

# QUARTERLY PRESS REVIEW

FOR ADVANCED EFL LEARNERS

WINTER 2013



*A Tribute to* **Nobel Laureate**  
**ALICE** **MUNRO**

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

## Train

by *Alice Munro*

This is a slow train anyway, and it has slowed some more for the curve. Jackson is the only passenger left, and the next stop is about twenty miles ahead. Then the stop at Ripley, then Kincardine and the lake. He is in luck and it's not to be wasted. Already he has taken his ticket stub out of its overhead notch.

He heaves his bag, and sees it land just nicely, in between the rails. No choice now – the train's not going to get any slower.

He takes his chance. A young man in good shape, agile as he'll ever be. But the leap, the landing, disappoints him. He's stiffer than he'd thought, the stillness pitches him forward, his palms come down hard on the gravel between the ties, he's scraped the skin. Nerves. The train is out of sight; he hears it putting on a bit of speed, clear of the curve. He spits on his hurting hands, getting the gravel out. Then picks up his bag and starts walking back in the direction he has just covered on the train. If he followed the train he would show up at the station there well after dark. He'd still be able to complain that he'd fallen asleep and wakened all mixed up, thinking he'd slept through his stop when he hadn't, jumped off all confused.

He would have been believed. Coming home from so far away, from Germany and the war, he could have got mixed up in his head. It's not too late, he would be where he was supposed to be before midnight. But all the time he's thinking this he's walking in the opposite direction. He doesn't know many names of trees. Maples, that everybody knows. Pines. He'd thought that where he jumped was in some woods, but it wasn't. The trees are just along the track,

thick on the embankment, but he can see the flash of fields behind them. Fields green or rusty or yellow. Pasture, crops, stubble. He knows just that much. It's still August.

And once the noise of the train has been swallowed up he realizes there isn't the perfect quiet around that he would have expected. Plenty of disturbance here and there, a shaking of the dry August leaves that wasn't wind, a racket of unknown, unseen birds chastising him.

People he'd met in the past few years seemed to think that if you weren't from a city, you were from the country. And that was not true. Jackson himself was the son of a plumber. He had never been in a stable in his life or herded cows or stoked grain. Or found himself as now stumping along a railway track that seemed to have reverted from its normal purpose of carrying people and freight to become a province of wild apple trees and thorny berry bushes and trailing grapevines and crows scolding from perches you could not see. And right now a garter snake slithering between the rails, perfectly confident he won't be quick enough to tramp on and murder it. He does know enough to figure that it's harmless, but its confidence riles him.

The little jersey, whose name was Margaret Rose, could usually be counted on to show up at the stable door for milking twice a day, morning and evening. Belle didn't often have to call her. But this morning she was too interested in something down by the dip of the pasture field, or in the trees that hid the railway tracks on the other side of the fence. She heard Belle's whistle and then her call, and started out reluctantly. But then decided to go back for another look.

Belle set the pail and stool down and started tramping through the morning-wet grass.

"So-boss. So-boss."

She was half coaxing, half scolding.

Something moved in the trees. A man's voice called out that it was all right.

Well of course it was all right. Did he think she was afraid of him attacking Margaret Rose who had her horns still on?

Climbing over the rail fence, he waved in what he might have considered a reassuring way.

That was too much for Margaret Rose, she had to put on a display. Jump one way, then another. Toss of the wicked little horns. Nothing much, but jerseys can always surprise you with their speed and spurts of temper. Belle called out, to scold her and reassure him.

“She won’t hurt you. Just don’t move. It’s her nerves.”

Now she noticed the bag he had hold of. That was what had caused the trouble. She had thought he was just out walking the tracks, but he was going somewhere.

“That’s what the trouble is. She’s upset with your bag. If you could just lay it down for a moment. I have to get her back towards the barn to milk her.”

He did as she asked, and then stood watching, not wanting to move an inch.

She got Margaret Rose headed back to where the pail was, and the stool, on this side of the barn.

“You can pick it up now,” she said. “As long as you don’t wave it around at her. You’re a soldier, aren’t you? If you wait till I get her milked I can get you some breakfast. Good night, I’ve got out of breath. That’s a stupid name when you have to holler at her. Margaret Rose.”

She was a short, sturdy woman with straight hair, gray mixed in with what was fair, and childish bangs.

“I’m the one responsible for it,” she said, as she got herself settled. “I’m a royalist. Or I used to be. I have porridge made, on the back of the stove. It won’t take me long to milk. If you wouldn’t mind going round the barn and waiting where she can’t see you. It’s too bad I can’t offer you an egg. We used to keep hens but the foxes kept getting them and we just got fed up.”

We. We used to keep hens. That meant she had a man around

somewhere.

“Porridge is good. I’ll be glad to pay you.”

“No need. Just get out of the way for a bit. She’s got herself too interested to let her milk down.”

He took himself off around the barn. It was in bad shape. He peered between the boards to see what kind of a car she had, but all he could make out in there was an old buggy and some other wrecks of machinery.

The white paint on the house was peeling and going gray. A window with boards nailed across it, where there must have been broken glass. The dilapidated henhouse where she had mentioned the foxes getting the hens. Shingles in a pile.

If there was a man on the place he must have been an invalid, else paralyzed with laziness.

There was a road running by. A small fenced field in front of the house, a dirt road. And in the field a dappled, peaceable-looking horse. A cow he could see reasons for keeping, but a horse? Even before the war people on farms were getting rid of them, tractors were the coming thing. And she hadn’t looked like the sort to trot round on horseback just for the fun of it. Then it struck him. The buggy in the barn. It was no relic, it was all she had.

For a while now he’d been hearing a peculiar sound. The road rose up a hill, and from over that hill came a clip-clop, clip-clop. Along with the clip-clop some little tinkle or whistling.

Now then. Over the hill came a box on wheels, being pulled by two quite small horses. Smaller than the ones in the field but no end livelier. And in the box sat a half dozen or so little men. All dressed in black, with proper black hats on their heads.

The sound was coming from them. It was singing. Discrete high-pitched little voices, as sweet as could be. They never looked at him as they went by.

It chilled him. The buggy in the barn and the horse in the field were nothing in comparison.

He was still standing there looking one way and another when he heard her call, "All finished." She was standing by the house.

"This is where to go in and out," she said of the back door. "The front is stuck since last winter, and it just refuses to open, you'd think it was still frozen."

They walked on planks laid over an uneven dirt floor, in a darkness provided by the boarded-up window. It was as chilly there as it had been in the hollow where he'd slept. He had wakened again and again, trying to scrunch himself into a position where he could stay warm. The woman didn't shiver here – she gave off a smell of frank healthy exertion and what was likely the cow's hide.

She poured the fresh milk into a basin and covered it with a piece of cheesecloth she kept by, then led him into the main part of the house. The windows there had no curtains, so the light was coming in. Also the woodstove had been in use. There was a sink with a hand-pump, a table with oilcloth on it worn in some places to shreds, and a couch covered with a patchy old quilt.

Also a pillow that had shed some feathers.

So far, not so bad, though old and shabby. There was a use for everything you could see. But raise your eyes and up there on shelves was pile on pile of newspapers or magazines or just some kind of papers, up to the ceiling.

He had to ask her, was she not afraid of fire? A woodstove too.

"Oh, I'm always here. I mean, I sleep here and everything. There isn't any place else I can keep the draughts out. I'm watchful. I haven't had a chimney fire even. A couple of times it got too hot and I just threw some baking powder on it. Nothing to it.

"My mother had to be here anyway," she said. "There was no place else for her to be comfortable. I had her cot in here. I kept an eye on everything. I did think of moving all the papers into the front room but it's really too damp in there, they would all be ruined. She died in May. Just when the weather got decent. She lived to hear about the end of the war on the radio. She understood perfectly. She

lost her speech a long time ago but she could understand. I'm so used to her not speaking that sometimes I think she's here but she's not."

Jackson felt it was up to him to say he was sorry.

"Oh well. It was coming. Just lucky it wasn't in the winter."

She served him oatmeal porridge and tea.

"Not too strong? The tea?"

Mouth full, he shook his head.

"I never economize on tea. If it comes to that why not drink hot water? We did run out when the weather got so bad last winter. The hydro gave out and the radio gave out and the sea gave out. I had a rope round the back door to hang on to when I went out to milk. I was going to get Margaret Rose into the back kitchen but I figured she'd get too upset with the storm and I couldn't hold her. Anyway she survived. We all survived."

Finding a place in the conversation, he asked were there any dwarfs in the neighborhood?

"Not that I've noticed."

"In a cart?"

"Oh. Were they sitting? It must have been the little Mennonite boys. They drive their cart to church and they sing all the way. The girls have to go in the buggy but they let the boys ride in the cart."

"They never looked at me."

"They wouldn't. I used to say to Mother that we lived on the right road because we were just like the Mennonites. The horse and buggy and we drink our milk unpasteurized but the only thing is, neither one of us can sing.

"When Mother died they brought so much food I was eating it for weeks. They must have thought there'd be a wake or something. I'm lucky to have them there.

"But they are lucky too, because they are supposed to practice charity and here I am practically on their doorstep and an occasion for charity if you ever saw one."

He offered to pay her when he'd finished but she batted her hand at his money.

But there was one thing, she said. If before he went he could manage to fix the horse trough.

What this involved was actually making a new horse trough, and in order to do that he had to hunt around for any materials and tools he could find. It took him all day, and she served him pancakes and Mennonite maple syrup for supper. She said that if he'd only come a week later she might have fed him fresh jam. She picked the wild berries growing along the railway track.

They sat on kitchen chairs outside the back door until after the sun went down. She was telling him something about how she came to be here and he was listening, but not paying full attention because he was looking around and thinking how this place was on its last legs but not absolutely hopeless, if somebody wanted to settle down and fix things up. A certain investment of money was needed, but a greater investment of time and energy. It could be a challenge. He could almost bring himself to regret that he was moving on.

Her father – she called him her daddy – had bought this place just for the summers, she said, and then he decided that they might as well live here all year round. He could work anywhere, because he made his living with a column for the Toronto *Telegram*. (Jackson just for a second embarrassingly pictured this as a real column holding or helping to hold up a building.) The mailman took what was written and it was sent off on the train. He wrote about all sorts of things that happened, mentioning Belle's mother occasionally but calling her Princess Casamassima, out of some book. Her mother might have been the reason they stayed year round. She had caught the terrible flu of 1918 in which so many people died, and when she came out of it she was a mute. Not really, because she could make sounds all right, but she seemed to have lost words. Or they had lost her. She had to learn all over again to feed herself and go to the bathroom but one thing she never learned was to keep her clothes

on in the hot weather. So you wouldn't want her just wandering around and being a laughingstock, on some city street. Belle was away at a school in the winters. It took him a little effort to realize that what she referred to as Bishop Strawn was a school. It was in Toronto and she was surprised he hadn't heard of it. It was full of rich girls but also had girls like herself who got special money from relations or wills to go there. It taught her to be rather snooty, she said. And it didn't give her any idea of what she would do for a living.

But that was all settled for her by the accident. Walking along the railway track, as he often liked to do on a summer evening, her father was hit by a train. She and her mother had already gone to bed when it happened and Belle thought it must be a farm animal loose on the tracks, but her mother was moaning dreadfully and seemed to know first thing.

Sometimes a girl she had been friends with at school would write to ask her what on earth she could find to do up there, but little did they know. There was milking and cooking and taking care of her mother and she had the hens at that time as well. She learned how to cut up potatoes so each part has an eye, and plant them and dig them up the next summer. She had not learned to drive and when the war came she sold her daddy's car. The Mennonites let her have a horse that was not good for farmwork anymore, and one of them taught her how to harness and drive it.

One of the old friends came up to visit her and thought the way she was living was a hoot. She wanted her to go back to Toronto but what about her mother? Her mother was a lot quieter now and kept her clothes on, also enjoyed listening to the radio, the opera on Saturday afternoons. Of course she could do that in Toronto but Belle didn't like to uproot her. Or maybe it was herself she was talking about, who was scared of uproot.

The first thing he had to do was to make some rooms other than the kitchen fit to sleep in, come the cold weather. He had some mice

to get rid of and even some rats, now coming in from the cooling weather. He asked her why she'd never invested in a cat and heard a piece of her peculiar logic. She said it would always be killing things and dragging them for her to look at, which she didn't want to do. He kept a sharp ear open for the snap of the traps, and got rid of them before she knew what had happened. Then he lectured about the papers filling up the kitchen, the firetrap problem, and she agreed to move them, if the front room could be got free of damp. That became his main job. He invested in a heater and repaired the walls, and persuaded her to spend the better part of a month climbing down and getting the papers, rereading and reorganizing them and fitting them on the shelves he had made.

She told him then that the papers contained her father's book. Sometimes she called it a novel. He did not think to ask anything about it but one day she told him it was about two people named Matilda and Stephen. A historical novel.

"You remember your history?" He had finished five years of high school with respectable marks and a very good showing in trigonometry and geography but did not remember much history. In his final year, anyway, all you could think about was that you were going to the war.

He said, "Not altogether."

"You'd remember altogether if you went to Bishop Strawn. You'd have had it rammed down your throat. English history, anyway."

She said that Stephen had been a hero. A man of honor, far too good for his times. He was that rare person who wasn't all out for himself or looking to break his word the moment it was convenient to do so. Consequently and finally he was not a success.

And then Matilda. She was a straight descendant of William the Conqueror and as cruel and haughty as you might expect. Though there might be people stupid enough to defend her because she was a woman.

"If he could have finished it would have been a very fine novel."

Jackson of course wasn't stupid. He knew that books existed because people sat down and wrote them. They didn't just appear out of the blue. But why, was the question. There were books already in existence, plenty of them. Two of which he had to read at school. *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Huckleberry Finn*, each of them with language that wore you down, though in different ways. And that was understandable. They were written in the past. What puzzled him, though he didn't intend to let on, was why anybody would want to sit down and do another one, in the present. Now.

A tragedy, said Belle briskly, and Jackson didn't know if it was her father she was talking about or the people in the book that had not been finished. Anyway, now that this room was livable his mind was on the roof. No use to fix up a room and have the state of the roof render it unlivable again in a year or two. He had managed to patch the roof so that it would do her a couple more winters but he could not guarantee more than that. And he still planned to be on his way by Christmas.

The Mennonite families on the next farm ran to older girls and the younger boys he had seen, not strong enough yet to take on heavier chores. Jackson had been able to hire himself out to them during the fall harvest. He had been brought in to eat with the others and to his surprise found that the girls behaved giddily as they served him, they were not at all mute as he had expected. The mothers kept an eye on them, he noticed, and the fathers kept an eye on him. All safe.

And of course with Belle not a thing had to be spoken of. She was – he had found this out – sixteen years older than he was. To mention it, even to joke about it, would spoil everything. She was a certain kind of woman, he a certain kind of man.

The town where they shopped, when they needed to, was called Oriole. It was in the opposite direction from the town where he had grown up. He tied up the horse in the United Church shed there, since there were of course no hitching posts left on the main street.

At first he was leery of the hardware store and the barbershop. But soon he realized something about small towns which he should have realized just from growing up in one. They did not have much to do with each other, unless it was for games run off in the ballpark or the hockey arena, where all was a fervent made-up sort of hostility. When people needed to shop for something their own stores could not supply they went to a city. The same when they wanted to consult a doctor other than the ones their own town could offer. He didn't run into anybody familiar, and nobody showed a curiosity about him, though they might look twice at the horse. In the winter months, not even that, because the back roads were not plowed and people taking their milk to the creamery or eggs to the grocery had to make do with horses.

Belle always stopped to see what movie was on though she had no intention of going to see any of them. Her knowledge of movies and movie stars was extensive but came from some years back. For instance she could tell you whom Clark Gable was married to in real life before he became Rhett Butler.

Soon Jackson was going to get his hair cut when he needed to and buying his tobacco when he ran out. He smoked now like a farmer, rolling his own and never lighting up indoors.

Secondhand cars didn't become available for a while but when they did, with the new models finally on the scene and farmers who'd made money in the way ready to turn in the old ones, he had a talk with Belle. The horse Freckles was God knows how old and stubborn on any sort of hill.

He found that the car dealer had been taking notice of him, though not counting on a visit.

"I always thought you and your sister was Mennonites but ones that wore a different kind of outfit," the dealer said.

That shook Jackson up a little but at least it was better than husband and wife. It made him realize how he must have aged and changed over the years, and how the person who had jumped off the

train, that skinny nerve-wracked soldier, would not be so recognizable in the man he was now. Whereas Belle, so far as he could see, was stopped at some point in life where she remained a grown-up child. And her talk reinforced this impression, jumping back and forth, into the past and out again, so that it seemed she made no difference between their last trip to town and the last movie she had seen with her mother and father, or the comical occasion when Margaret Rose – now dead – had tipped her horns at a worried Jackson.

It was the second car they had owned that took them to Toronto in the summer of 1962. This was a trip they had not anticipated and it came at an awkward time for Jackson. For one thing, he was building a new horse barn for the Mennonites, who were busy with the crops, and for another, he had his own harvest of vegetables coming on, which he planned to sell to the grocery store in Oriole. But Belle had a lump that she had finally been persuaded to pay attention to, and she was booked now for an operation in Toronto.

What a change, Belle kept saying. Are you so sure we are still in Canada?

This was before they got past Kitchener. Once they got on the new highway she was truly alarmed, imploring him to find a side road or else turn around and go home. He found himself speaking sharply to her – the traffic was surprising him too. She stayed quiet all the way after that, and he had no way of knowing whether she had her eyes closed, had given up, or was praying. He had never known her to pray.

Even this morning she had tried to get him to change his mind about going. She said the lump was getting smaller, not larger. Since the health insurance for everybody had come in, she said, nobody did anything but run to the doctor and make their lives into one long drama of hospitals and operations, which did nothing but prolong the period of being a nuisance at the end of life.

She calmed down and cheered up once they got to their turnoff

and were actually in the city. They found themselves on Avenue Road, and in spite of exclamations about how everything had changed, she seemed to be able on every block to recognize something she knew. There was the apartment building where one of the teachers from Bishop Strawn had lived (that was only the pronunciation, the name was spelled Strachan, as she had told him a while ago). In the basement there was a shop where you could buy milk and cigarettes and the newspaper. Wouldn't it be strange, she said, if you could go in there and still find the *Telegram*, where there would be not only her father's name but his smudgy picture, taken when he still had all his hair?

Then a little cry, and down a side street she had seen the very church – she could swear it was the very church – in which her parents had been married. They had taken her there to show her, though it wasn't a church they were members of. They did not go to any church, far from it. Her father said they had been married in the basement but her mother said the vestry.

Her mother could talk then, that was when she could talk. Perhaps there was a law at the time, to make you get married in a church or it wasn't legal.

At Eglinton she saw the subway sign.

"Just think, I have never been on a subway train."

She said this with some sort of mixed pain and pride.

"Imagine remaining so ignorant."

At the hospital they were ready for her. She continued to be lively, telling them about her horrors in the traffic and about the changes, wondering if there was still such a show put on at Christmas by Eaton's store. And did anybody remember the *Telegram*?

"You should have driven in through Chinatown," one of the nurses said. "Now that's something."

"I'll look forward to seeing it on my way home." She laughed, and said, "If I get to go home."

"Now don't be silly."

Another nurse was talking to Jackson about where he'd parked the car, and telling him where to move it so he wouldn't get a ticket. Also making sure that he knew about the accommodations for out-of-town relations, much cheaper than you'd have to pay at a hotel.

Belle would be put to bed now, they said. A doctor would come to have a look at her, and Jackson could come back later to say good night. He might find her a little dopey by that time, they said.

She overheard, and said that she was dopey all the time so he wouldn't be surprised, and there was a little laugh all round.

The nurse took him to sign something before he left. He hesitated where it asked for what relation. Then he wrote "friend."

When he came back in the evening he did see a change, though he would not have described Belle then as dopey. They had put her into some kind of green cloth sack that left her neck and most of her arms quite bare. He had seldom seen her so bare, or noticed the raw-looking cords that stretched between her collarbone and her chin.

She was angry that her mouth was dry.

"They won't let me have anything but the meanest little sip of water."

She wanted him to go and get her a Coke, something that she never drank in her life as far as he knew.

"There's a machine down the hall – there must be. I see people going by with a bottle in their hands and it makes me so thirsty."

He said he couldn't go against orders.

Tears came into her eyes and she turned pettishly away.

"I want to go home."

"Soon you will."

"You could help me find my clothes."

"No I couldn't."

"If you won't I'll do it myself. I'll get myself to the train station myself."

"There isn't any passenger train that goes up our way anymore."

Abruptly then, she seemed to give up on her plans for escape.



In a few moments she started to recall the house and all the improvements that they – or mostly he – had made on it. The white paint shining on the outside and even the back kitchen whitewashed and furnished with a plank floor. The roof reshingled and the windows restored to their plain old style, and most of all glories, the plumbing that was such a joy in the wintertime.

