

QUARTERLY PRESS REVIEW

FOR ADVANCED EFL LEARNERS

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Fiction 2
The Canal by *Jennifer Johnson*

Archive 5
A Newsroom of One's Own by *Virginia Woolf*

Feature 10
The Scottish Highlands by *Kevan Manwaring*

Personal essay 19
A Flaneur from New York by *Leonard Quart*

Side by Side 23
The Collectors (III) fordította *Tárnok Attila*
by *Rohinton Mistry*

QUARTERLY PRESS REVIEW

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The Canal

by *Jennifer Johnson*

We used to live near the canal; not on it, I wouldn't have cared for that, the water looked so sinister and I have such a horror of the damp. I knew those houses that backed right on to the water – you could see them from the bridge on Gloucester Avenue – their gardens looking dank, too deeply green. There must have been rats.

Not that our house was free of damp – in the basement kitchen there were patches in the corners and under the stairs where the fuse boxes were. I could always smell it, even in summer, but Paul didn't believe me, as he couldn't. I didn't mind walking along the old towpath though, it was pleasant, running as it did along the north end of the park and past the Zoo to Camden Lock or west to St John's Wood and beyond. On a Sunday we always made a point of walking together, and often that is the way we went. When we still had the dog, Paul used to run with him beside the canal, on weekday mornings before he left for work. Teddy could safely be let off the lead there, away from

the road.

One Sunday, around the middle of May, we decided to walk all the way to Little Venice. As we joined the path, we saw a man standing by the water's edge with a fishing rod in his hand. We don't usually talk to strangers, not in town anyway. Where I grew up in Sussex you would say hello to anyone you met out walking, everyone did, but in London people might think you peculiar so it is safer to ignore them. Paul knew that as well as me; besides, he was always warning me about the dangers we were surrounded by living in London. When my bag was snatched in Camden he couldn't believe I'd been so careless as to leave it under the table at that café. But that morning we weren't really talking much, to each other. There had been an argument at breakfast about something and neither of us wanted to be the first to forget it.

Until a year before, we'd lived in another house, nearer the park. We had to sell it and buy somewhere smaller; though I knew this had to be done I was sad about it and I thought that since we had to move we could go away to another part of London. Paul couldn't understand that. We have friends here, he said; we're used to this area, why go to the trouble of starting all over again? But that is exactly what I wanted to do, start again, be another sort of London person. I couldn't convince him and we ended up just two streets away. Other people moved in to our old house, a family;

I couldn't bear to go past it, so if I had to go that way I had devised a couple of detours. Paul noticed one day as I was driving us up to Hampstead and we'd had a row then. He said, 'Are you seriously intending to avoid driving past our old house for the foreseeable future? How is that going to work?' He's such a rational person, I did love that in him, because I'm not, but he suffers from a sort of emotional blindness, in my opinion. Perhaps it's because he teaches philosophy, I don't know, but since he was never going to understand after a while I pretended that I had got over it and if we did have to go past the house I would look the other way and hold my breath. He hadn't noticed.

That Sunday – as we sat reading the papers, finishing breakfast – he said, why don't we walk past number 22 and see what the new people have done to it? I should have just agreed, and pretended as usual, but there was a story in the paper, about a dog, which reminded me of another thing I was pretending about: that I didn't blame him for Teddy's death. So I said I would rather not, that I still did not want to go near our old house. He was shocked of course, he'd had no idea I still felt that way, but he was angry too. He asked me why I was punishing him for something that couldn't be helped, and when I answered that if I were, it was no less than he was doing to me, it brought tears to his eyes, and I was sorry, though I would not say so. We had come too close, we both knew it. We had to

recover. After a few minutes, just sitting there at that pine table too big for the kitchen, I said let's go out. So we did, and we didn't go past the house, we walked the other way to the canal; that should have felt like a victory, but it didn't. We walked in a silence that neither of us wanted to break; perhaps that is why Paul decided to speak to the man with the fishing rod, so that he didn't have to speak to me.

'Caught anything?'

The man was wearing an anorak, though the day was warm. He had dark, greasy-looking hair and the kind of face my mother used to call 'ferrety'.

'No, there's not much left.' It was one of those flat London voices.

'Why's that then?'

'Eastern Europeans,' said the man. 'They come down here and take all the fish.'

This was interesting and it promised a distraction from the unpleasantness in our kitchen. I had only recently read somewhere about immigrants from places like Bulgaria and Romania getting into trouble for catching fish in rivers and lakes, without licences of course, because in their countries they could fish where they liked. But the canal seemed an unlikely place. I peered into the dirty-looking green water; it was impenetrable. I hadn't thought there could be living things down there, just old shopping trolleys and bottles. An empty crisp packet floated by. I asked,

‘What sort of fish are in here then?’

‘All sorts, carp, bream, perch, even pike. I caught an eel once,’ he answered, not looking at me directly. His eyes seemed to flicker somewhere between the two of us, as if he couldn’t decide which was worth talking to.

It sounded so unlikely to me. If it had been any other day I think we would have carried on walking, Paul and I would have been more in tune with each other; but perhaps we had exhausted ourselves, in the kitchen, so that it was easier just to stand there. The fisherman, having an audience, then told us a story:

‘They get here around half-two in the morning, night fishing, that’s when you get the best fish – they know that. There’s always nine of them – I think it’s a religious thing. They rig up a line over the canal; drop hooks off it, all across, into the water. Then they come back, around five, take off all the fish. One time I was down here, when they come back and I say to them, don’t take it all, and put some back. But their leader just shouts at me,’ and here he dropped his voice, putting on a foreign sounding accent, ‘he goes “What you want? What you want?” Like that. And they take all the fish.’

Behind us flowed the usual Sunday human traffic: the tourists en route for Camden market, the leisurely weekend cyclists and dog walkers. We should I thought rejoin them, there was something disturbing here, in this story of the canal’s night visitors. I didn’t like it. I

touched Paul’s sleeve but he drew away, we were still not speaking; he wouldn’t acknowledge me and I suppose he wanted to know more. ‘Aren’t there controls here, on who fishes and when?’

‘Oh yes, we do. We control it. We came down and sorted them out’. He paused then went on, ‘I didn’t actually do it myself, though. I know the man who did,’ and he stopped again. He didn’t have to wait long for Paul to ask, ‘Did what?’

‘Killed them.’

The sun sparkled on the canal; it was one of those beautiful days of early summer, when all the leaves are freshly green, before dusty London dulls them. From the zoo came the whooping call of some unknown creature, far from its jungle home, as alien and bizarre as this. We stood there as if we had nowhere to go. So we heard him tell us how he and his friend lay in wait, for these nine men; how one by one his friend stabbed them and threw the bodies in the canal.

As he spoke a canal boat passed. A child waved and I automatically waved back. Two people cycled by speaking French. I didn’t want to hear any more of this, we had already heard too much, but Paul asked, ‘So what happened to the bodies?’

‘They just sank here. Would’ve gone down to the Lock, down Camden. When the lock gates open they’d’ve been off, along the canal to Limehouse. Then into the river, down to the sea – gone.’

He stopped, he'd come to the end of his story, and at last, though too late, Paul walked on and I followed. After a few minutes Paul said, 'Obviously mad'.

'But do you think any of that was true?' I asked. Paul sounded more confident, he had decided.

'Don't be silly, of course not. How could it be? It was a ludicrous story from start to finish. He was either nuts or having a laugh. Forget about it.'

We walked on, in silence again, past the zoo, past the great empty villas on the Outer Circle to Little Venice. We left the towpath then, climbing up the stairway to the road and made our way back home. Neither of us said so, but we didn't want to pass the fisherman again.

It was on those walks of ours that we used to talk, as much as we ever did. Away from the house we usually managed to recapture some of the easy companionship we had known when we were first together. That morning's quarrel was not the first, and though we never planned it, the way we usually made up was to get out of the house, find neutral ground. By the time we got home again whatever we had argued about would have been displaced by general conversation about some aspect of our material lives; those dangerous topics not altogether forgotten but tidied away to allow us to carry on. Half an hour on a film we'd seen or our holiday plans could be equally effective. It was all a pretence, of course, but I think

deception may be an essential ingredient for a reasonably happy marriage. In a way I deceived him right from the start. We met when we were both studying philosophy at university, though for me it was just a subsidiary subject and I didn't get on with it at all. I was much more interested in the personal lives of all those people than in the details of their theories – Queen Christina of Sweden summoning Descartes to her freezing palace where he died of cold meant more to me than his Discourse on Method. I know that I misled Paul, for he thought I was much the same sort of person as he was, outgoing and positive. He told me that his last girlfriend had wanted to talk about her problems all the time, anxieties he had found so trivial that finally he had broken up with her. I wanted him to like me so I pretended I didn't have any. I kept it up for years; I think I could have kept it up for longer – cheerfulness can be a habit, not such a bad one – but the misery of the dog and the house, and other things were all too much and the old, sad, me was re-emerging; the one Paul didn't know he had married.

The day we met the fisherman we did not recover by the time we got home; Paul refused to talk to me about it and I didn't want to talk about anything else, every detail of that horrible conversation seemed to haunt me, I couldn't forget it. As weeks went by I carried it around with me like a curse and I don't think I deserved that. I wouldn't walk by the canal again; the

water made me think of death. Paul tried to persuade me, a few times, and then he gave up. Sunday mornings he went out by himself, I didn't ask where he went.

We lost the dog when we moved. Paul had taken Teddy out while I was unpacking boxes of books, he had been getting in the way; he was only young. After they had been gone for about an hour I decided to go out to meet them, and as I stepped out of the house I saw them on the other side of the road. Just as I realised that Teddy was not on the lead, he spotted me and, with that uncomplicated dog joy of his, he bounded towards me and under the wheels of a taxi. We both loved that dog; it was a terrible loss. Why Paul had let him loose, with still one road to cross, he couldn't explain; all he would say was that if only I had not come outside at that moment it wouldn't have happened. He knew it was his fault, but he had to blame me too because he tried so hard not to blame me for my much greater failure. We had sold the house because it was too big for just two people. Paul pretended not to mind that we had no children – that I could not, ever – but he had always had a dream of fatherhood that I denied him. I can see that it was unforgiveable.

We grieved separately, resenting each other for weeks until we both realised that we had to suppress all that bad feeling if we were to have any chance of

carrying on together. I suppose that was the great achievement in our marriage, the art of concealment that we perfected, or thought we had. Who knows how much longer it would have lasted? It was that hard-earned equilibrium that our friend on the canal disrupted; if we had not met him we might have recovered from the quarrel. In the event, it was merely interrupted.

