

QUARTERLY PRESS REVIEW

FOR ADVANCED EFL LEARNERS

AUTUMN 2013



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The Berlin Wall from a Homeless Shelter

by *Horatio Morpurgo*

I finally reached the Berlin Wall at daybreak, just as the lamps above it all went out. By mid-morning the place sounded like a workshop, chisels worrying euphorically away at the graffiti – who knew what those chippings might not one day be worth? If we are seriously re-considering, now, Europe and our place in it, then I think there is a third view of this matter, beyond the two which are currently permitted. I don't by that mean the views 'for' and 'against'. I mean the view from ruinous disunity, the view from 1945, for which all profess a polite but condescending respect. The other (preferred) timeline is 1973, from which our talking heads perform those intricate cost-benefit analyses which are alleged to prove something or other.

But what if you were twenty-two when you were there in 1989? The British public, with a little help from its newspapers, has learnt to put an exact and very round figure on what all those chippings and that euphoria were worth. Back then we seemed less sure. Squaddies set up tea urns in the Potsdamer Platz, rubbish-strewn no man's land that it still was, jauntily offering cups of wishy-washy to bemused but grateful passers-by. Tea urns and long tables in the Potsdamer Platz struck me as a fitting and a witty note on which to end the old War and European partition. The brand of surrealism was one I recognised and enjoyed.

I had arrived in Germany that autumn with no more clue than anyone else about what was at hand. This was before the age of cash machines, too: I'd brought enough money, in travellers' cheques, to meet the modest needs of a serious young student of literature. I'd spent the bulk of what I had left on getting to Berlin via an entertaining but roundabout route, which there's no time to go into here. I'd phoned my bank and some money was due to arrive tomorrow. But tonight I was skint.

One of that illustrious tea-dispensing unit gave me the number of their barracks and I called it, but my patriotic impulse was not reciprocated. They were kind enough to furnish me with a list of homeless shelters, one of which finally said it had room. On arrival, more or less in shock from the cold as I was, a charitable soul on reception treated me to a talking-to about how this place was for the homeless and not for student-adventurers. I might not be among the deserving homeless: she conceded that I might all the same be counted among the truly cold.

The only other occupant of the dormitory I was assigned was already asleep. It was still dark when I heard him getting dressed and leaving. Yet when I woke it was to the uneasy awareness that I was not alone in the room.

A man was sitting with his knees drawn up on the bottom of the bunk opposite mine. He was dressed in his day-clothes and there was no sign of any luggage. In his mid-twenties perhaps, he wore that rumpled Chinese-made denim which was standard issue for the young East German male. Frowning at two or three sheets of printed paper, he seemed in his absorption not so much unaware as utterly uninterested in whether or not he was alone.

I addressed him in German. He looked up, startled: rumpled Chinese denim notwithstanding it was clear that this was no East German. In an accent somewhere halfway between mid-Atlantic and middle European he asked apologetically whether I spoke

English. Encouraged by my answer he handed over the sheets of paper immediately, asking me to translate.

Jozef was Polish. On one document were the details of a Peugeot which had been confiscated and impounded. Another was a detailed map. The third was an order that he present himself at half past eight, at a Police Headquarters marked on the map, for questioning about a stolen vehicle. That left us twenty minutes and I say 'us' because it was at once clear he couldn't go alone. I suppose this was also, if I'm honest, as close as I'd really got to one of these easterners. They might be everywhere and I might have had innumerable brief exchanges in recent days but nothing substantial. I'd listened to a good deal of scepticism from young West Germans and it was true the crowds of East Germans didn't look quite so admirable once you'd watched the men queuing outside porno-cinemas while their womenfolk went into ecstasies over the stacks of chocolate bars in supermarkets. But it seemed mean to judge from such randomly gathered impressions.

Or maybe it was his shock and exhaustion as he gazed at the indecipherable text before which he stood accused – maybe it was this which persuaded me to play the defence lawyer. Too much marvelling at this momentous public event had awoken in me a craving to quit marvelling and do something. Here, now, was what I could do. Because the point of all this was to be found, surely, neither in news-room hyperbole nor in the anxious imaginings of the affluent, but precisely in what only being here could offer. Like the opportunity to help someone out who is even more stranded than you are.

Even if he was a thief?

But he wasn't. He told me everything as we hurriedly followed his map as best we could through the unfamiliar streets and the freezing fog. Unless somebody there spoke Polish and was going to translate and / or represent him, which I doubted, it seemed

wisest for me to prepare my brief in what little time we had. He'd been woken in the small hours to more than one torch he couldn't say how many – being shone in his face. Then there was thumping on the window and angry voices and he glimpsed the silhouette of a Police cap against a building. They obviously wanted him to open up and when he obliged they wanted him to get out, too. One was jabbing at the For Sale sign he'd put in the window while another got in the front seat and seemed to be checking the mileage or something. He'd bought the car in Warsaw a couple of months earlier, then his mother had fallen ill when the cold weather started and he'd driven across to see if he could sell it so they could bribe the doctor.

He had tried to tell them all this but the dark and the torches and the hostility had frightened him. He had been confused. His German was no good and they didn't speak English 'or to me they didn't.' Now a squad car arrived with two more officers. They took his wallet and the keys of his car – was that legal? - and in return he had got these sheets of paper of which he could make nothing at all. From waking with torches in his face to arriving at the hostel with these sheets of paper, he had understood nothing.

He talked while I made the best sense I could of the photocopied map and it brought US soon enough to a collection of large buildings with squad cars parked everywhere.

There were two plain clothes detectives in the small room to which we were directed, one at the desk another on a swivel chair to one side.

'you're late,' the swivelling officer greeted us. We had made the best time we could, I explained, and introduced Jozef.

'Who are you then?' the swiveller asked, revolving towards me with an irritable and omnipotent air.

'I'm his translator.'

Together the two policeman directed at me a look which mingled pity with contempt in a most original manner: ‘Then you can “translate” to him,’ the swivelling officer suavely resumed, ‘that we found ten video machines in the boot. Maybe he can “translate” how they got there to you and then you can “translate” that back to us.’

My expression as I turned to Jozef was probably not the friendliest and he saw it at once. That look of alarmed and exhausted incomprehension spread once again over the features of his face as he asked what was being said.

I explained and he protested vehemently that it couldn’t be his car.

‘Yes yes,’ the swivelling officer wearily waved a sheet of paper at us, from which he then read. ‘Polish male. Apprehended 0430. Green VW. Passau, right?’

The vehicle in question was a black Peugeot, I assured him.

The non-swivelling officer muttered an apology and snatched up another piece of paper on his desk. Now they started again. It was the nonswiveller’s turn. How exactly had Jozef acquired his translator? he asked. I explained the circumstances of our meeting. The detectives both listened, archly expressionless now. Having been caught out, but I’d seen no sign they meant to provide a translator themselves. Besides, the ten video machines had confirmed me in my new calling by giving me an early success. I was getting a highly ethical buzz out of this.

They returned to the attack. Their records showed that the vehicle Jozef did not deny attempting to sell had been stolen a year earlier in another part of town. What, the non-swivelling officer would like to know, did my new-found friend have to say about that?

I already knew what he had to say – that he’d bought it in Warsaw a couple of months ago, knew nothing of its history and now needed money because his mother had fallen ill.

They were sorry to hear that. The mileage had been tampered with as well.

Its present figure was less than half what it had shown at its last service.

Would Jozef like to comment in any way?

He would not. He’d bought it in Warsaw a couple of months ago. From a dealer. He couldn’t remember the garage’s name. ‘It was just some place.’

‘We keep hearing about this ‘Just Some Place’ where all you people buy your cars ...’ The swiveller pulled himself up short. ‘So you buy yourself a car, drive it across, find a quiet street, put up your For Sale sign in the window

He’d had a girlfriend who lived in that street once – he remembered where it was so he parked there.

It’s hard to re-construct now what I felt about his stories at the time. That about parking in streets with which you have a past might have sounded like sob-stuff to me at the time but I would have more time for it now. I remember the un-well mother narrative did feel a little suspect, especially the way he went on repeating it, and especially now that I was required to repeat it on his behalf. It must have irritated the detectives too because the swiveller his confidence returning, rudely interrupted it to ask if they could see another piece of photo ID. To me the question in itself sounded routine.

But from the inside pocket of his denim jacket Jozef now produced something around which a clear plastic bag had been carefully folded several times, which bag he now unfolded. From it there fell at last into his hand an American passport in mint condition, which he passed across. The non-swivelling officer fell

at once to testing his thumb against the weave of its pages with an expert air, then, after passing it to his colleague, didn't quite know where to put his eyes. With the nail of his forefinger the swiveller scabbled at random pages, as when you try to remove the surprisingly tenacious remains of some insect accidentally flattened long ago between the pages of a book.

And I sat as if nothing could be funnier than their predicament. my expression set to a smugly vindicated 'Wow it must feel really precarious where you're sitting now'. Though I was no less baffled than they. This Jozef was a darker horse than I'd taken him for. He might have seemed about to crack but he had kept his counsel and played his cards in the right order. I, of course, had been one of them. The passport had been acquired through marriage, he claimed.

They'd been keeping the wallet in a drawer all along. Jozef checked through its contents while a document releasing the car was signed and back at reception we were told which bus would drop us nearest to the car pound. Oh yes, we strutted forth like schoolboys, elated and triumphant, back out into what was left of the morning. I expect there was some relieved chortle- chortling about German peaked caps shining torches in your eyes. And yes, he'd worked in Texas for three years and met a girl there. 'Have fun with American girls but don't marry them' was his advice. He had kept the passport, naturally. I asked what he had done for a living there. He had worked in a garage, he said. I appreciated his frankness. We were quiet after that.

The bus dropped us as far as I could desire to be from any Global News Event. Here were scrap metal dealers and super-stores packed with hideous furniture and an incinerator for the city's rubbish. The man read our piece of paper, searched through a giant wreath of keys. unfastening one of them and asking us to follow. In immense dimly-lit rows the stolen or wheel- clamped

vehicles stretched away under the long low ceiling and we were led along them by the guardian of this dreadful place to the black Peugeot. There was Jozef's bag still in the back with its change of clothes inside. How that place reeked of petty crime, of the frayed nerves and the vexation with which all of us clutter up our own and other peoples' lives. It had been perverse of me to turn away from the most sensational event in recent history for this squalor.

Back on the road, complete with wallet and wheels, Jozef had his life back: even when he was a kid he'd loved everything about England – the Beatles, fair play, Churchill, tradition... Driving me to the bank where my money had been sent was the least he could do. It had arrived, so having started the day in a homeless shelter, by midday fortune was beaming down affectionate smiles upon both of us though we were, truth to tell, tiring of each other pretty fast.

He insisted on buying me a whisky so we went to a bar where he ordered me a much larger one than I generally drink at ten or eleven in the morning. Or any other time actually I've never much liked the stuff. But here for a few minutes were the two of us, still playing the victors together in this bar instead of me wandering at a loss and him – well, it still made me shudder to think what the police had had in store for him. He wrote his phone number and address in the back of my diary, made me swear if I was ever in any sort of trouble in Warsaw I should be sure to call him. I still look at it now and again, but have not yet been in trouble in Warsaw. ♦

Joys of Insomnia

by *A. L. Kennedy*

Perhaps because I was born in the middle of the night I never have really associated the hours of darkness with wasting my time in sleep – more with being up and about and ready, I sometimes think much more ready than I manage to be in the day. Insomnia started early for me, but it wasn't about *not sleeping*, it was about being full of other things, being too delighted to let go and drop away. I'm told that when I was little I would go to bed quite obediently, but then for a while I would sing – small person in under blankets and singing, happy to elongate the day and perhaps fond of music, I suppose, I'm not sure. I had no work to engage me, no social calendar, no pressing concerns, I only wanted to be me, with my own restless skin, just following along behind my thinking.

This was around the time when I can recall my parents tucking me in and then edging out of my room with, 'I'll just leave the door open a bit, so it won't be dark.' This meant that I suffered from night light envy. Other kids had night lights that glowed fondly, or revolved endearing pictures round their bedroom walls, that played tunes, even. I had *the door open a bit* – which, very obviously, was going to let the monsters in – and also provide just enough illumination for me to be stricken by the sight of them as they pounced. I've slept with my head underneath the covers ever since. Sheets are impervious to monsters, everybody knows that.

By the time I went to school, my twin causes of sleeplessness:

over-excitement and monsters: were already well-established. I was a pupil in the same institution for thirteen years – primary, junior, secondary – and until I became an occasionally carefree senior my education seemed based around a core curriculum of shouting. The primary school shouting was especially intense. To be sure, I was usually much too spineless and translucent to be shouted at myself, but there were always the wholesale excoriations of our class as a nest of imbeciles and ne'er-do-wells to be endured and I never did know when some unforeseen regulation might not be personally transgressed, or my inability to handle sums or swimming or shoelaces might become finally intolerable. Sunday nights – already full of the chill and flinching that were a natural part of Monday morning – became ill-fitting and pushed me into a habit of wakefulness. When I finally did drift off, I would dream of uncompleted homework and werewolves and shame.

But the stronger push was always from varieties of elation. I could read before I went to school and – as soon as narratives didn't simply involve the variously hapless animals of Blackberry Farm – I would be found and held by book after book. I wouldn't be able to stop reading – all comfortable and uninterrupted and what could be wrong about staying in this or that beautiful world until three in the morning? I knew that I'd wake up tired, I knew that I'd feel queasy if I had to run about in gym or if – since my school was obsessed with the moral and physical benefits of Scottish country dancing – I were required to disport myself through a gauntlet of dashing white sergeants and reels – and shouting – but I'd also worked out that the world was full of books, that centuries and continents of books were heaped around me – enticing and funny and scary and hypnotizing and overwhelming books and how could I possibly read them all – never mind the new books mushrooming up on every side – if I didn't keep putting in the hours?