“If you hadn’t shown up I’d have soon been living in absolute squalor.”

He didn’t voice his opinion that she already had been.

“When I come out of this I am going to make a will,” she said. “All yours. You won’t have wasted your labors.”

He had of course thought about this, and you would have expected that the prospects of ownership would have brought a sober satisfaction to him, though he would have expressed a truthful and companionable hope that nothing would happen too soon. But no. It all seemed quite to have little to do with him, to be quite far away.

She returned to her fret.

“Oh, I wish I was there and not here.”

“You’ll feel a lot better when you wake up after the operation.”

Though from everything that he had heard that was a whopping lie. Suddenly he felt so tired.

He had spoken closer to the truth than he could have guessed. Two days after the lump’s removal Belle was sitting up in a different room, eager to greet him and not at all disturbed by the moans coming from a woman behind the curtain in the next bed. That was more or less what she – Belle – had sounded like yesterday, when he never got her to open her eyes or notice him at all.

“Don’t pay any attention to her,” said Belle. “She’s completely out of it. Probably doesn’t feel a thing. She’ll come round tomorrow bright as a dollar. Or maybe she won’t.”

A somewhat satisfied, institutional authority was showing, a veteran’s callousness. She was sitting up in bed and swallowing some

kind of bright orange drink through a conveniently bent straw. She looked a lot younger than the woman he had brought to the hospital such a short time before.

She wanted to know if he was getting enough sleep, if he’d found some place where he liked to eat, if the weather had not been too warm for walking, if he had found time to visit the Royal Ontario Museum, as she thought she had advised.

But she could not concentrate on his replies. She seemed to be in an inner state of amazement. Controlled amazement.

“Oh, I do have to tell you,” she said, breaking right into his explanation of why he had not got to the museum. “Oh, don’t look so alarmed. You’ll make me laugh with that face on, it’ll hurt my stitches. Why on earth should I be thinking of laughing anyway? It’s a dreadfully sad thing really, it’s a tragedy. You know about my father, what I’ve told you about my father –”

The thing he noticed was that she said father instead of daddy.

“My father and my mother –”

She seemed to have to search around and get started again.

“The house was in better shape then than when you first got to see it. Well it would be. We used that room at the top of the stairs for our bathroom. Of course we had to carry the water up and down. Only later, when you came, I was using the downstairs. With the shelves in it, you know, that had been a pantry?”

How could she not remember that he had taken out the shelves and put in the bathroom? He was the one who had done it.

“Oh well, what does it matter?” she said, as if she followed his thoughts. “So I had heated the water and I carried it upstairs to have my sponge bath. And I took off my clothes. Well I would. There was a big mirror over the sink, you see it had a sink like a real bathroom only you had to pull out the plug and let the water back into the pail when you were finished. The toilet was elsewhere. You get the picture. So I proceeded to wash myself and I was bare naked, naturally. It must have been around nine o’clock at night so there was

plenty of light. It was summer, did I say? That little room facing west?

“Then I heard steps and of course it was Daddy. My father. He must have been finished putting Mother to bed. I heard the steps coming up the stairs and I did notice they sounded heavy. Somewhat not like usual. Very deliberate. Or maybe that was just my impression afterwards. You are apt to dramatize things afterwards. The steps stopped right outside the bathroom door and if I thought anything I thought, Oh, he must be tired. I didn’t have any bolt across the door because of course there wasn’t one. You just assumed somebody was in there if the door was closed.

“So he was standing outside the door and I didn’t think anything of it and then he opened the door and he just stood and looked at me. And I have to say what I mean. Looking at all of me, not just my face. My face looking into the mirror and him looking at me in the mirror and also what was behind me and I couldn’t see. It wasn’t in any sense a normal look.

“I’ll tell you what I thought. I thought, He’s walking in his sleep. I didn’t know what to do, because you are not supposed to startle anybody that is sleepwalking.

“But then he said, ‘Excuse me,’ and I knew he was not asleep. But he spoke in a funny kind of voice, I mean it was a strange voice. Very much as if he was disgusted with me. Or mad at me, I didn’t know. Then he left the door open and just went away down the hall. I dried myself and got into my nightgown and went to bed and went to sleep right away. When I got up in the morning there was the water I had drained and I didn’t want to go near it but I did.

“But everything seemed normal and he was up already typing away. He just yelled good morning and then he asked me how to spell some word. The way he often did, because I was a better speller. So I did and then I said he should learn how to spell if he thought he was a writer, he was hopeless. But then sometime later in the day when I was washing some dishes he came up right behind

me and I froze. He just said, ‘Belle, I’m sorry.’ And I thought, Oh, I wish he had not said that. It scared me. I knew it was true he was sorry but he was putting it out in the open in a way I could not ignore. I just said, ‘That’s okay,’ but I couldn’t make myself say it in an easy voice or as if it really was okay.

“I couldn’t. I had to let him know he had changed us. I went to throw out the dishwasher and then I went back to whatever else I was doing and not another word. Later I got Mother up from her nap and I had supper ready and I called him but he didn’t come. I said to Mother that he must have gone for a walk. He often did when he got stuck in his writing. I helped mother cut up her food.

“I didn’t know where he could have gone. I got Mother ready for bed though that was his job. Then I heard the train coming and all at once the commotion and the screeching which was the train brakes and I must have known what had happened though I don’t know exactly when I knew.

“I told you before. I told you he got run over by the train.

“But I’m not telling you this, I am not telling you just to be harrowing. At first I couldn’t stand it and for the longest time I was actually making myself think that he was walking along the tracks with his mind on his work and never heard the train. That was the story all right. I was not going to think it was about me or even what it primarily was about. Sex.

“It seems to me just now I have got a real understanding of it and that it was nobody’s fault. It was the fault of human sex in a tragic situation. Me growing up there and Mother the way she was and Daddy, naturally, the way he would be. Not my fault nor his fault.

“There should be acknowledgment, that’s all I mean, places where people can go if they are in a situation. And not be all ashamed and guilty about it. If you think I mean brothels, you are right. If you think prostitutes, right again. Do you understand?”

Jackson, looking over her head, said yes.

“I feel so released. It’s not that I don’t feel the tragedy, but I have

in a way got outside the tragedy, is what I mean. It is just the mistakes of humanity that are tragic, if you see what I mean. You mustn't think because I'm smiling that I don't have compassion. I have serious compassion. But I have to say I am relieved. At the same time. I have to say I somehow feel happy. You are not embarrassed by listening to all this?"

"No."

"You realize I am in a slightly abnormal state. I know I am. There is this abnormal clarity. I mean in everything. Everything so clear. I am so grateful for it."

The woman on the bed had not let up on her rhythmical groaning all through this. Jackson felt as if that refrain had entered into his head.

He heard the nurse's squishy shoes in the hall and hoped they would enter this room. They did.

The nurse said that she had to give Belle her sleepy-time pill. He was afraid she would tell him to kiss her good night. He had noticed that a lot of kissing went on in the hospital. He was glad when he stood up that there was no mention of it.

"See you tomorrow."

He woke up early, and decided to take a walk before breakfast. He had slept all right but told himself he ought to take a break from the hospital air. It wasn't that he was worried so much by the change in Belle. He thought it was possible or even probable that she would get back to normal, either today or in a couple more days. She might not even remember the story she had told him. Which would be a blessing.

The sun was well up, as you could expect at this time of year, and the buses and streetcars were already pretty full. He walked south for a bit, then turned west onto Dundas Street, and after a while found himself in the Chinatown he had heard about. Loads of recognizable and many not-so-recognizable vegetables were being trundled into shops, and small, skinned, apparently edible animals were already

hanging up for sale. The streets were full of illegally parked trucks and noisy, desperate-sounding Chinese. All the high-pitched clamor sounded like they had a war going on, but probably to them it was just everyday. Nevertheless he felt like getting out of the way, and he went into a restaurant run by Chinese but advertising an ordinary breakfast of eggs and bacon. When he came out of there he intended to turn around and retrace his steps.

But instead he found himself heading south again. He had got onto a residential street lined with tall and fairly narrow brick houses. They must have been built before people in the area felt any need for driveways or possibly before they even had cars. Before there were such things as cars. He walked until he saw a sign for Queen Street, which he had heard of. He turned west again and after a few blocks he came to an obstacle. In front of a doughnut shop he ran into a small crowd of people. They were stopped by an ambulance, backed right up on the sidewalk so you could not get by. Some of them were complaining about the delay and asking loudly if it was even legal to park an ambulance on the sidewalk, and others were looking peaceful enough while they chatted about what the trouble might be. Death was mentioned, some of the onlookers speaking of various candidates and others saying that was the only legal excuse for the vehicle being where it was.

The man who was finally carried out, bound to the stretcher, was surely not dead or they'd have had his face covered. He was not being carried out through the doughnut shop, as some had jokingly predicted – that was some sort of dig at the quality of the doughnuts – but through the main door of the building. It was a decent enough brick apartment building five stories high, housing a Laundromat as well as the doughnut shop on its main floor. The name carved over its main door suggested pride as well as some foolishness in its past.

Bonnie Dundee.

A man not in ambulance uniform came out last. He stood there looking with exasperation at the crowd that was now thinking of

breaking up. The only thing to wait for now was the grand wail of the ambulance as it found its way onto the street and tore away.

Jackson was one of those who didn't bother to walk away. He wouldn't have said he was curious about any of this, more that he was just waiting for the inevitable turn he had been expecting, to take him back to where he'd come from. The man who had come out of the building walked over and asked if he was in a hurry.

No. Not specially.

This man was the owner of the building. The man taken away in the ambulance was the caretaker and superintendent.

"I've got to get to the hospital and see what's the trouble with him. Right as rain yesterday. Never complained. Nobody close that I can call on, so far as I know. The worst, I can't find the keys. Not on him and not usually where he keeps them. So I got to go home and get my spares and I just wondered, could you keep a watch on things meanwhile? I got to go home and I got to go to the hospital too. I could ask some of the tenants but I'd just rather not, if you know what I mean. Natural curiosity or something."

He asked again if Jackson was sure he would not mind and Jackson said no, fine.

"Just keep an eye for anybody going in, out, ask to see their keys. Tell them it's an emergency, won't be long."

He was leaving, then turned around.

"You might as well sit down."

There was a chair Jackson had not noticed. Folded and pushed out of the way so the ambulance could park. It was just one of those canvas chairs but comfortable enough and sturdy. Jackson set it down with thanks in a spot where it would not interfere with passersby or apartment dwellers. No notice was taken of him. He had been about to mention the hospital and the fact that he himself had to get back there before too long. But the man had been in a hurry, and he already had enough on his mind, and he had already made the point that he would be as quick as he could.

Jackson realized, once he got sitting down, just how long he'd been on his feet walking here or there.

The man had told him to get a coffee or something to eat from the doughnut shop if he felt the need.

"Just tell them my name."

But that Jackson did not even know.

When the owner came back he apologized for being late. The fact was that the man who had been taken away in the ambulance had died. Arrangements had to be made. A new set of keys had become necessary. Here they were. There'd be some sort of funeral involving those in the building who had been around a long time. Notice in the paper might bring in a few more. A troublesome spell, till this was sorted out.

It would solve the problem. If Jackson could. Temporarily. It only had to be temporarily.

Yes, all right with him, Jackson said.

If he wanted to take a little time, that could be managed. Right after the funeral and some disposal of goods. A few days he could have then, to get his affairs together and do the proper moving in.

That would not be necessary, Jackson said. His affairs were together and his possessions were on his back.

Naturally this roused a little suspicion. Jackson was not surprised a couple of days later to hear that this new employer had made a visit to the police. But all was well, apparently. He had emerged as just one of those loners who may have got themselves in too deep some way or another but have not been guilty of breaking any law.

It looked as if there was no search party under way.

As a rule, Jackson liked to have older people in the building. And as a rule, single people. Not zombies. People with interests. Talent. The sort of talent that had been noticed once, made some kind of a living once, though not enough to hang on to all through a life. An announcer whose voice had been familiar on the radio during the war but whose vocal cords were shot to pieces now. Most people

probably believed he was dead. But here he was in his bachelor suite, keeping up with the news and subscribing to the *Globe and Mail*, which he passed on to Jackson in case there was anything of interest to him in it.

Once there was.

Marjorie Isabella Treece, daughter of Willard Treece, longtime columnist for the Toronto *Telegram*, and his wife Helena (née Abbott) Treece, has passed away after a courageous battle with cancer. Oriole paper please copy. July 18, 1965.

No mention of where she had been living. Probably in Toronto. She had lasted maybe longer than he had expected. He didn't spend a moment's time picturing the rooms of work he'd done on her place. He didn't have to – such things were often recalled in dreams, and his feeling then was more of exasperation than of longing, as if he had to get to work on something that had not been finished.

In the building of Bonnie Dundee, there had to be consideration of human beings, as he tackled the upkeep of their surroundings and of what the women might call their nests. (The men were usually uneasy about any improvement meaning a raise in the rent.) He talked them round, with good respectful manners and good fiscal sense, and the place became one with a waiting list. "We could fill it all up without a loony in the place," said the owner. But Jackson pointed out that the loonys as he called them were generally tidier than average, besides which they were a minority. There was a woman who had once played in the Toronto Symphony and an inventor who had truly just missed out on a fortune for one of his inventions and had not given up yet though he was over eighty. And a Hungarian refugee actor whose accent was not in demand but who still had a commercial running somewhere in the world. They were all well behaved, even those who went out to the Epicure Bar every day at noon and stayed till closing. Also they had friends among the truly famous who might show up once in a blue moon for a visit. Nor should it be sneezed at that the Bonnie Dundee had an in-house

preacher, on shaky terms with whatever his church might be but always able to officiate when called upon.

People did often stay until his office was necessary.

An exception was the young couple named Candace and Quincy who never settled their rent and skipped out in the middle of the night. The owner happened to have been in charge when they came looking for a room, and he excused himself for his bad choice by saying that a fresh face was needed around the place. Candace's. Not the boyfriend's. The boyfriend was a crude sort of jerk.

On a hot summer day Jackson had the double back doors, the delivery doors, open, to let in what air he could while he worked at varnishing a table. It was a pretty table he'd got for nothing because its polish was all worn away. He thought it would look nice to put the mail on, in the entryway.

He was able to be out of the office because the owner was in there checking some rents.

There was a light touch on the front doorbell. Jackson was ready to haul himself up, cleaning his brush, because he thought the owner in the midst of figures might not care to be disturbed. But it was all right, he heard the door being opened, a woman's voice. A voice on the edge of exhaustion, yet able to maintain something of its charm, its absolute assurance that whatever it said would win over anybody who came within listening range.

She would probably have got that from her father the preacher. He remembered thinking this before.

This was the last address she had, she said, for her daughter. She was looking for her daughter. Candace her daughter. She had come here from British Columbia. From Kelowna where she and the girl's father lived.

Ileane. That woman was Ileane.

He heard her ask if it was possible for her to sit down. Then the owner pulling out his – Jackson's – chair.

Toronto so much hotter than she had expected, though she knew

Ontario, had grown up there.

She wondered if she could possibly beg for a glass of water.

She must have put her head down in her hands as her voice grew muffled. The owner came out into the hall and dropped some change into the machine to get a 7-Up. He might have thought that more ladylike than a Coke.

Around the corner he saw Jackson listening, and he made a gesture that he, Jackson, should take over, being perhaps more used to distraught tenants. But Jackson shook his head violently. No.

She did not stay distraught long.

She begged the owner's pardon and he said the heat could play those tricks today.

Now about Candace. They had left within a month, it could be three weeks ago. No forwarding address.

"In such cases there usually isn't..."

She got the hint.

"Oh, of course I can settle..."

There was some muttering and rustling while this was done. Then, "I don't suppose you could let me see where they were living..."

"The tenant isn't in now. But even if he was I don't think he'd agree to it."

"Of course. That's silly."

"Was there anything else you were particularly interested in?"

"Oh no. No. You've been kind. I've taken your time."

She had got up now, and they were moving. Out of the office, down the couple of steps to the front door. Then the door was opened and street noises swallowed up her farewells if there were any.

However she had been defeated, she would get herself out with a good grace.

Jackson came out of hiding as the owner returned to the office.

"Surprise," was all the owner said. "We got our money."

He was a man who was basically incurious, at least about personal matters. A thing which Jackson valued in him.

Of course he would like to have seen her. He hadn't got much of an impression of the daughter. Her hair was blond but very likely dyed. No more than twenty though it was sometimes hard to tell nowadays. Very much under the thumb of the boyfriend. Run away from home, run away from your bills, break your parents' hearts, for a sulky piece of goods, a boyfriend.

Where was Kelowna? In the west somewhere. British Columbia. A long way to come looking. Of course she was a persistent woman. An optimist. Probably that was true of her still. She had married. Unless the girl was out of wedlock and that struck him as very unlikely. She'd be sure, sure of herself the next time, she wouldn't be one for tragedy. The girl wouldn't be, either. She'd come home when she'd had enough. She might bring along a baby but that was all the style nowadays.

Shortly before Christmas in the year 1940 there had been an uproar in the high school. It had even reached the third floor where the clamor of typewriters and adding machines usually kept all the downstairs noises at bay. The oldest girls in the school were up there – girls who last year had been learning Latin and biology and European history and were now learning to type.

One of these was Ileana Bishop, a minister's daughter, although there were no bishops in her father's United Church. Ileana had arrived with her family when she was in grade nine and for five years, because of the custom of alphabetical seating, she had sat behind Jackson Adams. By that time Jackson's phenomenal shyness and silence had been accepted by everybody else in the class but it was new to her, and during the next five years, by not acknowledging it, she had produced a thaw. She borrowed erasers and pen nibs and geometry tools from him, not so much to break the ice as because she was naturally scatterbrained. They exchanged answers to problems and marked each other's tests. When they met on the street

they said hello, and to her his hello was actually more than a mumble – it had two syllables and an emphasis to it. Nothing much was presumed beyond that except that they had certain jokes. Ileana was not a shy girl but she was clever and aloof and not particularly popular, and that seemed to suit him.

From her position on the stairs, when all these older girls came out to see the ruckus, Ileana along with all the others was surprised to see that one of the two boys causing it was Jackson. The other was Bill Watts. Boys who only a year ago had sat hunched over books and shuffled dutifully between one classroom and another. Now in army uniforms they looked twice the size they had been, their powerful boots making a ferocious noise as they galloped around. They were shouting out that school was canceled for the day, because everybody had to join the army. They were distributing cigarettes everywhere, even tossing them on the floor where they could be picked up by boys who didn't even shave.

Careless warriors, whooping invaders. Drunk up to their eyeballs.

"I'm no piker," they were yelling.

The principal was trying to order them out. But because this was still early in the war and there was as yet some awe and veneration concerning the boys who had signed up, wrapping themselves so to speak in the costume of death, he was not able to show the ruthlessness he would have called upon a year later.

"Now now," he said.

"I'm no piker," Billy Watts told him.

Jackson had his mouth open probably to say the same, but at that moment his eyes met the eyes of Ileana Bishop and a certain piece of knowledge passed between them.

Ileana Bishop understood, it seemed, that Jackson was truly drunk but that the effect of this was to enable him to play drunk, therefore the drunkenness displayed could be managed. (Billy Watts was just drunk, through and through.) With this understanding Ileana walked down the stairs, smiling, and accepted a cigarette, which she held

unlit between her fingers. She linked arms with both heroes and marched them out of the school.

Once outside they lit up their cigarettes.

There was a conflict of opinion about this later, in Ileana's father's congregation. Some said Ileana had not actually smoked hers, just pretended to pacify the boys, while others said she certainly had. Smoked.

Billy did put his arms around Ileana and tried to kiss her, but he stumbled and sat down on the school steps and crowed like a rooster. Within two years he would be dead.

Meanwhile he had to be got home, and Jackson pulled him so that they could get his arms over their shoulders and drag him along. Fortunately his house was not far from the school. They left him there, passed out on the front steps, and entered into a conversation.

Jackson did not want to go home. Why not? Because his stepmother was there, he said. He hated his stepmother. Why? No reason.

Ileana knew that his mother had died in a car accident when he was very small – this was sometimes taken to account for his shyness. She thought that the drink was probably making him exaggerate, but she didn't try to make him talk about it any further.

"Okay," she said. "You can stay at my place."

It just happened that Ileana's mother herself was away, looking after Ileana's sick grandmother. Ileana was at the time keeping house in a haphazard way for her father and her two young brothers. This was fortunate. Not that her mother would have made a fuss, but she would have wanted to know the ins and outs and who was this boy? At the very least she would have made Ileana go to school as usual.

A soldier and a girl, so suddenly close. Where there had been nothing all this time but logarithms and declensions.

Ileana's father didn't pay attention to them. He was more interested in the war than some of his parishioners thought a minister should be, and this made him proud to have a soldier in the

house. Also he was unhappy not to be able to send his daughter to college, on his minister's salary, because he had to put something by to send her brothers someday. That made him lenient.