We lasted the rest of the summer, surviving the two weeks in Cornwall and the dutiful family visits. Paul kept busy working on a series of lectures for the History of Philosophy course and I read novels. We were polite to each other but guarded. The end, when it came, was banal. He told me he had been spending a lot of time with a junior lecturer in his department; at least he had the decency not to tell me then that she was pregnant. He did say he was sorry, but so was I.

I always thought it funny how people said that they 'drifted apart', as if they had been somehow afloat, like dinghies tethered together, or swans perhaps, swimming in tandem. I think of Paul and me then as stepping on to different platforms, taking trains in opposite directions; more deliberate than drifting. On the last day we divided up the books, the rest we were leaving till later, and then sat together in the garden on the old cane chairs that had belonged to his mother. And sitting there, in an ease we had rarely known in those ten years, I thought of what could be forgiven. ♦

A Newsroom of One's Own

by Virginia Woolf

From The Charleston Bulletin Supplements, dictated by Virginia Woolf to her nephew Quentin Bell when he was a child. Between 1923 and 1927, Bell and his brother Julian hand-produced a "newspaper" for and about their relatives and visitors to their home in East Sussex, England. Woolf's contributions, referred to within the family as "supplements," were published in 2013 for the first time by the British Library.

1927 JANUARY

In the beginning of January the Bell family decided that the climatic conditions of London were unfavourable to their art. Mrs. Bell, by advertising in Exchange & Mart, discovered a land where there is no conversation, no society, no literature; where the inhabitants are dumb; where the sun always shines from the North; the old clear light untainted by intellect undisturbed by passion which is necessary for the composition of still lives, perpetually prevails. So she packed 87 boxes of canvas oil paint, let her house to

half a dozen coloured gentry of dubious morality set off one fine winter's day, for Cassis.

She was somewhat dismayed to pass three apparently human beings in the road, but determined not to open her eyes on any provocation whatsoever. She procured a sufficiency of vegetable produce from the town of Marseille, arranged enough still lives to last Bell Grant six months. Then the distinguished couple wetted their brushes settled in.

FEBRUARY

After three or four weeks of complete silence, the door opened admitted Colonel Teed. He was followed by Miss Campbell; she by Major Carruthers; he by Wyndham Tryon; next came Miss Bellains; finally an American coal merchant who had lost his wife had taken to art by way of consolation, edged his way into the room: were all coldly received.

Unfortunately, there is a flaw in Grant's character. The desire for conversation sometimes seizes him. He articulates not distinctly but rapidly. Soon he was swept into the torrent. The whirlpool, the maëlstrom, of Cassis society. Miss Bellains had him to her bedroom told him the story of her life. So did Miss Campbell, Mrs. Carruthers, a lady whose name he never caught. Meanwhile Mrs. Bell, who has no flaw of that kind anywhere about her, had to listen to the adventures sorrows of the gentleman. Col. Teed told her he had

killed bears in Rangoon. The widower described Mabel's death. Though Mrs. B. completely confused the lady the Bear, her mere presence was a consolation, it thus fell out that Bell Grant became the hub of society. No tea party let alone sketching party, to say nothing of little expeditions to the Calanques, or merry gatherings at midnight in Bellains' bungalow were complete without them. Wyndham Tryon went mad.

MARCH

Such was the state of affairs when the Woolves arrived. As might have been expected, Mrs. Woolf found extremely congenial society in the company of Mr. Tryon together they paced the beach by the hour, exchanging ideas often of the highest interest, but unfortunately unintelligible to the rest of the world. Mr. Woolf, whose love of the animal kingdom does him such credit, spent most of his time inducing the frogs to unbosom themselves to him freely. Miss Campbell joined him in this occupation. Meanwhile Mr. Bell wrote his epoch-making work on Civilization on the Balcony.

Mr. Fry fell over a seat knocked out a tooth, which being his last had a sentimental value. A bird was seen with a snake in its beak. Mrs. Bell prognosticated an omen. No sooner were the words out of her mouth than...

APRIL

a telegram arrived. What did I say? said Mrs. Bell, "A Catastrophe!" Her eyes lit with joy. "The choice lies between a Renault a Citroën," she said, letting the telegram fall to the floor. At the same moment the snake fell to the ground. "Grandpapa Bell is dying," she announced, went into Marseille to choose a car.

MAY

So the grim angel of death hovered over the home of Bell. But nothing as Mrs. Bell said would induce him to settle. The family returned to London; they found coffee coloured stains wherever the Indians had sat down: life resumed its even way.

The spring was wet in the extreme at last on a rainy day, the Fowl alluded to above came to perch: there was perhaps the grandest funeral ever known in Wiltshire.

Violet was sick in the rhododendron bushes. Vanessa Bell met the coffin on the stairs. Quentin struck the right note. All traffic was suspended. The sons carried the pall. Clive opened the Black Box. Vanessa bought a secondhand Renault.

JUNE

The less said about this month, the better. Nothing was mentioned except mags: and glass [*illeg.*]. The only society kept was that of Fred and Harris. The only passions felt were those of rivalry greed. Clive was

*Summer
2016*

forced to desert Bloomsbury in search of Civilization.

The only question was Citroën or Singer?

Buick or Renault?

Saloon or Touring?

Four Cylinder or Six?

+ then the great rivalry began.

JULY

The less said about July the better.

Mrs. Bell drove from Hyde Pk-Corner to Marble Arch.

Mr. Woolf drove from Marble Arch to Hyde Park Corner.

Mrs. Woolf knocked a boy off his bicycle.

Mrs. Bell killed a cat.

The less said the better.

AUGUST

It was discovered that the new study at Tilton was by no means rain-proof.

The discovery was repeated every day between Aug. 1st Oct. 15th. Nevertheless, the Squire entertained profusely: and was not daunted by the insufficiency of the food the inadequacy of the liquor from giving several dinner parties. He proved the valuable mathematical fact that two grouse are enough to feed 12 people, allowing for the birds being cooked on toast.

On August 10th the last bottle of so called wine was

drunk: recourse was had to a fine spring of natural water, upon which he had depended ever since.

SEPTEMBER

The rain continued, which was welcomed at Tilton; but less so in the alcoholic of the county.

The Renault the Singer now took the roads together, it was found unnecessary for either car to use its horn, since the driver of each never ceased to trumpet the praises of his own conveyance. Cows would stampede at the noise: chickens evaporate: cocks crow.

But impartial observers were unanimously of opinion that the SINGER WAS THE BEST.

OCTOBER

This month was chiefly remarkable for the fact, if such it can be called, that Julian went to Cambridge. But as nobody dares to conceive what he did there we can only have a blank, hope that it is the white flower of a blameless life.

Old Bloomsbury revived.

One hundred weight of pale surface glass [*illeg.*] was consumed

Maynard's water supply was replenished: Harland was drunk – all efforts to discover on what have failed.

NOVEMBER

Imagination boggles at the thoughts of what was said

what was done over it draws the sheet of pale OBLIVION.

DECEMBER

is thank heaven the last month in the calendar. Nature blinking at what we have had to record drew a white veil over the landscape did her best to insinuate wine at Tilton: without success.

Among cracked radiators lunatic motorists, we bow profoundly to the inscrutable will of providence Take our Leave. Amen! ♦

July in the Scottish Highlands

by *Kevan Manwaring*

Gone for a song' aptly summarizes my recent Scottish adventure. I spent the first week in July walking the West Highland Way, Scotland's first long-distance footpath that runs ninety-six miles from Millgavie, north of Glasgow (or from the city centre if you prefer) to Fort William – a dramatic trek which stretches from the Lowlands to the Highlands, from the 'bonnie banks' of Loch Lomond to the bleak wilderness of Rannoch Moor, and through the epic mountainous backdrop of Glen Coe and Ben Nevis. I had ridden on my Triumph Legend through parts of the route over the last three years, and earlier, by train, on the stunning West Highland Line, and I vowed that one day I would walk it, for it is just too beautiful to pass through in an hour or two. Such majesty deserves to be lingered over, indeed, deserves to be earned.

Having planned, prepared and packed over the last few weeks I set off with much anticipation and relief – embarking on a solo holiday marking the end of my academic year, a much-needed 'detox' from the de-

mands of academe and the maddening din of daily life, depressing news, and soggy summers. Yet I left in a heatwave and was relieved to be heading north – although it was a long, hot ride up. I took the scenic route up the Welsh Marches, and broke the journey at the foot of the Lakes, at YHA Arnside. I pushed on the next day and finally made it to the start of the walk, parking my bike at the only campsite on the edge of town after leaving my heavy backpack with Travel-lite, a baggage transfer company who can take your luggage to each day's destination for a minimal fee. I would be camping along the way, and this option made all the difference, meaning I need only take a small day-sac with packed lunch, water, waterproofs, and guidebook. Other walkers I saw slogging along the Way burdened with oversized packs and I did not envy them, although they had my respect, for the walking was challenging enough (at times) without having to lug all that extra weight as well.

And so, after much effort, I was finally able to begin the walk – setting off from Millgavie mid-afternoon for the first leg, a modest eight and half miles to Drymen campsite. The official start is an impressive looking archway on the High Street. It delighted me to think you could step through this mundane portal and end up in the Highlands amid majestic scenery. While I girded my loins with some late lunch, three young local kids, all cheekiness and freckles, buzzed around me,

asking me if I'd seen a golden eagle. They were particularly keen on birds of prey. Only in Scotland can I imagine such a conversation taking place – it was heartening to hear kids interested in nature more than the virtual worlds they predominantly inhabit. I was interrogated about what raptors I had seen and where, before finally being allowed to set off. I touched the obelisk for luck, and struck out, stick in hand. I was on my way, and song soon filled my heart and lungs – setting the keynote of the whole trip.

The West Highland Way was to become my songline.

Each day I chose a ballad and sang it along the way – not non-stop, of course, but just now and then when I felt myself flagging, or enthused by the scenery. And the rhythm of the song kept my legs moving. One could see why many songs emerged out of repetitive tasks – weaving, digging, fishing, rowing, and marching. There are exhaustive taxonomies of 'work songs', collected by Lomax and his ilk. My 'work' of the day was to hike – between ten and twenty miles. This was pleasant, satisfying toil and my ideal choice of R&B. I find walking in nature nourishing in many ways. It is the best medicine – easing the stresses of life and restoring a sense of self. Away from the madding crowd, one could hear oneself think. You get a perspective on things, a clarity, which is hard to achieve in an urban environment. With (natural) movement comes, paradoxically, stillness – a stoic, calm centredness, feet firmly planted on

terra firma. One achieves direct results for one's efforts – climb that hill and win a great view; don't like the view, move on to a better one – a reciprocation rare in our digital, disembodied lives. One's progress is a direct result of one's toil – and it is clear how 'travel' and 'travail' arise from the same word. Work and walk become one.

Yet the effort is eased with song.