And more overwhelming still was the unmistakable drive towards writing. It wasn't at all that I believed I could do better than any of the authors by whom I was surrounded, it was only that writing my own words was the most overwhelming experience of all. Given the horrible standard of my early scribbling – ramblings through a pseudo-Celtic mythical kingdom, mildly satirical songs for the school magazine, years of utterly inexcusable poetry – I can be entirely certain that no one else would have been overwhelmed by anything other than nausea in its clumsy, purple, self-important presence. But it made me elated and, after dinner and schoolwork and dog-walking and the rest, even if I'd put the light out and laid myself down for definite rest, little ideas and scraps and nonsenses would tickle in and start to shake me. They would make the nights too bright to resist. I remember once, long after school and university, being in possession of my first laptop – I'd potted out to the kitchen and left it by itself in a darkening room and when I walked back in with a coffee, it was there and shining – this word-holding thing just quietly glowing like a window into somewhere else and better and more wonderful and I remember thinking, 'Yes, that's how a good page would look if you could really see it, that's how it always did look in my head.' It's a light that I hope will always wake me.

But, of course, not being a creature of moderation, as soon as I was able to earn my living by writing and nothing but, I and my ergonomically disastrous laptops – I burned through one every couple of years – would work too hard and too long and too late into the lovely and undisturbed nights – finally being paid to do what grown-ups had told me not to. So I got ill. My spine – like every other human's – is still mainly designed for activity, hunter-gathering, swinging in trees. It grew tired of unnatural compressions, poor posture, self-employed stress and carrying the

staring weight of the brain to which I had retreated. I developed a herniated disk. Six months of misdiagnosis and increasingly desperate alternative therapies only harmed me further. Finally, an unwise business trip to London meant I folded up in my publisher's offices and was shipped to an A&E – as it happened, on my birthday. After an afternoon of 'If you'll just hold still ... oh, and happy birthday ... press the button if you feel claustrophobic ... and I see from the form it's your birthday' I was X-rayed and MRI-ed and diagnosed with both the dodgy disk and muscle wasting. I emerged with one week's pain relief, a neck collar and the temporary ability to flag down cabs no matter what.

Immobility and muscle-wasting and pain, pain and immobility and more muscle-wasting – I spent a decade in that loop. Waiting lists, physio, a diminishing income. The first time my range of movement was assessed I wanted to cry – I could barely lift my arms. I was wearing slip-on shoes, buying my groceries one tin at a time. And there was no sleep. I would pass the nights watching Sci-Fi and stand-up comedy. There was no light left in the darkness, only the thought that going to bed exhausted me, that this was my life now, that kissing hurt. And I was angry – I'd given my life to a vocation and been rewarded with this – a pain which made even typing almost intolerable.

And I hope I will never forget that slowly, slowly friends and strangers suggested remedies and tiny advances were made and that gently the pain of unaccustomed exercise could replace the pain of being me and the fear of getting worse again, being knocked back into more days of lying down. I was offered places to stay and recuperate, advice, concern – the world was bleak but also generous. And I did recover. A few years ago I could be in New York and arrange to meet a friend across on the other side of Central Park and I could amble over in twenty minutes and then have to waste time in coffee shops. I'd planned that my

journey would take an hour – when I'd last been there, it had.

Naturally, I promised myself that I would be sensible thereafter and never overdo things again. I would take breaks and holidays. I bought a special chair to support me, I practised Tai Chi almost every day, I took vitamins and went for long walks, lots of long, long walks. I tried to remember to be grateful for mobility, for the mercy and simplicity of comfort, and to make up for being antisocial and bad-tempered on so many, many occasions when the pain was too bad and too boring to mention.

But I'm me – I love what I do, I love to sit up late in my wonderful chair and drink too much caffeine and make something mildly dramatic out of endless typing – the all-night sessions, the two- and three-day sessions, only interrupted by baths and black and white movies. It now seems traditional that I'll finish my novels in an all-out dash, running just ahead of them and hoping I won't fall. I spent last year bundled up in a New England barn conversion, supplied with Diet Coke and Jimi Hendrix, grinding the hours away between summer storms that whitened the whole sky, that flashed me into somewhere else, drenched me in warm rain when I stood out on the deck. I write, God help me, very much according to the model set out by Honore de Balzac – a man who habitually woke at midnight, who lived through love letters rather than love, who killed himself with black coffee and overwork.

Which means that, as I write this, I am recovering – I hope – from months of viral labyrinthitis. It's a condition which produces a kind of profound seasickness and anxiety, which leaves you clinging to your spinning and ducking bed while savage possibilities rage over you, every thought you shouldn't have: loss and permanent ill-health and hurts to those you love. For the last few months sleep has been either unobtainable, or a long, hot succession of nightmares, often with the illusion of having

woken, but being paralyzed while yet more fears unfold. And it's my own fault, entirely. In the last ten years I've taken precisely two holidays – during one of which I had to work. I should know better. I should do better. I have to do better.

I write at night, because it's the proper time for dreaming – emails and essays during the day, journalism, correspondence, payment of bills – but I wait for the sun to weaken and set before I can find, as old William says, that '... imagination bodies forth the shapes of things unknown and gives to them a local habitation and a name.' Unfortunate when the shapes are monsters, their names familiar – 'What if I don't get better? What if I fall even further behind? What if the work is failing and I can't see it? What if he doesn't love me in any way? What if my life won't work? What if he's gone for good? What if, as usual, the little joys are wasted and go wrong?' Everyone has their 3 a.m. tribunal of mistakes made and damages received and threats that are more or less credible, but all insist on being heard. It's perhaps why, when we care for each other, we so often ask, 'How did you sleep?' We know what a terrible place the edge of sleep can be. It is perhaps one of the quieter reasons for making love, or rather for being each other's companions in our beds – we try to be present when the people we need most have to drop into the other little death and we like to feel them there for us when we surface badly, when we are afraid and pulling the sheet up over our faces will make no difference, will not save us.

And we wish each other 'Sweet dreams.' Of course we do. And, sometimes stupidly and sometimes sensibly, I will spend my professional life and night after night attempting to build dreams for other people and for myself, trying to sing and elongate the day. Trying to make the words that shine, the way so many other people's words have always done for me. ♦

The Hanging

by Rich Schapiro

The body of William Sparkman Jr., a 51-year-old census worker, was found in 2009 in an isolated cemetery in the Appalachian region of Kentucky. He hung naked from a tree, hands bound, the word *FED* scrawled in black marker across his chest. Sparkman's death briefly made headlines: to some, it seemed to implicate our polarized politics; to others, a region long known for its insularity. And then the case disappeared from view. Here is the story of what really happened to Bill Sparkman, a complex man whom few people truly knew.

The road to Hoskins Cemetery snakes deep into the Daniel Boone National Forest, a 700,000-acre swath of rugged wilderness in southeastern Kentucky.

The cemetery isn't easy to find; it lies hidden about 100 yards off Arnetts Fork Road, a narrow, winding stretch of pavement that ends abruptly at a grassy clearing, about a mile farther on. Hunkered down along its final half mile are about 15 weathered ranch houses and ramshackle trailers. Most of the families living along the road have been doing so for generations, eking out a hardscrabble existence driving tow trucks or repairing cars or digging up and selling wild ginseng and other herbal roots. Jagged ridges wall off this tiny community, making it a lot like many other places in Clay County – remote, clannish, and foreboding, even to Kentuckians from the next county over.

To reach Arnetts Fork, you must drive two miles into the forest on Big Double Creek Road. In late spring and summer, the thick brush lining the road and a canopy of leaves overhead form a sort of cocoon. Cellphone service is spotty. Outsiders say that if you stumble across any people in these woods, chances are they're up to no good. It's the kind of place you don't go without a gun.

At 6:15 p.m. on Saturday, September 12, 2009, a 41-year-old Ohio man named Jerry Weaver turned his silver Chevy Equinox onto Arnetts Fork Road. With him were his wife, Connie, and their 19-year-old daughter, Brittany. The Weavers were heading to the cemetery to visit the graves of some of Connie's relatives. Riding in two cars ahead of them were her parents, plus her sister and brother-in-law and their two kids. They had all converged on Kentucky for a family reunion.

When the convoy reached the gravel road leading to the cemetery, each car stopped on the roadside. A metal gate blocked the entrance, but the men saw that the creek running next to the road was dry, and decided they could cross it and rejoin the road beyond the gate. Everyone but Weaver piled into his father-in-law's black Toyota pickup, filling the cab and truck bed. Weaver told them to go ahead, then pulled out his gun, a Taurus .357 Magnum. He had seen things in these woods before that he didn't like. Holding the revolver at his side, Weaver started following the truck on foot.

It was a glorious day – mid-70s and clear, with a light wind. Weaver walked with his eyes trained on the Toyota. As the vehicle curled slightly to the right, just out of sight, he heard Connie scream. Weaver rushed forward and at first saw only a red pickup truck at the near edge of a clearing. But as he walked around the empty vehicle, a figure at a far corner of the clearing came into view, about 40 yards away. It was motionless: a naked man hanging from a tree.

Weaver froze. Within seconds, his father-in-law, Clinton Hibbard, stepped beside him, holding his own gun, a .38-caliber revolver. He had parked far away from the body. No reason for the rest of his family to stare at that. The forest was eerily quiet; both men felt as though they were being watched. They were still too far from the body to make out its condition. Hibbard asked Weaver what he thought they should do. "Get out of here and call 911," Weaver replied instantly.

About an hour later, Weaver and his father-in-law met up with a state trooper at a forest-ranger station five miles away and led him to the scene. For the first time, Weaver walked up close to the suspended corpse.

He was horrified.

The man's wrists and ankles were bound with gray duct tape. A red rag was stuffed into his mouth, secured with tape wrapped around his head. A U.S. Census Bureau identification card dangled from the tape, near his right ear. And scrawled across the man's chest, in ink from a black felt-tip pen, were three giant letters: *FED*.

The man was slumped forward, his feet touching the ground, a noose of white nylon rope around his neck. The rope had been tossed over the branch directly above him, wrapped around a nearby tree, and tied off on a third tree. He was wearing only socks.

The state trooper ran the license plate on the red Chevrolet S-10 pickup truck. The name matched the one on the ID card: William Sparkman Jr. He was 51 years old and lived 40 miles away in London, the seat of nearby Laurel County.

The trooper took a close look at the man's two census tags. The first featured a head shot. On the second was the Census Bureau's "Oath of Non-Disclosure," under the legend Sworn for Life to Protect Confidentiality.

The gruesome scene haunted Weaver for weeks. He was certain the middle-aged census worker had been murdered and hung up for display. "Like some kind of calling card," he later said. For days after, Weaver's teenage daughter remained so traumatized, she slept on the floor of her parents' bedroom.

Kentucky State Police Detective Donald Wilson was at home, settling into his weekend, when the call came. "Deceased person found hanging in Hoskins Cemetery." No cause for alarm, Wilson thought; suicides weren't all that uncommon in the area.

Tall and well built, with a boyish face and light-brown hair cropped close, Wilson, age 28 at the time, had been a state trooper for six years. Just two days earlier, he'd been promoted to detective. This would be his first case.

Wilson hopped into his unmarked police cruiser and headed for the scene. He arrived at the cemetery at 8:30 p.m. "Holy shit," he mouthed as he got his first good look at the body. Besides the nakedness, the tape, the ID card, and the word on the corpse's chest, Wilson noticed that Sparkman's face was a bloody mess. A trickle of blood had leaked out of his right ear. Wilson wondered whether he had been bludgeoned.

Something else caught Wilson's attention. The tape binding Sparkman's ankles was tightly wrapped, but the tape around his wrists was loose and full of kinks. Stranger still, a separate strip of tape ran over the top of Sparkman's head, securing his eyeglasses to his face.

Waving flashlights, Wilson and the trooper who'd arrived with Weaver scoured the scene. About 10 feet from the body, they found three red rags matching the one in Sparkman's mouth. They also discovered a short length of rope, apparently cut from the one used to hang him. The pair searched for a cutting instrument, but didn't find one. Whoever was responsible for

Sparkman's death must have ditched it in the surrounding woods or taken it away.

Wilson pulled out a pad and pen. He noted that there was excess rope where the knot was secured to the second tree, suggesting it had been tied, then untied, tightened, and retied. The area around the body appeared to be undisturbed, and no tire tracks from vehicles other than Sparkman's were visible in the clearing. Inside the bed of Sparkman's truck was a pile of clothes, neatly folded: a pair of navy dress pants, a three-button polo shirt, gray Fruit of the Loom boxer briefs. No shoes. No wallet. That the truck was left untouched struck Wilson as curious. Criminals in the area were known to burn vehicles to eliminate evidence.

At 9:30 p.m., two veteran officers, Sergeant Tom Atkin and Detective Mike Bowling, arrived on the scene. All four investigators combed through the dirt, grass, and leaves near Sparkman's body. Atkin discovered a syringe and an empty vial about 25 feet away, leading the men to wonder whether Sparkman had been drugged. But the paraphernalia might just as easily have been left behind by an addict.

Wilson had on his hands what is known as an "equivocal death," a case in which the manner of death is unknown. Any seasoned homicide detective will tell you that an equivocal-death investigation cannot be closed until all scenarios but one are ruled out. Wilson mentally mapped out the possibilities: autoerotic asphyxiation (accident); an elaborate suicide; forcible hanging (murder); or the hanging of the body postmortem (murder).

The history of Clay County is soaked in blood. Violence roiled this remote corner of Appalachia in the late 19th century, fueled by grisly feuds between rival families. The hostility between the wealthy and influential clans – the Bakers versus the Howards, the Philpots versus the Griffins, the Garrards versus the Whites – spanned decades and spawned national headlines. "A strange,

bloody story of Clay County's two recent feuds," read a *New York Times* report published on November 26, 1899. "Its ferocity, barbarity, and cruelty are appalling."

