

Q U A R T E R L Y
P R E S S R E V I E W
FOR ADVANCED EFL LEARNERS

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- Travel 2**
A Skeptic in the South Pacific by *James Fallows*
- Recollection 4**
The Pope's Approval by *Stanley Johnson*
- Essay 8**
A Vacation in Iran by *Graeme Wood*
- Review 17**
The Last Star Poet: Dylan Thomas by *James Parker*
- Side by Side 20**
Wild Swans Vadhattyúk
by *Alice Munro* fordította *Tárnok Attila*

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A Skeptic in the South Pacific

by *James Fallows*

You seem stressed, my wife said just before midnight one Friday. We were in the endless-line hell of the LAX international terminal, with a nine-hour overnight trip in super-discount seats ahead of us. I was pecking out e-mails with one hand and thumbing through phone apps with the other while scanning the room in the vain hope that some hipster power-socket hog would unplug before flight time and give me a chance.

Four days later, my cornered-rat sense of all-fronts besiegement had receded this far: while scuba diving in a coral reef, I noted three good-size sharks approaching from the side, but I didn't worry about the rose-tinted plumes swirling into the water from the fresh coral-scrape wound on my knee. Instead I lazily asked myself, "These sharks with the black tips on their fins are the 'nice' sharks, right?" So they were, and after the group swam by, I turned my attention to a manta ray. Four days after that, when preparing for the 24-hour slog by motorboat, van, ferry, and airplane back to our home in Washington, I looked at my smartphone and my

computer and wondered how long I could go without turning either of them back on.

"Getting away from it all" is an ideal, a dream, a cliché. Over the decades, since spending our first few "honeymoon" months of marriage enrolled in a labor project in Ghana, my wife and I have tested the practical limits of escape. We have learned that the trick is getting just far enough away: sufficient distance to let you truly shed workaday worries, but not so far as to make you feel forgotten and lost. Life at the getaway site should seem uncluttered and simple but not austere. Flush toilets are a plus; hot water, a necessity; a way to make coffee, very important for me.

Late last year, we found something as close to the ideal restorative balance as we have encountered anywhere: more connected than the Ghanaian labor project, more set-apart than the standard beach resort. It was on Motu Fareone, a tiny islet off the volcanic island of Moorea in French Polynesia, near Tahiti, where we spent the Christmas-through-New-Year's period in a villa we rented with our grown sons and their families. I realize the lack of novelty in praising the same paradise that has attracted foreigners from Paul Gauguin to Marlon Brando. But they were no fools.

Former French colonies typically retain some of their culinary patrimony. You can get good French bread in Vietnam and Senegal, and we could in every little storefront trading post on Moorea. More than just an ex-colony, French Polynesia is an official part of France

d'outre mer, "overseas France." While it strangely does not use the euro (instead French Pacific francs, issued on gaily illustrated currency worth a little more than one U.S. cent apiece), its stores are stocked with many of the brands and goods you would expect to find in the motherland. These notably include cheeses, wines, confits, and other items from a French charcuterie, alongside native mangos, papayas, and bananas. A new fiber-optic cable now runs between these islands and Hawaii, so you can get an Internet connection – if you must. Flights on the national airline, Air Tahiti Nui, go once a day from Tahiti's main city, Papeete, nonstop to Los Angeles and thence of course to Paris.

Those are the "near enough" factors. Everything else took us "far enough" away. The electricity on our islet came from a generator that ran only part of each day; the water was from a solar desalinization plant that put out about two gallons an hour. For the six adults and one baby in our party, this was enough water, but not more. If you can swim every few hours, you need only a brief freshwater rinse at bedtime. You need not wash clothes very often if you wear a bathing suit all day and a sarong at night. We got up, swam, ate, swam, read, and went to bed. The reminder of life's imperfections came mainly through the incessant mosquitoes: there can be no such thing as enough repellent spray.

Much of Moorea, like our entire islet, is ringed by coral reefs a few hundred yards offshore. Big Pacific waves break against the reefs. Within are shallow, calm, limpid

lagoons. All other members of our family love swimming; I do not. Yet in this setting, even I was wading out on the first day, and snorkeling on the second, and by the last I was swimming the kilometer-wide channel to Moorea and back, before lunchtime.

The lagoons and reefs attract divers from around the world, and they are the venue for the most consequential tension between distance and connectedness. Twenty-five years ago, when living with our children in Malaysia, we first saw the spectacular reefs and marine life of the South Pacific. In the time since then, many of those same reefs have died; they now look like gray concrete hulks. Moorea is on the cusp. As you swim, snorkel, or dive, you pass from spectacular concentrations of brain- or antler-shaped coral, with fancifully colored fish large and small darting among them and rays or sea turtles passing by, to ... bleached and pulverized marine deserts. Marine researchers from the University of California and elsewhere have made Moorea a major test site for conditions that will allow reef biospheres to survive. To understand the stakes and to marvel at the existing beauty, try to visit soon.

Moorea's many tourism Web sites will give you the practical details; VillaCorallina.com describes the place where we stayed, and TopDive.com is the main scuba operator in the area. My sense of calm didn't last long enough after our visit, but even now I am soothed by memories of placidly drifting past those sharks. ♦

The Pope's Approval

by *Stanley Johnson*

Summers always have to come to an end. As the children went back to their respective schools, I realised I needed a London base.

I thought it would be best to avoid Hampstead so I wrote off to some estate agents serving the Paddington area. Paddington, I felt, was convenient. There were good trains to the West Country from Paddington.

In any case, I already had use of a pied à terre in Paddington.

When I left the European Commission on being elected to the European Parliament in June 1979, Crispin and Penelope Tickell had very kindly lent me their flat in Blomfield Road, which runs alongside the Union Canal near Paddington Basin. Crispin served as Roy Jenkins's chef de cabinet when Jenkins took over the Presidency of the Commission and was still en poste in Brussels, but Penelope, who happened to be in London that day, volunteered to come with me to inspect a maisonette on Maida Avenue, the road which runs along the canal on the opposite side from Blomfield Road.

We met outside the house. It was a large, imposing,

stucco-fronted building, looking out onto the canal. Boatmen glided past on barges. They didn't call it Little Venice for nothing. My spirits soared after the débacle on Exmoor. Perhaps I could survive living on my own in a place like this.

The house was three storeys high, with the maisonette occupying the second and third floors. According to the particulars, it had three bedrooms and a large L-shaped sitting room looking out over the water. Just the ticket, I thought.

The maisonette was empty, but the agent had given me the keys. I suppose we had been looking around inside for about twenty minutes when the flat's own doorbell rang. Though the maisonette was reached through the main entrance, as was the ground-floor flat, it had its own door at the top of the stairs leading up to the first floor.

I ignored it. It sounded again. More urgently. 'I wonder who that can be,' Penelope said.

I opened the door, and looked down the stairs into the hall to see a slim, dark-haired woman gazing up at me with a cross look on her face.

'What are you doing?' she asked.

I don't know why I didn't give the obvious answer. I could have told the cross young lady that I was a potential tenant on a tour of inspection. But there was something about the whole situation that irked me. I didn't like being put on the spot.

'Actually, I'm a burglar,' I said. 'I've just broken in, and quite soon, I'm going to start a fire.'

Fast forward several weeks. I have made my apologies to Jenny, the young lady from downstairs. As a matter of fact, I have fallen for her. But I don't think she has fallen for me.

Before Christmas, Jenny fled to Barbados. But I tracked her down, flying out to the Caribbean myself on the next available plane.

I went wind-surfing that first afternoon. I am not particularly good at wind-surfing. I crashed heavily on some rocks. When I dragged the wind-surfer back in to shore after a disappointing stint, Jenny pointed out that the little toe on my left foot was sticking out at right angles.

'You must have dislocated it.' She didn't sound very sympathetic. I think my sudden appearance in Barbados, when she thought I was safely back in London, had rather thrown her.

Having a dislocated little toe is surprisingly debilitating. You can't wear normal shoes, for example. Your feet look odd, even in sandals, because there is this solid lump of flesh sticking out at one side.

'Stop worrying about how it looks,' Jenny advised. 'You need to have that seen to soon, otherwise they'll have to break it and reset it.'

I realised then that Jenny, apart from being an absolute stunner as far as looks were concerned, was an extremely practical person. She helped me (hobbling) into her rented car and drove off at speed.

'Where are we going?' I asked.

'There's a vet's surgery halfway to Sandy Lane.'

'A vet?'

'No time to lose,' she said.

Half an hour later, after a couple of quick, if painful, wrenches from a man who obviously knew what he was doing, I was right as rain.

After a few more days together, we flew back from Barbados to London. Jenny, recently widowed, had two dogs. Douglas was a large chocolate Labrador; Jimmy was a Cairn terrier.

I carried my bags upstairs to my maisonette. Jenny went straight into her downstairs flat and firmly shut the door.

Most days, as I looked out of my first-floor window onto the canal when I was in London (which wasn't often since the Euro parliamentary term had begun again), I would hear the front door slam and, seconds later, see Jenny stride down the path into the street, being – literally – pulled by the two dogs. Jenny clearly gave the dogs their money's worth because it would often be more than an hour before she returned.

I met her once on the doorstep. Douglas slobbered over me, while Jimmy nipped at my heels.

'Where do you take them?' I asked. 'Hyde Park, usually,' Jenny said. 'I have to keep an eye on them though.'

'I'll take them tomorrow, if you like. I don't have to go to Strasbourg till Tuesday this week.'

Jenny looked doubtful.

‘No, I mean it,’ I insisted. ‘I’ll be delighted.’

Truthfully, when I made the offer, I didn’t for a moment foresee any problems. I had grown up with dogs. There were always dogs on the farm. They were a basic part of my parents’ life and of my own childhood. At meal-times, if you didn’t want to eat the fatty bits, you could surreptitiously flip them onto the floor for the dogs.

Next day I set off in the car with Jimmy and Douglas. I parked near the Serpentine. It was a bright, sunny day.

Jimmy and Douglas, once released from the leash, took off and disappeared into the distance. Within seconds of letting them out of the car, I had managed to lose both of them.

I wouldn’t say I panicked, but it certainly wasn’t a happy moment. I headed off on foot in the direction I thought the two dogs had taken. I asked passers-by. ‘I say, you haven’t by any chance seen two dogs, Jimmy and Douglas? Chocolate Labrador and Cairn Terrier.’

Two fruitless hours later, I drove back to the house on Maida Avenue and parked the car on the concrete pad in front of the garage.

I rang Jenny’s doorbell. I wasn’t quite sure how I was going to break the news.

Jenny opened the door just a crack. This wasn’t Penelope welcoming Odysseus on his return from Troy.

‘I hear you lost the dogs.’ She sounded cool, if not icy. ‘Someone rang up. They were both of them found in Hyde Park earlier today. Near Park Lane, actually. Not the best place for them.’

Jimmy and Douglas obviously had no hard feelings. They pushed their way out into the hall and greeted me enthusiastically.

One morning, I went downstairs to the front hall to collect the morning mail. On the mat I found an extraordinary communication. It was from James Scott-Hopkins, a former MP, now an MEP, whom Mrs Thatcher had asked to serve as the leader of the sixty-one Conservatives MEPs.