Jackson and Ileana didn't go to the movies. They didn't go to the dance hall. They went for walks, in any weather and often after dark. Sometimes they went into a restaurant and drank coffee, but did not try to be friendly to anybody. What was the matter with them? Were they falling in love?

Ileana went by herself to Jackson's house to collect his bag. His stepmother raised her skinny eyebrows and showed her bright false teeth and tried to look as if she was ready for some fun.

She asked what they were up to.

"You better watch that stuff," she said, with a big laugh. She had a reputation for being a loudmouth but people said she didn't mean any harm. Ileana was especially ladylike, partly to annoy her.

She told Jackson what had been said, and made it funny, but he didn't laugh.

She apologized.

"I guess you get too much in the habit of caricaturing people, living in a parsonage," she said.

He said it was okay.

That time at the parsonage turned out to be Jackson's last leave. They wrote to each other. Ileana wrote about finishing her typing and shorthand and getting a job in the office of the town clerk. In spite of what she had said about caricatures she was determinedly satirical about everything, more than she had been in school. Maybe she thought that someone at war needed joking.

When hurry-up marriages had to be arranged through the clerk's office she would refer to the "virgin bride."

And when she mentioned some stodgy minister visiting the parsonage and sleeping in the spare room she wondered if the mattress would induce naughty dreams.

He wrote about the crowds on the *Île de France* and the ducking

around to avoid U-boats. When he got to England he bought a bicycle and he told her about places he had biked around to see if they were not out of bounds.

Then about being picked to take a map course which meant he would work behind the lines if there was ever such a need (he meant of course after D-Day).

These letters though more prosaic than hers were always signed with love. When D-Day did come there was what she called an agonizing silence but she understood the reason for it, and when he wrote again all was well, though details impossible.

In this letter he spoke as she had been doing, about marriage.

And at last V-E Day and the voyage home. He mentioned showers of summer stars overhead.

Ileana had learned to sew. She was making a new summer dress in honor of his homecoming, a dress of lime-green rayon silk with a full skirt and cap sleeves, worn with a narrow belt of gold imitation leather. She meant to wind a ribbon of the same green material around the crown of her summer straw hat.

"All this is being described to you so you will notice me and know it's me and not go running off with some other beautiful woman who happens to be at the train station."

He mailed his letter to her from Halifax, telling her that he would be on the evening train on Saturday. He said that he remembered her very well and there was no danger of getting her mixed up with another woman even if the train station happened to be swarming with them that evening.

On their last evening they had sat up late in the parsonage kitchen where there was the picture of King George VI you saw everywhere that year. And the words beneath it.

I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year, "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."

And he replied, "Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than



light and safer than a known way.”

Then they went upstairs very quietly and he went to bed in the spare room. Her coming to him must have been by mutual agreement because he was not surprised.

It was a disaster. But by the way she behaved, she didn't seem to know. The more disaster, the more frantic became her stifled displays of passion. There was no way he could stop her trying, or explain. Was it possible a girl could know so little? They parted finally as if all had gone well. And the next morning said goodbye in the presence of her father and brothers. In a short while the letters began, loving as could be. He got drunk and tried once more, in Southampton. But the woman said, “That's enough, sonny boy, you're down and out.”

A thing he didn't like was women or girls dressing up. Gloves, hats, swishy skirts, all some demand and bother about it. But how could she know that? Lime green, he wasn't sure he knew the color. It sounded like acid.

Then it came to him quite easily, that a person could just not be there.

Would she tell herself or tell anybody else, that she must have mistaken the date? He'd told himself that she would make up some lie, surely – she was resourceful, after all.

Now that she was gone, Jackson felt a wish to see her. Her voice even in distress had been marvelously unchanged. Drawing all importance to itself, musical levels. He could never ask the owner what she looked like, whether her hair was still dark, or gray, and she herself skinny or gone stout. He had not paid much attention to the daughter, except on the matter of disliking the boyfriend.

She had married. Unless she'd had the child by herself and that wasn't likely. She would have a prosperous husband, other children. This the one to break her heart.

That kind of girl would come back. She'd be too spoiled to stay away. She'd come back when necessary. Even the mother – Ileana – hadn't she had some spoiled air about her, some way of arranging

the world and the truth to suit herself, as if nothing could foil her for long?

The next day whatever ease he had about the woman passing from his life was gone. She knew this place, she might come back. She might settle herself in for a while, walking up and down these streets, trying to find where the trail was warm. Humbly but not really humbly making inquiries of people, in that spoiled cajoling voice. It was possible he would run into her right outside this door.

Things could be locked up, it only took some determination. When he was as young as six or seven he locked up his stepmother's fooling, what she called her fooling or her teasing when she gave him a bath. He ran out on the street after dark and she got him in but she saw there'd be some real running away if she didn't stop so she stopped. She said he was no fun because she could never say that anybody hated her. But she knew he hated her even if she couldn't account for it and she stopped.

He spent three more nights in the building called Bonnie Dundee. He wrote an account for the owner of every apartment and when and what upkeep was due. He said that he had been called away, without indicating why or where to. He emptied his bank account and packed the few things belonging to him. In the evening, late in the evening, he got on the train. He slept off and on during the night and in one of those snatches he saw the little Mennonite boys go by in their cart. He heard their small sweet voices singing.

This had happened before in his dreams.

In the morning he got off in Kapuskasing. He could smell the mills, and was encouraged by the cooler air. ♦

(2012)

## The Progress of Love

by Tárnok, Attila

Death is the final kick. A grateful friend: the ultimate release from burdens. A mean judge: it announces the sentence of mortality. The first time a writer is measured against harder currencies than text is in his necrologue. His death is the common denominator that places him in level with historical-literary figures. A career completed, it can be examined from a historical viewpoint. A writer alive, however, is always more interesting a person than his counterpart who has passed away, on whose personality we can only muse. Alice Munro, probably the best Canadian short fiction writer alive, residing Canada, is a common example of this. The events of her life are widely believed to be the background of her stories. In *Probable Fictions* she complains about the reader who tries to identify settings and characters of her stories as their real life replicas. Canadian readers are obsessed to take details of fiction as the scandalous gossip of their life or community. Stephen Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* was received with raging opposition (perhaps justly so) in Orillio; Margaret Lawrence's *Manawaka*, it is often taken for granted, is her hometown Neepawa, Manitoba and Alice Munro's Jubilee equals Wingham, Ontario in the process of a 'literary' folk-ethymology. Of course, it is always a small community that feels offended about being pictured in fiction realistically, or feels proud when romanticized. Mordecai Richier's portrait of Montreal, for example, has never encountered opposition.

Alice Munro – along with Mavis Gallant and others – is under informal contract to the *New Yorker*. This means that the *New Yorker* has the right to see their work first, so any stories that appear in

other magazines, one can assume are *New Yorker* rejects. Alice Munro comments on their rigorous requirement for accuracy in a recent radio interview: “The *New Yorker* has an army of people to check up on facts, and if you have a ferry leaving at two o'clock and it leaves at two thirty that would be changed. So there is always a sort of factual accuracy which is wonderful, and they found out that I have the heart patients on the wrong floor of the Toronto General Hospital. Things like that... I remember in one of the early stories I was talking about plastic curtains, and they said, do you mean shower curtains? Because it turned out that at the *New Yorker* no one knew about those imitation lace curtains that people used to have, maybe still have on parlor windows. So I set them straight about plastic curtains and a few things like that.”

Canadian fiction writers are often crucified on the cross of this contradiction: the requirement for accuracy by the *New Yorker* to which magazine they would love to contribute, and the small town mentality of the community they portray.

Alice Munro, in her latest book, *The Progress of Love*, perhaps for reasons discussed above, reveals an inconsistency in structure, in the context of the entire book as well as in the patterns and themes of individual stories, but this inconsistency and her use of a sometimes difficult-to-follow mosaic or montage construction of time frames might be justified. It is, of course, not required of short story writers to present a string of stories that are related in theme, setting and character as the stories in *Lives of Girls and Women*. Consistency in themes, a single central character and a recurring narrative voice are simple traditional norms.

Robert Thacker notices that “the stories here encompass more time than in earlier works of Alice Munro”. Yet events are frequently recollected from memory. In the sense of events occurring within the timespan of the narrative, these stories often embrace a very short time, even in some cases no time at all (for example, the framework of 'White Dump' is a static present tense in which frame nothing

actually happens, and the story is the telling of past events on several planes of time). The use of several time planes is, of course, to break up a long span of narrative time by reordering chronology for the sake of holding on to the reader's interest. Maybe it is somewhat disturbing at places where a few sentence-long conversation is extended to pages by inserts of character sketches, by description of other events, by analyses of what is on one character's mind, or by jumping back to tell us what had happened earlier. This prolongation of a conversation distinguishes Alice Munro's prose from adventure stories. However, her narrative almost never comes to the present tense; with that she avoids adventure's counterpart, the documentary.

Her usual themes, the Ingmar-Bergmanish psychological drama in family environments on the one hand, and her wine-sweet reminiscences of her, she makes it seem, long past childhood on the other hand, are enriched in this volume with the fabulous realist story of 'The Moon in the Orange Street Skating Rink'. This story, well may be the best one in the book, brings back memories to me of the enjoyment of reading sugar-coated, ironic works of Czech authors, such as Jaroslav Hasek or Bohumil Hrabal.

Alice Munro's method of telling a story is telling it backwards. She almost always presents us the conclusion first, that is, whatever happened last in the ordinary course of events, then goes further and further back into the past explaining and analyzing the precedents of the conclusion. Therefore, the psychological drama can be more correctly called post-traumatic from the reader's point of view, because we get to know the tragic event first: the father dies in 'The Progress of Love', a boy drowns in 'Miles City, Montana', or an elderly couple dies in 'Fits' – and the story itself is about the circumstances of how these tragic events came about in the first place. On this level, Munro's stories are the opposites of ordinary adventure stories where the conclusion, the present tense of events, comes at the end as a punch line, but her stories are also like

mysteries in that the plot is the winding-off, the solving of the shocking human deed which we are told first.

Alice Munro's finest trait is her ability to draw character sketches as elaborate as lace. We almost always learn the purpose or reason of a character's action by direct statements. Sometimes the narrator remarks it objectively, at other times the narrator tells us about it as the character's explanation.

Often, Alice Munro handles transitions with so much care and (what seems) ease that the eyes can slip through pages without stoppage. An illustration of such shifts is compressed into a passage in 'Fits' on pages 118-9, where our view of the events jumps back and forth from Robert's perspective to that of the narrator's omniscient view excluding Robert.

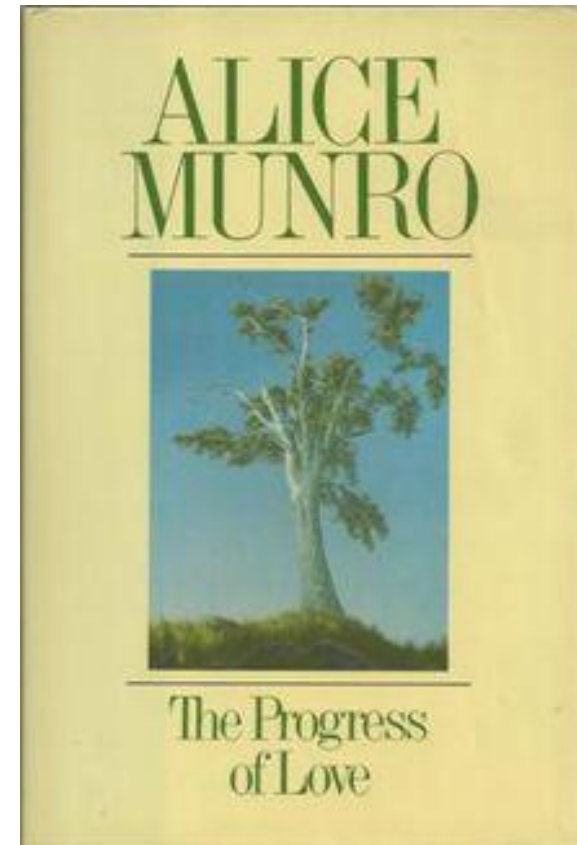
In this collection of short stories, Alice Munro does not portray a community per se, consequently her book is less homogenous than her earlier work. The eleven stories in the new collection, as a result, are less also coherent. *The Progress of Love* is a collection of fine, unrelated stories, but some of them do not belong to the best of Munro. While some of the stories are beautiful, the inclusion of others in the book is questionable. Other reviewers felt something of this discrepancy. Jean Mallinson observes Alice Munro's treating her characters as "the dispersal of the narrator's interest among a whole range of characters" and that "she does not pick favourites but gives each character his or her due is a sign of her maturity as an artist". However, this observation also can be interpreted as a loss of a consistent viewpoint. Many of the stories are compiled of short, laconic pieces; each describes seemingly unrelated events and usually they jump back and forth in time. W.R. Martin describes this technique: "we find the chronology often disordered and something like a mosaic of strikingly-colored pieces puzzlingly juxtaposed, with no plain theme or obvious current". Robert Thacker notices this slight imperfection or queer aftertaste as well. He writes, "*The Progress of Love* offers both greater complexity and, oddly enough, greater

uncertainty than we have seen before: not uncertainty of purpose, control or detail, but rather uncertainty of meaning or uncertainty of being”, and also, “the stories here proclaim Munro’s uncertainty by their structures”.

More than that, Alice Munro displays a weakness in thematic development. The reader does not know what the plot of ‘Eskimo’ aims at, and even the ending (“This is the beginning of her holiday” ,p.208) fails to illuminate the point. Another story, ‘Fits’ is enigmatic nonetheless, and the identification of commercial institutions makes the story boring when hyper-realistic: “She had stood in line at the Bank of Montreal”, or: “They were together, buying groceries in the I.G.A.”(p.119). Neil Besner describes this technique as ‘kitchen linoleum realism’: Alice Munro “offers us an extraordinary insight into the ordinary”.

However, inspite of all the criticism, *The Progress of Love* was the most popular reading among Canadian writers when it was published; “Alice Munro the writer all the writers are reading”, advertises the cover of the January-February issue (1987) of *Books in Canada*. Her next collection of stories, according to rumors, is about to be published and much awaited. Indeed, her prose came of age and although changed very little since her first book, *Dance of the Happy Shades*, her literary experience ripens the unchanged material into a brilliant collection of short stories in *The Progress of Love*. Miss Kernaghan’s character in ‘The Moon in the Orange Street Skating Rink’ who “allowed only one shirt a week in the washing” and “set the dish of jam in the middle of the table where nobody could reach it easily” and who kept worrying that “so much exercise would give those boys terrible appetites” is not only similar to some of Dickens’s characters stricken by a shortage of financial possibilities, but should be placed beside them in regards of artistic creative merit as well. ♦

(Mount Royal College, 1987)



*Side by...*

## The Moon in the Orange Street Skating Rink

by *Alice Munro*

SAM GOT A SURPRISE, WALKING INTO Callie's variety and confectionery store. He had expected a clutter of groceries, cheap bits and pieces, a stale smell, maybe faded tinsel ropes, old overlooked Christmas decorations. Instead, he found a place mostly taken up with video games. Hand-lettered signs in red and blue crayon warned against alcohol, fighting, loitering, and swearing. The store was full of jittery electronic noise and flashing light and menacing, modern-day, oddly shaved and painted children. But behind the counter sat Callie, quite painted up herself, under a pinkish-blond wig. She was reading a paperback.

Sam asked for cigarettes, to test her. She laid down the book, and he looked at the title. *My Love Where the High Winds Blow*, by Veronica Gray. She gave him his change and settled her sweater around her shoulders and picked up her book, all without looking at him. Her sweater was covered with little jiggly balls of pink and white wool, like popcorn. She waited till the last minute to speak to him.

"You taken up smoking in your old age, Sam?"

"I thought you didn't know me."

"I'd know your hide in a tannery," said Callie, pleased with herself. "I knew you the minute you walked in that door."

Sam is sixty-nine years old, a widower. He is staying at the Three Little Pigs Motel, out on the highway, for a few days while on his way to visit his married daughter in Pennsylvania. For all he used to tell his wife about Gallagher, he would never bring her back to see it. Instead, they went to Hawaii, to Europe, even to Japan.

*...by side*

## Az Orange Street-i jégpálya

fordította *Tárnok Attila*

SAM MEGLEPŐDÖTT, AMIKOR betért Callie Vegyesboltjába. Zsúfolt élelmiszerhalmokra számított, olcsó darabárúra, áporodott szagra, öreg, elfeledett karácsonyfadíszekre. Ehelyett videojátékokra lelt. Piros és kék zsírkrétás feliratok figyelmeztettek, hogy tilos az alkoholfogyasztás, a verekedés, az üres ácsorgás és a káromkodás. Az üzletben elektronikus zajok, villogó fények és modern, furcsa hajviseletű, kifestett gyerekek tartózkodtak. A pult mögött ülő Callie, vörösös-szőke parókában, szintén kisminkelve, egy olcsó regényt olvasott.

Hogy próbára tegye, Sam cigarettát kért. A nő letette a könyvet, Sam a címére pillantott: *My Love Where the High Winds Blow*, írta Veronica Gray. Az eladónő anélkül, hogy felnézett volna, odaadta a visszajárót, megigazította a kardigánját a vállán, és újra kezébe vette a könyvet. A kardigán mintázatában a fehér és rózsaszín gyapjúlabdák mint pattogatott kukoricák ugrándoztak. A nő hosszú pillanatokig várt, mielőtt a férfihez szólt.

– Öregségedre rászoktál a dohányzásra, Sam?

– Azt hittem, meg se ismertél.

– Cserzőműhelyben is megismerném az irhádát – mondta Callie elégedetten. – Rádismertem, amint beléptél az ajtón.

Sam hatvankilenc éves özvegyember. Útban Pennsylvaniában élő lányához az országút menti Three Little Pigs nevű motelben szállt meg. Sokat mesélt feleségének Gallagherről, s mégse hozta el őt soha ide. Inkább Hawaii-ba, Európába, sőt Japánba mentek. Most Gallagherben sétál, szinte ő az egyetlen gyalogos. Nagy a

Now he goes for walks in Gallagher. Often he is the only person walking. The traffic is heavy, and not as varied as it used to be. Manufacturing has given way to service industries. Things look to Sam a bit scruffy. But that could be because he lives now in Victoria – in Oak Bay, an expensive and pretty neighborhood full of well-off retired people like himself.

Kernaghan's boarding house used to be the last house – last building – on the edge of town. It's still there, still close to the sidewalk. But the town has spread a little at all its edges. A PetroCar gas station. A Canadian Tire Store with a big parking lot. Some new, low houses. Kernaghan's has been painted a pale, wintry blue, but otherwise looks neglected. Instead of the front veranda, where the boarders each had a chair, Sam sees a glassed-in porch entirely filled up with batts of insulating material, an upended mattress, screens, and heavy old storm windows. The house used to be light tan, and the trim was brown. Everything was terribly clean. Dust was a problem, the road being so close and not paved at that time. There were always horses going by, and people on foot, as well as cars and farm trucks. "You simply have to keep after it," said Miss Kernaghan, in an ominous way, referring to the dust. As a matter of fact, it was Callie who kept after it. Callie Kernaghan was nineteen when Sam and Edgar Grazier first saw her, and she could have passed for twelve. A demon worker. Some people called her a drudge, Miss Kernaghan's little drudge, or they called her slavey – Slavey Kernaghan. The mistake they made was in thinking that she minded.

Sometimes a woman coming in from the country, lugging her butter and eggs, would take a rest on the front steps. Or a girl would sit there to take off her rubber boots and put on her town shoes – hiding the boots in the ditch until she put them on again on her way home. Then Miss Kernaghan would call out, from the darkness behind the dining-room window, "This is not a park bench!" Miss Kernaghan was a big, square-shouldered, awkward woman, flat in front and back, with hennaed hair and a looming white-powdered

forgalom és nem olyan színes, mint régen.

A kézműves ipar szerepét átvette a szolgáltató ipar. Samnek minden egy kicsit elhanyagoltnak tűnik, de talán azért, mert most Victoriában él, Oak Bayben, egy csinos, gazdag kerületben, ahol hozzá hasonló tehető nyugdijasok laknak.

Kernaghan panziója volt régen az utolsó ház – az utolsó épület – a város szélén. Még mindig áll, ugyanolyan közel a járdához, mint rég, csak a város nőtt meg egy kissé. Egy Petro-Car benzinkút. Egy Canadian Tire áruház, nagy parkolóval. Néhány új, alacsony ház. A Kernaghan panziót halvány, hideg kékre festették, amúgy elhanyagoltnak tűnik. A verandát, ahol régen minden kosztosnak jutott egy kertészék, beüvegezték, odabent szigetelőanyag halomban, falnak támasztott matrac, szúnyogháló és nehéz, öreg ablaktáblák. A ház vajszerű volt régen, a szegélylécek barnák. Minden ragyogott a tisztaságtól, egyedül az akkor még aszfaltozatlan útról felszálló por okozott gondot. Lovak, gyalogosok, sőt kocsik és kisméretű teherautók is jártak erre.