The county's reputation for lawlessness continued into the 1900s. Assassinations were common, especially around election time. Newspapers described the place as a cloistered hive of bloodshed, a place that didn't take kindly to the prying eyes of journalists or detectives. The violence ebbed in the 1940s, however, and a coal boom soon brought the region a degree of prosperity. It didn't last. The coal mines were largely stripped bare by the mid-'80s. By then, marijuana had supplanted coal as the region's most notable export. Eastern Kentucky had long been known as a haven for moonshiners, so producing pot was a natural next step. According to one estimate, by 1989, perhaps 40 percent of the county's residents were growing marijuana. Most of the crop was being cultivated in the Daniel Boone National Forest, where farmers reportedly booby-trapped their pot patches using boards studded with rusty nails and fishing lines strung with sharp hooks.

When details of Sparkman's death exploded in the media, Clay County was thrust back into the spotlight; the story led off *The Rachel Maddow Show* on September 23, received nationwide newspaper coverage, and drew breathless commentary from bloggers and talking heads. Suspicion that Sparkman had been slain because of his affiliation with the government fueled the coverage. Antigovernment sentiment was on the rise, and the Tea Party movement was fast gaining momentum. President Obama had been in office eight months, and Glenn Beck had recently told his followers, "The time for silent dissent has long passed." Five months before the hanging, a Department of Homeland Security report titled "Rightwing Extremism" had warned of the growing potential of violence from domestic fringe groups.

In Manchester, the county seat and the sleepy five-stoplight hub of Clay County, locals debated the case in tobacco stores and pawn shops, in the smattering of fast-food restaurants, and at the Huddle House, a greasy spoon where a country-fried steak goes for \$7.29. Some suspected that Sparkman had stumbled upon a pot patch or a methamphetamine mill and had been rubbed out by drug dealers. Others thought he might have just knocked on the wrong door in a place where people don't welcome strangers, especially those with government badges – concluding, in the words of Edmund Shelby, the editor of *The Manchester Enterprise*, “that antigovernment types got ahold of him and did some nasties.”

Despite Clay County's violent history, murders are rare there now; only six have been recorded since 2006. Poverty is a far more dire problem. Clay is perennially one of the poorest counties in Kentucky. The area's biggest employers are the school system, the city hospital, and a nearby federal prison. There are no large factories, only a Walmart. Per capita income is \$12,500, and 45 percent of the county's residents receive Medicaid.

The 21,730 people living in Clay County are predominantly white (94 percent) and predominantly Republican (84 percent), but you don't find much passion for politics. Tea Party groups have sprouted up in several other parts of Kentucky, but are absent in this one. Politicians are largely seen by the destitute as lacking the ability or the will to reverse their plight.

Nonetheless, outside the county seat, sentiments toward political authorities tend to have a rough edge. Head east from Manchester toward Hoskins Cemetery, on a darkened road that climbs up and down steep hills, and you come across people who are quick to dismiss politicians and authority figures as “crooks” and “liars.” Their resistance to authority dates back centuries, to when illegally distilling whiskey was big business and eluding

federal agents was a crucial part of the enterprise. The vigilantism that reigned centuries ago has no doubt faded, but some people haven't moved on.

If you walk up Arnetts Fork Road to the first house after the cemetery, you'll find a wiry 59-year-old man named Elzie Wagers, who keeps a semiautomatic rifle under his mattress. “That's the answer to a lot of problems,” Wagers says in a slow drawl, as he shows off his weapon. He doesn't trust the local authorities or politicians. “When you got a bunch of crooks and you can't get justice, there's ways of getting justice.”

Communities like the one Wagers lives in, built along a dead-end road tucked into a wooded valley, are known as hollows – pronounced “hollers.” Clay County is full of hollows, and nearly everybody seems to have a story about wandering into one and ending up staring down the barrel of a rifle. Some describe the way of life in the hollows as little changed over the past couple centuries.

Jimmy Lyttle, formerly a Clay County magistrate and the owner of Jimbo's Four-Lane Tobacco, put it this way: “Once you go east of I-75,” the interstate that lies 20 miles west of Manchester, “there's two things they don't like: change and strangers.”

Saturday, September 12, 2009

The night was pitch-black. With the lights of their police cruisers illuminating the woods, Donald Wilson and the other investigators walked circles around the body, searching up to 300 feet away for additional evidence. Nothing. By the time Wilson helped the coroner cut down Sparkman's corpse, it was nearly midnight. Wilson peered through the windows of Sparkman's truck and saw evidence that it had been ransacked. Papers were scattered throughout the vehicle, the glove box and console were open, the passenger seatback was leaning forward. The

investigators opted to wait until morning to search the interior; the night was too dark, and they didn't have the proper equipment. While the men waited for a tow truck, Atkin found the keys to Sparkman's vehicle on the ground underneath it.

Soon after the investigators returned to their base in London, Atkin called Nextel, hoping the telecommunications company could pinpoint the location of Sparkman's phone. No luck. A Nextel representative said the phone was either turned off or out of service.

Armed with a search warrant, Wilson and three fellow officers arrived at Sparkman's modest white ranch house at about 6:20 a.m. The house, surrounded by trees, sits beside a sloping road that runs past three other houses. Its driveway was empty, and there was no sign of forced entry.

Wilson opened the front door and stepped inside. Cobwebs clung to walls and corners, and a thick layer of dust covered parts of the floor and shelving. Clothes were strewn about the master bedroom. Though the house was untidy, there was no indication that a struggle had taken place. Wilson and the others moved through the house methodically. In the kitchen, they found a Jack Russell terrier and several bags of dog food. A newish-looking printer sat on the kitchen table, with cords attached, but there was no computer.

The time was nearing 8 a.m. when they left. Wilson, who'd been awake for 24 hours, returned to the crime scene alone, hoping daylight would reveal additional clues. His search, again, turned up empty.

At about the same time, roughly 100 miles north, a forensic pathologist was performing an autopsy on Sparkman at the state police's central lab, in Frankfort. The pathologist, Cristin Rolf, determined the preliminary cause of death to be asphyxiation. The blood that had leaked out of Sparkman's ear, Rolf concluded, was

the result of insect infestation. She detected traces of red fibers stuck to the duct tape that had bound Sparkman's wrists and ankles. The lack of bruising around the taped areas led Rolf to believe that Sparkman had not struggled against the bindings. That was significant. It meant that he was already dead or unconscious before he was bound; or he had died accidentally from autoerotic asphyxiation; or he had deliberately killed himself.

Rolf noticed one other oddity. Sparkman's colon had apparently been cleansed with an enema – a possible indicator of homosexual activity. She subsequently ordered a rape kit.

At 8 o'clock the next morning, Monday, September 14, Wilson called the FBI's regional office in London and set up a meeting. Since Sparkman seemed to have been targeted because of his government affiliation, Wilson knew the FBI would want a piece of the case. Speaking to Special Agent Tim Briggs, Wilson described the condition of Sparkman's body and emphasized the letters scrawled on his chest. Briggs was pissed. He made clear that Wilson should not have waited two days before contacting him. The FBI immediately opened a joint investigation with the state troopers and requested assistance from its evidence-recovery unit in Louisville.

After the meeting, Wilson drove to the lab in Frankfort to drop off evidence, which included Sparkman's clothes, the scraps of rag and rope from the ground, and the duct tape from Sparkman's body. For capturing fingerprints, few surfaces are more reliable than tape. But the tests came back negative. Whoever was responsible for Sparkman's death apparently had been careful enough to wear gloves.

Wilson received a phone call from Sergeant Atkin the following morning. Sparkman's 20-year-old son, Josh, had shown up at the state police's London post with several documents, and his demeanor had struck the officers as odd. He was unnervingly

calm and spoke in a flat, emotionless voice. Among the documents he turned over was a “just in case” letter written by his father, which Josh had found buried in a filing cabinet. William Sparkman had been diagnosed with non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma in 2007, but had been cancer-free for the past year. The letter spelled out what Josh needed to do with the family’s finances if the elder Sparkman passed away. While meeting with Atkin, Josh asked whether Sparkman’s gun had been found. He couldn’t recall the make, but he was certain it was a .22-caliber pistol. His father had been no gun aficionado, but said one never knew who or what he might run into in Clay County’s backwoods. Josh said Sparkman had kept the gun in his truck.

That afternoon, FBI agents scoured the truck. They found a laptop briefcase, but no laptop. Also missing were Sparkman’s gun, wallet, and phone. The agents found his credit-card holder, but the cards were gone. They scanned the truck interior with a light used to locate microscopic evidence. No blood or other bodily fluids were found. The dashboard and steering wheel held traces of red fibers, indicating that the surfaces had been wiped down to eliminate fingerprints. The fibers appeared to match the red rags found at the scene.

Federal agents descended on Sparkman’s house the next morning. Combing through it, they discovered a fixed-blade knife and a pair of black cargo pants in Josh’s old bedroom. When they inspected the pants, they detected what appeared to be the same red fibers seen in Sparkman’s truck. The agents also discovered a large syringe with an unknown substance on the plunger. None of these items alone constituted a smoking gun, but taken together, they began to tell a story. Wilson would soon find out that Josh was a misfit who’d had a rocky relationship with his father. A high-school dropout, he’d fallen in with the wrong crowd as a teen and, according to the FBI, had had trouble with drugs. His

clothing reflected his rebelliousness; one of his shirts was emblazoned with the words Psycho Path. Those close to Sparkman knew that he had lost control of Josh, who was notorious for wrecking cars and screaming at his father.

Four days after Sparkman’s body was found, Wilson had his first person of interest.

Sparkman adopted Josh in 1991. Josh was 2 years old at the time and had been living with a foster family in Orlando, Florida. Sparkman didn’t fit the mold of the typical adoptive parent. He was 33 and single, a Boy Scout director stationed in Texas. People close to Sparkman were surprised when he told them he wanted to adopt. He just wanted a child, he said, and was confident his experience with the Boy Scouts primed him to be a dad. He didn’t expand on the reasons.

The Boy Scouts were central to Sparkman’s life. The oldest of three boys, he grew up in a middle-class neighborhood in Mulberry, a tiny town in central Florida. His mother, Henrie, was a high-school principal, and his dad, Billy, worked as an executive at a large furniture chain. Sparkman excelled in school, but scouting was his passion. “Bill really eats this scout stuff up,” his father would say. Sparkman devoured books devoted to such topics as coin collecting and compass use. He loved the hands-on training as well, learning such skills as how to make fire with wet wood and how to make tea out of dandelions and pine needles. Sparkman rose rapidly through the scouting ranks and became an Eagle Scout at age 16, just three years after joining.

“He was very eager to achieve whatever was out there that was achievable,” says Chuck Cooper, his Boy Scout troop leader in the 1970s and ’80s. “He had a thirst for knowledge. He was sharp. He had an inquiring mind.”

Sparkman’s family was not surprised when, after brief stints at Vanderbilt University and the University of South Florida, he

decided to become a professional scout. He went on to oversee scouting programs in several Florida counties.

Throughout this period, Sparkman showed little interest in dating. The Boy Scouts were his life. While he was in the process of adopting Josh, Sparkman was promoted to assistant director of the Order of the Arrow, the Boy Scouts' national honor society. He moved near the Boy Scouts' national headquarters, in Irving, Texas, and finalized his adoption of Josh soon after. The following year, 1993, Sparkman accepted a district-executive position in Lexington, Kentucky, and relocated to London, about 75 miles south.

Boasting quality schools and a bucolic charm, London must have seemed like an ideal place to raise a child. But life with Josh didn't go as planned. After Sparkman was found dead, his mother and others closest to him immediately suspected Josh or his pals. She soon found out that Sparkman had made Josh a beneficiary of one of his two life-insurance policies. Sparkman had laid this out in his "just in case" letter. Josh, in other words, had a motive.

Thursday, September 17, 2009

Wilson's colleague, Detective Doug Boyd, hopped into his cruiser and set out for Cookeville, Tennessee, a bustling city where Josh was living, about 125 miles southwest of London. Josh had told investigators he worked at a fast-food chain called Church's Chicken. In the week before his father was found, he told them, he had worked the closing shift every day but September 12, the day Sparkman's body was discovered. Josh said that his car had broken down earlier in the week and he was dependent on friends to get around. He hadn't left Cookeville that entire week.

Boyd was dispatched to Tennessee with a specific order: suss out Josh's alibi.

His first stop was Church's Chicken. There, Josh's manager confirmed that the young man had worked that week, but not on September 12. She gave Boyd a time sheet, which listed Josh as working from 7:08 p.m. until 11:56 p.m. on September 10, and 4:31 p.m. until 10:56 p.m. on September 11.

Boyd drove to Josh's house and spoke with his roommate and close friend, Gracie Thomas, age 21. Josh and Gracie had been inseparable since they had first met a decade earlier through a church group. She treated him like a younger brother. Gracie confirmed to Boyd that Josh's green Chevy was undrivable. She said she'd seen him every day that week.

Around the time Boyd was interviewing Gracie, a skinny 20-year-old named Lowell Adams walked into the state-police station in London. A day earlier, investigators had stopped by his house and told his mother they wished to speak with him about Sparkman's death. Lowell's name was mentioned in the letter that Josh had found: Sparkman had listed him as the beneficiary of his second insurance policy. Sparkman wrote that Lowell sometimes accompanied him while he performed his census duties, "for security purposes."

Lowell met with Sergeant Atkin, one of Atkin's detectives, and an FBI agent in a cramped, cream-colored office. He told the investigators that he and Josh had been good friends until 10th grade, when they began to drift apart. William Sparkman became a friend of the family and occasionally tutored Lowell in math. For the past two years, Sparkman had paid him \$7.50 an hour, in cash, for security and navigational help while carrying out his census work – a practice that the FBI agent knew was a violation of official census policy. Lowell went on to say that Sparkman would always bring along a government-issued laptop, a personal laptop, and his pistol, which he kept in a hard-plastic case in the truck. Lowell admitted that he was uncomfortable the first time he

accompanied Sparkman – they had little in common – but their bond grew over time. Asked about Sparkman’s romantic life, Lowell said they never discussed it. Lowell, in fact, didn’t know of his ever dating, but he knew Sparkman had a strained relationship with Josh.