On my first day, quite spontaneously, I found myself singing the Scottish 'classic', 'Wild Mountain Thyme', and however hoary such songs, in situ they take on a new vitality and meaning. One feels connected to the landscape and its history – the romanticism balanced out by the mud and mizzle, sweat and blisters. And the 'soundtrack' is not endless – but often punctuating long bouts of silence: not thinking about anything in particular, just in my body enjoying the mute joy of walking.

'Wild Mountain Thyme', also known as 'Purple Heather' and 'Will Ye Go, Lassie, Go?', seems as old as the hills, but was in fact written by Francis McPeake, from Belfast, in the Fifties, who dedicated it to his wife. It was first recorded by McPeake's nephew (also called Francis McPeake) in 1957 for the BBC series, *As I Roved Out*. McPeake's lyrics are in fact based upon 'The Braes of Balquhiddy' by Scottish poet, Robert Tannahill (1774-1810), a contemporary of Robert Burns; a troubled soul who committed suicide, unaware that his song would later gain such popularity.

Tannahill himself seems to have adapted the traditional song 'The Braes o' Bowhether'. When Bob Dylan recorded it, he cited McPeake's song as 'Trad.' – and so the layers of invention and tradition interweave, like flowers piled upon a bower.

It was late in the day to be starting the walk, so I didn't pass any walkers on this first day – only seeing a couple of lycra-d bicyclists and runners whizzing by while I stopped for a cuppa at my first stop, a little grove just off the route which happened to be a memorial. A mock-fire pit was marked with a plaque, which read:

Here burned the Craigallian fire during the Depression of the 1930s. It was a beacon of companionship and hope for young unemployed people who came from Glasgow and Clydebank seeking adventure in Scotland's wild places. Their pioneering spirit helped to make the Scottish Countryside free for all to roam.

By the end of the first day I was afforded my first glimpse of Loch Lomond and Ben Lomond in the distance, which marks the true start of the Highlands. The landscape opened out, the first of several shifts of scale over the next few days. Millgavie's high street, Glasgow's ring roads, the motorways and service stations, traffic and hard miles were far behind. I was living my dream, and all the effort had been worth it.

After a noisy night at Drymen campsite – a small site attached to a farm at Easter Drumquhassle, just a

mile and half shy of Drymen itself, idyllic except for a group of German teen-hikers who decided to make merry next to my tent way past the 10pm curfew until heavy rain sent them scurrying to their tents – I experienced a peaceful and satisfying day's hiking.

The high point, literally, was Conic Hill (361m/1184ft), a landmark of the Highland Boundary Fault, which sunders the Lowlands from the high country to the north. From its summit, one is afforded breathtaking views over Loch Lomond and its many small islands. Reaching its scintillating waters, I bathed my hot feet – a blissful respite. For the rest of the day, I followed its wooded shoreline. The Loch would be my sparkling companion for the next three days, as I traversed its eastern shore. At twenty-three miles long, up to five miles wide, and 190m/623ft deep, it is Britain's largest area of freshwater, supplying 450 million litres of water a day to the population of Central Scotland. Over the day it changed its hue like the mood of a god, from quicksilver to beaten pewter. Wallace Stevens once said that 'truth often depends upon a walk around a lake' – and by taking two or three days to traverse its length, I was allowing myself a full measure of its wisdom.

One of the misty isles glimpsed from the banks was Inchcailloch, the 'Island of the Old Women', where it is thought St Kentigern, an Irish princess, settled and founded a nunnery, dying in 734AD. The chaste islet

looked like it would provide a suitable sanctuary from the world of men.

Of course, along such a song-haunted shore it was hard not to break into spirited renditions of 'The Bonnie Banks o' Loch Lomond', (Roud No. 9598) which has been adopted and adapted by many a football team around the world. It is thought to have been inspired by the execution of prisoners from the Jacobite Uprising of 1745, who were believed to be taken by the 'low road', the road of the Underworld and spirit, back to their beloved homeland, by the Fairy folk. Another theory is that it expresses the lamentation of a lover of a captured Scottish rebel, executed in London. The heads of the rebels were displayed on pikes from the capital to Edinburgh in a procession along the 'high road' (the most important thoroughfare), while relatives of the rebels had to walk back along the 'low road' (the ordinary road of peasants and commoners – something I could relate to!). Whatever its origin, it could not be more perfect to warble out along the shores, and yet it was to another Scottish classic that I turned to most at this stage of the journey.

Entering into this dramatic scenery I was inspired to sing Dougie Maclean's modern classic, 'Caledonia', a song I love to sing, with its many great lines including: 'I have moved and kept on moving...' which seemed very resonant as I pushed along, my stick keeping time.

At sixteen miles, this day was the second longest of the walk, and I arrived at Rowardennan SYHA (no camping is permitted on Lomond's eastern shore) rather footsore. My body felt the shock of the intensified effort and I stiffened up and hobbled up (the 'hiker-penguin' walk a common sight at these way-stations), and yet after this day things got easier, as my body got used to the rhythm of the day's exertion. Rowardennan is a handsome hostel with good facilities. That evening there was an excellent talk by Ben Lomond ranger, Fraser McKechnie. He showed slides of the mountain (974m/3195ft), Scotland's most southerly Munro, which he knew like the proverbial back of his hand, having grown up in sight of it. His deep love of the place, his sheer sense of belonging and rootedness, was inspiring. He concluded his talk with a self-penned song, 'The Grail', and ended with a flourish on his flute-staff. He gave many useful pointers about encountering a mountain, but the piece of advice he offered that really struck a chord for me was: 'Let [it] sing its own song'.

Over the next few days I took heed to McKechnie's wisdom, treading softly and doing a lot of listening – walking in silence and solitude for hours on end, savouring peaceful nights camping in the middle of nowhere, all the while sinking deep into myself and into the Highland genius loci. Many insights were gleaned; many beyond words. Often I would just 'stand and stare'. This ineffable profundity and animal 'being-

ness' is summed up well by John Keats in his 'Lines Written in the Highlands after a Visit to Burns's Country':

*One hour, half-idiot, he stands by mossy waterfall,
But in the very next he reads his soul's memorial.*

As I left the northern end of Loch Lomond I cast my eyes back for one last look along its majestic length, then crested a hill to be treated with a sight which was so beautiful it nearly brought me to tears – a grand view towards the Highlands, with a bothy in the middle distance, framed in perfection. It seemed such a picture of self-contained contentment. I resisted the temptation to get out my journal and write something for the moment felt beyond words. Yet afterwards, this quote from Kathleen Raine's poem, 'The Wilderness', seemed to sum it up well:

*Yet I have glimpsed the bright mountain behind the
mountain,
Knowledge under the leaves, tasted the bitter berries
red,
Drunk water cold and clear from an inexhaustible
hidden fountain.*

When I passed close, I realise what I thought was Doune Bothy was a private residence, fenced off and

boarded up, while the actually bothy sat modestly beside it – open to all travellers to use for shelter, with its simple raised platforms for laying out a mat and sleeping bag, a fire place, a table and chair, and not much else. This prosaic truth (and time-and-time again the harsh clang of a gate, burn-flooded boot, or carelessly abandoned tissue at a viewpoint provided reality checks) didn't make the Sublime I experienced any less visceral.

Yet much of what I experienced was grounded in quotidian actuality: the texture of moss on a trunk; the chill draught from a waterfall; the metallic glitter of naked rock; the pale rump of a roe deer, pausing to look back; the flash of a raptor, swooping low; the raw stump of a felled fir. The signposts – a bracketed white thistle – were discreet but reliable, and I didn't need to use a map beyond the hand-drawn ones in the guidebook for the whole of the way. Without having to worry about navigation, I could simply enjoy the route.

One of my favourite Way-songs, which I returned to again and again, was John Martyn's version of 'Spencer the Rover'. It is a traditional ballad (Roud No. 1115), but Martyn's lyrics and melody are particularly fine, and seemed to fit the contours of the walk and my mood perfectly:

*In Yorkshire, near Rotherham, he had been on the
ramble,*

*Weary of travelling, he sat down to rest,
By the foot of yon mountain
Lays a clear, flowing fountain,
With bread and cold water he himself did refresh.*

For much of the way I followed old drovers' roads, along which the Highland herds would be driven down from as far north as Skye to the markets in Falkirk and Crieff. I spent a night at one of their stances at Beinglas Farm, next to the coach honey-pot of The Drovers Inn. Such places, in their heyday, would have seen as much as 100,000 sheep and 10,000 cattle move past each year. Now, they just have to contend with the odd rowdy tourist group.

For the longest section of the walk, nineteen and a half miles from Inverarnan to Bridge of Orchy, I learnt and sang 'The Skye Boat Song', which seemed deeply appropriate on a day of relentless rain! This tune, about the escaped Bonnie Prince Charlie being taken to Skye to heal from his wounds after Culloden, was actually penned by an Englishman (Sir Harold Boulton), to an air collected by Anne Campbelle MacLeod (later, Lady Wilson). It is based upon a classic Gaelic rowing song: an iorram. An adapted version of it is used as the theme tune of the Amazon Prime hit series, *Outlander* – in Bear McCreary's version, the protagonist changes gender like a fish in a polluted river, even though he has based it upon Robert Louis Stevenson's poem, 'Sing

me a Song of a Lad that is Gone', which is often sung to the same tune. Artistic license!

As I arrived at the charming Bridge of Orchy, the sun came out and I was able to pitch my tent (wild-camping) in bonnie weather, mercifully. Once my shelter was up – at a stunning spot by the effervescent waters of the river Orchy, with its wide stony bed sending the pellucid current chattering on its way – I went to the hotel and celebrated accomplishing the longest part of the walk with a pint of 'Afterglow', and ended up talking to a couple from Inverness who were 'walking back home' along the route. The weather clearly hadn't put a dampener on their spirits either. I went to bed early, but awoke in the middle of the night – stepping out of my tent to be treated to a sublime vista, of the Highland landscape illumined by the full moon, the twin peaks of Beinn Dorain and Beinn an Dothaidh discernible against the velvet sky. It was breathtaking: a Samuel Palmer moment. And the morning was equally glorious. This wild pitch was one of the highlights of the trip – and, of course, completely gratis.