– Gyakran kell port törölni, és kész – mondta Miss Kernaghan. Mindenesetre Callie portalanított. Callie Kernaghan tizenkilenc éves volt, mikor Sam és Edgar Grazier megismerte, de tizenkettőnek nézett ki. Rengeteget dolgozott. Néhányan Miss Kernaghan rabszolgájának hívták, Kernaghan Szolginak, mert azt hitték – tévesen –, hogy gyűlöl dolgozni.

A közeli tanyákról jövő asszonyok, akik vaját, tojást hoztak a városba, néha leültek a lépcsőre pihenni. A lányok is itt ültek le, hogy gumicsizmájukat városi cipőre cseréeljék. A csizmát a csatornába rejtették és útban hazafelé vették fel újra. Olykor Miss Kernaghan kikiáltott az étkező félhomályából: – Ez nem köztéri pad!

Miss Kernaghan nagydarab, szögletes vállú, ügyetlen asszony volt, beesett elől-hátul, hennázott hajjal, tompára púderezett arccal és vastagon festett, mogorván görbe szájjal. Buja történetek keringtek róla, bár halványabbak és nehezebben igazolhatók, mint

face and a thickly painted, sullenly drooping mouth.

Stories of lasciviousness hung around her, dimmer, harder to substantiate than the stories of her amazing avarice and stinginess. Callie, supposedly a foundling, was said by some to be Miss Kernaghan's own daughter. But her boarders had to toe the line. No drinking, no smoking, no bad language or bad morals, she told the Grazier boys on their first day. No eating in the bedrooms, she told them later, after Thanksgiving, when they brought a large, greasy box of sweet buns from home. "It attracts mice," she said.

Miss Kernaghan said fairly often that she had never had boys before. She sounded as if she was doing them a favor. She had four other boarders. A widow lady, Mrs. Cruze, very old but able to look after herself; a business lady, Miss Verne, who was a bookkeeper in the glove factory; a bachelor, Adam Delahunt, who worked in the bank and taught Sunday school; and a stylish, contemptuous young woman, Alice Peel, who was engaged to a policeman and worked as a telephone operator. These four took up the upstairs bedrooms. Miss Kernaghan herself slept on the couch in the dining room, and Callie slept on the couch in the kitchen. Sam and Edgar got the attic. Two narrow metal-frame beds had been set up on either side of a chest of drawers and a rag rug.

After they had taken a look around, Sam pushed Edgar into going down and asking if there was any place they could hang their clothes. "I didn't think boys like you would have a lot of clothes," Miss Kernaghan said. "I never had boys before. Why can't you do like Mr. Delahunt? He puts his trousers under the mattress every night, and that keeps the crease in them grand."

Edgar thought that was the end of it, but in a little while Callie came with a broom handle and some wire. She stood on the bureau and contrived a clothespole with loops of wire around a beam.

"We could easy do that," Sam said. They looked with curiosity but little pleasure at her floppy gray undergarments. She didn't answer. She had even brought some clothes hangers. Somehow they knew already that this was all her own doing.

az elképesztő fukarságáról szólóak. Callie valószínűleg lelenc volt, néhányak szerint pedig Miss Kernaghan saját lánya. A kosztosokra szigorú szabályok vonatkoztak. Tilos inni, dohányozni, káromkodni és erkölcstelenkedni, ezt Miss Kernaghan rögtön az első nap megmondta a Grazier fiúknak. Tilos a hálóban enni, szölt nekik később, Hálaadás napja után, mikor a fiúk egy nagy ragacsos doboz édes süteményt hoztak otthonról. – Idecsalogatja az egereket – mondta.

Gyakran hangoztatta, hogy fiúk sosem laktak nála azelőtt. Úgy csinált, mintha szívességet tenne. Négy további lakója volt. Egy özvegyasszony, Mrs. Cruze, nagyon öreg, de még tudott gondoskodni magáról, egy üzletasszony, Miss Verne, aki könyvelő volt a kesztyűgyárban, egy aggleény, Adam Delahunt, a bankban dolgozott és cserkészvezető volt, meg egy elegáns de gögös fiatal nő, Alice Peel, aki telefonkezelőként dolgozott és jegyben járt egy rendőrrel. Ők négyen az emeleti hálókat foglalták el. Miss Kernaghan az ebédlőben aludt egy díványon, Callie pedig a konyhában a kanapén. A padlásszobát Sam és Edgar kapták, ahol két keskeny vaságy állt egy fiókosszekrény és egy rongyszőnyeg két oldalán.

Miután körülnéztek, Sam rávette Edgart, kérdezze meg, hová akasszák a ruháikat. – Nem gondoltam volna, hogy a maguk fajta fiúknak sok ruhája van – mondta Miss Kernaghan. – Nálam sosem laktak fiúk azelőtt. Tegyük a nadrágjukat a matrac alá éjszakára, mint Mr. Delahunt. Nagyszerűen megmarad a vasalt él.

Edgar azt hitte, ezzel az ügy le van zárva, de nemsokára Callie hozott egy drótot és egy seprűnyelet. Felállt a komódra és a gerendához erősítette a rudat.

– Ezt mi is meg tudtuk volna csinálni – mondta Sam. A lány nem válaszolt. Ők kíváncsian, de nem nagy élvezettel nézték kilátzó szürke alsószoknyáját. Callie később még akasztókat is hozott. Valahogy a fiúk már érezték, hogy mindezt saját elhatározásból teszi.

“Thank you, Callie,” said Edgar, a slender boy with a crown of fair curls, turning on her the diffident, sweet-natured smile that had had no success downstairs.

Callie spoke in the rough voice that she used in the grocery store when demanding good potatoes. “Will that be all right for yez?”

Sam and Edgar were cousins – not brothers, as most people thought. They were the same age – seventeen – and had been sent to board in Gallagher while they went to business college. They had grown up about ten miles from here, and had gone to the same country school and village continuation school. After a year at business college, they could get jobs in banks or offices or be apprenticed to accountants. They were not going back to the farm.

What they really wanted to do, and had wanted since they were about ten years old, was to become acrobats. They had practiced for years and put on displays when the continuation school gave its concerts. That school had no gym, but there were some parallel bars and a balancing rail and mats in the basement. At home, they practiced in the barn, and on the grass in fine weather. How do acrobats earn a living? Sam was the one who had begun to ask that question. He could not picture Edgar and himself in a circus. They were not dark enough, for one thing. (He had an idea that the people who worked in circuses were all Gypsies.) He thought there must be acrobats going around on their own, doing stunts at fairs and in church halls. He remembered seeing some when he was younger. Where were they from? How did they get paid? How did you find out about joining them? Such questions troubled Sam more and more and never seemed to bother Edgar at all.

In the early fall, after supper, while there was still some light in the evenings, they practiced in the vacant lot across the street from Kernaghan’s, where the ground was fairly level. They wore their undershirts and woollen pants. They limbered up by doing cartwheels and handstands and headstands, somersaults and double somersaults, and then welded themselves together. They shaped their bodies into signs – into hieroglyphs – eliminating to an

– Köszönjük, Callie – mondta Edgar, egy szőke tincsekkel koronázott, vékony fiú, félénk, édes természetű mosollyal, mely odalent semmilyen hatást nem váltott ki.

Callie durva hangon válaszolt, ahogy az üzletben szokott szép krumplit követelni. – Megfelel?

Sam és Edgar unokatestvérek voltak, nem édestestvérek, ahogy legtöbben hitték. Tizenhét évesek voltak, és a Kereskedelmi Főiskolán tanultak Gallagherben. Egy tíz mérföldre lévő tanyán nőttek fel, ott jártak iskolába, később pedig a faluban lévőbe. A főiskola első éve után elhelyezkedhetnek majd valamelyik bankban, vagy hivatalban betanított könyvelőnek. A farmra nem áll szándékukban visszamenni.

Tízéves koruk óta akrobaták szerettek volna lenni. Éveken át gyakoroltak és a falusi iskolában még bemutatókat is tartottak a hangversenyek előtt. Nem volt tornaterem, de a pincében találtak egy duplakorlátot, egy tornászgerendát és egy birkózószőnyeget. Otthon az istállóban gyakoroltak, vagy jó időben kint a fűvön. Miből élnek az akrobaták, merült fel a kérdés először Samben. Nem tudta elképzelni magukat egy cirkuszban. Először is, nem voltak sötét bőrűek. Valahogy azt hitte, cirkuszban csak cigányok dolgoznak. Úgy képzelte, vannak olyan akrobaták is, akik járják a vidéket, és vásárokon, egyházi ünnepeken adják elő mutatványaikat. Úgy emlékezett, fiatalabb korában látott ilyeneket. Honnan jöttek? Honnan kaptak fizetést? Hogyan lehetne csatlakozni hozzájuk? Samet egyre inkább foglalkoztatták ezek a kérdések, míg Edgart egyáltalán nem érdekelték.

Kora ősszel, amikor még elég világos volt, vacsora után a Kernaghan panzióval szemközti üres telken gyakoroltak, ahol a talaj nagyjából egyenletes volt. Atlétát és gyapjúnadrágot viseltek. Cigánykerekekkel, fej- és kézállással melegítettek be, aztán egymásba olvadtak a gyakorlatokhoz. Testüket jelekké, hieroglifákká formálták, bámulatosan feledtetve, hogy két különálló test forrt egybe. A fejek és vállak ütközése véletlennek tűnt.



astonishing degree their separateness and making the bumps of heads and shoulders incidental. Sometimes, of course, these creations toppled, everything came apart, arms and legs flew free, and grappling bodies reappeared – just two boys’ bodies, one tall and slight, the other shorter and sturdier. They began again, building jerkily. The balancing bodies swayed. They might topple, they might hold. All depended on whether they could subdue themselves into that pure line, invisibly join themselves, attain the magic balance. Yes. No. Yes. Again.

They had an audience of boarders sitting on the porch. Alice Peel took no notice. If she was not out with her fiancé, she was in her room attending to the upkeep of her clothes and person – painting her nails, doing up her hair or taking it out, plucking her eyebrows, washing her sweaters and silk stockings, cleaning her shoes. Adam Delahunt was a busy person, too – he had meetings of the Temperance Society and the Gideons to go to, social activities of his Sunday-school class to superintend. But he sat for a while and watched with Mrs. Cruze and Miss Verne and Miss Kernaghan. Mrs. Cruze still had good eyesight and she loved the show. She stamped her cane on the porch floor and yelled, “Get him, boy! Get him!” as if the stunts were some sort of wrestling match.

Mr. Delahunt told Sam and Edgar about his Sunday-school class, called the Triple-Vs. The Vs stood for Virtue, Vigor, and Victory. He said that if they joined they could get to use the United church gymnasium. But the boys were Coldwater Baptists at home, so they could not accept.

If Callie watched, it was from behind windows. She always had her work.

Miss Kernaghan said that so much exercise would give those boys terrible appetites.

When Sam thought of himself and Edgar practicing in that vacant lot – it was now part of the Canadian Tire parking space – he always seemed to be sitting on the porch, too, looking at the two boys striving and falling and pulling themselves up on the grass-one

Természetesen ezek az alkotmányok összedőltek néha, minden szétesett, karok és lábak repültek szabadon, és összekuszálódott testekké váltak – két fiú testévé, egyik magas és vékony, a másik alacsonyabb és izmosabb. Újrakezdték, szakaszosan építkezve. Néha úgy tűnt, egyensúlyukat veszítik. Összedőlnek, vagy megtartják? Minden azon múlt, mennyire tudják magukat alávetni a tiszta mértani formáknak, láthatatlanul összecsatolni magukat, megtartani a bűvös egyensúlyt. Igen... Nem... Mégis... Újra.

A közönség a verandán ülő kosztosokból állt, Alice Peel kivételével. Ő, ha nem ment sehova a vőlegényével, ruháinak és küllemének a karbantartásával foglalatzkodott a szobájában: hajberakással, szemöldökritkítással, esetleg a körmét festette, vagy a kardigánjait és a selyemharisnyáját mosta, cipőit tisztogatta. Adam Delahunt is elfoglalt ember volt – gyűlésekre járt az Anti-alkoholista Egyesületbe, a Gideons Klubba, meg ott volt számára a cserkészet. Ő mégis elüldögélt egy darabig Mrs. Cruze, Miss Verne és Miss Kernaghan társaságában. Mrs. Cruze-nak még jó volt a látása és nagyon tetszett neki a műsor. Oda-odakoppintotta a botját a veranda padlójához és átkiáltott a fiúknak: – Kapd el, te gyerek! Ragadd meg! – mintha a mutatvány valamiféle birkózómeccs lett volna.

Mr. Delahunt mesélt a fiúknak a cserkészcsapatról, EDE volt a nevük. Erkölc, Diadal, Erény. Szerinte, ha csatlakoznának a cserkészekhez, használhatnák a United Church tornatermét. De a fiúk konok baptista nevelést kaptak otthon, így nem fogadhatták el az ajánlatot.

Callie a házból, az ablakon át nézte a mutatványokat, neki mindig volt valami tennivalója.

Miss Kernaghan folyton zsémbelődött, hogy a sok mozgástól farkaséhesek lesznek majd a fiúk.

Mikor Sam visszagondolt azokra a bemutatókra az üres telken, ahol most a Canadian Tire áruház parkolója van, a verandán ülők közt is elképzelte magát, ahogy bámulja a két küzdő, feltornyosodó

figure soaring briefly above the other, triumphantly hand- balanced – and then the cheerful separate tumbling. These memories have a certain damp brown shading. Perhaps from the wallpaper in the Kernaghan house. The trees that lined the road at that time were elms, and their leaf color in fall was a brown-spotted gold.

The leaves were shaped like a candle flame. These leaves fell in his mind on a windless evening with the sky clear but the sunset veiled and the countryside misty. The town, under leaves and the smoke of burning leaves, was mysterious and difficult, a world on its own, with its church spires and factory whistles, rich houses and row houses, networks, catchwords, vested interests. He had been warned; he had been told town people were snotty. That was not the half of it.

The exercise did increase the Grazier boys' appetites, but those would have been terrible anyway. They were used to farm meals and had never imagined people could exist on such portions as were served here. They saw with amazement that Miss Verne left half of what little she got on her plate, and that Alice Peel rejected potatoes, bread, bacon, cocoa as a threat to her figure; turnips, cabbage, beans as a threat to her digestion; and anything with raisins in it simply because she couldn't stand them. They could not figure out any way to get what Alice Peel turned down or what Miss Verne left on her plate, though it would surely have been fair.

At ten-thirty in the evening, Miss Kernaghan produced what she called "the evening lunch." This was a plate of sliced bread, some butter and jam, and cups of cocoa or tea. Coffee was not served in that house. Miss Kernaghan said it was American and corroded your gullet. The butter was cut up beforehand into meager pats, and the dish of jam was set in the middle of the table, where nobody could reach it easily. Miss Kernaghan remarked that sweet things spoiled the taste of bread and butter. The other boarders deferred to her out of long habit, but between them Sam and Edgar cleaned out the dish. Soon the amount of jam dwindled to two separate spoonfuls. The cocoa was made with water, with a little skim milk added to

majd összeomló fiút a fűvön: az egyik dicsőségesen lebeg a másik fölött, karjaival egyensúlyoz, aztán vidám bukfcencet vet. Ezeknek a részleteknek furcsa, nyirkos-barna színezete van az emlékeiben, talán a tapéta, vagy az út menti szilfák okán, amik még álltak akkoriban, és leveleik ősszel aranybarnán csillogtak mint a gyertyaláng. Ezeket a leveleket vélte látni egy szélcsendes este a naplemente fátyol mögötti fényében. A város a levélegetések füstje alatt titokzatosnak és kuszának mutatkozott: egy önmagában létező világnak, templomtornyaiival, a gyári duda hangjával, gazdag házakkal és sorházakkal, belső kötődésekkel, jelszavakkal, megszerzett jogokkal. Figyelmeztették, szóltak neki, hogy a város lakói szemét alakok. Még ha csak szemetek lettek volna!

A gyakorlatok valóban fokozták a Grazier fiúk étvágyát, és a koszt amúgy is gyatra volt. Falusi ételekhez szoktak, el se tudták képzelni, hogy az életben maradáshoz kevesebbet is elég enni. Bámulattal tapasztalták, hogy Miss Verne még a felét ott is hagyja annak a kevésnek, amit kap, és hogy Alice Peel soha nem eszik krumplit, kenyeret, szalonnát és kakaót, mert félti az alakját, répát, káposztát és babot, mert nem tesz jót az emésztésének, ráadásul visszautasított mindent, amiben mazsola volt, mert ki nem állhatta. A fiúk próbálták valamilyen úton-módon megszerezni, amit Alice Peel nem kért és amit Miss Verne otthagytott a tányérján, de nem jártak sikerrel.

Este féltizenegykor Miss Kernaghan elkészítette az úgynevezett későesti vacsorát. Néhány szelet kenyér, vaj, lekvár és pár csésze kakaó vagy tea. Kávét sohasem adott, mert mint mondta: az amerikai, és egyébként is kikezdi a nyelőcsövet.

A vajat előre felvágta apró darabkákra, a lekvárt pedig az asztal közepére állította, ahol senki nem érhetette el kényelmesen. – Az édes dolgok elrontják a vajjas kenyér ízét – jegyezte meg.

A lakók megszokásból nem rontották el a vajjas kenyér ízét, de Sam és Edgar tisztára törölték a lekváros tányért. A lekváradag nemsokára két kanálnyi elkülönített kupaccá zsugorodott. A kakaó

make a skin and to support Miss Kernaghan's claim that it was made with milk entirely.

Nobody challenged her. Miss Kernaghan told lies not to fool people but to stump them. If a boarder said, "It was a bit chilly upstairs last night," Miss Kernaghan would say at once, "I can't understand that. I had a roaring fire going. The pipes were too hot to lay your hand on them." The fact of the matter would be that she had let the fire die down or go out altogether. The boarder would know or strongly suspect this, but what was a boarder's suspicion against Miss Kernaghan's firm, flashy lie? Mrs. Cruze would actually apologize, Miss Verne would mutter about her chilblains, Mr. Delahunt and Alice Peel would look sulky but would not argue.

Sam and Edgar had to spend their whole allowance of pocket money, which wasn't much, on food. At first they got hot dogs at the Cozy Grill. Then Sam figured out that they would be farther ahead buying a package of jam tarts or Fig Newtons at the grocery store. They had to eat the whole package on the way home, because of the rule about no food in the bedrooms. They liked the hot dogs, but they had never felt really comfortable at the Cozy Grill, which was full of noisy high-school students, younger and a lot brassier than they were. Sam felt some possibility of insult, though none ever developed. On the way back to Kernaghan's from the grocery store, they had to pass the Cozy Grill and then Dixon's, a drugstore with an ice-cream parlor in the back. That was where their fellow-students from the business college went for cherry Cokes and banana splits after school and in the evenings. Passing Dixon's windows, they stopped chewing, looked stolidly straight ahead. They would never go inside.

They were the only farm boys at business college, and their clothes set them apart. They had no light-blue or light-brown V-neck sweaters, no grownup-looking gray trousers, only these stiff woollen breeches, thick home-knit sweaters, old suit jackets worn as sports coats. They wore shirts and ties because it was required, but they had only one tie each and a couple of shirts. Miss Kernaghan

vízrel készült, meg egy kevés sovány tejjel, Miss Kernaghan álláspontját bizonyítandó, hogy az egész tiszta tej.

Senki sem vonta őt kérdőre. Miss Kernaghan nem azért hazudott, hogy megtévesse az embereket, hanem hogy kordában tartsa őket. Ha egy lakó megjegyezte: – Egy kicsit hűvös volt az emeleten a múlt éjjel –, Miss Kernaghan azonnal visszavágott: – Nem értem miképp lehet. Úgy megraktam a kazánt, hogy meg se lehetett érinteni a csöveket.

Valójában hagyta a tüzet kialudni. A lakók is tudták, vagy erősen sejtették ezt, de mit ért egy lakó véleménye Miss Kernaghan határozott hazugsága ellen? Mrs. Cruze még mentegőzött is, Miss Verne a fagydaganatáról motyogott valamit, Mr. Delahunt és Alice Peel barátságatlan pillantásokat vetettek, de ők sem vitatkoztak soha.