In the final minutes of the interview, Lowell said he’d last accompanied Sparkman on September 5, exactly a week before he was found dead. On September 8, Lowell missed a call from Sparkman, who didn’t leave a message; Lowell never spoke to him again.

The interview was revealing, but it brought the investigators no closer to understanding what had happened. They didn’t fully grasp Lowell’s relationship with Sparkman, and scheduled him for a polygraph. They could not have known that Lowell knew more than he was letting on. A lot more.

Sparkman had few friends before he moved to Kentucky, and once there, he didn’t go out of his way to make any new ones. At Josh’s Little League baseball games, he would sit by himself in a folding chair near left field, recording his son’s every at-bat in a notepad. He would greet the other parents but never speak with them for very long.

Shortly after Josh started school, Sparkman resigned from his Boy Scout post and later started volunteering at his son’s elementary school. He was determined to help Josh, who was struggling in the classroom, succeed. This devotion did not go unnoticed. “It seemed his whole heart was into Josh,” says Beverly Johnson, who had a son in the same class.

Sparkman was eventually offered a job at Johnson Elementary School as an instructional assistant, a position he held for nine years. The job paid a pittance, but it gave Sparkman the opportunity to work with kids, which he loved. He was always upbeat and eager to help students, who adored him. Sparkman

was also a model colleague – prompt, proper, and willing to do anything for a fellow teacher.

One year, Beverly Johnson, who also worked as an instructional assistant, used up all her vacation days while her 8-year-old son, Zachary, was hospitalized with bleeding ulcers. Around Christmas, he developed strep throat, and doctors wanted to take his tonsils out. It pained Johnson not to be able to stay home and take care of him. The moment Sparkman heard about her predicament, he solved it. “I gave you 10 days” – vacation he’d accrued but hadn’t used – “so you don’t have to worry about that anymore,” he told her.

“I never asked him for days. He just insisted,” Johnson would say later. “That explains what kind of person he was. He was a real giving person, a compassionate person.”

Nonetheless, the school’s teachers would sometimes discuss among themselves how “unusual” he was. Socializing with adults didn’t seem to come naturally to him. Sparkman could appear distant and, at times, be quite blunt, the kind of person around whom others trod carefully, so as not to say the wrong thing. He was also intensely private. Even the teachers who worked closely with him didn’t know much about his personal life. Sparkman never spoke about dating, and his colleagues never knew him to have any romantic partner.

Outside of work, Sparkman was a homebody. He liked to surf the Web and play Sudoku. He had a serious coin collection, and various pieces of *Star Trek* memorabilia. He delighted in playing with his dog, Jack. He spent Friday evenings on the phone with his mother, the two of them watching the TV game show *Are You Smarter Than a 5th Grader?*

When Sparkman did go out to eat, he gravitated to budget-friendly places like Applebee’s and Cracker Barrel. Money was always tight in the Sparkman household. Josh was a huge financial

drain. After he left school he got his GED, but he could never hold down a job, and was constantly begging his dad to replace his wrecked vehicles. Sparkman's mother occasionally sent him cash to help him make ends meet. (He always paid her back, she says.)

In 2005, Sparkman started supplementing his income by working part-time for the Census Bureau. His territory included several rural counties in eastern Kentucky, including Clay. One of Sparkman's closest colleagues at Johnson Elementary, a retired state trooper named Gilbert Acciardo, repeatedly warned him to be careful. Acciardo had patrolled Clay County. He knew it was a rough place.

"I just said to Bill, 'Everybody's not nice. The farther east that you go, the more people are a little more standoffish about people coming to their house,'" Acciardo recalled later. "He just assumed everybody was like him, happy-go-lucky. He saw all the good in people, and I realized, because of my background, that there were bad people too. He just joked and laughed about it," Acciardo added. "You could tell that he wasn't taking me seriously."

Thursday, September 17, 2009

A phone rang at the Manchester Police Department. It was Willie Jean Moore, a 46-year-old resident of Arnetts Fork Road whose past arrests for theft had made her a well-known figure in law-enforcement circles. But this call had nothing to do with any of her cases. She told an officer that she had information about the death of the census worker.

When Moore showed up at the police station, Detective Wilson and an FBI agent were waiting. She walked into the small interrogation room looking haggard and talking fast. According to police reports, Moore said Hoskins Cemetery was a favorite hangout among local druggies. In recent weeks, Moore said, she

had seen a car belonging to one of them, Robbie Collins, parked at the cemetery. She also said Collins was acting suspiciously in the days before Sparkman was found dead. At 9 p.m. on September 9, she said, she saw Collins riding an ATV down Arnetts Fork Road, before turning off the road and riding through the creek bed toward the cemetery.

At 7 p.m. the next day, Moore said, Collins and a friend stopped by her house. They appeared unhinged and told her they had to get out of town for a while. Collins gave Moore his cellphone number and asked her to call him every few days to let him know what the talk was around the community. Sparkman's body was found two days later.

Moore's story was intriguing, but Wilson didn't think much of it. Throughout the interview, she kept getting lost in elaborate and often incomprehensible tangents. He had experience dealing with people like Moore. Sometimes, they want to help a little too much.

Then again, Robbie Collins was known to run with a rough crowd, and he had a long criminal history that included arrests for arson and illegal gun possession. The 29-year-old stood just 5 feet 8 inches, but he weighed 225 pounds. Around his right eye was a crude tribal tattoo. When Wilson discovered that Collins had indeed skipped town, his interest grew.

While on his way to interview one of Collins's friends, Wilson was flagged down by a tow-truck driver. The driver told Wilson that a few days before Sparkman's body was discovered, he'd gotten behind a slow-moving Toyota pickup truck and spotted what he believed to be a pair of hands, bound together, rising out of the truck bed, amid a group of three to five people. The driver said he'd even called 911 to report it. Wilson immediately called the emergency-dispatch line to check the complaint. A representative said the driver had filed the report that Tuesday

evening. Wilson couldn't be sure what the man saw, but he was confident it wasn't Sparkman. One of Sparkman's neighbors had reported seeing him that Wednesday.

The next day, a confidential source told an FBI agent that the word on the street was that Sparkman had been a "rat for the feds." Investigators knew that if such a tantalizing piece of evidence leaked to the media, it would act like gasoline on a fire. The case had just ignited in the press after a law-enforcement official anonymously tipped off an Associated Press reporter. The dominant theory expressed in the media was that Sparkman had been killed by antigovernment extremists. But law-enforcement figures in Clay County remained skeptical. "Typical murders in this area, you get shot. They throw you over the hill," Sheriff Kevin Johnson would say later. "There's not this kind of 'I'm going to send you a message' type thing."

When Manchester Police Chief Jeff Culver learned about Sparkman's death, his first thought was that it was tied to the FBI's presence in the area. In the previous decade, methamphetamine and prescription-drug use had skyrocketed, overdoses were common, and dealers were becoming more brazen. Fed up, a coalition of more than 60 churches had staged an antidrug march in May 2004 that drew some 3,500 people. Federal agents swooped in not long after and, over six years, arrested dozens of people, including drug dealers and some of the county's most powerful political figures, on charges ranging from racketeering and extortion to vote-rigging and drug dealing. Culver speculated that Sparkman had been killed to send a message to the FBI: *Get out.*

Wilson was still no closer to learning what had happened to Sparkman, and the state police and FBI remained tight-lipped about the case. "We're not responding to any of the speculation, the innuendo, or the rumors that are floating around," state-police

spokesman Don Trosper said at the time. "The Kentucky State Police concerns itself with facts."

Wilson did his best to tune out the noise. His job was to follow the evidence. Unbeknownst to him, the investigation would soon take a sharp turn.

Sparkman had relished his census job. He loved exploring different places. The position brought him into contact with people like Mary Hibbard. A married mother of two from Manchester, Hibbard is a retired special-education teacher. She and her husband, Greg, are devout Baptists; Mary doesn't go anywhere without her EvangeCube, an evangelism tool fashioned after a Rubik's Cube that presents the story of Jesus Christ in pictures – to "introduce people to Christ who may not know Him," she says. When Sparkman drove up the Hibbards' steep driveway in the spring of 2009, he was met by their two powerful boxers, Bocephus and Booboo. Sparkman honked the horn, and out came Mary. He remained in the seat of his pickup truck during the interview, recording her answers on his computer. After a few minutes, Mary started asking the questions. "Do you know Jesus?" she asked.

Religion is woven deeply into the social fabric in these parts. Clay County has no movie theaters and only a handful of bars, but more than 100 churches. For many people, life revolves around the church. It's where weekends are spent, where lifelong friendships are forged, where husbands-to-be meet their brides. Mailboxes are emblazoned with Christian-themed signs. Sparkman told Hibbard he was a Christian. A former altar boy, he was a member of a Methodist church in London.

Ultimately, however, Sparkman believed education was his true calling. He longed to become a full-time teacher. Over the course of his nine years in the Laurel County School System, he had seen several other instructional assistants gain full-time positions after

returning to school to get teaching degrees. With a son to care for and bills to pay, Sparkman didn't think he'd ever get the opportunity to do the same. But then he learned about Western Governors University, an online college with offices in Salt Lake City, Utah, and in the summer of 2005, he enrolled.

Two years later, Sparkman went to see his doctor for an ingrown toenail. The visit led to the discovery of a cyst on the side of his neck. He was immediately sent to the hospital. The diagnosis his doctors feared came 45 days later: Sparkman had Stage 3 non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. It was early November 2007. He was weeks away from graduating.

Sparkman was shaken by the diagnosis but not devastated by it. In a conversation with a colleague later that day, he revealed that he had cancer by explaining that he was planning to write a book – *How My Big Toe Saved My Life*.

Sparkman started chemotherapy that month. The sessions stretched across four months, stripping him of his hair and much of his strength. Through it all, Sparkman continued working at Josh's old school, as a substitute teacher and an after-school staffer.

Sparkman vowed not to let the cancer derail his pursuit of a college degree, and in December 2007, he graduated with a bachelor's of science in mathematics education. His resilience inspired the staff at Western Governors so deeply that they chose him to be a commencement speaker. But by the time the ceremony rolled around in February 2008, Sparkman's blood-cell count was so low that his doctors told him he couldn't safely fly. Determined to receive his diploma in person, Sparkman decided he'd drive the 1,735 miles to Salt Lake City.

At eight and a half minutes, Sparkman's speech was the longest of the day. "I wanted to share a little about the road I took to get here today," Sparkman began. He told of his Boy Scout days, his

move to Kentucky, his experience working in the school system, and of course, his battle with cancer. The speech was folksy and funny and poignant. "I'd been knocked down, but I refused to be knocked out," Sparkman said. "Those brick walls will appear from time to time in your career. Do not let them stop you. There are no failures, just teaching moments."

That April, Sparkman found out his cancer was in remission. He had won. With his cancer retreating and his diploma in hand, he must have been brimming with confidence.

Monday, September 28, 2009

Lowell Adams was seated in the FBI office in London, awaiting the start of a polygraph test. Ten days had passed since his initial police interview. He had decided to come clean.

During the pre-test interview, Lowell told the polygrapher that he wanted to correct his earlier statement. Then he dropped a bomb: Sparkman had spoken with him several times about killing himself. In fact, on the Saturday before he was found dead, Sparkman told Lowell that he was going to do it that Wednesday. In August, Lowell explained, Sparkman had told him that his cancer had returned, the experimental drugs were not working, and he didn't expect to make it beyond October. Sparkman said he wanted to commit suicide to spare himself the agony of dying from cancer.

Lowell had a lot more to say. Sparkman had told him he'd already selected a place in the woods in Clay County to do the deed. He had it all planned out. He intended to hang himself by throwing a rope around a tree, attaching cinder blocks to his feet, and hurling himself down a hill. He was going to tie his hands behind his back to give the appearance that someone had murdered him. To further confuse investigators, he was going to

dispose of his gun and laptop, and wipe down his truck to eliminate fingerprints.

Lowell continued: Sparkman told him he'd already practiced asphyxiating himself by putting a bag over his head. Sparkman wasn't sure he could pull everything off on his own, so he asked Lowell to help. Lowell refused. On that Saturday, Sparkman asked Lowell to get drunk with him later in the day, one last hurrah. Sparkman picked up a case of Budweiser, but Lowell turned him down, saying he had to work the next day. He was concerned that people might think either that he was "in on it" or that they were engaged in homosexual activity, which, he emphasized, was not the case.

Lowell was done. The polygraph test was postponed; it could render inaccurate results after such an extended pre-interview. The polygrapher wrote out Lowell's statement on white computer paper. At the bottom of the three-page note, Lowell signed his name and added a one-line mea culpa: "I have read this sorry I didn't tell this before."

Wilson learned about Lowell's statement the next morning in a meeting at the FBI office. From the outside, it may have been hard to reconcile the cancer-beating, college-graduating Sparkman with the despondent, apparently cancer-stricken Sparkman whom Lowell had described. But Lowell's account fit many of the case's particulars. What's more, Lowell didn't describe every last detail. That would have aroused suspicion. Had Lowell gotten it exactly right, Wilson would have placed him at the scene.

Lowell took the polygraph test eight days later. He passed.

The evidence pointing to suicide was mounting, but Wilson still couldn't reach a definitive conclusion. There was still too much physical evidence that couldn't be explained: the letters on his chest, the small length of rope, the missing knife or other

cutting instrument. And there was another mystery: If it was suicide, how did he pull it off?

When the glow of his graduation and his cancer triumph faded, Sparkman was still balancing three low-paying jobs: substitute teacher, after-school staffer, and census taker. His main priority became finding a full-time teaching job. Sparkman kept a close eye on the openings posted on the Laurel County Schools Web site. Months passed, and he was still struggling to find work. When a math-teacher position opened up at a high school near his house, Sparkman told his colleagues how badly he wanted it. When he learned that the job had gone to someone else, he didn't hide his disappointment.

