

QUARTERLY PRESS REVIEW

FOR ADVANCED EFL LEARNERS

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What's Your Problem?

by Jeffrey Goldberg

Someone told me that when I check out of a hotel, I should take the electronic door key with me, because it has my credit-card information embedded in it. Is this true?

P. Q., Miami, Fla.

Dear P. Q.,

It is not true. My personal security chief, Bruce Schneier – author of *Practical Cryptography* – says that hotel keys store only the room number, an access code, and an expiration date. As Schneier explained: “Some systems program the cards with two access codes: ‘current’ and ‘next.’ When a traveler puts his card into the door for the first time, the door recognizes the card’s ‘current’ code as the door’s ‘next’ code; it then locks out the old ‘current,’ moves the ‘next’ to ‘current,’ and accepts the card’s ‘next’ as the new ‘next.’ This process continues, with each new card locking out the previous card.” Does that clear it up for you?

I live in a place that draws a lot of tourism, and friends often try to impose themselves on us when visiting. How do I deflect these constant requests without hurting any feelings?

P.B., San Francisco, Calif.

Dear P.B.,

I would muster a constitutional argument against such visits. As one of our nation’s foremost scholars of the Third Amendment (motto: “There’s a Third Amendment?”), I can say with unearned surety that the Founders understood that exasperating houseguests would one day be a plague upon the land, especially the land surrounding San Francisco Bay, in particular the Telegraph Hill and Pacific Heights neighborhoods. (Such geniuses were our Founders that they predicted not only the seizure of California from Mexico in 1846, but the rise of price-gouging San Francisco hotels.) As you undoubtedly recall, the Third Amendment, squeezed in between two other, forgettable amendments, states: “No soldier shall, in time of peace be quartered in any house, without the consent of the Owner, nor in time of war, but in a manner to be prescribed by law.” On the surface, of course, the adoption of the Third Amendment seems to have been spurred by a profound fear of Hessians, who, among other things, refused to pick up after themselves during the occupation of Trenton in the winter of 1776. But an expansive interpretation of the Third Amendment, I believe, provides the justification necessary to refuse quarters to San Francisco-bound freeloaders.

Alternatively, you can tell your friends your house has bedbugs.

What is the difference between eight-grain bread and 14-grain bread?

A.W., Minneapolis, Minn.

Dear A.W.,
Six.

Ever since our first child was born, I have slept very poorly. When I close my eyes, my mind becomes crowded with worries. I worry about my kids' safety, their future, college education, happiness, just about anything you could think of. Is there anything I can do to put my mind at ease?

N.E., Atlanta, Ga.

Dear N.E.,

Alas, no. You are suffering from an incurable disease called parenthood. The birth of a child is the most transcendent moment in a person's life. It also marks the beginning of what I call "The Great Terror," in the words of the historian Robert Conquest. (Conquest was referring to Stalin's ferocious purges of the early 20th century, which were also terrifying, but not significantly more terrifying than hearing your children say they are off to play a game called "trampoline pumpkin-carving.") To put your mind at ease, I suggest removing from your home all knives, turpentine, No. 2 pencils, bathtubs, medicine, electrical outlets, chairs, peanut butter, and stairs. You should also try to remember that many of the hazards facing our children are overblown: the Crimes Against Children Research Center, for instance, notes that rates of sexual assault, bullying, and other violence against children have declined substantially in recent years, despite media suggestions to the contrary. But statistics be damned; fear is fear. Only death frees you of worry entirely, and the onset of death brings its own anxieties. However, one advantage of death is that your children will no longer torment you with incessant demands for iPads and Ke\$ha downloads.

When I was 17, I shoplifted condoms from a pharmacy, not because I'm a criminal but because I was too embarrassed

to make eye contact with the clerk. I'm now in my late 40s and in a similar situation. Well, sort of similar. I need Viagra to function properly, but I'm too embarrassed to ask my doctor for a prescription. My doctor is a friend of mine, but I don't think this is the problem. Am I just pathologically shy when it comes to sex?

T.R., St. Louis, Mo.

Dear T.R.,

You should not feel shame or embarrassment about your problem. For one thing, you are obviously not too pathologically shy to actually have sex, unless you stole those condoms to make balloon animals. And your dilemma is a common one, though this columnist does not have personal experience with it, suffering as he does from Extreme Erectile Function Syndrome. If this columnist manages to reach 90, however, he will avail himself of whatever medications, stimulants, prosthetic devices, or kitchen implements he deems necessary to compete in his age category. (To celebrate reaching such an advanced age, he will also consume only chili dogs, Ho Hos, and cocaine.) But you should see a doctor soon – if not your own doctor, then a stranger in another city. Erectile dysfunction can be a symptom of more serious problems, including diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, and lingering guilt over your career as a teenage condom thief.

Everyone tells me the iPad can save magazines. But I've got to be able to tote a magazine everywhere. The iPad is expensive and fragile, and I have no way to carry it. A woman can always carry it in her bag. Hipsters and metrosexuals have messenger bags. Older males entirely comfortable with their sexuality have European man-bags.

I'm middle-aged and retrograde; how am I supposed to carry my iPad everywhere?

B.S., Los Angeles, Calif.

Dear B.S.,

I suggest wrapping the print edition of your magazine around your iPad. Its luxuriously glossy pages will provide ample padding.

I recently had a technical malfunction with my iPhone. A friend sent me an invitation to a party and I meant to text back, "Hi, I don't want to go to that party," but I was typing quickly and wrote, "Ho, I don't want to go to that party." This friend recently broke up with a good friend of mine after she met another guy at a conference, so there is some sensitivity about her morals. Anyway, now she won't talk to me. What should I do?

A.C., Washington, D.C.

Dear A.C.,

This is the result either of sloppy typing or of the "autocorrect" feature on your iPhone, which is a wonderful thing, except when it turns the word *marinate* into *masturbate*. Your options are limited: You can bring her the phone in question and demonstrate how the mistake was made. You can explain that if you had intended to compare her to a prostitute, you would have done so in a more comprehensive manner. Or you can find a friend with a better sense of humor.

Can you tell me the best way to propose to a woman?

C.F., Madison, Wis.

Dear C.F.,

Honestly, quickly, privately. First rule, no spectacle: no offers of matrimony during halftime at Giants Stadium, and no pretend-spontaneous proposals on the *Today* show or anything hosted by Howie Mandel. It is best to avoid putting a woman in a position in which she finds herself too embarrassed, or overcome by television studio lights, to say no. Second rule, spit it out. You will be acting strangely, and possibly sweating uncontrollably, in the hours before you propose. This behavior could, over time, alienate her, so it is best to propose well before dessert. Third rule, verbosity is not a sin. Outline for her, at great length if necessary, her various extraordinary attributes, and why you cannot live without them. Fourth rule, do not be *too* honest. As you hand her the ring, do not say, for example, "You win" or "Okay, I give up."

In the wake of the Japanese earthquake and tsunami disaster, I've become worried about the chance that there is radiation in my sushi. Is it right to be worried?

P.D., Long Beach, Calif.

Dear P.D.,

Sarah Silverman once said that 9/11 was devastating for her because it was the day she discovered that her soy chai latte had 900 calories. I feel much the same about your question, but I will try to answer it anyway. You would be right to worry if you were dining in the cafeteria of the Fukushima nuclear-power plant. But the truth is that your sushi probably does not come from Japan at all; less than 1 percent of the sushi-grade fish consumed in America does. And you must have some faith that the FDA, which monitors the fish trade, is keeping an eye out for

radioactive filets. Moreover, we can hope that the devices installed by the Department of Homeland Security at American ports to prevent the importation of nuclear weapons will also detect nuclear tuna. If you need to worry about something, worry about mercury. Also, sushi is raw.

My wife and I take turns selecting which movies to rent for us to watch together. I like Woody Allen movies, but she cannot stand them. Should I keep selecting them when it is my turn, in the hope that she will come around?

S.K., Bloomfield, Ky.

Dear S.K.,

Usually when women say they “cannot stand” something, that is simply girl code for “I haven’t done it enough to agree with your point of view, but if you keep pushing me, I will undoubtedly see that you are right.” As a test case, try treating your wife to a weekend-long marathon of repeat viewings of *Melinda and Melinda* and *Cassandra’s Dream*. Eventually, she’ll come around.

Why, when we describe a person as conservative, do we say that they are “to the right of Attila the Hun”? Just how right-wing was Attila the Hun?

D.W., Los Angeles, Calif.

Dear D.W.,

Attila the Hun was very right-wing, even compared with other Huns, who were, as a rule, advocates of small government, school choice, and beheading. Attila first came to public attention when he issued his “Contract With Mongolia,” which called for lower

taxes, ending state subsidies for unfunded federal mandates, the pillaging of Scythia, and an end to collective bargaining. His decision to invade western Europe was motivated in part by a desire to dismantle the welfare state, and in part by a desire to rape government employees. Though Attila was in many respects a social conservative, he was also an advocate of postnatal abortion. After retiring from politics, he worked as an executive at Koch Industries, and appeared on *Dancing With the Stars*.

Can a man ever be truly satisfied with his life?

P.F., Seattle, Wash.

Dear P.F.,

No. Unless that man is Bono. Or Jay-Z. Bono and Jay-Z, I imagine, are satisfied. And if they aren’t, they should keep it to themselves.

I recently had my dog neutered, and I swear he’s mad at me. Before the neutering, he was the friendliest dog in the world. Now he keeps his distance and gives me, if I’m not mistaken, disapproving looks. How do I mitigate his anger?

B.C., Toronto, Canada

Dear B.C.,

You should explain to him, in a firm but empathetic tone, that his castration will reduce occurrences of undesirable sexually dimorphic behavior and testosterone-induced inflammation of the prostate, and will contribute other ancillary health benefits. Tell him you are confident that he will, in time, come to accept and even appreciate his new anatomy. Make it clear that he is not

alone, and that he should continue to be honest and direct with you about his emotions. And if all this fails to soothe him, remind him that he's a fucking dog.

I am a rising executive in a financial firm. I'm very shy and introverted, but I enjoy my job because I deal mostly with numbers, not with people. Because of my skills, I've been promoted four times in four years. But now a problem has come up: I've been invited to a "leadership retreat," where executives are forced to "share" our feelings publicly and, even worse, participate in "trust games" designed to "break down barriers" between us. I am not capable of doing these things. How do I handle this?

J.R., Pasadena, Calif.

Dear J.R.,

I sympathize with your plight. *Trust game* is one of the most frightening terms in the English language, along with *anthrax attack* and *potluck supper*. For help with your question, I turned to a leader of the Introvert American community, the writer Jonathan Rauch. Here is what he suggests: "You will be surprised at how well you do with the aid of a few simple stratagems. First, hide behind the extroverts. If all you do is look interested (this can be accomplished by raising the eyebrows approximately once a minute and keeping the eyes generally open, as opposed to shut), many of them will do your share of the 'sharing.' Second, act – as in, perform. It's exhausting, and the stage fright you will experience isn't fun, but remember, you're not facing a very tough audience (see above). Third, take frequent breaks. Really any excuse will do: calls from home, pregnancy (this works better if you're female), a need to empty your colostomy bag, etc. In most cases, a 10-to-15-

minute break is good for an hour's recharge." If none of that works, consider switching to a solitary, misanthropic profession, like writing advice columns.

I believe that my brain has only limited space to store information, and I would like to clear it of, for instance, song lyrics that I don't want to remember. Do you know any techniques for forgetting useless information and music?

P.D., New Orleans, La.

Dear P.D.,

Your question is an important one. I recently woke up with Rod Stewart's "Maggie May" in my head. Fortunately, I was soon able to forget it. Unfortunately, it was replaced by the Human League's "(Keep Feeling) Fascination." I asked a memory expert I know, Joshua Foer, the author of *Moonwalking With Einstein: The Art and Science of Remembering Everything*, if it is possible to force forgetfulness, particularly of crappy songs. This is his answer: "There's actually a scientific term for jingles that get lodged in your head: *earworms*. It's probably not the case that having 'Hit Me Baby One More Time' bouncing around your skull is keeping you from mastering multivariate calculus, but that doesn't mean it's not annoying. (Interestingly, a recent study found that women experience earworms for longer than men, and generally find them more annoying. I don't know what to make of that.) A study published earlier this year (the researchers gave subjects the 'Catchy Tunes Questionnaire') found that the worst way to get rid of earworms is to try to get rid of earworms. The more you think about trying to forget them, the deeper they burrow. This is pretty much true about consciously trying to forget anything. There's even a name for the phenomenon: *ironic processing*. The best advice

I've heard for making earworms go away is to just stop being irritated by them, and come to peace with the fact that you're humming Britney Spears."

I am a third-generation Japanese American woman, a professional, and a parent. My children go to school with mostly non-Asians, and in the past I've occasionally been asked for parenting tips. But the craze over Asian parenting has become much more intense lately. It's very offensive to me to be asked for parenting secrets, like how to dominate the SATs, especially by people who mistakenly think I'm Chinese. What do I tell these people?

C.T., San Diego, Calif.

Dear C.T.,

You should tell them about the Secret Asian Academic Lucky Happy Fun Diet: a soup, eaten three times daily by the entire family, consisting of bok choy, conger eel, duck tongue, and low-sodium soy sauce. Tell your fellow parents that the soup can be eaten only while sitting in the lotus position, in front of a gong. If this technique fails to satisfy your questioners, tell them you don't speak English. Or threaten them with your deadly kung fu skills.

Recently, my son asked me to name the greatest movie ever made. I said, "Citizen Kane." He asked why, and I said, "Well, I don't know." I was just repeating the conventional wisdom. I don't really even like to watch Citizen Kane. I mean, it's not a movie I would choose to watch on a Saturday night. So why does everyone think it's so great?

B.F., Manchester, N.H.

Dear B.F.,

For one thing, there's that great scene in which Zach Galifianakis wakes up from a roofie-induced blackout and discovers Mike Tyson's tiger in his hotel bathroom. But beyond that, it's true that *Citizen Kane* falls into the category of films that are more admired than loved. The cinematography is revolutionary, as is the use of flashbacks, and its self-distancing irony made Orson Welles a director ahead of his time. But that irony – bleakness, even – makes *Citizen Kane* for some people an unsatisfying movie-watching experience. I would suggest, for slightly more uplifting fare, *Night and Fog*. Or perhaps *Pootie Tang*.

We recently bought a weekend home, and our neighbors asked if they could hunt on our 12 acres. I am an animal-rights advocate, and I politely said no. They argued that it was an issue of fairness to the deer: without hunters, overpopulation would drive the deer to starvation. I am researching methods of birth control for wild animals, and I'm wondering if you could help. I'd like to tell them that there are ways to control the deer population besides killing.

P.D., Ann Arbor, Mich.