During the course of the discussions to be held in Rome later this month with Italian colleagues from the Christian Democratic Party, Members of the European Democratic Group will have the honour of being received by His Holiness the Pope in the Vatican. Wives are also invited. Mantillas should be worn.

By then, Jenny had forgiven me for losing her dogs in Hyde Park. She had even driven down to the farm with me for the weekend with the dogs in the back. She had met my parents, who approved of her enormously.

The dogs as well as Jenny were a total success. When Douglas killed a duck on the pond at West Nethercote, my father patted him approvingly.

‘Every dog is allowed his duck,’ he had said.

I was still in the hall, mulling over Scott-Hopkins’s intriguing message, when Jenny came out of her own ground-floor flat to pick up her own post.

‘Do you have a mantilla?’ I asked.

Strictly speaking, the invitation to meet the Pope applied to MEPs and their wives. It didn’t say anything

about ‘partners’ or ‘girlfriends’. And anyway, Jenny, when I invited her to join me on the trip to Rome, said she wasn’t sure that she wanted to meet ‘a whole load of Tories’. She hadn’t met a lot of Tories in the past. I had a feeling she disapproved of them.

‘Do come,’ I urged her. ‘How often are you going to have an audience with the Pope?’

Two weeks later we found ourselves in Rome, being ushered into the gilded Papal reception rooms in the Vatican.

Scott-Hopkins, a tall, imposing man, made the introductions.

‘This is Lord Bethell, Holy Father,’ Scott-Hopkins said. ‘This is Lady Douro. This is Sir Fred Warner and this is Lady Warner. This is Sir Henry Plumb and this is Lady Plumb. This is Sir Jack and Lady Stewart-Clark. This is Sir David Nicholson and Dame Shelagh Roberts...’

Jenny and I shuffled slowly forward while the Pope greeted the grandees. Eventually, it was the turn of the ‘plebs’, to use that now fashionable term.

I saw Scott-Hopkins look at me and then look at Jenny. He seemed doubtful. He had obviously forgotten her name.

‘This is ... er ... Mr Johnson, Holy Father,’ Scott-Hopkins mumbled, ‘and this is, er, in point of fact...’

When Jim lost the thread, as he sometimes did, he ‘in point of fact’ed quite a lot.

The Holy Father looked at our puzzled leader. He looked at me. He peered at Jenny under her mantilla. He

obviously decided to help Scott-Hopkins out.

‘Well, this is Mrs Johnson, I suppose,’ he said.

The Pope was not speaking *ex cathedra* but he might as well have been. When it was all over, and the Pope had gone back to the Papal apartments, and the Conservative MEPs and their wives had dispersed in various directions, Jenny and I scooted off to have a pizza in the piazza.

Jenny tucked the mantilla into her bag. ‘Well, what do you think?’ I asked.

She studied the menu. ‘I’ll go for the pizza napolitana but with extra anchovies.’

‘No,’ I persisted, ‘what do you feel about being “Mrs Johnson”? The Pope seems to think it’s a good idea.’

Jenny and I were married on 27 February 1981, which, at the time of writing (June 2014), is more than thirty-three years ago. I have a lot to thank the Pope for. ♦

A Vacation in Iran

by Graeme Wood

For years, I have been advising my cash-poor friends: the secret to an ultracheap international holiday is a Google News search for the words *runaway inflation*. The place listed in the dateline of any recent articles including that phrase should be your destination. En route to your home airport, visit the bank and withdraw U.S. dollars in crisp hundreds and fifties. At your beleaguered landing place, the local currency's value will be melting away like a snowman in July. Your greenbacks will remain pleasantly solid. Everyone at your destination – hoteliers, restaurant staff, tour guides – will covet them and cut you deals. For you, luxuries will suddenly become affordable. Until your return flight (assuming you make it back safely, and are not robbed by an increasingly desperate local mob), you will experience the dismal science at its most cheery.

Economists' name for truly berserk runaway inflation is *hyperinflation*. America's most nightmarish bout of inflation – in recent memory, at least – came

and went at the end of the Carter administration, when prices rose by about 14 percent in 1980, the peak year. Hyperinflation, by contrast, is beyond nightmarish: a rise in prices of at least 50 percent a *month*, according to the generally accepted definition. Thankfully, it is rare. Steve Hanke, an economist at Johns Hopkins University, has documented 56 instances since 1795, ranging from a comparatively benign monthlong burst in Taiwan in 1947 (prices rose by a little more than half in that month, then the increase slowed), to a truly surreal year in Hungary in 1945-46, when at one point prices doubled every 15 hours. In Slobodan Milošević's Yugoslavia in 1994, hyperinflation stopped only when the presses at the national mint, in Topčider, overheated to their breaking point.

The most famous recent case of sustained hyperinflation is Zimbabwe in 2007-08, when prices, at the peak, doubled every 24 hours. "It was the only case where the inflation completely ran its course, and the government just printed money until people just no longer used it," says William Masters, an economist at Tufts University. Eventually, after the inflation rate reached 80,000,000,000 percent a month, folks simply stopped showing up at the central bank to pick up Zimbabwean dollars, and the U.S. dollar and South African rand spontaneously became the country's primary currencies.

In 2001, I spent a few months in Zimbabwe, just as

the warm-up act for that country's hyperinflationary episode was taking the stage. Already, the currency's loss of value could be observed by the day. I changed my U.S. dollars in small quantities and spent my Zimbabwean dollars as soon as I acquired them. For the first time in my life, I could stay in just about any hotel I pleased: I recall renting a cozy room in the Eastern Highlands for \$1.50 (U.S.) a night, including a full English breakfast. For less than \$7, I took a sleeper train first-class from Mutare to the capital, Harare, and marveled at the thread count of the bedclothes, the fancy place settings, the frosted double-*R* logo on the windows, still there from when the train was run by Rhodesia Railways. On my return trip to Mutare a few weeks later, the curtains and curtain rods had been stripped from the windows, almost certainly by the railway employees themselves, whose wages no longer covered living expenses and had to be supplemented by stealing bits off the trains.

Masters has various pieces of Zimbabwean currency framed on a wall in his office, for novelty, including a standard-issue note from January 2008 that says in small letters, "Pay the bearer on demand ten million dollars on or before 30th of June 2008." As inflation spiraled upward, people resorted to bartering with blankets and goats; for the everyday transaction of paying minibus fares, they improvised token systems, so that every minibus did not require a second minibus

following it, just to haul its passengers' cash. "Hyperinflation uses up a lot of people's time," Hanke says, "because they're spending a great deal of their time not working, and instead trying to figure out how to unload currency that is melting in their hands."

Inflation happens for many reasons, but hyperinflation scenarios are nearly always the same: a government fails to harvest enough revenue to pay its bills – usually because a war has drained its treasury, or its poor fiscal policies have tanked the economy – so it prints money to make up the difference. "The central bank is just producing a lot more money than people want to hold," Hanke says. "They're spending much more money than they're raising in taxes, and they can't get credit from the private sector. At that point, you're off to the races." Monetary supply outstrips demand, and the wild irresponsibility of the government scares everyone away from saving cash. Instead, people buy whatever they can get, immediately, and prices rise accordingly. Anyone caught with cash loses everything.

And anyone who has hard currency – the kind that doesn't evanesce expensively, like smoke from a Cohiba – is sitting pretty.

If you want to experience the pleasures and opportunities of runaway inflation today, you have two options, at least in theory. The first is the hermit kingdom of North Korea, where your dollars are

welcome but you are not. No one is really sure how fast prices are rising in Pyongyang, since the society is almost completely closed, and North Korea's Central Bureau of Statistics consists of little more than a man wearing a Kim Il Sung lapel pin and giving a thumbs-up sign. Almost no one gets into or out of the country, but outside experts' best guess is that prices are rising very fast.

The second option is the Islamic Republic of Iran. Its inflation rate has, in the past year or so, reached runaway speed. Iran has long suffered from inflation rates that we in the West would consider unbearable, notably during the Iran-Iraq War, in the 1980s. Recently, however, as the United States and the European Union have become progressively more serious about sanctions in response to Iran's nuclear pursuits, the inflation rate has ticked up toward ruinous levels – exactly as the sanction proponents hoped. The price of imports has skyrocketed. What's more, oil revenues have collapsed. Two-thirds of Iran's government spending is typically financed with oil revenue, but as sanctions have pinched more tightly, Iran has resorted to storing oil offshore in filled-up tankers, idling for want of buyers. The government has thus been faced with a choice: cut back radically on spending, or crank up the currency printing presses – already humming – even further.

For a couple weeks in October, according to Hanke's

calculations, Iran's inflation rate reached a level that, had it kept up for a full month, technically would have qualified as hyperinflation. Inflation has since subsided to a rate that is merely unsustainable. How we measure inflation depends entirely on the basket of goods we use to track prices, and because the prices of some goods, such as chicken and bread, are subsidized by the government, these prices remain low. But Djavad Salehi-Isfahani, an Iranian American economist at Virginia Tech, says that inflation has at least doubled the usual rate of 15 percent a year, and Hanke thinks the rate is even higher – as much as 110 percent in 2012 – but is systematically underreported by the Iranian government. The Iranian rial trades semi-openly, and as this magazine went to press, its value was hovering under 40,000 to one U.S. dollar, weaker by nearly half compared with six months earlier. Authorities tried to ban currency trading for a few weeks in October, when the inflation rate peaked, but they failed. Finally they just asked money changers not to advertise the depressing new rates in their windows.

Wood's First Rule of Budget Travel applies here: where there is runaway inflation, there are great deals for travelers with hard cash. So in January, I boarded a flight from Dubai to Kish, an Iranian duty-free-shopping and holiday resort in the Persian Gulf. The island is tiny – small enough to circumnavigate by car

in about half an hour. Unlike every other part of Iran, Kish requires no visas from anyone, including Americans. I hoped to find a place where foreign and domestic currencies converged, and where Iranian tourists could tell me a little about what their rials could still buy them. Historically, Iranians have gone to Kish to buy goods from overseas and to relax in the sun. But a collapsing currency means that overseas goods have become significantly more expensive, even if the sunshine is still free.

From Dubai, I flew on the Iranian carrier Kish Air, aboard an MD-82 jet packed with foreign holidaymakers. We arrived safely, though upon takeoff from Dubai, I had wondered how a country barred from getting new American-made airplane parts maintained an old American-made airplane. The other passengers were mostly Filipinas on leave from jobs in Dubai. Kish, they told me, had emerged as a preferred holiday destination for those too poor to go all the way home to the Philippines. After just a short flight, they could live like queens for a week, having toiled as scullery maids for a year or more without vacation in Dubai. On the island, they lounged in modest rented apartments, drank juice by the sea, and biked among the palm trees. At the airline office at Fish Roundabout, a traffic circle in Dubai, I had asked Filipinas who had visited Kish previously what I should bring for my trip. They all said dirhams – the convertible currency of the

United Arab Emirates, pegged to the U.S. dollar – and nothing else. Cash was king in Kish: with just a little bit of it, everything you could really want for a weekend jaunt would be available for a pittance.