Things weren't going particularly well at home, either. According to court documents, in August 2008, Josh was arrested for receiving a stolen gun from a friend. A judge sentenced him to six months' house arrest and had him outfitted with an electronic ankle bracelet. Sparkman decided he had finally had enough. A few months after Josh's house arrest ended, Sparkman told him it was time he moved out.

After Josh moved in with Gracie Thomas in the summer of 2009, she often heard him berating his dad over the phone. For years, Gracie had watched Josh walk all over his father. Sparkman still hadn't cut him off; he regularly added money to Josh's prepaid Walmart credit card. If Sparkman hadn't given up on Josh by now, he was never going to. "Bill lived and breathed for Sparky," says Gracie's mom, Candice Smith, referring to Josh by his nickname.

Thursday, October 8, 2009

At a meeting at the state-police headquarters, in Frankfort, Emily Craig addressed Wilson and the other investigators. A renowned forensic anthropologist, Craig had been asked to review the case.

She started by suggesting that the time of death, given the contents of Sparkman's stomach and the condition of his body, could have been as early as Wednesday night. She said a fractured bone in his neck was healing, a sign that the injury had occurred in the past and had nothing to do with his death. This supported Lowell's claim that Sparkman had practiced suffocating himself.

Craig's third finding was by far the most significant. While studying the lettering on Sparkman's chest, Craig, who is also a professional illustrator, was struck by a mark at the top of the letter *E*. It looked to her to be what illustrators refer to as a "bead," a drop of ink that appears at the end of any marker stroke on a nonporous surface. At the bottom of the letter, she noticed that the black ink was evenly dispersed, which signals the start of a stroke. The other letters had the same features. This, Craig determined, indicated that the letters on Sparkman's chest had been drawn upside down. It seemed Sparkman had scrawled *FED* on himself.

Lowell's account was bolstered by two other discoveries revealed at the meeting: Rolf, the forensic pathologist, backed off from her original statement that Sparkman's colon appeared to have been cleansed; instead, she said, it was simply empty. And the toxicology report showed no sign of any drug that would render Sparkman unconscious.

A few days after the meeting, Wilson brought Sparkman's glasses to the Walmart in London and found out that they were made to correct 20/400 vision. Now it made sense: Sparkman wouldn't have been able to pull it all off without his glasses. He had taped them on for a simple reason: to allow him to see.

Wilson sensed that the investigation was nearing its end. On October 22, Josh Sparkman and Robbie Collins were called in to take polygraph tests. They both passed. No link was found between the fibers on Josh's pants and the red rags at the scene.

In Collins's case, cellphone records confirmed that he was nowhere near Hoskins Cemetery the week Sparkman vanished. The DNA results would come in not long after. The red rags contained only Sparkman's DNA, and the small piece of rope found on the ground contained a partial DNA profile that also was consistent with Sparkman's.

On October 26, the lead investigators held one final meeting. At this point, the group acknowledged, all leads had been exhausted. The evidence pointed to only one scenario: Sparkman had killed himself, but staged the scene to create the appearance that he was murdered. The tape around his wrists and ankles, the rag in his mouth, the census ID taped to his head, the letters on his chest – it was all a ruse. Sparkman wanted the police to believe he was murdered because he worked for the government. But why?

Lowell had claimed that Sparkman told him he wanted to kill himself rather than die from cancer. But Sparkman's two cancer doctors contradicted that theory. In interviews with the FBI, they said Sparkman was told in April 2008 that his cancer was in remission. In fact, on his last visit, on August 13 of that year, his chemotherapy port was taken out. The doctors gave Sparkman no reason to believe his cancer had returned.

Without a suicide note, determining with certainty why someone took his or her own life is impossible. At least one person close to Sparkman thinks he might have been struggling with his sexuality. Wilson concluded that financial problems pushed him over the edge. Sparkman had had a hard time keeping up with his house payments, and his home was in foreclosure. His finances were in such disarray, he had started taking out credit cards to pay off other cards, compounding his debt. At the time of his death, Sparkman owed more than \$50,000, according to the FBI.

Then there were the life-insurance policies, payable to Josh and Lowell. Each was valued at \$300,000, and each went into effect in 2009. Both policies were for accidental death only; they wouldn't pay out for a suicide.

The investigators believed Sparkman's inability to find a full-time teaching job had left him increasingly despondent. Josh couldn't hold down a job, and was in and out of trouble with the law. The future seemed grim for Bill and his boy. Wilson believed that Sparkman saw his dramatic final act as the only way to spare his son a lifetime of financial hardship.

The investigators called a press conference for November 24. At 2 p.m. that day, in a conference room at the state-police lab in Frankfort, Captain Lisa Rudzinski ticked off the evidence pointing to suicide. Wilson, standing ramrod-straight, looked on. Rudzinski took her time while discussing the most combustible element of the case, the three letters scrawled on Sparkman's chest. With a black marker, she drew each letter on a dry-erase board, from the bottom up, emphasizing the bead at the top of each one. Describing Sparkman's final moments, Rudzinski didn't mince words. She pointed out that his body was in contact with the ground almost to his knees. To have survived, Rudzinski said, "all Mr. Sparkman had to do at any time was stand up."

The case proved to be far less sinister than the early theories amplified by the press. There were no antigovernment zealots. No murderous drug traffickers. No bloodthirsty backwoodsmen.

After the investigation was closed, Sparkman's house was seized, and Josh seemed to drop out of sight. Because Sparkman's death was ruled a suicide, the insurance money was never paid out.

One person who was not at all surprised by the outcome of the case was Charles House, the president of the Clay County Genealogical and Historical Society. An author and biographer,

House has spent more than a decade researching Clay County's past and people. "This place has had lots and lots of murders throughout its history, going back to the blood feuds in the 1800s and even up until the 1970s," House says. "But I don't think there's ever been a single case of an outsider coming in here and getting whacked." He told the reporters who called him – and call they did, from places as far away as France – that the media were sensationalizing the case by recycling old stereotypes about the region. "We're not so backward that we get angry about this stuff anymore, because it's been going on since the 1960s," says House. "We're just more amused than angry."

On September 8, four days before he was found dead, Bill Sparkman called Sara Upchurch, his lead field representative at the Census Bureau. Sparkman told her he planned to spend the next two days doing census runs in Clay County and nearby Knox County. He didn't specify exactly where he was going, and Upchurch had no reason to ask. Sparkman was his usual chipper self. He told Upchurch there were several festivals and family reunions going on in town over the weekend. Then they exchanged good-byes and hung up.

At about noon the next day, Linda Wilder stepped out of her house to walk her dog and saw Sparkman's red truck heading down the street. Wilder lived at the bottom of Sparkman's block. In 16 years, they had spoken infrequently; the bulk of their contact came via casual waves. This time was no different. Sparkman waved to Wilder. Wilder waved back.

It was the last time Bill Sparkman was seen alive.

Later that day, according to the police, he drove to Clay County and turned down Arnetts Fork Road. He had already ditched his census laptop and pistol, and he had already written *FED* on his chest. In his vehicle was a long white rope, five red rags, possibly a small blade, and strips of gray duct tape, just

enough for the job. Sparkman crossed the creek and parked his truck in the clearing. He pulled out the rope and carried it to a tree at the opposite edge of the clearing, his socks making the faintest of impressions on the dirt and leaves.

Now, according to the police, his Boy Scout training kicked in. He tossed the rope over a branch about 15 feet up, wrapped it around the trunk of a nearby tree, and then tied it off at the base of a third tree. He tied the other end into a noose, and cut off the loose end with a knife or a sharp rock that he chucked into the dense woods. Then, he likely walked back to the truck and wiped down the steering wheel and dashboard with one of the rags. He stripped off his polo shirt, pants, and underwear and placed them neatly in the truck bed. Naked except for his socks, he tiptoed back to the tree. Holding a rag in each hand, he carefully wrapped his ankles together with the tape, making sure his fingers never touched the adhesive. He then took off his glasses, placed a strip of tape over his head, and secured them onto his face. He stuffed a rag into his mouth, then ran a strip of tape around his head. Grabbing another rag, he bound his wrists together with the final piece of tape by rolling one around the other.

Everything was in place. But Sparkman realized the rope was too long. He hopped over to the second tree, loosened the tape around his wrists, untied the knot, and then retied it with less slack. Satisfied with the new length, he hopped back to the noose and slid his head inside. He steadied himself. And then, according to the police, Bill Sparkman took one final breath and let his feet go out from under him. ♦

Downton Abbey

by *Francine Prose*

Every former colony gets the nostalgia it deserves, its own longing for some relic of the departed empire or some compulsion to recreate its more outlandish idiosyncrasies. In Mexico, it's the baptismal chapels encrusted with gold stolen from the ancestors of the infant whose tiny forehead is being sprinkled with holy water. In North Africa, the boulevards and cafes that signal, *This is not the medina!* In India, the Dickensian office culture, from the paper-choked bureaucracies of the post-independence years to the present-day call centres staffed by twenty-first-century male and female Bob Cratchits reading aloud from scripts to panicky or impatient voices halfway around the world.

We in the United States were British subjects for such a relatively short time, one might think that less of the mother country would have rubbed off on us and remained. In theory, we should have been comparatively free, to make ourselves up from scratch, to invent a style and fantasy unique to a nation of exiled cultists, grifters, cowboy entrepreneurs, deported convicts, slaveholders and slaves. And in a way, I suppose, we have.

Yet a base-level Anglophilia is constantly thrumming on, or just under, the surface of our culture, a nostalgia fueled by that particularly American strain of a deadly sin: British country-house real-estate envy. How it thrills us to imagine ourselves as the residents of a dwelling plucked out of our childhood fairy-tale books and adolescent fantasies. How elegantly those spires and

towers rise above the local mega-mansion that we may have been coveting, and how effortlessly those rolling green lawns shame the vulgar bougainvilleas of a Beverly Hills movie-star hacienda.

Ishiguro's novel and the Merchant-Ivory film version of *The Remains of the Day* were so popular here that the lovelorn butler played by Anthony Hopkins is still padding the hushed corridors of the American psyche. Not long ago, I watched Robert Altman's 2001 *Gosford Park*, the British-country-house murder mystery given fresh life by Altman's gifts and by a stellar ensemble cast. The screenplay for *Gosford Park*, which is played out against the backdrop of two exquisite country manors, was written by Lord Julian Fellowes, a novelist and screenwriter who has now given us *Downton Abbey*. Having completed its second season, the PBS television series has sparked another surge of Anglophiliac longing – specifically the desire to return to the manor to which we imagine we were born, and where we would still be living had our founding fathers not made all that fuss about a tax on tea, in what would prove to be a nation of coffee-drinkers.

Our post-colonial nostalgia has taken various forms, though there is often an overlap with Disney princess culture: the glamorous dresses, the enchanted castle, the handsome prince, the pumpkins turned into spectacular vintage cars. Once I read an entire article in *Vanity Fair* magazine trying to figure out what its subject had done; the answer was he'd been married to Princess Margaret's best friend.

Like princess culture, Anglophilia is easy to commodify and sell. The royal wedding generated more attention (and presumably more prime-time ad revenue) than the Arab spring; newscasts here routinely featured some young woman and her mom who'd traveled from Sacramento in the hope of catching a glimpse of Will and Kate. It is generally well known, especially by the owners of New England luxury inns, that British Victorian décor is at

once comforting and arousing, especially to women, though I have always failed to see the comforting or arousing aspects of a narrow bed so high off the floor you need a ladder to reach it.

In any case, our nostalgia for that imaginary past life spikes when things get rough – socially, economically, environmentally, let's say the weather turns strange. It's only natural, only *human* to want to return to a time when we could just all sit back and relax and let the royals decide. Oh, for the days when everyone knew who they were and accepted their social roles, understood what they were doing and appreciated the tea sandwiches without the tea tax. The seasons were the seasons, Christmas, spring, the weather was nice. And everyone, upstairs and downstairs, got to live in a fabulous house.

Perhaps it goes without saying that Americans who entertain upstairs-downstairs fantasies generally imagine themselves to have been part of the upstairs contingent. In that they're like the intrepid who undergo past life regressions to find out that they were once pharaohs and queens, never pyramid-building slaves.

In 1970, I was out of the country; I remember clearly that in that year of social upheaval and political uncertainty, many letters I got from home featured news about the latest episode of *The Forsythe Saga* and the hunt for the Manson family. Now once again in our hour of need – elections, struggling economy, continued financial scandals, bail-outs and real estate foreclosures – how fortunate we are to have yet another British dynasty rescue us from our dreary or dread-haunted Sunday nights and install us, however briefly, amid all that luscious square footage. It's no accident that *Downton Abbey* is named after the star of the show.

Much has been written about the programme that has attracted millions of viewers (almost five million in the US alone) in a hundred countries worldwide. Variant theories have been floated to explain its popularity, beyond the obvious, which is that

everyone likes beautiful people and beaded dresses and fancy cars and not knowing if the headstrong lovers are going to get together or not. The looming question of who will inherit the Abbey resonates with Americans who at this point may prefer the antiquated, sexist, vaguely comprehensible laws of primogeniture to the chaotic, heartless and grabby dispossessions resulting from real estate swindles, subprime lending and so forth.

Perhaps the scariest theory is that one reason for the show's unprecedented success among younger viewers and other habitual Masterpiece-Theater-avoiders is that the series has made it all right to like rich people again. After all that confusing Occupy Wall Street stuff about the 99 per cent, it's a comfort to be reminded that Lord and Lady Cawley are model human beings, beneficent, generous, gentle, Gandhi and Mother Theresa with a few human quirks. A few weeks ago I mentioned this idea to a rather conservative *Downton Abbey* fan, and his response – amusement, consternation, nervousness about the fact that I'd said the words 'rich people' in a rich person's apartment – made me think that this theory might be partly true.

