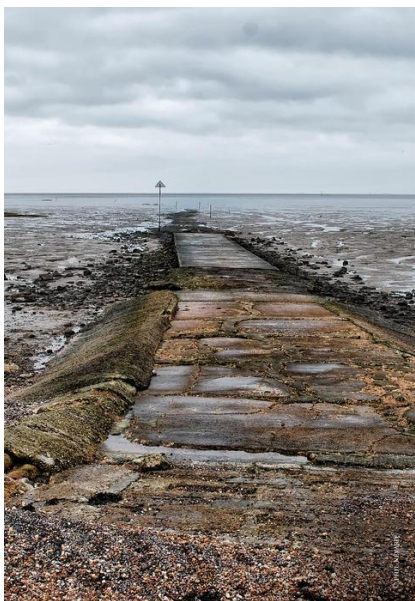


**Q U A R T E R L Y**  
**P R E S S R E V I E W**  
FOR ADVANCED EFL LEARNERS

WINTER 2012



**Essay** 2  
The Art of Travelling from *Granta*

**Dispatch** 4  
Visit the South Pole by *Gavin Francis*

**Memoir** 8  
The Magic Place by *Kapka Kassabova*

**Feature** 12  
Hunting Down bin Laden by *Nicholas Schmidle*

**Side by Side** 26  
The Incense-burner A füstölőégető  
by *John Morrison* fordította *Tárnok Attila*

QUARTERLY PRESS REVIEW is an electronic magazine consisting of texts found in the public domain abridged for educational purposes.

Back issues: <http://pressreview.atw.hu>

Correspondence: [tarisz@hotmail.com](mailto:tarisz@hotmail.com)

## The Art of Travelling

from *Granta*

Road-warrior hell: I get off a 15-hour flight from North America and turn on my BlackBerry at some Asian airport. Instead of focusing on the immediate environment and the ride into town, I am engrossed in the several dozen e-mails that piled up while I was en route, a third of which require a serious response, and one or two of which relay worrying news. As if that isn't enough of a distraction: throughout all my journeys, because of the 12-hour time difference, each morning in Asia begins with a slew of e-mails from the East Coast, again requiring responses, again relaying crises to deal with. Wherever we are, we are all always available, and everybody knows it. The media tell us how lucky we are to live in the Information Age. I believe we have created a hell on Earth for ourselves.

Let me bore you with the old days: In the early 1980s, nobody had advance notice of my arrival anywhere. I'd fly to Addis Ababa to cover a famine, or to Sarajevo to cover the preparations for the Winter Olympics, armed with only about eight names and telephone numbers. Because I did not have to waste time sending e-mails back and forth for days to set up appointments, I had that much more time to read about the history and geography of the country to which I was headed. And you know what? When I arrived and dialed those numbers, about half the people on the list answered and were pleased to meet with me: after all, I had come all this way, completely dependent on their hospitality. And

so hospitality was offered. And those people introduced me to other people. It was all so much more efficient then. Now, after corresponding for days with someone just to arrange a meeting, when you arrive at his office thousands of miles away, he answers some of your questions by referring you to a Web site.

I am not saying information is now harder to come by. I am saying the intensity of the experience of foreign places has been diluted. The real adventure of travel is mental. It is about total immersion in a place, because nobody from any other place can contact you. Thus your life is narrowed to what is immediately before your eyes, making the experience of it that much more vivid.

It isn't just the landscapes that are overpowering, but the conversations, too. Real conversations require concentration, not texting on the side. The art of travel demands the end of multitasking. It demands the absence of bars on your smartphone when you are in a café with someone. That's because travel is linear – it is about only one place or a singular perception at a time.

In 1973, upon graduating from college, I traveled for three months in Communist Eastern Europe. Not only could nobody from home contact me, there was no real news about the world in the English-language newspapers where I was (the *International Herald Tribune* was banned in many places or arrived days late). My interactions with the young East Germans, Poles, Hungarians, and others I met along the way were intense in the extreme. Indeed, these were rich personal lives I encountered, precisely because the political and public spaces were so barren. I never forgot those faces, those conversations. That was the summer of Watergate, about which I couldn't have cared less.

More recently, in the early years of the last decade, I sailed with a friend every summer throughout the Canadian Maritime

Provinces, as far north as Newfoundland. Except in a few towns, we had no cellphone contact and no access to e-mail. After a week, I would settle into a meditative peace, helped by a bottle of French Bandol every evening. There is no entry for a traveler as dramatic as one by sea, and I'll carry with me forever the pen-and-ink, charcoal sight of the Louisbourg fortress emerging out of the dirty white fog on Cape Breton, as well as the wild, short grasses that summarized the celibate, sculptural beauty of these northern seascapes. It was a world of gray rock, dark spruce, and silver-blue.

Travel is like a good, challenging book: it demands presentness – the ability to live completely in the moment, absorbed in the words or vision of reality before you. And like serious reading itself, travel has become an act of resistance against the distractions of the electronic age, and against all the worries that weigh us down, thanks to that age. A good book deserves to be finished, just as a haunting landscape tempts further experience of it, and further research into it. Travel and serious reading, because they demand sustained focus, stand athwart the nonexistent attention spans that deface our current time on Earth.

During that summer in Eastern Europe almost 40 years ago, I found myself in a small lodge in a Romanian forest during two days of rainstorms. I read Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* there. And so I experienced solitude rather than loneliness. Nothing existed for me except the worlds of 19th-century Russia and late-20th-century Romania. That was travel! Utter isolation made it possible. Because there was no mobile hot zone to reenter when I arrived in Bucharest or some other Balkan city, there was also nothing to look forward to, or to dread. The present moment was then truly sacred.

My friend now plans to sail the Northwest Passage in a small

boat, which means being essentially out of electronic contact for about four months in the High Arctic. I can't go along. My day job makes it impossible. I remain a prisoner of the BlackBerry nightmare. But I know there are people like my friend whose circumstances are different, who will opt for authentic experience, who will resist. Only because of them, the art of travel lives on. ♦

## Visit the South Pole

by *Gavin Francis*

When I arrived at Halley Research Station, on the Caird Coast of the Weddell Sea and only a few hundred miles from the South Pole, to take up the job of base doctor, I found a message from my boss sent from 14,000 kilometres away. ‘Any second thoughts?’ he asked. ‘Because for ten more months, no one is getting in and no one is getting out.’ He made Halley sound like a custodial sentence, though he knew I had freely, even enthusiastically, chosen the isolation it imposed. Before my departure he’d overseen my training in orthopaedics, pharmacy, dentistry, anaesthetics, neurosurgery, radiology and ophthalmology. It was a cram course in the super-specialization of modern medicine. ‘You’re unlikely to need any of this stuff,’ he told me during the longer tutorials. ‘But you never know ...’

As a teenager I had been entranced by stories from the so-called ‘Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration’; of Shackleton’s astonishing survival, and Scott’s piteous death. I wanted to see for myself the continent that each had described so beautifully. The view outside my new office window didn’t disappoint; it was like the earth on the first day of creation, a glittering world beneath a firmament of light. In the sky above, frozen water molecules mingled and bonded with the air in a strange alchemy, transmuting the sun’s rays into haloes and rainbows. There was never any darkness; our ‘day’ would last three and a half months. For the first few weeks, surrounded by such luminance, thoughts,

memories, ambitions and emotions washed through me un snagged; I had the sense of a deep reordering within. There was no boredom in this emptiness, just an awareness of something expanding as if the aperture of my mind was widening for a long exposure. A whole year lay ahead with no clinics, no waiting room, no pager and hardly any patients.

My training up to that point had overemphasized the technical, it veered away from risk and plunged into blood tests and multi-million dollar scanners at every uncertainty. But at Halley I’d have to get along with a military X-ray box, a canvas bag of dental tools, and an Edwardian-era microscope for counting blood cells. On arrival I even found an anaesthetic machine, intended to be filled with ether, gathering dust in one of the cupboards. The base had been running for fifty years, and the surgery equipment had evolved to manage all medical emergencies that had occurred over that time. I had glass cabinets full of pills, an ECG machine in case of a heart attack, and several bottles of laughing gas. A bewildering variety of stretchers and splints were piled in the cupboards, some which looked as if they’d been stowed since the base’s inception. There was a kit for trephining holes in the skull, to be used as last resort in coma after a head injury. The earliest Antarctic doctors took straitjackets; I had a stack of ‘chemical cosh’ antipsychotics instead. There were tracheostomy sets, appendicectomy kits, and under the sink I found five vinyl-black body bags. There were only fourteen of us on base: we were equipped for a fatality rate of 35%.

At the beginning I was kept busy several hours a day checking, replacing and packing medical kit boxes. These boxes were to be taken from the base out on ‘deep field’ research projects, by exploration parties probing Antarctica’s heart. They might end up in core-drilling camps, clumped round a tunnel that was being cut kilometre-deep into the ice. Or with small mobile

geology groups, buzzing through nameless mountains on snowmobiles, gathering rocks that showed Antarctica once had forests and swamps. Whatever they were doing, what these groups had in common was remoteness, and the lack of anyone medically trained on site. In an emergency they were supposed to get out their medical kit, give a bit of first aid, call me up on the radio and wait for instructions.

Back in England I had been involved in decisions about what would go into these boxes – what was really necessary to provide basic medical care at the end of the earth. Each was designed to fit on a sledge. For the first few weeks, surrounded by such luminance, thoughts, memories, ambitions and emotions washed through me un snagged; I had the sense of a deep reordering within. Pulled by skidoos now rather than dogs or men, these sledges were the same ash-framed models that Scott and Shackleton had hauled over a century ago. Space on each was limited, and weight was to be kept down to twenty kilogrammes. I stocked the boxes to deal with tonsillitis and tooth-rot, piles and the consequences of unprotected sex (the days of all-male Antarctica are over, thank goodness). I packed laxatives and local anaesthetics, elastoplasts and eye drops. A bottle of vitamin pills to prevent scurvy. Scalpels, catheters and a collar should anyone break his or her neck. Some of the most useful items, considering the risk of falling into a crevasse, were the few rolls of Plaster of Paris. Each box was like the distillation of all that we have learned as a species about our bodies and their infirmities, a time capsule of medicine at the start of the twenty-first century. They spoke of our communications (with question grids for use over radio static), our sexual mores (condoms, the Pill, and the morning-after pill), and even the ozone hole (tubes of factor thirty sun block).

Ours is a nervous age, we're often told, and the heroes of exploration are all gone. What, I had wondered, did our

predecessors like Scott or Shackleton take when they set out into the blank spaces on the map?

In the well-stocked polar section of the little base library I unearthed the packing list for Shackleton's medical kit – the drugs and dressings he took on the sledge trips of his *Nimrod* Expedition of 1907, the one that turned back only ninety-seven miles from the South Pole. It added up to a weight of about three kilos, less than a sixth of the modern kit, and to my technomedical mind read more like a witch's *grimoire* than the best medical advice of just a century ago.

Shackleton had isinglass, prepared from the swim bladders of Russian sturgeons. Coated with silk, it was used on open wounds. He had 'gold-beater's skin', a parchment-like dressing only fractions of a millimetre thick. Prepared from the intestines of oxen or of sand sharks, it was used in the manufacturing of hammered gold foil but also to promote the healing of open sores. He had tonics of iron and strychnine and tonics of iron and arsenic; the wrong doses of either would cause a lingering death. The kit carried a preparation to treat colic that combined tincture of cannabis with tincture of chilli pepper. Ginger was used as a carminative, a sonorous word that I had to look up (it stops farting). Cocaine was dripped in the eye to cure snowblindness, and chalk ground up with opium was used for diarrhoea. No antibiotics in 1907 of course. Perhaps the only medications that Shackleton carried that we would still use today were aspirin and morphine.

Only fifty years ago it was still mandatory for doctors to study botany and chemistry. Fifty years before that, most drugs and dressings were prepared directly from raw materials, often by the prescribers themselves. The contrast with the material I had to work with was extraordinary; all of mine came pre-packaged, shrink-wrapped and sterilized, each with a barcode and a use-by

date.

As I cleared away the mountain of packaging left over after refilling each medical box, I envied those doctors of a century ago. I wondered if I had been born a hundred years too late. Their drugs and equipment might have been primitive, but they betrayed an intimacy with the natural world that I felt I had lost. It takes special knowledge to prepare and store arsenic and shark-gut, coca leaves and opium. That knowledge, gained through the practice of medicine, was useful in other sciences. Medical practitioners of that age often made ground-breaking contributions to widely divergent disciplines.

A case in point was Shackleton's doctor, Eric Marshall, who was cartographer and surveyor as well as chief surgeon. Another was the doctor on Scott's *Discovery* expedition, Edward Wilson, who doubled up as a marine biologist and ornithologist. In 1910, when Wilson returned to the Antarctic on the *Terra Nova*, he not only selected the medical inventory, he oversaw the colossus of Scott's scientific programme as well as gathered data for a monograph on the lives of emperor penguins.

I asked around Halley, trying to understand how scientists there were unravelling the mysteries of Antarctica. I wanted to find a way to contribute the way my predecessors did. Halley concentrates on atmospheric science, with big-budget projects examining the solar wind, clean air chemistry, the ozone hole, the earth's magnetic field. But my medical training towards the end of the twentieth century had been so narrow there was little that I could add. It is not only medicine that has become super-specialised over the last hundred years; the sciences have done the same.

I got used to dealing with medical queries over the radio. The calls were few and far between: upset stomachs, scalding burns, constipation and the odd toothache. Someone had a rash and

someone else an itchy scalp. On one occasion I even managed to make a 'home visit', being flown four hundred miles to give a ten-minute consultation. On base I did my first dental filling and picked steel fragments from an eye.

My list of consultations could have been taken from the medical records of the *Nimrod* or the *Terra Nova*. Human beings, regardless of the age they live in, seem to rot their teeth, obsess over their guts, or injure themselves with fires and falls. I may not have been able to contribute to the scientific programme the way Wilson did, but he would have nodded with recognition at the problems I was called on to manage. Hubris aside, I wondered if the kit he carried meant that he could have managed them as well as I could.

I looked up the contents of Wilson's sledging medical kit, the one that he dragged to the South Pole, that was buried with him when he died on the Ross Ice Barrier. The whole case weighed less than two kilograms, and, prepared only three years after the *Nimrod* sailed, showed an unsurprising degree of overlap with Shackleton's kit. The list of contents read like an incantation to me: Aromatic chalk, kola, borate, digitalis tincture, chlorodyne, borofax, hazeline and camel hair. But isn't all medicine a form of enchantment?

In early 1912, on the return journey from the Pole, shattered by defeat and weakened by inadequate stores, the four men with Scott began to succumb to injury. Despite Wilson's best management, the party was slowed down. Edgar Evans, the strongest in the party, cut his hand and the wound turned septic. Wilson no doubt dressed it with isinglass, and administered iron tonic with caffeine, but Evans still died at the foot of the Beardmore Glacier.

When Titus Oates unwrapped his frost-bitten foot in the tent each evening, Scott wrote that Wilson showed 'self-sacrificing

devotion in doctoring Oates's feet.' He spent hours lancing Oates' blisters, lathering his sores in antiseptic, debriding dead tissue and carefully wrapping each foot in gauze. But Oates still died, wandering out into a blizzard, just days after Wilson handed out the opium 'tablets' that would enable each man to choose a painless death.

I pictured their tent as they set up each night. The silence around them unassailable, Oates and Evans dissolving by turn into the vastness of Antarctica the way that breath dissipates into the sky. Each day the surviving men edged closer to their hut and their salvation, but the day's marches grew shorter. The temperatures plummeted as the summer's radiance dimmed. The sun became murderous, reddening as winter approached. Their injuries had slowed them too much, they had left too late, and by mid-March, close to the autumnal equinox, they knew they would never get through. We know the rest.