Dear P.D.,

I was going to suggest that you place brightly colored bowls of condoms in the woods, but then I realized that the deer might have difficulty opening those little packages, because they lack opposable thumbs. But I suggest you wait a while before bringing this up with your neighbors. No one enjoys being lectured by outsiders, especially about a well-loved tradition such as hunting. Imagine if your rural neighbors moved to the city and asked you to stop eating cash products. How would you feel then? ♦

My Year at Sea

by *Christopher Buckley*

CALL ME WHATEVER. I went to sea in 1970, when I was 18, not in Top-Siders, but in steel-toed boots.

I was deck boy aboard a Norwegian tramp freighter. My pay was \$20 a week, about \$100 today. Overtime paid 40 cents an hour, 60 on Sundays. Not much, I know, yet I signed off after six months with \$400 in my pocket. My biggest expense was cigarettes (\$1 a carton from the tax-free ship's store; beer was \$3 a case). I've never since worked harder physically or felt richer. The Hong Kong tattoo cost \$7 and is with me still on my right shoulder, a large, fading blue smudge. Of some other shore-side expenses, perhaps the less said, the better.

The term gap year wasn't much in use then, but I've never thought of it as a gap year. It was the year of my adventure. I was "shipping out," and there was romance in the term. I'd read Conrad and Melville at boarding school. It's tricky – or worse, boring – trying to explain an obsession. Mine had something to do with standing on the ice out on Narragansett Bay, watching the big ships making their way through the ragged channel toward open sea. Maybe it makes more sense just to quote from the first paragraph of *Moby-Dick*:

Whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul ... then, I account it high time to go to sea ... If they but knew it, almost all men in their degree, some time or other, cherish very nearly the same feelings towards the ocean with me.

I went around the world. Our itinerary wasn't fixed – a tramp freighter goes where the cargo is. The Fernbrook ended up taking me from New York to Charleston, Panama, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Manila, Hong Kong, Bangkok, Singapore, Sumatra, Phuket (then still an endless white beach with not a building on it), Penang, Port Swettenham, India, and, as it was still called, Ceylon.

The final leg – Colombo to New York, around the Cape of Good Hope – took 33 days, longer than expected owing to a Force 10 gale in the South Atlantic. I remember the feeling of barely controlled panic as I took my turns at the helm, the unwelcome knowledge that 31 lives depended on my ability to steer a shuddering, heaving 520-foot ship straight into mountainous seas. When the next man relieved me, my hands were too cramped and shaky to light a cigarette. Even some of the older guys, who'd seen everything, seemed impressed by this storm: "Maybe ve sink, eh?" one winked at me, without detectable mirth.

They were Norwegian, mostly, and some Germans and Danskers (sorry, Danes). The mess crews were Chinese. I was awoken on the first cold (November, as it happened) morning by a banging on my cabin door and the shout "Eggah!" It took me a few days to decipher. Eggs. Breakfast.

This was long before onboard TVs and DVD players. Modern freighters, some of which carry up to 12 passengers, come with those, plus three squares a day, plus amenities: saunas, pools, video libraries. If I embarked today as a passenger aboard a freighter, I'd endeavor not to spend the long days at sea – and they are long – rewatching *The Sopranos*. I prefer to think that I'd bring along a steamer trunk full of Shakespeare and Dickens and Twain. Short of taking monastic vows or trekking into the Kalahari, a freighter passage might just offer what our relentlessly

connected age has made difficult, if not impossible: splendid isolation.

You can't tell what's aboard a container ship. We carried every kind of cargo, all of it on view: a police car, penicillin, Johnnie Walker Red, toilets, handguns, lumber, Ping-Pong balls, and IBM data cards. A giant crate of those slipped out of the cargo net and split open on the deck as we were making ready to leave San Francisco. A jillion IBM data cards, enough to figure out $E = mc^2$. It fell to me to sweep them into the Pacific. I reflected that at least they made for an apt sort of ticker tape as we left the mighty, modern U.S. in our wake and made for the exotic, older-world Far East.

The crossing took three weeks. I didn't set foot onshore in Manila until four days after we landed. As the youngest man on board, I had drawn a series of cargo-hold watches. My job, ostensibly, was to prevent the stevedores from stealing, a function I performed somewhat fecklessly. On the last day in Manila, after I'd stood a 72-hour watch, another huge crate slipped its straps and crashed to the deck. Out poured about 5,000 copies of *The Short Stories of Guy de Maupassant* intended for Manila's public schools. The stevedores seemed confused as to whether these were worth stealing. By now I was beyond caring. I yawned and told the foreman, "Good book. Go for it."

At sea in those latitudes, temperatures on the ship's steel decks could reach 115 degrees. During lunch breaks, I'd climb down the long ladder to the reefer (refrigerated) deck at the bottom of Number Two Hold. There were mounds, hillocks, tons – oh, I mean tons – of Red Delicious apples from Oregon. I would sit on top in the lovely dark chill, munching away, a chipmunk in paradise. One day I counted eating eight. I emerged belching and blinking into the heat, picked up my hydraulic jackhammer, and went back to chipping away at several decades of rust and paint.

I remember standing in the crow's nest as we entered the misty Panama Canal, and the strange sensation as the 4,000-ton ship rose higher and higher inside the lock. I remember dawn coming up over the Strait of Malacca; ragamuffin kids on the dock in Sumatra laughing as they pelted us with bananas; collecting dead flying fish off the deck and bringing them to our sweet, fat, toothless Danish cook to fry up for breakfast. I remember sailing into Hong Kong harbor and seeing my first junk; steaming upriver toward Bangkok, watching the sun rise and set fire to the gold-leafed pagoda roofs; climbing off the stern down a wriggly rope ladder into a sampan, paddling for dear life across the commerce-mad river into the jungle, where it was suddenly quiet and then suddenly loud with monkey-chatter and bird-shriek, the moonlight lambent on the palm fronds.

Looking back, as I often do, these ports of call seem to me reachable only by freighter. Mine was a rusty, banged-up old thing, but I suppose there's no reason a shiny new container ship wouldn't do the trick. ♦

Madrid Journal

by Bernard Spencer

May 2nd

THEY ARE GOING TO SACK the traditional Madrid dustmen. Anyhow, they are going to install dust-cars, big shiny vehicles with trodden-down backs, to replace the donkey-carts and mule-carts of the 'traperos' [rag-and-bone men] or 'basureros' [dustmen]. And I don't imagine the same people will operate the new cars as did the carts. As you came back at five or six after a night's drinking you would meet them, sometimes walking by their donkey's head or sometimes riding on the baskets of rubbish; some of the girls very handsome, dressed in faded reds or pinks, their heads tied in a scarf and riding proudly, a slight and not unbecoming pallor of dust on their skin. This to the sound of the harness bells, exhortations to their animals and now and then the creaking, windy love call as one donkey came in sight of another. I sometimes hear one dustman who walks past my house and speaks to his mule in deep, dignified Spanish tones, addressing it, personally, as 'mula'!

So well known is this morning dust-army, that I have known someone say to his friend, 'I know I have had a real party when I see donkeys,' a remark which in other parts of the world would be interpreted differently.

One of these warm, windless nights. Over a beer at 'La Concha' he told me about the excavations at Paestum. Since I have never seen them I countered too quickly with those at Delos.

Stupid. I might have found either an informed archaeologist or a fellow-spirit, someone to whom dug-up towns give the same mysterious, romantic, ignorant excitement as they do to me. The long, empty, roofless boulevards of Delos, with the wind blowing, a few pillars standing; nobody.

He had been in Naples for a couple of years. Confessed quietly to having made fifty or sixty visits to Pompeii. Yes, he said, he had travelled a good deal; Madrid was a very noisy town. No comment. In careful English he observed that his French and German were as good as his Spanish, but he wanted to improve his English and Russian. In England he had been asked in Lancashire if he came from Cheshire. Looking at his mild, brown appearance, I said that he might easily be taken for an Englishman. 'No, you are saying that to flatter me.' Damn, I didn't mean when he spoke. Back away, get out of that one.

He is a dealer in antiques. When he went to America and was asked the object of his visit, he said it was 'to look at the antics there'. 'So they were distressed,' he added 'by my wrong stress; and so was I.'

He was fond of the Liverpool area, where by the way the best Victorian antiques are to be found. He would like to go back to Liverpool. Liverpool! in his determined Spanish way he paid the bill, leaving me protesting, and wandered off among the shadows under the acacia trees.

A dog asleep on the pavement, smiling.

Shapes of Spanish clouds. This evening it is windy and the sky from my terrace looks like a hairdresser's experiments as he tries to invent a new coiffure, some brushed up, some curled round an imaginary cheek or neck.

On other days there are cigar shaped clouds, perhaps one drove the other, as regular as cigars or cheroots in a box. Or fish-clouds; some like swordfish.

Then a corner of the intense blue sky is striped with clouds, as though a piece of striped material had been dropped there, or in an empty sky there is one small cloud shaped like a star. Unpleasant reflection; the burst of an anti-aircraft shell, but white.

The distracting lusciousness of the girl in my class this morning who has only turned up four times in two months. 'Are you Sita Solez Lopez?' 'No, I am Sylvia.' She was not attending to the lesson, but kept on pulling down the low neck of her jersey still further and sleepily scratching the upper slope of her breast. What is it all for, this terrifying biological engine of Spanish girls' sex appeal? Couldn't the necessary ends of Nature be attained less prodigally? It is as if trees should need to become greener or flowers to have a stronger scent, or glow worms to shine like head-lamps.

Half the people who drank with me in my flat last night were strangers and probably will stay so. Who was the quiet, serious woman in black on the divan? Who was the other one with the silver pattern round the neck of her dress? I imagine a sort of statistical parade of my drinks lined up on a table before I start one of these evenings. This time I happen to remember what they were: six gin-fizzes, something like a bottle of wine at the restaurant with dinner, two anis (one on the house) and four brandy and sodas. And since they were Spanish drinks, a good inch of gin or brandy in the tumbler each time. By the drinks, on my imaginary table, is a packet or more of cigarettes to be smoked before dawn. Is it the same in every capital city?

How strange the foreign wish for hot food appears to the Spanish! it comes – and so does the coffee – just as it comes, cold or lukewarm. The plates are cold, and evermore shall be so. We open a tin of my precious English kippers brought from Gibraltar. My maid has a passion for them. 'What is this fish, señor?' 'Smoked herring.' 'Then it is a large sardine.' 'No, it is not,

it is a fish called a herring.' Then tonight: 'Maria Cristina, I have helped myself, won't you come and take your half before it gets cold?' Presently she re-appears; 'Señor, do you like that fish hot?' 'Yes, in England we always eat it hot.' 'I find it so much better cold. I make a sandwich of it with bread, the bread soaks up the grease, and in that way it is very rich.'

This is the season of swifts. They are making black flashes across my terrace every morning and evening. I have just discovered that some of them are nesting in my roof, in the holes in the walls where at one time there must have been supports fixed for an awning over the terrace. Somehow flattering me to run a swift's hostel. A swoop at full tilt, a fluttering sound, a blink of wings and they are in. (Question: can they turn round inside, or must they come out, tail first, at the same speed?)

My best taxi story: We were coming fast round the corner into El Barco and nearly carried away a rag-and-bone man, who, with the traditional sack over his shoulder, was just stepping off the pavement. My driver had been making pungent comments on everyone and everything throughout the journey. Here was a target for his scorn. He began in the formal Spanish manner, 'Rag-and-bone man, what were you thinking about?' The answer that snapped back, whatever it was, for I couldn't hear it, shook my driver visibly, but he recovered himself, and, as he accelerated, leaned through the window to retort, 'That is what I married for!' (!por eso me case!)

Memo: Frances' story of the taxi-man who proposed to her after taking her across the town. 'I have never seen a woman whom I liked better than you, señorita. You need have no doubts about me; I am a serious man. Will you give me six months in which to court you?'

Hammering; one of the typical noises of Madrid. At the bottom of my seven flights of stairs there are two workmen beating

away; in the narrow space the noise is nearly unendurable. They are making a cut in the upper part of the wall with chisels. The blonde on the fifth floor wants to put in an electric oven and they are installing the cables. Pieces of plaster fly all over the stairs and the hall, though sometimes the men notice you and stop to let you pass. Why are they always hammering here, whereas in other countries things can often be done by screws, wrenches and twisting? I wonder why Madrid is not lower than it is, in the process of being hammered into the ground.

I wake up and it is a wonderful morning, already heavy with the heat of the day to come. Some smoke hangs in the air, in the direction of the mountains too lazy to go up to the sky. The snow on the mountains is nearly melted. On the road to Toledo, at midday, half-a-dozen labourers are sitting in a field having lunch in the shade of black umbrellas, as sheep in hot weather stoop their heads together to keep cool. Miles and miles of Castille without any trees at all, and the crops coming up thick. Peasants in the fields with floppy Van Gogh straw hats. A tractor in brilliant red and blue, and two hoopoes with black-barred wings flying up. In the village, when we arrive we ask the way of a shepherd who is carrying a sheep round his neck, held by front and back legs and kicking like clockwork. Instead of the normal sheepdog, there is a greyhound following him. A storm of swifts round the old church. A plaster Virgin over the entrance of the house where we are to have lunch. During lunch an unidentified insect rolls its egg across my knee. When menaced, it flies with it to the table.

Maria Cristina has a friend in to help her and they are washing the blankets. Up go the wet ones, dangled plump across the terrace and my view. During lunch, the expected; the cord comes away and down they all come on the floor of the terrace. I have coffee and watch Maria Cristina and Maria Luisa putting them

back, making a game of it, giggling, their ear-ringed heads bobbing about against an immaculate June sky which goes milky with haze down towards the rooftops. In the corner, against wall and sky, a bang of red geraniums.

‘Señor, Mr. Harrison will give himself tonsillitis. He keeps on drinking cold water from the refrigerator!’ ‘I will tell him so, Maria Cristina.’

House Porters

MY FIRST HOUSE HAD a woman as porter. ‘A disaster,’ said the man I rented my flat from. She was very dirty and very drunk, and on some whim once re-directed some letters of mine, though they were clearly addressed, to Aranjuez. Sometimes, in a drunken fit, she would run screaming round the ‘patio’ complaining that she had been robbed, and all the heads of the residents would pop out of the windows and a many sided argument would go on in shrieks.

My second house had a suave, correct porter who successfully kept out beggars. My third, a porter who seldom appeared at all but lived noisily and squalidly in his room under the stairs with a large family. One day we all received letters from the landlord telling us that the porter was on a charge of stealing the equivalent of £111, collected from the tenants to pay for the central-heating. On no account were we to entrust him with any money. Some months later he was still in his job, though as a presumed thief and a notorious drunkard (for I was told he stole the money, poor chap, to pay for his continual debauches) it seemed curious that he was still considered suitable. One of my neighbours asked him why he was so cheerful, since he was due to appear on a serious charge. ‘There is only one ill that cannot be mended,’ he replied, ‘and that is death.’