On the other hand, my own fondness for the show has (I can promise) nothing to do with any attraction to, or fascination with, the British peerage. The truth is, I've watched both seasons; a few weeks ago, at a Sunday evening dinner party, I found myself reflecting grumpily that I would have had more fun if I'd stayed home watching *Downton Abbey*, which I caught up with, the next night, on my computer.

By and large, I'm an easy mark for TV serials. When serials work, they can be great; Dickens would have been the first to note the inherent appeal of a form that ritually denies and then satisfies our curiosity about the outcome of a plot. If only in its ability to string us along from week to week, *Downton Abbey* is a bit like *The Sopranos* with a castle substituting for Tony's New Jersey palazzo.

It's got fancier art direction, less sex, fewer people getting whacked, no humour, and fewer moments (actually, none at all) when the writing is as good as it is when Tony's consigliere Syl Dante complains that his wife is an albacore around his neck.

For me, and I think for many Americans, much of what we find appealing is the Abbey itself. Highclere Castle, near Newbury, is a Victorian Gothic extravaganza combining Cinderella's palace, the Mormon Tabernacle, Canterbury Cathedral and the Wizard of Oz's Emerald City. It's the prize that every character is fighting for, mourning, or resisting. Several books have appeared documenting the history of Highclere, which was built by the third earl of Carnarvon, starting in 1838. But nothing on the page can achieve what happens to our pulse when the cameras hurtle us towards the Abbey with all those violins throbbing. It's like sex, maybe better than sex, many viewers might secretly think.

After a recap of the previous week's events, the Abbey is the first thing we see, rushing closer. Then suddenly, we're in the house and we watch the rest of the show in a tranked-out languor in which our televisions, like thoughtful and unobtrusive attendants, are filling our cups with warm milk tea the instant they run out.

We love the house so much we're willing to overlook a few reservations about details. For example, heating. Residents of inclement climates may wonder how the ladies can wear those diaphanous gowns at Christmastime. Even with the fire in the hearth, isn't someone else's nose turning blue? Is this California? And why are the lawns so verdant for so much of the year? It's why my husband insists on calling the series Chlorophyll Downs.

It's been remarked that everyone on the show is extremely nice: aristocrats, maids, cooks and butlers and footmen. The only unpleasant ones are the socially ambitious strivers, a few conniving or naive servants who scheme to rise above their

station, and the vile newspaper baron Sir Richard, contriving to do the same thing but on a higher and more threatening level. But to complain that the show reinforces conservative and inaccurate stereotypes concerning social class only insults the intelligence of viewers (like myself) who obviously know that. It also misidentifies the problem, which has less to do with conservatism than with subtler and more troubling effects of the stereotypical: the way in which it reduces life to a drama we've already seen, a milieu inhabited by people we've already met – which means we don't have to worry much about where we are or who anyone is beyond the social role.

If *Downton Abbey* is pretty good TV, or even good TV, but certainly not great TV (a category into which I'd put *The Sopranos*, *The Wire*, and *Homeland*) one problem may be that its characters are not only discouraged from crossing class lines but from doing anything that will surprise us. We can count on the precisely calibrated dose of satisfaction delivered by Maggie Smith playing a matriarch who has lived long enough to feel she can fire the censor between her brain and her mouth. We know there's no chance of anyone uttering anything remotely like the equivalent of Syl Dante mangling Coleridge.

So what keeps us home on Sunday night (apparently there are *Downton Abbey* viewing parties, but I haven't been invited) are fairly conventional questions of plot: Will our heroes and heroines succeed or fail? Reconcile or break one another's hearts? Will the rebel daughter marry beneath her? Who will inherit the power and especially the house? We want to know what the characters will do, but once we have met them, we no longer have any questions about who they *are*, or what they will say. Whenever someone begins to speak, we can turn the sound off and provide the dialogue ourselves.

That divide – predictability and one-dimensionality on one

side, surprise and complexity on the other – is partly what defines the gap between entertainment and art, which isn't to say that art can't also be entertaining. It's what sets a show like *Downton Abbey* apart from the novels of Henry Green, several of which have certain surface similarities to the PBS series, most especially *Loving*, which takes place in a castle in Ireland during the early 1940s.

But beyond their country-house setting and their periodic swings between the mistress of the house's plush chamber and the servant's quarters, the two works could hardly be more dissimilar. One could compare any scene in *Downton Abbey* (from the most to the least dramatic) to any scene in *Loving*, a novel in which the drama is so quiet and, we feel, so *lifelike* that (unlike in the TV series with its nagging violins demanding our attention) a moment of distraction could mean missing some critical turn in the action. And any such comparison would rapidly reveal the vast difference in conception and execution.

Loving has many extraordinarily complicated and highly nuanced scenes in which the characters seem to unfold, revealing artichoke-like layers of depth, quirks and startling flashes of compassion or meanness.

One of my favourite interludes in the novel is one in which the most abject and frightened houseboy is allowed to accompany the two vital attractive maids to oversee the children playing at the beach; the maids flirt and toy with the young man, as he in a futile attempt tries to win their admiration or approval. Another memorable scene takes place in front of the hearth and involves a proposal of marriage that Edith the maid and Raunce the butler alternately drag and cajole each other into, a betrothal so potentially strangulated by the prospective bride and groom's pride, love, fear and uncertainty that we fear it might not happen – and are deeply moved when it does.

Now that *Downton Abbey* is on hiatus allow me to suggest that you fill some of those empty Sunday evenings with the novels of Henry Green. And let me also suggest that you pause to consider the difference between the high-wire Edith and Raunce are walking without leaving their chairs in front of the fireplace with the melodramatic chain-yankings of attraction and misunderstanding that, through two seasons of *Downton Abbey*, keep Lady Mary and her true love Matthew apart. Both the TV series and the novel are set during a World War. But while the show confronts its occupants with the moral dilemma about whether to turn the Abbey into a hospital for the war wounded (we can bet they'll do the right thing) *Loving* discloses some far more unsettling and provocative truths about the range of responses and reactions large and small, admirable and less so, unleashed by the anxieties generated by war, however distant.

I can close my eyes and visualize the castle in *Downton Abbey*. But though I have read *Loving* perhaps half a dozen times, someone could hold a gun to my head and I couldn't begin to describe the house in which it is set. I could, however, track the nuances of the conversation in which Edith and her Raunce sit in front of the hearth, playing at being the lord and lady of the manor, and in the process discovering the greatest of comforts: that their affection is mutual, that neither is alone in love. Every time I read the book, this moment affects me with an intensity of feeling that all the green lawns, gothic spires and violins in *Downton Abbey* cannot wrest from the pleasantly narcotized stupor in which I am invited weekly to roam the chilly parlours and steamy kitchens of the high life, and the empire, we left behind. ♦



Side by...

A Man of Good Will

by *Frank Sargeson*

WHEN I WAS A BOY AT SCHOOL our family lived some way along the road from a tomato-grower who was supposed to be eccentric. Among other things it was said that he didn't eat meat, neither had he ever been known to smoke or drink. Neither, as I found out for myself later on, did he use certain words or tell the usual sort of stories. But a lack of the more obvious vices will make people talk just as readily as the reverse, so I suppose it was only natural for some such word as eccentric to be passed round the neighbourhood.

He was a single man, this David Williams, and well on in years. He was so dark in colouring that people said he had a touch of the tar-brush, but if his name was anything to go by he probably got his dark skin from Welsh blood. He was a sketch of a man to look at, he walked pigeon-toed, and he was so thin his clothes seemed to hang on a framework of sticks. When you talked to him he laughed a lot, pushing his face in yours, and catching hold of your arm. Over one of his eyes he had a drooping eyelid, and it didn't fit in too well with the rest of him because it rather suggested wickedness. He had his sister living with him, attending to the house and helping with the outside work, and to look at she was very much the same kind as her brother. Though if anything, there was even less of her.

On their place there was a tremendous lot to do. They had a big glass-house for winter growing, and as soon as the warmer

...by side

Egy jóraivaló ember

fordította *Tárnok Attila*

ISKOLÁS KOROMBAN NEM MESSZE laktunk egy paradicsomtermesztőtől, akit sokan különcnek tartottak. Egyebek mellett azt beszéltek róla, hogy nem eszik húst, nem dohányzik és nem fogyaszt alkoholt. Mint később tapasztaltam, nem használ trágár kifejezéseket és nem leli örömét közönséges történetekben. Ám bizonyos rossz tulajdonságok hiánya ugyanúgy pletykálkodást gerjeszt, mint a vélt bűnök, így, gondolom, természetesen, hogy a környékünkön lábra kapott a 'különc' megbélyegzés.

Egyedülálló volt ez a David Williams, bár már benne járt a korban. Sötét bőre miatt az emberek azzal ugratták, hogy megbotlott a kátrányos vödörben, de ha a nevéből következtethetünk, valószínűleg Wales-i származásának köszönhetette a színét. Karikatúrába illő göthös lábakon járt és sovány testén úgy lógott a ruha, mintha karóra akasztották volna. Beszélgetés közben mindig nevetett, egészen közel hajolt az arcodhoz és megfogta a karod. Az egyik szemöldöke lefittyedt; ez gonoszság benyomását keltette. A vele lakó nővére tartott rendet a házban, besegített a kerti munkákban és tisztára az öccse hasonmása volt, csak ha lehet, még soványabb.

Rengeteg tennivaló akadt náluk. Télen a nagy üvegházban dolgoztak, de amint eljött a jobb idő, megszorodtak a külső munkák. Egyik télen kerestem pár shillinget az iskolai szünetben, besegítettem a tejes embernél. A zúsmarás, kora reggeli órán, ahogy végighajtottunk az utcán, láttuk, hogy az üvegházban már

weather came there'd be the outdoor work as well. One winter I earned a few shillings by helping a milkman during my school holidays, and driving along the road in the small hours of a frosty morning we would see a light moving inside the glass-house. Some mornings there would be two lights, and that meant Miss Williams was working with her brother. But no matter how early they started you'd see them working until well on into the evening, when they must have been too tired to do another stroke.

The Williams were grafters, everybody agreed about that. They never seemed to have any time for recreation, unless that was the name you could give to the time they put in on their flower beds and keeping the place tidy. They never went to socials or dances, they never even went to church, so nobody got to know them at all well. But they had people's respect for being such hard workers. Occasionally it would be said they were a pair of money-grubbers, living only to rake in the cash, but I think that would usually be said by somebody who wouldn't have minded being able to do the same thing. That is, if they were doing it. Nobody knew for certain.

Then after they had been on the place for a number of years Miss Williams became ill. She was taken to hospital and died after a few days. The funeral was a private one and her brother had her cremated, and a story got about that he afterwards took the ashes and threw them into the air to be scattered by the wind. I heard people talking about this and some said it was a horrible thing to do. They said it didn't show much respect for the dead. I remember my mother said that the thought of it was enough to give her the creeps.

Miss Williams's illness had happened round about Christmastime, when the outdoor tomatoes would soon be coming into bearing. Her brother was away for about a week

mozgolódás van. Némelyik reggelen két fénypont különült el, ami azt jelentette, hogy Miss Williams is ott serénykedik. De függetlenül attól, milyen korán keltek, még késő este is dolgoztak, amikor már vélhetőleg majd összeestek a fáradtságtól.

Szorgalmasak voltak, ebben mindenki egyetértett. Szórakozni sosem maradt idejük, hacsak a virágágyás és a kert gondozását nem tekintjük annak. Nem jártak össze senkivel, nem jártak táncolni, de még templomba sem, így senki nem ismerhette meg őket igazán. Ennek ellenére, munkájukkal kiérdemelték az emberek megbecsülését. Időnként az a vád érte őket, hogy csak azért élnek, hogy besöpörjék a pénzt, ám bár általában olyanok hangoztatták ezt, akik maguk sem bántak volna egy kicsit jobban keresni. Igazából senki sem tudta, hogy megy soruk.

Jópár éve közöttünk éltek már, amikor Miss Williams beteg lett. Kórházba került és néhány nappal később meghalt. A temetésen nem voltak megemlékezők, és szárnyra kapott a pletyka, hogy az öccse a szélbe szórta a hamvakat. Volt, aki ezt elképesztőnek tartotta, így mondták: megfosztotta a halottat a végső tisztességtől. Emlékszem, anyámat, megfogalmazása szerint, még a gondolattól is kiverte a hideg.

Miss Williams betegsége karácsony körül jelentkezett, amikor a szabadban ültetett paradicsom teremni kezdett. Az öccse úgy egy hétig távol volt, a ház be lett zárva és kezdett minden elhanyagolódni. Aztán észleltük, hogy visszatért és olyannak tűnt, mint azelőtt, de két ember helyett kellett dolgoznia. Túl sok volt ez számára. Egyik este felkereste apámat és megkérdezte, nincs-e kedvem munkába állni. Apámnak kételyei támadtak. Nem díjazta az egyénieskedő embereket, de mivel épp befejeztem az iskolát és még nem találtam magamnak megfelelő elfoglaltságot, meg egyeztettem a gazdálkodóval. Másnap reggel átmentem Mr. Williamshez, egy ideig csak utánoztam a főnökömet, mindent megfigyeltem, és egy hét elteltével kezdtem belejönni a munkába.

after the funeral, the house was locked up and everything was neglected. Then it was noticed he was back again and he seemed to be just the same as ever, but he had about double the work to do. It was too much for him and one evening he came along the road to see my father. He wanted to know if I would like a job, and I think my father was a bit doubtful. He wasn't the sort of man to approve of queer fish, but I'd just left school and hadn't found anything to do, so finally it was all fixed up. I went over the next morning and began by following my boss about, watching until I got the hang of things, and after a week or so I began to develop into quite a capable lad. I couldn't keep up with the speed my boss worked at, but we got on all right together, and besides teaching me the work he told me all his theories. He was against the use of quick manures, he said, it meant that tomatoes grown that way didn't feed you properly, though what was a commercial grower to do? If he didn't do as the next man did he'd go broke. And he was against all the expensive and complicated business of spraying. He said it wouldn't be necessary if you had healthy plants that weren't forced. He didn't even approve of the poisonous spray for caterpillars, and as we worked along the rows he taught me to watch out for the moths' eggs, which you found underneath the leaves and on the flowers. It was quite a good method perhaps, but it took up a lot of time.

