, the terrific swooshing of its wings prehistoric. But the sloth showed none of this alarm, only swaying slightly in Gabi's arms.

'There, there, little one,' she whispered. 'It's okay.'

'Uhhuh.'

'Done,' Sol said.

I held the throat of the balloon while Sol closed it off with a steel clamp and then screwed in the threaded end of the wire. Fresh raindrops pattered on the balloon's surface.

'You sure this is inflated enough?' Sol asked.

'It's lighter than you'd think,' I said.

From the case in my bag I unpacked one of the explosive bolts and, after blowing moss and dirt out of the screw hole on the harness, twisted it into place. Gabi brushed a moth from the back of my hand, and I gave her a covert wink.

Sol hooked the karabiner at the end of the balloon wire to the loop of the explosive bolt and gave it a gentle tug. Gabi and I tested all the buckles of the harness, making sure they were secure, and that the sloth's fur was not caught anywhere.

Sol released the balloon and I pinched the wire between my fingers, slowly releasing it so the sloth didn't experience a sudden jolt. Gabi and I held the sloth together, our fingers meeting here and there, concealed in amongst the thick green fleece. Sol was not watching but unpacking the laptop.

'You're gonna have to let it go at some point,' he said.

'Ready?' I said. Gabi nodded.

Gently, we allowed the lift of the balloon to take the weight of the sloth, which looked like a baby in a bouncer, still grinning, its legs dangling. Gabi maintained a cautious grip on one foot as it

rose, and then let it slip from her grasp. The sloth reached up with one arm and hooked its claws around the wire. We watched it ascend all the way through the understorey, our open mouths catching raindrops. The sloth did not wiggle or thrash about the way most things do but acquiesced to the demands of the balloon, following the vines up into the canopy, until it was just a green dot beneath the balloon, a pupil in the great eye gazing back at us. Here the canopy was sparse, great holes rent into it by illegal loggers, but these gaps allowed the balloon an easy passage that would be impossible in the pristine areas

'It's all coming through,' Sol said. 'The speed is just right. The data is spot on.,

'Straight as an arrow,' Gabi said, gazing skywards.

The keys of our laptop were sticky with the juice of citrus fruits, the screen a maze of fingerprints where we had pointed things out to each other on previous lifts. Direct feeds from the monitors poured in, a line of seven digit numbers from the altimeter cascading down the screen at a rate of ten data points per second. In a separate window, the monitor around the sloth's neck relayed the creature's heart rate and blood pressure, which were translated here into green waves on a graph.

'Cool as a cucumber,' Sol said. 'I think our little friend is going to be the highest yet.'

All around us fatter raindrops hit leaves. Gabi wiped the back of her neck.

'Do you want your poncho?' I asked.

'I'm fine,' she said.

Sol did not break his gaze from the laptop screen but turned his head towards me a little.

'Well, he's joined the mile-high club now,' I said.

'Do you think it was a he?' Gabi asked. 'I thought it was a girl.'

'It was a male,' Sol said.

‘Did you see his little sloth balls?’ I said.

Sol reached round to touch the middle of his back. ‘The patch between its shoulder blades,’ he said.

‘He’s really going for it,’ I said. ‘He’ll be a record-breaker in a second or two ... there!’

We all cheered, clapping our hands above our heads. I rubbed the palm of my hand on Gabi’s back. She reached her hand out to squeeze my arm but her timing was off and there was an untidy collision of limbs as I retrieved my arm.

‘How high do you think he’ll go?’ I said.

‘We’re going to have a hell of a hike to find him afterwards,’ Gabi said.

‘Seriously?’ Sol said, looking round at her.

‘What?’ She said. ‘You weren’t thinking about leaving him?’

‘Well, not until it went this high. It’s still going. It could easily drift into the valley now, get caught up in a tree.’

‘This little feller could be the one that unlocks everything,’ I said, swooping my hand up in a steeply accelerating curve, fingertips for nose cone, folded thumb for wing. ‘We owe it to him.’

‘It’s already two-thirty,’ Sol said. ‘We’re unlikely to find it now before nightfall.’

‘We weren’t going back to camp tonight anyway,’ I said.

‘But it could take us way off course. I’m not going into one of the dodgy areas for the sake of one sloth.’

‘We’re going to get him,’ Gabi said. ‘And that’s that.’

‘That’s that, is it?’ Sol laughed.

‘Come on, don’t be like that,’ I said.

On the screen the data was still flooding in.

‘I hope the monitor’s not screwed,’ Sol said. ‘It’s over twenty-one hundred now.’

‘No, the readings are good,’ I said. ‘You wait, any moment now he’s going to go.’

We all stared at the screen, the raindrops beating a faster, heavier rhythm now against our backs. Sol pulled his poncho from his backpack and made a canopy for the laptop.

‘It’s too high,’ he said.

‘Give it a moment longer.’

‘Come on little one,’ Gabi said. She showed me that her fingers were crossed and I gave her an appreciative smile.

And then suddenly the sloth’s blood pressure rocketed, and the characteristic spike and sudden drop off indicated that it had reached its ascension threshold and been rendered unconscious.

‘There!’ I said. ‘You beauty!’ I punched Sol on the arm.

The sloth was so high that the sharp crack of the bolt exploding, jettisoning the balloon, was inaudible this time. So, too, the snap and whoosh of the parachute deploying. We all stared up into the bruising sky, our hands shielding our eyes against the rain, looking for the bright orange segment of the parachute, but even after two minutes it didn’t appear.

‘It’s gone way off,’ Sol said.

Gabi lifted the GPS tracker on her belt and thumbed the rubber power button. I began to pack our things. Sol clapped the laptop shut and stuffed it into his pack.

‘He’s still drifting,’ Gabi said. ‘But it’s not more than a couple of miles.’

‘Yes, but a couple of miles here?’ Sol said.

‘Honey,’ Gabi said, putting both her hands on his shoulders. ‘We really have to. Please?’

Sol held her gaze for a moment, then, rolling his eyes, said, ‘Fine. But if we hear even the faintest hum of a chainsaw or smell a whiff of smoke, we’re turning around. Deal?’

‘Deal,’ she said, smiling, then closed her arms around his neck and kissed him on the mouth. She made a noise of disgust and released him. ‘You’re dripping,’ she said. ‘Are you feeling okay?’

'I'm allowed to sweat in the jungle.'

It was my turn to carry the heavy pack – the one that held the helium canister. I passed it to Sol and he lifted it so I could loop my arms through the straps.

'Which direction?' I said.

The GPS co-ordinates settled, indicating that the sloth had touched down 3.2 miles away. Gabi wiped raindrops from the backlit screen. We were one green dot, and the sloth another, just a few centimetres apart.

Across this space we progressed a pixel at a time, Sol in the lead, slashing leaves with a machete and throwing sticks through vast webs. We had to climb across fallen trees, leap over processions of army ants and, at one point, wade through a slow-moving river that was so deep we had to hold our packs above our heads while rain splashed up into our faces. When we got to the other side we undid our belts and stripped down to our underwear to check for leeches. I risked a glimpse at Gabi's wet legs, and when she snapped the elastic of her knickers back against her skin, I felt it as a pulse inside my belly.

The sky gradually turned flame orange. Sol stopped and turned around.

'We should set up camp,' he said. He was panting. For the last hour his pace had been slowing.

'You look like crap,' I said.

Gabi put her palm to his forehead.

'You're freezing,' she said.

'Just stop it,' he said. 'This looks like a good place to rest.'

'But we can't leave the sloth in the harness all night,' Gabi said.

'We're never going to reach it before dark,' Sol said.

'How much further is it?' I asked.

'Just over a mile,' Gabi said.

'That's another couple of hours!' Sol said, wrinkling his face in pain.

'We can make that,' Gabi said.

'Look,' I said. 'Sol, you're wasted. You rest here, start setting up the camp. Gabi and I can hot-foot it and be there and back in no time.'

Gabi nodded, her hands on her hips.

'No way,' Sol said, shaking his head. 'We're not splitting up. It's much further than you think, and we're getting way too close to Etuya. We'll rest now, and then head out at dawn. The weather's setting in too.'

Gabi covered the sides of her face with her hands and looked at me. I chewed my lip.

'I think Gabi and I should go,' I said. 'We can stay in radio contact. And if the rain gets bad and we can't make it back, we can always set up camp and meet you back here in the morning.'

Sol glared at me.

'Fine,' he said, picking up his pack. 'We'll all go.'

'You're not well,' I said. 'You need to rest. And to be honest, mate, you'll only slow us down.'

Sol looked at Gabi.

'We're not splitting up,' he said.

She stroked his arm, and said to me, 'Why don't you take Sol's pack, and we can leave the big pack here, then come back for it in the morning?'

'Sure,' I said.

'Fine,' Sol said, throwing his pack at my chest and wiping his face with his sleeve.

We were less than half a mile from the sloth when Sol tripped over a root and fell for the third time.



‘You should have stayed,’ I said.