My present porter: a wrinkled, kind old man, very deferential, who likes to sit outside the porch playing with children. His wife came up to the flat the other day – Maria Cristina is on very good terms with her, and they do shopping for each other. I renewed my complaint that the gas-pressure was very bad. ‘Ah,’ said the old lady, ‘It has never been right since the war. Everything is different since the war (the Civil War).’ ‘But it can’t be that there is less gas in Madrid, for the new block next door has flames from the gas stove a foot high and roaring! You must send for the gas men again!’ ‘Patience, we must have patience,’ she replied. ‘No, señora, not patience; effort, insistence, and things will get done. I hear the word “patience” too often!’ Here I ended my rant, for I observed that she and Maria Cristina were looking at the Englishman with embarrassment and pity. ♦

The Rasmussen Murder Case

by *Matthew McGough*

IT WAS BURGLARY gone awry. That’s how it looked, at least, to the Los Angeles police detectives who arrived at a gated condo complex in the Van Nuys section of Los Angeles on the evening of February 24, 1986.

The body of a 29-year-old nurse and three-month newlywed, Sherri Rasmussen, had been discovered by her husband, John Ruetten. When Ruetten, an engineer, had come home from work at 5:55 p.m., he’d known instantly that something was wrong. The garage door was open and the silver two-door BMW he’d bought Rasmussen as an engagement gift was gone. It seemed strange that she would not be home; he knew she had called in sick to work that morning.

When Ruetten rushed inside, he found his wife’s body in the ransacked living room. Shards from a broken porcelain vase littered the floor. A TV wall unit was partially collapsed. A credenza drawer had been yanked out and its contents, mostly documents, dumped on the floor.

Examining the scene, the lead homicide detective, Lyle Mayer, began to piece together what he thought had taken place. Burglars must have entered through the unlocked front door. While one removed electronics from the wall unit, the other went upstairs and was surprised by Rasmussen. Her attire – robe, T-shirt, and panties – suggested she had not been expecting visitors.

Rasmussen was six feet tall and fit, and the ensuing struggle was ferocious. It evidently began in the dining room on the second floor of the townhouse, where shots were fired from a .38-caliber pistol, one of which may have hit Rasmussen. Hearing the shots, the downstairs burglar probably fled, ditching the video components. A blood trail down the stairs and a bloody handprint near the front door suggested Rasmussen had tried to escape or reach the panic button on the alarm panel located there, but her assailant followed. In the living room Rasmussen had been bitten on her left forearm, perhaps while grappling for the gun, and then struck over the head with the heavy vase, a blow that likely incapacitated her. The assailant had then taken a quilt from across the room – presumably to muffle the gun’s report – and fired more shots through it, killing Rasmussen. A housekeeper in the unit next door later said she’d heard a scuffle and a scream, but no gunshots. Imagining the din to be a domestic altercation, she hadn’t called the police.

In all, Rasmussen had been shot three times in the chest, the bullets piercing her heart, lungs, and spine. When it was over, the killer stole the BMW parked in the garage. That most items in the house appeared undisturbed – including Rasmussen’s jewelry box, sitting in plain view on her dresser – seemed to Mayer further evidence of a rushed exit.

It wasn’t until nearly two o’clock in the morning that Lloyd Mahany, a criminalist from the Los Angeles County coroner’s office, arrived to examine the body. It was his second homicide of the night. Mahany began by checking for trace evidence around the victim’s body-hair, fibers, anything unusual – but he found nothing of note. Next he opened a sexual-assault kit and collected a series of swabs and slides. When he noticed the bite mark on Rasmussen’s arm, Mahany selected a six-inch swab housed in a tube with a red rubber stopper. He removed the stopper and

carefully swabbed the impression left by the assailant’s teeth. He reinserted the swab into the tube, squeezed the stopper shut, and labeled it with his initials and the coroner’s case number. He placed the tube inside a 5-by-7-inch L.A. coroner’s physical-evidence envelope, on which he wrote Sherri Rasmussen’s name, a description of the contents, and where he’d obtained them. Then he sealed it, noting the date and time he had done so.

The sun was just coming up over the San Fernando Valley when Mahany completed his work at the crime scene. He drove directly to the coroner’s office, where an evidence custodian booked the swab of the bite mark on Sherri Rasmussen’s arm into evidence at 10:32 a.m. on February 25, 1986.

Nels and Loretta Rasmussen, Sherri’s parents, arrived in Los Angeles from Arizona the day after the murder. Nels immediately sought out Mayer, the homicide detective, who informed him that the police were looking for one or more burglars in connection with the killing. He also told Nels they had ruled out John Ruetten as a suspect. Nels mentioned that his daughter had complained one or two months earlier about an ex-girlfriend of her husband’s who had shown up at Sherri’s hospital one day and confronted her. Nels didn’t know the ex-girlfriend’s name, but he knew she was a Los Angeles police officer. In Nels’s mind, she was a prime suspect. Mayer made a note of the ex-girlfriend in the case file but apparently never followed up. The stolen BMW was found abandoned nearby about a week later, but it offered up no further clues.

Two months after the murder, a pair of men attempted a burglary a few blocks from Sherri’s condo. When Mayer learned that one of them had brandished a gun, these unidentified burglars became the focus of his homicide investigation. But the suspects remained elusive, and months passed without further leads. In late October, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a story on the now

eight-month-old case, reporting that the Rasmussens were offering a \$10,000 reward for any information regarding the suspects in their daughter's murder, whom Mayer described in the article as two Latino men between 5 feet 4 inches and 5 feet 6 inches tall.

In 1986, the year Rasmussen was killed, Los Angeles recorded 831 murders, a figure nearly triple what it is today. By the end of the year, LAPD [Los Angeles Police Department] homicide detectives had solved 538 of those murders, a clearance rate of 65 percent. Of them, 463 were "cleared by arrest" and 75 "cleared other," a catchall designation for cases in which there is sufficient information to support the arrest of a suspect but, for reasons outside police control, no arrest can be made – for instance, when the suspect is dead or cannot be extradited to Los Angeles. LAPD homicide detectives track their clearance rate the way pro athletes track their season stats. It's the number by which their performance is judged, both within the unit and up the chain of command.

The clearance rates reported at the end of each calendar year stand in perpetuity; they cannot be "corrected" through later arrests. If a homicide occurs in late December but an arrest is made in January, credit for the clearance is taken in the year of the arrest, not the year of the murder. One corollary of this quirk is that a division can raise its current-year clearance rate by solving old cases as well as fresh ones. In 2009, for instance, the LAPD's Olympic Division recorded seven new murders, but its detectives were able to solve a total of 15, giving the unit an eye-popping clearance rate of 214 percent.

At midnight on December 31, when the LAPD closed the books on its 1986 homicide statistics, Sherri Rasmussen's murder was indelibly recorded as one of 293 unsolved cases.

Few people could have predicted in early 1986 that the science of police work was about to take an epochal leap forward. Not since 1901, when Scotland Yard validated fingerprinting for the purpose of criminal identification, had detectives' power to solve crimes been so profoundly transformed.

Seven months after Sherri Rasmussen's death, half a world away from Los Angeles, DNA was used in a criminal investigation for the first time. Two 15-year-old girls from neighboring villages outside Leicester, in the English Midlands, had been killed, one of them that summer and one three years earlier. Both victims had been raped and strangled, their bodies left beside out-of-the-way footpaths. The inescapable conclusion for both police and terrified residents was that a serial predator was hiding among the local population.

As Joseph Wambaugh, the LAPD detective turned crime writer, recounted masterfully in his 1989 book, *The Blooding*, an unprecedented force of 200 police officers was assembled to hunt for the murderer. Suspicion quickly fell upon a 17-year-old boy who seemed to have an unnatural interest in the second crime scene. When the boy was arrested and interrogated, he offered a rambling half-confession to the more recent murder, alternately describing his acts in great detail and then, moments later, denying he'd done anything wrong. The police were certain that he had killed both girls. But no matter how hard they pushed him, the boy refused to confess to the first murder.

By that time, police laboratories in England and America were accustomed to analyzing biological evidence, typically blood or semen, using a laboratory method called serology to determine blood type. It was useful for investigative purposes, but too imprecise to serve as a smoking gun. Serological testing that the police had expected would link the boy to the victims had come

up negative, but, in light of the other evidence, they discounted the results.

Someone mentioned to investigators a newspaper article about a local geneticist named Alec Jeffreys, who had developed a novel process for mapping gene variations using DNA molecules. Jeffreys – who would later be knighted for his contributions to forensic science – realized almost instantly the potential of the new technology, for which he coined the term *genetic fingerprinting*. Police asked Jeffreys to develop DNA profiles from the suspect's blood sample and from semen at the two crime scenes. The results stunned everyone. The same person had indeed raped and killed both girls. But he wasn't the boy whom police had in custody. The first criminal suspect ever subjected to forensic DNA testing was thus exonerated by it.

The investigation went back to the drawing board in all respects except one: police now had a DNA profile of their killer, who they suspected lived nearby. In January 1987, a bold plan was announced: the police requested that all male residents between the ages of 17 and 34 provide blood samples for DNA analysis, to eliminate themselves as suspects. No one was forced to participate in “the blooding,” as the DNA dragnet came to be called, and few expected that the killer would volunteer himself. But police hoped that the list of those who declined to participate would provide new leads.

Several months and thousands of blood samples later, the police received a curious tip. A woman who worked at a bakery in Leicester had been gossiping with co-workers at a pub when one mentioned that he had agreed to take the blood test on someone else's behalf. The woman called the police, and the naïf who'd taken the surrogate blood test promptly fingered the man who had talked him into it, a fellow baker with the improbable name of Colin Pitchfork. When confronted, Pitchfork confessed to the

killings, and DNA analysis later confirmed that he had raped both girls. In January 1988, Pitchfork became the first murderer in history to be convicted on the basis of DNA evidence. All over the world, newspapers hailed the breakthrough and marveled at the ways DNA forensics might revolutionize detective work.

In Los Angeles, the first two defendants told by prosecutors that DNA evidence would be used against them promptly pleaded guilty. The third, in 1989, was an accused rapist named Henry Wilds. The prosecutor in his case was Lisa Kahn, a deputy in the district attorney's Van Nuys office – the same branch that would have handled the Rasmussen murder a few years earlier, had a suspect ever been arrested. Wilds was charged with committing two rapes, in 1986 and 1987. The LAPD had collected semen at both crime scenes, and Kahn received permission to submit the evidence to a private lab for DNA analysis, which confirmed that Wilds's DNA profile matched that of the rapist.

Jury selection began in January 1990. Kahn recalls her desire to find jurors who would be able to make sense of this new universe of DNA testimony. “We were looking for a bright jury,” she explains. “So I get up there first and I say, ‘Has anybody ever heard of DNA?’ Some little retired guy raises his hand and says, ‘Yeah, I know, I know. It means “Does Not Apply.”’” DNA experts testified for both sides. The jury – which included Kahn's “little retired guy” – voted to convict. In the wake of the successful prosecution, Kahn became responsible for handling any DNA-admissibility hearing that took place in Los Angeles County.

Forensic scientists and legal historians refer to the late 1980s and early '90s as the height of “the DNA wars.” As DNA evidence was accepted state by state, jurisdiction by jurisdiction, defense attorneys were initially helpless against the highly credentialed scientific experts called by prosecutors to testify. But

that began to change in 1989, when two lawyers, Peter Neufeld and Barry Scheck, convinced a New York judge that poor laboratory procedures warranted exclusion of DNA evidence that had been introduced against their client. The decision, *People v. Castro*, sent shock waves through the criminal-justice system. Over the next few years, in courtrooms across America, the adversarial process worked its magic. All concerned – prosecutors, defense lawyers, forensic scientists, judges – had to raise their game. Laboratories became more careful with evidence; trial courts grew more familiar with DNA; and higher courts affirmed its admissibility as a matter of law.

By 1994, the DNA wars were basically over, as a singular case would affirm. On June 13 of that year, LAPD homicide detectives visited the Rockingham Avenue mansion of O. J. Simpson to notify him that his ex-wife and an acquaintance of hers had been stabbed to death outside her Brentwood condominium. Simpson was soon linked to the crime by forensic evidence – in particular, a blood-soaked glove that a detective named Mark Fuhrman reported finding on Simpson’s property. (Defense lawyers would later suggest that Fuhrman had planted it.) On behalf of the prosecution, Kahn coordinated the DNA testing of more than 50 blood samples that seemed to tie Simpson inextricably to the killings.

Yet contrary to expectations, Simpson’s “Dream Team” of defense lawyers did not fight to keep DNA results out, nor did they challenge the forensic value of DNA evidence during the trial. Ultimately, the not-guilty verdict turned more on Fuhrman’s alleged racism and the LAPD’s carelessness in handling evidence than on the validity of the DNA. Indeed, by the end of the trial, the DNA results had ironically become a pillar of the defense’s alternate narrative of the murder. Of course it was O.J.’s DNA: it had been planted at the scene!

By one count, the term *DNA* was spoken in court 10,000 times during the nine-month trial, in addition to innumerable citations on television and in print. Just five years after a potential juror had confidently informed Lisa Kahn that *DNA* stood for *Does Not Apply*, it had become a household term.

Even as forensic technology was taking great leaps forward, the investigation into Sherri Rasmussen’s murder remained stalled. For years, her parents, Nels and Loretta, did everything possible to keep the case alive. In November 1987, they returned to Los Angeles and held a press conference, at which they renewed their offer of a \$10,000 reward for information leading to an arrest. Sherri’s widower, John Ruetten, was also there. “It’s been nearly two years of hell, not knowing who did this to Sherri or why,” he told the assembled reporters. In 1988, Nels wrote a letter to then-Chief of Police Daryl Gates requesting his intervention in the case, specifically looking into the possibility that an ex-girlfriend of Ruetten’s who was a police officer might have been involved. He received no reply. About that time, Nels again mentioned the ex-girlfriend to the Van Nuys detectives. “You watch too much television,” he remembers being told.

Into the early 1990s, Loretta called the Van Nuys homicide unit regularly to inquire about Sherri’s case. In 1993, the Rasmussens traveled to Van Nuys for a face-to-face meeting with one of the detectives who had inherited the case when Lyle Mayer retired. Mayer’s successor explained that he had reviewed the original case notes and tried to advance the investigation, but he had been unable to identify any suspects, and prospects for new leads were poor. Nels brought up an article about DNA forensics he had read in a science magazine and offered to pay for DNA analysis of the evidence at a private lab. The detective turned him down. Move on with your lives, he advised the Rasmussens. After that meeting, Loretta stopped calling.

Meanwhile, in a freezer in the Los Angeles County coroner's office, alongside biological evidence from hundreds of other murders, the swab of the bite mark on Sherri Rasmussen's arm lay waiting for forensic science – and the LAPD's scrutiny – to catch up with it.