To begin with I'd go along the road home to my lunch at midday. But later on I'd stay and eat with my boss, he seemed to like my company and he got a butcher to call sometimes and leave a piece of sausage, though he never ate any himself. And it was mainly during our times of eating together that he began to tell me about how he had come to be a tomato-grower. Probably he said much that I was too young to understand, but it was all so different from what I was used to hearing in my own home, that I could always listen without feeling impatient. Also it fascinated

Nem haladtam olyan fürgén, mint ő, de jól kijöttünk egymással. A betanítás mellett az elméleteit is megosztotta velem. Ellenezte a nagyüzemi trágyát, úgy tartotta, az ezzel termesztett paradicsom nem nyújt annyi tápanyagot, de mit tehet az ember, ha eladásra termel? Ha nem csinál mindent úgy, ahogy a többi gazda, tönkremegy. A drága és komplikált permetezést is ellenezte. Azt mondta, szükség sem lenne rá, ha egészséges zöldséget termesztenénk. Még a hernyók elleni mérget sem fogadta el. Megtanított rá, hogyan vizsgáljam át, vannak-e peték a levelek fonákján vagy a virágon. Lehet, hogy jó módszer volt ez így, de rengeteg időnkbe telt végigjárni a sorokat.

Eleinte hazaugrottam ebédelni, de később a gazdánál ragadtam. Úgy tűnt, kedveli a társaságomat. Egy hentes néha hagyott nála egy darab kolbászt, de Mr. Williams nem élt vele. Az ebéd-szünetek alatt lassanként jobban megismertem. Mesélt arról, hogyan kezdett paradicsommal foglalkozni, és valószínűleg olyasmiről is, amit akkori eszemmel fel sem fogtam, de minden annyira más volt, mint az otthon hallható történetek, hogy soha nem untatott. Csak ránéztem és már vidám voltam; ahogy göcsörtös lábain átment a konyhán, hogy megtöltse a teáskannát, ahogy a fejét hátraszegve, petyhüdt szemhája alól pillantásokat vetett felém.

Fiatalon egy méteráruboltban kezdett dolgozni, élvezte a munkáját. Jó érzéke volt a kirakatrendezéshez, rövid időn belül átkerült egy nagyobb üzletbe, ahol aztán évekig maradt; szerette, amit csinál, egyre több pénzt keresett, de a lelke mélyén nem volt boldog. Mint mondta, nem elégítette ki a feladat. Elhibáztottnak vélte, hogy az emberek ilyen helyeken kénytelenek dolgozni, elzárva magukat a napfénytől és a friss levegőtől. Azzal a különbséggel, hogy este haza lehet menni, az egész olyan, mint egy börtön. Akik üzletek és bankok pultjai mögött, mint kalitkában dolgoznak vagy egész nap egy liftben közlekednek fel és alá,

me to watch him. He'd walk pigeon-toed across the kitchen to fill the tea-pot, or he'd bend his head back to look out at me from under his drooping eyelid.

He'd begun life in a draper's shop, he said, and for a number of years he'd liked the work quite well. He had the knack of arranging things so he was put on to dressing the window, and he did so well it wasn't long before he was able to get a job in a big store. He stayed there for years, finding the work quite to his liking, and getting more and more money, but at the same time he wasn't happy and he wasn't satisfied. Deep down he wasn't, he said. He'd begun to feel it was wrong of people to shut themselves away from the sun and fresh air by working in such places, except that you went home at night it was just as though you'd been put in gaol. As for people who worked inside cages behind the counters of banks, or sat all day going up and down in lifts – well, you might just as well live in a cage out at the zoo. And such ideas had kept coming into his head, until he decided he'd cut out all his pleasures and save hard so that he could set himself up in a new way of living. Why, he said, it had even meant he'd had to change his mind about getting married. Then later on when he'd got started he found out the life meant much harder work than he'd ever imagined. Yet he'd liked it all right, he said. He'd feel prouder over the sight of a good bunch of tomatoes, with the top ones just beginning to colour, than he'd ever felt over any window he'd dressed. And another thing, it was an education, because it had taught him things he never knew before.

If you grew something for sale, he found out, particularly if it was something that wouldn't keep, you mainly had to take just what people would pay for it, even though you might get a lot less than would pay for the work and expense it had cost you. And that was a different thing from what happened in the big

nos, ennyi erővel egy állatkerti ketrecben is leélhetnék az életüket. Ilyen gondolatok foglalkoztatták visszatérően, amíg egyszer csak elhatározta, lemond a szórakozásról és spórolni fog, hogy új életet kezdhessen. Szeretett volna megnősülni, de az új elképzelés eltérítette a szándékától. Aztán később, amikor a földdel kezdett foglalkozni, rájött, hogy az sokkal több munkával jár, mint eredetileg gondolta. De azért nem bánta meg, tette hozzá. Nagyobb büszkeséggel tölti el egy sor paradicsom látványa, ahogy a felső darabok kezdenek pirosodni, mint amit kirakatdíszítés közben valaha is érzett. És még egy: a kerti munka olyan dolgokra tanította meg, amit azelőtt nem ismert.

Ha valamit eladásra termelünk, főleg, ha az áru romlandó, el kell fogadjunk annyit, amennyit az emberek hajlandóak fizetni érte, jöllehet, ez néha sokkal kevesebb, mint az előállítási költség. A méterárüzlet máshogy működött. Ott a beszerzési ár általában alacsonyabb volt, mint az eladási ár. Nem várták meg, amíg megfelelő ellenértéket kínál fel valaki, nem. A vevő a szabott árat fizette meg. Fura világban élünk, révedt el. Néha legszívesebben arcul ütné a vevőt, aki finnyáskodik a paradicsom ára fölött, pedig az még a betakarítással járó munkát is alig fedezi, és ha arra kérnéd, hogy hasonlóan alacsony haszonért dolgozzon, az illető rögtön a plafonon lenne. Legtöbbjüket azonban nem kárhoztathatjuk, hisz nem engedheti meg magának, hogy magasabb áron vásároljon. Cudar világot élünk, dűnnyögte, hát hogyan legyenek az emberek egymásnak felebarátai, ha állandóan a pénzen jár az eszük. S ha nem tetszik, kérdezd meg magadtól, mit tehetsz ellené? Szerencsésnek mondhatod magad, ha van mit enned, élvezd a friss levegőt és a napsütést és örülj, hogy nem kell öltönyt húznod munkába menet. Csak az nyugtalanítja, mondta, hogy nem marad ideje olvasni. És az a vicc, hogy amikor belevágott, éppenséggel azt képzelte, eztán majd rengeteg ideje lesz.

Mindezt és hasonlókat általában az ebédidő alatt sorolta el.

store he had worked in, where you usually managed to buy at one price and sell at another that would always keep you on the right side. You didn't wait until you were offered a price, no, you mainly got the price you asked for. Well, the world was a funny place, he said, you'd strike people who'd grumble over the price of tomatoes when it hardly paid you for the work of picking them, yet if you'd asked these people to work for such little return they'd have properly hit the roof. And most of them you couldn't blame, because they could never have afforded to buy at a fair price. Well, well, he said, the world was all wrong, men couldn't be brothers to each other when they spent so much time worrying over the prices they were going to pay or get. It made you feel unhappy, but when you'd puzzled your brains you asked yourself what could you do? You could count yourself one of the lucky ones if you got plenty to eat and a good share of sunshine and fresh air, and didn't have to dress up to go to work. The only thing that worried him, he said, was that he hardly ever had enough spare time to read a book. And the joke of it was he'd thought when he started out he was going to have plenty.

All this and a lot more I mainly listened to during the half hours when we knocked off for lunch. A few things would sink in, and from time to time I'd be liable to fetch them up at home. Mr. Williams says, I would begin, and sometimes I'd annoy my father by contradicting him with something my boss had said. I'm afraid my father was the sort of man who gets upset if people say things that aren't like what the newspapers say. One evening I heard him talking to my mother, telling her that I was under a bad influence, and that I'd better look round for another job. That was all I heard, but I knew my mother would be on my side. She was easy-going, and I knew she liked me to come home and tell her what I'd had for lunch, and what the inside of Mr. Williams's house was like. It made her feel important to be able

Némely gondolatát magamévá tettem, és időről időre elkottyantottam otthon. Mr. Williams azt mondja, fogtam bele és azzal idegesítettem apámat, hogy vele szemben a főnököm nézetét képviselem. Apám az a fajta ember volt, akit felbosszant, ha valaki másképp vélekedik, mint ahogy arról az újságok beszámolnak. Egyik este hallottam, amint azt mondja anyámnak: rossz hatással van a kertész a fiúra, legjobb, ha másik munka után néz. Csak ennyit hallottam, de tudtam, hogy anyám az én oldalamon áll. Ő könnyebben vette a dolgokat és örült, amikor elmeséltem, mit ebédeltem Mr. Williamsnél vagy hogy milyen a háza belül. Fontosnak érezte magát, hogy a városban büszkélkedhet vele, milyen talpraesett munkaadóm van: főz és mos magára, megvarrja a ruháját és mindent rendben tart, még a padlót is ő mossa fel. Csuda egy krapek! Bár az utolsó szót néha úgy ejtette: hapek.

Egyelőre tehát apám sem erőltette az új állást, szerencsére, mert jó idő járt a paradicsomra. Forrón süttött a nap. Állandóan az orromban éreztem a paradicsom erős illatát és a földszagot; rengeteget öntöztünk, hogy a talaj mindig nedves legyen és sok trágyát használtunk. Reggel korán kezdtem, este későig maradtam, kiemelt fizetést kaptam, de úgy tűnt, soha nem érjük utol magunkat a munkában. Ráadásul az értékesítésről is gondoskodnunk kellett, és a szedés után még órákon át forró paradicsom halmokban állt a ládázó helyiségben. Ám miképp az kedvező időben lenni szokott, a többi gazda is bőséges termést takarított be, és ahogy a főnök mondta, sosem látott még ennyi paradicsomot, ilyen olcsón. Azok a konzervüzemek, amelyek néhány termelő összes termését lekötötték, jó kis slamasztikába kerültek, mondta, mert a nagy mennyiségű szállítmányt nem is tudták feldolgozni hirtelen, és az egészet olcsóbban megvehették volna a piacon. A beszállítói szerződéssel bíró gazdák jól jártak, de a többiek, morfondírozott a főnök, jobban örültek volna a rossz időjárásnak.

to tell people about how he did all his own cooking, washed and mended his clothes, and managed to keep everything tidy even to polishing the floors. What an eccentric man! Though I remember she hadn't got the word quite right and said eccentric.

So in the meantime my father didn't interfere with my job, and it was lucky for my boss because the season was turning out a good one. Every day was a real scorcher. I lived with the strong tomato-smell always in my nose, and the hot smell of the earth that we were forever sprinkling with manure and drenching with water until it was soaked right through. I'd start early, stay late, and get paid extra, but we never seemed to be able to catch up with what had to be done. On top of the other work was the marketing, and tomatoes that were still warm from the sun hours after they'd been picked, seemed always to be layers deep on the floor of the packing shed. Like all good seasons it had benefited everybody's crops alike. It was one right out of the box, and my boss told me he'd never known so many tomatoes about at so cheap a price. Sauce factories that had contracted for whole crops had landed themselves in the cart, he said, deliveries were more than they knew what to do with, and they were buying dearer than they could have bought on the market. So the growers who had contracts were all right, but as for the rest of them, well, my boss reckoned a bad season of blight couldn't have been a worse blow than such plenty was.

Then one morning I turned up to work and got a surprise to find my boss hadn't even finished his breakfast. And instead of telling me what to get busy on he asked me inside. Have you had a good tuck-in? he said, and I said I'd had plenty. Go on, he said, I know what boys' appetites are like, and he made me sit down to a poached egg on toast. He sat there with his arms folded, and I'd never seen him taking it so easy. It's a silly game, this working so hard, he said, look what it did to my poor sister. With my mouth

Aztán egyik nap, ahogy megérkeztem, meglepődtem, hogy a gazdám még be sem fejezte a reggelijét, és ahelyett, hogy kiadná a feladatot, behívott a házba. Nem vagy éhes, kérdezte. Bőségesen megreggeliztem, mondtam. Na, gyere, tudom, milyen az ember étvágya a te korodban. Pirítóssal és buggyantott tojással kínált. Keresztbe font karral ült mellettem, soha nem láttam ilyen tétlennek. Ostobaság annyit dolgozni, mondta, nézd meg, mi lett szegény nővéremmel. Teli szájjal motyogtam valamit válaszul. Elmesélte, mi történt előző este a gazdálkodók gyűlésén. Azt határozták el, hogy mindenki ásson egy gödröt és szabaduljon meg a terménye felétől. De garantálom, hogy nem fognak egymásban megbízni. Nem működhet a dolog. Nem beszélve az átkozott szegényről. Felálltam, hogy ellenezzem a tervet, de egy szó sem jött ki a számon. Csak álltam ott mint egy ostoba fajnő, tátott szájjal, és az elnök rám parancsolt, hogy üljek le. Mr. Williams többször elismételte a történetet és úgy kacagott rajta, mintha viccet mesélne.

Mikor befejeztem az evést, még mindig nem indult el dolgozni. Ahelyett, hogy otthagytuk volna az edényeket, mint máskor: ebéd utánig, mosogatni kezdett, nekem meg odanyújtotta a törülőruhát. Szóljál, fiam, ha nem tetszik a női munka, mondta és nevetett. Aztán megvártam, míg felsöpör, és amikor végül kimentünk, fel-alá sétálgatva megjegyezte: senki nem lehet boldogtalan egy ilyen gyönyörű napon a kertben. Férfi a kertben, asszony a házban, gyerek a bölcsőben, erre teremtetünk. Aztán mintha semmi különös nem történt volna, kiadta a munkát. De nem kell megszakadnod, tette hozzá és elmosolyodott. Ha nem a gazdám mondta volna, azt hittem volna, meghibbant.