‘It’s too dark to see a damn thing,’ Sol said.

‘What do you reckon?’ I asked Gabi.

She sighed and tucked the hair that had spilled from her ponytail behind her ear.

‘We’ll have to stop.’

At night we all slept in one tent alongside each other, Sol, then Gabi, then me. Sol grumbled in his sleep. I lay on my side, facing Gabi. Often, the soft patter of raindrops on the tarpaulin above my head was accompanied by the percussion of larger things striking the surface. Mostly these Sounds were small and sharp, the clear tap of a beetle’s back. Sometimes the thump was heavier, a sound that made me visualise hairy abdomens and a multitude of legs. The silence that followed these heavier thumps was worse than the thumps themselves.

I moved my hand with excruciating slowness out of my sleeping bag, listening all the while for a break in Sol’s sleep noises. Reaching across, I placed the back of my hand against the side of Gabi’s sleeping bag. I was hungry for her solidity and, finding it, was comforted.

My hand had been there, curled against her side, for no more than a minute when I felt her fingertips in my palm, spreading my fingers wide, laying her hand down flat upon mine, locking together at the knuckles, and squeezing.

Gabi got us up and moving while the sky was still a dark slate. We ate on the way, swallowing down cereal bars with warm water from our flasks. Sol could eat nothing but painkillers, but Gabi would allow him no rest.

‘The sloth’s been out there tangled up all night,’ she said. ‘He’ll be starving.’

Gabi took the lead, and the machete, setting a relentless pace that Sol struggled to maintain. After an hour or so, she spotted

the bright orange nylon of the parachute and broke into a run. I kept with her, leaving Sol in our wake. And it was together that we burst into the little clearing, scaring the thing away, whatever it was – a jaguar, I think, from the brief flash of its hind quarters and tail that we saw as it leapt Out from beneath the chute and disappeared into the forest.

Here we stopped.

Gabi uttered a small sound of remorse. In those seconds that we were alone, I put my arms around her, turned her towards me and squeezed her tight against my chest. I peered down at her face. There were no tears, but redness and anger.

‘We should have come last night,’ she said. ‘We shouldn’t have stopped.’

This is how Sol came upon us, pressed close together, behind us the bloodied parachute. He hung his head and, in squatting down, lost his balance and fell onto his knees. ♦

## Side by...

### Notes From a Small Island

by *Bill Bryson*

MY FIRST SIGHT OF ENGLAND was on a foggy March night in 1973 when I arrived on the midnight ferry from Calais. For twenty minutes, the terminal area was aswarm with activity as cars and lorries poured forth, customs people did their duties, and everyone made for the London road. Then abruptly all was silence and I wandered through sleeping, low-lit streets threaded with fog, just like in a Bulldog Drummond movie. It was rather wonderful having an English town all to myself.

The only mildly dismaying thing was that all the hotels and guesthouses appeared to be shut up for the night. I walked as far as the rail station, thinking I'd catch a train to London, but the station, too, was dark and shuttered. I was standing wondering what to do when I noticed a grey light of television filling an upstairs window of a guesthouse across the road. Hooray, I thought, someone awake, and hastened across, planning humble apologies to the kindly owner for the lateness of my arrival and imagining a cheery conversation which included the line, 'Oh, but I couldn't possibly ask you to feed me at this hour. No, honestly – well, if you're *quite* sure it's no trouble, then perhaps just a roast beef sandwich and a large dill pickle with perhaps some potato salad and a bottle of beer.' The front path was pitch dark and in my eagerness and unfamiliarity with British doorways, I tripped on a step, crashing face-first into the door and sending half a dozen empty milk bottles clattering. Almost immediately the upstairs

## ...by side

### Egy amerikai Doverben

fordította *Tárnok Attila*

1973 MÁRCIUSÁBAN EGY KÖDÖS ESTÉN pillantottam meg először Angliát; az éjféle komppal érkeztem Calais-ből. A kikötő húsz percig gépkocsiktól, teherautóktól nyüzsgött, a vámosok tették a dolgukat és minden utazó London felé vette az irányt. Aztán hirtelen minden elcsendesült és én úgy róttam az álmos, ködbe burkolózó, rosszul megvilágított utcákat, mintha egy Bulldog Drummond-filmben szerepelnék. Kellemes érzéssel töltött el, hogy felfedezhetek egy angol kisvárost.

Az egyetlen elkedvetlenítő körülmény az volt csupán, hogy a hotelek és a panziók már bezártak éjszakára. Egészen a vasútállomásig gyalogoltam, hátha találok még egy Londonba induló vonatot, de az állomás redőnyeit is lehúzták már. Miközben azon tűnődtem, mitévő legyek, az utca túloldalán, egy panzió emeleti ablakában televízió szürkés-kék fényét pillantottam meg. Éljen, gondoltam, valaki ébren van. Jókedvemben lejátszottam magamban, milyen kifejezésekkel mentegetőzőm majd a késői zavarásért és elképzeltem a kedves háziúr szívélyes fogadtatását. „Igazán sajnálom, de nem várhatom el Öntől, hogy étellel szolgáljon ilyen késői órán” – véltem mondani. „Nos, ha csakugyan nem gond, akkor esetleg egy darab hideg marhasült kenyérral, uborkával vagy krumplisalátával, legfeljebb egy üveg sör bőven megteszi.” A bejárat előtt koromsötét volt. Igyekeztemben és mert nem ismertem még a brit bejáratok kialakítását, megbotlottam egy lépcsőfokban, arccal az ajtónak estem és felborítottam néhány üres tejesüveget. A zajra azonnal kinyílt az emeleti ablak.

window opened.

‘Who’s that?’ came a sharp voice.

I stepped back, rubbing my nose, and peered up at a silhouette with hair curlers. ‘Hello, I’m looking for a room,’ I said.

‘We’re shut.’

‘Oh.’ But what about my supper?

‘Try the Churchill. On the front.’

‘On the front of what?’ I asked, but the window was already banging closed.

The Churchill was sumptuous and well lit and appeared ready to receive visitors. Through a window I could see people in suits in a bar, looking elegant and suave, like characters from a Noel Coward play. I hesitated in the shadows, feeling like a street urchin. I was socially and sartorially ill-suited for such an establishment and anyway it was clearly beyond my meagre budget. Only the previous day, I had handed over an exceptionally plump wad of colourful francs to a beady-eyed Picardy hotelier in payment for one night in a lumpy bed and a plate of mysterious *chasseur* containing the bones of assorted small animals, much of which had to be secreted away in a large napkin in order not to appear impolite, and had determined thenceforth to be more cautious with expenditures. So I turned reluctantly from the Churchill’s beckoning warmth and trudged off into the darkness.

Further along Marine Parade stood a shelter, open to the elements but roofed, and I decided that this was as good as I was going to get. With my backpack for a pillow, I lay down and drew my jacket tight around me. The bench was slatted and hard and studded with big roundheaded bolts that made reclining in comfort an impossibility – doubtless their intention. I lay for a long time listening to the sea washing over the shingle below, and eventually dropped off to a long, cold night of mumbled dreams in which I found myself being pursued over Arctic ice floes by a

– Van ott valaki? – kérdezte egy éles hang.

Megdörzsöltem az orromat, hátraléptem és felkiáltottam a hajcsavarók keretezte sziluett felé: – Jó estét. Szobát szeretnék kivenni.

– Zárva vagyunk.

– Értem – feleltem, de mi lesz a vacsorámmal?

– Próbálja meg a Churchill-fogadót. Az elején.

– Minek az elején? – kérdeztem, de az ablakot nagy robajjal becsapták.

A Churchill jól megvilágított, pazar szállodának tűnt, és látszólag fogadott még vendégeket. Az ablakon bepillantva elegáns, öltönyös úriembereket láttam egy bárban, úgy néztek ki, mintha egy Noel Coward-darabból léptek volna elő. Megálltam a félhomályban és úgy éreztem magam, mint egy utcagyerek. Társadalmilag és szabászatilag alulmaradtam egy ilyen intézménnyel szemben, s a szállásdíj nyilvánvalóan meghaladta volna szűkös kereteimet. Éppen előző nap nyújtottam át egy tekintélyes összeget kigúvadt szemű, picardiai szállásadómnak hepehupás ágyam és egy tál titokzatos, beazonosíthatatlan apró állatok csontjaiban bővelkedő *chasseur* fejében, amely étel jó részét szalvétámban kimentettem, nehogy udvariatlannak tűnjek, és elhatároztam, hogy mostantól óvatosabb leszek a költekezéssel. Így vonakodva ugyan, de lemondtam a Churchill-fogadó hívogató melegségéről, és odébb vánszorogtam a sötétben.