In good spirits I pushed up out of the valley and onwards – to Rannoch Moor. I was looking forward to this section, crossing the largest area of wilderness in Britain (all 50 square miles of it). It felt truly epic, like something out of Middle Earth, and so it seemed apt to be singing Tolkien's 'Walking Song', penned by Bilbo Baggins and first performed in 'Three is Company', the

third chapter of Book One of The Fellowship of the Ring:

*Still around the corner there may wait
A new road or a secret gate,
And though we pass them by today,
Tomorrow we may come this way
And take the hidden paths that run
Towards the Moon or to the Sun.*

Well, the sun shone that day as I crossed the moor, so it felt like I was taking a hidden path to the sun. Now the scale of things was turned up to 'eleven' as I entered into the vast arena of Glen Coe, home of the infamous 1692 massacre of the Macdonalds, but on that day it felt nothing but benign (it's very different in lashing rain I've found!). Ahead could be glimpsed 'Mount Doom', the distinctive arrowhead of The Great Herdsman of Etive, Buachaille Etive Mor. In high spirits I made my way to the Kingshouse hotel, where I pitched my tent by the river before visiting the Climbers Bar in the back. There I treated myself to some Hunters Chicken and a pint or two, talking to the other customers. The sunset was suitably dramatic – I described it in my journal as a 'massacre of light'.

The next day I 'woke up singing'. Heading towards the dramatic edifice of the Herdsman at the head of Glen Coe, I found myself creating a song to celebrate:

'The Shepherd of the Mountain'. Even the fact the Way followed the A82, busy with tourist traffic, didn't dampen my spirits. I was glad to be taking my time through this spectacular landscape. I couldn't resist taking a photograph of what must be the most photogenic and photographed cottage in Britain, a tiny white dwelling dwarfed by the dark flank of the Herdsman.

And then I began my ascent of the 'Devil's Staircase', the highest point of the West Highland Way. It wasn't as bad as it sounds – I was up in half an hour – but the feeling of reaching this craggy zenith was satisfying and I found myself singing out the chorus of King Creosote's 'Pauper's Dough': 'You've got to rise from the gutter you are inside...' Perhaps it was just as well nobody was around to hear my wailing at this point!

The Way rapidly descended almost down to sea level at the 'aluminium town' of Kinlochleven, following close by the massive hydroelectric pipes. The hostel campsite was cheek-by-jowl to the power station – contrasting ironically with the 'hobbit huts' on offer, Mordor-meets-Shire-chic. But the showers were good (after 2 nights' wild-camping much appreciated!) and the drying rooms just the job. The chippy was shut, but they had a Co-op – saved!

The next day I savoured the last full day of walking, from Kinlochleven to Glen Nevis, where I would camp at the foot of Ben Nevis. The main route was through the big pass, Lairigmor, which had little in the way of

shelter. The day was another rainy one (only two out of seven days, so I couldn't complain) and the climb out of the doldrums of Kinlochleven was steep. I put a spring in my step with Dick Gaughan's 'Both Sides the Tweed', written in 1979 – when the vote for the Scottish Parliament was squashed by a shifting of goalposts (the notorious 40% vote fix). It was based upon a response to the 1707 Treaty of Union, but Gaughan 'made some minor adjustments to give it contemporary relevance'. Many considered it to be of ancient 'Trad' provenance, which Gaughan called 'the highest compliment imaginable'. I learnt it from a friend of mine in Bath, Marko Gallaidhe, an Irish singer and musician. The chorus I find particularly emotive:

*Let the love of the land's sacred rights
To the love of our people succeed
Let friendship and honour unite
And flourish on both sides the Tweed.*

The song's message is as resonant now as ever. The last time I was up, in the late summer of 2014, the landscape of the Highlands and Lowlands was divided between the 'Yes' and the 'No' campaigns. There was still the odd Independence flag defiantly flying – like 'Old Glory' in the Southern States, although its message is very different. The blue-and-white signified no

kind of bloodshed, except perhaps to non-SNP candidates north of the border.

I soldiered on, like the wounded Campbells fleeing the Battle of Inverlochy in 1645 who passed this way, pursued by Montrose's Royalists. Further on I paused, halfway, with a view over 'MacBeth's Loch'. The King of the Scots (1040-1057) was said to have resided in its centre on probably a crannog. The misty loch is said to be haunted by a ghostly water-bull, which likes to snack on unlucky cattle now and then – a folkloric factoid I contemplated as I munched on my rolls.

Stoked up for the final push, I steamed ahead through the dripping conifer plantations, past weary hikers. It was with immense satisfaction that I arrived at the Glen Nevis camping and caravanning park – a primly-manicured place of hard, serviced plots for mobiles and caravans, and softer sward for tents. I sat and savoured the sensation of the soft drizzle upon my face. Almost immediately Travel-lite rocked up with my rucksack and the driver shook my hand. I had made it!

But there was one last mountain to climb.

A popular finale of the West Highland Way is to climb Ben Nevis, at 1344m (4406ft) Britain's highest mountain. 75,000 people are estimated to climb it every year, but that didn't make it any less of a slog (most I imagine haven't walked a 100 miles before doing so). The ascent was more a case of stamina than skill – it

was little more than a lot of steps – but the lashing rain lower down, and the freezing fog and snow higher up, made the way at times not just an effort, but dangerous. To give me a final much-needed boost, I listened to Martyn Bennett's awesome swansong 'Grit' (Real World Records, 2015) on my headphones (not used on the walk until this point). This stomping fusion of traditional Scottish folk and electronica by musical prodigy Bennett (who died tragically young in 2005) seemed like a fitting finale to my Highland adventure. And, critically, it got my legs moving as the temperature plummeted, both external and internal. The Cailleach-blasted summit, with the ruins of a Victorian observatory, is not the place to linger – though that didn't stop Victorian meteorologist, Clement Wragge, from ascending it every day for two years to take readings. The 1883 observatory was now in ruins, but provided some temporary shelter from the elements. The experience was surreal – an eerie stillness after the three hours of effort. I was fortunate to have it to myself, but couldn't stay up there longer than it took to sip some coffee, shove some shortbread down me, and pull on a fleece. Already soaked, the dramatic drop in temperature could have been life-threatening if I had hung about, and so I descended as quickly and safely as I could, passing many eager day-visitors going up. I was asked about the remaining climb, and the conditions, and started to feel like the 'shepherd of the

mountain' myself (or like the ptarmigan that seemed to guide me in the right direction on the summit, stopping every few feet along the path to check I was following). Unlike many I passed, I seemed suitably-attired and prepared for what lay above. Having been one of the first up there, I couldn't help but feel pleased with myself to be descending against this surging tide of tourists.

After cooling my feet at the Visitor Centre, I made my weary way to Fort William and the official end of the Way – now at the far end of the High Street, so you have to run the gauntlet of its 'goblin market'. There a bronze statue of a wise-looking walker awaits to be photo-bombed. Next to it sat an elderly man in a kilt I recognised passing in the last stages of the ascent (emerging from the mist and snow he had told me I had 'twenty minutes' yet to go). He had climbed the 'venomous mount' several times, and to do it in his Highland regalia was impressive, especially at his advanced years. As so often along the Way one was humbled by those younger, older, faster, or more heavily burdened than you – but I was not in competition with them. I did it for myself, and what an incredibly rewarding experience it was! I walked down Fort William's high street feeling twelve feet tall. It was a well-earned epiphany, one that I will take home with me and carry, like a shiny pebble, in the pocket of my heart. ♦

A Flaneur from New York

by *Leonard Quart*

As a boy I wandered through the streets, stores and parks of my East Bronx neighbourhood avidly noticing everything that I encountered. I took mental notes, but I was too young then to be able to articulate or write about what I experienced. Sometimes I would sit on the hard concrete stands of our local park's sandlot ball field watching the Puerto Rican league baseball teams play, while listening to the middle-aged men (taxi drivers, letter carriers, furriers) watching the game. The men wore white ribbed undershirts and straw hats, smoked harsh-smelling cigars, exchanged insults, and vented about their jobs and domestic lives that only seemed to oppress them. There was some camaraderie but no intimacy between them – much loud, declamatory talk thrown out for their own pleasure and self-esteem, but little connection with the people they were talking to. On other days I would watch retired Jewish garment workers wearing fedoras and caps and dark overcoats gather on the park's benches arguing angrily and animatedly in Yiddish

and English about the merits and defects of Stalin, their union leaders, and Harry Truman vs. Henry Wallace. They may have been the last American generation where so many white workers would be so politically passionate and even ideologically sophisticated.

There were other times that I took long walks down the neighbourhood's prime lower-middle-class shopping street. I watched how the stores changed over time. In the early fifties they were individually owned – jewelry, toy and clothing stores, dress shops, bakeries and ice cream parlours that were far from elegant and affluent, but comfortable and welcoming. Then gradually the street turned into a string of ninety-nine cent chain stores – their inventory sloppily laid out in overflowing cartons and scattered on tables – cheap pizza slice places, and a variety of other characterless, scruffy, downscale shops. The neighbourhood was clearly in decline. By the late fifties rows of stores were burned down for insurance, and their charred remains littered the sidewalks; and clumps of vaguely menacing gang members in black leather jackets and ducktail haircuts and their girl friends in their gang auxiliary sweaters hung out and self-consciously postured in front of a luncheonette. These scenes signified the street's growing shabbiness and the neighbourhood's general deterioration, prefiguring the white flight of the sixties, which turned my section of the Bronx into a

generally impoverished Hispanic enclave. (And later into a burnt-out wasteland of abandoned buildings, shattered streetlights, and empty, refuse-glutted lots.)

During that time I was attending a municipal college in Harlem and my interest in and connection to neighborhood life and streets began to wane. Manhattan became my destination for parties, cultural events and just exploring, and it was ultimately where I established my permanent home.

From the beginning, for my walks to be truly meaningful they had to be solitary in nature; otherwise, I would lose myself in conversation with friends, and miss much of the social and personal detail and drama that aroused my curiosity. And even when alone I had to avoid becoming enmeshed in my own thoughts and feelings, and try to focus on what was outside myself. Though screening all the external sensation out when I walked did offer the kind of serenity that allowed me to dig deeper into myself.

That fervour for walking has held up over the years and I have continued to take these Bronx walks in Manhattan, London, Seattle, and other cities for close to half a century. However, it's only when I began to write about them that I discovered that my passion had a name. I was a flaneur in the tradition but obviously without the talent of Charles Baudelaire, the great nineteenth-century French poet and prose writer, who distinguished his flaneurs from other people who either

walk to work, or to meet somebody – for the flaneur’s walks are more fanciful and much less functional. They rarely have a particular goal in mind. What he or she does is to open his consciousness up to the scenes that one passes. The flaneur closely observes how people eat, dress, speak, and play, their interest being whetted by daily living as much as by classical objects of art or historic monuments.

At seventy-six I continue to walk a great deal, but I am a step or two slower, and I get tired more easily. There are also occasional moments when my feet stiffen or tingle intensely (I suffer from neuropathy) and I begin to feel as if I’m hauling lead weights around. When that happens I can’t navigate more than a few blocks without needing to sit down and rest.

Still, on my solitary strolls I still try to notice everything that I pass. These are walks where I desire to prevent any significant detail or incidental drama from eluding me.