Sam és Edgar a kevés zsebpénzüket mindig ételre költötték. Kezdetben hot-dogot vettek a Cozy Grillnél, aztán Sam rájött, hogy jobban járnak, ha lekváros lepényt, vagy Newton-fügét vásárolnak az üzletben. Az egészet meg kellett egyék útban hazafelé, mert a szabálynak megfelelően a hálóba nem vittek ételt. A hot-dogot is szerették, de kényelmetlenül érezték magukat a Cozy Grillnél a náluk fiatalabb, sokkal pimaszabb és zajongó gimnazisták között. Sam félt, hogy egyszer beléjük találnak kötni, bár soha nem fordult elő inzultus. Az üzletből útban a panzió felé a Cozy Grill majd a Dixon fűszerüzlet előtt kellett elmenniük, ami mögött egy fagyizó működött. Főiskolai hallgatótársaik odajártak az előadások után vagy esténként cseresznyés kóláért és banánfagyaltért. Ahogy Sam és Edgar elhaladtak a kirakati ablak előtt, abbahagyták a rágcsálást és közönyösen maguk elé néztek. Soha nem mentek be.

Egyedül ők voltak vidékiek a főiskolán, és ez a ruhájukon is látszott. Nem volt világoskék vagy világosbarna kivágott nyakú pulóverük, se felnőttes sötét nadrágjuk, csak a feszes gyapjú bricsesz, vastag, házilag kötött pulóverek és öreg zakók, amiket

allowed only one shirt a week in the washing, so Sam and Edgar often had dirty collars and cuffs, and even stains – probably from jam tarts – that they had unsuccessfully tried to sponge away.

And there was another problem, related partly to clothes and partly to the bodies inside. There was never much hot water at the boarding house, and Alice Peel used up more than her share. In the sleepy mornings, the boys splashed their hands and faces as they had done at home. They carried around and were used to the settled smell of their bodies and daily-worn clothes, a record of their efforts and exertions. Perhaps this was a lucky thing. Otherwise, girls might have paid more attention to Edgar, whose looks they liked, and not to Sam, with his floppy sandy hair and freckles and his habit of keeping his head down, as if he were thinking of rooting for something. There would have been a wedge between them. Or, to put it another way, the wedge would have been there sooner.

Winter came and put an end to the acrobatic stunts in the vacant lot. Now Sam and Edgar longed to go skating. The rink was only a couple of blocks away, on Orange Street, and on skating nights, which were Mondays and Thursdays, they could hear the music. They had brought their skates with them to Gallagher. They had skated almost as long as they could remember, on the swamp pond or the outdoor rink in the village. Here skating cost fifteen cents, and the only way for them to afford that was to give up the extra food. But the cold weather was making their appetites fiercer than ever.

They walked over to the rink on a Sunday night when there was nobody around and again on a Monday night when the evening's skating was over and there was nobody to keep them from going inside. They went in and mingled with the people leaving the ice and taking off their skates. They had a good look around before the lights were turned off. On their way home, and in their room, they talked quietly. Sam enjoyed figuring out a way that they could get in for nothing, but he did not picture them actually doing it. Edgar took for granted that they would go from plan to action.

sportkabátként viseltek. Inget és nyakkendőket is hordtak ugyan, mert kötelező volt, de csak egy-egy nyakkendőjük és néhány ingjük volt. Miss Kernaghan egy ing mosását engedélyezte hetente, így Samnek és Edgarnak gyakran koszos volt az inggallérja vagy kézelője, sőt pecsétes a lekváros buktától.

Volt még egy, részben a ruhákkal, részben a testápolással kapcsolatos probléma. A panzióban kevés volt a meleg víz, és Alice Peel többet használt, mint amennyi egy személynek járt volna. A fiúk reggelente álmosan kezét és arcot mostak, mint otthon, de az egész napi mozgás eredményeként estére a ruhájuk átvette testük izzadt szagát. Talán ez volt a szerencséjük. Különben meglehet, hogy a lányok több figyelmet fordítottak volna Edgarra, aki amúgy is tetszett nekik, mint a vörösesszőke hajú, szeplős Samre, aki mindig a földet nézte, mintha keresne valamit. Nézeteltérésre adhatott volna okot, vagy pontosabban: előbb vezetett volna nézeteltéréshez.

Eljött a tél és véget vetett az akrobata-mutatványoknak az üres telken. Sam és Edgar most korcsolyázni vágyott. A pálya néhány sarokra volt csak tőlük, az Orange Streeten. Hétfőnként és csütörtökönként, amikor kinyitott, a zene elhallatszott a panzióig. Amióta az eszüket tudták, minden télen korcsolyáztak, Gallagherben is itt volt velük a korcsolya. A belépő tizenöt centbe került, amit csak úgy tudtak volna előteremteni, ha lemondanak a koszt kiegészítéséről, de hideg időben még nagyobb volt az étvágyuk, mint egyébként.

Egy vasárnap este, amikor senki nem járt arra, elsétáltak a jégpálya felé, aztán hétfőn éjjel újra, zárórakor, mikor már nem volt kapus, mert a közönség lecsatolt korcsolyákkal már távozóban volt. Elvegyültek a hazafelé indulók közt és jól körülnéztek, mielőtt eloltották a villanyokat. Halkan beszélgettek útban hazafelé és később a szobában. Sam kiötlött egy tervet, hogyan juthatnának be ingyen a jégre, de a megvalósítására nem gondolt. Edgar viszont készpénznek vette, hogy a tervből tett lesz.

“We can’t,” said Sam. “Neither of us are small enough.”

Edgar didn’t answer, and Sam thought that was the end of it. He should have known better.

The Orange Street Skating Rink, in Sam’s memory, is a long, dark ramshackle shed. A dim, moving light shows through the cracks between the boards. The music comes from gramophone records that are hoarse and scratchy – to listen to them is like reaching for the music through a wavering wall of thorns. “Tales from the Vienna Woods,” “The Merry Widow,” “The Gold and Silver Waltz,” “The Sleeping Beauty.” The moving light seen through the cracks comes from a fixture called “the moon.” The moon, which shines from the roof of the rink, is a yellow bulb inside a large tin can, a syrup tin, from which one end has been cut away. The other lights are turned off when the moon is turned on. A system of wires and ropes makes it possible to pull the tin can this way and that, creating an impression of shifting light – the source, the strong yellow bulb, being deeply hidden.

The rinkie-dinks controlled the moon. Rinkie-dinks were boys from ten or eleven to fifteen or sixteen years old. They cleaned the ice and shovelled the snow out the snow door, which was a snugly fitted Flap low in the wall, hooked on the inside. Besides the ropes that controlled the moon, they worked the shutters that covered the openings in the roof – opened for air, closed against driving snow. The rinkie-dinks collected the money and would sometimes shortchange girls who were afraid of them, but they didn’t cheat Blinker. He had somehow fooled them into thinking he had every skater counted. Blinker was the rink manager, a sallow, skinny, and unfriendly man. He and his friends sat in his room, beyond the men’s toilet and changing room. In there was a wood stove, with a tall, blackened conical coffeepot sitting on top, and some straight-backed chairs with rungs missing, and a few old, filthy armchairs. The plank floor, like all the floors and benches and wailboards in the rink, was cut and scarred by fresh and old skate marks and darkened with smoke and dirt. The room where the men sat was hot

– Egyikünk sem elég kicsi hozzá – mondta Sam.

Edgar nem válaszolt és Sam azt hitte, ezzel az ügyet lezárták, pedig ismerhette már Edgart.

Az Orange Street-i jégpálya, ahogy Sam emlékszik rá, egy hosszú, sötét, rozoga tákolmány volt. Halvány, vibráló fény szűrődött ki a palánk repedésein. A zenét karcos, rekedtes gramofonlemezeken szolgáltatták, olyan volt őket hallgatni, mintha szélben hullámzó túskebokron keresztül nyúlna valami után az ember. Mesél a bécsi erdő, A víg özvegy, Arany és ezüst valcerok, Az alvó szépség. Holdfényként egy himbálózó sárga égő szolgált egy konzervdoboz belsejében. Amikor világított a hold, a többi fény kialudt. A konzervdobozt huzalok és kötelek rendszerével mozgatták ide-oda, ami vibráló fény hatását keltette, bár az erős sárga égő mélyen rejtve maradt.

Fiatal, tíz-tizenöt év körüli fiúk irányították a holdat. A jeget is ők tisztították: a jégkását egy a palánk belsejéhez illesztett felfelé nyíló csapóajtón át lapátolták ki. A hold mellett ők kezelték a redőnyöket is a tetőnyílásokon – kinyitották, hogy levegőt engedjenek be, vagy becsukták, ha esett a hó. Ezek a fiúk szedték a pénzt és olykor kevesebbet adtak vissza, mint amennyi járt azoknak a lányoknak, akik félték tőlük, de Blinkert soha nem merték becsapni. Ő valahogy elhitette velük, hogy minden vendéget számon tart. Blinker, egy sápadt arcú, sovány, barátságtalan ember volt a jégpálya vezetője. Ismerőseivel a szobájában ült, a férfimosdó és az öltöző mögött. Volt egy fatüzelésű kályhája, a tetején egy elfeketedett kávéskannával, meg néhány egyenes hátú széke, amiknek támlájából helyenként hiányzott egy-egy rúd, és pár koszos, öreg fotelja. A padló, ahogy az összes pad- és falburkolat a jégpálya egész területén, karcolásokkal volt tele és a kosztól, füsttől elfeketedett. A szoba meleg volt és vágni lehetett a füstöt. A férfiak valószínűleg likőrt ittak a foltos zománcozott bögrékből, de lehet, hogy csak kávé. Azt is beszéltek, hogy egyszer a fiúk bejutottak a férfiak előtt, és belepisiltek a kávéskannába. Egy másik változat

and smoky and it was assumed they drank liquor in there, though perhaps it was only coffee out of the stained enamel mugs. Of course, there was a story that boys had once got in before the men arrived, and had peed in the coffeepot. Another story was that one of his friends had done that when Blinker went to scoop up the admission money.

The rinkie-dinks could be busy or idle around parts of the rink, climbing the wall ladders, walking along the benches, even running along the platform, which had no guardrail, under the roof openings. Sometimes they would wiggle through these openings onto the roof, and get back in the same way. Some of the time, of course, they skated. They got in for nothing.

So did Sam and Edgar and Callie, soon enough. They came along when the skating was well under way and the rink full and noisy. Close to one corner of the building were some cherry trees, and a very light person could climb one of these trees and drop onto the roof. Then this very light, bold, and agile person could scramble along the roof and crawl through one of the openings and jump to the platform underneath, risking a fall to the ice below and broken bones or even death. But boys risked that all the time. From the platform you could climb down a wall ladder, then work your way around the benches and slip over the wall of the passage made for shovelling out snow. Then it was a matter of crouching in the shadow, watching for the right moment, unhooking the snow door, and letting in the two who were waiting outside: Sam and Edgar, who lost no time putting on their skates and taking to the ice.

Why did others not manage the same trick, Sam might be asked on those occasions, years and years later, when he chose to tell the story, and he always said maybe they did, he wouldn't know about it. The rinkie-dinks of course could have opened the door to any number of friends, but they were not disposed to do so, being quite jealous of their own privileges. And few of the night skaters were small enough and light and quick and brave enough to get in through the roof. Children might have tried it, but they skated on

szerint Blinker egyik barátja volt a tettes, míg a főnök elment besöpörni a bevételt.

A jégpálya kisegítői különböző helyeken tevékenykedtek. Felmásztak a létrákon, a padok mentén sétáltak, sőt futkároztak a tetőnyílások alatti, korlát nélküli állványokon. Néha kibújtak a tetőre a nyílásokon át és ugyanúgy vissza. Időnként természetesen korcsolyáztak is, ingyen.

Nemsokára Sam, Edgar és Callie is. Akkor érkeztek, amikor már zajos tömeg töltötte meg a pályát. Az épület egyik sarkánál cseresznyefák álltak, egy pehelysúlyú személy könnyen felmászható az egyikre és onnan a tetőre ugorhatott. Aztán négykézláb végigmászhatott a legközelebbi tetőnyíláshoz és csontjai épségét, sőt életét kockára téve leugorhatott a nyílás alatti állványra. A kisegítők állandóan ezt gyakorolták. Az állványról a falba erősített létrán le a földre és ott a padok mentén körbe a hóajtóhoz már egyszerű volt eljutni. Aztán az árnyékban guggolva már csak várni kellett a megfelelő pillanatot, kiakasztani a hóajtót és beengedni a kint várakozó Samet és Edgart, akik azonnal felcsatolták korcsolyáikat és már a jégen is voltak.

Hogy lehet, hogy mások nem alkalmazták ugyanezt a trükköt, kérdezték Samtól évek múltán, mikor alkalmanként elmesélte a történetet. Ő mindig ugyanúgy válaszolt: talán megpróbálták mások is, de ő nem tud róla. A kisegítők természetesen beengedhették volna a barátaikat, de nem valószínű, hogy megtették, mert féltették saját kiváltságukat. Olyan meg alig akadt az esti korcsolyázók közt, aki elég kicsi, pehelysúlyú és fürgé lett volna ahhoz, hogy bejusson a tetőn át. Gyerekek talán próbálkozhattak vele szombat délutánonként, de nekik nem adatott meg a sötétség védőpajzsa. Érdekes, hogy Callie-t soha nem fülelték le. Talán mert nagyon gyors és mindig körültekintő volt: tudott várni. Kopott, nem rá illő ruhát viselt, bricseszadrágot, viharkabátot és posztósapkát. Mindig voltak fiúk, akik más által kinőtt, rongyos ruhákban jártak. A város elég nagy volt ahhoz, hogy ne legyen minden arc azonnal ismerős.

Saturday afternoons and didn't have the advantage of darkness. And why was Callie not noticed? Well, she was very quick, and she was never careless; she waited her time. She wore a ragged, ill-fitting set of clothes – breeches, windbreaker, cloth cap. There were always boys around who were dressed in cast-off raggedy clothes. And the town was just big enough that not every face could be placed instantly. There were two public schools, and a boy from one, noticing her, would just think she went to the other.

Sam's wife once asked, "How did you persuade her?" Callie – what was in it for Callie, who never owned a pair of skates?

'Callie's life was work,' Sam said. "So anything that wasn't work – that was a thrill for her." But he wondered – how did they persuade her? It must have been a dare. Making friends with Callie at first had been something like making friends with a testy and suspicious little dog, and later on it had been like making friends with the twelve-year-old she looked to be. At first she wouldn't stop work to look at them. They admired the needlework picture she was making, of green hills and a round blue pond and a large sailboat, and she pulled it to her chest as if they were making fun of her. 'Do you make the pictures up yourself?' said Sam, meaning it as a compliment, but she was incensed.

"You send away for them," she said. "You send to Cincinnati." They persisted. Why? Because she was a little slavey, forever

Out of things, queer-looking, undersized, and compared to her they were in the mainstream, they were fortunate. They could be mean or kind to her as they pleased, and it pleased them to be kind. Also, it was a challenge. Jokes and dares were what finally disarmed her. They brought her tiny lumps of coal wrapped in chocolate papers. She put dried thistles under their sheets. She told them she had never refused a dare. That was the secret of Callie – she would never say that anything was too much for her. Far from being oppressed by all the work she had to do, she gloried in it. One night, when Sam was doing his accounting at the dining-room table, she thrust a school notebook under his nose.

Két helyi iskolában folyt tanítás, így ha egy fiú meglátta Callie-t, azt gondolta, hogy a másikba jár.

Sam felesége egyszer megkérdezte: – Hogy vettétek őt rá? Mi hasznot húzott az egészből Callie, hisz még korcsolyája sem volt?

– Callie élete a munka volt – mondta Sam. – A munkán kívül minden izgalmas volt a számára.

Valóban, hogy győzték meg őt, tünődött. Talán vakmerőségből tette. Olyan volt megbarátkozni vele először, mint megbarátkozni egy gyanakvó, ingerlékeny kutyakölyökkel, aztán később olyan, mint megbarátkozni egy tizenkét évessel, amennyinek egyébként látszott. Kezdetben meg sem állt a munkában, rájuk se hederített. A fiúk dicsérték a hímzést, amin dolgozott, a zöld hegyeket, a kerek kék tavat, a tó közepén a nagy vitorlást, de a lány úgy ölelte magához a kézimunkát, mintha a fiúk gúnyolódának.

– Te magad rajzolod elő a képet? – kérdezte Sam elismerően, de Callie durcás volt.

– Úgy küldik – mondta – Cincinnatiából.

Miért nem adták fel? Mert Callie egy kis rabszolga volt, örökké kimaradt mindenből; fura külsejű, apró termetű, és hozzá képest a fiúk szerencsésnek érezték magukat, többet kaptak a sorstól. Lehettek volna rosszak hozzá, de jól esett kedvesnek lenni, izgalmakat rejtett. Végül a viccek és a közös kalandok fegyverezték le a lányt. A fiúk pici szénrögöket csomagoltak csokoládépapírba, azzal lepték meg. Ő meg száraz bogáncsot tett a lepedőjük alá. Azt mondta, soha nem félt a merész kalandoktól. Ez volt Callie titka: merészségben nem ismert határokat. Bármennyit dolgozott is, kalandra mindig kapható volt. Egyik este, mikor Sam a könyvelési feladatán dolgozott az ebédlőasztalnál, Callie egy iskolai füzetet dugott az orra alá.

– Mi ez, Callie?

– Nem tudom.

Egy album volt, teleragasztva újságkivágásokkal, amik róla szóltak. A cikkek versengésre hívták fel az olvasót.

“What’s this, Callie?”

“I don’t know!”

It was her scrapbook, and pasted in it were newspaper items about herself. The newspaper had invited people to enter into competitions. Who could do the most bound buttonholes in eight hours? Who could can the most raspberries in a single day? Who had crocheted the most amazing number of bedspreads, tablecloths, runners, and doilies? Callie, Callie, Callie, Callie Kernaghan, again and again. In her own estimation, she was no slavey but a prodigy pitying the slothful lives of others.

It was only on Monday nights that they could go skating, because that was the night Miss Kernaghan played bingo at the Legion Hall. Callie kept her boy’s clothes in the woodshed. They came from a ragbag of things belonging to Mrs. Cruze, who had brought it with her from her old home, intending to make quilts, but never got around to it. All except the cap. That had belonged to Adam Delahunt, who put it in a bundle of things he gave to Callie to save for the Missionary Society, but Miss Kernaghan told Callie just to put those things down in the cellar, in case.

Callie could have slipped off from the skating rink as soon as her job was done – she could have walked out by the main entrance and nobody would have bothered her. But she never did. She climbed over the top of the benches, walked along testing the boards for springiness, climbed partway up one of the ladders, and swung out on one hand, one foot, hanging over the partition and watching the skaters. Edgar and Sam never stopped skating till the moon was turned off and the music stopped and the other lights came on. Sometimes they raced each other, darting in and out among the sedate couples and rows of unsteady girls. Sometimes they showed off, gliding down the ice with their arms spread. (Edgar was the more gifted skater, though not so ruthless a racer – he could have done fancy skating, if boys did it then.) They never skated with girls, but that wasn’t so much because they were scared to ask as that they didn’t want to be kept to anybody else’s measure. Callie waited for

Ki készíti a legtöbb beszegett gomblyukat nyolc óra alatt? Ki főzi be és teszi el a legtöbb málnát egyetlen nap alatt? Ki horgolja a legelképesztőbb mennyiségű ágytakarót, terítőt és zsúrterítőt? Callie, Callie, Callie, Callie Kernaghan újra és újra. Nem rabszolgának tartotta magát, hanem őstehetségnek, aki szánja az embereket tunya életük miatt.

Csak hétfő esténként mehettek korcsolyázni, amikor Miss Kernaghan tombolahúzásra ment a Veterán Klubba. A fiúruhákat Callie a faskamrában tárolta. Abból a limlombból válogatták ki, amit Mrs. Cruze hozott még korábbi lakhelyéről azzal a szándékkal, hogy majd paplant csinál belőlük, de végül soha nem jutott odáig. Kivéve a sapkát. Azt Adam Delahunt adta Callie-nak azzal, hogy őrizze meg a Missziós Szövetség számára, de Miss Kernaghan azt tanácsolta, vigyen csak le mindent a pincébe, sosem lehet tudni.