Wilson was a renaissance man; a scientist, healer and polymath. Though trained as a doctor he made advances across the natural sciences that would be inconceivable today. He took the best medical kit of his day, but he and his men died all the same.

Would I have done any better? I'd found I couldn't contribute to modern Antarctic science, but my antibiotics and non-adherent dressings might have cured Evans's wound. My Inadine gauze and hydrocolloid plasters might have saved Oates's foot. If they had been able to march a little faster, with a little less pain, then they just might have made it home.

When I looked out over the plains of ice beyond my office window they seemed endless, stretching sequinned towards the Pole, sublime in their indifference. I felt relief that I'd never have to walk into that unknown the way that Shackleton or Scott did.

But if I did, and injured myself on the ice, satellite-tracking

would pinpoint my location. Friendly voices would reassure me over the radio, and an aeroplane of deliverance would swoop down from the sky. There are advantages to living in an era of specialization. Perhaps I was born to the right age after all. ♦



## The Magic Place

by *Kapka Kassabova*

People always ask ‘Where are you from?’ But in the 21st century, this question is not about the passports you hold. This is why I’ve given up on the short, geopolitically precise answer, which is ‘Bulgarian Kiwi Brit’ – no one knows what to say next. Somehow, bringing up *Lord of the Rings* or the Bulgarian umbrella murder doesn’t seem right. And anyway, this short answer doesn’t address the unspoken questions-within-the-question, such as Where do you really belong; Goodness, how did your accent get like this; Are you here by choice, necessity or accident; and Oh, I see, you’re one of those people who’ve been around the world but can’t be happy anywhere? Well, I used to be. Now I live in Britain and I’m not. So, here is the long answer – instead of a love letter to Scotland.

For each one of us, there are three types of place in the world:

1. Neutral: you go there on holiday, enjoy and return home without regret. Nothing important will happen to you there. It’s not the place itself that is neutral of course – every place on earth has a charge – but we are concerned with the chemistry between you and the place. It is like meeting someone whose name or face you soon forget.

2. Places where you are destined to be ill at ease, in some subtle but incurable way not unlike a dysfunctional relationship between two people who bring out the worst in each other. There

are several ways of being out of joint in a place, and one is called homeland (being born in the wrong place). Another is called emigration (moving to the wrong place). The obvious cure seems to be further travel, physical and mental. To be in a suspended state. To be simply *away*.

3. Which takes us to the third kind of place: the magic place. Paul Bowles summed it up in his aptly titled memoir *Without Stopping*: ‘Like any Romantic, I had always been vaguely certain that sometime during my life I should come into a magic place which in disclosing its secrets would give me wisdom and ecstasy – perhaps even death.’

He did come into that place, and so do his characters. For him and them, it was North Africa. Where was *my* magic place, I wondered, aged eight, as I stayed up late reading *Scarlet Sails* by Alexander Green. From where I stood on the chipped balcony of Block Number 328, the world was a distant rumour, radio static, something that happened in books. It is the story of a girl waiting for a mythical ship with scarlet sails to appear and take her away. Green’s stories were set in places with names like Zurbagan and Caperna, and his characters were called Longren and Azole, which is why you wouldn’t guess that he never made it out of Soviet Russia, except in his imagination. I stood on our concrete balcony and surveyed the thousands of lit-up squares on the thousands of identical high-rises on the outskirts of Sofia. Not a scarlet sail in sight.

Tinkling with trams and punctuated by Orthodox churches, Sofia lived in the shadow of chestnut trees and late totalitarianism. It held on to its belle époque remains under the onslaught of brutalist architecture and big-fisted proletarian monuments that soon became chipped, like our Block Number 328 where my sister, my mathematician parents and I lived as cheerfully as we could. We had an orange Skoda, and my father spent every



weekend lying under it, in between writing research papers, while my mother made birthday cakes without flour; milk or sugar – such things were reserved for the Bright Future.

I was ten, and already writing poems about railway stations and sailing away. On dangerous adventures, like *The Sea Wolf* by Jack London. To misty Scotland – or was it England? – with Sherlock Holmes and *The Hound of the Baskervilles*; to Rome with *I, Claudius*; to America with Charlie Chaplin's *My Autobiography*; to Italy with Michelangelo's *The Agony and the Ecstasy*.

Five years later at Sofia's Lycée Français, I devoured Albert Camus's *L'étranger* and felt the murderous hammer of the Algerian sun on that beach. Clearly, Mersault's story was written especially for me – a Bulgarian teenager throbbing with hormones and alienation. Then I forgot the question and the alienation, because the Berlin Wall suddenly fell, and in the resulting rubble our family was catapulted in an unexpected direction: the West. Or rather Down Under, where an academic job materialized for my father.

In my atlas, New Zealand was two small splashes at the bottom of the Pacific. Magic was imminent: palm trees, dolphins, smiling natives. New Zealand was going to be like my illustrated edition of *Robinson Crusoe*. Hyperventilating with disbelief, we waved goodbye to everyone we knew, crossed the timeline on a one-way ticket, and arrived at the bottom of the South Island with a container of books and a piano. The news hit us instantly: this was not the tropics (it was snowing), the people looked like sunburned Scots, and we were at the end of the world. For years, we huddled together for comfort and got on with the business of psychic survival, as emigrant families do. We tried not to look back because we couldn't afford to. Instead, we got our New Zealand passports, took to eating 'fush and chups', learned to sing 'Po Karekare Ana' (my dad on the accordion), and lived in a big house with a garden – my parents' post-brutalist dream come true.

And yet something was missing. It was as if we'd stepped off a cliff and were floating in some Pacific ocean-carpeted waiting room to the afterworld. Through my late teens and twenties, I wrestled with the feeling that my real life was unfolding elsewhere, far from here. Here was burnt tussock and killer sun, flowers that reminded me of nothing and beaches that went on forever but were too cold or dangerous to swim in. Here were friendly people who loved rugby and the outdoors. Here was weatherboard suburbia that stretched like an infinite Legoland, and Japanese cars that shone in the sun with a migrainous glare. I moved from Dunedin to Wellington to Auckland, longing to feel part of something. But that something remained in my head.

In Tahiti, where I spent a month on a university scholarship researching my old favourite Albert Camus, I found myself swimming further and further from the beach. One afternoon I swam so far that I lost sight of the shore. I could see the triangles of sharks' fins ahead – they came out at dusk. Perhaps I was on a swimmer's high, but my deep desire was to keep going until I met my destiny, whatever that was. I felt more connected with the water than with the land. Back at the beach, I realized what had just happened. This is what living in the Pacific was for me – a death wish on hold. I didn't know how to fix it, except by running away, again.

In Marseille, where I spent a year dodging work as a language assistant in a college, I found myself living alone by the sea and writing my first novel. It was set in Bulgaria and New Zealand, and it was raw and angry about both places. Something strange was happening: I was discovering the imaginative pull of distance, but this time as a writer. The further away I was from a place, the more vividly I imagined it, the more real it became to me. And the urge to *write it* into being overrode the natural urge to live in the present.

Presently, the faded stone forts, old-world brokenness and bleached afternoons of Marseille pulled me in like a distant memory. I was certain that I had already seen the Castle of If where the Count of Monte Cristo was imprisoned. I felt closer to the Arabs with their shambolic markets, the Foreign Legionnaires with their unhappy eyes, and the quick-tempered Marseillais who spat and pissed on the pavements than I had ever felt with the wholesome outdoor-bound Kiwis and Aussies. It dawned on me now: the magic place is not just about the landscape and the buildings, it's also about the people who *grow* from the place. Something in me – the old, grubby part of my soul – plugged straight into Marseille, and for the first time in my life, I felt like I was actually *living*. Then my visa expired, and I returned to New Zealand, Europe-sick and plotting my next escape. But not before I started writing a historic novel set in France and Greece.

I spent my Wellington days inside a bare rented room, surrounded by maps of the Mediterranean and books on Greece. I was living in a continuous state of 'internal emigration' – which is what I'd done as a child, with my books. It's when you feel more at home inside your head than in your environment. Result: you spend as much time as possible inside your head. I'm sure there is a psychiatric term for this, but I was too busy planning my move to Greece at the time to stop and comprehend the fact that it was enough to write a novel set in Greece; moving there would be overkill, even for me.

In any case, the mad plan was dislodged by the news that my first novel was short-listed for a prize. I went to Delhi for the award, and overstayed by two months. I considered moving to Delhi, then got into trouble. I was out of control. Where best to go when you're out of control? Buenos Aires of course, at the worst moment of its financial collapse. I spent a month dancing tango and taking notes. The economy was bust, people were

crying in the streets, the tango clubs were full, and naturally, I considered moving there. But I went to Berlin instead, for a year's writing fellowship during which I aborted a novel set – of course – in Paraguay and Argentina. I lived in the Jewish neighbourhood Mitte and walked along the vanished Wall which criss-crossed the city like stitching. At least here, everything was real, even the ghosts who followed me like limping dogs. Berlin was like Sofia, except more so. I was reliving, every day, in the first person singular, the collective past of the twentieth century. Not something to put a spring in your step. So when my visa expired, I went home.

Home. Where was that? Home can be your mother tongue – that was gone, I was writing and living in English, making my imaginative home there. Home could be your father's house – and in fact, I was living with my parents in Auckland again. But when you're thirty and living with your parents, it doesn't feel so much as home as arrested development. I needed to strike out again. I hadn't given up looking for the magic place that would give me all those things that Paul Bowles found in the Sahara.

I went to the Sahara. I photographed some dunes, drank tea with the Berbers, visited the Hotel Continental in Tangiers where the opening and closing scenes in *The Sheltering Sky* are filmed. The closest I found to 'wisdom and ecstasy' was when I was visited by some intestinal parasites and a strange desert flu. Afterwards, I read every single book set in Morocco that I could find in English and French, starting with our old friend Paul Bowles and ending with Tahar Ben Jelloun's story of a political prisoner who lived underground for twenty years.

My arrival in Edinburgh seven years ago was almost a blind date. Ever since a short visit with my parents as a teenager, I'd remembered the city as a castle on a rock atop a purple ocean.

This time, my happiness was instant, a destiny fulfilled. The

castle was still here – everything was still here, because nothing changes here except in memory. I loved the way chimneys cast shadows on sunny afternoons, the way buildings were made to precede you and outlive you while housing you, as if you too will live forever. The *haar* that crept in from the sea. The cemeteries bumpy with centuries of flesh. The way locals asked ‘Where do you stay?’ and my neighbours invited me for a ‘fish supper’. The way nobody is *too* interested in you – a great British quality, this live-and-let-live discretion – and yet you end up talking with strangers in shops, because Edinburgh people have time. The worn stone steps that lead to unexpected passages of time. The palatial smugness of Morningside and the smashed-up people of Leith; the lanes where today’s best ideas were written down by men who walked through excrement because Edinburgh was not so big on hygiene. The sense of being in the centre of things yet not in the eye of the storm, an hour from London and Europe, a radio button away from the BBC, less than a century away from an empire. And you were simultaneously living in two countries, like a matryoshka doll, which was ideal. I was far from the concrete balcony of my childhood, but not so far that I felt removed from myself. I stayed.

I had arrived in Edinburgh not knowing a single soul – except the man I came with, who was a kindred lost spirit. He never stopped being a lost spirit, which is why our four years together came to an abrupt end that resembled a car crash. Overnight, he disappeared from my life and into a new identity. I was tempted to pack up the wreckage of my Edinburgh life, bury it and put a cross on it somewhere discreet, like the top of Arthur’s Seat, then go some place completely new where nobody could guess where I came from and what I carried inside.

But my destiny was here; I knew it in my bones. I dug my heels in even deeper in Edinburgh. I stayed, all over again. But a

city was not enough any more, I had too many painful memories there and I needed to feel at home in this whole country. I needed *space* to house my past, as well as my future. I bought a car and drove deep into the Scottish Highlands.

I plunged into a wilderness of giant shaved hills that spoke of distant devastation, and dark forests that sometimes looked indigo. I needed space to house my past, as well as my future. I swam in lochs and walked by rivers. Sky that moved every second. The sheep were scattered like tombs. The wind had a voice I understood. The stone houses grew from the land. This was an ancient, human landscape whose imprint I already carried. Here were the changing colours of my childhood seasons. The blue line of the sea ahead, like a promise. The stoical faces of the people. This place was the northern continuation of me. Strangely, in this remote bit of the continent, everything important felt within reach: the sky, the ocean, the past, the end of Europe and the beginning, the city and the opposite of the city, the life of the mind and the life of the body. I felt geographically complete.

‘And now,’ Bowles writes, ‘as I stood in the wind looking at the mountains ahead, it was as if I were drawing close to the solution of an as-yet unposed problem. I was incredibly happy as I watched the wall of mountains slowly take on substance, but I let the happiness wash over me and asked no questions.’

I had already spent a lifetime asking those questions. Now, I had an answer.

These days I live in the Highlands with someone who is deeply rooted in the place and, like the place, has the wisdom to accommodate my history. I will never stop travelling of course, because I never want to abandon the world. Just as I hope the world doesn’t abandon us if politicians with doughy faces and dated ideas have their way and Scotland breaks away from the Britain that makes it such a perfect home for the likes of us – the

people who have left the fear and loathing of nationalism in the rubble of the twentieth century, and believe that borders need to open, not close, so that we can be more, not less.

That's all very well, but what happens to the imagination when the spirit stops flickering like the needle of a broken compass? You go inwards more than you go outwards, and the nature of your enquiry changes. It's not about where to go next, but about where you've been, what happened and why. I now know that the practice of internal emigration when there is clearly no need to emigrate further is simply called being a writer. And there is no cure for it. Something else I know: those who go broke searching for the magic place are homeless. What they are *really* looking for is home. Home not as the place you come from, but the place you reach; home as the place where you understand yourself. That is where the wisdom and the ecstasy are. The death too, one day.

Perhaps *you* knew this all along. Lucky you. ♦

## Hunting Down bin Laden

by *Nicholas Schmidle*

Shortly after eleven o'clock on the night of May 1st, two MH-60 Black Hawk helicopters lifted off from Jalalabad Air Field, in eastern Afghanistan, and embarked on a covert mission into Pakistan to kill Osama bin Laden. Inside the aircraft were twenty-three Navy SEALs from Team Six, which is officially known as the Naval Special Warfare Development Group, or DEVGRU. A Pakistani-American translator, whom I will call Ahmed, and a dog named Cairo – a Belgian Malinois – were also aboard. It was a moonless evening, and the helicopters' pilots, wearing night-vision goggles, flew without lights over mountains that straddle the border with Pakistan. Radio communications were kept to a minimum, and an eerie calm settled inside the aircraft.

Fifteen minutes later, the helicopters ducked into an alpine valley and slipped, undetected, into Pakistani airspace. For more than sixty years, Pakistan's military has maintained a state of high alert against its eastern neighbor, India. Because of this obsession, Pakistan's "principal air defenses are all pointing east," Shuja Nawaz, an expert on the Pakistani Army and the author of "Crossed Swords: Pakistan, Its Army, and the Wars Within," told me. Senior defense and Administration officials concur with this assessment, but a Pakistani senior military official, whom I reached at his office, in Rawalpindi, disagreed. "No one leaves their borders unattended," he said. Though he declined to elaborate on the location or orientation of Pakistan's radars – "It's

not where the radars are or aren't" – he said that the American infiltration was the result of “technological gaps we have vis-à-vis the U.S.” The Black Hawks, each of which had two pilots and a crewman from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, or the Night Stalkers, had been modified to mask heat, noise, and movement; the copters’ exteriors had sharp, flat angles and were covered with radar-dampening “skin.”