New York is a much different city now from what it was two decades ago. Manhattan is awash with money, and so are sections of Brooklyn. And on the Lower East Side’s rapidly gentrifying Orchard St., where once there were blocks of musty, unfashionable bargain clothing stores run by immigrants (my mother used to force me to buy at one of them) there are now French bistros, Japanese boutiques wood-panelled bars, hotels, small luxury buildings, and two expensive hotels.

In the adjoining, once bohemian East Village where in the eighties uniformed policemen might queue up to buy drugs in the middle of the day, drug markets were rife, and homeless encampments thrived, there is much less crime, and the streets are clean, if not beautiful. On almost every street three or four new, dull, overpriced apartment houses have been built (and a one bedroom on Avenue B can sell for as much as \$1,395,000), and sometimes one sees a building with a touch of architectural uniqueness. Many of the area’s tenements have been renovated to appeal to younger, more affluent residents – close to seventy per cent of the population is now white – and a variety of first-rate restaurants have popped up to serve them.

In affluent areas like Midtown’s 57th St., a set of thin extremely tall towers is rising whose tenants are foreign billionaires, who essentially live in them only a few weeks a year. The buildings are sterile symbols of ostentatious global wealth, and only undermine the character of the streetscapes – dwarfing everything around them including landmarked buildings like Carnegie Hall.

In Manhattan new condos have gone up on almost every available empty lot, and replacing any tenement or two-story building that can be demolished. There are no Manhattan neighbourhoods that one walks through that are free from some glimmer of gentrification and the possibility of a future transformation. In addition,

the city stands as the apotheosis of American income inequality where the infamous one per cent of top earners have over a third of the total income.

Walks also can mean encounters with strangers; though I don't normally talk to people I pass. But one day I descend into a sweltering subway station and while waiting for a train I have a rushed conversation with a man who runs the newsstand. He claims to have been a painter in Bangladesh, and speaks of the anonymity of this tedious work where he never has a real encounter – complaining he must live with the continually jarring, dehumanizing sound of the trains. The talk lasts just a moment, but it's a poignant one, and it strikes me that for every immigrant success story there are always a number who are able to make a living but find the dreams they came with dashed. They survive in America, but they are unfulfilled. Yes, what they have here maybe better than the poverty and violence they had lived with before, but the despair persists.

I have been moved to reflect with greater complexity about my walks by a new book, *A Philosophy of Walking* (Verso) by a Frenchman, Frédéric Gros – a philosopher interested in the quotidian. Written with consummate clarity, the book conveys Gros's thoughts about walking, offering a discussion of various thinkers (e.g., Thoreau, Kant, Rousseau) for whom walking was essentially a contemplative act.

Most of his famous walkers take long rambles in nature, but I am most interested in his chapter on the city flaneur – my model. Gros writes that the anonymity of the flaneur does not 'crush him, but is an opportunity for enjoyment, enabling him to feel more vividly himself'. More importantly, 'he follows everything, observing, his mind always alert'. It is what I try to do, laying myself open to, in Gros's words, 'scattered visual impacts'. At times, as is my wont, I make social and political judgments. So I am aware how so many of the city's aesthetic pleasures – the resurrection of Central Park, the grace of a Fifth Avenue Church, a Ralph Lauren store housed in the Renaissance Revival Rhinelander Mansion on Madison Avenue are rooted in the city's corporate wealth and economic inequality. But, for the moment, I suspend my political consciousness and take pleasure in their beauty. For like most flaneurs, on my walks it is the sensations themselves that are paramount. ♦

Side by...

The Collectors (III)

by *Rohinton Mistry*

ON THE PAVEMENT OUTSIDE St Xavier's Boys School, not far from the ornate iron gates, stood two variety stalls. They were the stalls of Patla Babu and Jhaaria Babu. Their real names were never known. Nor was known the exact source of the schoolboy inspiration that named them thus, many years ago, after their respective thinness and fatness.

Before the schoolboys arrived In the morning, the two would unpack their cases and set up the displays, beating the beggars to the choice positions. Occasionally, there were disputes if someone's space was violated. The beggars did not harbour great hopes for alms from schoolboys but they stood there nonetheless, like mute lessons in realism and the harshness of life. Their patience was rewarded when they raided the dustbins after breaks and lunches.

At the end of the school day the pavement community packed up. The beggars shuffled off into the approaching dark, Patla Babu went home with his cases, and Jhaaria Babu slept near the school gate under a large tree to whose trunk he chained his boxes

...by side

Bélyeggyűjtés (3. rész)

fordította *Tárnok Attila*

A SZENT XAVÉR FIÚISKOLA MELLETT a járdán, a díszrácsos kaputól nem messze, két árus kínalta portékáit, Patla Babu és Jhaaria Babu. Valódi nevüket senki nem ismerte. Mint ahogy azt sem, honnan eredt az a sok évvel ezelőtt született diákos gúnynev, amely a két ember testi fogyatékoságát, kövérségét és véznaságát így megjelenítette.

Reggel, a tanítás kezdete előtt mindketten felállították asztalaikat, előpakoltak a dobozokból és a koldusokat megfelelő távolságra száműzték. Néha veszedés támadt, ha azok egyikük területét nem tartották tiszteletben. A koldusok nem reméltek pénzt a fiúktól, mégis kitartóan ácsorogtak az iskola körül, néma leckét kaptak realizmusból és az élet sanyarúságából. Türelmük jutalmául a szünetek és az ebédidő végeztével megrohamozhatták a szemétyűjtőket.

A tanítás után csoportok formálódtak a járdán, a koldusok eltűnedezték a közeledő sötétségben, Patla Babu hazament a dobozaival, Jhaaria Babu pedig egy fa alatt töltötte az éjszakát a kapu közelében, a dobozait a fa törzséhez láncolta.

during the night.

The two sold a variety of nondescript objects and comestibles, uninteresting to any save the eyes and stomachs of schoolboys: supari, A-1 chewing gum (which, in a most ungunlike manner, would, after a while, dissolve in one's mouth), jeeragoli, marbles, tops, aampapud during the mango season, pens, Camel Ink, pencils, rulers, and stamps in little cellophane packets.

Patla Babu and Jhaaria Babu lost some of their goods regularly due to theft. This was inevitable when doing business outside a large school like St Xavier's, with a population as varied as its was. The loss was an operating expense stoically accepted like the success or failure of the monsoons, and they never complained to the school authorities or held it against the boys. Besides, business was good despite the losses: insignificant items like a packet of jeeragoli worth ten paise, or a marble of the kind that sold three for five paise. More often than not, the stealing went on for the excitement of it, out of bravado or on a dare. It was called "flicking" and was done without any malice towards Patla and Jhaaria.

Foremost among the flickers was a boy in Jehangir's class called Eric D'Souza. A tall, lanky fellow who had been suspended a couple of times, he had had to repeat the year on two occasions, and held out the promise of more repetitions. Eric also had the reputation of doing

A két árus olyan leírhatatlan tárgyakat és élelmiszereket árult, amelyek az iskolásokat kivéve mindenki számára teljesen érdektelenek lettek volna. Suparit, A-1 típusú rágógumit, ami, a rágógumikra nem jellemző módon, egy idő után elolvadt a szájban, jeeragolit, golyókat, pörgettyűket, aampapudot mangóérés idején, tollakat, Camel tintát, ceruzákat, vonalzókat és apró, celofán levelekbe bújtatott bélyegeket.

Patla Babu és Jhaaria Babu időről időre lopásból származó veszteséget is el kellett könyveljen. Ez egy Szent Xavér méretű iskolánál, amelynek a tanulói igen vegyes összetételű csoportot alkottak, elkerülhetetlen volt. A veszteséget sztoikusán fogadták, mint működésük feltételét és ahogy a monszun sikerét vagy kudarcát készpénznek veszi az ember; soha nem tettek panaszt a tanároknál és soha nem szorították sarokba a fiúkat. Miért tették volna. Jól ment az üzlet, a veszteség általában jelentéktelen volt: egy tíz paise-t érő csomag jeeragoli vagy egy három-négy paise-t érő golyó. A lopás gyakran a csínytevésben lelt örömök kedvéért történt, diáknyelven ezt fricskának hívták, de Patla és Jhaaria iránt egy szikrányi rosszindulatot sem éreztek a fiúk.

A fricskázók között elől járt egy fiú Jehangir osztályából, Eric D'Souza. Magas, nyurga fiú volt, kétszer kapott már megrovást, kétszer ismételt évet és valószínűsíthető volt, hogy fog még bukni. Eric arról is nevezetes volt, hogy a pad alatt magával játszik a rövid-

things inside his half pants under cover of his desk. In a class of fifty boys it was easy to go unobserved by the teacher, and only his immediate neighbours could see the ecstasy on his face and the vigorous back and forth movement of his hand. When he grinned at them they looked away, pretending not to have noticed anything.

Jehangir sat far from Eric and knew of his habits only by hearsay. He was oblivious to Eric's eye which had been on him for quite a while. In fact, Eric found Jehangir's delicate hands and fingers, his smooth legs and thighs very desirable. In class he gazed for hours, longingly, at the girlish face, curly hair, long eyelashes.

Jehangir and Eric finally got acquainted one day when the class filed out for games period. Eric had been made to kneel down by the door for coming late and disturbing the class, and Jehangir found himself next to him as he stood in line. From his kneeling position Eric observed the smooth thighs emerging from the half pants (half-pants was the school uniform requirement), winked at him and, unhindered by his underwear, inserted a pencil up the pant leg. He tickled Jehangir's genitals seductively with the eraser end, expertly, then withdrew it. Jehangir feigned a giggle, too shocked to say anything. The line started to move for the playground.

Shortly after this incident, Eric approached Jehangir during breaktime. He had heard that Jehangir

nadrágjában. Ötven fiú járt az osztályba, nem csoda, hogy a tanár nem vette észre, csak a közvetlen közelében ülők látták arcán az eksztázis jeleit, és hogy keze energikusan le-föl mozog. Amikor rájuk vigyorgott, a többiek félrefordultak, mintha semmit nem vettek volna észre.

Jehangir Eric-től távolabb ült, a szokásairól csak hallomásból tudott. Eric ferde pillantásait nem észlelte, pedig az már egy ideje kinézte magának. Törékeny kezét, ujjait, szőrtelen lábát és combjait Eric érzékinek találta. A teremben órákon át vágyakozva nézte lányos arcát, göndörödő haját, hosszú szempilláját.

Egy napon, amikor az osztály tornaórára vonult ki, végül ismeretséget kötöttek. Eric az ajtónál térdelt, mert késett és megzavarta az órát, Jehangir előtte állt a sorban. Térdelő helyzetben Eric hosszan vizsgálta, ahogy Jehangir sima combja előtűnik a rövidnadrág alól (a rövidnadrág kötelező viselet volt az iskolában), rákacsintott, és mivel alsónemű nem állta útját, egy ceruzát feltolt a nadrág egyik szárán. Nagy szakértelemmel csiklandozta Jehangir nemi szervét a radírral, majd kihúzta a ceruzát. Jehangir nevetést színlelt, de valójában nagyobb sokkot érzett, semhogy szóljon. A sor lassan kivonult az udvarra.