Nem messze, a tengerparti sétányon találtam egy minden oldalról nyitott, de fedett pihenőhelyet. Úgy éreztem, ennél jobbra ma nem számíthatok. A fejem alá tettem a hátizsákomat és kabátomba burkolózva végignyúltam a padon. A pad kemény léceit összefogó, óriási kiálló csavarok miatt lehetetlen volt kényelmesen pihenni, a csavarfejek talán épp az elrettentést szolgálták. Sokáig feküdtem így, hallgattam, ahogy a tenger lent a parton a kavicsokat mossa, és végül hűvös, lidérces látomásoktól szabdalt álomba zuhantam, amelyben gúvadt szemű franciák üldöznek parittyával és

beady-eyed Frenchman with a catapult, a bag of bolts, and an uncanny aim, who thwacked me repeatedly in the buttocks and legs for stealing a linen napkin full of seepy food and leaving it at the back of a dresser drawer of my hotel room. I awoke with a gasp about three, stiff all over and quivering from cold. The fog had gone. The air was now still and clear, and the sky was bright with stars. A beacon from the lighthouse at the far end of the breakwater swept endlessly over the sea. It was all most fetching, but I was far too cold to appreciate it. I dug shiveringly through my backpack and extracted every potentially warming item I could find – a flannel shirt, two sweaters, an extra pair of jeans. I used some woollen socks as mittens and put a pair of flannel boxer shorts on my head as a kind of desperate headwarmer, then sank heavily back onto the bench and waited patiently for death's sweet kiss. Instead, I fell asleep.

I was awakened again by an abrupt bellow of foghorn, which nearly knocked me from my narrow perch, and sat up feeling wretched but fractionally less cold. The world was bathed in that milky pre-dawn light that seems to come from nowhere. Gulls wheeled and cried over the water. Beyond them, past the stone breakwater, a ferry, vast and well lit, slid regally out to sea. I sat there for some time, a young man with more on his mind than in it. Another booming moan from the ship's foghorn passed over the water, re-exciting the irksome gulls. I took off my sock mittens and looked at my watch. It was 5.55 a.m. I looked at the receding ferry and wondered where anybody would be going at that hour. Where would I go at that hour? I picked up my backpack and shuffled off down the prom, to get some circulation going.

Near the Churchill, now itself peacefully sleeping, I came across an old guy walking a little dog. The dog was frantically trying to pee on every vertical surface and in consequence wasn't so much walking as being dragged along on three legs.

csavarfejekkel a kezükben az Északi-sark jégtáblái közt; hátborzongató pontossággal találnak fenékbe vagy lábon, büntetésül, amiért a szobámban, a fiók hátuljában egy lopott asztalkendőben szivárgó ételmaradékot hagytam magam után. Három körül zihálva, a hidegtől elgémberedve és dideregve ébredtem. A köd felszállt. A levegő tiszta volt és mozdulatlan, az ég csillagoktól fényes. A világítótorony a hullámtörő gáton túlról jeleket küldött a végtelenbe. Mindez magával ragadó volt, de túlságosan átfagytam ahhoz, hogy értékelni tudjam. Reszketve kutattam át a hátizsákom és minden lehetséges, meleget nyújtó ruhaneműt magamra vettem: egy flanelinget, két pulóvert, még egy farmert. A gyapjúzoknimat kesztyűnek használtam, a flanel alsónadrágot pedig a fejemre húztam kétségbeesésemben, és nehézkesen visszaereszkedtem a padra. Türelmesen vártam a halál édes csókját, de ehelyett újra elaludtam.

A ködkürt éles üvöltése ébresztett, majdnem lefordultam az ágnyi keskeny padról, és nyomorultságom tudatában, bár némileg kevésbé fagyoskodva felültem. A világ látszólag a semmiből érkező, tejszerű, pirkadat előtti halvány fényben fürdött. Sirályok vitorláztak és kiáltoztak a víz fölött. Mögöttük és a hullámtörő sziklákon túl egy óriási, jól megvilágított komp araszolt ki a tengerre. Jó ideig ültem így: kavargó gondolataim kusza sodrában. A sirályokat felizgató hajókürt moraja újra végiggördült a vízen. Lehúztam kezemről a gyapjúzoknit és az órára néztem. 5 óra 55 perc. A távolodó kompot bámultam és azon tűnődtem, mi dolga lehet bárkinek a vízen ilyen korán. Hova mehetnék *én* ilyen korán? Felvettem a hátizsákomat és lecsoszogtam a sétányra, hogy megmozgassam a tagjaimat.

A Churchilltől – most ott is mindenki aludt – nem messze egy idős férfivel találkoztam, apró kutyáját sétáltatta. A kutya fáradhatatlanul igyekezett minden függőleges felületet lepisilni, ennek következtében nem annyira sétáltatták, mint inkább három lábon rángatták.

The man nodded a good-morning as I drew level. ‘Might turn out nice,’ he announced, gazing hopefully at a sky that looked like a pile of wet towels. I asked him if there was a restaurant anywhere that might be open. He knew of a place not far away and directed me to it. ‘Best transport caff in Kent,’ he said.

‘Transport calf?’ I repeated uncertainly, and retreated a couple of paces as I’d noticed his dog was straining desperately to moisten my leg.

‘Very popular with the lorry drivers. They always know the best places, don’t they?’ He smiled amiably, then lowered his voice a fraction and leaned towards me as if about to share a confidence. ‘You might want to take them pants off your head before you go in.’

I clutched my head – ‘Oh!’ – and removed the forgotten boxer shorts with a blush. I tried to think of a succinct explanation, but the man was scanning the sky again.

‘Definitely brightening up,’ he decided, and dragged his dog off in search of new uprights. I watched them go, then turned and walked off down the promenade as it began to spit with rain.

The café was outstanding – lively and steamy and deliciously warm. I had a platter of eggs, beans, fried bread, bacon and sausage, with a side plate of bread and marge, and two cups of tea, all for 22p. Afterwards, feeling a new man, I emerged with a toothpick and a burp, and sauntered happily through the streets, watching Dover come to life. It must be said that Dover was not vastly improved by daylight, but I liked it. I liked its small scale and cosy air, and the way everyone said ‘Good-morning,’ and ‘Hello,’ and ‘Dreadful weather – but it might brighten up,’ to everyone else, and the sense that this was just one more in a very long series of fundamentally cheerful, well-ordered, pleasantly uneventful days. No-one in the whole of Dover would have any particular reason to remember 21 March 1973, except for me and

A férfi üdvözlésként felém bólintott, amikor egymás mellé értünk.

– Talán szép idő lesz ma – mondta és reménytelen az égre tekintett. A felhők úgy csüngtek alá, mint egy rakás vizes törülköző. Megkérdeztem, van-e valahol étterem, ahol már kinyitottak. Ismert a közelben egy helyet, útba igazított.

– A legjobb transzport kaff Kentben – jelentette ki.

– Transzport kauf? – ismétetem utána bizonytalanul és odébb húzódtam, mert láttam, hogy a kutya kétségbeesve igyekszik benedvesíteni a lábam.

– Nagyon népszerű a kamionsofőrök körében. Ezek mindig rátalálnak a legjobb helyekre, nemde? – Barátságosan rám mosolygott, aztán némileg lehalkítva a hangját és közelebb hajolva, mintha valami titkot szeretne megosztani velem, annyit mondott: – Esetleg levehetné az alsónadrágot a fejről, mielőtt benyit.

A fejemhez kaptam és elvörösödve tettem el a flanel alsót. Próbáltam valami racionális magyarázatot nyújtani, de a férfi már újra az eget kémlelte.

– Egyértelműen tisztul – jegyezte meg és odébb ráncigálta a kutyáját, további függőleges felületek reményében. Miután magamra maradtam, a tengerparti sétány felé vettem az irányt. Csapkodó eső kezdett esni.

Az élénk hangulatú kávézóban kellemes, párás meleg fogadott. Szalonнас tojást, sült kolbászt, babot, bundás kenyeret és két csésze teát fogyasztottam, mindösszesen 22 pennyért. Új embernek éreztem magam. Fogpiszkálóval a számban, aprókat böffentve kószáltam az ébredő Dover utcáin. El kell mondanom, hogy Dover reggel sem mutatott jelentős előrelépést az előző éjszakai bemutatkozáshoz képest, mégis tetszett. Tetszett családi jellege, ahogy az emberek üdvözölték egymást, és ahogy mindenki megállapította, hogy pocsék idő van, de talán tisztul, és éreztem, hogy ez a nap csupán egy a hosszú, eseménytelen, de alapjában véve kedélyes és rendezett napok sorában. Senkinek nincs oka ma

a handful of children born that day and possibly one old guy with a dog who had encountered a young fellow with underpants on his head.

I didn't know how early one could decently begin asking for a room in England, so I thought I would leave it till mid-morning. With time on my hands, I made a thorough search for a guesthouse that looked attractive and quiet, but friendly and not too expensive, and at the stroke of ten o'clock presented myself on the doorstep of the one I had carefully selected, taking care not to discompose the milk bottles. It was a small hotel that was really a guesthouse, indeed was really a boardinghouse.