The SEALs’ destination was a house in the small city of Abbottabad, which is about a hundred and twenty miles across the Pakistan border. Situated north of Islamabad, Pakistan’s capital, Abbottabad is in the foothills of the Pir Panjal Range, and is popular in the summertime with families seeking relief from the blistering heat farther south. Founded in 1853 by a British major named James Abbott, the city became the home of a prestigious military academy after the creation of Pakistan, in 1947. According to information gathered by the Central Intelligence Agency, bin Laden was holed up on the third floor of a house in a one-acre compound just off Kakul Road in Bilal Town, a middle-class neighborhood less than a mile from the entrance to the academy. If all went according to plan, the SEALs would drop from the helicopters into the compound, overpower bin Laden’s guards, shoot and kill him at close range, and then take the corpse back to Afghanistan.

The helicopters traversed Mohmand, one of Pakistan’s seven tribal areas, skirted the north of Peshawar, and continued due east. The commander of DEVGRU’s Red Squadron, whom I will call James, sat on the floor, squeezed among ten other SEALs, Ahmed, and Cairo. (The names of all the covert operators mentioned in this story have been changed.) James, a broad-chested man in his late thirties, does not have the lithe swimmer’s frame that one might expect of a SEAL – he is built more like a discus thrower. That night, he wore a shirt and trousers in Desert

Digital Camouflage, and carried a silenced Sig Sauer P226 pistol, along with extra ammunition; a CamelBak, for hydration; and gel shots, for endurance. He held a short-barrel, silenced M4 rifle. A “blowout kit,” for treating field trauma, was tucked into the small of James’s back. Stuffed into one of his pockets was a laminated gridded map of the compound. In another pocket was a booklet with photographs and physical descriptions of the people suspected of being inside. He wore a noise-cancelling headset, which blocked out nearly everything besides his heartbeat.

During the ninety-minute helicopter flight, James and his teammates rehearsed the operation in their heads. Since the autumn of 2001, they had rotated through Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, and the Horn of Africa, at a brutal pace. At least three of the SEALs had participated in the sniper operation off the coast of Somalia, in April, 2009, that freed Richard Phillips, the captain of the *Maersk Alabama*, and left three pirates dead. In October, 2010, a DEVGRU team attempted to rescue Linda Norgrove, a Scottish aid worker who had been kidnapped in eastern Afghanistan by the Taliban. During a raid of a Taliban hideout, a SEAL tossed a grenade at an insurgent, not realizing that Norgrove was nearby. She died from the blast. The mistake haunted the SEALs who had been involved; three of them were subsequently expelled from DEVGRU.

The Abbottabad raid was not DEVGRU’s maiden venture into Pakistan, either. The team had surreptitiously entered the country on ten to twelve previous occasions, according to a special-operations officer who is deeply familiar with the bin Laden raid. Most of those missions were forays into North and South Waziristan, where many military and intelligence analysts had thought that bin Laden and other Al Qaeda leaders were hiding. (Only one such operation – the September, 2008, raid of Angoor Ada, a village in South Waziristan – has been widely reported.)

Abbottabad was, by far, the farthest that DEVGRU had ventured into Pakistani territory. It also represented the team's first serious attempt since late 2001 at killing "Crankshaft" – the target name that the Joint Special Operations Command, or JSOC, had given bin Laden. Since escaping that winter during a battle in the Tora Bora region of eastern Afghanistan, bin Laden had defied American efforts to trace him. Indeed, it remains unclear how he ended up living in Abbottabad.

Forty-five minutes after the Black Hawks departed, four MH-47 Chinooks launched from the same runway in Jalalabad. Two of them flew to the border, staying on the Afghan side; the other two proceeded into Pakistan. Deploying four Chinooks was a last-minute decision made after President Barack Obama said he wanted to feel assured that the Americans could "fight their way out of Pakistan." Twenty-five additional SEALs from DEVGRU, pulled from a squadron stationed in Afghanistan, sat in the Chinooks that remained at the border; this "quick-reaction force" would be called into action only if the mission went seriously wrong. The third and fourth Chinooks were each outfitted with a pair of M134 Miniguns. They followed the Black Hawks' initial flight path but landed at a predetermined point on a dry riverbed in a wide, unpopulated valley in northwest Pakistan. The nearest house was half a mile away. On the ground, the copters' rotors were kept whirring while operatives monitored the surrounding hills for encroaching Pakistani helicopters or fighter jets. One of the Chinooks was carrying fuel bladders, in case the other aircraft needed to refill their tanks.

Meanwhile, the two Black Hawks were quickly approaching Abbottabad from the northwest, hiding behind the mountains on the northernmost edge of the city. Then the pilots banked right and went south along a ridge that marks Abbottabad's eastern perimeter. When those hills tapered off, the pilots curled right

again, toward the city center, and made their final approach.

During the next four minutes, the interior of the Black Hawks rustled alive with the metallic cough of rounds being chambered. Mark, a master chief petty officer and the ranking noncommissioned officer on the operation, crouched on one knee beside the open door of the lead helicopter. He and the eleven other SEALs on "helo one," who were wearing gloves and had on night-vision goggles, were preparing to fast-rope into bin Laden's yard. They waited for the crew chief to give the signal to throw the rope. But, as the pilot passed over the compound, pulled into a high hover, and began lowering the aircraft, he felt the Black Hawk getting away from him. He sensed that they were going to crash.

One month before the 2008 Presidential election, Obama, then a senator from Illinois, squared off in a debate against John McCain in an arena at Belmont University, in Nashville. A woman in the audience asked Obama if he would be willing to pursue Al Qaeda leaders inside Pakistan, even if that meant invading an ally nation. He replied, "If we have Osama bin Laden in our sights and the Pakistani government is unable, or unwilling, to take them out, then I think that we have to act and we will take them out. We will kill bin Laden. We will crush Al Qaeda. That has to be our biggest national-security priority." McCain, who often criticized Obama for his naïveté on foreign-policy matters, characterized the promise as foolish, saying, "I'm not going to telegraph my punches."

Four months after Obama entered the White House, Leon Panetta, the director of the C.I.A., briefed the President on the agency's latest programs and initiatives for tracking bin Laden. Obama was unimpressed. In June, 2009, he drafted a memo instructing Panetta to create a "detailed operation plan" for finding the Al Qaeda leader and to "ensure that we have expended

every effort.” Most notably, the President intensified the C.I.A.’s classified drone program; there were more missile strikes inside Pakistan during Obama’s first year in office than in George W. Bush’s eight. The terrorists swiftly registered the impact: that July, CBS reported that a recent Al Qaeda communiqué had referred to “brave commanders” who had been “snatched away” and to “so many hidden homes [which] have been levelled.” The document blamed the “very grave” situation on spies who had “spread throughout the land like locusts.” Nevertheless, bin Laden’s trail remained cold.

In August, 2010, Panetta returned to the White House with better news. C.I.A. analysts believed that they had pinpointed bin Laden’s courier, a man in his early thirties named Abu Ahmed al-Kuwaiti. Kuwaiti drove a white S.U.V. whose spare-tire cover was emblazoned with an image of a white rhino. The C.I.A. began tracking the vehicle. One day, a satellite captured images of the S.U.V. pulling into a large concrete compound in Abbottabad. Agents, determining that Kuwaiti was living there, used aerial surveillance to keep watch on the compound, which consisted of a three-story main house, a guesthouse, and a few outbuildings. They observed that residents of the compound burned their trash, instead of putting it out for collection, and concluded that the compound lacked a phone or an Internet connection. Kuwaiti and his brother came and went, but another man, living on the third floor, never left. When this third individual did venture outside, he stayed behind the compound’s walls. Some analysts speculated that the third man was bin Laden, and the agency dubbed him the Pacer.

Obama, though excited, was not yet prepared to order military action. John Brennan, Obama’s counterterrorism adviser, told me that the President’s advisers began an “interrogation of the data, to see if, by that interrogation, you’re going to disprove the theory

that bin Laden was there.” The C.I.A. intensified its intelligence-collection efforts, and, according to a recent report in the *Guardian*, a physician working for the agency conducted an immunization drive in Abbottabad, in the hope of acquiring DNA samples from bin Laden’s children. (No one in the compound ultimately received any immunizations.)

In late 2010, Obama ordered Panetta to begin exploring options for a military strike on the compound. Panetta contacted Vice-Admiral Bill McRaven, the SEAL in charge of JSOC. Traditionally, the Army has dominated the special-operations community, but in recent years the SEALs have become a more prominent presence; McRaven’s boss at the time of the raid, Eric Olson – the head of Special Operations Command, or SOCOM – is a Navy admiral who used to be a commander of DEVGRU. In January, 2011, McRaven asked a JSOC official named Brian, who had previously been a DEVGRU deputy commander, to present a raid plan. The next month, Brian, who has the all-American look of a high-school quarterback, moved into an unmarked office on the first floor of the C.I.A.’s printing plant, in Langley, Virginia. Brian covered the walls of the office with topographical maps and satellite images of the Abbottabad compound. He and half a dozen JSOC officers were formally attached to the Pakistan/Afghanistan department of the C.I.A.’s Counterterrorism Center, but in practice they operated on their own. A senior counterterrorism official who visited the JSOC redoubt described it as an enclave of unusual secrecy and discretion. “Everything they were working on was closely held,” the official said.

The relationship between special-operations units and the C.I.A. dates back to the Vietnam War. But the line between the two communities has increasingly blurred as C.I.A. officers and military personnel have encountered one another on multiple

tours of Iraq and Afghanistan. “These people grew up together,” a senior Defense Department official told me. “We are in each other’s systems, we speak each other’s languages.” (Exemplifying this trend, General David H. Petraeus, the former commanding general in Iraq and Afghanistan, is now the incoming head of the C.I.A., and Panetta has taken over the Department of Defense.) The bin Laden mission – plotted at C.I.A. headquarters and authorized under C.I.A. legal statutes but conducted by Navy DEVGRU operators – brought the coöperation between the agency and the Pentagon to an even higher level. John Radsan, a former assistant general counsel at the C.I.A., said that the Abbottabad raid amounted to “a complete incorporation of JSOC into a C.I.A. operation.”

On March 14th, Obama called his national-security advisers into the White House Situation Room and reviewed a spreadsheet listing possible courses of action against the Abbottabad compound. Most were variations of either a JSOC raid or an airstrike. Some versions included coöperating with the Pakistani military; some did not. Obama decided against informing or working with Pakistan. “There was a real lack of confidence that the Pakistanis could keep this secret for more than a nanosecond,” a senior adviser to the President told me. At the end of the meeting, Obama instructed McRaven to proceed with planning the raid.

Brian invited James, the commander of DEVGRU’s Red Squadron, and Mark, the master chief petty officer, to join him at C.I.A. headquarters. They spent the next two and a half weeks considering ways to get inside bin Laden’s house. One option entailed flying helicopters to a spot outside Abbottabad and letting the team sneak into the city on foot. The risk of detection was high, however, and the SEALs would be tired by a long run to the compound. The planners had contemplated tunnelling in – or,

at least, the possibility that bin Laden might tunnel out. But images provided by the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency showed that there was standing water in the vicinity, suggesting that the compound sat in a flood basin. The water table was probably just below the surface, making tunnels highly unlikely. Eventually, the planners agreed that it made the most sense to fly directly into the compound. “Special operations is about doing what’s not expected, and probably the least expected thing here was that a helicopter would come in, drop guys on the roof, and land in the yard,” the special-operations officer said.

On March 29th, McRaven brought the plan to Obama. The President’s military advisers were divided. Some supported a raid, some an airstrike, and others wanted to hold off until the intelligence improved. Robert Gates, the Secretary of Defense, was one of the most outspoken opponents of a helicopter assault. Gates reminded his colleagues that he had been in the Situation Room of the Carter White House when military officials presented Eagle Claw – the 1980 Delta Force operation that aimed at rescuing American hostages in Tehran but resulted in a disastrous collision in the Iranian desert, killing eight American soldiers. “They said that was a pretty good idea, too,” Gates warned. He and General James Cartwright, the vice-chairman of the Joint Chiefs, favored an airstrike by B-2 Spirit bombers. That option would avoid the risk of having American boots on the ground in Pakistan. But the Air Force then calculated that a payload of thirty-two smart bombs, each weighing two thousand pounds, would be required to penetrate thirty feet below ground, insuring that any bunkers would collapse. “That much ordnance going off would be the equivalent of an earthquake,” Cartwright told me. The prospect of flattening a Pakistani city made Obama pause. He shelved the B-2 option and directed McRaven to start rehearsing the raid.



Brian, James, and Mark selected a team of two dozen SEALs from Red Squadron and told them to report to a densely forested site in North Carolina for a training exercise on April 10th. (Red Squadron is one of four squadrons in DEVGRU, which has about three hundred operators in all.) None of the SEALs, besides James and Mark, were aware of the C.I.A. intelligence on bin Laden's compound until a lieutenant commander walked into an office at the site. He found a two-star Army general from JSOC headquarters seated at a conference table with Brian, James, Mark, and several analysts from the C.I.A. This obviously wasn't a training exercise. The lieutenant commander was promptly "read in." A replica of the compound had been built at the site, with walls and chain-link fencing marking the layout of the compound. The team spent the next five days practicing maneuvers.

On April 18th, the DEVGRU squad flew to Nevada for another week of rehearsals. The practice site was a large government-owned stretch of desert with an elevation equivalent to the area surrounding Abbottabad. An extant building served as bin Laden's house. Aircrews plotted out a path that paralleled the flight from Jalalabad to Abbottabad. Each night after sundown, drills commenced. Twelve SEALs, including Mark, boarded helo one. Eleven SEALs, Ahmed, and Cairo boarded helo two. The pilots flew in the dark, arrived at the simulated compound, and settled into a hover while the SEALs fast-roped down. Not everyone on the team was accustomed to helicopter assaults. Ahmed had been pulled from a desk job for the mission and had never descended a fast rope. He quickly learned the technique.

The assault plan was now honed. Helo one was to hover over the yard, drop two fast ropes, and let all twelve SEALs slide down into the yard. Helo two would fly to the northeast corner of the compound and let out Ahmed, Cairo, and four SEALs, who would monitor the perimeter of the building. The copter would

then hover over the house, and James and the remaining six SEALs would shimmy down to the roof. As long as everything was cordial, Ahmed would hold curious neighbors at bay. The SEALs and the dog could assist more aggressively, if needed. Then, if bin Laden was proving difficult to find, Cairo could be sent into the house to search for false walls or hidden doors. "This wasn't a hard op," the special-operations officer told me. "It would be like hitting a target in McLean" – the upscale Virginia suburb of Washington, D.C.

A planeload of guests arrived on the night of April 21st. Admiral Mike Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, along with Olson and McRaven, sat with C.I.A. personnel in a hangar as Brian, James, Mark, and the pilots presented a brief on the raid, which had been named Operation Neptune's Spear. Despite JSOC's lead role in Neptune's Spear, the mission officially remained a C.I.A. covert operation. The covert approach allowed the White House to hide its involvement, if necessary. As the counterterrorism official put it recently, "If you land and everybody is out on a milk run, then you get the hell out and no one knows." After describing the operation, the briefers fielded questions: What if a mob surrounded the compound? Were the SEALs prepared to shoot civilians? Olson, who received the Silver Star for valor during the 1993 "Black Hawk Down" episode, in Mogadishu, Somalia, worried that it could be politically catastrophic if a U.S. helicopter were shot down inside Pakistani territory. After an hour or so of questioning, the senior officers and intelligence analysts returned to Washington. Two days later, the SEALs flew back to Dam Neck, their base in Virginia.

On the night of Tuesday, April 26th, the SEAL team boarded a Boeing C-17 Globemaster at Naval Air Station Oceana, a few miles from Dam Neck. After a refuelling stop at Ramstein Air Base, in Germany, the C-17 continued to Bagram Airfield, north

of Kabul. The SEALs spent a night in Bagram and moved to Jalalabad on Wednesday.

That day in Washington, Panetta convened more than a dozen senior C.I.A. officials and analysts for a final preparatory meeting. Panetta asked the participants, one by one, to declare how confident they were that bin Laden was inside the Abbottabad compound. The counterterrorism official told me that the percentages “ranged from forty per cent to ninety or ninety-five per cent,” and added, “This was a circumstantial case.”