At Kish's single-runway airport, under the owlish stare of a portrait of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the women were led aside to a bin of scarves and formless blue tunics, so anyone who arrived in risqué attire could cover up before meeting the male immigration officers. When I got to the front of the line, the officer planted a big wet kiss of an entry stamp in my passport and waved me through to the baggage claim with nary a question. I exited the airport into the warm gulf night and headed straight to my hotel, the Parmis.

The first sign of rising prices was the hotel rate card. I had agreed over the phone to pay 370 dirhams, or about \$100, for a night at a five-star hotel, including breakfast and lunch. (I had originally been told that the hotel had no vacancies, but when I asked again in English, with the implication of payment in foreign currency, a room materialized.) The rates for Iranians were quoted in Iranian rials, and to me – I had not been in Iran in more than three years – they looked not high but simply wrong. A zero in Persian writing is represented by a dot, and here I saw dots leading far off to the right, as if someone had left an ellipsis on the rate card instead of the full price. The Iranian price was 1.8 million rials. I asked the desk clerk whether

prices had gone up, and he smiled and said “Up, up, up!” with his hand gesturing to the ceiling or to God. “Not so bad,” he added, optimistically. Not for him, anyway – the decline of the rial had made it harder for Iranians to vacation abroad in places like Dubai and Istanbul; many were keeping their trips affordable by coming to Kish instead. The crowds were most apparent at meals, when the hotel buffet overflowed with Iranian tourists trampling each other to get at the last bit of *chelo kebab*.

The next morning, I wandered around the shopping malls to see how much things cost. Because sanctions limit Iran’s financial transactions with the West, foreign goods are hard to find. (You can’t run an Apple store in Tehran if you can’t use a bank to transfer your profits home to Cupertino. Iranian merchants are reduced to taking trips to Dubai with suitcases of cash, so they can return with suitcases of iPhones – ideally without attracting the attention of customs agents.) The duty-free status of Kish makes the malls there attractive to mainland Iranians, because foreign goods are at least a little cheaper and easier to get. (Iran treats Kish as a foreign country, for tariff purposes, so there are no pesky customs agents.)

The malls were packed with clothes, cellphones, computers, and chocolate from overseas. The few Iranian goods on sale were very cheap, in dollars. I bought a movie-theater-size cup of pure pomegranate

juice, produced by a company in Shiraz, for about 60 cents. (Services were likewise available, island-wide, for pennies on the dollar. I got a \$4 haircut at my five-star hotel.) Many of the imported items were Chinese knockoffs that all but screamed “caveat emptor,” and they were so cheap that inflation didn’t much matter: zero multiplied by two still equals zero.

But for other imported goods – or at least the ones that might be expected to function properly – the rial prices were grotesque. A shop that sold kitchen appliances from the Italian manufacturer De’Longhi was tidy and gleaming but totally devoid of customers. Non-Chinese consumer electronics, such as real iPads – bounty from across the Persian Gulf – were similarly unaffordable. One mall had a white cuboid storefront that called itself the Kish Island Apple Store. Inside, a current-generation iPad sold for 27 million rials. At the current exchange rate, that was almost \$900, but when I offered to pay in U.S. dollars, the price magically sank by \$200.

That afternoon, I walked briefly along the beach. Swimming and kiteboarding didn’t much entice (Iranian beaches are sex-segregated; as a straight man at an all-male beach, I was reminded of the *Simpsons* episode in which Homer swears off beer, goes to a baseball game, and, after staring incredulously for a while, says, “I never realized how boring this game is”), so I rented a Segway, sturdy enough to ride on the sand

and broken concrete of the beachfront, for 10,000 rials a minute. I darted around the island in the company of a bald young Iranian – I’ll call him Parviz – who was an engineer by training but had come to Kish more than a year earlier as a Segway-rental manager. He had about half a dozen Segways tied up by his hut on the beach.

“The owner bought these more than a year ago,” he told me, gesturing at the scooters beneath us as we peeled down the road, dodging Filipina cyclists with their borrowed veils flowing behind them. “If he bought them today, they’d be three times the price.” Parviz’s boss had invested at the right moment: by front-loading his spending, he had traded cash for noncash assets that would earn rials at the rate dictated by inflation. And if he’d gone into debt to finance his Segway business – I didn’t ask – that debt would have shriveled, in real terms, by about half.

As in all cases of runaway inflation, there are winners among the losers. Iranians with foresight and the ability to borrow have profited enormously from the past year’s inflation. Many Iranians complain, Salehi-Isfahani of Virginia Tech told me later, that only the most politically connected people get significant loans from banks, so there is an inherent iniquity in the ability to profit off severe inflation. It’s easy to see why credit is rationed in Iran: the interest rate facing borrowers is fixed at 21 percent, so an inflation rate of about 30 percent means an automatic real rate of

return of nearly 10 percent, just for borrowing.

This dynamic, in which savvy borrowers win big while people on fixed incomes, like the old and the retired, lose their savings, reproduces exactly what we’ve seen in previous inflation episodes elsewhere. “Hyperinflation is among the most cruel forms of government expropriation,” William Masters says. “If the government says it’s going to take your farm away, at least there’s a kind of visible honesty to that.” If you bought a large farm in Zimbabwe in 2000 and had a 30-year fixed-rate mortgage, in 2008 you could have paid that mortgage off with the 10-million-Zimbabwean-dollar note framed in Masters’s office, and expected change back in the transaction. But if you’d been in the more common situation of eking out some small savings, over many years, you’d find that your industry and foresight had been nullified, your thin cushion of savings yanked from under you.

Iran isn’t Zimbabwe, of course – it’ll take a lot more zeroes on the hotel rate cards for that – and on Kish I saw plenty of ordinary Iranians, the kind not lucky enough to own a fleet of Segways, biking around calmly, enjoying a holiday without visible signs of impoverishment. Yes, Kish has five-star hotels, but it is more like an Iranian Vegas than an Iranian Nantucket: affordable as an annual or biennial holiday to all but the poor. I attended an epic seven-hour show at the Kish Dolphin Park (total cost: \$16, including a

commission for the concierge at the Parmis), and had a splendid time alongside Iranians from Tehran, Isfahan, Kashan, Shiraz, and Mashhad. The show was remarkably diverse – in addition to the dolphins, there were clowns, magicians, reptile wranglers, and a man who extinguished candles with the crack of a bullwhip. Whatever toll near-hyperinflation was taking, it hadn't plunged the Iranian people into a tailspin of misery – or at least not yet, and not here.

Which is not to say that the past year had been painless. At the dolphin show, I sat next to two sisters, Mina and Mona, both in their early 20s and from Tehran. We laughed and joked and promised to send each other digital photos. But they also told me that their savings had evaporated, they couldn't afford the holidays they had enjoyed before, and they weren't sure what financial calamity might happen next. Mina is an accountant at a paint factory in Tehran, and she watches her money closely enough to know that her pay isn't keeping pace with costs.

“Life is very hard now for us,” she told me. “Why?” I asked. She struggled for the English word and instead offered the Persian one, *tahrim*, and told me to look it up. I didn't have to. *Tahrim* shares a root with the English word *harem* – another place that, like Iran, is closed off from the rest of the world. And it means, simply, “sanctions.”

I left Kish the next day and returned to Dubai, the

land of high but predictable prices. It was clear to me, at least, that Iranians were suffering, though just how badly the sanctions had ravaged the economy was hard to gauge. There are signs that unemployment in Iran is rising, and unease has rippled through the Iranian middle class, now that previously attainable luxuries like trips to Turkey or well-made electronic goods are prohibitively expensive. According to some observers, the middle and lower classes have begun hoarding even basic household items, fearing that their prices will soon rise too. It's unknown how these bad inflationary vibes will affect the country's politics. The day I left Kish, the commander of the Revolutionary Guard, Brigadier General Nasser Shabani, issued a statement warning that Iran's economic woes constituted a regional national-security threat.

This is hardly the first time that U.S. economic warfare has caused, or intended to cause, destabilizing price jumps. The decades-long blockade of Cuba has certainly inflated prices there, though never at hyperinflationary rates (and with nothing to show for the effort, politically). The United States has used more direct forms of inflation attack: in the Second World War, General Douglas MacArthur ordered that bogus currency be sent ashore into the Japanese-occupied Philippines, to dilute the value of Axis bank notes. (The efforts played a minor role, if any, in the defeat of the enemy.) And in Vietnam, the CIA distributed fake

currency to destabilize the Communist government. Of course, the ultimate goal of the sanctions against Iran is not solely to pump up prices: they are supposed to embarrass, ostracize, and humble the Iranian leadership. But high inflation is one major manifestation of the distress that sanctions produce, and it might be expected to further those larger goals.

Or maybe not. Other countries with severe inflation have achieved depressing levels of political continuity. Robert Mugabe, for instance, celebrated 33 years of power in Zimbabwe this year. On the list of 56 hyperinflationary episodes that Steve Hanke compiled, many countries underwent dramatic change soon after – think Weimar Germany – but few governments, if any, collapsed directly because of hyperinflation. Expensive flatscreen TVs have never caused a revolution. Eventually, solid currency like the U.S. dollar flows in to replace the worthless native currency (economists call this phenomenon Thiers's Law: good money drives out bad money), and hyperinflation typically ends with the government forced, in effect, to adopt someone else's money – say, by pegging its flailing currency to a solid one. That doesn't end the predation, of course. In the case of Zimbabwe, the Mugabe regime just stole money in other ways, such as by taking over mines. The government has weakened – in January, Finance Minister Tendai Biti told reporters that his country's public account contained exactly 217

U.S. dollars after payrolls had been met – but it's still in power.

That might be because the citizens most capable of instigating revolution are the least affected. “Politically connected people [in Zimbabwe] were able to weather it well,” William Masters says, in part by getting import licenses that allowed them to sell at inflated prices goods they had bought at artificially low prices overseas. “They made out like bandits, because they were.” Hanke says he knew members of the Royal Harare Golf Club who would order their beers before playing a round, in case the price went up while they were on the course. They were, however, still members of a golf club, so clearly the hyperinflation hadn't ruined everyone. Some clerical leaders of Iran are, for their parts, widely believed to be fantastically wealthy. The politically connected there will almost certainly survive and prosper, although the Islamic Republic's amour propre would surely suffer a gut punch if the country had to abandon its own currency and adopt, say, the Turkish lira or the euro.

It's not yet clear whom the Iranian working classes will blame for destroying their retirement savings. During my trip, no one mentioned any hatred for America – I'm Canadian, so they might have confided safely – or blamed America for the country's ills. It's at least plausible that Iranians would attribute their suffering to their own government. “Everyone knows

there is corruption, and that the economy is mismanaged and inefficient,” says Mohsen Milani, a professor of international relations at the University of South Florida. “The big question is whether [sanctions] will have an effect on nuclear issues. And I believe they will. Elections are controlled and manipulated, but the candidate who can promise to end the sanctions is likely to win.” Salehi-Isfahani, the economist at Virginia Tech, points out that wages have mostly increased quickly to keep up with prices – although government-employee salaries have increased at only half the needed rate, and the economic situation has worn down optimism. “People are adjusting to lower real incomes,” Salehi-Isfahani told me. “But I doubt very much that they have adjusted to the lack of hope. The government can’t supply that just by keeping chicken cheap.”