Miután a fiúkat beengedte, Callie elhagyhatta volna a jégpályát akár a főbejáraton keresztül is, senki sem szólt volna rá, de soha nem tette. Átmászott a padok fölött, föl az állványokra, rugózva végigsétált a pallókon, és a létra közepén fél lábon, egy kézzel kapaszkodva a korcsolyázókat nézte. Edgar és Sam addig meg nem állt, amíg világított a hold és szólt a zene. Néha versenyeztek, nyugodt párok és lányok bizonytalan sorai közt nekilendülve. Olykor a látvány kedvéért karjukat széttárva siklottak a jégen. Edgar tehetségesebb volt, jégtánc elemeket is ismert, már amennyire fiúk akkoriban csináltak ilyet, de nem versenyzett úgy mint Sam. Lányokkal soha nem korcsolyáztak. Nem azért mert félték őket leszólítani, inkább mert nem akartak másokhoz igazodni. Zárórakor Callie kint várt rájuk, együtt mentek haza, mint három fiú. Soha nem fütyült vagy hógolyózott, hogy bizonyítsa, hogy fiú. Dulakodó fiúkra emlékeztető járása volt, előzékeny, de független, minden tetre kész – verekedésre vagy kalandra. Nehéz, durva fekete haját a vászonsapka alá gyűrte, ami egyébként nagy lett volna rá. Arca így, hogy nem keretezte haj, kevésbé látszott sápadtnak és a gúnyos, kihívó tekintet eltűnt, inkább egy józan,



them outside when the skating was over, and they walked home together, three boys. Callie didn't do any ostentatious whistling or snowballing to show she was a boy. She had a scuffling boy's walk, thoughtful but independent, alert for possibilities – a fight or an adventure. Her heavy, rough black hair was stuffed up under the cloth cap, and kept it from being too big for her head. Without the hair around it, her face looked less pale and scrunched up – that spitting, mocking, fierce look she sometimes had was gone and she looked sober and self-respecting. They called her Cal.

They came into the house the back way. The boys went upstairs and Callie changed her clothes in the icy woodshed. She had ten minutes or so to get the evening lunch on the table.

When Sam and Edgar lay in bed in the dark on Monday nights after skating, they talked more than was usual. Edgar was apt to bring up the name of Chrissie Young, his girlfriend last year, at home. Edgar claimed to be sexually experienced. He said he had done it to Chrissie last winter, when they went tobogganing after dark and ran into a snowdrift. Sam didn't think this was possible, given the cold, their clothing, the brief time before other tobogganers caught up with them. But he wasn't sure, and, listening, he grew restless and perhaps jealous. He mentioned other girls, girls who had been at the skating rink wearing short flared skirts and little fur-trimmed jackets. Sam and Edgar compared what they had seen when these girls twirled around or when one of them fell on the ice. What would you do to Shirley, or Doris, Sam asked Edgar, and quickly passed on, in a spirit of strangely mixed ridicule and excitement, to ask him what he would do to other girls and women, more and more unlikely, caught where they couldn't defend themselves. Teachers at the business college – mannish-looking Miss Lewisohn, who taught accounting, and brittle Miss Parkinson, who taught typing. The fat woman in the post office, the anemic blonde in Eaton's Order Office. Housewives who showed off their behinds in the back yard, bending over clothes baskets. The grotesque nature of certain choices excited them more than the

önérezetes fiú benyomását keltette. Fiús nevet adtak neki: Cal.

A házba hátulról mentek be, a fiúk rögtön föl az emeletre. Callie a hideg fűszobában átöltözött, aztán tíz perce maradt, hogy előkészítse a vacsorát.

Mikor Sam és Edgar hétfő esténként, korcsolyázás után lefeküdtek, még sokáig beszélgettek a sötétben. Edgar szívesen beszélt régi barátnőjéről, Chrissie Youngról. Némileg tapasztaltnak hitte magát. Azt mondta, átesett a tűzkeresztségen Chrissie-vel, mikor tavaly télen egyszer szánkózni mentek és sötétedés után hófúvásba keveredtek. Sam ezt nem tartotta valószínűnek egyrészt a hideg miatt, másrészt az öltözetük miatt és mert a többi szánkó hamarosan utolérte őket. De biztosat nem tudhatott, úgyhogy hallgatott, és nőtt benne a nyughatatlanság, a féltékenység. A jégpályán korcsolyázó lányokról is beszélgettek, akik rövid harangszoknyát és szörme díszítésű kiskabátot viseltek. Megbeszélték, mit láttak, amikor ezek a lányok körbe forogtak, vagy amikor valamelyikük elesett. Mit csinálnál Shirley-vel vagy Dorisszal, kérdezte Sam Edgart és gyorsan folytatta a humor és az izgalom kevert, különös hangulatában: mit csinálna ő más lányokkal és asszonyokkal, ha egészen képtelen helyzetben találná őket, amikor nem tudnának védekezni. Tanárokkal a főiskolán – a férfi alkatú Miss Lewisohnnal, aki könyvvitelt tanított, vagy a törekeny Miss Parkinsonnal, aki gépírást. Vagy a kövér asszonnyal a postán, a vérszegény szőkével az Eaton's áruház rendelési osztályán. Háziasszonyokkal, akiknek kilátszott a hátsó felük, ahogy az udvaron a ruhás kosár fölé hajoltak teregetés közben. Néhány esetben a groteszk jobban izgatta őket, mint olyan lányok bája és csinosága, akiket mindenki csodált. Alice Peelt szinte hanyagul letudták: az ágyához kötnék és útban vacsorához megerősokolnák. Miss Vernét nyilvánosan szégyenítenék meg a lépcsőn, mert rajtakapnák hogy a lábát a lépcsőorsó köré vetve izgatja magát. Az öreg Mrs. Cruze-t nem bántanák, tartottak bizonyos határokat. És Miss Kernaghan? Reumájával, ruhájának kopott rétegeivel, furcsán

grace and prettiness of girls who were officially admired. Alice Peel was dismissed almost perfunctorily – they tied her to her bed and ravished her on their way down to supper. Miss Verne was spread quite publicly on the stairs, having been caught exciting herself with her legs around the newel post. They spared old Mrs. Cruze – they had some limits, after all. What about Miss Kernaghan, with her rheumatism, her layers of rusty clothes, her queer painted mouth? They had heard stories, everybody had. Callie was supposed to be the child of a Bible salesman, a boarder. They imagined the Bible salesman doing it in place of themselves, plugging old Miss Kernaghan. Over and over, the Bible salesman rams her, tears her ancient bloomers, smears her hungry mouth, drives her to croaks and groans of the most extreme need and gratification.

“Callie, too,” said Edgar.

What about Callie? The joys of the game stopped for Sam when she was mentioned. The fact that she, too, was female came to him as an embarrassment. You would think he had discovered something disgusting and pitiable about himself.

Edgar didn't mean that they should just imagine what could be done to Callie.

“We could get her to. I bet we could.”

Sam said, ‘She's too small.’

“No, she's not.”

That persuading Sam does remember, and it was accomplished by dares, which makes him think the skating-rink adventure must have been managed the same way. A Saturday morning when the winter was nearly over, when the farmers' sleighs, driven over the packed snow, grated on patches of bare ground as they passed Kernaghan's house. Callie coming up the attic stairs with the wet mop, scrub pail, dust rags. She kicked the rag rug down the stairs so that she could shake it out the door. She stripped the beds of the flannelette sheets, with their intimate, cozy smell. No fresh air enters the Kernaghan house. Outside the windows are the storm windows. This is the time and place for Callie's seduction.

festett szájával? Hallották ők is az asszonyt körüllegő pletykákat, ahogy mindenki. Callie állítólag egy egykori bibliaárus kosztos lánya volt. A bibliaárust képelték el maguk helyett, ahogy megejti az öreg Miss Kernaghant. Újra és újra: a bibliaárus üti őt, letépi a hosszú női alsót, éhes száját összemaszatolja és a legalapvetőbb szükségletek kielégítését kísérő nyögésekbe kergeti.

– Callie-t is – mondta Edgar.

Csakugyan, és Callie? Mikor őt említették, a játék öröme eltűnt Sam számára. A tény, hogy ő is nő volt, Samben furcsa gátlást ébresztett. Talán valami szánalmasat és undorítót fedezett fel saját magában.

Edgar nem akarta Callie-t meghagyni a képzelet eszközének.

– Őt rá tudnánk venni. Fogadok, hogy rá tudnánk.

– Túl kicsi – mondta Sam.

– Dehogy.

A győzködésre Sam jól emlékszik. Úgy hajtották végre, mint egy merész kalandot, ahogy bizonyára a jégpálya-trükkre is rávették. Tél vége volt. Egy szombat reggel, amikor a farmerek szánkói még a félrelapátolt hóban is megcsikordultak a foltokban előbukkanó földön, amint elhajtottak a Kernaghan ház előtt, Callie felmosóronggyal, vödörrel és szőnyegporolóval jött fel a padláslépcsőn. A rongyszőnyeget lerúgta a lépcsőn, hogy majd az ajtónál kirázza. Az ágyakról lehúzta a testszagú flanel lepedőket. A dupla ablakok miatt friss levegő nem hatolt be a Kernaghan házba. Itt volt az alkalom Callie elcsábítására.

Pontosabban a szó nem megfelelő. Callie először ingerült és türelmetlen volt, aztán mogorva, végül furcsán engedékeny. A leghatékonyabb taktikának az bizonyult, hogy gúnyolódtak vele, mondván: fél. Akkor már tudniuk kellett valódi korát, mégis úgy kezelték, mint egy huncut játszótársat, akit ugratni kell. Eszükbe se jutott hízelegni neki és hogy úgy simogassák, mint egy lányt.

Az egész közel sem ment olyan könnyen, mint azt elképzelték, még így sem, hogy Callie mindenbe beleegyezett. Samnek

That is not a suitable word for it. Callie cross and impatient at first, keeping at her work, then sullen, then oddly tractable. Taunting her with being scared was surely the effective tactic. They must have known, by then, her real age, but they still treated her as if she were an imp to be cajoled – didn't think of stroking or flattering her as if she were a girl.

Even with her cooperation, it was nothing like as easy as they had imagined. Sam became convinced that the story about Chrissie was a lie, even though Edgar was invoking Chrissie's name at the moment.

“Come on,” Edgar said. “I'll show you what I do to my girlfriend. Here's what I do to Chrissie.”

“I bet,” said Callie sourly, but she let herself be pulled down on the narrow mattress. The elastic of her winter bloomers had left red rings around her legs and waist. A flannel vest, buttoned over an undershirt, her brown ribbed stockings, held up by long, lumpy suspenders. Nothing but the bloomers was taken off. Edgar said the suspenders were hurting him and went to undo them, but Callie cried out, “Leave those alone!” as if they were what she had to protect.

Something very important is missing from Sam's memory of that morning – blood. He has no doubt of Callie's virginity, remembering Edgar's struggles, then his own, such jabbing and prodding and bafflement. Callie lay beneath them each in turn, half-grudging, half-obliging, putting up with them and not complaining that anything hurt. She would never do that. But she would not do anything, specifically, to help.

“Open your legs,” said Edgar urgently.

“They're open already.”

The reason he doesn't remember blood is probably that there wasn't any. They did not get far enough. Callie was so thin her hipbones stood up, yet she seemed quite extensive to Sam, and unwieldy and complicated. Cold and sticky where Edgar had wet her, dry otherwise, with unexpected bumps and flaps and blind

meggyőződése volt, hogy a Chrissie-ről szóló történet hazugság, jöllehet Edgar Chrissie nevét hozta szóba Callie-nek is.

– Gyere – mondta Edgar. – Megmutatom, mit csinálok Chrissie-vel, a barátnőmmel.

– Azt meghiszem – mondta Callie savanyúan, de hagyta magát lefektetni a keskeny matracra. Hosszú bugyijának gumija gyűrűket hagyott a lábán és a derekán. Flanel mellényt hordott a trikója fölött és barna, bordás harisnyát, amit hosszú harisnyakötők tartottak. Csak a bugyit vették le. Edgar azt mondta, zavarja a harisnyakötő és elkezdte kicsatolni. – Azt hagyj! – kiáltott fel Callie, mintha meg kellene védenie.

Valami nagyon fontos hiányzik Sam emlékeiben arról a reggelről: a vér. Nem vonta kétségbe Callie szüzességét, emlékezett Edgar zavarbaesett küszködésére, aztán a sajátjára. Callie felváltva feküdt mindkettőjük alatt, félig kelletlenül, félig engedelmesen és egyáltalán nem panaszkodott, hogy fájna. Panaszkodni soha nem szokott. De nem is segédkezett.

– Nyisd szét a lábad – mondta Edgar sürgetőleg.

– Már szét vannak nyitva.

Valószínűleg azért nem emlékezett vérrre, mert nem volt vér. Nem hatoltak elég mélyre? Callie olyan vékony volt, hogy kiállt a csípőcsontja, Sam mégis terjedelmesnek találta, esetlennek és komplikáltnak. Hideg és ragacsos volt, ahol Edgar nyomot hagyott, amúgy száraz, tele váratlan bukkanókkal és dudorokkal, vak völgyekkel – bőrszerű érzést keltett. Mikor később erre gondolt, még mindig nem tudta bizonyosan, milyenek a lányok. Úgy tűnt, mintha egy bábút adnának maguk helyett, vagy egy engedelmes kutyakölyköt. Mikor lefordult róla, látta, hogy csupa libabőr ahol meztelen: a halottnak tűnő szőrcsomó körül. Meg hogy összekenték az egyik harisnyáját. Callie megtörölte magát egy portörő ronggyal – éppenséggel egy tisztával – és azt mondta, olyan ez mint mikor valaki orrot fúj.

– Nem vagy bolond, ugye? – mondta Sam félig szó szerint értve,

alleys – a leathery feel to her. When he thought of this afterward, he still wasn't sure that he had found out what girls were like. It was as if they had used a doll or a compliant puppy. When he got off her, he saw that she had goose bumps where her skin was bare, all around that tuft of dead-looking hair. Also, that their wet had soaked one stocking. Callie wiped herself with the dust rag – granted, it looked to be a clean one – – and said it reminded her of when somebody blew their nose.

“You're not mad?” said Sam, meaning partly that, and partly, you won't tell? “Did we hurt you?”

Callie said, “It would take a lot more than that stupid business to hurt me.”

There was no more skating after that. The weather got too mild.

Miss Kernaghan's rheumatism was worse. There was more work than ever for Callie. Edgar got tonsillitis and stayed home from classes. Sam, on his own at the business college, realized how much he had come to enjoy it. He liked the noise of the typewriters – the warning of the bells, the carriages banging back. He liked ruling the account-book pages with a straight pen, making the prescribed heavy and fine lines. He especially liked figuring out percentages and quickly adding up columns of numbers, and dealing with the problems of Mr. X and Mr. B, who owned a lumberyard and a chain of hardware stores, respectively.

Edgar was out of school nearly three weeks. When he came back, he had fallen behind in everything. His typing was slower and sloppier than it had been at Christmastime, he smeared ink on the ruler, and he could not understand interest tables. He seemed listless, he grew discouraged, he stared out the window. The lady teachers were somewhat softened by his looks – he was lighter and paler since his illness; even his hair seemed fairer – and he got away with this indolence and ineptitude for a while. He made some efforts, occasionally tried to do homework with Sam, or went to the typing room at noon to practice. But no improvement lasted, or was enough. He took days off.

félíg úgy, hogy „ugye nem mondd el?” – Nem okoztunk fájdalmat?

– Sokkal több kell ahhoz, mint ez a hülye dolog – válaszolt Callie.

Többé nem korcsolyáztak. Az idő is enyhére fordult.

Miss Kernaghan reumája rosszabbodott, így Callie-nak még több dolga akadt. Edgar mandulagyulladásra kapott és nem járt órákra. Sam, ahogy egyedül maradt a kereskedelmi iskolában, rájött, mennyire élvezte. Szerette az írógépek zaját: a csengőt, ami a sor végét jelzi és a sorváltót, ahogy a jobb kéz visszalendíti a papírtartó kocsit. Szerette megvonulni a könyvelési lapokat, meghúzni az egyenes, előírtan vastag vagy vékony vonalakat. Különösen szeretett százalékot számolni, számoszlopokat összeadni és imádta a Mr. B-ről, a vaskereskedőről és Mr. X-ről a fatelep-tulajdonosról szóló szöveges feladatokat.

Edgar majdnem három hétig hiányzott az iskolából. Mire felgyógyult, mindenben visszaesett. Lassabban és felületesebben gépelt, mint karácsony táján, elmaszatolta a tintát a vonalzó és nem értette meg a kamat-táblázatokat. Közömbösnek és bátortalannak tűnt, sokszor csak bámult ki az ablakon. A hölgy oktatók kissé ellágyultak attól, ahogy Edgar nézett rájuk – betegsége óta vékonyabb és sápadtabb lett, még a haja is kiszőkült. Valameddig még elnézték hanyagságát és együgyűségét. A fiú megpróbálta összeszedni magát, néha Sammel írta meg a leckét, és délben gyakorolt a gépíróteremben, de fejlődése nem volt sem tartós, sem elegendő. Voltak napok, amikor be sem ment az órákra.

Betegsége idején kapott egy jobbulást kívánó üdvözlőlapot. A képen egy zöld sárkány ugrott ki az ágyból, csíkos pizsamában. A lap egyik oldalán ez állt: „Halljuk, hogy lelkedet elvitte a sárkány.” És a túloldalon: „Sebaj, nemsokára itt harcolsz a vártán.” A lap alján ceruzával: „Chrissie”.

De Chrissie Stratfordban élt, ápolónőnek tanult. Honnan tudott volna Edgar betegségéről? A borítékon, a címzett neve mellett a

While he was sick, Edgar had received a get-well card. It showed a green dragon in striped pajamas propped up in bed. On the front of the card were the words “Sorry to Hear your Tail is Dragon,” and inside “Hope that Soon, You’ll have it Waggon.” Down at the bottom, in pencil, was written the name Chrissie.

But Chrissie was in Stratford, training to be a nurse. How would she know Edgar was sick? The envelope, with Edgar’s name on it, had come through the mail but had a local postmark.

“You sent it,” Edgar said. “I know it’s not her.”

“I did not,” said Sam truthfully.

“You sent it.” Edgar was hoarse and feverish and racked with disappointment. “You didn’t even write in ink.”

“How much money have we got in the bank?” Edgar wanted to know. This was early May. They had enough to pay their board until the end of the term.

Edgar had not been to the college for several days. He had been to the railway station, and he had asked the price of a one-way ticket to Toronto. He said he meant to go alone if Sam wouldn’t go with him. He was wild to get away. It didn’t take long for Sam to find out why.

“Callie might have a baby.”

“She isn’t old enough,” said Sam. Then he remembered that she was. But he explained to Edgar that he was sure they hadn’t been sufficiently thorough.

“I’m not talking about that time,” said Edgar, in a sulky voice.

That was the first Sam knew about what had been going on when Edgar stayed away from school. But Sam misunderstood again. He thought Callie had told Edgar that she was in trouble. She hadn’t. She hadn’t given him any such information or asked for anything or made any threats. But Edgar was frightened. His panic seemed to be making him half sick. They bought a package of cake doughnuts at the grocery store and sat on the stone wall in front of the Anglican church to eat them. Edgar took one bite and held the doughnut in his hand.

helyi posta bélyegzője volt látható.

– Te küldted – mondta Edgar. – Tudom, hogy nem Chrissie.

– Nem is én – vallotta be Sam az igazat.

– Te küldted. – Edgar lázas és rekedt volt, csupa kiábrándultság. – Még a tintát is sajnáltad.

– Mennyi pénzünk van a bankban – kérdezte Edgar május elején. Az összeg éppen elegendő volt a szemeszter végéig a kosztra és a szobára. Edgar néhány napja már nem járt be az előadásokra. A vasútállomáson megérdeklődte, mennyibe kerül egy jegy Torontóig. Azt mondta, egyedül is megy, Sam nélkül is. Minden áron menni akart, Sam csakhamar azt is megtudta, miért.

– Callie valószínűleg terhes.

– Nincs is még abban a korban – mondta Sam, aztán rájött, hogy igen. De biztos nem tőlük, kezdte magyarázni.

– Én nem arra az alkalomra gondolok – mondta Edgar ellenvetést nem tűrő hangon.

Sam most eszmélt csak rá, hogy Edgar miért került az előadásokat. De megint rossz nyomon járt. Azt gondolta, Callie tájékoztatta Edgart a közeledő baj felől, de Callie semmi ilyet nem tett. Nem kért, nem fenyegetőzött. Edgar így is megijedt, szinte betege lett a félelemnek. Vettek egy doboz fánkot és felültek a kőfalra megenni az anglikán templommal szemben. Edgar beleharapott egybe és csak forgatta a kezében.

Sam megjegyezte, hogy már csak öt hét van hátra a főiskolán.

– Úgyse megyek vissza oda. Túlságosan le vagyok maradva – mondta Edgar.

Sam nem szólt, de elképzelte magát főiskolai diplomával, ahogy egy bankban dolgozik. Három részes öltönyben tetszelgett a pénztár ketrecében. Bajusza is volt. Néha pénztárosokból lesznek a bankigazgatók. Csak mostanában gondolt arra, hogy a bankigazgatók is lejjebb kezdik a ranglétrán.

Milyen munkát kaphatnának Torontóban?

– Előadhatnánk akrobata-mutatványokat az utcán – mondta

Sam said that they had only five more weeks at college.

“I’m not going back there anyway. I’m too far behind,” said Edgar.

Sam did not say that he had pictured himself lately working in a bank, a business-college graduate. He saw himself in a three-piece suit in the tellers’ cage. He would have grown a mustache. Some tellers became bank managers. It had just recently occurred to him that bank managers did not come into the world ready-made. They were something else first.