Panetta was mindful of the analysts’ doubts, but he believed that the intelligence was better than anything that the C.I.A. had gathered on bin Laden since his flight from Tora Bora. Late on Thursday afternoon, Panetta and the rest of the national-security team met with the President. For the next few nights, there would be virtually no moonlight over Abbottabad – the ideal condition for a raid. After that, it would be another month until the lunar cycle was in its darkest phase. Several analysts from the National Counterterrorism Center were invited to critique the C.I.A.’s analysis; their confidence in the intelligence ranged between forty and sixty per cent. The center’s director, Michael Leiter, said that it would be preferable to wait for stronger confirmation of bin Laden’s presence in Abbottabad. Yet, as Ben Rhodes, a deputy national-security adviser, put it to me recently, the longer things dragged on, the greater the risk of a leak, “which would have upended the thing.” Obama adjourned the meeting just after 7 P.M. and said that he would sleep on it.

The next morning, the President met in the Map Room with Tom Donilon, his national-security adviser, Denis McDonough, a deputy adviser, and Brennan. Obama had decided to go with a DEVGRU assault, with McRaven choosing the night. It was too late for a Friday attack, and on Saturday there was excessive cloud cover. On Saturday afternoon, McRaven and Obama spoke on the

phone, and McRaven said that the raid would occur on Sunday night. “Godspeed to you and your forces,” Obama told him. “Please pass on to them my personal thanks for their service and the message that I personally will be following this mission very closely.”

On the morning of Sunday, May 1st, White House officials cancelled scheduled visits, ordered sandwich platters from Costco, and transformed the Situation Room into a war room. At eleven o’clock, Obama’s top advisers began gathering around a large conference table. A video link connected them to Panetta, at C.I.A. headquarters, and McRaven, in Afghanistan. (There were at least two other command centers, one inside the Pentagon and one inside the American Embassy in Islamabad.)

Brigadier General Marshall Webb, an assistant commander of JSOC, took a seat at the end of a lacquered table in a small adjoining office and turned on his laptop. He opened multiple chat windows that kept him, and the White House, connected with the other command teams. The office where Webb sat had the only video feed in the White House showing real-time footage of the target, which was being shot by an unarmed RQ 170 drone flying more than fifteen thousand feet above Abbottabad. The JSOC planners, determined to keep the operation as secret as possible, had decided against using additional fighters or bombers. “It just wasn’t worth it,” the special-operations officer told me. The SEALs were on their own.

Obama returned to the White House at two o’clock, after playing nine holes of golf at Andrews Air Force Base. The Black Hawks departed from Jalalabad thirty minutes later. Just before four o’clock, Panetta announced to the group in the Situation Room that the helicopters were approaching Abbottabad. Obama stood up. “I need to watch this,” he said, stepping across the hall into the small office and taking a seat alongside Webb. Vice-

President Joseph Biden, Secretary Gates, and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton followed him, as did anyone else who could fit into the office. On the office's modestly sized LCD screen, helo one – grainy and black-and-white – appeared above the compound, then promptly ran into trouble.

When the helicopter began getting away from the pilot, he pulled back on the cyclic, which controls the pitch of the rotor blades, only to find the aircraft unresponsive. The high walls of the compound and the warm temperatures had caused the Black Hawk to descend inside its own rotor wash – a hazardous aerodynamic situation known as “settling with power.” In North Carolina, this potential problem had not become apparent, because the chain-link fencing used in rehearsals had allowed air to flow freely. A former helicopter pilot with extensive special-operations experience said of the pilot's situation, “It's pretty spooky – I've been in it myself. The only way to get out of it is to push the cyclic forward and fly out of this vertical silo you're dropping through. That solution requires altitude. If you're settling with power at two thousand feet, you've got plenty of time to recover. If you're settling with power at fifty feet, you're going to hit the ground.”

The pilot scrapped the plan to fast-rope and focussed on getting the aircraft down. He aimed for an animal pen in the western section of the compound. The SEALs on board braced themselves as the tail rotor swung around, scraping the security wall. The pilot jammed the nose forward to drive it into the dirt and prevent his aircraft from rolling onto its side. Cows, chickens, and rabbits scurried. With the Black Hawk pitched at a forty-five-degree angle astride the wall, the crew sent a distress call to the idling Chinooks.

James and the SEALs in helo two watched all this while hovering over the compound's northeast corner. The second pilot,

unsure whether his colleagues were taking fire or experiencing mechanical problems, ditched his plan to hover over the roof. Instead, he landed in a grassy field across the street from the house.

No American was yet inside the residential part of the compound. Mark and his team were inside a downed helicopter at one corner, while James and his team were at the opposite end. The teams had barely been on target for a minute, and the mission was already veering off course.

“Eternity is defined as the time between when you see something go awry and that first voice report,” the special-operations officer said. The officials in Washington viewed the aerial footage and waited anxiously to hear a military communication. The senior adviser to the President compared the experience to watching “the climax of a movie.”

After a few minutes, the twelve SEALs inside helo one recovered their bearings and calmly relayed on the radio that they were proceeding with the raid. They had conducted so many operations over the past nine years that few things caught them off guard. In the months after the raid, the media have frequently suggested that the Abbottabad operation was as challenging as Operation Eagle Claw and the “Black Hawk Down” incident, but the senior Defense Department official told me that “this was not one of three missions. This was one of almost two thousand missions that have been conducted over the last couple of years, night after night.” He likened the routine of evening raids to “mowing the lawn.” On the night of May 1st alone, special-operations forces based in Afghanistan conducted twelve other missions; according to the official, those operations captured or killed between fifteen and twenty targets. “Most of the missions take off and go left,” he said. “This one took off and went right.”

Minutes after hitting the ground, Mark and the other team

members began streaming out the side doors of helo one. Mud sucked at their boots as they ran alongside a ten-foot-high wall that enclosed the animal pen. A three-man demolition unit hustled ahead to the pen's closed metal gate, reached into bags containing explosives, and placed C-4 charges on the hinges. After a loud bang, the door fell open. The nine other SEALs rushed forward, ending up in an alleylike driveway with their backs to the house's main entrance. They moved down the alley, silenced rifles pressed against their shoulders. Mark hung toward the rear as he established radio communications with the other team. At the end of the driveway, the Americans blew through yet another locked gate and stepped into a courtyard facing the guesthouse, where Abu Ahmed al-Kuwaiti, bin Laden's courier, lived with his wife and four children.

Three SEALs in front broke off to clear the guesthouse as the remaining nine blasted through another gate and entered an inner courtyard, which faced the main house. When the smaller unit rounded the corner to face the doors of the guesthouse, they spotted Kuwaiti running inside to warn his wife and children. The Americans' night-vision goggles cast the scene in pixellated shades of emerald green. Kuwaiti, wearing a white shalwar kameez, had grabbed a weapon and was coming back outside when the SEALs opened fire and killed him.

The nine other SEALs, including Mark, formed three-man units for clearing the inner courtyard. The Americans suspected that several more men were in the house: Kuwaiti's thirty-three-year-old brother, Abrar; bin Laden's sons Hamza and Khalid; and bin Laden himself. One SEAL unit had no sooner trod on the paved patio at the house's front entrance when Abrar – a stocky, mustachioed man in a cream-colored shalwar kameez – appeared with an AK-47. He was shot in the chest and killed, as was his wife, Bushra, who was standing, unarmed, beside him.

Outside the compound's walls, Ahmed, the translator, patrolled the dirt road in front of bin Laden's house, as if he were a plainclothes Pakistani police officer. He looked the part, wearing a shalwar kameez atop a flak jacket. He, the dog Cairo, and four SEALs were responsible for closing off the perimeter of the house while James and six other SEALs – the contingent that was supposed to have dropped onto the roof – moved inside. For the team patrolling the perimeter, the first fifteen minutes passed without incident. Neighbors undoubtedly heard the low-flying helicopters, the sound of one crashing, and the sporadic explosions and gunfire that ensued, but nobody came outside. One local took note of the tumult in a Twitter post: "Helicopter hovering above Abbottabad at 1 AM (is a rare event)."

Eventually, a few curious Pakistanis approached to inquire about the commotion on the other side of the wall. "Go back to your houses," Ahmed said, in Pashto, as Cairo stood watch. "There is a security operation under way." The locals went home, none of them suspecting that they had talked to an American. When journalists descended on Bilal Town in the coming days, one resident told a reporter, "I saw soldiers emerging from the helicopters and advancing toward the house. Some of them instructed us in chaste Pashto to turn off the lights and stay inside."

Meanwhile, James, the squadron commander, had breached one wall, crossed a section of the yard covered with trellises, breached a second wall, and joined up with the SEALs from helo one, who were entering the ground floor of the house. What happened next is not precisely clear. "I can tell you that there was a time period of almost twenty to twenty-five minutes where we really didn't know just exactly what was going on," Panetta said later, on "PBS NewsHour."

Until this moment, the operation had been monitored by

dozens of defense, intelligence, and Administration officials watching the drone's video feed. The SEALs were not wearing helmet cams, contrary to a widely cited report by CBS. None of them had any previous knowledge of the house's floor plan, and they were further jostled by the awareness that they were possibly minutes away from ending the costliest manhunt in American history; as a result, some of their recollections – on which this account is based – may be imprecise and, thus, subject to dispute.

As Abrar's children ran for cover, the SEALs began clearing the first floor of the main house, room by room. Though the Americans had thought that the house might be booby-trapped, the presence of kids at the compound suggested otherwise. "You can only be hyper-vigilant for so long," the special-operations officer said. "Did bin Laden go to sleep every night thinking, The next night they're coming? Of course not. Maybe for the first year or two. But not now." Nevertheless, security precautions were in place. A locked metal gate blocked the base of the staircase leading to the second floor, making the downstairs room feel like a cage.

After blasting through the gate with C-4 charges, three SEALs marched up the stairs. Midway up, they saw bin Laden's twenty-three-year-old son, Khalid, craning his neck around the corner. He then appeared at the top of the staircase with an AK-47. Khalid, who wore a white T-shirt with an overstretched neckline and had short hair and a clipped beard, fired down at the Americans. (The counterterrorism official claims that Khalid was unarmed, though still a threat worth taking seriously. "You have an adult male, late at night, in the dark, coming down the stairs at you in an Al Qaeda house – your assumption is that you're encountering a hostile.") At least two of the SEALs shot back and killed Khalid. According to the booklets that the SEALs carried, up to five adult males were living inside the compound. Three of them were now dead;

the fourth, bin Laden's son Hamza, was not on the premises. The final person was bin Laden.

Before the mission commenced, the SEALs had created a checklist of code words that had a Native American theme. Each code word represented a different stage of the mission: leaving Jalalabad, entering Pakistan, approaching the compound, and so on. "Geronimo" was to signify that bin Laden had been found.

Three SEALs shuttled past Khalid's body and blew open another metal cage, which obstructed the staircase leading to the third floor. Bounding up the unlit stairs, they scanned the railed landing. On the top stair, the lead SEAL swivelled right; with his night-vision goggles, he discerned that a tall, rangy man with a fist-length beard was peeking out from behind a bedroom door, ten feet away. The SEAL instantly sensed that it was Crankshaft. (The counterterrorism official asserts that the SEAL first saw bin Laden on the landing, and fired but missed.)

The Americans hurried toward the bedroom door. The first SEAL pushed it open. Two of bin Laden's wives had placed themselves in front of him. Amal al-Fatah, bin Laden's fifth wife, was screaming in Arabic. She motioned as if she were going to charge; the SEAL lowered his sights and shot her once, in the calf. Fearing that one or both women were wearing suicide jackets, he stepped forward, wrapped them in a bear hug, and drove them aside. He would almost certainly have been killed had they blown themselves up, but by blanketing them he would have absorbed some of the blast and potentially saved the two SEALs behind him. In the end, neither woman was wearing an explosive vest.

A second SEAL stepped into the room and trained the infrared laser of his M4 on bin Laden's chest. The Al Qaeda chief, who was wearing a tan shalwar kameez and a prayer cap on his head, froze; he was unarmed. "There was never any question of detaining or capturing him – it wasn't a split-second decision. No

one wanted detainees,” the special-operations officer told me. (The Administration maintains that had bin Laden immediately surrendered he could have been taken alive.) Nine years, seven months, and twenty days after September 11th, an American was a trigger pull from ending bin Laden’s life. The first round, a 5.56-mm. bullet, struck bin Laden in the chest. As he fell backward, the SEAL fired a second round into his head, just above his left eye. On his radio, he reported, “For God and country – Geronimo, Geronimo, Geronimo.” After a pause, he added, “Geronimo E.K.I.A.” – “enemy killed in action.”

Hearing this at the White House, Obama pursed his lips, and said solemnly, to no one in particular, “We got him.”

Relaxing his hold on bin Laden’s two wives, the first SEAL placed the women in flex cuffs and led them downstairs. Two of his colleagues, meanwhile, ran upstairs with a nylon body bag. They unfurled it, knelt down on either side of bin Laden, and placed the body inside the bag. Eighteen minutes had elapsed since the DEVGRU team landed. For the next twenty minutes, the mission shifted to an intelligence-gathering operation.

Four men scoured the second floor, plastic bags in hand, collecting flash drives, CDs, DVDs, and computer hardware from the room, which had served, in part, as bin Laden’s makeshift media studio. In the coming weeks, a C.I.A.-led task force examined the files and determined that bin Laden had remained far more involved in the operational activities of Al Qaeda than many American officials had thought. He had been developing plans to assassinate Obama and Petraeus, to pull off an extravagant September 11th anniversary attack, and to attack American trains. The SEALs also found an archive of digital pornography. “We find it on all these guys, whether they’re in Somalia, Iraq, or Afghanistan,” the special-operations officer said. Bin Laden’s gold-threaded robes, worn during his video addresses,

hung behind a curtain in the media room.

Outside, the Americans corralled the women and children – each of them bound in flex cuffs – and had them sit against an exterior wall that faced the second, undamaged Black Hawk. The lone fluent Arabic speaker on the assault team questioned them. Nearly all the children were under the age of ten. They seemed to have no idea about the tenant upstairs, other than that he was “an old guy.” None of the women confirmed that the man was bin Laden, though one of them kept referring to him as “the sheikh.” When the rescue Chinook eventually arrived, a medic stepped out and knelt over the corpse. He injected a needle into bin Laden’s body and extracted two bone-marrow samples. More DNA was taken with swabs. One of the bone-marrow samples went into the Black Hawk. The other went into the Chinook, along with bin Laden’s body.

Next, the SEALs needed to destroy the damaged Black Hawk. The pilot, armed with a hammer that he kept for such situations, smashed the instrument panel, the radio, and the other classified fixtures inside the cockpit. Then the demolition unit took over. They placed explosives near the avionics system, the communications gear, the engine, and the rotor head. “You’re not going to hide the fact that it’s a helicopter,” the special-operations officer said. “But you want to make it unusable.” The SEALs placed extra C-4 charges under the carriage, rolled thermite grenades inside the copter’s body, and then backed up. Helo one burst into flames while the demolition team boarded the Chinook. The women and children, who were being left behind for the Pakistani authorities, looked puzzled, scared, and shocked as they watched the SEALs board the helicopters. Amal, bin Laden’s wife, continued her harangue. Then, as a giant fire burned inside the compound walls, the Americans flew away.

In the Situation Room, Obama said, “I’m not going to be

happy until those guys get out safe.” After thirty-eight minutes inside the compound, the two SEAL teams had to make the long flight back to Afghanistan. The Black Hawk was low on gas, and needed to rendezvous with the Chinook at the refuelling point that was near the Afghan border – but still inside Pakistan. Filling the gas tank took twenty-five minutes. At one point, Biden, who had been fingering a rosary, turned to Mullen, the Joint Chiefs chairman. “We should all go to Mass tonight,” he said.