In any case, no wages could ever really keep pace with very severe inflation of the sort that might be retriggered by sanctions, or a further closing of Chinese or Russian markets to Iranian trade. Iran’s foreign-exchange reserves are thought to be dwindling. In the absence of a new infusion, we can expect continued flight from the rial, a rise in prices, and finally the temptation that governments under stress have faced at least 56 times before: to print far too much money in order to pay the bills.

A key point in any hyperinflation scenario is a government’s moment of moral self-discovery, when it realizes that it is willing – under pressure of its own making or from external forces – to finance itself at its most vulnerable citizens’ expense. To see the direction Iran is taking, we might consider monitoring not only the imports of uranium, but also those of printer ink. ♦

The Last Star Poet: Dylan Thomas

by *James Parker*

Poetry is dead!” cried John Berryman, emerging in distraction from the Manhattan hospital room that Dylan Thomas had just exited by another, more conclusive route. Poetry had been unconscious for four days, as a result of alcohol and then morphine. It had finally succumbed while being washed by a nurse – babied into eternity under a woman’s hands, life’s last feebleness recalling its first.

Poetry is dead. Did Berryman, himself a poet, really say that? The record is unclear. It could be a legend. But he was certainly there, by the bedside at St. Vincent’s, on November 9, 1953; certainly overwrought; and if he did say it, his words – as Walford Davies points out in the new edition of his excellent study, *Dylan Thomas* – “were something more than melodrama.” Marshall McLuhan hadn’t yet given us the formula, but if Dylan Thomas was the medium, poetry was the message. Already a radio favorite in Britain, he blazed his reputation across 1950s America with a sequence of Led Zeppelin-esque reading tours, multicity road shows in which the dying throb of Romanticism met the incoming crackle of mass communi-

cation. This Welshman was electronically famous, and he constellated in his rumpled persona various blips and signals that all said poet. The bow-tied ham at the lectern, bass-baritoning away; the scapegrace of the after-party, peeing into potted plants; the inspired tavern regular, talker for hours, blood brother to the universe; the craftsman in his deep and scratching silence; the fire-tailed bard; the cometary Celt. All of it was Dylan, all of it was poetry, and when he died, it died with him. He was the last of the rock-star poets, because the minute the real rock stars showed up – amps buzzing, drugs twanging – the poets would be shuffled off into inconsequence.

And then there was the poetry itself. In this, the year of his centenary, how do we feel about the on-the-page poetry of Dylan Thomas? His big, late-period thumpers are not looking good. “Fern Hill” is gloop; “Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night” is inferior Yeats. And his early stuff is impossible, a young man and his bubbling glands, his bubbling thesaurus – Faded my elbow ghost, the mothers-eyed / As, blowing on the angels, I was lost – the sort of poetry you press upon a non-poetry-reader if you want to make sure he never goes near a poem again. The famous Thomas artistry, meanwhile, all those whirring micro-mechanisms of beat and assonance and interior rhyme, now appears a work of slight craziness – as if the poem is an obsessive cuckoo clock from which, upon the stroke of midnight, the three-inch poet will himself pop out to blow a tiny raspberry.

I'm being nasty. But I write out of injury: Thomas was a wizard to the teenage me, and meeting him again in my flatulent middle years I am startled, offended, by the plain unreadability of 60 percent of his verse. Our eunuch dreams, all seedless in the light ... What the hell? How did he spellbind me so? Well, with lines like this: Though they be mad and dead as nails, / Heads of the characters hammer through daisies. Which sounds amazing, and in which two lovely clichés – dead as a doornail and pushing up daisies – are rewired to produce a beyond-triumphant image of typewriter keys slamming upward through the earth. “The blood-jet is poetry,” wrote Sylvia Plath, “there is no stopping it.” For Dylan Thomas, it was “the force that through the green fuse drives the flower” – what a line! – the sticky generative sizzle, first flash of utterance, to which he consecrated his art. His poems are in a sense about nothing else. They are intricate, musical ways, brilliant here and terrible there, of saying I'm alive, right now, and this is a poem, and soon I'll be dead.

This was what I, you, America responded to. This, and the charm of the man, the charm of the boy, the shock-headed cherub-troll who'd come waddling down to London from Swansea with a cigarette between his lips and a brown beer bottle in his pocket. Up through the lubber crust of Wales / I rocketed to astonish. The Czech novelist Jan Drda, accompanying Thomas during a 1949 visit to Prague, observed that the poet “did not seem to walk at all, he frisked and gambolled, he made the impression of a bear floating in the air.” Drinking and drinking and

drinking; writing and not writing; misbehaving; dying. Reading his own work aloud, he enchanted; reading others', he channeled. Not always: his recording of “The Owl” by Edward Thomas is like Stevie Nicks's “Landslide” performed by Meatloaf. But give him something a bit heavy-metal, something like D. H. Lawrence's “Whales Weep Not!” – And over the bridge of the whale's strong phallus, linking the wonder of whales / the burning archangels under the sea keep passing, back and forth – and he'd flatten the auditorium.

By his mid-30s the fame was in full spate but the verse, the force, the sap had dried up. Six poems in six years, he confided to a Time journalist who interviewed him in New York in 1952. He wasn't blocked; he was finished. Had he squandered his gift? “Scriptlings” and “radio whinnies,” he called his work for the BBC, the 100-plus radio broadcasts he'd made since 1943, including “Walter de la Mare as a Prose Writer” and readings of his own stories. All a monstrous distraction, so it appeared, from his poetry, his “real” work.

But talent takes care of itself, and the truth is that in his hackwork and hirework, Thomas developed another style: a subversive super-prose, Falstaffian and flexible, anti-bardic, running athwart the solemnities and swollen loins of his poetic corpus in gleeful little crosscurrents of irony. Now he wasn't writing I see the tigrion in tears / In the androgynous dark. He was writing “Down in the dusking town, Mae Rose Cottage, still lying in clover, listens to the nannygoats chew, draws circles of lipstick

round her nipples.” It was the sound of his last and greatest work, the Spoon River-esque “play for voices” *Under Milk Wood*. A Welsh village asleep, dreaming about God and sex and murder; a Welsh village awake, bobbing through the daylight on underground rivers of pathology, as we all are. This new language – so close to the language of his letters and his conversation – was omnivorous and all-redeeming: everything seen and reckoned with, everything absolved.

Too late. What hadn’t been taken care of, what had been horribly neglected, was the vessel, the creature, and as he put the final touches on *Under Milk Wood* for its debut in New York, Thomas was falling apart: he had gout and gastritis and galloping heebie-jeebies. The whole disaster is recorded in John Malcolm Brinnin’s *Dylan Thomas in America* (1955), in which the author – also a poet, and the man responsible for organizing the reading tours – hovers above his doomed and room-wrecking subject like a kind of bald, severed intellect. On top of Thomas’s fragmenting health, an article in *Time* had been rather rude (“He borrows with no thought of returning what is lent, seldom shows up on time, is a trial to his friends, and a worry to his family”), and when Thomas threatened to sue, the magazine hired a detective to follow him around New York and take notes. “Seen taking benzedrine” is a line that survives from the gumshoe’s log.

The medium is the message, McLuhan said, which his onetime student, the great Hugh Kenner, translated for

us most helpfully as What you’re taking for granted is always more important than whatever you have your mind fixed on. Cavil at Dylan Thomas’s overdoings; praise this bit and dispraise that bit; but there he was, there he is, an emblem of poetry, which is Being itself – the force that through the green fuse, etc. And the world honored him for it, while chopping him to pieces, because Being is victorious everywhere. It’s the loony, peccant villagers of *Under Milk Wood*, their bad habits embraced with animal clemency. It’s Auntie Hannah in “A Child’s Christmas in Wales,” who liked port, and who “stood in the middle of the snowbound back yard, singing like a big-bosomed thrush.” Whales, weep not; Wales, weep not. It’s that thing in the presence of which, though it contains terror and morphine and a crying John Berryman, you’re forgiven before you’re even born. ♦

Side by...

Wild Swans
by Alice Munro

FLO SAID TO WATCH OUT FOR White Slavers. She said this was how they operated: an old woman, a motherly or grandmotherly sort, made friends while riding beside you on a bus or train. She offered you candy, which was drugged. Pretty soon you began to droop and mumble, were in no condition to speak for yourself. Oh, Help, the woman said, my daughter (granddaughter) is sick, please somebody help me get her off so that she can recover in the fresh air. Up stepped a polite gentleman, pretending to be a stranger, offering assistance. Together, at the next stop, they hustled you off the train or bus, and that was the last the ordinary world ever saw of you. They kept you a prisoner in the White Slave place (to which you had been transported drugged and bound so you wouldn't even know where you were), until such time as you were thoroughly degraded and in despair, your insides torn up by drunken men and invested with vile disease, your mind destroyed by drugs, your hair and teeth fallen out. It took about three years, for you to get to this state. You wouldn't want to go home, then, maybe couldn't remember home or find your way if you did. So they let you out on the streets. Flo took ten dollars and

...by side

Vadhattyúk
fordította Tárnok Attila

FLO FIGYELMEZTETTE, hogy a cukrosnénivel vigyázni kell. A következőképpen csálnak lépre: egy idős asszony, amolyan anyás-nagymamis, összebarátkozik veled a buszon vagy a vonaton. Édességgel kínál, ám altató van benne. Hamar elálmosodsz, motyogsz magadban, de a szavaid érthetetlenek. Ó, kérem, segítsen valaki, néz körül az asszony, a lányom (unokám) rosszul van, le akarunk szállni, a friss levegőn majd összeszedi magát. Előlép egy udvarias úriember, aki idegennek adja ki magát, és a következő megállóban az asszonnyal lesegítenek a járműről. Senki világon a nem lát többé. A foglyuk vagy. A cukrosnéni házában, ahova megkötözve visznek, és azt sem tudod, hol vagy, kíméletlenül megaláznak, szétszednek, részeg férfiak belédtépnek, gonosz betegségeket adnak át, leradírozzák a tudatod, kihullik a hajad, a fogaid. Nagyjából három év alatt jutsz erre az állapotra. Nem akarsz többet hazamenni, talán már haza se találnál. És akkor kitesznek az utcára.

Flo tíz dollárt egy kis vászontasakban odavarrt Rose kombinéjához. Könnyen előfordulhat, hogy ellopják a lány erszényét.

Az egyházi személyekkel is vigyázz, mondta, azok a

put it in a little cloth bag which she sewed to the strap of Rose's slip. Another thing likely to happen was that Rose would get her purse stolen.

Watch out, Flo said as well, for people dressed up as ministers. They were the worst. That disguise was commonly adopted by White Slavers, as well as those after your money.

Rose said she didn't see how she could tell which ones were disguised.