I don't remember its name, but I well recall the proprietress, a formidable creature of late middle years called Mrs Smegma, who showed me to a room, then gave me a tour of the facilities and outlined the many complicated rules for residing there – when breakfast was served, how to turn on the heater for the bath, which hours of the day I would have to vacate the premises and during which brief period a bath was permitted (these seemed, oddly, to coincide), how much notice I should give if I intended to receive a phone call or remain out after 10 p.m., how to flush the loo and use the loo brush, which materials were permitted in the bedroom wastebasket and which had to be carefully conveyed to the outside dustbin, where and how to wipe my feet at each point of entry, how to operate the three-bar fire in my bedroom and when that would be permitted (essentially, during an Ice Age). This was all bewilderingly new to me. Where I came from, you got a room in a motel, spent ten hours making a lavish and possibly irredeemable mess of it, and left early the next morning. This was like joining the Army.

'The minimum stay,' Mrs Smegma went on, 'is five nights at one pound a night, including full English breakfast.'

'Five nights?' I said in a small gasp. I'd only intended to stay

már, hogy emlékezzen az 1973. március 21-i Doverre; rajtam kívül talán csak azoknak, akik aznap születtek és esetleg egy kutyát sétáltató öregúrnak, aki találkozott egy alsónadrágját a fején viselő fiatalemberrel.

Nem tudtam, nem udvariatlan-e túl korán reggel kiadó szobát keresni Angliában, ezért úgy döntöttem, későbbre halasztom a keresgélést. A következő néhány órában alaposan körülnéztem: megnyerő, csendes, barátságos, de olcsó szállást kerestem, és pontban tízkor kopogtattam a gondosan megválasztott ajtón, vigyázva rá, fel ne borítsam a tejesüvegeket. A *Hotel* felirat, úgy tűnt, panziót takar, de a valóságban állandó lakókkal bírt.

A 'hotel' nevére nem, csak a tekintélyes termetű, középkorú szállásadó nevére emlékszem: Mrs. Smegma megmutatta a szobámat és a mellékhelyiségeket, majd elsorolta az összes komplikált szabályt, amelyet szem előtt kell tartanom. Mikor van reggeli; hogy kell melegvizet nyerni a fürdéshez; mikor kell elhagyni az épületet – rejtélyes módon ez az időszak egybeesett a fürdési idővel –; az eseményt mennyi idővel megelőzően kell bejelentenem, ha telefonhívást várok vagy ha este tíz után szándékozom hazaérkezni; miképpen kell wc-t öblíteni és hogy használjam a wc-kefét; milyen típusú szemét engedélyezett a szobai szemetesben és mely típusúakat kell óvatosan a külső tárolóban elhelyeznem; hol és hogyan kell érkezéskor lábat törölni; hogy kell bekapcsolni a szobai radiátort és mikor üzemeltethető – lényegében kizárólag a jégkorszak idején. Mindez számomra őrjítően új volt. Ahonnan én származom, az ember kivesz egy motelszobát, tíz órát arra szán, hogy pazar és lehetőleg helyreállíthatatlan rendetlenséget teremtsen benne, majd másnap kijelentkezik. Ez itt olyan volt számomra, mintha a hadseregbe léptem volna be.

– Öt éjszaka a minimum tartózkodási idő – folytatta Mrs. Smegma. – Egy font egy éjszaka, és ez tartalmazza a bőséges angol reggelit.

– Öt éjszaka? – kapkodtam a levegőt. Egyetlen éjszakára

the one. What on earth was I going to do with myself in Dover for five days?

Mrs Smegma arched an eyebrow. 'Were you hoping to stay longer?'

'No,' I said. 'No. As a matter of – ,

'Good, because we have a party of Scottish pensioners coming for the weekend and it would have been awkward. Actually, quite impossible.' She surveyed me critically, as she might a carpet stain, and considered if there was anything else she could do to make my life wretched. There was. 'I'm going out shortly, so may I ask that you vacate your room within quarter of an hour?'

I was confused again. 'I'm sorry, you want me to leave? I've just got here.'

'As per the house rules. You may return at four.' She made to depart but then turned back. 'Oh, and do be so good, would you, as to remove your counterpane each night. We've had some unfortunate occurrences with stains. If you do damage the counterpane, I will have to charge you. You do understand, of course?'

I nodded dumbly. And with that she was gone. I stood there, feeling lost and weary and far from home. I'd spent an hysterically uncomfortable night out of doors. My muscles ached, I was dented all over from sleeping on boltheads, and my skin was lightly oiled with the dirt and grit of two nations. I had sustained myself to this point with the thought that soon I would be immersed in a hot, soothing bath, followed by about fourteen hours of deep, peaceful, wallowing sleep, on plump pillows under a downy comforter.

As I stood there absorbing the realization that my nightmare, far from drawing to a close, was only just beginning, the door opened and Mrs Smegma was striding across the room to the strip light above the sink. She had shown me the correct method for turning it on – 'There's no need to yank it. A gentle tug is suf-

akartam maradni. Mi a fenét fogok kezdeni magammal Doverben öt napig?

Mrs. Smegma felhúzta a szemöldökét: – Hosszabban szeretne maradni?

– Nem – mondtam. – Ami azt illeti...

– Akkor jó, mert a hétvégére skót nyugdíjasokat várunk, és nehézkes lenne őket elhelyezni, ha Ön is marad. Sőt, nagyjából lehetetlen.

Úgy vizsgálgatott, mint egy foltot a szőnyegen, és mintha azon tanakodna, akad-e még valami, amivel ellehetetleníthet. Akadt.

– Elmegyek itthonról, így, ha kérhetem, negyedórán belül hagyja el a szobát.

Zavarban voltam. – Elnézést, azt szeretné, hogy távozzam? Hiszen csak most érkeztem.

– A hárszabály értelmében négykor visszatérhet.

Indulni készült, aztán még visszafordult. – Oh, és ha lenne olyan kedves, vegye le a mokettet esténként. Sajnálatos módon, néha akadnak, akik lepecsételik. Gondolom, megérti, ha a mokett beszennyeződik, ki kell fizetnie.

Bambán bólogattam. Ezzel távozott. Elveszette és fáradtan ácsorogtam egy ideig, távol éreztem magam az otthonomtól. Az előző éjszakát tűrőképességemmel határos kényelmetlenségben töltöttem. Fájtak az izmaid, a csavarfejek nyomai kitapinthatóak voltak a testemen, és a bőröm két nemzet porától és ételeitől volt zsíros. Eddig a pillanatig kitartottam, abban a reményben, hogy hamarosan elmerülök egy fürdőkád forró vizében, aztán tizennégy órát hentergek békésen, pihe párnán, paplan alatt.

Ahogy ott álltam és próbáltam felfogni a valóságot, hogy a lidércsorozat nemhogy a végéhez közeledne, épp ellenkezőleg: csak most kezdődik, kinyílt az ajtó és Mrs. Smegma csattogott át a szobán a mosdó feletti fénycső felé. Korábban megmutatta, hogy kell bekapcsolni (nem kell rángatni, egy óvatos húzás éppen elég). Nyilvánvalóan eszébe jutott, hogy égve maradt. Egy határozott – a

ficient' – and evidently remembered that she had left it burning. She turned it off now with what seemed to me a sharp yank, then gave me and the room a final suspicious once-over, and departed again.

When I was sure she was quite gone, I quietly locked the door, drew shut the curtains and had a pee in the sink. I dug a book from my backpack, then stood for a long minute by the door surveying the tidy, unfamiliar contents of my lonely room.

'And just what the flick is a counterpane?' I wondered in a small, unhappy voice and quietly took my leave.

What a different place Britain was in the spring of 1973. The pound was worth \$2.46. Average weekly take-home pay was £30.11. A packet of crisps was 5p, a soft drink 8p, lipstick 45p, chocolate biscuits 12p, an iron £4.50, an electric kettle £7, a black-and-white TV £60, a colour TV £300, a radio £16, the average meal out £1. A scheduled airline ticket from New York to London cost £87.45 in winter, £124.95 in summer. You could have eight days in Tenerife on a Cook's Golden Wings Holiday for £65 or fifteen days from £93. I know all this because before this trip I looked up the issue of *The Times* for 20 March 1973, the day I arrived in Dover, and it contained a full-page advertisement from the Government outlining how much most of these things cost and how they would be affected by a zippy new tax called VAT, which was to be introduced a week or so later. The gist of the advert was that while some things would go up in price with VAT, some things would also go down. (Ha!) I also recollect from my own dwindling cerebral resources that it cost 4p to send a postcard to America by air, 13p for a pint of beer, and 30p for the first Penguin book I ever bought (*Billy Liar*). Decimalization had just passed its second anniversary, but people were still converting in their heads – 'Good lord, that's nearly six shillings!' – and you had to know that a sixpence was really worth 2 1/2 and

szememben legalábbis így tűnt – rántással kikapcsolta, gyanakodva még egyszer végigmért, majd elhagyta a szobát.