The helicopters landed back in Jalalabad around 3 A.M.; McRaven and the C.I.A. station chief met the team on the tarmac. A pair of SEALs unloaded the body bag and unzipped it so that McRaven and the C.I.A. officer could see bin Laden’s corpse with their own eyes. Photographs were taken of bin Laden’s face and then of his outstretched body. Bin Laden was believed to be about six feet four, but no one had a tape measure to confirm the body’s length. So one SEAL, who was six feet tall, lay beside the corpse: it measured roughly four inches longer than the American. Minutes later, McRaven appeared on the teleconference screen in the Situation Room and confirmed that bin Laden’s body was in the bag. The corpse was sent to Bagram.

All along, the SEALs had planned to dump bin Laden’s corpse into the sea – a blunt way of ending the bin Laden myth. They had successfully pulled off a similar scheme before. During a DEVGRU helicopter raid inside Somalia in September, 2009, SEALs had killed Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan, one of East Africa’s top Al Qaeda leaders; Nabhan’s corpse was then flown to a ship in the Indian Ocean, given proper Muslim rites, and thrown overboard. Before taking that step for bin Laden, however, John Brennan made a call. Brennan, who had been a C.I.A. station chief in Riyadh, phoned a former counterpart in Saudi intelligence. Brennan told the man what had occurred in Abbottabad and informed him of the plan to deposit bin Laden’s

remains at sea. As Brennan knew, bin Laden’s relatives were still a prominent family in the Kingdom, and Osama had once been a Saudi citizen. Did the Saudi government have any interest in taking the body? “Your plan sounds like a good one,” the Saudi replied.

At dawn, bin Laden was loaded into the belly of a flip-wing V-22 Osprey, accompanied by a JSOC liaison officer and a security detail of military police. The Osprey flew south, destined for the deck of the U.S.S. Carl Vinson – a thousand-foot-long nuclear-powered aircraft carrier sailing in the Arabian Sea, off the Pakistani coast. The Americans, yet again, were about to traverse Pakistani airspace without permission. Some officials worried that the Pakistanis, stung by the humiliation of the unilateral raid in Abbottabad, might restrict the Osprey’s access. The airplane ultimately landed on the Vinson without incident.

Bin Laden’s body was washed, wrapped in a white burial shroud, weighted, and then slipped inside a bag. The process was done “in strict conformance with Islamic precepts and practices,” Brennan later told reporters. The JSOC liaison, the military-police contingent, and several sailors placed the shrouded body on an open-air elevator, and rode down with it to the lower level, which functions as a hangar for airplanes. From a height of between twenty and twenty-five feet above the waves, they heaved the corpse into the water.

Back in Abbottabad, residents of Bilal Town and dozens of journalists converged on bin Laden’s compound, and the morning light clarified some of the confusion from the previous night. Black soot from the detonated Black Hawk charred the wall of the animal pen. Part of the tail hung over the wall. It was clear that a military raid had taken place there. “I’m glad no one was hurt in the crash, but, on the other hand, I’m sort of glad we left the helicopter there,” the special-operations officer said. “It quiets

the conspiracy mongers out there and instantly lends credibility. You believe everything else instantly, because there's a helicopter sitting there.”

After the raid, Pakistan's political leadership engaged in frantic damage control. In the *Washington Post*, President Asif Ali Zardari wrote that bin Laden “was not anywhere we had anticipated he would be, but now he is gone,” adding that “a decade of cooperation and partnership between the United States and Pakistan led up to the elimination of Osama bin Laden.”

Pakistani military officials reacted more cynically. They arrested at least five Pakistanis for helping the C.I.A., including the physician who ran the immunization drive in Abbottabad. And several Pakistani media outlets, including the *Nation* – a jingoistic English-language newspaper that is considered a mouthpiece for Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency, or I.S.I. – published what they claimed was the name of the C.I.A.'s station chief in Islamabad. (Shireen Mazari, a former editor of the *Nation*, once told me, “Our interests and the Americans' interests don't coincide.”) The published name was incorrect, and the C.I.A. officer opted to stay.

The proximity of bin Laden's house to the Pakistan Military Academy raised the possibility that the military, or the I.S.I., had helped protect bin Laden. How could Al Qaeda's chief live so close to the academy without at least some officers knowing about it? Suspicion grew after the *Times* reported that at least one cell phone recovered from bin Laden's house contained contacts for senior militants belonging to Harakat-ul-Mujahideen, a jihadi group that has had close ties to the I.S.I. Although American officials have stated that Pakistani officials must have helped bin Laden hide in Abbottabad, definitive evidence has not yet been presented.

Bin Laden's death provided the White House with the symbolic

victory it needed to begin phasing troops out of Afghanistan. Seven weeks later, Obama announced a timetable for withdrawal. Even so, U.S. counterterrorism activities inside Pakistan – that is, covert operations conducted by the C.I.A. and JSOC – are not expected to diminish anytime soon. Since May 2nd, there have been more than twenty drone strikes in North and South Waziristan, including one that allegedly killed Ilyas Kashmiri, a top Al Qaeda leader, while he was sipping tea in an apple orchard.

The success of the bin Laden raid has sparked a conversation inside military and intelligence circles: Are there other terrorists worth the risk of another helicopter assault in a Pakistani city? “There are people out there that, if we could find them, we would go after them,” Cartwright told me. He mentioned Ayman al-Zawahiri, the new leader of Al Qaeda, who is believed to be in Pakistan, and Anwar al-Awlaki, the American-born cleric in Yemen. Cartwright emphasized that “going after them” didn't necessarily mean another DEVGRU raid. The special-operations officer spoke more boldly. He believes that a precedent has been set for more unilateral raids in the future. “Folks now realize we can weather it,” he said. The senior adviser to the President said that “penetrating other countries' sovereign airspace covertly is something that's always available for the right mission and the right gain.” Brennan told me, “The confidence we have in the capabilities of the U.S. military is, without a doubt, even stronger after this operation.”

On May 6th, Al Qaeda confirmed bin Laden's death and released a statement congratulating “the Islamic nation” on “the martyrdom of its good son Osama.” The authors promised Americans that “their joy will turn to sorrow and their tears will mix with blood.” That day, President Obama travelled to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, where the 160th is based, to meet the DEVGRU unit and the pilots who pulled off the raid. The



SEALs, who had returned home from Afghanistan earlier in the week, flew in from Virginia. Biden, Tom Donilon, and a dozen other national-security advisers came along.

McRaven greeted Obama on the tarmac. (They had met at the White House a few days earlier – the President had presented McRaven with a tape measure.) McRaven led the President and his team into a one-story building on the other side of the base. They walked into a windowless room with shabby carpets, fluorescent lights, and three rows of metal folding chairs. McRaven, Brian, the pilots from the 160th, and James took turns briefing the President. They had set up a three-dimensional model of bin Laden’s compound on the floor and, waving a red laser pointer, traced their maneuvers inside. A satellite image of the compound was displayed on a wall, along with a map showing the flight routes into and out of Pakistan. The briefing lasted about thirty-five minutes. Obama wanted to know how Ahmed had kept locals at bay; he also inquired about the fallen Black Hawk and whether above-average temperatures in Abbottabad had contributed to the crash. (The Pentagon is conducting a formal investigation of the accident.)

When James, the squadron commander, spoke, he started by citing all the forward operating bases in eastern Afghanistan that had been named for SEALs killed in combat. “Everything we have done for the last ten years prepared us for this,” he told Obama. The President was “in awe of these guys,” Ben Rhodes, the deputy national-security adviser, who travelled with Obama, said. “It was an extraordinary base visit,” he added. “They knew he had staked his Presidency on this. He knew they staked their lives on it.”

As James talked about the raid, he mentioned Cairo’s role. “There was a dog?” Obama interrupted. James nodded and said that Cairo was in an adjoining room, muzzled, at the request of

the Secret Service.

“I want to meet that dog,” Obama said.

“If you want to meet the dog, Mr. President, I advise you to bring treats,” James joked. Obama went over to pet Cairo, but the dog’s muzzle was left on.

Afterward, Obama and his advisers went into a second room, down the hall, where others involved in the raid – including logisticians, crew chiefs, and SEAL alternates – had assembled. Obama presented the team with a Presidential Unit Citation and said, “Our intelligence professionals did some amazing work. I had fifty-fifty confidence that bin Laden was there, but I had one-hundred-per-cent confidence in you guys. You are, literally, the finest small-fighting force that has ever existed in the world.” The raiding team then presented the President with an American flag that had been on board the rescue Chinook. Measuring three feet by five, the flag had been stretched, ironed, and framed. The SEALs and the pilots had signed it on the back; an inscription on the front read, “From the Joint Task Force Operation Neptune’s Spear, 01 May 2011: ‘For God and country. Geronimo.’ ” Obama promised to put the gift “somewhere private and meaningful to me.” Before the President returned to Washington, he posed for photographs with each team member and spoke with many of them, but he left one thing unsaid. He never asked who fired the kill shot, and the SEALs never volunteered to tell him. ♦

## *Side by...*

### The Incense-burner

by *John Morrison*

IT WAS A ONE-WAY TRIP, and I paid off in London in the middle of winter with twenty pounds in cash, a wristwatch worth fifteen pounds, and a good kit of clothes, half on my back and half in a suitcase. And a fair bit of experience for my nineteen years.

I put up at somebody's 'Temperance Hotel' near King's Cross Station because I was sick of the drunken orgies that had marked every port of call coming over from Australia, and was knocked up at eleven o'clock the first night by a housemaid innocently armed with dust-pan and empty bucket who asked me if there was anything I wanted. There wasn't. That also was something I'd got sick of on the way over.

At the end of a fortnight I had added something to my experience and was down to thirty shillings, a pawn-ticket in place of the watch, and the suitcase, still with contents. So I left the hotel, took a room in a seamen's lodging-house down near the East India Docks, and started to look for a ship home.

I wasn't long in finding out that I'd left my gallop a bit late. In 1929 a seaman looking for a ship out of London needed something better than thirty shillings and a brand-new discharge book. I had only one entry in my book, and Second Engineers and shipping officials weren't impressed. Thousands of good men were haunting the docks every day. Real seamen, with lifetimes of experience behind them, and rubbed old books to prove it. I

## *...by side*

### A füstölőégető

fordította *Tárnok Attila*

VISSZAÚT NEM VOLT. Londonban nyertem elbocsátást a tél közepén, húsz font készpénzzel, egy tizenöt fontot érő karórával, és egy váltás jó ruhával a bőröndben. Tizenkilenc évemhez képest jó adag tapasztalat volt a hátam mögött.

A Temperance Hotelben szálltam meg a King's Cross Station közelében, mert már elegendő volt az italos orgiákból, amely minden kikötő jellemzője volt Ausztráliából útban idefele. Első éjszaka tizenegykor egy szemeteslapáttal és üres vödörrel felfegyverzett szobalány kopogtatott ártatlanul; érdeklődött, szükségem van-e valamire. Semmire nem volt. Ebből is kezdett már elegendő lenni a tengeri út során.

Két hét elteltével újabb tapasztalattal lettem gazdagabb, de addigra már csak harminc shillingem maradt, egy zálogcédula az óráért és a bőrönd – érintetlenül. Ezért kijelentkeztem a szállodából, és lejjebb, egy tengerészbérházban béreltem szobát, az East India Dokk közelében. Hazafelé tartó hajók után kezdtem érdeklődni.

Hamar rájöttem, hogy túl későn akartam kiszállni a versenyből. 1929-ben egy tengerésznek, aki Londonból induló hajót keresett, valamivel többre volt szüksége, mint harminc shillingre és egy vadonatúj, elbocsátó szolgálati könyvre. Az én könyvemben csak egyetlen bejegyzés állt, és ez nem hatott meg se gépészt, se másodtisztet. Jó matrózok ezrei járták kísértetként a dokkokat minden nap. Igazi tengerészek, egy életen át gyűjtött tapasztalat-

came to the conclusion after a few days that my book was more of a handicap than a help. I'd had enough of London, and I wanted a ship bound for Australia and nowhere else. And my book made it all too clear. Second Engineers and Second Mates used to flick it open, drop the corners of their lips, and pass it back to me with a dry smile. I had it written all over me – Adelaide to London. They wanted men for a round voyage, not homesick Australians who would skin out at the first port touched.

I lasted two weeks; ten shillings a week for my room and ten shillings the fortnight for food. I did it by getting in sweet with a ship's cook, a Melbourne man, on one of the *Bay* ships laid up for repairs. I got breakfast out of the black pan every blessed day of the fortnight. Sometimes tea, too, until he told me not to make it too hot.

There were some good feeds, but not nearly enough, and it was all very irregular, and I was only nineteen, and as fit as they come, and walking up to fifteen miles every day, and I got hungrier and hungrier. There were days when I could have eaten my landlady. She was a skinny, sad-looking woman with bulging fish's eyes and a rat-trap mouth. I thought she was the toughest thing I'd ever met in my life. I was out all day every day, and on the rare occasions when I saw her she didn't seem to care whether she spoke to me or not. I used to turn in fairly early and lie reading, and until a late hour every night I could hear the thumping of a smoothing-iron in the kitchen at the far end of the passage. She was a widow; with only one other lodger, a pensioner, she had to support herself by taking in washing. It was a dark, silent, dismal hole of a place, smelling perpetually of wet clothes and yellow soap.

I saw the other lodger only once, an old man in a beard and long overcoat, vanishing into his room as I came in one night. I

tal a hátuk mögött, és ezt kopott, öreg szolgálati könyvek bizonyították. Néhány nap után arra a következtetésre jutottam, hogy papírjaim inkább hátrányt jelentenek, mint előnyt. Elegendem volt Londonból, és sehol másutt nem akartam szolgálni, csak Ausztráliába tartó hajón; ez a papírjaimból túlságosan is nyilvánvaló tűnhetett. Másodtisztok és másodkapitányok ahogy felcsapták a könyvet, elhúzták a szájuk szélét és száraz mosollyal nyújtották vissza. Rám volt írva: Adelaide–London. Oda-vissza útra kerestek embereket, nem hazavágyó ausztrálokat, akik lelépnek az első hazai kikötőben.

Két hétig bírtam. Tíz shilling volt a heti lakbér és tíz a két-heti koszt. Addig is csak úgy, hogy jóba lettem egy melbourne-i hajószakáccsal, aki valami Bay nevű, javítás miatt rostokoló hajón szolgált. Két héten át minden áldott nap egy fekete tepsiből reggeliztem. Néha teát is kaptam, míg szóvá nem tette, hogy túlferralom.

Nagyon ritkán volt jó a koszt, és akkor sem elég. Tizenkilenc éves voltam, erős, ahogy illik, és a napi tizenöt mérföldes gyaloglástól mind éhesebb lettem. Voltak napok, amikor akár a házvezetőnőmet is fel tudtam volna falni. Vékony, szomorú tekintetű asszony volt, kidülledő halszemekkel és előreugró állkapcsokkal. A legszilárdabb asszony, akivel valaha találkoztam. Az utcát jártam egész nap, és ha olykor összefutottunk, úgy tűnt, teljesen mindegy neki, hogy szóba állok-e vele vagy sem. Viszonylag korán feküdtem le, az ágyban olvastam még, és minden nap késő éjjelig hallottam a konyhából, a folyosó túlsó végéről vasalója tompa kalapálását. Özvegy volt, rajtam kívül csak egy nyugdíjas bérlője akadt, ezért mosást vállalt, hogy legyen miből megélnie. Sötét, csendes, komor odú volt a ház; a száradó ruhák és a sárga szappan szagát állandóan érezni lehetett.

A másik lakót, egy szakáll mögé és hosszú felöltőbe rejtőző öregembert csak egyszer láttam, amint egyik este eltűnt a szobá-

heard him often enough though. Too often. He had one of those deep, rumbling coughs that seem to come all the way up from the region of the stomach. He would go for minutes on end without stopping. He used to wake me up every night. Sometimes I thought he was going to suffocate.