Flo had worked in Toronto once. She had worked as a waitress in a coffee shop in Union Station. That was how she knew all she knew. She never saw sunlight, in those days, except on her days off. But she saw plenty else. She saw a man cut another man's stomach with a knife, just pull out his shirt and do a tidy cut, as if it was a watermelon not a stomach. The stomach's owner just sat looking down surprised, with no time to protest. Flo implied that that was nothing, in Toronto. She saw two bad women (that was what Flo called whores, running the two words together, like badminton) get into a fight, and a man laughed at them, other men stopped and laughed and egged them on, and they had their fists full of each other's hair. At last the police came and took them away, still howling and yelping.

She saw a child die of a fit, too. Its face was black as ink.

"Well I'm not scared," said Rose provokingly. "There's the police, anyway."

"Oh, them! They'd be the first ones to diddle you!" She

legrosszabbak. Az ilyen álruhát viselők gyakran cukrosnénik, cukrosbácsik és a pénzéd akarják elszedni.

Rose megjegyezte, hogy nem fogja tudni megkülönböztetni az álruhát a valódi papi viselettől.

Flo régebben dolgozott egy ideig Torontóban. Pincérnő volt egy kávézóban a pályaudvarnál, ezért tudja, mit beszél. Csak a szabadnapján látott napfényt. De látott mást, eleget. Egyszer tanúja volt, hogy egy embert megkéselnek. A támadó felhúzta az áldozat ingjét a hasán, és egyszerűen meglékelte, mint egy görögdinnyét. A hasgazdája csak nézett maga elé meglepetten, felháborodni sem maradt ideje. Flo sejtetni kívánta, hogy az ilyen esetek nem rendkívüliek Torontóban. Egy másik alkalommal két rossznő – így hívta a kurvákat, egybemosva a két szót, mintha azt mondaná: rosszcsont – összeverekedett, egy férfi röhögött rajtuk, aztán megálltak a járókelők, ugyanúgy nevetve. Volt, aki még biztatta is a veszekedőket, a két rossznő meg egymás haját tépte, a markuk tele volt a másik tincseivel. Végül a rendőrök vitték el őket, de a rossznők továbbra is őrzöngve rikácsoltak.

Látott egy gyereket, akit elvitt egy roham. Az arca fekete volt, mint a tinta.

– Nem fogok bejvedni – kérkedett Rose. – Ha kell, szólok egy rendőrnek.

– Ó, azok fognak csak igazán cicázni veled!

Rose egy szót sem hitt el abból, amit anyja a szexről mesélt. A temetkezési vállalkozót, például. Az elegánsan öltözött, kopasz kis férfi betért néha az üzletbe és

did not believe anything Flo said on the subject of sex. Consider the undertaker.

A little bald man, very neatly dressed, would come into the store sometimes and speak to Flo with a placating expression.

“I only wanted a bag of candy. And maybe a few packages of gum. And one or two chocolate bars. Could you go to the trouble of wrapping them?”

Flo in her mock-deferential tone would assure him that she could. She wrapped them in heavy-duty white paper, so they were something like presents. He took his time with the selection, humming and chatting, then dawdled for a while. He might ask how Flo was feeling. And how Rose was, if she was there.

“You look pale. Young girls need fresh air.” To Flo he would say, “You work too hard. You’ve worked hard all your life.”

“No rest for the wicked,” Flo would say agreeably.

When he went out she hurried to the window. There it was — the old black hearse with its purple curtains.

“He’ll be after them today!” Flo would say as the hearse rolled away at a gentle pace, almost a funeral pace. The little man had been an undertaker, but he was retired now. The hearse was retired too. His sons had taken over the undertaking and bought a new one. He drove the old hearse all over the country, looking for women. So Flo said. Rose could not believe it. Flo said he gave them the gum and the candy. Rose said he probably ate them himself. Flo said he had been seen, he had been

nyájaskodva beszélgetett Flóval.

– Csak egy zacskó cukorkát szeretnék. És talán néhány csomag rágógumit. Egy-két csokoládét. És nem lennék terhére, ha arra kérném, csomagolja be nekem?

Flo tiszteletteljes modort utánzó hangon szabadkozott, hogy számára ez egyáltalán nem fáradság. Vastag fehér papírba csomagolta az édességeket, a csomag úgy nézett ki, mint egy kis ajándék. A férfi mindig ráérősen, pizsmogva válogatott, közben dudorászott és cseverészett. Megkérdezte, hogy van Flo. Ha Rose a boltban volt, felőle is érdeklődött.

– Sápadt vagy. Fiatal lányoknak a friss levegőn a helye. – Majd Flóhoz fordulva hozzátette: – Ön, asszonyom, túl sokat dolgozik. Egész életében sokat dolgozott.

– Szegény ember nem pihenhet – mondta Flo egyetértőleg.

Miután a férfi kilépett a boltból, Flo a kirakathoz sietett. Az utcán ott állt a bíborszínnel függönyözött, öreg fekete halottaskocsi.

– Ma cserkészni indul – mondta Flo, ahogy a kocsi lassan, szinte mint egy temetési menet, kigördült az utcából. A kisöreg rég nyugdíjba vonult, a fiai a kocsiját újabbra cserélték: viszik tovább a vállalkozást. De az öreg bebarangolja a vidéket a régi kocsival, nők után jár. Flo legalábbis ezt állította. Rose mindezt nehezen tudta elképzelni. Flo azt is mondta, a férfi fiatal lányok számára veszi az édességet, Rose úgy gondolta, az öreg eszi meg. Flo szerint, volt, aki látta, sőt hallotta. Enyhe

heard. In mild weather he drove with the windows down, singing, to himself or to somebody out of sight in the back.

*Her brow is like the snowdrift,
Her throat is like the swan.*

Flo imitated him singing. Gently overtaking some woman walking on a back road, or resting at a country crossroads. All compliments and courtesy and chocolate bars, offering a ride. Of course every woman who reported being asked said she had turned him down. He never pestered anybody, drove politely on. He called in at houses, and if the husband was home he seemed to like just as well as anything to sit and chat. Wives said that was all he ever did anyway but Flo did not believe it.

“Some women are taken in,” she said. “A number.” She liked to speculate on what the hearse was like inside. Plush. Plush on the walls and the roof and the floor. Soft purple, the color of the curtains, the color of dark lilacs.

All nonsense, Rose thought. Who could believe it, of a man that age?

Rose was going to Toronto on the train for the first time by herself. She had been once before, but that was with Flo, long before her father died. They took along their own sandwiches and bought milk from the vendor on the train. It was sour. Sour chocolate milk. Rose kept

időben leengedi az ablakokat, és hallani lehet, ahogy magának vagy a kocsni belsejében egy kívülről nem látható személynek énekel.

*A szemöldöke mint a hó,
A nyaka, akár egy hattyú.*

Flo utánozta, az öreg énekét. Elhagyatott utakon magányosan sétáló vagy a kereszteződésben megpihenő nők nyomába ered. Az udvarias dicséretetek, bókok, a csokoládé megteszi a hatását. Felajánlja, hogy elviszi őket egy darabon. Persze a nők általában azt mesélik, hogy visszautasították a férfi ajánlatát. Ő soha nem erősködött, udvariasan továbbhajtott. Ha valahova bekopogott, azt se bánta, hogy a férj otthon van, elücsörgött, beszélgetett egy ideig. A feleségek állították, hogy csupán ennyi volt az egész, de Flo másként gondolta.

– Vannak nők, aki felülnek az öregúrnak – mondta. Eltöprengett rajta, milyen lehet a halottaskocsi belülről. Plüss. A padlótól a mennyezetig körbe mindenhol plüss. Puha lilák, mint a függönyök, akár a bíbor színű orgona.

Abszurd, gondolta Rose. Hogy képzelhet valaki ilyesmit egy ilyen idős férfiről?

Rose először utazott egyedül Torontóba vonattal. Járt már ott korábban, jóval az apja halála előtt, de akkor Flo is elkísérte. A szendvicset otthonról hozták, de a vo-

taking tiny sips, unwilling to admit that something so much desired could fail her. Flo sniffed it, then hunted up and down the train until she found the old man in his red jacket, with no teeth and the tray hanging around his neck. She invited him to sample the chocolate milk. She invited people nearby to smell it. He let her have some ginger ale for nothing. It was slightly warm.

“I let him know,” Flo said looking around after he had left. “You have to let them know.”

A woman agreed with her but most people looked out the window. Rose drank the warm ginger ale. Either that, or the scene with the vendor, or the conversation Flo and the agreeing woman now got into about where they came from, why they were going to Toronto, and Rose’s morning constipation which was why she was lacking color, or the small amount of chocolate milk she had got inside her, caused her to throw up in the train toilet. All day long she was afraid people in Toronto could smell vomit on her coat.

This time Flo started the trip off by saying, “Keep an eye on her, she’s never been away from home before!” to the conductor, then looking around and laughing, to show that was jokingly meant. Then she had to get off. It seemed the conductor had no more need for jokes than Rose had, and no intention of keeping an eye on anybody. He never spoke to Rose except to ask for her ticket. She had a window seat, and was soon extraordinarily happy. She felt Flo receding, West Hanratty flying away from her, her own wearying self discarded as easily as every-

naton vettek tejet az utasellátótól. Savanyú volt, savanyú csokis tej. Rose aprókat kortyolt belőle, nem volt hajlandó beismerni, hogy amit annyira kíván, cserbenhagyhatja. Flo csak beleszagolt, aztán fel-alá szaladgált a vonaton a fogatlan, idős, piros mellényes férfi nyomában, aki egy nyakába akasztott tálcáról árusított. Mikor rátalált, az asszony indítványozta, hogy kóstolja meg a tejét. Sőt, körbekínálta az utasoknak: csak szagoljanak bele. Végül a férfi adott ingyen egy langyos gyömbéritalt.

– Megmondtam neki a magamét – nézett körbe Flo, miután a férfi továbbállt. – Mindig ki kell mondanunk az igazunkat.

Egy asszony egyetértett vele, de a legtöbb utas csak bámult ki az ablakon. Rose megitta a meleg gyömbéritalt. Vagy ez, vagy a jelenet, amit az anyja rendezett, vagy a beszélgetés miatt, amit anyja az egyetértő asszonnyal folytatott, ami utóbb arról szólt, ki honnan jön, és miért megy Torontóba, majd szóba került, hogy Rose-nak reggel székrekedése volt, ezért olyan sápadt, vagy a néhány korty csokis tej miatt, Rose-nak hánynia kellett a vonat végében. Torontóban egész nap azon aggodalmaskodott, hogy az emberek megérik a kabátján a hányás szagát.

Ez alkalommal Flo a kalauz gondjaira bízta a lányt: – Tartsa szemmel, soha nem ment még el egyedül itthonról!

Mosolyogva nézett körül, hogy mutassa, a megjegyzést humorosnak szánta, de ekkor már le kellett száll-

thing else. She loved the towns less and less known. A woman was standing at her back door in her nightgown, not caring if everybody on the train saw her. They were traveling south, out of the snow belt, into an earlier spring, a tenderer sort of landscape. People could grow peach trees in their backyards.

Rose collected in her mind the things she had to look for in Toronto. First, things for Flo. Special stockings for her varicose veins. A special kind of cement for sticking handles on pots. And a full set of dominoes.