If Lisa Kahn was the district attorney's resident DNA geek, that role in the LAPD was filled by Detective David Lambkin. In 1981, as a young cop, Lambkin had requested assignment to the Automated Information Division, which, among other responsibilities, maintained a citywide crime database that could be searched by modus operandi or other basic criteria – for instance, all liquor-store robberies in which the suspect wore a mask. Primitive as the IBM punch-card and mainframe-computer databases might seem today, they were cutting-edge at the time, and they nurtured Lambkin's interest in how technology could be used to solve cases. He made detective quickly and requested assignment to a sex-crimes unit. Lambkin excelled at the work, but by 1990, he felt burned out and decided to shift to homicides.

At the dawn of the DNA age, Lambkin's background investigating sex crimes proved an excellent foundation for homicide work. Given the number of drive-by shootings then occurring in the city, LAPD detectives were far more accustomed to picking shell casings up off the street than searching for hair strands, semen stains, and other barely visible bodily traces. Lambkin, by comparison, had been working with biological evidence for years, and was already convinced of DNA's potential. Moreover, he believed strongly that the LAPD had a moral obligation to do its best to solve cold cases. "For these families, this stuff never goes away," he says.

In 1993, Lambkin was working homicide at the Hollywood Division, where he had a front-row seat for the conclusion of perhaps the coldest case ever solved by the LAPD. The victim,

Thora Rose, had been brutally killed in her apartment in October 1963. At the time, detectives had collected more than 30 fingerprint lifts from the scene, but they had never identified a suspect. In 1990, when the lifts were uploaded to a fingerprint database, the computer reported a match with a previously unknown suspect named Vernon Robinson.

In 1963, Robinson had been an 18-year-old Navy recruit stationed in San Diego. After leaving the Navy in 1966, he fell into drugs and crime, and was eventually sentenced to three years at San Quentin for assault and robbery. Robinson emerged from prison a changed man. He got sober and enrolled in college. Later, he married and raised a family. When he was arrested for killing Thora Rose, Robinson was a 45-year-old manager for a building-maintenance company in Minneapolis. The LAPD detective who arrested him had been 8 years old when the murder occurred.

In court, Robinson cut a respectable figure. His children and members of his church packed the gallery in support of him. Deputy D.A. Paul Turley, in his closing argument, addressed head-on the defendant's evident rehabilitation and the three decades that had passed between the crime and the trial. "I'm very happy to stand in opposition to the principle that you are entitled to one free murder every 30 years," Turley told the jury. The jurors, and the judge, agreed: Robinson was convicted and sentenced to life in prison.

The Rose case made Lambkin eager to see how many other homicides from the city's past might be solved using new technology. LAPD homicide detectives had always been free to work cold cases, but only as time permitted between fresh murders, which wasn't very often. Now, using the new fingerprint and ballistics databases that had come online, Lambkin found he was able to clear some old homicides fairly easily. Although he didn't solve every fresh case he worked, he closed enough old

ones to maintain a remarkable 100 percent personal clearance rate every year from 1991 through 1996.

In October 1998, the FBI launched a DNA database called the Combined DNA Index System, or CODIS, which gave detectives the ability to compare DNA samples collected at crime scenes with the DNA profiles of legions of potential suspects. When, in 2000, a \$50 million state grant became available to fund DNA testing in certain unsolved murders, Lambkin and Lisa Kahn seized the opportunity to propose a task force to tackle the citywide backlog. After considerable political machinations, the LAPD's new Cold Case Homicide Unit went operational in November 2001.

The cold-case unit initially consisted of seven detectives: three teams of two, with Lambkin at the helm. The "office" the unit was given – a 250-square-foot former janitorial storage space – was so cramped that every time someone wanted to leave, others had to pull in their chairs to make room.

The unit gradually came to grips with the magnitude of its caseload. The coldest homicide on the LAPD's books was, literally, the first one: the unsolved murder of a man named Simon Christensen in downtown Los Angeles on the night of September 9, 1899. A century later, the unit could not do much about that one. But how far back could they go, given the inevitable loss and decay of physical evidence? "I knew from experience that there was probably nothing left from earlier than 1960," Lambkin says. The unit's initial focus would therefore be on unsolved homicides committed from 1960 through 1998.

Using the LAPD's annual statistics, Lambkin tallied the numbers. During those 39 years, 23,713 murders took place in Los Angeles. Of those cases, 13,300 were cleared by arrest and another 2,668 were recorded as "cleared other." That left 7,745 cold cases. Page by page, for months, the detectives combed the

old homicide summary books. "We were looking for cases that had the best chance for us to potentially work with, given the small numbers [of detectives] we had," says Rick Jackson, who was part of the original unit. "So we looked for sexually motivated murders, where there was a better chance for DNA. We looked at maybe a burglary murder that was unsolved. Because a burglary murder – someone is going to have broken into the place, spent some time there. In an indoor crime scene, obviously, the longer you are there, the more you do – whether you're sexually assaulting, burglarizing, moving around ransacking – you increase the chance for good fingerprints."

Late in 2002, when the cold-case unit finished its initial screening of all unsolved homicides committed in Los Angeles from 1960 through 1998, it judged 1,400 to have good forensic potential for reinvestigation – among them, the 1986 murder of Sherri Rasmussen.

In February 2003, a year and a half after its formation, the cold-case unit made its first arrest, solving the 1983 murder of a young nurse and mother named Elaine Graham. A suspect, Edmond Marr, had been identified at the time but was never prosecuted; confronted with wiretap evidence and a DNA report that linked him to the murder, Marr eventually pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 16 years to life.

Seven months later, in September, the unit cleared four cases at once when it arrested its first serial killer, Adolph Laudenberg. A 77-year-old grandfather with a bushy white beard, Laudenberg was suspected of having raped and strangled four women between 1972 and 1975; the media quickly dubbed him the "Santa Claus Strangler." The detectives possessed the killer's DNA profile, but had no sample from Laudenberg with which they could compare it. A warrant could have forced their suspect to give them a sample, but they weren't sure they had enough evidence to get

one. They could also have asked Laudenberg to submit a sample voluntarily, but that would have alerted him that he was a suspect.

Detectives have a third way to get a suspect's DNA sample without running afoul of the Fourth Amendment: collect a voluntarily discarded sample. In this case, it would not be easy. Laudenberg lived in a mobile home that he moved sporadically around Los Angeles. Eventually, a detective arranged to meet at a doughnut shop to discuss what he described as a series of burglaries from automobiles. Afterward, the coffee cup the old man had used was whisked to the lab and his DNA was harvested from the brim. The profiles matched, and Laudenberg is now serving a life sentence. "The press loves these cases," Lambkin says. "I mean, it is all positive every time you solve one. If you don't solve one, well, no one solved it. But when you do, you're like a freaking magician."

During the summer and fall of 2003, Lambkin's unit was working its way, case by case, through the 1,400 unsolved homicides it had flagged as having good forensic potential. On September 19, DNA analysis was requested on evidence from the 1986 murder of Sherri Rasmussen. The request reached the desk of a criminalist at the LAPD crime lab, but given staffing shortages, no action was taken on it for more than a year.

In December 2004, a criminalist named Jennifer Butterworth noticed the unworked request sitting on her colleague's desk and volunteered to handle it. The first article Butterworth analyzed was a blood swatch taken at the victim's autopsy, which gave her Rasmussen's DNA profile. When she turned to the crime-scene evidence, the items she initially tested – a piece of fingernail, a bloodstained towel – yielded only the victim's profile. Then Butterworth noticed that the property sheet listed a bite-mark swab. Yet she couldn't find the swab in the rape kit or anywhere

else. A week went by before the coroner's office could locate the missing evidence.

The 5-by-7-inch envelope, new and crisp when Lloyd Mahany had sealed it in 1986, was no longer so pristine. Its condition would later be described in court as "pretty beaten up" and "ratty." There was a tear at one end, from which protruded the red-capped top of the tube holding the swab, but the tube itself appeared intact. When Butterworth analyzed the swab, it yielded a mixture of two DNA profiles, one of which matched Rasmussen's. The other presumably belonged to her killer.

This mystery profile did not return a CODIS hit, which meant the suspect was not in the FBI's DNA database. But a curious detail caught Butterworth's eye. DNA profiles developed since the late 1990s typically include a gender marker. In most violent crimes, the suspect comes up XY, or male. But the DNA results in front of Butterworth were XX, meaning that the person who bit Sherri Rasmussen was female. Without the case file, Butterworth had little information regarding theories of the case or possible suspects, and so lacked context for her discovery. But it was certainly unusual. She typed up her conclusions and sent the report to the cold-case unit on February 8, 2005.

As it happened, just a few months before, California voters had overwhelmingly approved Proposition 69, a ballot measure co-authored by Lisa Kahn. Prop 69 required police to collect DNA samples from all individuals arrested for a felony or a sex crime, as well as from all state-prison inmates who had been convicted of such crimes. The DNA profiles of tens of thousands of California inmates were uploaded to the FBI's vast database. As a result, in 2005 Lambkin's unit was swamped with CODIS-based "cold hits": DNA reports implicating suspects previously unknown to detectives.

As tantalizing a clue as Butterworth's DNA report provided in the Rasmussen case – namely, that a woman might be the murderer – it did not point directly to a specific suspect, unlike the many cold hits rolling in thanks to Prop 69. Perhaps for this reason, Butterworth's report went into the Rasmussen case file, and the case file itself went back on the shelf, where it would sit for a few years more.

By early 2007, when David Lambkin retired, the Cold Case Homicide Unit had solved more than 40 old murder cases. His successor was Robert Bub, another veteran homicide detective. Bub estimates that when he took over the unit, it numbered 10 detectives and had about 120 cases open. The team had by then moved to a new, slightly more spacious squad room on the fifth floor of Parker Center, the LAPD's legendarily decrepit headquarters, but it still didn't have enough space for all the murder books that it had accumulated. Detectives boxed up whichever cases weren't being actively worked and sent them back to the divisions where they had originated, if there was room for them, or to the LAPD archives if there wasn't.

As a result, sometime in 2007, the Sherri Rasmussen case file was returned to the Van Nuys Division in a cardboard box. By coincidence, Bub followed it in March 2008, when he accepted a transfer to run the Van Nuys homicide unit, which had just lost its supervising detective and two others to retirement. When the dust settled, the squad consisted of Bub and three other detectives: Pete Barba, Marc Martinez, and Jim Nuttall.

Whereas Van Nuys once recorded 30 to 40 homicides a year, nowadays it averages five to seven. "It's a very manageable number of murders for three guys to work," Bub says. In early February 2009, with the squad's most recent homicide cleared, Nuttall and Barba began poking around for an interesting cold case. They settled on Sherri Rasmussen's.

"It was four books when it reached me, four books deep," Nuttall says of the case file. "They kept a pretty good chronological record of everything that was done over 23 years." When Nuttall reached the 2005 DNA-analysis report, he saw immediately that the gender marker was incompatible with the original theory of the case. "That jumps off the page at you, because when you have that, and you're aware that the case is based on two male burglars – well, that alters the entire course of the investigation. You have to go back to square one."

The detectives went back over the whole investigation – but this time with the assumption that they were looking for a female suspect. When they finished going through the case file, they had a list of five names, among them that of Stephanie Lazarus, who was cited in the original police work as John Ruetten's ex-girlfriend, with the further notation "P.O." Nuttall didn't make anything of the initials until he called Ruetten, who told him that Lazarus had been a Los Angeles police officer.

Nuttall was stunned at the thought that a cop might have killed someone and gotten away with it. "It was extremely difficult initially to process that possibility," he says. Wondering whether she might still be on the job, the detectives typed her name into the LAPD's directory, and there she was: Detective Stephanie Lazarus. Nuttall phoned Bub and told him they had identified the police-officer ex-girlfriend whom Nels Rasmussen had brought up all those years before. The suspects on the squad's list were numbered 1 through 5. Lazarus, considered the least likely suspect, was No. 5.

The detectives on the Van Nuys squad made two pacts regarding the Rasmussen case. First, they agreed that they would maintain total secrecy, and would never speak or write Lazarus's name where anyone else might hear or see it. There was no way to know who in the division might be acquainted with her, and they

didn't want to dirty her good name in the likely event that she didn't have anything to do with the murder – or tip her off in the unlikely event that she did. Second, they promised one another that they would follow the trail of evidence wherever it led. “This was not a random act of violence toward Sherri Rasmussen,” Nuttall says. “Somebody on that list committed this crime.”

The Van Nuys detectives quickly eliminated three of the five women on their list for having insufficient motive to harm Rasmussen. That left them with only two suspects: Lazarus and one other woman, a fellow nurse who, according to the original case notes, had occasionally argued with Sherri at the hospital. “We were teetering,” Bub recalls. But as far as motive was concerned, “the information that we had was that [Lazarus and Ruetten’s] relationship had been over since the previous summer. We didn’t have anything to establish there was any animosity.”

The detectives decided they would investigate the nurse first, confirming or eliminating her as a suspect. She was located living in Northern California, and Bub made arrangements with local law enforcement to surreptitiously collect a DNA sample from her. In mid-April, just over two months into the new investigation, that DNA report came back negative. The detectives’ list was down to one name: Stephanie Lazarus.

Fact by fact, the team began piecing together Lazarus’s relationship to Sherri Rasmussen. Lazarus and John Ruetten had become close friends at UCLA, where they’d lived in the same dorm. After graduating in the early 1980s, they dated on and off. In 1985, Ruetten began dating Rasmussen seriously. He proposed to her that summer, and they married in November. Three months later, she was dead.

At the time, Lazarus was a 26-year-old patrol officer in her third year with the LAPD. In 1993, she made detective, and in 1996 she married a fellow LAPD officer, with whom she later

adopted a little girl. In 2006, Lazarus was assigned to the department’s Art Theft Detail, a plum post with a degree of prestige rare for Los Angeles police work. In her long career, she had never been involved in a use-of-force incident or been accused of any misconduct.

Still, as the Van Nuys unit continued to dig, other details fell uncomfortably into place. Marc Martinez recalled that in the mid-1980s, most LAPD cops carried a .38 as their backup or off-duty gun – the same caliber weapon indicated on the ballistics report in the Rasmussen murder book. On April 30, the detectives entered Lazarus’s name into the California state gun registry, which returned a list of all the firearms she had ever registered. One of them, a .38, had been reported stolen on March 9, 1986 – 13 days after the murder.