His name was Burroughs – ‘old Burroughs’ to Mrs Hall. I knew nothing about him – or about Mrs Hall either, if it came to it – until my last day in the house. I had sevenpence ha’penny left, and the rent of my room was due that night. It was a cold, raw day with skies you could reach up and touch, and a threat of snow. In the morning I did the usual round of the docks, missed out on a last feed on the *Bay* ship, and went back to Finch Street to tell Mrs Hall I was leaving. I’d had to recognize the fact that I was well and truly on the beach; that there was nothing for it now but the Salvation Army ‘Elevator’, an institution about which I’d heard plenty in the past two weeks.

I was to learn that day that my landlady’s forbidding manner was nothing more than a front deliberately built up over years of contact with tough London seamen. She had a heart of gold, but like a lot of good people had become afraid to let the world see it.

She talked to me at the kitchen door, and as I told her what I was going to do she stared past me down the length of the short passage with her grim little mouth tightly shut and an expression of sullen bitterness on her dour face. I felt I was telling her an old and familiar and hated story. She must have seen a lot of defeated men in her time. Behind her was a table piled with washing; two or three ramshackle chairs, a linoleum with great holes rubbed in it, and a stove with several old-fashioned irons standing at one side.

‘It’s a damned shame, that’s what it is,’ she burst out with a vehemence that startled me. ‘Good, clean, respectable, young men walking the streets.’ She sniffed and tossed her head. For a

jában, amikor épp hazaértem. Hallani azonban elég gyakran hallottam. Túl gyakran is. Köhögése olyan furcsa volt, olyan mélyről jövő, mintha egészen a gyomor legbelsőbb régióiból törne fel. Percekig köhögött egyfolytában, megállás nélkül, minden éjjel fölébredtem rá; néha az volt az érzésem, mindjárt megfullad.

Burroughs-nak hívták, Mrs. Hall „öreg Burroughs”-nak. Semmit sem tudtam róla – mellesleg Mrs. Hallról sem, ha már itt tartunk –, egészen a házban töltött utolsó napomig. Hét és fél pennym maradt, és a lakbért is aznap kellett volna fizetnem. Hideg, havazással fenyegető, komor nap volt, az ég olyan közelinek tűnt, hogy szinte meg lehetett érinteni. Délelőtt szokás szerint végigjártam a kikötőket, lekéstem az utolsó kaját a Bay nevű hajón, aztán visszamentem a Finch Streetre megmondani Mrs. Hallnak, hogy elmegyek. Fel kellett ismerjem a tényt, hogy ha nem akarok a híd alá kerülni, nincs más hátra, mint az Üdvhad-sereg „liftje”, az az intézmény, amelyről annyiszor hallottam az elmúlt két hétben.

Azt is aznap kellett felismernem, hogy a házvezetőnő katonás modora csupán védekezés volt részéről, amit az váltott ki, hogy évek óta csak durva, londoni tengerészekkel akadt dolga. Arany szíve volt, de mint oly sok jó ember, félt ezt kimutatni a világnak.

A konyhaajtóban állva közöltem vele szándékomat. Keresztülbámult rajtam, a rövid folyosó vége felé meredt, vékony száját összeszorította, makacs arcán mogorva, keserű kifejezés ült. Éreztem, régi, ismerős és gyűlölt történet számára, amit mondok. Bizonyára jónéhány legyőzött emberrel találkozott már életében. Mögötte egy asztal állt tele mosatlan ruhával, két-három rozoga szék, és a tűzhely szélén néhány régimódi vasaló. A linóleumba nagy lyukakat dörzsölt az idő.

– A rohadt életbe! – fakadt ki olyan vehemenciával, hogy egészen megglepett. – Rendes, becsületes fiatalemberek kerülnek

moment I thought she was going to cry. Instead she asked me in for a cup of coffee. 'I was just going to make one. It'll warm you up.'

It was the worst coffee I'd ever tasted, half a teaspoonful of some cheap essence out of a bottle, mixed with boiling water. And a slice of bread to eat with it. Stale bread spread thinly with greasy margarine. But I was cold and hungry, and friendly words vent with it. God help her! It was all the hospitality she could offer me. One glance around that wretched room convinced me that I had been living better than her.

I told her I didn't want to take any good clothes into the hostel with me, and asked could I leave my suitcase with her until my luck turned.

'You can leave anything you like. Only no responsibility, mind you.' She went on to tell me that she never knew from one day to another who she was going to have under her roof, and in the middle of it there came a muffled sound of coughing from along the passage. She stopped to listen, holding her breath and pulling a face, as if she were actually experiencing some of the old man's distress. 'I'm not saying anything about him. He's all right. I can go out and leave anything lying around. Poor old soul! There's many a time I give him a cup of coffee, and I swear to God it's the only thing that passes his lips from morn till night. Where he gets to when he goes out ...'

'He's pretty old, isn't he, Mrs Hall?'

'Not that old. He was in the war. He's a sick man, that's what's wrong with him. One of these days I'll wake up and find I've got a corpse on my hands. You just ought to be here when he gets one of his foreign parcels.'

'Foreign parcels?'

Mrs Hall finished her coffee, got up, and began sorting the things on the table. 'Don't ask me where it comes from. He never

az utcára. – Beleszagolt a levegőbe és hátravetette a fejét. Egy pillanatig azt hittem, sírni fog, de meglepetésemre behívott egy kávéra. – Úgyis akartam főzni egyet. Majd meglátja, felmelegíti.

Soha olyan rossz kávét nem ittam azelőtt. Fél teáskanál valami olcsó sűrítményből, forró vízben elkeverve. Egy szelet olajos margarinnal vékonyan megkent, szikkadt kenyeret is adott hozzá. De én fáztam és éhes voltam, ráadásul barátságos szavakat is kaptam mellé. Az Isten áldja meg érte! Ez volt a lehető legszívélyesebb vendégszeretet, amit felajánlhatott. Egyetlen pillantás körbe a nyomorult helyiségben meggyőzött arról, hogy még én is jobb körülmények között éltem, mint ő.

Nem akartam a jó ruhámat magammal vinni az Üdvhadserg szállójára, megkérdeztem hát, itt hagyhatnám-e a bőröndömet, amíg a dolgaim rendeződnek.

– Itt hagyhat, amit csak akar. Persze felelősséget nem vállalok. – Azzal folytatta, hogy soha nem tudhatja előre, ki fogja a szobát kivenni. Mindeközben a folyosó felől elfojtott köhögés hallatszott. Az asszony elhallgatott, lélegzet-visszafojtva figyelt, és olyan arcot vágott, mint aki átérzi az öregember gyötrelmét.

– Róla nem mondhatok semmi rosszat. Vele minden rendben. Elmehetek itthonról úgy, hogy mindent előhagyok. Szegény öreg! Isten bizony, sokszor más se megy le a torkán reggeltől estig, csak az a kávét, amit én adok neki. Tudnám, hova megy, amikor elmegy itthonról...

– Öreg fickó már ugye, Mrs. Hall?

– Nem olyan öreg. A háborúban harcolt. Beteg ember, ez a baj vele. Egy szép napon arra fogok ébredni, hogy egy hulla van a házamban. Azt kéne látnia, mikor csomagot kap külföldről.

– Csomagot külföldről?

Mrs. Hall megitta a kávéját, felállt, és az asztalon lévő holmikát kezdte rendezgetni.

– Ne kérdezze, honnan jönnek. Ő maga soha nem mond

tells me anything, and I never stick my nose into another body's business. But he's got somebody somewhere that hasn't forgotten him. Every few months he gets this parcel. Not much – a pair of underpants or socks, or a muffler – just bits of things. And a little bundle of dry leaves, herbs for his cough I suppose. My God, you just ought to smell them! He burns them in a bit of a tin pan he's got. They stink the house out. And there he sits and just sucks it in. It's beyond me how he can stand it. I've got to get out till he's finished.'

Mrs Hall sniffed and blew, as if the smell of the herbs from the foreign parcel were in her nostrils even then. 'He's been here twelve months, and if it wasn't for that I wouldn't care if he stopped for three years. He never bothers nobody, and he keeps his room like a new pin. I've never yet seen him with drink in, and that's a change from some of them I get here, you mark my words. I know *you're* not the drinking kind, otherwise I wouldn't have asked you in here.'

Poor Mrs Hall!

She wished me good luck and promised to keep my suitcase in her own room until I came back for it.

Travelling light, I walked all the way to the Salvation Army headquarters in Middlesex Street, stated my case to a 'soldier' just inside the door, and was sent over to an elderly grey-haired 'officer' seated at a desk piled with papers. All this happened a long time ago, and many of the details are hazy, but I'm left with an impression of newness, of spacious floors, of pleasant faces, of friendly efficiency.

The officer asked me what it was I wanted them to do for me. I told him.

'I'm an Australian. I worked my way over as a ship's trimmer. I wanted to see London; you know how it is. Now I'm broke, and I'm looking for a passage back home. I've got to find somewhere

semmit, én meg nem ütöm bele az orrom mások dolgába. De van valahol valakije, aki nem feledkezik meg róla. Néhány havonta kap ilyen csomagot. Nem sok mindent, alsónadrágot, zoknit, fülvédőt. Csupa apróságot. Na és egy kis köteg száraz levelet, gondolom, valami gyógynövényt a köhögésére. Uramatyám, ha maga egyszer abba beleszagolna! Van egy kis ónszerpenyője, abban égeti. Tiszta bűz lesz az egész ház, ő meg csak ül ott, és belélegzi. Föl nem foghatom, hogy nem árt meg neki. Én általában elmegyek itthonról, míg be nem fejezi.

Mrs. Hall úgy szimatolt körbe, mintha a külföldi csomag gyógyfüveinek szaga még most is az orrában lenne.

– Tizenkét hónapja van itt, és ha nem lennének a füvek, azt se bánám, ha három évig maradna. Soha senkit nem zavar, és a szobájában olyan rend van, mint a patikában. Soha nem láttam, hogy italt hozott volna be, és jegyezze meg, amit mondok, ritka ez azok között, akik itt megfordulnak. Tudom, hogy maga sem alkoholizál, egyébként nem hívtam volna be.

Szegény Mrs. Hall!

Jó szerencsét kívánt és megígérte, hogy a saját szobájában fogja őrizni a bőröndömet, amíg vissza nem jövök érte.

Terheimtől megszabadulva elsétáltam az Üdvhadsereg Middlesex Street-i irodáihoz, a bejáratnál elmondtam a körülményeimmet egy „közlegénynek”, ő egy idősebb, ősz hajú „tiszthez” irányított, aki egy papírhalmokkal teli íróasztal mögött ült. Mind ez régen történt már, a részletekre eléggé homályosan emlékszem, de az egészről valami újszerűségnek, tágas tereknek, kellemes arcoknak és barátságos hangulatnak a benyomása maradt meg bennem.

A tiszt megkérdezte, miben segíthet. Elmondtam.

– Ausztrál vagyok. Hajóinasként érkeztem. Látni akartam Londont, tudja hogy van ez. Mostanra minden pénzem elfogyott, és visszafelé induló hajót keresek, de addig is aludnom kell

to live while I look for a ship.’

‘Where have you been living?’ Nothing inquisitorial about the question. He was taking quiet stock of me all the time. I had no reason to deceive him, but I felt it would be a waste of time anyway, that I was dealing with a man full of experience.

‘In lodgings down in Custom House near the East India Docks. I’ve got to get out tonight, though; I haven’t a shilling left.’

‘You didn’t jump your ship, did you?’

Only a man who knew sailors would have asked me that. ‘No, I’ve got a clean book.’ My hand went to my pocket, but he stopped me with a gesture.

‘It isn’t necessary for me to pry into your affairs, my boy. You understand that if you go into the Elevator you won’t have much time to look for a ship?’

‘I know I’ll have to work, but that’s all right. I could get some time off now and then, couldn’t I?’

‘Yes, as long as you did your task. But that’s the responsibility of the commandant down there.’ He reached out and picked a form off a little pile at his side. ‘I’ll give you a note to take down. I can’t promise he’ll have room for you, but it’s worth while trying. What’s your name?’

‘Thomas Blair.’

‘Do you know where Old Street is?’

They took me in, and for a little over three weeks I earned food and lodging by sorting waste string at the establishment known as the Elevator, down in Spitalfields.

It was the strangest three weeks I have ever experienced, and the most generally hopeless company of men I was ever mixed up with. There were about forty of us, of whom perhaps twenty were professional tramps wintering in. Of the others, fellows in circumstances more or less similar to my own, I got an impres-

valahol.

– Eddig hol lakott? – Egy csöpp faggatózás sem volt a hangjában. Egész idő alatt csendesen méregetett. Semmi okom nem volt rá, hogy megtévesszem, de éreztem, hogy fölösleges is volna megpróbálnom, mert egy sokat tapasztalt emberrel van dolgom.

– A Custom House környékén van a szállásom, az East India Dokk közelében. Csakhogy ma este ki kell onnan költöz-nöm. Egy árva shillingem se maradt.

- Nem lógott el a hajóról, ugye?

Csak olyan ember kérdez ilyet, aki jól ismeri a tengerészeket.

– Nem, tiszta a szolgálati könyvem. – A kezem a zsebem fe-lé indult, de ő leintett.

– Nincs rá szükség, hogy beleüssem az orrom az ügyeibe. Azzal ugye tisztában van, ha bemegy a liftbe, nem sok ideje lesz hajó után nézni.

– Tudom, hogy dolgoznom kell, de nem baj. Néha lenne egy kis szabadidőm, nemde?

– Amennyiben elvégzi a feladatát. De ezt a lenti parancsnok hatásköre megítélni. – Egy kis papírhalom felé nyúlt, s kiemelt belőle egy adatlapot. – Adok egy papírt, amivel lemehet. Nem ígérhetem meg, hogy lesz helyük, de érdemes megpróbálni. Ne-ve?

– Thomas Blair.

– Az Old Streetet keresse!

Elszállásoltak. Bő három hétig azzal kerestem meg a szállás és a koszt árát, hogy hulladék spárgát válogattam a Lift néven ismert intézménynél, lent Spitalfieldsben.

Furcsa három hetet éltem ott végig, szerencsétlen sorsú, reménytelen emberek társaságában. Körülbelül negyvenen voltunk, köztünk vagy húszan hivatásos csavargók, akik így próbál-ták átvészelní a telet. Az volt a benyomásom, hogy a többiek kö-

sion that only a few were still trying to get their heads above water again. Conversation was not primarily around the prospect of finding employment, as I expected it to be, but around the petty incidents of the day, that evening's bill of fare, a certain current murder trial, and every triviality of hostel administration they could think up. At the time I was thoroughly contemptuous of it all, but I understand better now. Those men had had a lot more of London than I had; I was still fresh to the struggle.

We worked nine hours a day; seven-thirty in the morning until five-thirty in the evening, with an hour off for dinner.

I was never able to find out why they called the place the Elevator, unless because it was intended as an elevator of fallen men. That's likely enough, but I'm not sure that it worked out in practice. I'm not questioning the good faith of the Salvation Army officers charged with its administration, but the prevailing atmosphere was far from elevating. On the first morning a short conversation with my immediate bench-mate served to reveal in a flash the spirit permeating the entire establishment.

'Been in before?' he asked me.

'No.'

'Stopping long?'

'No longer than I can help.'

'That might be longer than you think, chum. Y'ought to try and get on the staff. It's a sitter if they don't know you.'

'What staff?'

'Here, and up at the hostel. Sweeping out, making beds, cooking and serving. They're all chaps that come in off the streets, like you. Not much money in it, but everything's turned on free. All you got to do is get saved.'

'Saved?'