Nem sokkal ezután a közbjáték után Eric megkönyékezte Jehangirt az egyik szünetben. Hallott róla, hogy Jehangir nagyon szeretne bélyegeket szerezni.

– Arré, fiú, tudok neked bélyeget szerezni, amelyet

was desperate to acquire stamps.

“Arré man, I can get you stamps, whatever kind you want,” he said.

Jehangir stopped. He had been slightly confused ever since the pass with the pencil; Eric frightened him a little with his curious habits and forbidden knowledge. But it had not been easy to accumulate stamps. Sundays with Burjor Uncle continued to be as fascinating as the first. He wished he had new stamps to show – the stasis of his collection might be misinterpreted as lack of interest. He asked Eric: “Ya? You want to exchange?”

“No yaar, I don’t collect. But I’ll get them for you. As a favour, man.”

“Ya? What kind do you have?”

“I don’t have, man. Come on with me to Patla and Jhaaria, just show me which ones you want. I’ll flick them for you.”

Jehangir hesitated. Eric put his arm around him: “C’mon man, what you scared for, I’ll flick. You just show me and go away.” Jehangir pictured the stamps on display in cellophane wrappers:

how well they would add to his collection. He imagined album pages bare no more but covered with exquisite stamps, each one mounted carefully and correctly, with a hinge; as Burjor Uncle had showed him to.

They went outside, Eric’s arm still around him.

csak akarsz – mondta.

Jehangir hátrahőkölt. A ceruzás incidens miatt kissé zavarban volt, Eric furcsa szokásai és tiltott tudása amúgy is riasztották, de nem volt könnyű bélyegeket szerezni. A vasárnapok Burjor bácsi társaságában továbbra is ugyanúgy lenyűgözték, mint az első alkalommal. Vágyott rá, hogy új szerzeményeket mutathasson meg a dokornak, félt hogy gyűjteménye lassú gyarapodását Dr Mody az érdeklődés hiányaként értelmezheti.

– Hm, cserélni akarsz? – kérdezte Ericről.

– Nem, yaar, én nem gyűjtök. De szerzek neked, apám. Szívességéből.

– Hm. Milyen fajtáid vannak?

– Nekem nincsen, ember. Gyere velem Patlához és Jhaariához és mutasd meg, melyikeket szeretnéd. Elfricskázom neked.

Jehangir tétovázott. Eric a vállára tette a kezét.

– Ne hülyülj, mitől félsz? Én fricskázom. Te csak megmutatod és odébbállsz.

Jehangir maga előtt látta az árusok celofánba csomagolt bélyegeit. Nagyszerű szerzemények lennének. Elképzelte az albumot, melynek immár nem lesz üres lapja, minden oldalt gondosan beillesztett, különleges bélyegek töltenek meg, ahogy Burjor bácsiét.

Az iskolaépületből kilépve Eric még mindig a vállába karolt. A két árus asztala körül diákok tolongtak. Rengeteg kéz nyúlka, tapogatott a kiállított áruk

Crowds of schoolboys were gathered around the two stalls. A multitude of groping, exploring hands handled the merchandise and browsed absorbedly, a multitude that was a prerequisite for flicking to begin. Jehangir showed Eric the individually wrapped stamps he wanted and moved away. In a few minutes Eric joined him triumphantly.

“Got them?”

“Ya ya. But come inside. He could be watching, man.”

Jehangir was thrilled. Eric asked, “You want more or what?”

“Sure,” said Jehangir.

“But not today. On Friday. If you do me a favour in visual period on Thursday.”

Jehangir’s pulse speeded slightly – visual period, with its darkened hall and projector, and the intimacy created by the teacher’s policing abilities temporarily suspended. He remembered Eric’s pencil. The cellophane-wrapped stamp packets rustled and crackled in his hand. And there was the promise of more. There had been nothing unpleasant about the pencil. In fact it had felt quite, well, exciting. He agreed to Eric’s proposal.

On Thursday, the class lined up to go to the Visual Hall. Eric stood behind Jehangir to ensure their seats would be together.

When the room was dark he put his hand on Je-

körül, a sokadalom előfeltétele volt a sikeres akciónak. Jehangir megmutatta Ericnek az egyesével becsomagolt bélyegeket, amelyekre vágyott, aztán el-somfordált. Néhány perccel később Eric diadalittasan érte utol.

– Megvannak?

– Hm. De menjünk be. Lehet, hogy figyel minket.

Jehangir repesett az örömtől. Eric azt kérdezte:

– Kell még több is?

– Persze – mondta Jehangir.

– De nem ma. Pénteken. Ha megteszed, amire kérek a csütörtöki rajzórán.

Jehangir szíve egy kissé hevesen vert. A rajzórán vetítéskor sötét van, a tanár figyelme átmenetileg függesztődik, a körülmények az órának bizonyos intimitást kölcsönöznek. Eszébe ötlött Eric tréfája a ceruzával. A bélyegek celofánja ropogott a kezében, és még többre is szert tehetne. A ceruza semmi kényelmetlenséget nem okozott neki, sőt, ami azt illeti, nos, izgalmat jelentett. Elfogadta Eric javaslatát.

Csütörtökön az osztály sorban állt a rajzterem előtt. Eric Jehangir mögött állt, hogy egymás mellett üljenek.

Amikor sötét lett a teremben, Jehangir combjára tette a kezét és simogatni kezdte. Jehangir egyik kezét Eric a saját élettelen ágyékára helyezte. Türelmetlenül suttozta:

– Csinálj már valamit, gyerünk!

hangir's thigh and began caressing it. He took Jehangir's hand and placed it on his crotch. It lay there inert. Impatient, he whispered, "Do it, man, c'mon!" But Jehangir's lacklustre stroking was highly unsatisfactory. Eric arrested the hand, reached inside his pants and said, "OK, hold it tight and rub it like this." He encircled Jehangir's hand with his to show him how. When Jehangir had attained the right pressure and speed he released his own hand to lean back and sigh contentedly. Shortly, Jehangir felt a warm stickiness fill his palm and fingers, and the hardness he held in his hand grew flaccid.

Eric shook off the hand. Jehangir wiped his palm with his hanky. Eric borrowed the hanky to wipe himself. "Want me to do it for you?" he asked. But Jehangir declined. He was thinking of his hanky. The odour was interesting, not unpleasant at all, but he would have to find some way of cleaning it before his mother found it.

The following day, Eric presented him with more stamps. Next Thursday's assignation was also fixed.

And on Sunday Jehangir went to see Dr Mody at ten o'clock. The wife let him in, muttering something under her breath about being bothered by inconsiderate people on the one day that the family could be together.

Dr Mody's delight at the new stamps fulfilled Jehangir's every expectation: "Wonderful, wonderful!

De Jehangir vonakodó simogatása semmi izgalmat nem hozott. Eric megfogta az idegen kezét, a nadrágján belülre gyömöszölte és így szólt:

– OK. fogd erősen és dörzsöld.

Körbekerülcsolta Jehangir kezét és mikor Jehangir ráérezett a megfelelő erősségű szorításra és ritmusra, Eric elengedte, hátradőlt és elégedetten szuszogott. Nemsokára valami meleg, ragacsos folyadék ömlött Jehangir ujjaira és tenyerébe, és a merevség a kezében ernyedtté vált.

Eric eltolta magától a kezét, Jehangir pedig a zsebkendőjébe törölte a tenyerét. A zsebkendőt Eric is elkérte, hogy megtörölje magát.

– Csináljam én is neked? – kérdezte, de Jehangir nem akarta. A zsebkendőjére gondolt. A szaga érdekes volt, nem is kellemetlen, de módját kell találja, hogy kimossa, mielőtt az anyja rálel.

Másnap Eric újabb bélyegeket szerzett neki, és újabb megállapodást kötöttek jövő csütörtökre vonatkozólag.

Vasárnap tízkor Jehangir átment Dr Modyhoz. A doktor felesége nyitott ajtót, morgott valamit a foga alatt, hogy az emberek milyen figyelmetlenek, még vasárnap is zavarkodnak, amikor együtt lehetne a család.

Ahogy Jehangir számított rá, Dr Mody el volt ragadtatva az új bélyegektől:

– Csodás, csodás! Honnan szerezted őket? Nem,

Where did you get them all? No, no, forget it, don't tell me. You will think I'm trying to learn your tricks. I already have enough stamps to keep me busy in my retirement. Ha! ha!"

After the new stamps had been examined and sorted Dr Mody said, "Today, as a reward for your enterprise, I'm going to show you a stamp you've never seen before." From the cupboard of biscuit and sweet tins he took a small satin-covered box of the type in which rings or bracelets are kept. He opened it and, without removing the stamp from inside, placed it on the desk.

The stamp said España Correos at the bottom and its denomination was noted in the top left corner: 3 PTAS. The face of the stamp featured a flamenco dancer in the most exquisite detail and colour. But it was something in the woman's countenance, a look, an ineffable sparkle he saw in her eyes, which so captivated Jehangir. Wordlessly, he studied the stamp. Dr Mody waited restlessly as the seconds ticked by. He kept fidgeting till the little satin-covered box was shut and back in his hands, then said, "So you like the Spanish dancing-lady. Everyone who sees it likes it. Even my wife who is not interested in stamp-collecting thought it was beautiful. When I retire I can spend more time with the Spanish dancing-lady. And all my other stamps." He relaxed once the stamp was locked again in the cupboard.

Jehangir left, carrying that vision of the Spanish

várj, ne mondd el! Ne gondold, hogy ki akarom szedni belőled a trükkjeidet! Annyi bélyegem van, hogy bőven elég nyugdíjas éveimre. Haha!

Miután az új bélyegeket átvizsgálták és rendszereztek, Dr Mody így szólt:

– Jutalmul, amiért ilyen ügyes voltál, mutatok ma neked egy bélyeget, amit sosem láttál eddig.

A szekrényből a kekszes dobozok mellől elővett egy szaténba burkolt kis dobozt, olyan fajtát, amelyben gyűrűt és ékszereket szoktak tartani. Felnyitotta és anélkül, hogy a bélyeget kivenné belőle, az íróasztalra helyezte.

A bélyeg alján egy felirat: Espaa Correos, a névérték a bal felső sarokban, 3 PTAS. A kép egy flamenco táncosnőt jelenített meg, ragyogó színekkel, aprólékosan. De Jehangirt leginkább a nő arcvonása ragadta meg, a tekintete: a szemeiben valami kimondhatatlan csillogás.