Within a week, the detectives obtained a copy of the stolen-gun report. It indicated that shortly after 2 p.m. that Sunday, Lazarus had walked into the lobby of the Santa Monica Police Department, identified herself as an LAPD officer, and told the clerk that her car, parked near Santa Monica Pier, had been broken into. The lock on the driver’s-side door had been punched, she said, and a blue gym bag stolen. Lazarus listed for the clerk the contents of the stolen bag: clothes, half a dozen cassette tapes, and the handgun, which she described as a Smith & Wesson five-shot .38 revolver. Without that gun – or, more precisely, without a bullet known to have been fired from it – the Van Nuys detectives would have no way to prove, or disprove, that it was the murder weapon.

By this time, Nuttall had spoken on the phone with Nels Rasmussen, Sherri’s father, whose persistence and intelligence impressed him. “I said, ‘We need to talk about everything. I need you to walk me through everything from A to Z,’” Nuttall recalls. He asked Nels about women who might have wanted to harm

Sherri, and Nels recounted what he had told detectives in 1986 about Ruetten's cop ex-girlfriend, who his daughter said had confronted her at the hospital where she worked. Given the sensitivity of the unfolding investigation, Nuttall had to be cautious about tipping his hand. But he told Nels, "Give me time to do what I have to do, and I think I'll be able to have an answer for you."

If a case against Lazarus was going to proceed, it was inevitably going to end up with the department's Robbery-Homicide Division, the elite detective unit that handles the city's most sensitive and high-profile murder cases. Bub, a veteran of RHD, was determined to deliver an ultra-professional case to them. The detectives had known for a while that they would need to obtain a sample of Lazarus's DNA to compare with the bite-mark swab. "We had kicked around the idea of doing it ourselves, doing surreptitious DNA," Bub says. "But the way the circumstances were, there would have been too many variables involved and too much potential for screwup. We felt it best, if we're going to do this and hand the package to RHD, we're going to hand it to them with everything done correctly."

Bub went to his lieutenant in the Van Nuys Division and briefed him on the investigation. Outside of Bub and the three men in his unit, the lieutenant was the first person in the department to learn that an LAPD detective had become a cold-case murder suspect. The captain of the Van Nuys Division and his commanding officer, the chief of the Valley Bureau, were quickly brought into the loop. "We explained that this could still turn out not to be her," Bub says. "There were some coincidences, but there was nothing definitive for us at this point." The chief decided that Bub's unit could hang on to the case until the DNA sample was obtained. Back at the squad room, the detectives prepared for two possible outcomes: if Lazarus's

DNA matched the sample from the swab, RHD would assume responsibility for the case; if it didn't match, the Rasmussen case would be designated "investigation continued" and shelved yet again, probably forever.

On May 19, 2009, the Van Nuys detectives met off-site with detectives from the LAPD's Professional Standards Bureau, a surveillance unit directly under the command of the chief of police, who was then William Bratton. On May 27, after a week of preparation and surveillance, plainclothes detectives surreptitiously trailed Lazarus as she ran errands. When she threw out a cup and straw she had been drinking from, the surveillance team swooped in and retrieved it from the trash.

At the Scientific Investigation Division, a DNA profile was quickly developed from the saliva on the straw and compared with the unidentified profile extracted from the bite-mark swab. On May 29, Bub was on a day off when his cell phone rang. The call was from a technician at the crime lab. Bub recalls, "It was one of those gut-wrenching moments when he said, 'Yes, it's a match.'"

The Art Theft Detail where Lazarus worked was on the third floor of Parker Center, just across the hall from the Robbery-Homicide Division squad room. Lazarus was friendly with a number of RHD detectives, which made assigning the case a challenge. The two detectives who were ultimately chosen, Greg Stearns and Dan Jaramillo, were selected in part because they did not know Lazarus well, and had no bias for or against her. Bub says maintaining the secrecy of the investigation was a top priority. Detectives are gossipy, he explains. "That's the nature of being a detective: we all want to know."

Within hours of receiving the DNA results, Bub and Nuttall brought the four binders that comprised the Rasmussen case file to Stearns and Jaramillo at Parker Center. "We're giving them this

spiel of where we are and how we got here, what's been going on for 23 years," Nuttall recalls. "Dan and Greg aren't asking questions yet, because they're still absorbing this information that's just overwhelming." When they finished, all four detectives went straight from RHD to the D.A.'s [District Attorney's] office, where Bub and Nuttall briefed the prosecutors who would be handling the case.

To maintain secrecy, Stearns, Jaramillo, and Nuttall spent the next week working out of a conference room at the D.A.'s office. While Stearns and Jaramillo began planning their strategy for interviewing Lazarus, Nuttall and Lisa Sanchez, another RHD detective, flew to Arizona to meet with the Rasmussen family. Because many more people within the LAPD and the D.A.'s office were now aware of where the investigation was headed, concern was growing that word could leak at any moment. Nuttall and Sanchez were tasked with getting on-the-record statements from the Rasmussens and updating them on the investigation, without tipping them off to just how close the police were to making an arrest.

Despite his many phone conversations with Nels, Nuttall had never met the Rasmussens in person, and he was nervous about the encounter. The night before, and all through the morning, he went over in his head exactly what he was going to say to them: "The hardest part was, I thought, *Man, Nels is going to undress this. He's going to know I know. He's not going to miss this.*"

When the two LAPD detectives pulled up to the house, Nels came out to the driveway to greet them. The whole family was waiting inside. "He walks me in," Nuttall recalls, "and I drew a blank on what I was going to say." The awkward silence was broken when Loretta crossed the room to where Nuttall stood, and hugged him. "Here's this woman who never said two words to me," Nuttall says. "She just walked across the room and she

gave me a hug." Before the detectives left, Nuttall made one last plea for the family's patience.

The detectives returned to Los Angeles and dove back into the case with Stearns and Jaramillo. One of the thorny issues still to be resolved was how and where to confront Lazarus. "Chief Bratton didn't want anybody approaching her when she had a gun or access to a gun," Nuttall explains. "There was no way anybody was going to sign off on us going into the house with a search warrant in the middle of the night and it maybe ending in tragedy."

In the end, they decided to stage the interview at Parker Center's Jail Division, located on the floor directly below the Robbery-Homicide Division and the Art Theft Detail. Firearms were not allowed in the jail, so it would not seem unnatural for all three detectives – Stearns, Jaramillo, and Lazarus – to surrender their guns before entering. The plan was for the RHD detectives to request Lazarus's help interviewing a jailed suspect who claimed to have information on an art-theft case. When she arrived at the interrogation room – one equipped with recording equipment to videotape the interview – they would shift gears and gradually turn to the Rasmussen case. Given how many suspects Lazarus had arrested herself over the years, she was undoubtedly well aware of her rights to silence and to legal counsel. The unknown factor was how long she would wait before invoking one or both. "Everything I knew about Stephanie, she was sharp," Nuttall says. Stearns and Jaramillo's goal would be to keep her talking as long as possible, while simultaneously assuring her that she was free to leave at any time.

She would be – but only technically. As Stearns and Jaramillo would know, but Lazarus could hardly suspect, the moment she ended the interview and walked out of the room, she would be

arrested, regardless of what she had told them. The interview was scheduled for early in the workday on Friday, June 5.

Chief Bratton wanted the Rasmussen family informed of the arrest in person as soon as it happened, so they didn't hear about it through the media. Nuttall was tapped for the job. He called the Rasmussens and said he was coming back and would need to see them again on Friday morning. Nels replied that he had a doctor's appointment. Nuttall recalls, "I said, 'Nels, if you can reschedule it, you may want to reschedule.'"

At 6:40 a.m. on June 5, 2009, Jaramillo stopped by Lazarus's desk. He was wearing a wire. "Stephanie?" he asked. "Do you know me? I'm Dan Jaramillo. I work over here on the other side." He explained that he was working on a case and had a suspect in the jail who was talking about stolen art. "I don't know a lot about this stuff," he told Lazarus. "You can kind of talk to him. You can see if he's for real."

"Sure," she said.

"Just for like five minutes or something," Jaramillo added.

When Lazarus arrived in the interrogation room, Stearns and Jaramillo abandoned the story of a suspect talking about stolen art, and explained that her name had come up in a case involving an ex-boyfriend of hers, John Ruetten. Knowing she was married to someone else, they told her, they'd selected a place where they could speak privately, away from gossiping colleagues.

Stearns and Jaramillo interviewed Lazarus for more than an hour, coming at her in an oblique manner that left it unclear whether they were speaking with her as a possible witness or a criminal suspect. The conversation meandered, but every digression led back, inevitably, to the murder of Sherri Rasmussen. It was only after Jaramillo asked Lazarus if she'd be willing to give them a DNA swab and noted, "It's possible we may have some DNA at the location," that she said she wanted to contact a

lawyer. Declaring herself "shocked," the veteran detective stood and walked out, 68 minutes after she'd sat down. Lazarus got only as far as the jail's hallway, where she was stopped by other RHD detectives and placed in handcuffs.

From the interrogation room, Lazarus was taken to Lynwood, the Los Angeles County jail facility for female prisoners, where she has been held ever since on \$10 million bail. On June 8, 2009, she was charged with the murder of Sherri Rasmussen. Since her arrest, Lazarus has steadfastly maintained her innocence. Through her lawyer, she declined interview request. Her trial is tentatively scheduled to begin in late August, 2011. ♦

Side by...

Dance of the Happy Shades

by *Alice Munro*

MISS MARSALLES IS HAVING another party. (Out of musical integrity, or her heart's bold yearning for festivity, she never calls it a recital.) My mother is not an inventive or convincing liar, and the excuses which occur to her are obviously second-rate. The painters are coming. Friends from Ottawa. Poor Carrie is having her tonsils out. In the end all she can say is: Oh, but won't all that be too much trouble, *now?* *Now* being weighted with several troublesome meanings; you may take your choice. Now that Miss Marsalles has moved from the brick and frame bungalow on Bank Street, where the last three parties have been rather squashed, to an even smaller place – if she has described it correctly – on Bala Street. (Bala Street, where is that?) Or: now that Miss Marsalles' older sister is in bed, following a stroke; now that Miss Marsalles herself – as my mother says, we must face these things – is simply getting *too old*.

Now? asks Miss Marsalles, stung, pretending mystification, or perhaps for that matter really feeling it. And she asks how her June party could ever be too much trouble, at any time, in any place? It is the only entertainment she ever gives any more (so far as my mother knows it is the only entertainment she ever has given, but Miss Marsalles' light old voice, undismayed, indefatigably social, supplies the ghosts of tea parties, private dances, At

...by side

Boldog lelkek tánca

fordította *Tárnok Attila*

MISS MARSALLES ÚJABB ESTET rendez, de a zene vagy az ünnepek iránti tiszteletből, soha nem hívja az estét előadásnak. Anyám nem tud meggyőzően hazudni, és az összes lehetséges kifogás huszadrangúnak tűnik. Festenek nálunk. Barátaink érkeznek Ottawából. Szegény Carrie mandulaműtetre vár. Végül mindössze annyit mond: Ó, dehát nem jelent ez most túl sok bosszúságot? Most alatt jónéhány zavaró mellékkörülményt ért. Lehet választani. Most, hogy Miss Marsalles kisebb lakásba költözött – amennyiben a leírás pontos – a Bank Street-i téglapépületből a Bala Street-re, pedig az elmúlt három alkalommal már a régi hely is szűkösnek bizonyult. (És hol van ez a Bala Street egyáltalán?) Vagy: most, hogy Miss Marsalles nővére még nem épült fel a szüléstől, fekvőbetegként lábadozik. Most, hogy maga Miss Marsalles is – anyám szavaival: nézzünk szembe a ténnyel – rohamosan öregszi.

– Most? – kérdezi Miss Marsalles sértetten, értetlenséget tetetve vagy talán csakugyan értetlenül. Hogy lehet a júniusi est bárhol és bármikor bosszúság? Ez maradt az egyetlen rendezvény, amit még manapság is megtart. (Anyám szerint ez az egyetlen rendezvény, amit valaha szervezett, de Miss Marsalles gyenge öreg hangján csüggedés nélkül, fáradhatatlanul képes utalni a homályba vesző teadélutánok, táncestek, gigantikus

Homes, mammoth Family Dinners). She would suffer, she says, as much disappointment as the children, if she were to give it up. Considerably more, says my mother to herself, but of course she cannot say it aloud; she turns her face from the telephone with that look of irritation – as if she had seen something messy which she was unable to clean up – which is her private expression of pity. And she promises to come; weak schemes for getting out of it will occur to her during the next two weeks, but she knows she will be there.

She phones up Marg French who like herself is an old pupil of Miss Marsalles and who has been having lessons for her twins, and they commiserate for a while and promise to go together and buck each other up. They remember the year before last when it rained and the little hail was full of raincoats piled on top of each other because there was no place to hang them up, and the umbrellas dripped puddles on the dark floor. The little girls' dresses were crushed because of the way they all had to squeeze together, and the living room windows would not open. Last year a child had a nosebleed.

“Of course that was not Miss Marsalles' fault.”

They giggle despairingly. “No. But things like that did not use to happen.”

And that is true; that is the whole thing. There is a feeling that can hardly be put into words about Miss Marsalles' parties; things are getting out of hand, anything may happen. There is even a moment, driving in to such a party, when the question occurs: will anybody else be there? For one of the most disconcerting things about the last two or three parties has been the widening gap in the ranks of the regulars, the old pupils whose children seem to be the only new pupils Miss Marsalles ever has. Every June reveals some new and surely significant dropping-out. Mary Lambert's girl no longer takes; neither does Joan Crimble's. What

családi vacsorák és magán jellegű rendezvények sorára.) Az estek hiányát ugyanúgy megsínylené – így fejezi ki magát –, mint a gyerekek. Meg amennyivel inkább, gondolja anyám, persze hangosan ki nem mondaná, mire gondol. A szájalom kifejezésével az arcán, türelmetlenül fordul félre a telefontól, mintha valami otromba koszt pillantott volna meg a szobában, amit nem takarított fel korábban, mert nem vette észre, de megígéri, hogy ott lesz az esten. Az elkövetkező két hétben ugyan felmerülnek benne gyenge kifogások, de érzi, hogy képtelen lesz nemet mondani.

Felhívja Marg French-et, aki – mint ő – Miss Marsalles egykori növendéke, és aki az ikreit is járhatja órákra; sajnálkoznak egy kicsit, és abban maradnak, együtt érkeznek majd, hogy egymás támaszai legyenek. Felidézik a két évvel ezelőtti estet, amikor a kis teremben kupacokban heverték egymáson az esőkabátok, mert nem volt hely felakasztani őket, és ahogy a csöpögő esernyőkből tócsák formálódtak a sötét parkettán. Olyan szorosan kellett egymás mellett ülni, hogy a kislányok ruhái meggyűrődtek, és a nappali ablakát nem lehetett kinyitni. Tavaly az egyik gyerekek eleredt az orra vére.

– Persze arról Miss Marsalles nem tehetett.

Kínjukban röhögcsélnek.

– Nyilván nem, de korábban nem történt ilyesmi.