Mikor meggyőződtem róla, hogy végleg távozott, halkán bezártam az ajtót, behúztam a függönyt és belepisiltem a csapba. Előbányásztam egy könyvet a hátizsákomból, aztán hosszú percekig álldogáltam az ajtónál, rendezett, ismeretlen, magányos szobámat szemlélve.

– Na és mi a franc az a mokett? – dörmögtem magam elé boldogtalanul és csendben elhagytam a szobát.

Mennyire más volt Anglia 1973 tavaszán! Egy font 2 dollár 46 centet ért, az átlagos heti kereset 30 font 11 penny volt, egy csomag chips 5 penny, egy üdítő 8 penny, rúzs 45 penny, csokis keksz 12 penny, egy vasaló 4 font 50, egy vízforraló 7 font, egy fekete-fehér tévé 60 font, a színes tévé 300, egy rádió 16 és egy átlagos éttermi vacsora 1 font. A repülőjegy New Yorkból Londonba télen 87,45-be, nyáron 124,95 került. Az ember nyolc napot tölthetett Tenerifében 65 fontért vagy tizenöt napot 93-ért. Mindezt onnan tudom, mert fellapoztam a *Times* 1973. március 20-i számát: azon a napon érkeztem Doverbe. Az újság egész oldalas fizetett hirdetést tartalmazott, amelyben a kormány vázolta, mennyibe fognak kerülni a fentiek az egy hét múlva bevezetendő csinos, új forgalmi adóval. A hirdetés lényegében azt igyekezett bemutatni, hogy míg egyes dolgok ára emelkedni fog az új adóval, más dolgoké viszont csökken. Jó vicc! Zsugorodó memóriámban még az is él, hogy 4 pennyért küldhettem képeslapot Amerikába, 13 penny volt egy pint sör és 30 pennyt fizettem első Penguin könyvemért, a *Hazug Billy*ért. Két éve vezették be a tizedes rendszert, de sokan fejben még mindig átszámolták (te jó ég, az majdnem 6 shilling!), és érdekes volt megtanulnom, hogy 6 penny igazából kettő és felet ér és hogy egy guinea 1 font 5 pennyt.

Nagyon sok szalagcím akár ma is szerepelhetne az újságok címoldalán. „Sztrájkolnak a francia légiirányítók”, „Ügyészségi nyomozást rendeltek el Ulsterben”, „Nukleáris kutatóközpont



that a guinea was £1.05.

A surprising number of headlines from that week could as easily appear today: 'French air traffic controllers strike', 'White Paper calls for Ulster power sharing', 'Nuclear research laboratory to be closed', 'Storms disrupt rail services' and that old standby of cricket reports, 'England collapse' (this time against Pakistan). But the most arresting thing about the headlines from that dimly remembered week in 1973 was how much industrial unrest there was about: 'Strike threat at British Gas Corporation', '2,000 Civil Servants strike', 'No London edition of *Daily Mirror*', '10,000 laid off after Chrysler men walk out', 'Unions plan crippling action for May Day', '12,000 pupils get day off as teachers strike' – all this from a single week. This was to be the year of the OPEC crisis and the effective toppling of the Heath Government (though there wouldn't be a general election until the following February). Before the year was out, there would be petrol rationing and mile-long queues at garages all over the country. Inflation would spiral up to 28 per cent. There would be acute shortages of toilet paper, sugar, electricity and coal, among much else. Half the nation would be on strike and the rest would be on three-day weeks. People would shop for Christmas presents in department stores lit by candles and watch in dismay as their television screens went blank after *News at Ten* by order of the Government. It would be the year of the Sunningdale Agreement, the Summerland disaster on the Isle of Man, the controversy over Sikhs and motorcycle helmets, Martina Navratilova's debut at Wimbledon. It was the year that Britain entered the Common Market and – it scarcely seems credible now – went to war with Iceland over cod (albeit in a mercifully wimpy, put – down-those-whitefish-or- we-might-just-shoot-across-your-bow sort of way).

It would be, in short, one of the most extraordinary years in modern British history. Of course, I didn't know this on that

felfüggesztése”, „Viharok korlátozzák a vasúti közlekedést” és állandó téma a krikett-tudósítás: „Anglia összeomlott”, ezúttal Pakisztán ellen. De a legelgondolkodtatóbb mozzanat 1973 halványan derengő hetének szalagcímei közt az, mennyi munkásmegmozdulás történt az ipar területén. „Sztrájk-fenyegetés a British Gas vállalatnál”, „2000 köztisztviselő sztrájkja”, „Londonban nem jelenik meg a *Daily Mirror*”, „10 ezren vesztették el az állásukat a Chrysler-dolgozók megmozdulása után”, „A szakszervezetek május 1-ére tervezett akciói”, „12 ezer diák szabadnapos a tanárok sztrájkja miatt”. Ez mind egyetlen hét alatt. Ez az év lesz majd az olajválság kirobbanásának és a Heath-kormány bukásának éve, bár a választás a következő év februárjára toódik. Az év vége előtt bevezetik a benzinjegyet és mérföld hosszú sorok állnak majd a benzinkutaknál. Az infláció 28 százalékra rúg, és hiány lesz többek között wc-papírból, cukorból, elektromos áramból és szénből. Az ország fele sztrájkol, a másik fele heti három napot dolgozik. Az emberek gyertyafényes áruházakban szerzik be a karácsonyi ajándékokat, és hitetlenkedve fogadják, hogy az esti tíz órai hírek után kormányrendeletre véget ér a tévéadás. Ez az év lesz a Sunningdale-i Egyezmény, az Isle of Man-en bekövetkezett baleset, a szikh-forrongások, a motorkerékpárosok számára kötelezővé tett bukósisak bevezetésének és Martina Navratilova wimbledoni bemutatkozásának az éve. Nagy-Britannia ebben az évben csatlakozott a Közös Piac államaihoz, és – ma már ez elképzelhetetlennek hangzik – háborúba lépett Izlanddal a tőkehalhalászat ügyében, jöllehet amolyan 'ereszd vissza azt a halat, különben belelövünk a hajó orrába' szintű, méltányos háborúba.

Röviden, 1973 a modern brit történelem egyik legkülönösebb évének ígérkezett. Természetesen fogalmam sem volt erről azon az esős márciusi reggelen Doverben. Gyakorlatilag semmiről sem volt fogalmam, ami egy különös módon kellemes állapot. Minden előttem álló esemény új, rejtélyes és izgalmas fényben játszott.

drizzly March morning in Dover. I didn't know anything really, which is a strangely wonderful position to be in. Everything that lay before me was new and mysterious and exciting in a way you can't imagine. England was full of words I'd never heard before – streaky bacon, short back and sides, Belisha beacon, serviettes, high tea, ice-cream cornet. I didn't know how to pronounce 'scone' or 'pasty' or 'Towcester' or 'Slough'. I had never heard of Tesco's, Perthshire or Denbighshire, council houses, Morecambe and Wise, railway cuttings, Christmas crackers, bank holidays, seaside rock, milk floats, trunk calls, Scotch eggs, Morris Minors and Poppy Day. For all I knew, when a car had an L-plate on the back of it, it indicated that it was being driven by a leper. I didn't have the faintest idea what GPO, LBW, GLC or OAP stood for. I was positively radiant with ignorance. The simplest transactions were a mystery to me. I saw a man in a newsagent's ask for 'twenty Number Six' and receive cigarettes, and presumed for a long time afterwards that everything was ordered by number in a newsagent's, like in a Chinese takeaway. I sat for half an hour in a pub before I realized that you had to fetch your own order, then tried the same thing in a tea-room and was told to sit down.

The tea-room lady called me love. All the shop ladies called me love and most of the men called me mate. I hadn't been here twelve hours and already they loved me. And everyone ate the way I did. This was truly exciting. For years I'd been the despair of my mother because as a left-hander I politely declined to eat the American way – grasping the fork in your left hand to steady the food while cutting, then transferring it to your right hand to lift the food to your mouth. It all seemed ridiculously cumbersome, and here suddenly was a whole country that ate the way I did. And they drove on the left! This was paradise. Before the day was half over, I knew that this was where I wanted to be.

I spent a long day wandering aimlessly and happily along resi-

Anglia tele volt olyan kifejezésekkel, amiket soha nem hallottam azelőtt: csikozott bacon, bakafrizura, Belisha világítótorony, szerviett, főtea, fagyaltkehely. Néhány szót rosszul ejtettem: *scone*, *pastry*, *Towcester*, *Slough*. Némely kifejezéssel soha nem találkoztam korábban: Tesco, Perthshire vagy Denbighshire, tanácsi lakás, Morecambe és Wise, vasúti csomópontok, csillagszóró, hivatalos ünnepek, parti sziklák, stráfkocsi, R-beszélgetés, Puskin-szelet, Morris Minor és a Fegyverletétel Napja. Halvány sejtésem se volt a lépten-nyomon használt rövidítések jelentéséről: GPO, LBW, GLC, OAP. Sütött rólam a tudatlanság. A legegyszerűbb tranzakció is rejtély-számba ment számomra. Egy ember előttem az újságosnál húsz hatost kért, és cigarettát kapott. Ezután sokáig abban a hitben éltem, hogy az újságosnál mindent számokkal kódolnak, mint nálunk, ha pizzát rendelünk. Fél óráig ültem egy *pubban*, mire rájöttem, hogy a pultnál kell rendelni, azután ugyanígy jártam el a teázóban, de az asztalomhoz küldtek.