'Go out to the penitent form at one of the prayer meetings. Give your heart to Jesus ...'

zül is, akik hasonló körülmények között kerültek oda, mint én, csak néhány ügyködött még azon, hogy újra a felszínre jusson. Beszélgetéseink nem elsősorban a munkakeresés körül forogtak, ahogy arra számítottam volna, hanem mindennapi incidensek, az esti étlap, vagy egy aktuális gyilkossági per, legjobb esetben a szállással kapcsolatos adminisztráció részletei körül. Akkor ezt az egészet lenéztem és megvettem, de most már jobban értem. Azok az emberek sokkal többet kaptak Londonból, mint én. A küszködésben én még gyenge kezdőnek számítottam...

Napi kilenc órát dolgoztunk, reggel fél nyolctól este fél hatig. Közben volt egy óra ebédidő.

Soha nem sikerült megtudnom, miért hívták a helyet liftnek. Talán azért, mert eredetileg elesett emberek felemelésére szolgált. Minden bizonnyal így volt, de a gyakorlatban nem hiszem, hogy bevált. Nem kérdőjelezem meg az Üdvhadsereg alkalmazottainak jóhiszeműségét, csak éppen az uralkodó légkör minden volt, csak felemelő nem. Az első délelőtt szóba elegyedtem a padszomszédokkal. Beszélgetésünk egy perc alatt megvilágította azt a szellemiséget, ami az egész intézményt átjárta.

– Voltál már itt? – kérdezte.

– Nem.

– Sokáig maradsz?

– Csak amíg muszáj.

– Az lehet, hogy tovább tart, mint gondolod, haver. Meg kéne próbálnod bekerülni személyzetnek. Ha még nem ismernek, nem lesz nehéz.

– Miféle személyzetnek?

– Hát az ittenibe, vagy amelyik a szálláson dolgozik. Takarítanak, ágyaznak, főznek, felszolgálnak. Akik ezt csinálják, mind olyan utcáról betévedt fickók, mint te. Nem fizetnek érte sokat, de mindent ingyen kapsz. Azzal kell kezdeni, hogy megmented magad.



And that was it. It was a home for the destitute, largely run by some of the destitute. And if you weren't particularly anxious to move on, and were sufficiently unscrupulous, you could be one of the running brigade. And the way to muscle into the running brigade was simply to get 'saved'. I discovered that some of the old hands got saved every year as soon as the winter winds began to blow and the roads frosted up.

All the charge-hands at the Elevator were such brands clutched from the burning, and a more foxy-looking crowd I never set eyes on. They were on a sweet thing, and in their anxiety to stick to it they took good care that precious little of the spirit of Army benevolence got beyond the corner of the building where the commandant had his little office. Beggars-on-horseback, they ran the place with much of the efficiency, and even less of the humanity, of an ordinary factory.

The Elevator was simply a depot for the collecting and sorting and repacking of waste paper, rags and string. All day long motor-trucks, horse-drawn lorries and handcarts kept coming in heaped with salvage, which was unloaded and dragged to various parts of the great concrete floor for sorting out.

I was put onto the string bench, and each morning was given a one-hundredweight bag of odds and ends of string which I had to disentangle and distribute into a row of boxes marked 'cotton', 'sisal' – I forget the other names.

That was my task for the day, the price I paid for three meals and a bed to sleep in at night. Anything I did over and above that was paid for, if I remember correctly, at the rate of half-a-crown a hundredweight. In the three weeks I was there I earned just enough cash to keep me in cigarettes, carefully rationed, and nothing more. And there was no getting out of it if you wanted those three feeds and the bed. I tried, on the very first day – seizing a moment when I thought nobody was looking, and ramming

– Megmentem?

– Egy istentisztelet után a vezeklők között felajánlod a lelked Jézusnak.

Ez volt a lényeg. Nélkülözők által vezetett otthon, nélkülözők számára. És ha az embert nem kifejezetten fűtötte a továbblépés vágya, és ha elég gátlástalan volt, egyike lehetett azoknak, akik az egészet vezetik. Ugy lehet bekerülni a csapatba, hogy Jézus egyszerűen megmenti az ember lelkét. Megtudtam, hogy az öregebb segédek lelkét minden évben megmenti Jézus, amint téli szelek kezdenek fújni és az utak jegesedni kezdenek.

A liftben minden segéd ilyen volt. Megmenekültek a tűztől, de rókaképűbb népséget soha életemben nem láttam. Kiemelt státuszt élveztek, és igyekezetükben, hogy pozíciójukat megőrizték, gondoskodtak róla, hogy az Üdvhadsereg jóakarátú szellemiségéből csak kevés érték kerüljön kívül a parancsnoki irodán. Koldusok paripán. Egy közönséges gyár hatékonyságával irányították az intézményt, csak még kevesebb humánnummal.

A lift valójában egy egyszerű lerakat volt, ahol hulladékpapírt, rongyot és madzagot gyűjtöttek, válogattak és csomagoltak újra. Egész nap özönlöttek a hulladékkal megrakott teherautók, lovas kocsik és taligák, mi pedig rakományukat a betonozott udvar különböző részeire cipeltük szétválogatásra.

Én a madzagpadhoz kerültem. Minden reggel egy ötvenkilós zsákot kaptam, tele madzagvégekkel. Ezeket ki kellett bogoznom és dobozokba osztanom anyaguknak megfelelően: pamut, kender – a többi anyagra nem emlékszem.

Ez volt a napi feladatom, ennyivel tartoztam a napi három étkezésért és a hálóhelyért. Amit ezen felül teljesítettem, azt kifizették. Ha jól emlékszem, fél koronát adtak ötven kilónként. A három hét alatt, amit ott töltöttem, épphogy a gondosan besztott cigarettára valót megkerestem, semmi többet. És ha valaki ragaszkodott a napi három étkezéshez és az ágyhoz, nem volt

a double handful of unsorted string into the sisal box. But one of the foxes saw me from a distant part of the floor and made me drag it out again under the threat of instant expulsion.

We didn't live at the Elevator. An old shop next door had been converted into a dining-room, and every day at 12 o'clock we trooped in and received dinners served from hot-boxes brought down from some Army cookhouse. And at the end of the day's work each man was given three tickets on the hostel in Old Street a mile or so away, one for tea, one for bed, and one for breakfast next morning.

The Old Street hostel was one of the biggest in London, and was run on much the same lines, and in much the same spirit, as the Elevator. There was a washhouse with neither soap nor towels, dormitories – barrack-like but quite clean – and a spacious dining-room where the men could sit for the rest of the evening after eating. I understood that most of the food – 'leftovers' of some kind or other – was donated or bought cheaply from hotels, cafes, shops and bakehouses. But it was priced so low that a man could usually eat plenty; it was dished up with every appearance of cleanliness, and I can't say I ever found it anything but appetising. Meal tickets were valued at 1s 3d, and we could choose what we liked from the bill of fare stuck up at the end of the serving counter: slice of bread and margarine 1d, pot of tea or coffee 1d, soup 2d, roast beef or mutton 3d, stew 3d, kippers 1d each, vegetables 2d, apple tart 3d.

All a bit primitive, if you like, but I had a two weeks' hunger to work off, and they were the most enjoyable meals I ever had in my life. Food was, indeed, the only thing that made life at all worth living just then. I would open my eyes every morning thinking of breakfast, and when it was over I'd grit my teeth and stagger through the next four hours sustained only by thoughts of dinner. And when that was over there came thoughts of tea.

kiút. Rögtön a legelső napon egy óvatlan pillanatban, amikor azt hittem, senki sem lát, megpróbáltam két marék spárgát válogatatlanul belegyömöszölni a kender feliratú dobozba. De a telep egy távolabbi részéből meglátott valamelyik róka, és azzal fenyegetőzve, hogy kirúgnak, kiszedette velem.

Nem a liftben laktunk. Egy szomszédos öreg üzlet lett átalakítva ebédlővé, és mi mindennap tizenkettőkor betódultunk, hogy megkapjuk az ebédet, amit ételhordókban hoztak az Üdvhadsereg valamelyik konyhájáról. Esténként, munka végeztével mindenki kapott három jegyet, ezt a körülbelül egy mérföldre levő Old Street-i szálláson váltottuk be. Egyet vacsorára, egyet az ágyhelyre, egyet meg a másnapi reggelire.

Az Old Street-i az egyik legnagyobb szálló volt Londonban. Ugyanolyan módon és szellemben működött, mint a lift. Volt egy mosdó része, szappan és törülköző nélkül, hálóterem – barakkszerűek, de egészen tiszták – és egy tágas étkező, ahol az emberek evés után az este hátralevő részében elücsöröghettek. Tudomásom szerint az étel nagyrészt ilyen-olyan maradék volt, amit az Üdvhadsereg adományként vagy fillérekért kapott különböző szállodáktól, kávézóktól, élelmiszerboltoktól és pékségekől. Nekünk olyan olcsón számították, hogy általában bőven lehetett enni. Felszolgáláskor ügyeltek, hogy az étel tisztának tűnjék, és nem mondhatnám, hogy ne találtam volna mindig étvágygerjesztőnek. Egy étkezési jegy 1 shilling 3 pennyt ért, és a felszolgáló pult végén kiakasztott étlapról választhattunk: egy szelet margarinos kenyér 1 penny, egy csésze tea vagy kávé 1 penny, leves 2 penny, sült marha vagy birka 3 penny, pörkölt 3 penny, füstölt hering 1 penny, zöldség 2 penny, almás lepény 3 penny.

Mindez talán túl primitív, ha tetszik, ám nekem kéthetes koplalást kellett behoznom, és mondhatom, emlékeim között ezek voltak a legélvezetesebb étkezések. Azokban a napokban

One red-letter day I cashed two tea tickets. My neighbour on the string-bench got on to something better for that evening, and gave me his. When I lined up at the counter the second time the fox in the white apron gave me a cold stare.

‘What’s this? I’ve served you once.’

‘Don’t be funny,’ I replied. ‘How many tickets d’you think we get?’

Still staring, he became positive, threw the ticket into the tray, and turned to the next man in line, dismissing me with a curt. ‘Move on, chum, you’ve had it.’

He should have known better, because there are two things for which a man is always prepared to fight, and food is one of them. I reached out and seized his wrist.

‘Come up with it, Mister! I’m in the Elevator. I worked for that ticket ...’

He shook himself free, but I must have looked as savage as I felt because he served me without further argument.

I was like that all the time, hostile on the whole infernal world and ready to take it out on anybody. Each week I got leave off for half a day and went the familiar round of the docks, but a ship seemed to be as far off as ever. I hated London as I’d never hated any place before, began to lose hope, and fell into a mood of gloomy self-pity that made me impatient and contemptuous of everybody around me. Those men didn’t talk much about their private affairs, and with the egotism and intolerance of youth I assumed that none of their troubles was as great as mine. A man with youth and good health, and no responsibilities, should find any tussle an exhilarating adventure, but some of us don’t realize that until youth is past. I used to try to cheer myself up by comparing my circumstances to those of old Burroughs coughing his life away down in the hovel in Finch Street, but that only made matters worse. Visions of the old man creeping along the dark

csakugyan egyedül az evésért volt érdemes élni. Minden reggel arra ébredtem, hogy a reggelire gondolok, s amikor azon túl voltam, összeszorított foggal szédelegtem végig a következő négy órát; csak az ebéd gondolata tartotta bennem a lelket. Amikor aztán az is lement, lehetett a vacsorára gondolni.

Egy piros betűs ünnepen két vacsorajegyet váltottam be. Műhelypad-szomszédomnak jobb dolga akadt estére, így nekem adta az övét. Mikor másodszor álltam sorba a pultnál, a fehérköpenyes róka hideg tekintetet vetett rám.

– Mi ez? Egyszer már kaptál.

– Ne vicceljen – válaszoltam. – Mit gondol, hány jegyet kapunk?

Rám meredt, majd visszanyerve magabiztosságát a tálcába dobta a jegyet, és már fordult is a következőhöz, engem kurtán elutasítva:

– Mozgás, haver! Már megkaptad.

Tudhatta volna, hogy egy férfi két dologért mindig kész harcolni, és az egyik az étel. Előrelendültem és elkaptam a csuklóját.

– Elő azzal a vacsorával, ember! A liftben vagyok. Dolgoztam azért a jegyért...

Kiszabadította a kezét, de minden bizonnyal ugyanolyan tántoríthatatlannak látszottam, mint amilyennek éreztem magam, mert teketória nélkül kiszolgált.

Állandóan ilyen voltam. Ellenséges az egész romlott világgal, és bárkivel szembeszállni kész. Minden héten volt egy fél szabadnapom. Ilyenkor végigjártam az ismerős dokkokat, de egy hazatérő hajó lehetősége egyre távolibbnak tűnt. Soha még helyet úgy nem gyűöltem, mint Londont. Ahogy kezdtem feladni a reményt, úgy lett úrrá rajtam valami homályos önsajnálát, amely türelmetlenné tett és megvetővé mindenkivel szemben, aki csak körülvelt. Azok az emberek nemigen beszéltek a magánéletükről, így fiatalságom türelmetlenségével és önzésével azt gondol-

passage, or crouched over his periodical burning of the herbs, positively frightened me. For he also had had a youth, and somewhere in the past there had been a beginning to the road that led to Finch Street, and that assuredly would go on from there nowhere but to the grave.

The hostel was full of them, shivering watery-eyed old men, who wandered the streets all day, and stumbled in at nightfall to stand for a long time studying the bill of fare with a few miserable coppers clutched in their stiff fingers. Nobody took any notice of them. No doubt they would have envied old Burroughs, for nobody ever sent *them* parcels with mufflers and ‘bits of things’ in them. All the same, they moved me to horror and fear more than to pity, for were they not life-members of a fraternity of which I had become a novitiate?

And if during the day all my dreams were of food, then at night-time all my dreams were of home. The coughing of old Burroughs had nothing on the wheezings and mutterings of that refuge of lost men. Sleep came to me slowly, and was often broken, and in the wakeful moments I would lie with wide eyes and tight lips, deliberately torturing myself with nostalgic longings.

Some building close by had a clock that chimed the hours, and whenever I heard it I would think carefully and call up a scene in Australia that I knew was true and exact of that very moment.

At midnight I would say to myself: it’s ten o’clock in the morning, and the hotels down Flinders Street are just opening and the wharfies coming away from the first pick-up are crossing from the Extension and dropping into the Hotham and the Clyde for a quick one before going home to lunch. And there’s a white sky and a smell of dust, and trembling pavements which by noon will be hot enough to fry eggs on. And down at St Kilda beach lazy little waves are lapping in, and some of the Fortunate Ones

tam, egyikük problémája sem olyan súlyos, mint az enyém. Egy egészséges fiatalember, akit nem nyomaszt a felelősség súlya, minden küzdelmet szívderítő kalandnak kéne ítéljen, de néhányan ezt nem érezzük át, csak miután ifjúságunk elmúlt. Azzal próbáltam felvidítani magam, hogy az öreg Burroughs életét hasonlítottam a magaméhoz, aki a Finch Street-i viskóban köhög el az életét. De ez csak súlyosbította állapotomat. Vízióim, amint az öreg végigmászik a sötét folyosón, vagy ahogy néha gyógyfüvei hamva mellett guggol, határozottan ijesztőek voltak. Hiszen valahol neki is volt ifjúkora, és valahonnan a múltból elindult az út, amely a Finch Streetre vezetett, és amely onnan minden bizonynyal már csak a sírba tart.

A szálló tele volt ilyenekkel. Vacogó, vizenyős szemű öregekkel, akik az utcákat rótták egész nap, aztán az est leszálltakor bebukdácsoltak a szállóra. Hosszan ácsorogva tanulmányozták az étlapot, dermedt ujjaik között néhány nyomorult pennyt szorongatva. Senki nem figyelt rájuk. Semmi kétség, ők irigyelnék az öreg Burroughst, mert nekik aztán soha senki nem küld csomagban fülvédőt és egyéb „apróságot”. Mindazonáltal inkább irtóztató félelmet keltettek bennem, mint sajnálatot, hisz ők egy életre szólóan elkötelezett lakói voltak annak a kolostornak, amiben én csupán novícius lettem.