Magamra hagyott és egész délelőtt felém se nézett, fogalmam sem volt, mit csinálhat. A ládázóban kellett volna dobozokat szögelnie, de nem jött onnan zaj. Azonban amikor behívott ebédelni, észleltem, hogy az előző délután szedett paradicsomnak

full I mumbled something, and he began to tell me about a growers' meeting that had been held the night before. He'd been along, he said, and they had a scheme for each man to dig a pit and throw away half his crop. But I'll guarantee they won't be able to trust each other enough to make that idea work. Besides, it would be a wicked shame. I got up to speak, he said, and the words wouldn't come. I just stood there like a fool with my mouth open, and the chairman told me to sit down. He told me this several times over, and he laughed as though it were a great joke.

When I'd finished eating he still didn't seem to be in any hurry. Instead of leaving the dishes until lunchtime he started on them right away, throwing me a tea-towel. Or don't you like women's work, my boy? he said, and laughed. Then he got me to wait while he swept the floor, and when we were finally out in the garden he just walked about saying that no man could help being happy in a garden on a day of such weather. A man in the garden, a woman in the house, and a child in the cradle, he said, that's what God put us on the earth to make come true. And then, just as if he hadn't said anything at all out of the ordinary, he told me what he wanted me to do. But don't work too hard, he said, and laughed. And if it had been anyone else but him I'd have thought he was slinging off.

He left me to go ahead and never came near me all morning, and I had no idea what he was doing. He should have been nailing up cases in the packing shed but I didn't hear him, though when he called me to lunch I noticed as I went past that the tomatoes we'd picked the afternoon before had all disappeared. He was drying his hands out on the verandah, and straightoff he said, Come and tell me if I've made a good job. So we went down the length of the glass-house to the front of the section, and there, just inside the gate, he'd put all the tomatoes in a heap. Not

nyoma veszett. A kezét szárítgatta verandán. Felém fordulva azt mondta, gyere, nézd meg, jó munkát végeztem-e. Végigmentünk az üvegházon és elöl, a kapun belül megláttam a kupacba rendezett paradicsomot. Nem csak amolyan hevenyészett kupacban, hanem szabályos, piramis alakú rendben, ahogy az üzletek kirakataiban látni kisebb halmokat néha. Kivéve, hogy ez hatalmas volt. Tetszik, kérdezte. Bólintottam. És nem csak azért, mert jó volt a paradicsomok tökéletességét nézni – minden egyes darab pirosan tündökölt a napfényben. Elégedettséget éreztem. A természetben már az én kezem munkája is benne volt, és csak állni és bámulni az eredményt, csodálatos érzéssel töltött el. Azelőtt még soha nem éreztem a kezem alól kikerülő alkotás gyönyörűségét. És talán azt is megértettem ott, hogy ennek az érzésnek semmi köze nincs a pénzhez, amit a termékért kaphatunk. Nem világos minden részlet, de arra pontosan emlékszem, mit éreztem akkor és azt is tudom, hogy a gazdám is mélységesen átéli ugyanezt. És azt hiszem, ő is megértette, mi jár a fejemben, mert ahelyett, hogy bármit szólt volna még, a vállamra tette a kezét. Nem nagyon voltam oda ezért a közeledésért, de sokáig így maradtunk.

Amikor visszamentünk a házba, úgy beszélt hozzám, mintha mi sem történt volna, mégis, utólag látom, az volt az első ilyen nagyon furcsa nap. Délután magamra hagyott ismét, ő pedig ideje nagy részét a kapunál töltötte. A verandáról levitt egy nyugágyat, abban ücsörgött. Az elkövetkező napokban a frissen szedett paradicsomot az óriási halomra rakosgatta. Egyik reggel, amikor megérkeztem, épp a szállítónkkal vitatkozott. Piacnap volt, a szállító azért jött, hogy a termést a városba vigye, mint máskor. A gazdám mondta neki, hogy ma nincs szállítmány, de a fuvaros a piramisra mutatva kérdőre vonta. Azokkal mi lesz? Semmi, drága barátom, nevetett Mr. Williams, de a fuvaros ideges lett, a karjánál fogva megráncigálta, elment a józan esze, kia-

just an ordinary heap though, he'd built them up into a sort of pyramid, the way you see them in the shop windows, only this one was a monster. He asked me if they looked nice, and I thought they certainly did. And it wasn't just because they made a pretty picture, each one a perfect specimen that showed a wonderful red polish in the sun. It was something more than that. I'd helped him do the work, and just to stand and look at the result gave me a wonderful feeling of being satisfied. Perhaps I'd never before understood what deep feelings you could have over things you'd made happen under your own hands. Perhaps I understood even more than that. I may have understood that the feeling had nothing to do with the money you could sell such things for. I'm not quite sure, but I know I had the feeling, and I knew my boss had it too, and that it was tremendously deep in him. And I think he knew about me as well, because instead of saying anything much he put his arm round my shoulders, and I wasn't at all keen about him doing this but I let him leave it there.

Once we were back up at the house he talked and acted just the same as usual, yet it turned out that day was the first of some very queer days for me. My boss would leave me to work on my own, while he spent most of his time sitting down at the gate in an old easy chair he took off the verandah. And besides leaving the heap of tomatoes there, he was all the time making it bigger with every fresh lot that we picked. One morning I turned up to work and struck him having an argument with our carrier. It was our main market day, and the carrier had made his call to pick up the cases we'd normally have been sending into town. My boss was saying he wasn't sending anything in, and the carrier was pointing to the heap and asking what the big idea was. I stood listening, and my boss just laughed and said, No, my friend, until the carrier got annoyed, and drove off after shaking my boss's hind from his arm, and telling him he was clean off his rocker.

bálta, aztán mérgesen elhajtott.

Később különböző történetek keltek szárnyra. Ezek eredete talán a szállítónkhoz vezethető vissza, bár a forrás lényegtelen, hisz mindenki láthatta a halom paradicsomot a kapunál és hogy a gazdám egykedvűen ücsörög a rozoga széken. Egyre több járókelő állt meg az utcán és bámult felénk. Alkalmanként kisebb tömeg verődött össze. Éreztem, hogy az emberek néha megfordulnak utánam az utcán, és bár otthon semmit nem meséltem Mr. Williamsről, apám mégis kérdőre vont. Nem tudtam mit mondani, de elvörösödhettem, mert anyám gyorsan témát váltott. Amikor kettesben maradtunk, ő is arról faggatott, mik a gazdám tervei a tornyosuló paradicsommal. Azt válaszoltam, hogy nem tudom, mégha ez nem is volt teljesen igaz, jóllehet, ha akartam volna sem tudtam volna a történeteket megmagyarázni.

Aztán napokig másról beszéltek a városban. Hirtelen időjárás változás állt be, nagy szél kerekedett, egyik nap erre, másnap amarra fújt, és néhány óra alatt több centi csapadék hullott. Az utcánkban a szél elvitte az egyik ház tetejét, nem csoda, hogy a paradicsomhalom is szétterült. A teacserjékről vágott napszitta karók nem bírták a termés súlyát, derékba törtek, csak a kötözőzsineg tartotta egybe a töveket. Ha nem esett volna, nem lett volna olyan súlyos a kár. Amikor újra forrón sütött a nap, minden erőfeszítésünkre szükség volt, hogy rendbe hozzuk a vizes földön vastagon elfekvő zöld dzsungelt, ha el akarjuk kerülni a teljes katasztrófát. A gazdámnak nem volt többé ideje ücsörögni. Pirkadatkor kezdtük a munkát, egész álló nap dolgoztunk, és nagy örömünkre úgy egy hét elteltével minden újra kiegyenesedett. Mindazonáltal súlyos károkat szenvedtünk, és ahogy az újságban olvastam, az egész országban hasonló volt a helyzet. Külön említették a paradicsomot, és azt jósolták, hogy fel fog menni az ára.

Azonban amint egyenesbe jöttek a dolgok, a gazdám ismét

Then stories about what was happening began to get around. Probably the carrier talked, but it wouldn't have made any difference if he hadn't, because anybody could look over the gate and see the heap, and my boss sitting in the old chair. More and more people began to stop and stare, and later on there'd sometimes be quite a crowd. I noticed people began to look at me in the street, and although I hadn't said a word at home, my father wanted to know what Mr. Williams thought he was up to. I didn't know what to say so I didn't say anything, but I must have gone red because my mother suddenly changed the subject. Though when she got me on my own she asked me what Mr. Williams was doing with that heap of tomatoes. I said I didn't know, and it wasn't exactly the truth, but I could never have explained, even if I'd wanted to try.

Then for a couple of days everybody had something else to talk about. The weather broke. All of a sudden there came a terrific gale that blew one way one day and the other the next, and in between there was a downpour that measured several inches in just a few hours. The wind lifted the roof off a house in our road, so it was no wonder my boss's tomatoes were all flattened out. The tea-tree sticks were dry and brittle from so much sun and the wobbling weight of the great top bunches was too much for them, they snapped off and the flax ties that held only meant a worse tangle. If it hadn't been for the rain the damage wouldn't have been so serious, but the sun came out hot again, and that sea of green tangle, lying thick on the wet ground, meant we had to go for our lives if we wanted to stop the blight from setting in. My boss never had time to sit in his chair for days. We'd both of us begin at daylight and work ourselves to a standstill, and after about a week it was certainly wonderful the way we managed to get things pretty straight again. Though of course a lot of damage had been done. All over the country it was

magamra hagyott a munkában. Visszatelepedett a székére és mindössze annyit tett, hogy a frissen szedett termést a szétterülő kupac tetejére rakosgatta. A halom alja már rothadásnak indult, és az egész egyre jobban szétterült. A kellemetlen szag a legyeket is odavonzotta. Egyik nap beállított a közegészségügyi ellenőr és azt mondta, el kell ásnunk a tönkrement termést. Nem díjazta, hogy a gazdám az arcába nevet és azt állítja, hogy a szag számára kellemes, mert a föld visszafogadja, amit adott.

Nem ő volt az egyetlen látogatónk. Minden nap skatulyából előhúzott, kényes úriemberek jöttek autóval; a gazdám mellettük farmerben, vászoncipőben és az utóbbi időben elhanyagolt, rongyolódó ingjében szöges ellentétjük volt. Jött egy alkalmazott a gazdám bankjától, valaki a piacról, egy rendőr, végül egy helyi orvos. Nem hallottam, miről beszélnek, és soha senkihez nem szóltam. Még azon a vasárnap délelőtt sem volt mit mondanom, amikor anyám hazajött a szomszédától és mesélte, hogy Mr. Williamst kórházba viszik, mentő jött érte. A kapunál fekszik a földön, mondta anyám, szívroham érte, úgy találtak rá. Kirohantam az utcára és még éppen láttam, ahogy a hordágyon betakargatják. Mozdulatlan volt, nem szólt és úgy tűnt, nem is hall bennünket. Lefittyedő szemhéja becsukódott az egyik szemén, a másik tágra nyitva meredt rám, de úgy éreztem, nem látja, hogy fölé hajolok.

the same and I read about it in the newspaper. Tomatoes were specially mentioned, and it was said that prices would go up.

Yet once things had been got straight my boss left me to work on my own again, while he went back to his chair, taking time off only to put more and more on the heap. Though by this time it had gone properly rotten inside, and was getting smaller if anything. Also it was smelling bad and bringing the flies around, and the sanitary inspector came and said it would have to be shifted into a hole and buried. And he didn't like it when my boss laughed and said it was a good smell, it meant that the earth was getting her own back again.

Nor was he our only visitor. They started driving up in their cars every day, looking as smart as if they'd just stepped out of bandboxes, and my boss would look a cut talking to them in his denims and sand- shoes, and his shirt full of holes that he'd left off mending. There was a man from my boss's bank came, and a man from the markets, and a policeman along with one of our local doctors. But I never heard what they talked about, and I never said a thing to anybody, not even the Sunday morning when my mother came in from next door, and said they were taking Mr. Williams to the hospital in an ambulance. They'd found him lying just inside the gate, she said, and he'd had a stroke.

I ran along the road and I was just in time to see my boss lying all tucked up on the stretcher. He couldn't move and he couldn't speak, and he didn't seem to be able to hear. The drooping lid was right down over that eye, but the other one was wide open. I got right in front of it, but he didn't seem as if he could see me.

A NAGYVILÁG OKTÓBERI SZÁMÁBAN:

ÁDÁM PÉTER

Danièle Sallenave útinaplója elé

DANIÉLE SALLENAVE

Utazás a megszállt Palesztinában (Ádám Péter fordítása)

KRISTIINA EHIN versei

(Szlukovényi Katalin és Csüllög Edina fordításai)

PÁL FERENC

Mozambiki írónak ítelték az idei Camões-díjat

MIA COUTO

Becsületbeli kérdés

Az új pap (Pál Ferenc fordításai)

ELENA JURISSEVICH versei (Szirti Bea fordításai)

ELKE HEIDENREICH

Szerelem (Kádár György fordítása)

KISS ILONA

A szovjet irodalom újratemetése vagy teljes feledése?

TURI MÁRTON

Megjósolhatatlan múlt vár ránk, avagy az apokalipszis orosz bestiáriuma

BOZÓK FERENC

Rimbaud utazásai lírában és térben

IVÁN ILDIKÓ

Patyomkin-vodka [Jevgenyij Popov: *Vodkára vodkát*]

ZELEI DÁVID

Szóba se jöhet Portugália? [Pál Ferenc (szerk.): *Camões, Pessoa, Saramago Magyarországon. Tanulmányok a magyar-portugál irodalmi recepciókutatás köréből*]