He asked Edgar what kind of jobs they could get in Toronto.

“We could do stunts,” Edgar said. “We could do stunts on the sidewalk.”

Now Sam saw what he was up against. Edgar was not joking. He sat there with one bite out of his doughnut and proposed this way of making a living in Toronto. Stunts on the sidewalk.

What about their parents? This only started crazier plans.

“You could tell them I was kidnapped.”

“What about the police?” said Sam. “The police go looking for anybody that’s kidnapped. They’d find you.”

“Then don’t tell them I’m kidnapped,” Edgar said. “Tell them I saw a murder and I have to go into hiding. Tell them I saw a body in a sack pushed off the Cedar Bush Bridge and I saw the men that did it and later I met them on the street and they recognized me. Tell them that. Tell them not to go to the police or say anything about it, because my life is at stake.”

“How did you know there was a body in the sack?” said Sam idiotically. “Don’t talk anymore about it. I have to think.”

But all the way back to Kernaghan’s Edgar did nothing but talk, elaborating on this story or on another, which involved his having been recruited by the government to be a spy, having to dye his hair black and change his name.

They got to the boarding house just as Alice Peel and her fiancé, the policeman, were coming out the front door.

“Go round the back,” said Edgar.

Edgar.

Ekkor Sam megértette, hogy Edgar nem tréfál. Ott ült, a fánkba épphogy beleharapott és azon gondolkodott, miből élhetnének meg Torontóban. Utcai akrobatikusként.

És mit mondanak a szüleinek? De ez a kérdés még örültebb ötleteket gerjesztett.

– Mondhatnád azt, hogy elraboltak.

– És a rendőrség? – kérdezte Sam. – Ők mindenkit keresnek, akit elrabolnak. És rádtalálnának.

– Akkor ne mondd, hogy elraboltak – mondta Edgar. – Mondd nekik azt, hogy tanúja voltam egy gyilkosságnak és most bujkálnom kell. Mondd, hogy tanúja voltam, amikor egy testet zsákba kötözve ledobtak a Cedar Bush hídról. Láttam a tettest és később találkoztam vele az utcán és felismert. Ezt mondd meg nekik. Mondd meg, hogy ne menjenek a rendőrségre, ne is említsék senkinek, mert az életem forog kockán.

– Honnan tudad, hogy a zsákban egy hulla van? – akadékoskodott Sam értelmetlenül.

– Ne beszéljünk erről többet. Gondolkoznom kell.

De útban visszafelé a panzióba, Edgar mást se csinált, csak beszélt, tovább szöve a történetet. Vagy egy másikat, hogy a kormány kémkedéssel bízta meg, ezért a haját be kellett festenie feketére és a nevét is meg kellett változtatnia.

Amikor a panzióhoz értek, Alice Peel a rendőr főlegényével épp a főbejáraton jött kifelé.

– Gyerünk a hátsó ajtóhoz – javasolta Edgar.

A konyhaajtó tárva-nyitva állt. Callie már letisztogatta a kályhacsövet, jelenleg a tűzhelynél tartott. A fekete főzőlapokat viaszos dörzspapírral fényesítette, a szegélyeket egy tiszta ronggyal. A tűzhely gyönyörű látványt nyújtott, mint egy ezüsteel futtatott fekete márványlap, de maga Callie tetőtől talpig maszatos volt. Még a szempillái is feketék voltak. A „My Darling Nellie Grey” kezdetű dalt énekelte, de gyors ütemben, hogy a keze mozgását kövesse.

The kitchen door was wide open. Callie had been cleaning the stovepipes. Now she had them all in place again, and was cleaning the stove. She was polishing the black part of it with waxed bread papers and the trim with a clean rag. The stove was a wonderful sight, like black marble set with silver, but Callie herself was smudged from head to foot. Even her eyelids were black. She was singing “My Darling Nellie Grey,” and she made it go very fast, to help with the polishing.

*“Oh, my darling Nellie Grey,  
They have taken you away,  
And I’ll never see my darling  
anymore.”*

Miss Kernaghan sat at the table, drinking a cup of hot water. Besides her rheumatism, she was troubled with indigestion. Creaks came from her joints, and powerful rumbles, groans, and even whistles, from her deep insides. Her face took no notice.

“You boys,” she said. “What have you been doing?”

“Walking,” said Edgar.

“You aren’t doing your stunts anymore.”

Sam said, “The ground’s too wet.”

“Sit down,” said Miss Kernaghan.

Sam could hear Edgar’s shaky breathing. His own stomach felt very heavy, as if all work on the mass of doughnut she had eaten all but one of them – had ceased. Could Callie have told? She didn’t look up at them.

“I never told you boys how Callie was born,” Miss Kernaghan said. And she started right in to tell them.

“It was in the Queen’s Hotel in Stratford. I was staying there with my friend Louie Green. Louie Green and I ran a millinery shop. We were on our way to Toronto to get our spring trim. But it was winter. In fact, it was a blizzard blowing. We were the only ones for supper. We were coming out of the dining room afterwards and

*Oh, my Darling Nellie Grey,  
Elraboltak téged,  
Így én többé nem látlak már  
Sohasem.*

Miss Kernaghan az asztalnál ült, egy pohár forró vizet ivott. A reumája mellett az emésztésével is gondjai voltak. Ropogtak a csontjai, erőteljes korgás és füttyök jöttek valahonnan nagyon mélyről nyögés kíséretében, de igyekezett palástolni a hangokat, mintha nem hallaná.

– Hát maguk miben settenkednek már megint? – kérdezte.

– Csak sétáltunk – mondta Edgar.

– Az akrobata-mutatványokat már nem gyakorolják?

Sam válaszolt: – Túl nyirkos a talaj.

– Üljenek le – mondta Miss Kernaghan.

Sam hallotta, ahogy Edgar remegve veszi a levegőt. A gyomrát nehéznek érezte a sok fáinktól, egy kivételével mindet ő ette meg. Talán Callie elszólta magát? A lány fel se nézett a munkából.

– Soha nem meséltem maguknak, fiúk, hogyan született Callie – mondta Miss Kernaghan és rögtön bele is kezdett.

– A Queen’s hotelben történt Stratfordban. Louie Grennell szálltam meg ott, volt vele egy közös kalapüzletünk. Torontóba mentünk, hogy tavaszi kalapdíszeket szerezzünk be. Tél volt. Sőt hófúvás. Az egész hotelben csak mi ketten vacsoráztunk. Az étkezőből kifelé jövet látjuk, hogy a bejárati ajtó kicsapódik és bejön három ember. Az egyik a sofőr volt, aki a vonathoz fuvarozta a vendégeket, utána egy asszony és egy férfi. A nő támogatni kellett. Visított, kiabált és fel volt fújódva. A díványra fektették, de állandóan lecsúszott a padlóra. Szinte még kislány volt, tizennyolc-tizenkilenc éves. Egy újszülött csecsemő pottyant ki belőle. A férfi csak ült a díványon, magába roskadva. Nekem kellett előkerítenem a fogadóst meg a feleségét. Szaladtak rögtön,

the hotel door blew open and in came three people. It was the driver that worked for the hotel, that met the trains, and a woman and a man. The man and the driver were hanging on to the woman and hauling her between them. She was howling and yelling and she was puffed up to a terrible size. They got her on the settee, but she slid off it onto the floor. She was only a girl, eighteen or nineteen years old. The baby popped right out of her on the floor. The man just sat down on the settee and put his head between his legs. I was the one had to run and call for the hotelkeeper and his wife. They came running and their dog running ahead of them, barking. Louie was hanging on to the banisters afraid she might faint. Everything happening at once.

“The driver was French-Canadian, so he had probably seen a baby born before. He bit the cord with his teeth and tied it up with some dirty string out of his pocket. He grabbed a rug and stuffed it up between her legs. Blood was coming out of her as dark as fly poison – it was spreading across the floor. He yelled for somebody to get snow, and the husband, or whatever he was, he never even lifted his head. It was Louie ran out and got her hands full, and when the driver saw what a piddling little bit she brought he just swore at her and threw it down. Then he kicked the dog, because it was getting too interested. He kicked it so hard it landed across the room and the hotel woman was screaming it was killed. I picked the baby up and wrapped it in my jacket. That was Callie. What a sickly-looking thing. The dog wasn’t killed at all. The rugs were soaked with blood and the Frenchman swearing a blue streak. She was dead but she was still bleeding.

“Louie was the one wanted us to take her. The husband said he would get in touch but he never did. We had to get a bottle and boil up milk and corn syrup and make her a bed in a drawer. Louie let on to be very fond of her, but within a year Louie got married and went to live in Regina and has never been back. So much for fond.”

Sam thought that this was all most probably a lie. Nevertheless it had a terrible effect on him. Why tell them this now? Truth or lies

előttük a kutyájuk csaholva. Louie a lépcsőkoriátra támaszkodott, attól félt, hogy elájul. Minden nagyon hirtelen történt.

A sofőr francia-kanadai volt, biztos látott már szülést. Foggal elharapta a köldökzsinórt, zsebéből egy koszos madzagot vett elő, azzal kötötte el. Felkapott egy rongyot és a nő lába közé gyűrte. Légyirtó sötétségű vér terítette be a padlót. Hozzanak be havat, kiáltotta, de a férjnek – ha az volt – a szeme se rebbent. Louie szaladt és hozott egy marékkal, de mikor a sofőr meglátta, csak káromkodott, hogy ez nulla és földhöz vágta. Aztán olyat rúgott a kutyába, mert kezdett túl kíváncsi lenni, hogy az a szoba túloldaláig repült. A fogadósné visított, hogy megölte. Én a kabátomba bugyoláltam a csecsemőt. Ez volt Callie, beteges külsejű. A kutya nem döglött meg. Vér áztatta a szőnyeget, a sofőr meg káromkodott, mint a vízfolyás. A nő már rég halott volt, de még mindig vérzett.

– Louie találta ki, hogy a csecsemőt vigyük magunkkal. A férj azt mondta, majd jelentkezik, de soha nem hallottunk felőle. Tejet kellett forralni, meg kukoricaszörpöt. Szereztünk egy üveget és megágyasztunk az egyik fiókban. Louie teljesen odavolt a gyerekért, de egy év múlva megházasodott és Regina-ba költözött, soha nem jött vissza. Ennyit a szeretetről.

Sam szerint az egész valószínűleg hazugság, a történet mégis szörnyű hatással volt rá. De miért meséli ezt most nekik? Igaz vagy sem, nem érdekes. Hogy a sofőr belerúgott-e a kutyába, vagy hogy az anya annyi vért vesztett-e, hogy behalt. Miss Kernaghan hideg hangsúlya, leplezett, de bizonyára barátságtalan szándéka, kiszámíthatatlan kegyetlensége zavarta Samet.

Callie egy pillanatra se hagyta félbe a munkát, csak halkabban énekelt. A konyha csupa fény volt azon a tavaszi estén, durva szappan és mosópor szaga terjengett. Sam máskor, ha pácban volt, mindig tudta, mi a vétke és milyen büntetést érdemel, de most nem érzékelte, milyen súlyos a bűnük és mit vonhat maga után. Még csak nem is Miss Kernaghan rosszindulatától tartott. De mitől?



didn't matter, or whether someone had kicked dog or bled to death. What mattered was Miss Kernaghan's cold emphasis as she told this, her veiled and surely unfriendly purpose, her random ferocity.

Callie hadn't stopped work for one word of the story. She had subdued but not entirely given up her singing. The kitchen was full of light in the spring evening, and smelled of Callie's harsh soaps and powders. Sam had sometimes before had a sense of being in trouble, but he had always known exactly what the trouble was and what the punishment would be, and he could think his way past it. Now he got the feeling that there was a kind of trouble whose extent you couldn't know and punishments you couldn't fathom. It wasn't even Miss Kernaghan's ill will they had to fear. What was it? Did Edgar know? Edgar could feel something being prepared – a paralyzing swipe. He thought it had to do with Callie and a baby and what they had done. Sam had a sense of larger implications. But he had to see that Edgar's instincts were right.

On Saturday morning, they walked through the back streets to the station. They had left the house when Callie went to do the weekend shopping, pulling a child's wagon behind her for the groceries. They had taken their money out of the bank. They had wedged a note in their door that would drop out when the door was opened: "We have gone. Sam. Edgar."

The words "We have gone" had been typed the day before at the college by Sam, but their names were signed by hand. Sam had thought of adding "Board paid till Monday" or "Will write to parents." But surely Miss Kernaghan would know that their board was paid till Monday and saying they would write to their parents would be a tip-off that they hadn't just gone home. "We have gone" seemed foolish, but he was afraid that if they didn't leave something there would be an alarm and a search.

They left behind the heavy, shabby books they intended to sell at the end of term – Accounting Practice, Business Arithmetic – and put what clothes they could into two brown-paper bags.

The morning was fine and a lot of people were out-of-doors.

Vajon Edgar tudja? Edgar érezte, hogy valami készülődik, valami bénító megrázkódtatás. Azt hitte, Callie-val és a gyerekkel kapcsolatos. Sam szigorúbb következményekre számított, de előbb meg akart győződni róla, hogy Edgar megérzései megalapozottak-e.

Szombat reggel félreeső utcákon át sétáltak az állomásra. Akkor hagyták el a panziót, amikor Callie hétfégi bevásárlásra indult egy gyerekkocsival, amiben majd az árut hozza haza. A bankban már előzőleg felvették a maradék pénzüket. Az ajtórésbe egy üzenetet tettek úgy, hogy kiessen, mikor kinyitják az ajtót: „Elmentünk. Sam. Edgar.”

Az első szót, „elmentünk”, Sam pénteken a főiskolán géppel írta, a nevüket kézzel írták alá. Sam még hozzá akarta tenni: „a lakbér hétfőig rendezve”, vagy „a szülőket értesítjük”, de Miss Kernaghan biztos tudja, hogy hétfőig kifizették a szobát és a „szülőket értesítjük” elárulná, hogy nem haza mentek. Az „elmentünk” bután hangzott, de félt, hogy ha nem hagynak üzenetet, keresnék őket.

A nehéz, ócska könyveket, amiket el akartak adni a szemeszter végén, a szobában hagyták – a Könyvelési gyakorlatok címűt és a Kereskedelmi számtant –, a ruháikat két barna papírzacskóba gyömöszölték.

Szép volt a reggel és sok ember sietett az utcákon a dolga után. A járda tele volt gyerekekkel, labdát pattogtattak, ugróköteleztek és ugróiskoláztak. Megjegyzéseket tettek Sam és Edgar tömött papírzacskóira.

– Mi van azokban a zacskókban?

– Döglött macskák – mondta Edgar és egy lány felé lendítette.

De a lány higgadt volt: – Hova vizitek?

– Eladjuk egy kínainak, főzze meg – mondta Edgar ijesztő hangon.

Maguk mögött hagyták a lányt, de hallották, ahogy kántálja: „Kínainak, főzze meg! Döglött macskát egye meg!” Az állomáshoz közelebb az ilyen gyerekcsoportok egyre ritkultak. Errefelé

Children had taken over the sidewalks for ball-bouncing, hopscotch, skipping. They had to have their say about the stuffed paper bags.

“What’ve you got in them bags?”

“Dead cats,” said Edgar. He swung his bag at a girl’s head.

But she was bold. “What are you going to do with them?”

“Sell them to the Chinaman for chop-cat-suey,” said Edgar in a threatening voice.

So they got past and heard the girl chanting behind them, “Chop-cat-suey! Chop-cat-suey! Eat-it-pooey!” Nearer the station, these groups of children thinned out, vanished. Now it was boys twelve or thirteen – some of the same boys who had hung around the skating rink – who were loitering near the platform, picking up cigarette butts, trying to light them. They aped manly insolence and would not have been caught dead asking questions.

“You boys given yourself plenty of time,” said the station agent. The train did not go till half past twelve, but they had timed their getaway according to Callie’s shopping. “You know where you’re going in the city? Anybody going to meet you?”

Sam was not prepared for this, but Edgar said, “My sister.” He did not have one.

“She live there? You going to stay at her place?”

“Her and her husband’s,” said Edgar. “She’s married.” Sam could see what was coming next.

“What part of Toronto they live in?”

But Edgar was equal. “North part,” he said. “Doesn’t every city have a north part?” The station agent seemed about satisfied. “Hang on to your money,” he told them.

They sat on the bench facing the board fence across the tracks, holding their rickets and their brown bags. Sam was counting up in his head how much money they had to hang on to. He had been to Toronto once with his father when he was ten years old. He remembered some confusion about a streetcar. They tried to get on at the wrong door, or get off at the wrong door. People shouted at them. His father muttered that they were all damn fools. Sam felt

tizenkét-tizenhárom éves fiúkkal találkoztak. Néhányuk a jégpályáról ismerős volt: az emelvény mellett szoktak ácsorogni, csikkeket keresgélni, hogy rágyújtsanak. Férfias arcátlanságot mímeltek és semmi pénzért nem fordítottak volna figyelmet a külvilágra.

– Fiúk, maguk jó előre kijöttek – mondta az állomásfőnök.

A vonat csak fél egykor jön, de ők Callie bevásárlásához igazították a szökést. – Eligazodnak a városban? Várja magukat valaki?

Sam erre nem volt felkészülve, de Edgar rávágta: – A nővérem.

Nem is volt nővérük.

– Nála fognak megszállni?

– Igen, a férjével él – mondta Edgar.

Sam érezte, mi következik.

– Melyik kerületben?

De Edgar nem jött zavarba: – Az északi városrészben – mondta. Minden városnak van északi része.

Az állomásfőnök annyiban hagyta: – Vigyázzanak a pénzükre!

Egy padon ültek, arccal a síneken túli deszkapalánk felé, kezükben a jegyük és a barna papírzacskók. Sam azt számolta fejben, mennyi pénzre kell vigyázzanak. Tízéves korában járt egyszer az apjával Torontóban. Valami félreértésre emlékezett, a villamoson rossz ajtónál akartak felszállni vagy leszállni. A többi utas felháborodott, mire az apja dörögött valamit, hogy „istenverte bolondok”. Sam érezte, hogy hasonló sérelmek várhatók. A város bonyolult, jobb, ha nem éri őket meglepetés. Aztán eszébe jutott valami, szinte ajándékként pottyant az ölébe. A Katolikus Segélyező Egylet. Ott tölthetnék az első éjszakát. Késő délután érkeznek a városba. Először esznek majd valamit, aztán megérdeklődik, merre van a Segélyező Egylet. Valószínűleg gyalog elérhető.

Elmondta Edgarnak, ami a fejében járt. – Aztán holnap sétálunk, megismerjük az utcákat és hogy hol lehet a legolcsóbban

that he had to hold himself ready for a great assault, try to anticipate the complexities ahead so they wouldn't take him by surprise. Then something came into his head that was like a present. He didn't know where it came from. The Y.M.C.A. They could go to the Y.M.C.A. and stay there that night. It would be late in the afternoon when they got in. They would first get something to eat, then ask somebody the way to the Y.M.C.A. Probably they could walk.

He told Edgar what they would do. "Then tomorrow we'll walk around and get to know the streets and find out where is the cheapest place to eat."

He knew that Edgar would accept any plan at the moment. Edgar had no notion yet of Toronto, in spite of that unexpected invention of a sister and a brother-in-law. Edgar was sitting here on the bench at the station, full of the idea of the train coming in and of their getting on. The blast of the whistle, the departure – the escape. Escape like an explosion, setting them free. He never saw them getting off the train, with their paper bags, in a banging, jarring, crowded, utterly bewildering new place. But Sam felt better now that he had a starting plan. If one good idea could occur to him out of the blue, why not another?

After a while, other people began to gather, waiting for the same train. Two ladies dressed up to go shopping in Stratford. Their varnished straw hats showed that it was getting close to summer. An old man in a shiny black suit carrying a cardboard box secured with twine. The boys who hung around and didn't go anywhere were nevertheless getting ready for the train's arrival – sitting all together at the end of the platform, dangling their legs. A couple of dogs were patrolling the platform in a semi-official way, sniffing at a trunk and some waiting parcels, sizing up the baggage cart, even looking down the tracks as if they knew as well as anybody else which direction the train was coming from.

As soon as they heard the whistle blowing for the crossroads west of town, Sam and Edgar got up and stood at the edge of the platform. When the train arrived, it seemed a very good sign that

enni.

Biztos volt benne, hogy Edgar pillanatnyilag bármilyen tervet elfogad. Edgar elképzelni se tudta, milyen lehet Toronto, a nővérsógor mese ellenére. Ahogy itt ült az állomáson, csak annyit látott előre, hogy behúz a vonat és ők felszállnak. A fülsüketítő fütty, az indulás: a menekülés. A menekülés majd robbanásszerűen felszabadítja őket. Nem tudta elképzelni magukat, amint leszállnak a vonatról, papírzacskókkal a kezükben, egy zsúfolt, ismeretlen városban lökdösődve, tülekedve. Sam épp ellenkezőleg: most, hogy előre tekintett, kezdte jobban érezni magát. Ha támadt egy jó ötlete, miért ne jöhetne több is?