És ahogy nappal minden gondolatom az étel körül forgott, úgy éjszaka csak az otthonomról álmodtam. Öreg Burroughs köhögése semmi sem volt ezeknek az elveszett embereknek a ziháló motyogásához képest. Mindig nehezen jött álom a szememre, és éjszaka gyakran felébredtem. Ilyen éber pillanatokban csak feküdtem tágra nyitott szemmel és összeszorított foggal, és szándékosan nosztalgikus vágyakkal kínoztam magam.

Egy közeli épületben toronyóra ütött. Valahányszor meghalottam, mindig kigondoltam és aprólékosan magam elé idéztem egy jelenetet, amelyről tudtam, hogy Ausztráliában hűen és pon-

are crossing the Promenade from the big apartment houses and spreading their towels on the sand for a brown-off. And even though it's a weekday, the Point Nepean Highway down the Peninsula is already lively with cars heading for the bush and more distant beaches. And there's a place down there in the heath country where my mates and I used to go rabbiting on Sunday afternoons. And the big loose-limbed manna-gum where we found the parrot's nest is still there, its thin foliage hard and sharp against the sky in that way that always reminded me of the figures on a Japanese willow-pattern plate. And somewhere on the scrubby slope that runs up to the road a wallaby sits with drooping paws and pricked ears. And the air is full of the scent of the paperbarks down in the swamp, and of the whistlings and twitterings of grey thrushes and honeyeaters and blue wrens. And every now and then, on the breathlike puff of a breeze that comes out of the north, there is another smell that I know well, and over in a saddle of the distant Dandenongs a column of smoke marks where the bushfire is burning ...

For three weeks.

Then – suddenly, like most bad things – it was all over.

One morning at breakfast time I got talking with a stranger who turned out to be a sailor. And within a few minutes he knew what I was looking for.

'Why don't you give the *Tairoa* a go?' he asked me. 'Ever done a trip as a steward?'

'No. What about the *Tairoa*.'

'She's leaving for Australia today, and they were signing on single-trippers yesterday. A lot of the New Zealand Company's packets do it. They go out stuffed with emigrants in the 'tween-decks. At the other end they dismantle the accommodation and fill up with cargo for home. They only want most of the stewards one way.'

tosan megfelel annak a pillanatnak.

Éjfélkor ilyesmit mondtam magamban: reggel tíz óra van. A szállodák lent a Flinder Streeten épp most nyitnak, és a dokkmunkások az első kirakodás után most jönnek föl a partról, hogy útban hazafelé beugorjanak egy gyors italra a Hotham and the Clyde-hoz. Az ég fehér, a levegőben por illata, és délre az aszfalt olyan forró lesz, hogy tojást lehetne rajta sütni. Lent a St. Kilda-partot lusta hullámok csapkodják, és óriás bérházaikból a kiváltságosak közül néhányan áthaladnak a sétatéren, hogy leterítsék törülközőiket a parti homokba. És jóllehet hétköznapi van, a Point Nepean országút már a félszigetre vagy a bozótba tartó kocsiktól élénk. És van ott egy hangafüves hely, ahol vasárnap délutánonként társaimmal nyulat fogtunk. És az óriási, laza lombozatú gumifa is ott áll még, ahol egyszer a papagájfészket felfedeztük. Vékony, kemény lombja élesen kirajzolódik az ég háttéréből, ami valahogy mindig japán fűzmintás tányérok figuráira emlékeztetett. És valahol az út melletti bozotos meredélyen lekonyuló mancsokkal, fülét hegyezve ül egy törpekenguru. És a mocsár felől kajaputfa illata úszik a levegőben, és szürkerigó, mézevő madár és kék ökörszem füttye és csivitelése hallatszik. És időnként egy lélegzetszerű szellő észak felől ismerős szagokat hoz, és a Dandenong-hegység egy távoli nyerge fölött látszik is egy bozóttűz füstoszlopa...

Három hétig tartott.

Aztán hirtelen, mint a legtöbb rossz, egyszeriben vége szakadt.

Egyik reggelinél úgy esett, hogy megismerkedtem valakivel, aki véletlenül matróz volt. Perceken belül tudta, mit keresek.

– Miért nem próbálsz meg a *Tairoa*-t? – kérdezte. – Szolgálatnál már utaskísérőként?

– Nem. De mi van ezzel a hajóval?

– Ma indul Ausztráliába, és tegnap vettek fel személyzetet

‘How is it I’ve never heard about this? I’ve walked those docks—’

‘Well you wouldn’t be looking for Chief Stewards with that book, would you? Anyway, the Shore Superintendent’s the chap you want to see. He’s got an office down at the East India somewhere. You’ll have to look lively if you want to try the *Tairoa* – she’s up for noon ...’

She’s up for noon – oh, the friendly, intimate jargon of the sea! There was a promise in the familiar phrase that raised my excitement to fever-heat. I never met that seaman again, but I’ll love him till the day I die.

It took me two hours to find the Shore Superintendent and less than five minutes to get the ship. He was a busy man all right. I was at his office by half-past eight, but they told me he had just left for a certain ship, and it was half-past ten before I caught up with him. I can’t at this distance of time trace my wanderings in those two hours, but I must have visited at least six vessels at widely separated berths, always just a few minutes behind him. However, I was after something that drew me like the very Holy Grail, and I nailed him at last just as he was about to get into his car. I knew I was on the right track as soon as he stopped to listen to me.

‘We don’t want trimmers,’ he said after a glance at my book. ‘We want stewards.’

‘That’s all right with me,’ I replied. ‘I want the passage. I’ll sign as a steward. I’ve worked in hotels.’

He passed the book back, taking me in from head to feet.

‘Where’s your gear?’

I could hardly speak for excitement. ‘Up in my room in Custom House ...’

‘You’d have to be aboard by twelve o’clock.’

‘I can do that. Where’s she lying?’

csak odaútra. A New Zealand Company postahajói közül sokan ezt csinálják. A fedélzetközi részek tele vannak kivándorlókkal. Mikor megérkeznek, szétszerelik a hálótermekeket és áruval megpakodva térnek haza. Ezért csak odafelé alkalmaznak utaskísérőket.

– Hogy lehet, hogy én soha nem hallottam ezekről, pedig bejártam a kikötőt...

– Biztos nem utaskísérőnek jelentkezél a munkakönyvvel. Egyébként a kikötő-felügyelővel kell beszélned. Valahol lent az East India Dokkon van az irodája. Határozottnak kell mutatkoznod, ha meg akarod próbálni a *Tairoa*-t. Délben bontanak vitorlát.

Délben bontanak vitorlát! A tenger bensőséges, barátságos zsargonja. Az ismerős kifejezés ígéretet sugallt és lázas izgalmat okozott. Soha nem láttam viszont azt a matrózt, de amíg élek, hálás leszek neki.

Két órámba tellett, míg megtaláltam a kikötő-felügyelőt, és nem egészen öt percbe, hogy alkalmazzon. Rendkívül elfoglalt ember volt. Fél kilencre értem az irodájához, de épp előttem indult el egy hajóhoz, úgyhogy fél tizenegy lett, mire utolértem. Ilyen idő távlatából nem emlékszem, merre barangoltam a két óra alatt, de legalább hat hajót kerestem fel, egymástól távol eső dokkokban, és a felügyelő mindig épp előttem néhány perccel indult tovább. Azonban ami után loholtam, úgy vonzott, mint Szent Grál, úgyhogy végül elcsíptem, épp mielőtt beült volna a kocsijába. Amint megállt, hogy meghallgasson, tudtam, hogy sinen vagyok.

– Nincs szükségünk matrózokra – mondta, miután egy pillantást vetett a könyvemre. – Utaskísérőket alkalmazunk.

– Nekem az is jó – válaszoltam. – Utaskísérőnek jelentkezem, dolgoztam szállodákban. Mindenképp menni akarok.

Visszanyújtotta a könyvem, közben tetőtől talpig végig-

He told me. 'Give us your name.' He pulled out a pocket-book. 'Report to the Second Steward and give him this note.'

She's up for noon ...

Finch Street was two miles away, but I'll swear I made it in twenty minutes. There was plenty of time, but I had it in mind there was a suitcase to lug over the return trip, and I wasn't taking any chances. It was a cold foggy morning, but I was sweating from the long chase and the fever of success. And the grey buildings, and the shrouded figures that passed me on the pavement, were like things seen through the enchanted mists of fairyland. All the world had become beautiful, and I strode along puffed with triumph and springing on my toes with physical well-being. I told myself that youth and strength and pertinacity had to tell in the long run. You couldn't keep a good man down. Not when he had something big to struggle for. Those old men of the hostel had lacked the spur, inspiration, a vision...

No more Elevator. No doubt I wore a silly smile, because more than once I caught a curious glance directed at me as I hurried on. Perhaps my lips were moving too, because the magical phrase 'she's up for noon' rang in my head until it took on the tune of a well-known military march. I could have danced to it, shouted it aloud.

She's up for noon...

I remember afterwards holding back to let an ambulance pass me as I was about to cross into Finch Street, but the fact that it was an ambulance didn't register at the time – only a car of some kind, and in a hurry.

But I did observe instantly the women out at their doors all along both sides, and the little knot of gossipers in front of my old lodgings.

I thought first of Mrs Hall, then of old Burroughs. But the humour of pitiless superiority was still on me, and I hardly quick-

mért.

– Hol van a holmija?

Az izgatottságtól alig jutottam szóhoz.

– Fent a szobámban a Custom House-nál.

– Dél előtt a fedélzeten kell lennie.

– Oda fogok érni. Hol horgonyoznak?

Megmondta.

– Adja meg a nevét! – Zsebkönyvet vett elő. - A másodutaskísérőnél jelentkezzen, ezt a papírt adja át neki!

Délben bontanak vitorlát...

A Finch Street két mérföldre volt, de lefogadom, hogy húsz percen belül megtettem az utat. Elég időm volt még, de én arra gondoltam, hogy visszafelé a bőröndömet is cipelnem kell majd. Nem akartam kockáztatni. Ködös, hideg délelőtt volt, én azonban a hosszú futástól és a siker lázától izzadtam. A szürke épületek és beburkolózott alakok, akiket elhagytam a járdán, olyanok voltak, mintha egy tündérvilág elvarázsolt páráján át látnám őket. Az egész világ gyönyörű lett, és én győzelemittasan futottam: fiatalságom, erőm és állhatatosságom igazolódik, mondogattam magamnak. Igaz embert nem lehet megtörni. Biztos nem, ha valami érdemesért küzdhet. Azokból az öregekből a szállóban hiányzott az ösztönzés, a távlat reménye...

Nincs többé lift. Alighanem eszelős mosoly ülhetett az arcomon, mert több helyütt, ahol elsiettem, kíváncsi pillantásokat vetettek felém. Lehet, hogy a szám is mozgott, mert varázsige-ként visszhangzott a fülemben: délben bontanak vitorlát. Egyszerre azon vettem észre magam, hogy egy katonai induló dallamára lüktet bennem: délben bontanak vitorlát... Kiabálni tudtam volna, tánkra perdülni.

Emlékszem, épp mielőtt átvágtam volna a Finch Streetre, meg kellett torpannom, hogy elengedjek egy rohanó mentőautót. Az, hogy mentő, nem jutott el akkor a tudatomig, csak az, hogy

ened my pace. I'd come back for a suitcase, that was all, and in a few minutes these people...

They turned their heads and watched me as I came up. I saw Mrs Hall in the doorway, her popping eyes red with weeping.

'It's the old man, sailor. They've just took him off. The poor old soul.'

Some of the arrogance and detachment left me. I wasn't interested in old Burroughs, but this woman had given me a cup of coffee and a few words of sympathy when I needed them most. The other women stood aside, and I moved into the passage, taking the landlady by her elbow and drawing her after me. Something tickled my nostrils, but all my attention was on something else.

'He's an old man, you know, Mrs Hall. What happened?'

'They think it's a stroke.' She began to weep again, dabbing her nose with the lifted end of her tattered apron. 'God help him! He tried to talk to me. He got one of them parcels this morning, them herbs. He's been sitting there – you got a ship, sailor?'

She could think of me too.

'Yes I'm going aboard in an hour. Where've they taken him?'

But I didn't hear her reply.

Because that something which had been tickling my nostrils got right inside, and I lifted my head like a parched bullock scenting water, and stared along the passage, and sniffed, and licked my lips – and drew in a mighty inhalation that filled my lungs and sent me dizzy with the sickness that had been eating into me for five mortal weeks. I seized Mrs Hall with a violence that made her stare at me in sudden fright.

'Mrs Hall! – that smell – those herbs – where did they come from?'

As if I didn't know!

'Sailor ...'

autó, és siet.

De azt azonnal észleltem, hogy az asszonyok az utca mindkét oldalán kint vannak a kapuk előtt, és hogy régi szálláshelyem ajtaja előtt pletykálkodók kis csoportja beszélget.

Először Mrs. Hallra gondoltam, azután az öreg Burroghsra. De még mindig a szánakozó felsőbbrendűség érzése volt bennem, úgyhogy alig gyorsítottam a lépteimet. Csak a bőrröndömet jöttem vissza, és néhány perc múlva ezek az emberek már...

A fejüket forgatva nézték, ahogy felmegyek. Mrs. Hallt láttam a folyosón, kidülledt szemei vörösek a sírástól.

– Az öreg volt, tengerész. Épp most vitték el. Szegény öreg pára.

A lekezelő távolságtartás némileg elszállt belőlem. Öreg Burroghs nem érdekelt, de ez az asszony kávét adott és együttérző szavakat, amikor erre a legnagyobb szükségem volt. A többi asszony féloldalt állt, én karon fogtam a házvezetőnőt és magam után vontam a folyosóra. Valami csiklandozta az orromat, de nem figyeltem rá.

– Beteges ember, tudja, Mrs. Hall. Mi történt?

– Azt mondják, infarktus. – Sírni kezdett megint, rongyos köténye végével törölgette az orrát. – Isten segítse meg! Valamit mondani akart nekem. Ma is kapott egy olyan csomagot, azokkal a gyógyfüvekkel. Afölött ücsörgött... Talált hajót, tengerész?

Még rám is tudott gondolni.

– Igen. Egy óra múlva indulok. Hova vitték?

De a válaszát már nem hallottam, mert az a valami, ami az orromat csiklandozta, hirtelen belém nyilallt. Úgy emeltem fel a fejem, mint egy szomjazó tulok, amely víz szagát érzi. A folyosó vége felé bámultam, beleszimatoltam a levegőbe és megnyaltam a szám szélét. Hatalmas lélegzetet vettem, mely megtöltötte a tüdőmet, és szinte szédültem a betegségtől, mely öt szörnyű hete rágta bensőmet. Olyan erőszakkal ragadtam meg Mrs. Hallt,



Burning gum-leaves! Oh, shades of the bush and smell of my home!

Pushing her from me, I was down the passage in two frenzied leaps and throwing open the door.

But nothing was left save the belongings of a lonely old man, a wisp of blue smoke rising from a tin set on an upturned box, and a digger's hat hanging on a nail driven into the mantelpiece. ♦

hogy ő hirtelen ijedséggel meredt rám.

– Mrs. Hall! Ez a szag... Azok a gyógyfüvek... Honnan jöttek?

Mintha nem tudtam volna!

– Tengerész...

Gumifa égő levelei! Ó, a bozót árnyéka, otthonom illata!

Eltoltam magamtól az asszonyt, két őrült ugrással a folyosó végén termettem, és feltéptem az ajtót.

De ott semmi sem volt, mindössze egy magányos öregember holmija. Egy felfordított láda tetején, egy óntányérból kékes füst gomolygott, és a kandallópárkányba vert szögön egy ausztrál farmerkalap lógott. ♦