A teázóban a felszolgáló édesemnek hívott, az összes bolti eladó drágámnak és minden férfi havernak. Még tizenkét órája sem voltam itt, és máris mindenki szeretett. És mindenki úgy evett, ahogy én. Ez csodálattal töltött el. Éveken át reménytelen küzdelmet folytattam anyámmal, mert balkezesként udvariasan visszautasítottam, hogy – amerikai módra – bal kézben tartsam a villát, amíg felvágom az ételt, aztán a jobb kezembe vegyem át, míg belapátolom. Ésszerűtlennek és kényelmetlennek tartottam az amerikai hagyományt, és most hirtelen egy egész ország étkezett úgy, ahogyan én. A bal oldalon vezetnek! Ez maga volt a csoda. Még el se jött a délután, már éreztem, hogy itt akarok élni.

Az egész napot azzal töltöttem, hogy céltalanul róttam az utcákat, belestem a lakások, üzletek ablakain, belehallgattam az emberek beszélgetéseibe a buszmegállóknak és az utcasarkon, érdeklődve mustrálgattam a zöldségesek, hentesek és halárosok portékáit, elolvastam a szórólapokat, a kifüggesztett hirdetőmenyeket. Mindent csendben magamba szívtam. A várból

dential streets and shopping streets, eavesdropping on conversations at bus-stops and street corners, looking with interest in the windows of greengrocer's and butcher's and fishmonger's, reading fly-posters and planning applications, quietly absorbing. I climbed up to the castle to admire the view and watch the shuttling ferries, had a respectful look at the white cliffs and Old Town Gaol, and in the late afternoon on an impulse went to a movie, attracted by the prospect of warmth and by a poster depicting an array of scantily clad young ladies in seductive mood.

'Circle or stalls?' said the ticket lady.

'No, *Suburban Wife-Swap*,' I answered in a confused and furtive voice.

Inside, another new world opened for me. I saw my first cinema adverts, my first trailers presented in a British accent, my first British Board of Film Censors certificate ('This movie has been passed as suitable for Adults by Lord Harlech, who enjoyed it very much'), and discovered, to my small delight, that smoking was permitted in British cinemas and to hell with the fire risks. The film itself provided a rich fund of social and lexical information, as well as the welcome opportunity to rest my steaming feet and see a lot of attractive young women disporting in the altogether. Among the many terms new to me were 'dirty weekend', 'loo', 'complete pillock', 'au pair', 'semi-detached house', 'shirt-lifter' and 'swift shag against the cooker', all of which have proved variously useful since. During the interval – another exciting new development for me – I had my first Kia-Ora, purchased from a monumentally bored young lady who had the remarkable ability to pull selected items from her illuminated tray and make change without ever removing her gaze from an imaginary spot in the middle distance. Afterwards I dined at a small Italian restaurant recommended by Pearl and Dean and returned contentedly to the guesthouse as night stole over Dover. It was alto-

megcsodáltam a kilátást, néztem a közlekedő kompokat és tisztelettel pillantottam a híres doveri fehér sziklákra és a régi börtön épületére. Délután hirtelen ötlettől vezérelve moziba mentem. Vonzott a szobameleg és a plakátról rám tekintő ledéren öltözött hölgyek csalogató mosolya.

– Zsöllye vagy szeparé? – kérdezte a jegyáros nő.

– Nem. A *Külvárosi szeretők*re – válaszoltam zavarodottan, bizalmas hangon.

A moziban újabb meglepetések értek. Először hallottam reklámot és előzetest brit angol kiejtésű színészek szájából. A Brit filmcenzúra bizottság hagyta jóvá a vetítést: „A következő film felnőtteknek ajánlott, Lord Harlech engedélyével, aki maga is rendkívüli módon élvezte.” Meghökkenve tapasztaltam, hogy az angol mozikban szabad dohányozni és senki sem esik pánikba a tűzveszélytől. Maga a film – mindamelltt, hogy pihentethettem fáradt tagjaimat – gazdag társadalmi és lexikális ismereteket közölt. Számos fiatal, csinos hölgy egymást szórakoztatta egy közös jelenetben. Ismét új kifejezésekkel találkoztam: huncut hétvége, slózi, az egyik szereplő 'tisztára zokni' volt, *au pair*, sorház, könnyű falat és egy gyors menet a kályhánál, amelyek ismerete azóta mind kivétel nélkül hasznomra vált. A szünetben – ez is új volt számomra – ittam egy Kia-Orát, amit egy hihetetlenül flegma hölgy úgy vett elő a megvilágított hűtőből, majd úgy nyújtott át a visszajáróval együtt, hogy közben egy pillanatra sem vette le a szemét egy képzeletbeli pontról a távolban. A vetítés után egy ismerőseim által ajánlott olasz étteremben vacsoráztam és elégedetten tértem vissza a szállásomra, miközben az éjszaka lassan magáévá tette Dovert. Kielégítő és tartalmas napot hagytam magam mögött.

Úgy terveztem, hogy korán lefekszem, de útban a szobám felé bekukkantottam a 'Kizárólag szállóvendégek részére' feliratú ajtón. Egy társalgóban találtam magam, kilúgozott huzatú fotelekkel, kanapéval, színes tévével, sőt könyvespolccal, amin egy csomó

gether a thoroughly satisfying and illuminating day.

I'd intended to turn in early, but on the way to my room I noticed a door marked RESIDENT'S LOUNGE and put my head in. It was a large parlour, with easy chairs and a settee, all with starched antimacassars; a bookcase with a modest selection of jigsaw puzzles and paperback books; an occasional table with some well-thumbed magazines; and a large colour television. I switched on the TV and looked through the magazines while I waited for it to warm up. They were all women's magazines, but they weren't like the magazines my mother and sister read. The articles in my mother's and sister's magazines were always about sex and personal gratification. They had titles like 'Eat Your Way to Multiple Orgasms', 'Office Sex – How to Get it', 'Tahiti: The Hot New Place for Sex' and 'Those Shrinking Rainforests – Are They Any Good for Sex?' The British magazines addressed more modest aspirations. They had titles like 'Knit Your Own Twinset', 'Money-Saving Button Offer', 'Make This Super Knitted Soap-Saver' and 'Summer's Here – It's Time for Mayonnaise!'

The programme that unfolded on the television was called *Jason King*. If you're of a certain age and lacked a social life on Friday evenings in the early Seventies, you may recall that it involved a ridiculous rake in a poofy kaftan whom women unaccountably appeared to find alluring. I couldn't decide whether to take hope from this or be depressed by it. The most remarkable thing about the programme was that, though I saw it only once more than twenty years ago, I have never lost the desire to work the fellow over with a baseball bat studded with nails.

Towards the end of the programme another resident came in, carrying a bowl of steaming water and a towel. He said, 'Oh!' in surprise when he saw me and took a seat by the window. He was thin and red-faced and filled the room with a smell of liniment. He looked like someone with unhealthy sexual ambitions, the

rejtvényűség és puha kötésű könyv sorakozott. Egy egyszerű asztalon gyűrött magazinok heverték. Bekapcsoltam a tévét és beletűrtam a magazinok kupacba, amíg bemelegedett a készülék. Kizárólag női magazinok voltak ezek, de nem olyanok, amelyeneket anyám és a nővérem olvasott. Az ő magazinjaikban az összes cikk a szexualitásról és a személy kiteljesedéséről szólt, olyan címek alatt, mint „Éld át többször az orgazmust” vagy „Szex az irodában: miként reagáljunk?” vagy „Tahiti, a forró vágyak szigete” sőt: „Hatással van-e a szexuális életre az esőerdők csökkenése?” A brit magazinok szerényebb témákat feszegettek: „Hogyan kössünk pulóvert ikrek számára?”, „Olcsó gombkészlet”, „Horgolt szappantartó” és „Itt a nyár: készítsünk majonézt!”

A tévében a *Jason King* című sorozat ment. Aki a hetvenes évek elején nélkülözötte a társasági életet péntekenként, nyilván emlékszik rá, hogy ennek a filmnek a főszereplője egy erkölcstelen és homokos kinézetű fakabát volt, akibe minden nő, látszólag ok nélkül, beleszeret. Nem sikerült eldöntennem, hogy reményt merítsek-e a filmből vagy depressziós legyek. Mégis, elgondolkodtató, hogy ugyan egyetlen egyszer volt hozzá szerencsém több mint húsz éve, még mindig munkál bennem a vágy, hogy megdolgozzam a fickót egy szöges baseballütővel.