Szótlanul tanulmányozta a bélyeget. Dr Mody izgatottan várt, teltek a másodpercek, izgett-mozgott, mignem a szatén borítású fedelet lecsukta, és a dobozzal a kezében mondta:

– Szóval tetszik a spanyol táncosnő. Eddig mindenkinek tetszett, aki látta. Még a feleségem is gyönyörűnek találta, pedig őt nem is érdekli a bélyegyűjtés. Ha majd nyugdíjba megyek, több időt szentelhetek a spanyol táncosnőnek és a többi bélyegnek.

Csak akkor lazított izgatottságán, amikor a bélyeg-

dancer in his head. He tried to imagine the stamp inhabiting the pages of his album, to greet him every time he opened it, with the wonderful sparkle in her eyes. He shut the door behind him and immediately; as though to obliterate his covetous fantasy, loud voices rose inside the flat.

He heard Mrs Mody's, shrill in argument and the doctor's, beseeching her not to yell lest the neighbours would hear. Pesi's name was mentioned several times in the quarrel that ensued, and accusations of neglect, and something about the terrible affliction on a son of an unloving father. The voices followed Jehangir as he hurried past the inquiring eyes of his mother, till he reached the bedroom at the other end of the flat and shut the door.

When the school week started, Jehangir found himself looking forward to Thursday. His pulse was racing with excitement when visual period came. To save his hanky this time he kept some paper at hand-

Eric did not have to provide much guidance. Jehangir discovered he could control Eric's reactions with variations in speed, pressure and grip. When it was over and Eric offered to do it to him, he did not refuse.

The weeks sped by and Jehangir's collection continued to grow, visual period by visual period. Eric's and his masturbatory partnership was whispered about in class, earning the pair the title of moothya-maroo. He

re rázárta a szekrényt.

Jehangir elköszönt, de fantáziáját a spanyol táncos kötötte le. Elképzelte, hogy a bélyeg az ő albumában díszeleg, a csillogó szemek őt üdvözlik, amikor kinyitja az albumot. Amint becsukódott mögötte az ajtó, hangoskodás hallatszott a lakásból, mintegy kitörölve Jehangir fejéből nagyravágyó képzelgéseit.

Hallotta Mrs Mody sikító veszekedését és hogy a doktor rimánkodik neki, hogy csendesebben, mert meghallják a szomszédok. A vitában többször elhangzott Pesi neve, vádaskodások, hogy egy gondatlan, nem szerető apa micsoda szerencsétlenségeket ró a fiára. A veszekedés hangjai még akkor sem tágitottak Jehangir füléből, amikor anyja kérdő tekintete előtt bevonult a lakás végében levő szobájába és magára csukta az ajtót.

A hét elején Jehangir már a csütörtököt várta. Szíve hevesen kalapált az izgatottságtól, ahogy közeledett a rajzóra. Hogy tiszta maradjon a zsebkendője, egy kis papírt készített elő.

Eric most nem sok utasítást kellett adjon. Jehangir magától rájött, hogy irányíthatja Eric reakcióját a ritmus változtatásával és a szorítás erejével. Mikor végzett, Eric megint felajánlotta, hogy ő is csinálja neki. Jehangir ezúttal nem utasította vissza.

Ahogy teltek a hetek, Jehangir gyűjteménye folyamatosan gyarapodott. Kettejük maszturbáló partner-sége suttogás tárgya lett az osztályban, lenézően a

accompanied Eric on the flicking forays, helping to swell the milling crowd and add to the browsing hands. Then he grew bolder, studied Eric's methods, and flicked a few stamps himself.

But this smooth course of stamp-collecting was about to end.

Patla Babu and Jhaaria Babu broke their long tradition of silence and complained to the school. Unlike marbles and supari, it was not a question of a few paise a day. When Eric and Jehangir struck, their haul could be totalled in rupees reaching double digits; the loss was serious enough to make the Babus worry about their survival.

The school assigned the case to the head prefect to investigate. He was an ambitious boy, always snooping around, and was also a member of the school debating team and the Road Safety Patrol. Shortly after the complaint was made he marched into Jehangir's class one afternoon just after lunch break, before the teacher returned, and made what sounded very much like one of his debating speeches: "Two boys in this class have been stealing stamps from Patla Babu and Jhaaria Babu for the past several weeks. You may ask: who are those boys? No need for names. They know who they are and I know who they are, and I am asking them to return the stamps to me tomorrow. There will be no punishment if this is done. The Babus just want their stamps back. But if the missing stamps are

moothya-maroo jelzöt ragasztották rájuk. A fricskázó portyák alkalmával Jehangir már ott maradt az árusok asztalánál, hogy növelje a nyúláló kezek tömegét. Aztán még merészebb lett. Miután megfigyelte Eric módszerét, ő is elcsent néhány bélyeget.

Ám a bélyeggyűjtésnek ez az akadálymentes korszaka lassan véget ért. Patla Babu és Jhaaria Babu hosszú idők hagyományát megszakítva, panaszt tett az iskolában. Ellentétben az üveggolyók és supari eltűnésével, a mostani lopások nem filléres ügyletek voltak. Amikor Eric és Jehangir lecsapott, a veszteség rúpiában is dupla számjegyű értékre rúgott: elég komoly összeg ahhoz, hogy az árusok aggodalmaskodjanak a megélhetésüket illetően.

Az iskola az ügy kivizsgálására a diáktitkárt jelölte ki. Ez egy ambiciózus fiú volt, mindenbe beleütötte az orrát, szerepet vállalt iskolai ügyekben és az utcai közlekedés-biztonsági járőrök soraiban. Nem sokkal az árusok panasa után, egy délután, az ebédszünet végén, de mielőtt a tanár megérkezett, Jehangir osztályában kortesbeszédbe kezdett: Ennek az osztálynak két tanulója az utóbbi hetekben bélyegeket lopkod Patla Babu és Jhaaria Babu asztaláról. Joggal vetődik fel a kérdés? Ki ez a két tanuló. De semmi szükség rá, hogy neveket említsünk. Az érintett személyek tudják, hogy róluk van szó, és én is tudom, kik ők. Arra kérem őket, hogy holnapig juttassák el nekem a bélyegeket, ez esetben nem vár rájuk bünte-

not returned, the names will be reported to the principal and to the police. It is up to the two boys.”

Jehangir tried hard to appear normal. He was racked with trepidation, and looked to the unperturbed Eric for guidance. But Eric ignored him. The head prefect left amidst mock applause from the class.

After school, Eric turned surly. Gone was the tender, cajoling manner he reserved for Jehangir, and he said nastily: “You better bring back all those fucking stamps tomorrow.” Jehangir, of course; agreed. There was no trouble with the prefect or the school after the stamps were returned.

But Jehangir’s collection shrunk pitifully overnight. He slept badly the entire week, worried about explaining to Burjor Uncle the sudden disappearance of the bulk of his collection. His mother assumed the dark rings around his eyes were due to too much reading and not enough fresh air. The thought of stamps or of Patla Babu or Jhaaria Babu brought an emptiness to his stomach and a bitter taste to his mouth. A general sense of ill-being took possession of him.

He went to see Burjor Uncle on Sunday, leaving behind his stamp album. Mrs Mody opened the door and turned away silently. She appeared to be in a black rage, which exacerbated Jehangir’s own feelings of guilt and shame.

He explained to Burjor Uncle that he had not bothered to bring his album because he had acquired

tés. A Babuk csak a bélyegeiket szeretnék visszakapni. Ha ez nem történik meg, a tanulókat jelenteni fogjuk az igazgatónak és a rendőrségnek. A döntés a két diák kezében van.

Jehangirnak erőfeszítésébe került, hogy higgadtságot tessen. Gyötörte az izgalom és Eric zavartalan nyugalmában keresett támaszt. De Eric ügyet sem vetett rá. A diáktitkár gúnyolódó taps közepette hagyta el a termet.

A tanítás végére Eric mogorva lett. Nyoma sem volt már a kedveskedő modornak, amivel korábban Jehangirt kezelte. Durván szólt hozzá:

– Legjobb lesz, ha holnap visszahozod az összes kibaszott bélyegedet.

Jehangir természetesen egyetértett vele, ezt követően se a diáktitkárral, se az iskolával semmi bajuk nem volt.

Ám Jehangir gyűjteménye egyik napról a másikra szánalmasan megfogyatkozott. Egész héten rosszul aludt, azon aggódott, hogy fogja megmagyarázni Burjor bácsinak, hogy a gyűjtemény jó része eltűnt. Anyja a sötét karikákat a fiú szeme körül a megerőltető olvasásnak és a friss levegő hiányának tudta be. Jehangir gyomrában már a bélyegek és Patla Babu vagy Jhaaria Babu pusztá gondolata is keserű szájízt és ürességet okozott. Általános rosszullét vett erőt rajta.

Vasárnap az album nélkül ment át Burjor bácsiékhoz. Mrs Mody nyitott ajtót, majd szó nélkül hátat

no new stamps since last Sunday, and also, he was not well and would not stay for long.

Dr Mody was concerned about the boy, so nervous and uneasy; he put it down to his feeling unwell. They looked at some stamps Dr Mody had received last week from his colleagues abroad. Then Jehangir said he'd better leave.

"But you must see the Spanish dancing-lady before you go. Maybe she will help you feel better. Ha! ha!" and Dr Mody rose to go to the cupboard for the stamp. Its viewing at the end of each Sunday's session had acquired the significance of an esoteric ritual.

From the next room Mrs Mody screeched: "Burjorji! Come here at once!" He made a wry face at Jehangir and hurried out.

In the next room, all the vehemence of Mrs Mody's black rage of that morning poured out upon Dr Mody: "It has reached the limit now! No time for your own son and Sunday after Sunday sitting with some stranger! What does behave that your own son does not? Are you a baap or what? No wonder Pesi has become this way! How can I blame the boy when his own baap takes no interest..."

"Shh! The boy is in the next room! What do you want, that all the neighbours hear your screaming?"

"I don't care! Let them hear! You think they don't know already? You think you are..."

Mrs Bulsara next door listened intently. Suddenly,

fordított. Sötét düh látszott eluralkodni az asszonyon, ami csak tovább növelte Jehangir büntudatát és szégyenérzetét.

Burjor bácsinak azt mondta, azért nem hozta az albumot, mert nem szerzett új bélyeget múlt hét óta és nincs túl jól, így nem marad sokáig.

Dr Modyt aggasztotta a fiú nyilvánvaló izgatottsága, de a rosszullét jegyeként könyvelte el. Megnézték a bélyegeket, amiket Dr Mody a héten kapott egy külföldi kollégájától, azután Jehangir távozni készült.