És ez igaz; ennyi az egész. Miss Marsalles estjeinek hangulatát nehéz szavakba önteni: a részletek szétesnek, bármi megtörténhet. Útban az estre, az autóban ülve van egy pillanat, amikor felmerül a kétely: eljön-e rajtunk kívül egyáltalán valaki? Az utóbbi néhány alkalommal nyugtalanító érzést keltett az állandó vendégek, az egykori növendékek – akiknek gyerekei alkotják (úgy tűnik, kizárólag) Miss Marsalles jelenlegi tanítványait – között fennálló, egyre szélesedő szakadék. Minden júniusban kiderül valakiről, hogy lemondta az órákat. Joan Crimble lánya

does this mean? think my mother and Marg French, women who have moved to the suburbs and are plagued sometimes by a feeling that they have fallen behind, that their instincts for doing the right thing have become confused. Piano lessons are not so important now as they once were; everybody knows that. Dancing is believed to be more favourable to the development of the whole child – and the children, at least the girls, don't seem to mind it as much. But how are you to explain that to Miss Marsalles, who says, “All children need music. All children love music in their hearts”? It is one of Miss Marsalles' indestructible beliefs that she can see into children's hearts, and she finds there a treasury of good intentions and a natural love of all good things. The deceits which her spinster's sentimentality has practised on her original good judgment are legendary and colossal; she has this way of speaking of children's hearts as if they were something holy; it is hard for a parent to know what to say.

In the old days, when my sister Winifred took lessons, the address was in Rosedale; that was where it had always been. A narrow house, built of soot-and-raspberry-coloured brick, grim little ornamental balconies curving out from the second-floor windows, no towers anywhere but somehow a turreted effect; dark, pretentious, poetically ugly – the family home. And in Rosedale the annual party did not go off too badly. There was always an awkward little space before the sandwiches, because the woman they had in the kitchen was not used to parties and rather slow, but the sandwiches when they did appear were always very good: chicken, asparagus rolls, wholesome, familiar things – dressed-up nursery food. The performances on the piano were, as usual, nervous and choppy or sullen and spiritless, with the occasional surprise and interest of a lively disaster. It will be understood that Miss Marsalles' idealistic view of children, her tender or simple-mindedness in that regard, made her almost useless as a

már nem jár, és Mary Lamberté sem. Mit jelentsen ez, tűnődik anyám és Marg French. Külvárosiként néha a lemaradás érzetével küszködnek. Úgy érzik, az ösztöneik összezavarodtak, nem tudják többé eldönteni, mi a helyes. Zongorázni tanulni nem olyan fontos ma már, mint volt egykor; ezt mindenki tudja. A gyermek személyiségének fejlődése szempontjából a tánc előnyt élvez, és – legalábbis a lányok számára – úgy tűnik, nem akkora büntetés, mint a zongoraórák. De hogy lehet ezt Miss Marsallesnek megmagyarázni, aki szerint minden gyereknek szüksége van a zenére, és minden gyerek szívből szereti a zenét. Miss Marsalles megingathatatlanul hisz benne, hogy a gyerekek szívébe lát, ahol dicséretes szándékok és minden jó dolog természetes szeretetének kincsestára rejlik. Legendásak és kolosszálisak a tévedések, amelyeket az aggszűz szentimentalizmus gyakorolt eredetileg helyes ítélőképességén. A gyerekek szívéről mint szent edényekről beszél; a szülő ilyenkor elbizonytalanodik: mit is válaszoljon.

Winifred nővérem régen Rosedale-ban járt órákra. Egy korom- és málnaszínű téglépületbe, ahol apró, sivár vakerkélyek voltak a második emeleti ablakok előtt. A házon seholy kémény, mégis tornyok benyomását őrzöm az emlékeimben. Sötét, nagyravágó, esztétikai szempontból kifejezetten ronda – a Marsalles család otthona. Rosedale-ban a júniusi estek elég jól sikerültek. A szendvicsek felszolgálását mindig kínos várakozás előzte meg, mert a konyhai kisegítő nem szokott nagyobb társasághoz vagy mert lassan dolgozott, de amikor végül elkészült, minden nagyon ízletesre sikeredett; csirkehúsos, spárgás zsemle, laktató, ismerős ízek: följavított, gyerekeknek való falatok. A zongoradarabok általában izgatott, darabos vagy duzzogó, lélektelen előadásmódban hangzottak el, ritkán tartogattak meglepetést vagy akár csúfos felsülést. Természetszerűleg Miss Marsalles, a gyerekek iránt érzett idealisztikus felfogása és erélytelen egy-

teacher; she was unable to criticize except in the most delicate and apologetic way and her praises were unforgivably dishonest; it took an unusually conscientious pupil to come through with anything like a creditable performance.

But on the whole the affair in those days had solidity, it had tradition, in its own serenely out-of-date way it had style. Everything was always as expected; Miss Marsalles herself, waiting in the entrance hail with the tiled floor and the dark, church-vestry smell, wearing rouge, an antique hairdo adopted only on this occasion, and a floor-length dress of plum and pinkish splotches that might have been made out of old upholstery material, startled no one but the youngest children. Even the shadow behind her of another Miss Marsalles, slightly, older, larger, grimmer, whose existence was always forgotten from one June to the next, was not discomfiting – though it was surely an arresting fact that there should be not one but two faces like that in the world, both long, gravel- coloured, kindly and grotesque, with enormous noses and tiny, red, sweet-tempered and shortsighted eyes. It must finally have come to seem like a piece of luck to them to be so ugly, a protection against life to be marked in so many ways, *impossible*, for they were gay as invulnerable and childish people are; they appeared sexless, wild and gentle creatures, bizarre yet domestic, living in their house in Rosedale outside the complications of time.

In the room where the mothers sat, some on hard sofas, some on folding chairs, to hear the children play “The Gypsy Song,” “The Harmonious Blacksmith” and the “Turkish March,” there was a picture of Mary, Queen of Scots, in velvet, with a silk veil, in front of Holyrood Castle. There were brown misty pictures of historical battles, also the Harvard Classics, iron firedogs and a bronze Pegasus. None of the mothers smoked, nor were ashtrays provided. It was the same room, exactly the same room, in which

szerűsége okán, mint tanár, semmit sem ért. Képtelen volt kifejezni nemtetszését, kivéve a legóvatosabb, azonnal felmentő stílusban és a dicsérete megbocsáthatatlan őszintétlenségről árulkodott. Csak egy-egy kivételesen lelkiismeretes növendék jutott el néha arra a szintre, hogy a darabját megközelítőleg előadásnak nevezzük.

De egészében véve az estek a résztvevőknek tartást adtak, ápoltak egy hagyományt, és a maguk idejeműlt, derűs módján szépek voltak. Az esemény menetrendje változatlan maradt az évek folyamán. Miss Marsalles a keramitlapos, sötét előszobában fogadta a vendégeket, sekrestye-illat lengte körül, sok rúzszt és archaikus frizurát viselt, amelyet kifejezetten az alkalomra csináltatott, és csak a legfiatalabb gyerekeket döbbsentette meg rózsamintás, szilvaszínű, földig érő ruhája, amelyet valószínűleg bútorkárpit anyagból varratott. Még a mögé vetődő árnyék – egy másik, egy nagyobb, vékonyabb, zordabb, öregebb Miss Marsalles, akinek a létezése júniustól júniusig rendre elfelejtődött – sem volt zavarba ejtő, bár a tény, hogy nem egy, hanem két ugyanolyan nyúlánk, kedves és groteszk, hatalmas orrú és rövidlátó, apró, békés vörösszemű arc köszöntötte az érkezőket, sokakat meghökkentett. Idős korukra előnyükre vált, hogy olyan csúnyák: védelmet biztosított számukra az annyi lehetetlen módon megjelölt élet ellen, hisz úgy maradtak vidámak, ahogy általában csak sérülékeny emberek és a gyermekek képesek. Nemiséggel fel nem ruházott, vad és ugyanakkor gyengéd lényeknek tunktek, bizarrnak és szelídnek. Rosedale-i házukban az idők bonyodalmain kívül éltek.

Abban a szobában, ahol az édesanyák ültek – néhányan kemény kanapén, mások összecsucskható székeken –, és ahol a gyerekek a Törökindulót, a Cigánytáncot vagy a Vidám kovácsmestert játszották, egy festmény függött a falon: Mária, skót királynőt ábrázolta bársony ruhában, selyem fátyollal, a

they had performed themselves; a room whose dim impersonal style (the flossy bunch of peonies and spirea dropping petals on the piano was Miss Marsalles' own touch and not entirely happy) was at the same time uncomfortable and reassuring. Here they found themselves year after year – a group of busy, youngish women who had eased their cars impatiently through the archaic streets of Rosedale, who had complained for a week previously about the time lost, the fuss over the children's dresses and, above all, the boredom, but who were drawn together by a rather implausible allegiance – not so much to Miss Marsalles as to the ceremonies of their childhood, to a more exacting pattern of life which had been breaking apart even then but which survived, and unaccountably still survived, in Miss Marsalles' living room. The little girls in dresses with skirts as stiff as bells moved with a natural awareness of ceremony against the dark wails of books, and their mothers' faces wore the dull, not unpleasant look of acquiescence, the touch of absurd and slightly artificial nostalgia which would carry them through any lengthy family ritual. They exchanged smiles which showed no lack of good manners, and yet expressed a familiar, humorous amazement at the sameness of things, even the selections played on the, piano and the fillings of the sandwiches; so they acknowledged the incredible, the wholly unrealistic persistence of Miss Marsalles and her sister and their life.

After the piano-playing came a little ceremony which always caused some embarrassment. Before the children were allowed to escape to the garden – very narrow, a town garden, but still a garden, with hedges, shade, a border of yellow lilies – where a long table was covered with crepe paper in infants' colours of pink and blue, and the woman from the kitchen set out plates of sandwiches, ice cream, prettily tinted and tasteless sherbet, they were compelled to accept, one by one, a year's- end gift, all

Holyrood-kastély előtt. Történelmi csaták barnult, elmosódott nyomatai, a Harvard klasszikusok, egy kovácsoltvas tűzbak és egy réz Pegazus. Senki nem dohányzott, hamutálak sem voltak a szobában. Az anyukák is ugyanitt adtak növendékkoncertet annak idején, saját gyerekkorukban. A helyiség tompán személytelen légköre – a hervatag pünkösdi rózsá- és gyöngyvesszőcsokor, a Miss Marsalles nem kimondottan boldog jelenlétére utaló, hullott szirmok a zongorán – egyszerre volt kényelmetlen és bizalomgerjesztő. Az édesanyák itt találták magukat évről évre: elfoglalt, aktív, fiatalasszonyként türelmetlenül hajtottak végig Rosedale ódivatú utcáin. A rendezvényt megelőző héten a közelgő értelmetlen napról, a gyerekek fellépő ruhája körüli bosszúságokról és mindenek fölött az unalmas estről panaszkodtak egymásnak, de lelkiileg egybeforrasztotta őket egy nem annyira Miss Marsalleshez, mint inkább saját gyerekkoruk szertartásaihoz fűződő, láthatatlan szövetség, egy igényesebb életforma nosztalgiája, amely akkoriban már kezdett széttöredezni, de amely fennmaradt, sőt, megmagyarázhatatlan módon, még ma is életre kelt Miss Marsalles nappalijában. A kislányok karton szilárdágúra keményített harangszoknyában, a szertartásosság természetes öntudatával mozogtak a falakat borító sötét könyvespolcok előterében, míg az anyukák nem sértő, de unott, belenyugvó arckifejezést öltöttek magukra, azt a fajta abszurd és némileg mesterkélt emlékeket idéző arckifejezést, amivel a leghosszabb családi összejövetelet is képesek türelmesen végigülni. Időnként jól nevelten összemosolyogtak. Ez a mosoly az ismerőség jókedvű csodálkozását takarta, arról árulkodott, hogy minden tökéletesen egybevág a korábbi évek gyakorlatával: ugyanazok a darabok csendülnek fel a zongorán, a szendvicsek is ugyanolyanok, és mindez a Marsalles nővérek a hagyományos keretekhez szinte hihetetlenül és teljességgel valószínűtlen módon történő ragaszkodását dicséri.

wrapped and tied with ribbon, from Miss Marsalles. Except among the most naive new pupils this gift caused no excitement of anticipation. It was apt to be a book, and the question was, where did she find such books? They were of the vintage found in old Sunday-school libraries, in attics and the basements of second-hand stores, but they were all stiff-backed, unread, brand new. *Northern Lakes and Rivers*, *Knowing the Birds*, *More Tales by Grey-Owl*, *Little Mission Friends*. She also gave pictures: “Cupid Awake and Cupid Asleep,” “After the Bath,” “The Little Vigilantes”; most of these seemed to feature that tender childish nudity which our sophisticated prudery found most ridiculous and disgusting. Even the boxed games she gave us proved to be insipid and unplayable – full of complicated rules which allowed everybody to win.

The embarrassment the mothers felt at this time was due not so much to the presents themselves as to a strong doubt whether Miss Marsalles could afford them; it did not help to remember that her fees had gone up only once in ten years (and even when that happened, two or three mothers had quit). They always ended up by saying that she must have other resources. It was obvious – otherwise she would not be living in this house. And then her sister taught – or did not teach any more, she was retired but she gave private lessons, it was believed, in French and German. They must have enough, between them. If you are a Miss Marsalles your wants are simple and it does not cost a great deal to live.

But after the house in Rosedale was gone, after it had given way to the bungalow on Bank Street, these conversations about Miss Marsalles’ means did not take place; this aspect of Miss Marsalles’ life had passed into that region of painful subjects which it is crude, and unmannerly to discuss.

“I will die if it rains,” my mother says. “I will die of depression

A darabok előadását egy mindig kellemetlen közjáték követte. Mielőtt a gyerekek kimenekülhettek volna a nagyon keskeny, nyomorúságos, ám mégiscsak sövényvel, árnyékkal és sárga liliummal szegélyezett kertbe, ahol a babarózsaszín és kék krepppapírral fedett, hosszú asztalnál a konyhai alkalmazott tányérokön szendvicseket, fagyaltot, ügyesen színezett, íztelen bólét osztott szét, minden gyerek kénytelen volt Miss Marsalles elé járulni, hogy átvegye a becsomagolt, masnival körülkötött évszázó meglepetés-ajándékot. A legnaivabb új növendékek kivételével, ezek az ajándékok senkiben nem keltették a várakozás izgalmát. Általában mindenki könyvet kapott. A kérdés csak az volt, hol talál Miss Marsalles ilyen könyveket. Régi kiadású, a hittankörök gyűjteményeiben, padlásokon, antikváriumok pincéiben fellelhető példányok voltak ezek, de mind keménykötésű, soha ki nem nyitott, vadonatúj. Tavak, folyók északon, Madárkalauz, Szürke Bagoly újabb történetei, Missziós baráti társaságok. Néha képeket ajándékozott a gyerekeknek: Cupido ébren és az alvó Cupido, Fürdés után, A kis virrasztók. Ezek többsége olyan gyerekes, puha meztelenséget ábrázolt, amelyet kifinomult álszeméremmel nevetségesnek és undorítóknak találtunk. Még a társasjátékok is unalmasnak és használhatatlannak bizonyultak: bonyolult módon olyan szabályokat követtek, amelyek alapján mindenki egyszerre győzhetett.