A műsor vége felé egy lavór forró vízzel és törülközővel felfegyverkezett lakó jött be a társalgóba. Amikor meglátott, felsóhajtott meglepetésében és az ablak mellett foglalt helyet. Ösztövért volt, vörös arcú és orvosi kenőcs szagával töltötte be a helyiséget. Nagyjából az a típusú ember, akinek a rémével – egészségtelen szexuális ambíciói miatt – egykor a tornatanárunk riogatott bennünket: ilyenek lesztek, ha önkielégítést végeztetek. Tehát nagyon hasonlított a tanár úrra. Nem voltam egészen biztos benne, de fogadni mertem volna, hogy láttam délután a *Külvárosi szeretők* vetítésén. Gyümölcsös rágógumit vett a szünetben. Most lopva nézett rám, valószínűleg hasonló gondolatokat dédelgetve, majd a fejére borította a törülközőt és a gőzölgő mosdótál fölé

sort of person your PE teacher warned that you would turn into if you masturbated too extravagantly (someone, in short, like your PE teacher). I couldn't be sure, but I would almost have sworn that I had seen him buying a packet of fruit gums at *Suburban Wife-Swap* that afternoon. He looked stealthily at me, possibly thinking something along the same lines, then covered his head with the towel and lowered his face to the bowl, where it remained for much of the rest of the evening.

A few minutes later a bald-headed, middle-aged guy – a shoe salesman, I would have guessed – came in, said 'Hullo!' to me and 'Evening, Richard,' to the towelled head and took a seat beside me. Shortly after that we were joined by an older man with a walking-stick, a dicky leg and a gruff manner. He looked darkly at us all, nodded the most tinily precise of acknowledgements, and fell heavily into his seat, where he spent the next twenty minutes manoeuvring his leg this way and that, as if positioning a heavy piece of furniture. I gathered that these people were all long-term residents.

A sitcom came on called *My Neighbour is a Darkie*. I suppose that wasn't its actual title, but that was the gist of it – that there was something richly comic in the notion of having black people living next door. It was full of lines like 'Good lord, Gran, there's a coloured chappie in your cupboard!' and 'Well, I couldn't see him in the *dark*, could I?' It was hopelessly moronic. The bald-headed guy beside me laughed until he was wiping tears from his eyes, and from under the towel there came occasional snorts of amusement, but the colonel, I noticed, never laughed. He simply stared at me, as if trying to remember what dark event from his past I was associated with. Every time I looked over, his eyes were fixed on me. It was unnerving.

A starburst briefly filled the screen, indicating an interval of adverts, which the baldheaded man used to quiz me in a friendly

hajolt. Ebben a helyzetben maradt gyakorlatilag egész este.

Néhány perccel később egy kopasz, középkorú férfi lépett be – cipőbolti eladónak véltem –, bólintott felém, a törülközőbe burkolózott fej irányába röviden köszönt: „Kívánok, Richard”, majd a mellettem lévő fotelba telepedett. Nem sokkal később egy idős, bottal járó, ingatag lábakon álló, érdes modorú férfi csatlakozott hozzánk. Sötétén végigmért bennünket, a lehető legapróbb mozdulattal biccentett és belezuhant egy fotelbe, ahol a következő húsz percben nehézkesen ide-oda manőverezte a lábait, mint aki súlyos bútorokat rendez át. Az volt az érzésem, hogy a társaim régóta itt laknak.

A következő műsor egy sorozat volt: *Színesbőrű szomszédok*. Talán nem ez volt a pontos cím, de valami ilyesmi, és a lényege, hogy néger szomszédokkal csupa multság az élet. Ilyen mondatok hangzottak el, mint: „Jézus Mária, Gran, egy fekete muki van a szekrényedben!” és „Hogy láttam volna az arcát a sötétben!” Az egész reménytelenül ostobán hatott, mégis, a kopasz férfi mellettem a könnyeit törölgette, annyira élvezte, a törülköző alól is kacagás hallatszott olykor, csak az idős férfi nem nevetett. Ő egész egyszerűen engem bámult, mint aki azt kutatja, milyen borús, múltbeli eseménnyel hozhat összefüggésbe. Ahányszor csak felé pillantottam, a szemei mindig rám szegeződtek. Elég idegesítő volt.

Rövid csillagszórós snitt jelezte, hogy reklám következik. A kopasz férfi a szünetet arra igyekezett felhasználni, hogy engem barátságos, de összefüggéstelen kérdések özönével árásson el. Ki vagyok, hogy kerültem ide? Azon, hogy amerikai vagyok, felélénkült:

– Mindig szerettem volna eljutni a tengerentúlra – mondta. – Mondja csak, van ott Woolworth áruház?

– A Woolworth éppenséggel amerikai vállalat.

– Na ne mondja! – kiáltott fel. – Hallotta ezt, ezredes? Méghogy a Woolworth amerikai!

Az ezredes, úgy tűnt, nem rázza meg ez a hír.

but confusingly disconnected way as to who I was and how I had fallen into their lives. He was delighted to find that I was American. 'I've always wanted to see America,' he said. 'Tell me, do you have Woolworth's there?'

'Well, actually, Woolworth's is American.'

'You don't say!' he said. 'Did you hear that, Colonel? Woolworth's is American.' The colonel seemed unmoved by this intelligence. 'And what about cornflakes?'

'I beg your pardon?'

'Do you have cornflakes in America?'

'Well, actually, they're American, too.'

'Never!'

I smiled weakly, and begged my legs to stand me up and take me out of there, but my lower body seemed oddly inert.

'Fancy! So what brings you to Britain then if you have cornflakes already?'

I looked at him to see if the question was serious, then embarked reluctantly and falteringly on a brief résumé of my life to that point, but after a moment I realized that the programme had restarted and he wasn't even pretending to listen, so I tailed off, and instead spent the whole of part two absorbing the heat of the colonel's glare.

When the programme finished, I was about to hoist myself from the chair and bid this happy trio a warm adieu when the door opened and Mrs Smegma came in with a tray of tea things and a plate of biscuits of the sort that I believe are called teatime variety, and everyone stirred friskily to life, rubbing their hands keenly and saying, 'Ooh, lovely.' To this day, I remain impressed by the ability of Britons of all ages and social backgrounds to get genuinely excited by the prospect of a hot beverage.

'And how was *World of Birds* tonight, Colonel?' asked Mrs Smegma as she handed the colonel a cup of tea and a biscuit.

– Na és gabonapehely?

– Ne haragudjon, nem értem.

– Esznek gabonapelyhet Amerikában?

– Ami azt illeti, az is amerikai.

– Soha! Érti? Soha.

Bárgyún mosolyogtam és azt kívántam, bárcsak felállhatnék és eltűnhetnék innen, de az alsó végtagjaim furcsán mozgásképtelennek mutatkoztak.

– És mondja, mi hozta Önt Angliába, ha maguknál is van gabonapehely?

Kérdőn néztem rá. Nem sikerült eldöntennem, komolyan kérdezi-e, aztán vonakodva és tétován addigi életem rövid ismertetésébe fogtam, de néhány pillanat múlva észleltem, hogy folytatódott a film, és beszélgetőtársam meg se kísérli elhíttetni velem, hogy figyel rám, így hamar rövidre vágtam a mondandómat, és a műsor második részét azzal töltöttem, hogy az ezredes felém irányuló tekintetének forró hullámait igyekeztem semlegesíteni.

Amikor az epizód véget ért, és én épp azon voltam, hogy feltápáskodok és búcsút intek ennek a három boldog embernek, kinyílt az ajtó és belépett Mrs. Smegma, tálcával a kezében, teáscsészékkel és egy tál keksszel, amit, úgy hiszem, errefelé teakeksznek hívnak. Erre három társam hirtelen életre kelt, a kezeiket dörzsölték, sóváran szuszogtak: „Ó, hisz ez nagyszerű!”

Mind a mai napig elcsodálkozom azon, hogy a britek – koruktól és társadalmi hovatartozásuktól függetlenül – valódi izgalmat élnek át egy forró ital lehetőségétől.

– Milyen volt ma *A madarak élete*, ezredes? – kérdezte Mrs. Smegma, ahogy a teát és a kekszet átnyújtotta az ezredesnek.

– Nem tudom – mondta az ezredes bosszúsan, és felém lövellt egy jelentőségteljes pillantást. – Másik csatornát néztek.

Mrs. Smegma, együttérzéséről biztosítva az ezredest, élesen rám villantotta szemét. Az a benyomásom támadt, hogy titokban talán egymás szeretői.

‘Couldn’t say,’ said the colonel archly. ‘The television – ’ he smacked me in the side of the head with a meaningful look ‘ – was tuned to the other side.’ Mrs Smegma gave me a sharp look, too, in sympathy. I think they were sleeping together.

‘*World of Birds* is the colonel’s favourite,’ she said to me in a tone that went some distance past hate, and handed me a cup of tea with a hard whitish biscuit.