For herself Rose wanted to buy hair-remover to put on her arms and legs, and if possible an arrangement of inflatable cushions, supposed to reduce your hips and thighs. She thought they probably had hair-remover in the drugstore in Hanratty, but the woman in there was a friend of Flo's and told everything. She told Flo who bought hair dye and slimming medicine and French safes. As for the cushion business, you could send away for it but there was sure to be a comment at the Post Office, and Flo knew people there as well. She also hoped to buy some bangles, and an angora sweater. She had great hopes of silver bangles and powder-blue angora. She thought they could transform her, make her calm and slender and take the frizz out of her hair, dry her underarms and turn her complexion to pearl.

The money for these things, as well as the money for the trip, came from a prize Rose had won, for writing an essay called "Art and Science in the World of Tomorrow." To her surprise, Flo asked if she could read it, and while

nia a vonatról, és úgy tűnt, a jegyszedő még annyira sem értékelte Flo humorát, mint Rose, és esze ágában sem volt bárkit szemmel tartani. Rose-hoz nem is szólt, kivéve, amikor a jegyét kérte. A lány az ablak mellett ült, és rövid időn belül kimondottan boldognak érezte magát. Ahogy távolodott az anyjától és a falutól, saját énje fáradtsága is elszállni látszott. Élvezte, hogy egyre ismeretlenebb városok mellett fut a vonat. Egy helyütt egy asszony hálóingben ácsorgott a háza hátsó udvarán, mit sem törődve azzal, hogy a vonatról minden utas tisztán látja. Délre tartottak, lassan maguk mögött hagyták a hó borította határt, és a korábban érkező tavaszban egy szelídebb táj felé haladtak. Az emberek errefelé akár barackot is természetthettek a kertben.

Rose gondolatban összeszedte, mi mindent kell elintéznie Torontóban. Először is, gyógyharisnyát kell találni anyja visszeres lábaira, aztán valami speciális gyors-sankötő oldatot, amivel megragaszthatják az edények letört füleit, továbbá egy komplett dominókészletet.

Saját maga számára szőrtelenítőt keres, a karját és a lábát szeretné epillálni, és ha lehet, egy olyan felfújható párnát, ami állítólag derékban és combban karcsúsít. Szőrtelenítőt valószínűleg a Hanratty-beli drogériában is kapna, de az ottani eladó Flo közeli barátja, és beárulná a lányt az anyjának. Még azt is kipletykálja, ki vesz hajfestéket, karcsúsító pirulákat vagy gumióvszert. Rose megrendelhetné a párnát csomagküldő szolgálattal is, de valaki biztos megjegyzést tenne a postán, és Flo ott is mindenkit ismer. Aztán karperecet is keres, és

she was reading it, she remarked that they must have thought they had to give Rose the prize for swallowing the dictionary. Then she said shyly, "It's very interesting."

She would have to spend the night at Cela McKinney's. Cela McKinney was her father's cousin. She had married a hotel manager and thought she had gone up in the world. But the hotel manager came home one day and sat down on the dining room floor between two chairs and said, "I am never going to leave this house again." Nothing unusual had happened, he had just decided not to go out of the house again, and he didn't, until he died. That had made Cela McKinney odd and nervous. She locked her doors at eight o'clock. She was also very stingy. Supper was usually oatmeal porridge, with raisins. Her house was dark and narrow and smelled like a bank.

The train was filling up. At Brantford a man asked if she would mind if he sat down beside her.

"It's cooler out than you'd think:" he said. He offered her part of his newspaper. She said no thanks.

Then lest he think her rude she said it really was cooler. She went on looking out the window at the spring morning. There was no snow left, down here. The trees and bushes seemed to have a paler bark than they did at home. Even the sunlight looked different. It was as different from home, here, as the coast of the Mediterranean would be, or the valleys of California.

"Filthy windows, you'd think they'd take more care,"

moher kardigánt. Reméli, hogy sikerül ezüstözött karperecet és kobaltkék kardigánt venni. Úgy érzi, ezek az újdonságok változtatnának a személyiségén: karcsúságot és önbizalmat kölcsönöznének, nem izzad majd a hónalja, és a bőre gyöngyszínű lesz.

A vásárláshoz a pénzt, ahogy az útiköltségre is, Rose egy irodalmi pályázaton nyerte, a benyújtott esszé címe: A holnap világának művészete és tudománya. Meglepetésére, a munkát Flo is elkérte, de olvasás közben megjegyezte, Rose talán azért kapta meg a díjat, mert bebilázta az értelmező szótár minden ritka kifejezését. Aztán elszégyellte magát és hozzátette: – Nagyon érdekes, amit írsz.

A lány az éjszakát Cela McKinneynél tölti majd. Cela McKinney apja unokahúga volt. Egy szálloda igazgatójához ment nőül, és úgy érezte, sokra vitte a világban. Ám az igazgató egy nap, miután hazaért, lehuppant az ebédlőben a padlóra, két szék közé és azt mondta: – Többet nem hagyom el a házat.

Semmi különös nem történt, egyszerűen csak elhatározta, hogy nem megy el többé otthonról. Így is tett, amíg meg nem halt. Azóta Cela McKinney furcsán nyugos. Este nyolckor bezárkózik, rettentően zsugori, vacsorára csak mazsolás zabkását eszik, a lakása szűkös, sötét és olyan szag járja át, mint egy bankot.

A vonat lassanként megtelt utasokkal. Brantfordnál egy férfi udvariasan megkérdezte, leülhet-e Rose mellé.

– Kint hűvösebb van, mint gondolná – mondta, és felajánlotta Rose-nak az újság kiemelhető női rovatát. A

the man said. "Do you travel much by train?"

She said no.

Water was lying in the fields. He nodded at it and said there was a lot this year.

"Heavy snows."

She noticed his saying snows, a poetic-sounding word. Anyone at home would have said snow.

"I had an unusual experience the other day. I was driving out in the country. In fact I was on my way to see one of my parishioners, a lady with a heart condition —"

She looked quickly at his collar. He was wearing an ordinary shirt and tie and a dark blue suit.

"Oh, yes," he said. "I'm a United Church minister. But I don't always wear my uniform. I wear it for preaching in. I'm off duty today."

"Well as I said I was driving through the country and I saw some Canada Geese down on a pond, and I took another look, and there were some swans down with them. A whole great flock of swans. What a lovely sight they were. They would be on their spring migration, I expect, heading up north. What a spectacle. I never saw anything like it."

Rose was unable to think appreciatively of the wild swans because she was afraid he was going to lead the conversation from them to Nature in general and then to God, the way a minister would feel obliged to do. But heded not, he stopped with the swans.

"A very fine sight. You would have enjoyed them." He was between fifty and sixty years old, Rose thought. He

lány köszönte, nem kéri.

Aztán, hogy ne tűnjék elutasítónak, hozzátette, csakugyan hűl az idő. Továbbra is kifelé bámult az ablakon, a tavaszi reggelbe. Itt délen már nem volt hó a földeken. A fák és a bokrok kérge sötétebbnek tetszett, mint odahaza, még a nap is másképp süttött. A táj annyira más volt, mint az otthoni, mintha mediterrán tengerparton vagy egy kaliforniai völgyben járna.

– Mocskos az ablak. Az ember elvárná, hogy több gondot fordítsanak rá – mondta a férfi. – Sokat utazik vonnattal?

Rose csak annyit mondott, nem.

A földeken néhol állt a víz. A férfi kifelé bökkve megjegyezte, sokat esett az idén.

– Sokat havazott.

Rose felfigyelt a választékos kifejezésre. Otthon mindenki azt mondaná, sok hó esett.

– A múltkor különös élményben volt részem. Autóval jártam a vidéket. Az egyházközséghez tartozó híveket kerestem fel, egyikük, egy szívpanaszokkal küszködő hölgy ...

Rose gyors pillantást vetett a férfi gallérjára. Utastársa egyszerű inget, nyakkendőt és kék öltönyt viselt.

– Nos, igen – mosolyodott el a férfi –, protestáns lelkipásztor vagyok, és hétköznapi nem viselek reverendát, csak a szertartások alkalmával. Ma szabadnapos vagyok. Szóval, mint mondtam, a vidéket jártam, és a távolban egy tónál kanadai lúdakat vettem észre. Ám ahogy jobban megnéztem, láttam, hogy hattyúk is van-

was short, and energetic-looking, with a square ruddy face and bright waves of gray hair combed straight up from his forehead. When she realized he was not going to mention God she felt she ought to show her gratitude.

She said they must have been lovely.

“It wasn’t even a regular pond, it was just some water lying in a field. It was just by luck the water was lying there and I had to drive by there. And they came down and I came driving by at the right time. Just by luck. They come in at the east end of Lake Erie, I think. But I never was lucky enough to see them before.”

She turned by degrees to the window, and he returned to his paper. She remained slightly smiling, so as not to seem rude, not to seem to be rejecting conversation altogether. The morning really was cool, and she had taken down her coat off the hook where she put it when she first got on the train, she had spread it over herself, like a lap robe. She had set her purse on the floor when the minister sat down, to give him room. He took the sections of the paper apart, shaking and rustling them in a leisurely, rather showy, way. He seemed to her the sort of person who does everything in a showy way. A ministerial way. He brushed aside the sections he didn’t want at the moment. A corner of newspaper touched her leg, just at the edge of her coat.

She thought for some time that it was the paper. Then she said to herself, what if it is a hand? That was the kind of thing she could imagine. She would sometimes look at men’s hands, at the fuzz on their forearms, their

nak köztük. Egy nagy csapat hattyú. Gondolom, észak felé vonultak. Micsoda látvány volt! Soha nem láttam még hasonlót.

Rose képtelen volt méltányolni a vadhattyúk látványát, mert attól tartott, hogy a beszélgetés innen majd a természet általános nagyszerűsége, aztán Isten felé terelődik, hisz a papok általában kötelességüknek érzik, hogy mindenkit megtérítsenek. De a tiszteletes ezúttal nem érzett ilyesféle kötelezettséget. Lehorgonyzott a hattyúknál.

– Nagyszerű látványt nyújtottak. Ön is gyönyörködött volna bennük.

Ötven és hatvan között járhat, gondolta Rose. Alacsony termetű, teli energiával, az arca szögletes, piros-pozsgás, fényes, őszülő haját hátrafésüli a homlokából. Mikor Rose rájött, hogy nem lesz szó Istenről, úgy érezte, valahogy ki kell mutatnia a háláját. Megjegyezte hát, hogy a hattyúk csakugyan csodálatosak lehetnek.

– Még csak nem is valami szabályos tónál szálltak le. Csak találtak egy kis vizet a mezőn. Tiszta véletlen, hogy a nedves völgy mellett vitt az utam. Meg az, hogy éppen akkor telepedtek meg, amikor arra hajtottam. Tiszta véletlen. Azt hiszem, az Erie-tó keleti végéről jönnek errefelé, de még soha nem volt szerencsém találkozni velük.