Az anyukákat nem annyira az ajándékok minősége, mint inkább az aggasztotta, nem túl nagy anyagi megterhelés-e mindez Miss Marsalles számára. Az elmúlt tíz évben csak egyszer emelkedtek az óradíjak, de az emelés miatt két-három szülő nem járatta tovább a gyereket zongorára. A szülők mindig ugyanarra az álláspontra jutottak: Miss Marsalles minden bizonnyal egyéb bevételi forrással is rendelkezik. Ez nyilvánvalónak tűnt; máskülönben nem engedhetné meg magának, hogy ebben a házban lakjon. Egykor a nővére is tanított, a nyugdíjazása után pedig

at this affair if it rains.” But the day of the party it does not rain and in fact the weather is very hot. It is a hot gritty summer day as we drive down into the city and get lost, looking for Bala Street.

When we find it, it gives the impression of being better than we expected, but that is mostly because it has a row of trees, and the other streets we have been driving through, along the railway embankment, have been unshaded and slatternly. The houses here are of the sort that are divided in half, with a sloping wooden partition in the middle of the front porch; they have two wooden steps and a dirt yard. Apparently it is in one of these half-houses that Miss Marsalles lives. They are red brick, with the front door and the window trim and the porches painted cream, grey, oily-green and yellow. They are neat, kept-up. The front part of the house next to the one where Miss Marsalles lives has been turned into a little store; it has a sign that says: GROCERIES AND CONFECTIONERY.

The door is standing open. Miss Marsalles is wedged between the door, the coatrack and the stairs; there is barely room to get past her into the living room, and it would be impossible, the way things are now, for anyone to get from the living room upstairs. Miss Marsalles is wearing her rouge, her hairdo and her brocaded dress, which it is difficult not to tramp on. In this full light she looks like a character in a masquerade, like the feverish, fancied-up courtesan of an unpleasant Puritan imagination. But the fever is only her rouge; her eyes, when we get close enough to see them, are the same as ever, red-rimmed and merry and without apprehension. My mother and I are kissed – I am greeted, as always, as if I were around five years old – and we get past. It seemed to me that Miss Marsalles was looking beyond us as she kissed us; she was looking up the street for someone who has not yet arrived.

magánórákat adott németből és franciából. Ketten együtt biztosan eleget keresnek. Ha Miss Marsalles fejével gondolkozik az ember, nem sok mindenre van szüksége, képes lehet kevés pénzből megélni.

Miután a rosedale-i házból a Bank Street-i egyszerűbb épületbe költöztek, a Miss Marsalles anyagi háttéréről morfondírozó beszélgetések megszűntek. Miss Marsalles életének ez a mozzanata a modortalan és illetlen beszédtema kategóriájába sorolódott.

– Szörnyet halok, ha esni fog – mondja anyám. – Nem élem túl.

Ám az előadás napján nem esik, sőt kifejezetten meleg van. Forró nyári időben hajtunk be a városba, és eltévedünk, mielőtt rátalálnánk a Bala Street-re.

Az utca, a fasornak köszönhetően – a vasúti töltés melletti poros, árnyékot nélkülöző többi utcával ellentétben – jobb benyomást kelt, mint amire számítottunk. A házak többsége errefelé ikerház; két lépcső vezet a füvetlen előkertekből a verandákra. Egy ilyen ikerház egyik felében lakik Miss Marsalles. A többnyire vöröstégla épületeken a famunkák szürkére, olajzöldre, sárgára vagy krémszínűre vannak festve, a bejárati ajtók és az ablakok jó állapotúak, csinosak, látszik, hogy karban vannak tartva. Miss Marsalles szomszédjában az utcafronti házrészből üzlethelyiség lett kialakítva; „ÉLELMISZEREK, ÉDESSÉGEK”, hirdeti egy felirat.

Az ajtó tárva-nyitva. Miss Marsalles a bejárat, a fogas és a lépcsőfeljáró háromszögébe préselődik, a vendég alig fér el mellette, és az elhelyezkedés lehetetlenné teszi, hogy valaki a nappali helyett az emelet felé induljon. Miss Marsalles a szokásos rúzst, frizurát és brokát ruhát viseli, az utóbbi szegélyére nehéz nem rátaposni. A homályban álarcosbálból előlépett figurának hat; olyan, mint egy rosszemlékű, kifestett, tobzódó kurtizán a

The house has a living room and a dining room, with the oak doors pushed back between' them. They are small rooms. Mary Queen of Scots hangs tremendous on the wall. There is no fireplace so the iron fire dogs are not there, but the piano is, and even a bouquet of peonies and spirea from goodness knows what garden. Since it is so small the living room looks crowded, but there are 'not a dozen people in it, including children. My mother speaks to people and smiles and sits down. She says to me, Marg French is not here yet, could she have got lost too?

The woman sitting beside us is not familiar. She is middle-aged and wears a dress of shot taffeta with rhinestone clips; it smells of the cleaners. She introduces herself as Mrs. Clegg, Miss Marsalles' neighbour in the other half of the house. Miss Marsalles has asked her if she would like to hear the children play, and she thought it would be a treat; she is fond of music in any form.

My mother, very pleasant but looking a little uncomfortable, asks about Miss Marsalles' sister; is she upstairs?

"Oh, yes, she's upstairs. She's not herself though, poor thing."

That is too bad, my mother says.

"Yes it's a shame. I give her something to put her to sleep for the afternoon. She lost her powers of speech, you know. Her powers of control generally, she lost." My mother is warned by a certain luxurious lowering of the voice that more lengthy and intimate details may follow and she says quickly again that it is too bad.

"I come in and look after her when the other one goes out on her lessons."

"That's very kind of you. I'm sure she appreciates it."

"Oh well I feel kind of sorry for a couple of old ladies like them. They're a couple of babies, the pair."

My mother murmurs something in reply but she is not looking at Mrs. Clegg, at her brick-red healthy face or the – to me –

tizenhetedik századból. De a tobzódást csupán a rúzs sejteti, a szemei, amikor elég közel érünk, látjuk, ugyanolyanok, mint mindig: karikásak, vörösek és vidámak, de nem tükröznek értelmet. Megcsókol minket; engem úgy kezel – ahogy általában –, mintha még mindig ötéves lennék, de túljutunk az előtérén. Miközben megcsókol bennünket, úgy tűnik, a hátunk mögött az utcát kémleli, mintha várna valakit, aki még nem érkezett meg.

A lakásban a nappali és az étkező közötti tölgyajtó nyitva áll. Mindkét szoba kicsi. Mária, skót királynő arcképe uralja a falfelületet. Nincs kandalló, így az öntöttvas tűzbak sincs itt, de a jóisten tudja milyen kertből származó pünkösdi rózsá- és gyöngyvesszőcsokor nem hiányzik a zongora mellől. A mérete miatt a nappali zsúfoltnak tetszik, pedig a gyerekekkel együtt alig vagyunk tízen. Anyám üdvözlő néhányakat, mosolyog és helyet foglal. Felém fordulva közli, hogy Marg French még nincs itt. Vajon ő is eltévedt?

A mellettünk ülő asszonyt nem ismerjük. Középkorú hölgy, strasszkapcsos, taft ruhát visel, árad felőle a tisztítószer illata. Mrs. Clegg, mutatkozik be, Miss Marsalles ikerszomszédja. Miss Marsalles felajánlotta, hogy meghallgathatja a gyerekek vizsgakoncertjét, és megtiszteltetésnek érzi, hogy itt lehet. A zene minden formáját imádja.

Anyám illedelmesen, de kissé feszélyezve megkérdezi, mi újság Miss Marsalles nővérével.

– Odafönt tartózkodik. Nem ismerni rá. Ó, szegénykém.

Sajnáljuk, mondja anyám.

– Igen. Igazán nagy kár, hogy nem lehet velünk. Adtam neki valamit, hogy átaludja a délutánt. Tudják, nem tud már beszélni. Minden fölött elvesztette az uralmát, úgy általában.

A beszélgetés hangjának bizonyos halk tónusából anyám érzékeli, hogy hosszabb és intimebb részletek következnek, ezért gyorsan újra megjegyzi, hogy nagyon sajnáljuk.

amazing gaps in her teeth. She is staring past her into the dining room with fairly well-controlled dismay.

What she sees there is the table spread, all ready for the party feast; nothing is lacking. The plates of sandwiches are set out, as they must have been for several hours now; you can see how the ones on top are beginning to curl very slightly at the edges. Flies buzz over the table, settle on the sandwiches and crawl comfortably across the plates of little iced cakes brought from the bakery. The cut-glass bowl, sitting as usual in the centre of the table, is full of purple punch, without ice apparently and going fiat.

“I tried to tell her not to put it all out ahead of time,” Mrs. Clegg whispers, smiling delightedly, as if she were talking about the whims and errors of some headstrong child. “You know she was up at five o’clock this morning making sandwiches. I don’t know what things are going to taste like. Afraid she wouldn’t be ready I guess. Afraid she’d forget something. They hate to forget.”

“Food shouldn’t be left out in the hot weather,” my mother says.

“Oh, well I guess it won’t poison us for once. I was only thinking what a shame to have the sandwiches dry up. And when she put the ginger-ale in the punch at noon I had to laugh. But what a waste.”

My mother shifts and rearranges her voile skirt, as if she has suddenly become aware of the impropriety, the hideousness even, of discussing a hostess’s arrangements in this way in her own living room. “Marg French isn’t here,” she says to me in a hardening voice. “She did say she was coming.”

“I am the oldest girl here,” I say with disgust.

“Shh. That means you can play last. Well. It won’t be a very long programme this year, will it?”

– Én vigyázok rá, amíg a másik tanít.

– Nagyon kedves Öntől. Bizonyára nagyra becsülik a fáradozását.

– Sajnálom az ilyen öreg hölgyeket. Olyanok mindketten akár egy kisgyerek.

Anyám mormol még valamit, de nem néz Mrs. Clegg felé, a téglavörös, egészséges arc vagy a nő számomra megdöbbenően hiányos fogsora felé. Mindenkin túl, az étkező irányába réved, nagyfokú önuralommal leplezi elképedését.

Az étkezőben megterített asztalt lát, minden készen áll a zsúrra, semmi sem hiányzik. A szendvicsestálak sorba rendezve, valószínűleg hosszú órák óta. A felső szendvicsek szélei enyhén kunkorodnak, legyek szálldosnak össze-vissza, és kényelmesen mászkálnak a pékségtől hozott habossüteményen. Az asztal közepén kristálykancsóban lila szörp jég nélkül, nyilvánvalóan minden buborék elszállt már belőle.

– Mondtam neki, hogy ne rámoljon ki mindent olyan korán – suttogja Mrs. Clegg kuncogva, mintha egy makacs gyerek apró csínytevéseiről adna számot. – Tudja, reggel öt óta szendvicseket gyárt. Hát milyen ízük lesz ezeknek délutánra. Gondolom, félt, hogy nem készül el időre. Félt, hogy valamit elfelejt. Mindig idegesek, ha valamit elfelejtenek.

– Romlandó ételt nem szabad elöl hagyni ilyen melegben – mondja anyám.

– Hát... talán nem kapunk ételmérgezést. Csak azon gondolkodom, micsoda kár azokért a bezáradt szendvicsekért. Amikor délben a szörphöz keverte a Ginger Ale-t, nevetnem kellett. Micsoda pazarlás!

Anyám megigazítja a szoknyája szövetét, mintha hirtelen rájött volna, mennyire illetlen, sőt gorombaság a vendéglátó iparkodását ilyen hangnemben kibeszélni a saját nappalijában.

– Marg French még mindig nincs itt – fordul felém kono-

Mrs. Clegg leans across us, letting loose a cloud of warm un-fresh odour from between her breasts. “I’m going to see if she’s got the fridge turned up high enough for the ice cream. She’d feel awful if it was all to melt.”

My mother goes across the room and speaks to a woman she knows and I can tell that she is saying, Marg French *said* she was *coming*. The women’s faces in the room, made up some time before, have begun to show the effects of heat and a fairly general uneasiness. They ask each other when it will begin. Surely very soon now; nobody has arrived for at least a quarter of an hour. How mean of people not to come, they say. Yet in this heat, and the heat is particularly dreadful down here, it must be the worst place in the city – well you can almost see their point. I look around and calculate that there is no one in the room within a year of my age.

The little children begin to play. Miss Marsalles and Mrs. Clegg applaud with enthusiasm; the mothers clap two or three times each, with relief My mother seems unable, although she makes a great effort, to take her eyes off the timing-room table and the complacent journeys of the marauding flies. Finally she achieves a dreamy, distant look, with her eyes focused somewhere above the punch-bowl, which makes it possible for her to keep her head turned in that direction and yet does not in any positive sense give her away. Miss Marsalles as well has trouble keeping her eyes on the performers; she keeps looking towards the door. Does she expect that even now some of the unexplained absentees may turn up? There are far more than half a dozen presents in the inevitable box beside the piano, wrapped in white paper and tied with silver ribbon – not real ribbon, but the cheap kind that splits and shreds.

It is while I am at the piano, playing the minuet from *Berenice*, that the final arrival, unlooked-for by anybody but Miss Marsalles,

kul. – Pedig azt mondta, mindenképp eljön.

– Én vagyok itt a legidősebb lány – mondom utálkozva.

– Pszt. Legalább te játszol utoljára. Hát nem lesz ez hosszú est az idén.

Ahogy Mrs. Clegg közelebb hajol hozzánk, a mellei közül meleg, állott testszagot áraszt. – Megnézem, feltekerte-e a hűtőt. A fagyalt miatt. Szörnyű kellemetlenül érezné magát, ha megolvadna.

Anyám a szoba másik felében egy ismerős asszonnyal beszélget, és a viselkedéséből látom, azt hajtogatja, hogy Marg French biztosra ígérte magát. Az asszonyok kisminkelt arca kezd hőségéről és általános kényelmetlenségről árulkodni. Egymástól tudakolják, mikor kezdődik a program. Bármelyik percben, nyilván; negyedórája senki sem érkezett. Milyen bántó, hogy sokan nem jöttek el! Bár ez a hőség – és itt a legrosszabb, sehol a városban nincs ilyen meleg – nos, néhányak távolmaradása talán érthető. Körülnézve a szobában úgy számolom, minden lány legalább egy évvel fiatalabb nálam.