I mewed some pitiful apology.

‘It was puffins tonight,’ blurted the red-faced fellow, looking very pleased with himself.

Mrs Smegma stared at him for a moment as if surprised to find that he had the power of speech. ‘Puffins!’ she said and gave me a still more withering expression that asked how anyone could be so lacking in fundamental human decency. ‘The colonel adores puffins. Don’t you, Arthur?’ She was definitely sleeping with him.

‘I do rather,’ said the colonel, biting unhappily into a chocolate bourbon.

In shame, I sipped my tea and nibbled at my biscuit. I had never had tea with milk in it before or a biscuit of such rocklike cheerlessness. It tasted like something you would give a budgie to strengthen its beak. After a minute the baldheaded guy leaned close to me and in a confiding whisper said, ‘You mustn’t mind the colonel. He hasn’t been the same since he lost his leg.’

‘Well, I hope for his sake he soon finds it,’ I replied, hazarding a little sarcasm. The baldheaded guy guffawed at this and for one terrifying moment I thought he was going to share my little quip with the colonel and Mrs Smegma, but instead he thrust a meaty hand at me and introduced himself. I don’t remember his name now, but it was one of those names that only English people have – Cohn Crapspray or Bertram Pantyshield or something similarly improbable. I gave a crooked smile, thinking he must be pulling my leg, and said, ‘You’re kidding.’

– *A madarak élete* az ezredes kedvenc műsora – szolt Mrs. Smegma felém fordulva, gyűlölettel a hangjában, de engem is megkínált a teából és a fehér, kőkemény kekszéből.

Motyogva kértem elnézést.

– Az északi lundáról szolt a mai rész – mondta a vörös fejű fickó, és látszott, hogy nagyon elégedett magával.

Mrs. Smegma egy pillanatig úgy nézett rá, mint akit meglep, hogy amaz egyáltalán meg mert szólalni. – Az északi lundáról? – mondta, és még megsemmisítőbb tekintetet vetett rám, amely azt sugallta, hogy a legalapvetőbb emberi figyelmességnek sem vagyok a birtokában. – Az ezredes imádja az északi lundát. Nem igaz, Arthur?

Most már biztos voltam benne, hogy szeretők.

– Csakugyan az egyik kedvencem – mondta az ezredes, és boldogtalanul harapott egyet a töltött csokoládéból.

Szégyenkezve kortyolgattam a teát és rágcsáltam a kekszet. Soha nem kóstoltam tejjel a teát, és soha nem találkoztam még ilyen kőkemény, örömet nem okozó keksszel. Olyan állaga volt, mint amit a kanárinak adnánk, hogy élésítse a csőrét. Egy kicsit később a kopasz férfi közel hajolt hozzám. – Ne foglalkozzon az ezredessel! Amióta elvesztette a lábát, nem a régi – suttogeta bizalmasan.

– Remélem, hamarosan rátalál – válaszoltam szarkazmussal.

A kopasz férfi felröhögött, egy kínos pillanatig azt hittem, ostoba szójátékomat megosztja a többiekkel, de ehelyett kövér kezét felém nyújtva bemutatkozott. Nem emlékszem már a nevére, de olyan név volt, amelyet kizárólag angolok viselnek: Colin Crapspray, Bertram Pantyshield vagy valami hasonló módon valószínűtlen. Megrökönyödve néztem rá, azt hittem, a bolondját járattja velem.

– Viccel? – kérdeztem.

– Egyáltalán nem – válaszolt hűvösen. – Miért? Mulatságosnak találja?

‘Not at all,’ he replied coldly. ‘Why, do you find it amusing?’

‘It’s just that it’s kind of. . . unusual.’

‘Well, you may think so,’ he said and turned his attention to the colonel and Mrs Smegma, and I realized that I was now, and would doubtless forever remain, friendless in Dover

Over the next two days, Mrs Smegma persecuted me mercilessly, while the others, I suspected, scouted evidence for her. She reproached me for not turning the light off in my room when I went out, for not putting the lid down in the toilet when I’d finished, for taking the colonel’s hot water – I’d no idea he had his own until he started rattling the doorknob and making aggrieved noises in the corridor – for ordering the full English breakfast two days running and then leaving the fried tomato both times. ‘I see you’ve left the fried tomato again,’ she said on the second occasion. I didn’t know quite what to say to this as it was incontestably true, so I simply furrowed my brow and joined her in staring at the offending item. I had actually been wondering for two days what it was. ‘May I request,’ she said in a voice heavy with pain and years of irritation, ‘that in future if you don’t require a fried tomato with your breakfast that you would be good enough to tell me.’

Abashed, I watched her go. ‘I thought it was a blood clot!’ I wanted to yell after her, but of course I said nothing and merely skulked from the room to the triumphant beams of my fellow residents.

After that, I stayed out of the house as much as I could. I went to the library and looked up ‘counterpane’ in a dictionary so that I might at least escape censure on that score. (I was astonished to find out what it was; for three days I’d been fiddling with the window.) Within the house, I tried to remain silent and inconspicuous. I even turned over quietly in my creaking bed. But no matter how hard I tried, I seemed fated to annoy. On the third

– Nem, dehogyis. Csak olyan ... szokatlan név.

– Csupán az Ön számára – mondta, és a többiek felé fordult.

Éreztem, hogy Dover a szememben egyszer s mindenkorra barátságtalan marad.

Az elkövetkező két napban Mrs. Smegma állandóan szimatolt utánam, és úgy vélem, a többiek bizonyítékokat szállítottak számára. Leteremtett, amiért nem kapcsoltam le a villanyt a szobámban, amikor elmentem otthonról, amiért nem hajtottam le a wc fedelét, amiért az ezredes melegvizét használtam – sejtelmem sem volt róla, hogy saját melegvize van, de egyszer valóban a kilincset rángatta és elégedetlen hangokat hallatott a folyosón –, amiért angol reggelit rendeltem két egymást követő reggelen, majd mindkétyszer a tányéromon hagytam a sült paradicsomot.

– Látom, megint meghagyta a sült paradicsomot – mondta házvezetőnőm a második alkalommal.

Nem tudtam, mit válaszolhatnék erre, hisz kétségtelenül igaz megállapítást tett, ezért egyszerűen felvontam a szemöldököm, és ugyanúgy fenyegetően szemléltem a maradékot a tányéromon, ahogy Mrs. Smegma. Az igazat megvallva, mindkét reggelen fürkészsze igyekeztem rájönni, mi lehet a kérdéses ételdarab.

– Bocsásson meg, hogy erre kérem – mondta fájdalomtól és évek bosszúságaitól terhes hangon –, de a továbbiakban, amennyiben nem óhajt sült paradicsomot, lenne szíves ezt előzetesen közölni velem.

Szégyenkezve pillantottam utána.

– Azt hittem vérrög – szerettem volna utána kiáltani, de természetesen egy szót sem szoltam, csak felkullogtam a szobámba, a többi lakó diadalittas tekintetétől kísérve.

Ezután, amikor csak lehetett, házon kívül tartózkodtam. A könyvtárban megnéztem egy szótárban a *mokett* jelentését, hogy legalább e tekintetben feddhetetlen maradjak. (Megdöböntett a felismerés, hogy három napon át tévedésből vigyáztam annyira a terítőre.) Házon belül igyekeztem csöndes és kiismerhetetlen



afternoon as I crept in Mrs Smegma confronted me in the hallway with an empty cigarette packet, and demanded to know if it was I who had thrust it in the privet hedge. I began to understand why innocent people sign extravagant confessions in police stations. That evening, I forgot to turn off the water heater after a quick and stealthy bath and compounded the error by leaving strands of hair in the plughole. The next morning came the final humiliation. Mrs Smegma marched me wordlessly to the toilet and showed me a little turd that had not flushed away. We agreed that I should leave after breakfast.

I caught a fast train to London, and had not been back to Dover since. ♦

maradni. Még arra is vigyáztam, hogy éjjel, ha a másik oldalra fordulok, ne recsegjen az ágyam. De bármennyire szerettem volna, nem tudtam elkerülni, hogy bosszantsak másokat. A harmadik nap délutánján, ahogy észrevétlenül beosontam, Mrs. Smegma, kezében egy üres cigarettásdobozzal elébem állt a folyosón, és magyarázatot várt rá, vajon miképpen került az a sövény tövébe. E pillanatban kezdtem megérteni, ártatlan emberek miért írnak alá alaptalan vallomásokot a rendőrségen. Azon az estén elfelejtettem letekerni a bojler a szabályellenesen beiktatott fürdés után, sőt – tetézve bűnömet – hajszálakat hagytam a lefolyóban. A végső megaláztatás másnap reggel ért. Mrs. Smegma szó nélkül a wc-hez vezényelt, és a lefolyóban egy apró szardarabra mutatott. Egyetértettünk abban, hogy reggeli után ki kéne költöznöm.

Expressz vonattal indultam Londonba, és soha nem jártam azóta Doverben. ♦