Rose egy kissé az ablak irányába fordult, a férfi pedig visszatért az újságjához. A lány halvány mosolyt felejtett az arcán, nehogy modortalannak lássék, mint aki nem elutasítja a beszélgetést, csupán felfüggeszti. A

concentrating profiles. She would think about everything they could do. Even the stupid ones. For instance the driver-salesman who brought the bread to Flo's store. The ripeness and confidence of manner, the settled mixture of ease and alertness, with which he handled the bread truck. A fold of mature belly over the belt did not displease her. Another time she had her eye on the French teacher at school. Not a Frenchman at all, really, his name was McLaren, but Rose thought teaching French had rubbed off on him, made him look like one. Quick and sallow; sharp shoulders; hooked nose and sad eyes. She saw him lapping and coiling his way through slow pleasures, a perfect autocrat of indulgences. She had a considerable longing to be somebody's object. Pounded, pleased, reduced, exhausted.

But what if it was a hand? What if it really was a hand? She shifted slightly, moved as much as she could towards the window. Her imagination seemed to have created this reality, a reality she was not prepared for at all. She found it alarming. She was concentrating on that leg, that bit of skin with the stocking over it. She could not bring herself to look. Was there a pressure, or was there not? She shifted again. Her legs had been, and remained, tightly closed. It was. It was a hand. It was a hand's pressure.

Please don't. That was what she tried to say. She shaped the words in her mind, tried them out, then couldn't get them past her lips. Why was that? The embarrassment was it, the fear that people might hear?

reggeli vonatfülke valóban hűvösnek érződött, ezért levette a fogasról a kabátját, ahova induláskor akasztotta, és magára terítette, mint egy úti plédet. A retiküljét elvette az ülésről, hogy helyet engedjen a tiszteletesnek, amikor leült. A férfi, az újsággal zizegve, szinte teátrálisan, ráérősen különválogatta a kiemelhető rovatokat. A lánynak olybá tűnt, ez az ember mindent ilyen színpadiasan kezel. Olyan papi-modorosan. Azokat a részeket, amik nem érdekelték, hanyagul félresöpörte. Az újság széle a lány lábát bökölte a térdénél, ameddig a kabát leért.

Rose elég sokáig úgy érezte, hogy az újság széle. De egy idő után arra gondolt, hogy talán egy kéz ér hozzá. Legalábbis bele tudta azt is képzelni. Néha szerette megbámulni a férfiak kezét. A szőrös alkarukat, a megfeszülő izmot. Elképzelte, mi mindenre képesek ezek a kezek. Még az ostoba férfiaké is, mint amilyen azé a szállítóé, aki a pékárut hozza Flo üzletébe. A magabiztos, érett figyelem, amivel a kenyeres kocsit igazgatja. Még az sem taszította Rose-t, hogy a nadrágszűj fölött kilátszik a férfi pocakja. Egy másik alkalommal az iskola franciatanárára figyelt fel. A tanár egyáltalán nem francia, McLarennek hívják, de Rose szerint a szak tárgy átítatta a személyiségét, kiköpött franciának látszik. A bőre színe élénksárga, szögletes válla van, kampos orra és szomorú a tekintete. Rose szinte látja maga előtt, ahogy a tanár lassan, gyöngéden, kényúr módjára ölelkezik, vonaglik. Szeretne egyszer ő is valakinek a keze közé kerülni, hogy kisajátítsák, legyűrjék, kiélvez-

People were all around them, the seats were full.

It was not only that.

She did manage to look at him, not raising her head but turning it cautiously. He had tilted his seat back and closed his eyes. There was his dark blue suit sleeve, disappearing under the newspaper. He had arranged the paper so that it overlapped Rose's coat. His hand was underneath, simply resting, as if flung out in sleep.

Now, Rose could have shifted the newspaper and removed her coat. If he was not asleep, he would have been obliged to draw back his hand. If he was asleep, if he did not draw it back, she could have whispered, Excuse me, and set his hand firmly on his own knee. This solution, so obvious and foolproof, did not occur to her. And she would have to wonder, why not? The minister's hand was not, or not yet, at all welcome to her. It made her feel uncomfortable, resentful, slightly disgusted, trapped and wary. But she could not take charge of it, to reject it. She could not insist that it was there, when he seemed to be insisting that it was not. How could she declare him responsible, when he lay there so harmless and trusting, resting himself before his busy day, with such a pleased and healthy face? A man older than her father would be, if he were living, a man used to deference, an appreciator of Nature, delighter in wild swans. If she did say Please don't she was sure he would ignore her, as if overlooking some silliness or impoliteness on her part. She knew that as soon as she said it she would hope he had not heard.

But there was more to it than that. Curiosity. More

zék, kimerítsék.

De mit tegyen, ha a lábát csakugyan egy kéz érinti? Ha mégis egy kéz, és nem az újság? Némileg odébb mozdult, amennyire ülő helyzetében az ablak közelsége engedte. Az állandó képzelődés most létrehívott egy valóságot, amire egyáltalán nem volt felkészülve. Figyelmeztető jelnek vette. Gondolatban lábának arra a pontjára összpontosított, ahol a bőrét takaró harisnyán át az érintést érezni vélte, de nem mert odanézni. Azt igyekezett eldönteni, van-e tényleges kontaktus. Újra megmozdult, de a lábait szorosan összezárva tartotta. És úgy tűnt, valóban, csakugyan egy kéz gyöngéd érintését észleli.

Kérem, ne, akarta mondani, gondolatban meg is formálta a szavakat, elpróbálta, hogy kiejti, de nem sikerült kimondani a kérést. Vajon miért nem? Vajon attól tartott, hogy a többi utas is meghallja? A fülke megtelt, minden helyen ültek már.

És ez nem minden.

Ahogy nehezen sikerült a tiszteletes felé pillantani, anélkül, hogy felemelné a tekintetét, csak egy óvatos pillantás erejéig, látta, hogy a férfi hátradőlve ül, a szeme csukva. Sötétkék zakóba bújtatott keze elvész a kitevített újság alatt. Az újság, félrecsúsztatva, némileg Rose kabátját is takarja. Az alvó férfi keze az újság alatt eryedten pihen.

Rose ekkor megtehetette volna, hogy az újságot félresöpörve, visszaakasztja a kabátot a fogasra. Ha a férfi nem alszik, bizonyára visszahúzza a kezét. Ha alszik, és

constant, more imperious, than any lust. A lust in itself, that will make you draw back and wait, wait too long, risk almost anything, just to see what will happen. To see what will happen.

The hand began, over the next several miles, the most delicate, the most timid, pressures and investigations. Not asleep. Or if he was, his hand wasn't. She did feel disgust. She felt a faint, wandering nausea. She thought of flesh: lumps of flesh, pink snouts, fat tongues, blunt fingers, all on their way trotting and creeping and lolling and rubbing, looking for their comfort. She thought of cats in heat rubbing themselves along the top of board fences, yowling with their miserable complaint. It was pitiful, infantile, this itching and shoving and squeezing. Spongy tissues, inflamed membranes, tormented nerve-ends, shameful smells; humiliation.

All that was starting. His hand, that she wouldn't ever have wanted to hold, that she wouldn't have squeezed back, his stubborn patient hand was able, after all, to get the ferns to rustle and the streams to flow, to waken a sly luxuriance.

Nevertheless, she would rather not. She would still rather not. Please remove this, she said out the window. Stop it, please, she said to the stumps and barns. The hand moved up her leg past the top of her stocking to her bare skin, had moved higher, under her suspender, reached her underpants and the lower part of her belly. Her legs were still crossed, pinched together. While her legs stayed crossed she could lay claim to innocence, she

a keze ott marad, ahol jelenleg motoz, Rose csöndesen elnézést kérhet, és egy határozott mozdulattal visszahelyezheti a petyhüdt kezét a férfi térdére. Ám ez a megoldás, habár nyilvánvaló és biztonságos, a lányban nem merült fel. Utóbb eltöprenghetett rajta, vajon miért nem. Hisz a tiszteletes keze, legalábbis ekkor még, tűrhetetlennek minősült. A lányban a kéz kényelmetlenség és valami csapda érzetét ébresztette, neheztelést, undort és gyanakvást váltott ki belőle. Mégsem sikerült ezt a kezét elutasítani, felülkerekedni a helyzeten. Hogyan is állíthatta volna meggyőződéssel, hogy a kéz ott volt, amikor a kéz gazdája nyilvánvalóan azt a látszatot igyekszik kelteni, hogy nincs ott. Hogy vonhatná felelősségre a férfit, amikor oly ártalmatlanul és bizakodóan pihen itt mellette, arcán egészséges várakozással tekint elfoglaltságai elé. Egy férfit, aki idősebb, mint az apja lenne, ha még élne, egy férfit, akit mély tisztelet övez, rajongásig szereti a természetet és csodálattal bámul meg egy hattyút. Még ha ki is tudná mondani, kérem, ne tegye, a férfi keresztülnézne rajta, mint aki úgy enged el a füle mellett egy apró udvariatlanságot, mint valami nyelvbötlést. Rose érezte, hogy amint kiejtené a kérést, máris azt kívánná, a férfi bárcsak ne hallaná.

Ám ez az érzés több mindent takart. Például kíváncsiságot. Állandóbb és parancsolóbb kíváncsiságot, mint egyszerűen a testi kék. Maga a kék csupán várakozásra készített, túl hosszú várakozásra, amíg minden kockázattal nem válik. Csak hogy lásd, mi jön azután.

A következő néhány mérföld során a kéz apró, szinte

had not admitted anything. She could still believe that she would stop this in a minute. Nothing was going to happen, nothing more. Her legs were never going to open.

But they were. They were. As the train crossed the Niagara Escarpment above Dundas, as they looked down at the preglacial valley, the silver-wooded rubble of little hills, as they came sliding down to the shores of Lake Ontario, she would make this slow, and silent, and definite, declaration, perhaps disappointing as much as satisfying the hand's owner. He would not lift his eyelids, his face would not alter, his fingers would not hesitate but would go powerfully and discreetly to work. Invasion, and welcome, and sunlight flashing far and wide on the lake water; miles of bare orchards stirring round Burlington.

This was disgrace, this was beggary. But what harm in that, we say to ourselves at such moments, what harm in anything, the worse the better, as we ride the cold wave of greed, of greedy assent. A stranger's hand, or root vegetables or humble kitchen tools that people tell jokes about; the world is tumbling with innocent-seeming objects ready to declare themselves, slippery and obliging. She was careful of her breathing. She could not believe this. Victim and accomplice she was borne past Glassco's Jams and Marmalades, past the big pulsating pipes of oil refineries. They glided into suburbs where bedsheets, and towels used to wipe up intimate stains flapped leeringly on the clotheslines, where even the chil-

bátortalan mozdulatokra vetemedett, hogy felfedje az ismeretlent. Nem alszik. A keze legalábbis nem. Rose undort érzett, bágyadtságot, hullámzó émelygést. Gondolatai közt hús képei jelentek meg: húscsomók, rózsaszín orrok, kövér nyelvek, tömpe ujjak, mind-mind felfedez, bejár, csúszik és lelóg és dörzsöl, a saját kényelmét keresi. Képzeletében tüzelő macskákat látott, ahogy a léckerítés tetejéhez dörgölöznek, és nyomorúságos hangon nyávogják szerte panaszukat. Ez az infantilis viselkedés, fészkelődés és furakodás szájalmas volt. Szivacsos szövetek, gyulladt membránok, megkínzott idegvégződések, szégyenteli szagok: megaláztatás.