A kicsik kezdik a műsort. Miss Marsalles és Mrs. Clegg szenvedélyesen tapsol, az anyukák megkönnyebbüléssel, de csak kétszer-háromszor ütik össze a tenyerüket. Anyám egyszerűen képtelen, bármennyire szeretné, levenni a szemét az étkezőasztalról és a békésen portyázó legyekről. Végül sikerül álmodozó, réveteg tekintetet erőltetnie magára, valahol a szörp fölött talál egy pontot, amit néz, ezáltal továbbra is az étkezőt vizsgálja, de semmi nem árulja el aggodalmát. Miss Marsalles is nehezen követi az előadást, időnként a bejárat felé pillant. Még mindig arra számít, hogy érkezhet valaki? Ilyen késéssel, indokolatlanul? Legalább tizenöt-húsz, fehér papírba csomagolt ajándék nyugszik a zongora mellett, ezüst masnival átkötve. Nem rendes masnival, csak az olcsó, rojtolódó fajtával.

Mialatt a Menüettet játszom a Berenice-ből, az utolsó ven-

takes place. It must seem at first that there has been some mistake. Out of the corner of my eye I see a whole procession of children, eight or ten in all, with a red-haired woman in something like a uniform, mounting the front step. They look like a group of children from a private school on an excursion of some kind (there is that drabness and sameness about their clothes) but their progress is too scrambling and disorderly for that. Or this is the impression I have; I cannot really look. Is it the wrong house, are they really on their way to the doctor for shots, or to Vacation Bible Classes? No, Miss Marsalles has got up with a happy whisper of apology; she has gone to meet them. Behind my back there is a sound of people squeezing together, of folding chairs being opened, there is an inappropriate, curiously unplaceable giggle.

And above or behind all this cautious flurry of arrival there is a peculiarly concentrated silence. Something has happened, something unforeseen, perhaps something disastrous; you can feel such things behind your back. I go on playing. I fill the first harsh silence with my own particularly dogged and lumpy interpretation of Handel. When I get up off the piano bench I almost fall over some of the new children who are sitting on the floor.

One of them, a boy nine or ten years old, is going to follow me. Miss Marsalles takes his hand and smiles at him and there is no twitch of his hand, no embarrassed movement of her head to disown this smile. How peculiar; and a boy, too. He turns his head towards her as he sits down; she speaks to him encouragingly. But my attention has been caught by his profile as he looks up at her – the heavy, unfinished features, the abnormally small and slanting eyes. I look at the children seated on the floor and I see the same profile repeated two or three times; I see another boy with a very large head and fair shaved hair, fine as a baby's; there are other children whose features are regular and unexceptional, marked only by an infantile openness and calm. The boys

dégek is megérkeznek, akikre egyedül Miss Marsalles számított. Először úgy tűnik, valami tévedés történt. A szemem sarkából látom, hogy egy vöröshajú asszony nyolc-tíz gyereket vezet; egyenruhát viselnek. Szürkeségük, egyformaságuk miatt úgy néznek ki, mintha egy magániskola tanulói lennének, de a mozgásuk túl botladozó, túl szétszórt. Legalábbis ez a benyomásom támad, de nem tudok igazán feléjük fordulni. Rossz címre érkeztek. Talán oltásra indultak az orvoshoz vagy a szünidei hittanórára. De nem, Miss Marsalles vidám bocsánatkérések közepette feláll és fogadja őket. A hátam mögött hallom, hogy a közönség összébbhúzódik, összecsucskható székeket nyitogatnak, és valami nem ide illő, furcsa módon bizarr kuncogást is hallok.

Az óvatosan viharos megérkezés mögött egyfajta fegyelmezett csend uralkodik. Történt valami, valami előre nem látható, esetleg valami drámai: az ember az ilyesmit ösztönösen érzi a levegőben. De tovább játszom. Az árulkodó csöndet a magam döcögő, darabos Händel-interpretációjával igyekszem betölteni. Ahogy fellálok a zongora mellől, szinte orra bukok az újonnan érkezett, földön ülő gyerekekben.

Egyikük, egy kilenc-tíz év körüli fiú fog utánam játszani. Miss Marsalles megfogja a kezét, rámosolyog, a fiú nem húzza vissza a kezét, és Miss Marsalles arckifejezésében sem tükröződik kényelmetlenség. Sajátos fordulat; és még hozzá fiú. Ahogy a zongorához ül, Miss Marsalles felé fordul, és a tanárnő kedves szavakkal bátorítja. De figyelmemet a fiú arcformája köti le profilból: nehézkes, befejezetlennek tűnő vonások, abnormálisan apró, ferde szemek. Körbenézek, és a padlón ülő gyerekek vonásaiban ugyanezt a profilt fedezem fel. Egy másik fiúnak túl nagy feje van, rövidre nyírt szőke haja olyan, mint egy csecsemőé. Megint mások teljesen szokványos vonásokkal rendelkeznek, de valami infantilis nyíltság és nyugalom sugárzik belőlük. A fiúkon fehér ing és szürke rövidnadrág, a lányokon szürkészöld gyapjú

are dressed in white shirts and short grey pants and the girls wear dresses of grey-green cotton with red buttons and sashes.

“Sometimes that kind is quite musical,” says Mrs. Clegg.

“Who are they?” my mother whispers, surely not aware of how upset she sounds.

“They’re from that class she has out at the Greenhill School. They’re nice little things and some of them quite musical but of course they’re not all there.”

My mother nods distractedly; she looks around the room and meets the trapped, alerted eyes of the other women, but no decision is reached. There is nothing to be done. These children are going to play. Their playing is no worse – not much worse – than ours, but they seem to go so slowly, and then there is nowhere to look. For it is a matter of politeness surely not to look closely at such children, and yet where else can you look during a piano performance but at the performer? There is an atmosphere in the room of some freakish inescapable dream. My mother and the others are almost audible saying to themselves: *No, I know it is not right to be repelled by such children and I am not repelled, but nobody told me I was going to come here to listen to a procession of little – little idiots for that’s what they are* – WHAT KIND OF A PARTY IS THIS? Their applause however has increased, becoming brisk, let-us-at-least-get-this-over-with. But the programme shows no signs of being over.

Miss Marsalles says each child’s name as if it were a cause for celebration. Now she says, “Dolores Boyle!” A girl as big as I am, a long-legged, rather thin and plaintive-looking girl with blonde, almost white, hair uncoils herself and gets up off the floor. She sits down on the bench and after shifting around a bit and pushing her long hair back behind her ears she begins to play.

We are accustomed to notice performances, at Miss Marsalles’ parties, but it cannot be said that anyone has ever expected mu-

ruha selyemövvvel és vörös gombokkal.

– Néha az ilyenek prima zenei érzékkel vannak megáldva – mondja Mrs. Clegg.

– Kik ezek? – suttozja anyám. Nyilvánvalóan nem érzékeli, mennyire kétségbeesettnek hangzik.

– A Greenhill School tanulóí, ahol Miss Marsalles órákat ad. Aranyos csöppségek, és némelyikük egészen muzikális. De persze egyikük sem százás.

Anyám zavartan bólint. Körülnéz a szobában, szeme a többi asszony riadt, becsapottságot tükrözö tekintetével találkozik, de senki nem tudja, miképpen reagáljon. Nincs mit tenni. Ezek a gyerekek is zongorázni fognak. A játékuk nem rosszabb – nem sokkal rosszabb –, mint a miénk, de valahogy lassan csinálnak mindent, és nincs hova nézni. Hisz nyilvánvaló udvariatlanság tüzetesen szemlélni az ilyen gyereket, ám mi mást lehet nézni a zongorajáték során, mint az előadót. A szobán valami bizarr, elkerülhetetlen álm hangulata uralkodik. Anyám és a többiek szinte hallhatóan arra gondolnak: nem szabad visszataszítónak látni az efféle gyerekeket, ezért nem fogom őket visszataszítónak látni, de senki nem szólt, hogy ilyen kis..., kis idiotákat kell majd hallgatnom. Hisz azok, nem? Miféle est akar ez lenni? A felharsanó taps mindazonáltal élénk: gyerünk, végezzünk hamar. Azonban semmilyen jel nem mutat arra, hogy a program a vége felé közeledne.

Miss Marsalles úgy konferálja fel a gyerekek nevét, mintha híres előadók lennének.

– És most Dolores Boyle következik! – mondja.

Egy hosszú lábú, vékony, nagyjából velem egyidős, szomorú tekintetű, szöke, majdnem fehér hajú lány kászálódik fel a földről. Leül a zongorához, elhelyezkedik, hosszú haját a füle mögé gyűri, és játszani kezd.

Hozzá vagyunk szokva, hogy időről időre felfigyeljünk vala-

sic. Yet this time the music establishes itself so effortlessly, with so little demand for attention, that we are hardly even surprised. What she plays is not familiar. It is something fragile, courtly and gay, that carries with it the freedom of a great unemotional happiness. And all that this girl does – but this is something you would not think could ever be done – is to play it so that this can be felt, all this can be felt, even in Miss Marsalles' living-room on Bala Street on a preposterous afternoon. The children are all quiet, the ones from Greenhill School and the rest. The mothers sit, caught with a look of protest on their faces, a more profound anxiety than before, as if reminded of something that they had forgotten they had forgotten; the white-haired girl sits ungracefully at the piano with her head hanging down, and the music is carried through the open door and the windows to the cindery summer street.

Miss Marsalles sits beside the piano and smiles at everybody in her usual way. Her smile is not triumphant, or modest. She does not look like a magician who is watching people's faces to see the effect of a rather original revelation; nothing like that. You would think, now that at the very end of her life she has found someone whom she can teach – whom she must teach – to play the piano, she would light up with the importance of this discovery. But it seems that the girl's playing like this is something she always expected, and she finds it natural and satisfying; people who believe in miracles do not make much fuss when they actually encounter one. Nor does it seem that she regards this girl with any more wonder than the other children from Greenhill School, who love her, or the rest of us, who do not. To her no gift is unexpected, no celebration will come as a surprise.

The girl is finished. The music is in the room and then it is gone and naturally enough no one knows what to say. For the moment she is finished it is plain that she is just the same as

kire Miss Marsalles növendékei közül mint előadó, de nem mondhatnám, hogy bárki valódi zenei élményre számítana. Ezúttal azonban a muzsika olyan könnyedén, annyira észrevétlenül csendül fel, hogy nincs is időnk meglepődni. A darab nem ismerős. Valami törekeny, udvarias és vidám műből való; mérhetetlen, érzélgésmentes boldogság szabadságát hordozza. És ez a kislány valamiképpen eléri – jóllehet a hallgatóság úgy találja, a darab technikailag kivitelezhetetlen –, hogy a közönség ráérezzen a szabadság ízére, mindezt itt, Miss Marsalles Bala Street-i nappalijában, egy abszurd délutánon. Minden gyerek elcsöndesedik, a Greenhill Schoolból érkezettek éppúgy, mint a többiek. A szülők tekintetében megrekedt a felháborodás kifejezése, az arcokon mélységes megrökönyödés ül, mint akit emlékeztetnek valamire, amit elfelejtett. A fehér hajú lány az orrát lógatva, félszegen ül a zongoránál, és a zene kiárad a nyitott ajtón, ablakokon át a salakos nyári utcára.

Miss Marsalles a zongora mellett áll, és szokásához híven mindenkire mosolyog. A mosolya se nem diadalittas, se nem szerény. Nem néz úgy, mint a bűvész, aki a közönség szemében csodás mutatványának hatását keresi, egyáltalán nem. Úgy vélhetnénk, most, hogy élete alkonyán találkozott végre valakivel, akit érdemes zongorára tanítani – akit tanítania kell –, a felfedezés jelentőségétől felvillanyozódik. De úgy tűnik, a lány játéka csupán annyit jelent számára, amire mindig is számított, amit ezért kielégítőnek és természetesnek talál: azok az emberek, akik hisznek a csodákban, nem ájulnak el, amikor rábukkannak. Sőt, Miss Marsalles ezt a lányt ugyanúgy kezeli, mint a többieket a Greenhill Schoolból, akik imádják őt vagy akár bennünket, akik nem. Számára a tehetség nem meglepetés, s az ünneplésre számítani lehet.

A darab véget ért. A muzsika itt lebeg még a szobában, aztán elillan, és természetesen senki nem tud mit mondani. Mert

before, a girl from Greenhill School. Yet the music was not imaginary. The facts are not to be reconciled. And so after a few minutes the performance begins to seem, in spite of its innocence, like a trick – a very successful and diverting one, of course, but perhaps – how can it be said? – perhaps not altogether in good taste. For the girl's ability, which is undeniable but after all useless, out-of-place, is not really something that anybody wants to talk about. To Miss Marsalles such a thing is acceptable, but to other people, people who live in the world, it is not. Never mind, they must say something and so they speak gratefully of the music itself, saying how lovely, what a beautiful piece, what is it called?

“The Dance of the Happy Shades,” says Miss Marsalles. *Danse des ombres heureuses*, she says, which leaves nobody any the wiser.

But then driving home, driving out of the hot red-brick streets and out of the city and leaving Miss Marsalles and her no longer possible parties behind, quite certainly forever, why is it that we are unable to say – as we must have expected to say – Poor Miss Marsalles? It is the Dance of the Happy Shades that prevents us, it is that one communiqué from the other country where she lives. ♦



abban a pillanatban, hogy végzett, nyilvánvalóvá vált, hogy az előadó ugyanaz, mint azelőtt: egy lány a Greenhill Schoolból. Ám a zene mégsem a képzelet játéka volt csupán, az egymásnak ellentmondó tényeket nem lehet összeegyeztetni. Néhány perc múlva, minden ártatlanság ellenére, az előadás cselnek érződik, hogyne, sikeres, figyelemelterelő cselnek, de talán – miképpen lehet ezt megragadni – nem egészen jó ízlésű cselnek. Mert senki nem beszél a lány megkérdőjelezhetetlen, de végeredményben nem helyén való, haszontalan képességéről. Miss Marsalles számára az ilyesmi elfogadható, míg mások számára, akik a világban élnek, nem az. Nem érdekes. Valamit mondani kell, ezért a darabról beszélgetnek, méltatva, milyen csodás, gyönyörű mű volt. Mi a címe?

– Boldog lelkek tánca – mondja Miss Marsalles. – *Danse des ombres heureuses* – teszi hozzá, amitől senki sem lesz okosabb.

Aztán útban hazafelé, a forró, vöröstéglás házakat, Miss Marsallest és soha újra meg nem rendezhető estjét magunk mögött hagyva, miért nem tudjuk azt mondani, amit máskor ilyenkor mindig: szegény Miss Marsalles? A Boldog lelkek tánca nem engedi, az egyetlen üzenet abból a másik világból, ahol ő él.

♦