– Csak vess előbb egy pillantást a spanyol táncosnőre! Talán jobban leszel tőle. Haha.

Azzal Dr Mody felállt, hogy elővegye a bélyeget a szekrényből. A vasárnapi találkozások záróakkordja lett már a spanyol bélyeg megtekintése, egyfajta ezoterikus szertartás jelentőségét öltötte magára.

A szomszéd szobából Mrs Mody sikoltó hangja hallatszott:

– Burjorji! Gyere ide azonnal!

A férfi savanyú pillantást vetett Jehangir felé, aztán kisietett a szobából.

A szomszéd szobában Mrs Mody egész délelőtt felhalmozott sötét dühének minden vehemenciájával támadt Dr Modyra:

– Ebből elég! Nincs időd a saját fiad számára, és minden vasárnap egy idegennel ücsörögsz. Mit nyújthat ő neked, amire a saját fiad nem képes? Hát baap vagy te egyáltalán? Nem csoda, hogy Pesiből ez lett.

she realized that Jehangir was in there. Listening from one's own house was one thing – hearing a quarrel from inside the quarrellers' house was another. It made feigning ignorance very difficult.

She rang the Modys' doorbell and waited, adjusting her mathoobanoo. Dr Mody came to the door.

“Burjorji, forgive me for disturbing your stamping and collecting work with Jehangir. But I must take him away. Guests have arrived unexpectedly. Jehangir must go to the Irani, we need cold drinks.”

“That's okay, he can come next Sunday.” Then added, “He must come next Sunday,” and noted with satisfaction the frustrated turning away of Mrs Mody who waited out of sight of the doorway. “Jehangir! Your mother is calling.”

Jehangir was relieved at being rescued from the turbulent waters of the Mody household. They left without further conversation, his mother tugging in embarrassment at the knots of her mathoobanoo.

As a result of this unfortunate outburst, a period of awkwardness between the women was unavoidable. Mrs Mody, though far from garrulous, had never let her domestic sorrows and disappointments interfere with the civilities of neighbourly relations, which she respected and observed at all times. Now for the first time since the arrival of the Modys in Firozsha Baag these civilities experienced a hiatus.

When the muchhiwalla arrived next morning, in-

“Őt nem is hibáztatom, hisz a saját baapja nem foglalkozik vele...”

– Csitt. Itt van a fiú a szomszéd szobában. Azt akarod, hogy a szomszédok is hallják, ahogy siránkozol?

– Nem érdekel. Hadd hallják! Azt hiszed, nem tudják úgy is? Azt hiszed, hogy te...

Mrs Bulsara érdeklődve hallgatózott a szomszédban. Hirtelen eszébe ötlött, hogy a fia odaát van. A saját lakásában hagyján, de a szomszédból hallani a veszekedést... Lehetetlenné vált nem meghallani.

Csengetett, és eligazítva magán a mathoobanoo kendőt várt. Dr Mody nyitott ajtót.

– Burjorji, ne haragudjon, hogy megzavarom a bélyeggyűjtés foglalatosságában, de haza kell vigyem Jehangirt. Váratlanul vendégek érkeztek. Jehangir el kéne szaladjon az iráni fűszereshez valami italért.

– Semmi baj, jöhet jövő vasárnap is – aztán hozzátette: – Jövő vasárnap mindenképp át kell jöjjön.

Megelégedéssel nyugtázta, hogy a felesége az ajtó takarásában legyőzötten fordul félre. – Jehangir! Az anyukád jött érted.

Jehangir megkönnyebbülést érzett a Mody család zavaros vizeiből történt szabadulásán. Szó nélkül távoztak, anyja a mathoobanoo csomóit igazgatta kényelmetlenségében.

A szerencsétlen kirohanás következményeképpen a fagyos viszony elkerülhetetlen volt a két asszony között. Bár Mrs Mody nem volt bőbeszédű, nem hagyta,

stead of striking a joint deal with him as they usually did, Mrs Mody waited till Mrs Bulsara had finished. She stationed an eye at her peephole as he emphasized the freshness of his catch. "Look bai, it is saféd paani," he said, holding out the pomfret and squeezing it near the gills till white fluid oozed out. After Mrs Bulsara had paid and gone, Mrs Mody emerged, while the former took her turn at the peephole. And so it went for a few days till the awkwardness had run its course and things returned to normal.

But not so for Jehangir; on Sunday, he once again had to leave behind his sadly depleted album. To add to his uneasiness, Mrs Mody invited him in with a greeting of "Come bawa come," and there was something malignant about her smile.

Dr Mody sat at his desk, shoulders sagging, his hands dangling over the arms of the chair. The desk was bare – not a single stamp anywhere in sight, and the cupboard in the corner locked. The absence of his habitual, comfortable clutter made the room cold and cheerless. He was in low spirits; instead of the crow's-feet at the corners of his eyes were lines of distress and dejection.

"No album again?"

"No. Haven't got any new stamps yet," Jehangir smiled nervously

Dr Mody scratched the psoriasis on his elbows. He watched Jehangir carefully as he spoke. "Something

hogya a családon belüli fájdalmak és csalódások befolyásolják a szomszédok felé gyakorolt udvariasságot. Most először azóta, hogy Firozsha Baagba költöztek, a korábban nagyra értékelt udvarias viszony meginogni látszott.

Reggel, amikor a halárus muchhiwalla megérkezett, ellentétben a korábbiak gyakorlatával, Mrs Mody, ahelyett, hogy közösen alkudozna, megvárta, amíg Mrs Bulsara végez. Szeme az ajtó kémlelőnyílásán nyugodott, amint az árus a halak frissességét bizonygatta.

– Idenézz, bai, saféd paani – mondta, egy halat a kezében tartva, megszorítva a kopoltyúi mögött, amíg fehéres folyadék szivárgott elő. Miután Mrs Bulsara fizetett és távozott, Mrs Mody jelent meg, a másik pedig elfoglalta helyét a saját kémlelőnyílása mögött. Ez így ment néhány napig, amíg a fagyos viszony oldódott és minden újra a régi lett.

Nem így Jehangir számára. A következő vasárnap ismét kénytelen volt otthon hagyni szomorúan megcsappant albumát. Kényelmetlenségét fokozta, hogy Mrs Mody szívélyesen tessékelte be:

– Gyere csak, bawa –, de a mosolyában rosszindulat bujkált.

Dr Mody az íróasztalánál ült, lógó vállakkal, kezei a szék karfáiról csüngtek alá. Az asztal üres volt, egyetlen bélyeg sem volt látható és a szekrény ajtaja is zárva. A szokásos rendetlenség hiánya a szobát

very bad has happened to the Spanish dancing-lady stamp. Look,” and he displayed the satin-covered box minus its treasure. “It is missing.” Half-fearfully, he looked at Jehangir, afraid he would see what he did not want to. But it was inevitable. His last sentence evoked the head prefect’s thundering debating-style speech of a few days ago, and the ugliness of the entire episode revisited Jehangir’s features – a final ignominious postscript to Dr Mody’s loss and disillusion.

Dr Mody shut the box. The boy’s reaction, his silence, the absence of his album, confirmed his worst suspicions. More humiliatingly, it seemed his wife was right. With great sadness he rose from his chair. “I have to leave now, something urgent at the College.” They parted without a word about next Sunday.

Jehangir never went back. He thought for a few days about the missing stamp and wondered what could have happened to it. Burjor Uncle was too careful to have misplaced it; besides, he never removed it from its special box. And the box was still there. But he did not resent him for concluding he had stolen it. His guilt about Patla Babu and Jhaaria Babu, about Eric and the stamps was so intense, and the punishment deriving from it so inconsequential almost non-existent, that he did not mind this undeserved blame. In fact, it served to equilibrate his scales of justice.

His mother questioned him the first few Sundays he stayed home. Feeble excuses about homework, and

örömtelenné és hideggé tette. A férfi rosszkedvű volt. A szarkalábak helyett a szemében fájdalom és levertség tükröződött.

– Ma sincs album?

– Nincs. Nincs új bélyegem – erőltetett Jehangir mosolyt az arcára.

Dr Mody a könyökét vakargatta. Jehangirt figyelte, amikor megszólalt:

– Valami szörnyűség történt a spanyol táncosnő bélyegemmel. Nézd – és mutatta a szaténfedelű dobozt, üresen. – Elűnt.

Félve tekintett Jehangir szemébe. Aggódott, hogy azt fogja látni benne, amit nagyon nem szeretett volna. De elkerülhetetlen volt. Dr Mody szavai felidézték a diáktitkár kortesbeszédét egy héttel azelőtt, és az esemény minden borzalma megjelent Jehangir vonásai közt: Dr Mody veszteségét és kiábrándultságát lezáró megszégyenítő utóiratként.

Dr Mody becsukta a dobozt. A fiú reakciója, csöndessége, hogy az albumot megint otthon hagyta, a férfi legszörnyűbb gyanakvását erősítette meg. S ami még megalázóbb, a jelek felesége igazát támasztották alá. Végtelen szomorúsággal állt fel:

– Most mennem kell, valami fontos ügyben várnak a főiskolán.

Úgy váltak el, hogy a jövő vasárnap szóba sem került.

Jehangir soha nem látogatta meg újra. Napokig az

Burjor Uncle not having new stamps, and it being boring to look at the same stuff every Sunday did not satisfy her. She finally attributed his abnegation of stamps to sensitivity and a regard for the unfortunate state of the Modys' domestic affairs. It pleased her that her son was capable of such concern. She did not press him after that. ♦

(To be continued)

eltűnt bélyeg járt az eszében, mi történhetett? Burjor bácsi túl gondos volt ahhoz, hogy elkeverje, sőt, soha ki sem vette a dobozából, és a doboz még megvolt. De nem bánta, hogy a férfi őt vádolja lopással. Patla Babu és Jhaaria Babu, azonkívül Eric és az elcsent bélyegek kapcsán érzett szégyenérzete olyan intenzív volt, a kihágásért kapott büntetés olyan jelentéktelen, szinte semmis, hogy most a meg nem érdemelt vádat teljesen magától értetődőnek vélte: a vád helyrebillentette igazságérzetének mérlegét.

Az első néhány vasárnap, hogy otthon maradt, anyja kérdőre vonta. Az erőtlen kifogások, hogy leckét kell írnia, hogy Burjor bácsinak nincs új bélyege és unalmas mindig ugyanazokat nézegetni minden vasárnap, nem elégítette ki anyja érdeklődését. Végül fia távolmaradását annak tudta be, hogy az felhagyott a bélyeggyűjtéssel, hogy érzékeny lélek és megzavarta a Mody család szerencsétlenül alakult belső viszálykodása. Örült neki, hogy fia képes ilyen finom figyelmességre, eztán már nem bolygatta az ügyet. ♦

(Folytatás a következő számban)