Ez mind már úton volt. A férfi keze, amit Rose undorodott volna akár csak megérinteni is, ez a konok, türelmes kéz, mindennek ellenére, képesnek bizonyult rá, hogy megzörrentse a páfrányt, megindítsa a patakot, felébressze a titkos képzelet szárnyalását.

Mégis: inkább ne! Azt kívánta még, bárcsak ne történne így. Kérem, vegye el a kezét, mondta kifelé, az ablaknak. Hagjya abba, mondta a kidőlt fáknak, a pajtáknak. A lábán fölfelé araszoló kéz már a harisnya fölötti csupasz bőrhöz ért, aztán még följebb, a harisnyakötő fölött elérte az alsóneműt és a lány alhasi tájékát. Rose keresztbe vetett lábait szorosán összezárta. Amíg a lábait keresztbe zárja, addig szó sem lehet beleegyezésről, ez ártatlanságának záloga. Még mindig hitt benne, hogy a folyamat azonnal félbeszakad. Hogy semmi egyéb nem történhet. Hogy elképzelhetetlen a lábait nem keresztbe vetni. Hogy nem lenne képes változtatni a testhelyeze-

dren seemed to be frolicking lewdly in the schoolyards, and the very truckdrivers stopped at the railway crossings must be thrusting their thumbs gleefully into curled hands. Such cunning antics now, such popular visions. The gates and towers of the Exhibition Grounds came to view, the painted domes and pillars floated marvelously against her eyelids' rosy sky. Then flew apart in celebration. You could have had such a flock of birds, wild swans, even, wakened under one big dome together, exploding from it, taking to the sky.

She bit the edge of her tongue. Very soon the conductor passed through the train, to stir the travelers, warn them back to life.

In the darkness under the station the United Church minister, refreshed, opened his eyes and got his paper folded together, then asked if she would like some help with her coat. His gallantry was self-satisfied, dismissive. No, said Rose, with a sore tongue. He hurried out of the train ahead of her. She did not see him in the station. She never saw him again in her life. But he remained on call, so to speak, for years and years, ready to slip into place at a critical moment, without even any regard, later on, for husband or lovers. What recommended him? She could never understand it. His simplicity, his arrogance, his perversely appealing lack of handsomeness, even of ordinary grown-up masculinity? When he stood up she saw that he was shorter even than she had thought, that his face was pink and shiny, that there was something crude and pushy and childish about him.

tén.

Pedig dehogynem. Ahogy a vonat a Dundas fölötti Niagara-szakadék mentén haladt el, ahogy a jégkorszak előtti völgybe letekintettek, az ezüsterdős apró dombok kötörmelékes lejtői felé, ahogy leereszkedtek az Ontario-tó partjához, Rose hang nélkül, lassan megtette azt az apró mozdulatot, ami a kéz gazdájának talán ugyanannyi kiábrándulást, mint elégedettséget okozott, és ami nyilvánvalóan és határozottan jelezte a lány beleegyezését. Ugyan a férfi szempillája sem rebbent, arca nem tükrözött érzelmeket, a keze nem habozott diszkrét de erőteljes munkába kezdeni. Invázió és önmegadás. A napfény szélesen villódzott a tó vizén, Burlington csupasz gyümölcsöskertjein, hosszú mérföldeken át.

Szégyen és nyomorúság. De mit árthat, győzködjük önmagunkat ilyen pillanatokban, mit árthat bármi, minél komiszabb, annál jobb, ahogy a mohó beleegyezés hideg hullámaait meglovagoljuk. Egy idegen keze, vagy gumós zöldségek, vagy alázatos konyhai eszközök, amivel sokan tréfálkoznak – a világot elárasztják az ártatlannak tűnő tárgyak, melyek egy nap síkosan és kényszerítően megmutatkoznak. Rose óvatosan vette a levegőt. A történeteket alig akarta elhinni. Cinkos áldozatként haladt el a Glassco-féle gyümölcsfeldolgozó mellett, az olajfinomítók hatalmas, lüktető csővezetékei mellett. Szinte észrevétlenül siklottak be a külvárosba, ahol lepedők és törülközők lengedeztek a ruhaszáritókötélen kihívóan, intim foltoktól megtisztultan, ahol még a gyerekek is buja játékokba merülnek az iskolaudvaron, és a

Was he a minister, really, or was that only what he said? Flo had mentioned people who were not ministers, dressed up as if they were. Not real ministers dressed as if they were not. Or, stranger still, men who were not real ministers pretending to be real but dressed as if they were not. But that she had come as close as she had, to what could happen, was an unwelcome thing. Rose walked through Union Station feeling the little bag with the ten dollars rubbing at her, knew she would feel it all day long, rubbing its reminder against her skin.

She couldn't stop getting Flo's messages, even with that. She remembered, because she was in Union Station, that there was a girl named Mavis working here, in the Gift Shop, when Flo was working in the coffee shop. Mavis had warts on her eyelids that looked like they were going to turn into sties but they didn't, they went away. Maybe she had them removed, Flo didn't ask. She was very good-looking, without them. There was a movie star in those days she looked a lot like. The movie star's name was Frances Farmer.

Frances Farmer. Rose had never heard of her.

That was the name. And Mavis went and bought herself a big hat that dipped over one eye and a dress entirely made of lace. She went off for the weekend to Georgian Bay, to a resort up there. She booked herself in under the name of Florence Farmer. To give everybody the idea she was really the other one, Frances Farmer, but calling herself Florence because she was on holidays and didn't want to be recognized. She had a little cigarette

teherautósofőrök a sorompó előtt várakozva örvendve rejtik hüvelykujjukat összekulcsolódó kezekbe. Micsoda ravasz komédia, micsoda képzelőerő! A vásárcsarnok tornyai és kapui tűntek most elő, festett kupolák és oszlopok lebegtek csodálatosképpen a lány rózsás égboltú szempillái mögött. Aztán ünnepi módon minden szertehullott. Ahogy egy felrebbenő csapat madár, akár vadhattyú, ébred egy hatalmas kupola alatt, és az égbe száll.

Rose a nyelve hegyébe harapott. Nemsokára a kalauz járta végig a szerelvényt, ébresztgette az utasokat.

A pályaudvar előcsarnokának homályában a protestáns tiszteletes felfrissülve tért magához, összehajtogatva az újságot, és ajánlkozott, hogy felsegíti Rose kabátját. Udvariassága távolságtartó volt, önelégült. Kérem, ne, mondta ki Rose végül, keserű szájjal. A férfi a lány előtt hagyta el a vonatot, sietett. Az állomáson eltűnt szem elől, Rose soha többet nem látta. De eztán mindig, úgymond, ugrásra készen állt, évekig, készen rá, hogy kritikus pillanatokban helyre csúszsanjon, tekintet nélkül minden későbbi férfire, férjre, szeretőre. Mi szólt mellette, Rose soha nem értette. Egyszerű arroganciája, perverz módon megnyerő otrombasága, mindennapos, közönséges, felnőtt férfiassága? Amikor a fülkében felállt, Rose csak ekkor észlelte, milyen alacsony, hogy az arca fényes rózsaszín, hogy valami durva, nyomakodó és gyerekesen naiv légkör lengi körül.

Csakugyan egyházi személy volt, vagy csak ezt állította magáról? Flo említette, hogy szélhámosok néha

holder that was black and mother-of-pearl. She could have been arrested, Flo said. For the nerve.

Rose almost went over to the Gift Shop, to see if Mavis was still there and if she could recognize her. She thought it would be an especially fine thing, to manage a transformation like that. To dare it; to get away with it, to enter on preposterous adventures in your own, but newly named, skin. ♦

A NAGYVILÁG SZEPTEMBERI SZÁMÁBAN:

UWE JOHNSON Évfordulók – Gesine Cresspahl életéből (Ircsik Vilmos fordítása)
JORGE LUIS BORGES versei (Imreh András fordításai)
JOHN BANVILLE De rerum natura (Szilágyi Mihály fordítása)
MATHIAS MENEGÓZ Kárpátia (Lukács Laura fordítása)
F. SCOTT FITZGERALD Édes szeretteink (Ortutay Péter fordítása)
ZELDA FITZGERALD A jéghegy (Ortutay Péter fordítása)
HAYDAR ERGÜLEN versei (Lackfi János fordításai)
ALBERT CAMUS Az idegen – Második rész (Ádám Péter és Kiss Kornélia fordítása)
MESTERHÁZI MÁRTON Shelley: Ozymandias

papnak adják ki magukat. Úgy öltöznek. De még különösebb, ha nem is öltöznek úgy, csak azt mondják magukról, hogy papok. De hogy ilyen közel került a meg nem történt mozzanathoz, Rose ezt a tényt nem szívesen fogadta el. A pályaudvart elhagyva érezte, hogy a kombinéja pántjába varrt, tíz dollárt rejtő kis vászonzsák dörzsöli a bőrét, és tudta, hogy egész nap dörzsölni fogja, emlékeztetőül.

Flo még ezzel is üzent. Rose felidézte magában, hogy a pályaudvar ajándékboltjában egy Mavis nevű lány dolgozott abban az időben, amikor Flo a szomszédos kávézóban. Mavis szemhéján seb éktelenkedett, úgy tűnt, jégárpa lesz, de aztán elmúlt, begyógyult. Lehet, hogy levetette, Flo nem kérdezett rá. Gyógyultan Mavis kedves arcú nő volt. Nagyon hasonlított egy akkori filmcsilagra. A színésznőt Frances Farmernak hívták.

Frances Farmer. Rose soha másutt nem hallott róla.

Csak egy név volt. Mavis egyszer egy hatalmas kalapot vett magának, amely takarta az egyik szemét, és egy horgolt csipke ruhát. Egy hétvégén felment a György-öbölhöz, és a hotelben Florence Farmer néven foglalt szobát. Eljátszotta, hogy ő valójában a híres színésznő, de nem akarja, hogy felismerjék, ezért jelentkezett be Florence néven, csupán nyaral. Egy hosszú fekete, gyöngyházfényű cigarettaszípkával pózolt. Letartóztathatták volna, mondta Flo. Hallatlan arcátlanság!

Rose majdnem bement az ajándékboltba, hogy megnézzé, Mavis ott dolgozik-e még, és kíváncsiságból, hogy vajon felismerné-e. Arra gondolt, nagyszerű lépés lenne

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2015*

MAGYAR MIKLÓS Albert Camus és a Boldog halál
IRCSIK VILMOS Uwe Johnson és az Évfordulók
RYSZARD LEGUTKO A közönséges ember diadala (Pálfalvi Lajos fordítása)
LUKÁCS LAURA Mathias Menegoz: Karpathia.
PETRŐCZI ÉVA Jonathan Franzen: Erős rengés. Jonathan Franzen: Diszkomfortzóna.
Helsingforsi krónika. Kjell Westö: Ahol egykor jártunk

leutánozni a nő átalakulását. Venni a bátorságot és megúszni. Belépni egy lehetetlenül abszurd kalandba, amit idegen néven, de a saját bőrében él át. ♦