Lassanként gyülekeztek a torontói vonat utasai. Jött két hölgy kiöltözve, vásárolni mentek Stratfordba. Lakkozott szalmakalapjuk jelezte, hogy közeledik a nyár. Egy öregember fényes fekete öltönyben, spárgával összekötözött kartondobozzal a kezében. Srácok mulatták az időt, mintha a vonatra várnának, lábukat lóbálva csoportosan ücsörögtek a peron végén, de ők nem utaztak sehova. Néhány kutya őrizte a peront félhivatalosan, az utazóládákat és a várakozók csomagjait szaglászta, a kézikocsikat méregették, sőt a vágány mentén a messzeségbe sandítottak, mintha tudnák, merről jön majd a vonat. Ahogy meghallották a figyelmeztető vonatfüttyöt a város nyugati végén levő útkereszteződés felől, Sam és Edgar a peron szélére húzódtak. Jó előjelnek tűnt, hogy pontosan oda álltak, ahol a kalauz leszállt és ahova a kis mozgatható lépcsőt helyezte a felszállóknak. Először egy asszony szállt fel egy csecsemővel, bőrönddel és két kisgyerekekkel. A kalauz segédkezett, mégis úgy tűnt végtelen időbe telik, amíg Samre és Edgarrá kerül a sor. Így is megelőzték a szalmakalapos hölgyeket, a kartondobozos embert és a többieket, akik mögöttük sorakoztak. Hátra se néztek. A majdnem üres kocsi végébe sétáltak, egymással szemben ültek le a kerítés felőli oldalon, nem a peron mellett. Ugyanaz a fakerítés, amit majd egy órája bámultak. Két-három perce ültek így, míg kintről az utazás

they had chosen to stand in the exact spot at which the conductor stepped down, carrying the little step. After he had spent an interminable time assisting a woman with a baby, a suitcase, and two small children, they were able to get on. They went ahead of the ladies in summer hats, the man with the box, and whoever else had lined up. They didn't once look behind. They walked to the end of the almost empty car and chose to sit where they could face each other, on the side of the train that looked out on the board fence, not on the platform. The same board fence they had been staring at for over three-quarters of an hour. They had to sit there for two or three minutes while there was the usual commotion outside, important-sounding shouts, and the conductor's voice crying, "Board!" in a way that transformed the word from a human sound to a train sound. Then the train began to move. They were moving. They each had one arm still around a brown bag and a ticket held in the other hand. They were moving. They watched the boards of the fence to prove it. They left the fence behind altogether and were passing through the diminished outskirts of the town – the back yards, back sheds, back porches, apple trees in bloom. Lilacs straggling by the tracks, gone wild.

While they were looking out the window, and before the town was entirely gone, a boy sat down in the seat across the aisle from them. Sam's impression was that one of those boys loitering on the platform had slipped onto the train, or somehow connived to get a free ride, perhaps out to the junction. Without really looking, he got an idea of the way the boy was dressed – too shabbily and carelessly to be going on any real trip. Then he did look, and he saw that the boy was holding a ticket, just as they were.

On the winter nights when they walked to the skating rink, they had not often looked at each other. Under the streetlights, they had watched their turning shadows on the snow. Inside the rink, the artificial moon altered colors and left some areas in near darkness. So the clothes this boy was wearing did not send any immediate message across the aisle. Except that they were not the kind of

szokásos izgatott hangjai szűrődtek feléjük, fontosnak hangzó kiáltások, a kalauz hangja: „Beszállás!”, olyan tónusban, ami az emberi hangot szinte vonat-hanggá alakítja. Aztán elindultak. Egyik kezükben mindketten a barna zacskót szorongatták még, a másikban a jegyet. Elindultak. Lassan maguk mögött hagyták a kerítést, és falusias külvárosi negyedek mellett haladtak: hátsó porták, udvarvégi fészerek, ház mögötti verandák, virágzó almafák mentén. Vadon, össze-vissza nőtt orgona bokrok. Mialatt az ablakon néztek kifelé és mielőtt teljesen kiértek volna a városból, egy fiú ült le velük átellenben. Samnek az a benyomása támadt, hogy ez egyikük volt a peronon lófráló fiúknak. Valahogy fellóghatott vagy kialakult egy potyautat, talán a keresztződésig. Anélkül, hogy ránézett volna, sejtette, hogy a fiú ócska ruházata kizárja, hogy hosszabb útra induljon. Aztán odapillantott és látta, hogy ugyanolyan jegyet tart a kezében, mint ők.

Téli esteiken, amikor a jégpálya felé ballagtak, általában nem néztek egymásra. Az utcalámpák fényében csak egymás forduló árnyékait figyelték, a mesterséges hold a jégpályán belül pedig átformálta a színeket, néhány helyet meg sem világított kellően. Így az átellenben ülő fiú öltözete még a felismerés halvány jelét sem közvetítette, kivéve, hogy általában nem ilyen ruhában szoktak utazni. Gumicsizma, olajos, festékfoltos vastag bricsesz nadrág, egy hónaljban szakadt viharkabát, amely amúgy is túl meleg és egy nagy, ormótlan kalap.

Hogy rázta le Callie az állomásfőnököt ilyen külsővel? Ugyanaz az állomásfőnök, aki Samet és Edgart olyan kíváncsian mérte végig és aki azt is tudni akarta, hol szállnak meg és ki várja őket az állomáson, jegyet adott el ennek az abszurd, koszos és szakadt külsejű ál-fiúnak Torontóba: Callie blöffölt, de eltalálta, és hagyta csak úgy ténferegni a peronon minden szó, minden kérdés nélkül. A fiúk ilyesfélét éreztek, mikor felismerték a lányt. Érezték, hogy Callie valami csodával határos képességről tett bizonyosságot. Főleg Edgar vélte annak. Honnan tudta, merre eredjen utánuk? Honnan

clothes usually worn on a trip. Rubber boots, heavy breeches with stains of oil or paint on them, a windbreaker torn under one arm and too warm for the day, a large, unsuitable cap.

How had Callie got past the station agent in that outfit? The same station agent who looked Sam and Edgar over so inquisitively, who wanted to know where they were planning to stay and who was meeting them, had let this absurd and dirty and ragged pretend-boy buy a ticket (to Toronto – Callie was guessing, and she guessed right) and walk out onto the platform without one word, one question. This contributed to the boys' feeling, when they recognized her, that she was exercising powers that didn't fall far short of being miraculous. (Maybe Edgar, in particular, felt this.) How had she known? How had she got the money? How was she here?

None of it was impossible. She had come back with the groceries and gone up to the attic. (Why? She didn't say.) She had found the note and guessed at once they hadn't gone home to the farm and weren't hitchhiking on the highway. She knew when the train left. She knew two places it went to – Stratford and Toronto. She stole the money for her ticket from the metal box under the hymn books in the piano bench. (Miss Kernaghan, of course, did not trust banks.) By the time she got to the station and was buying her ticket, the train was coming in and the station agent had a lot of things to think about, no time to ask questions. There was a great deal of luck involved – lucky timing and lucky guessing every step of the way – but that was all. It was not magic, not quite.

Sam and Edgar had not recognized the clothes, and there was no particular movement or gesture that alerted them. The boy Callie sat looking out the window, head partly turned away from them. Sam would never know exactly when he first knew it was Callie, or how the knowledge came to him, and whether he looked at Edgar or simply knew that Edgar knew the same thing he did and at the same time. This was knowledge that seemed to have simply leaked out into the air and to be waiting there to be absorbed. They passed

vette a pénzt? Hogy került ide?

Minden elképzelhető volt. Megérkezett a bevásárlásból és felment a padlásszobába. Miért? Erről Callie soha nem beszélt. Így találta meg az üzenetet és rögtön arra gondolt, hogy nem a farmra mentek haza és valószínűleg nem fognak stoppolni az országúton. Tudta, mikor megy a vonat. Két városról tudott, ahova vonatjárat indult: Stratford és Toronto. A pénzt a jegyre abból a fémdobozból lopta el, amit Miss Kernaghan, aki a bankokban persze nem bízott, a zongoraszékben tartott a templomi énekeskönyvek alatt. Mire az állomásra ért és jegyet váltott, a vonat már lassított és az állomásfőnöknek rengeteg mindenre kellett figyelnie, nem volt ideje Callie-t faggatni. Egy jó adag szerencse is kellett az egészhez: kitalálta a fiúk szándékát és pont időben érkezett az állomásra. Nem volt ebben semmi emberfeletti, nem sok.

Sam és Edgar nem ismerték fel rögtön az öltözéket és a fiú, Callie mozgása, gesztusai sem keltették fel a figyelmüket. Csak ült mellettük, kinézett az ablakon, félig hátat fordítva nekik. Volt egy pillanat, mikor Sam végre ráismert az átellenben ülő fiúban Calliera, de hogy honnan jött ez a gondolat és pontosan mikor, azt nem tudja. Ahogy azt sem, hogy Edgarra nézett-e, vagy csak megérezte, hogy ő is ráismert a lányra. Amolyan a levegőben terjengő, beszipantásra váró felismerés volt ez. Egy hosszú, pázsitos völgyön haladtak keresztül. Elhagyták a Cedar Bush hidat, ahova a városi fiúk versengve merészkedtek, a talpfák alatti tartóvasakba kapaszkodtak, úgy csüngtek lefelé, míg fejük fölött elhaladt a vonat. Vajon Callie meg merte volna-e tenni, ha unszolják? Mikor a hídon áthaladtak, már mindketten tudták, hogy Callie ül velük átellenben, és azt is érezték, hogy a másik is tudja.

Edgar szólalt meg először: – Nem akarsz átköltözni hozzánk?

Callie felállt és átült Edgar mellé. Fiúsan nézett maga elé, és nem tűnt olyan kötekedőnek, mint általában. Egy vágyait kordában tartó, jó humorú fiú benyomását keltette.

Samtól megkérdezte: – Nem rossz menetiránynak háttal utazni?

through a long cut, with grassy banks fresh on either side, and crossed the Cedar Bush Bridge – the same bridge where boys from town dared each other to climb down and cling to the supports under the ties while the train passed over their heads. (Would Callie have done that if they had dared her?) By the time they were across this bridge, they both knew that it was Callie sitting across from them. And each of them knew the other knew.

Edgar spoke first. “Do you want to move over with us?”

Callie got up and moved across the aisle, sitting down beside Edgar. She had her boy’s look on – a look not so sly or quarrelsome as her usual look. She was a good-humored boy, more or less, with reasonable expectations.

It was Sam she spoke to. “Don’t you mind riding backwards?”

Sam said no.

Next, she asked them what they had in the bags, and they both spoke at once.

Edgar said, “Dead cats.”

Sam said, “Lunch.”

They didn’t feel as if they were caught. Right away they had understood that Callie hadn’t come to bring them back. She was joining them. In her boy’s clothes, she reminded them of the cold nights of luck and cunning, the plan that went without a hitch, the free skating, speed and delight, deception and pleasure. When nothing went wrong, nothing could go wrong, triumph was certain, all their moves timely. Callie, who had got herself on this train with stolen money and in boy’s clothes, seemed to lift threats rather than pose them. Even Sam stopped thinking about what they would do in Toronto, whether their money would last. If he had been functioning in his usual way, he would have seen that Callie’s presence was bound to bring them all sorts of trouble once they descended into the real world, but he was not functioning that way and he did not see anything like trouble. At the moment, he saw power – Callie’s power, when she wouldn’t be left behind – generously distributed to all of them. The moment was flooded –

Sam mondta, hogy nem.

Aztán megkérdezte őket, mi van a papírzacskókban, és ők egyszerre szólaltak meg.

Edgar azt mondta: – Döglött macskák.

Sam azt mondta: – Ebéd.

Nem érezték magukat csapdában. Rögtön megértették, hogy Callie nem azért jött, hogy visszacsábítsa őket, inkább csatlakozott hozzájuk. Fiús ruhájában fortélyos, hideg téli estékre emlékeztette őket, az ötletükre, ami kitűnően bevált, az ingyen korcsolyázásokra, a sebesség örömére, a megtévesztés multságára. Arra az időre, amikor minden jól jött ki, a diadal érzésére. Úgy tűnt, mintha Callie nem teremtene veszélyhelyzetet, mintha inkább feloldaná azt, jöllehet lopott pénzből és fiúruhában került fel a vonatra. Még Sam is elfeledte egy időre korábbi kétségeit, hogy vajon mit csinálnak majd Torontóban és mire elég a pénzüik. Ha érzékszervei úgy működtek volna, mint általában, rögtön látta volna, hogy Callie jelenléte mindenféle problémához vezethet, amint visszaereszkednek a való világba, de egyelőre semmitől sem tartott. Pillanatnyilag csak egy mindannyiukban szétáradó erőt érzett, de főleg Callie erejét, aki nem akart alulmaradni semmiben. A perc, úgy tűnt, csupa energia és lehetőség. De csak boldogság volt. Igazából, ez csak a boldogság érzete volt.

Sam általában itt fejezte be a történetet, és egyes részleteket gyakran kihagyott. Ha megkérdezték tőle, mi történt azután, többnyire csak ennyit mondott: – Kissé komplikáltabb volt a dolog, mint amire számítottunk, de túléljük.

Ebben benne volt minden. Például az, hogy a hagymás-tojásos szendvicset falatozó hivatalnok számára a Katolikus Segélyező Egyletnél nem kellett két perc és rájött, hogy Callie-nál valami nem stimmel. Kérdések. Hazugságok, gúnyos mosoly, ijedelmek, telefonok. Elszöktettek egy fiatalkorút. Erkölcstelen céllal egy lány próbáltak becsempészni a férfiszállóba. Hol vannak a lány szülei? Egyáltalán tudja valaki, hogy itt van? Ki engedte meg neki, hogy

with power, it seemed, and with possibility. But this was just happiness. It was really just happiness.

That was how Sam's story – which had left some details and reasons out along the way – always ended. If he was asked how things went from there, he might say, "Well, it was a little more complicated than we expected, but we all survived." Meaning, specifically, that the Y.M.C.A. clerk, who was eating an egg-and-onion sandwich, did not take two minutes to figure out that there was something wrong about Callie. Questions. Lies, sneers, threats, phone calls. Abducting a minor. Trying to sneak a girl into the Y.M.C.A. for immoral purposes. Where are her parents? Who knows she's here? Who gave her permission? Who takes responsibility? A policeman on the scene. Two policemen. A full confession and a phone call, and the station agent remembers everything. He remembers lies. Miss Kernaghan has already missed the money and promises no forgiveness. Never wants to lay eyes on. A foundling born in a hotel lobby, parents probably not married, taken in and sheltered, ingratitude, bad blood. Let that be a lesson. Disgrace in plenty, even if Callie isn't a minor.

Meaning, further, that they all went on living, and many things happened. He himself, even in those first confused and humiliating days in Toronto, got the idea that a place like this, a city, with midday shadows in its deep, narrow downtown streets, its seriously ornamented offices, its constant movement and jangling streetcars, could be the place for him. A place to work and make money. So he stayed on, stayed at the Y.M.C.A., where his crisis – his and Edgar's and Callie's – was soon forgotten and something else happened next week. He got a job, and after a few years saw that this wasn't really the place to make money; the West was the place to make money. So he moved on.

Edgar and Callie went home to the farm with Edgar's parents. But they did not stay there long. Miss Kernaghan found she could not manage without them.

Callie's store is in a building she and Edgar own. The variety

eljöjjön hazulról? Ki vállalja a felelősséget? Megjelenik egy rendőr. Aztán még egy. Mindent bevallanak, egy telefon és az állomásfőnök mindenre emlékszik. Emlékszik a hazugságokra. Miss Kernaghan már felfedezte az eltűnt pénzt és nem ígér irgalmat. Látni se akarja Callie-t. Lelenc, egy motel portáján született, a szülők valószínűleg nem is voltak házasok, ő magához vette és felnevelte, hálátlanság, rossz vér. Majd megtanulja a leckét. Csupa szégyen, mégha Callie nem is fiatalkorú.

Meg benne volt az is, hogy mindhárman éltek a maguk életét és sok minden történt. Sam már azokban az első kusza és szégyenteli napokban érezte, hogy Toronto az ő világa: a város, ahol a komor hivatalokkal díszített keskeny belvárosi utcák napközben is árnyékosak és ahol állandóan zörögnek a villamosok. Ahol dolgozni tud, pénzt keresni. Így ő maradt. A Katolikus Segélyező Egylet férfiszállóján lakott, bűnét – Edgarral és Callie-val együtt – hamar elfelejtette. A következő héten már talált munkát, de egy-két év kellett ahhoz, hogy belássa, Torontóban nem könnyű pénzt félretenni; az ország nyugati városai biztatóbbak. Továbbállt.

Edgar és Callie hazamentek a farmra, Edgar szüleihez. De nem sokáig maradtak otthon. Miss Kernaghan belátta, hogy nélkülük nem boldogul.

Callie üzlete abban az épületben van, amit Edgarral közösen vettek. A vegyesbolt és a fodrász az alsó szinten, a lakrész felül. A fodrász helyén üzemelt régen az a bolt, ahol Sam és Edgar lekváros süteményeket szokott venni. – De kit érdekel az? – jegyzi meg Callie. – Kit érdekel, hogy volt régen?

Sam ízlését a felesége formálta, ők a szürke, fehér és kék tónusokat szerették, az egyenes vonalakat, néhány virágot. Callie berendezése szemkápázató. Arany brokát függöny, mintha ablakot takarna ott, ahol nincs is. Arany, plüss-szerű szőnyeg, durva, fehér gipsz mennyezet szikrázó csillagokkal. Az egyik falon tompa-arany tükör, Sam látja magát benne a keresztül-kasul fekete és ezüst erezeten át. Borostyán üveggömbökben kovácsoltvas

store and a hairdressing place downstairs, their living quarters upstairs.

(The hairdressing place is where the grocery used to be – the same grocery where Sam and Edgar used to buy jam tarts. ‘But who wants to hear about that?’ Callie says. ‘Who wants to hear about the way things used to be?’)

Sam’s idea of good taste has been formed by his wife’s grays and whites and blues and straight lines and single vases. Callie’s place upstairs is stunning. Gold brocade draped to suggest a large window where no window is. Gold plushy carpet, rough white plaster ceiling sparkling with stars. One wall is a dull- gold mirror in which Sam sees himself crisscrossed by veins of black and silver. Lights hang from chains, in globes of amber glass.

In the midst of this sits Edgar, like a polished ornament, seldom moving. Of the three of them, he has kept his looks the best. He had the most to keep. He is tall, frail, beautifully groomed and dressed. Callie shaves him. She washes his hair every day, and it is white and glistening like the angel hair on Christmas trees. He can dress himself, but she puts everything out for him – trousers, socks, and matched tie and pocket handkerchief, soft shirts of deep blue or burgundy, which set off his pink cheeks and his hair.

‘He had a little turn,’ says Callie. ‘Four years ago in May. He didn’t lose his speech or anything, but I took him to the doctor and he said yes, he’s had a little turn. But he’s healthy. He’s good.’

Callie has given Sam permission to take Edgar for a walk. She spends her days in the store. Edgar is waiting upstairs in front of the television set. He knows Sam, seems glad to see him. He nods readily when Sam says, ‘Just get your overcoat on. Then we’re off.’ Sam brings a new, light-gray overcoat and a gray cap from the closet, then, on second thought, a pair of rubbers to protect Edgar’s shining shoes.

‘Okay?’ says Sam, but Edgar makes a gesture, meaning, ‘Just a moment.’ He is watching a handsome young woman interviewing an older woman. The older woman makes dolls. The dolls are made

lámpák lógnak.

Mindezek között ott ül Edgar mint egy kifényesített dísz tárgy, alig moccan. Hármuk közül ő néz ki a legfiatalabbnak. Adottság kérdése. Magas, törekeny, ápolt és jól öltözött. Callie borotválja. Minden nap megmossa a fejét, a haja csillogóan fehér, mint karácsonyfákon az árvalányhaj. Fel tud egyedül öltözni, de Callie teszi ki számára a ruhát – nadrágot, zoknit, azonos színű nyakkendőt és dísz-zsebkendőt, mélykék és burgundi-vörös puha ingeket, amik elütnek hajától és rózsaszín arcától.

– Egy kicsit megváltozott – mondja Callie. – Négy éve, májusban. Nem vesztette el a hangját vagy ilyesmi, de elvittem az orvoshoz és az orvos is azt mondja, igen, kicsit más, mint szokott lenni. De egészséges és jól van.

Callie megengedte Samnek, hogy elvigye Edgart sétálni. Ő az üzletben tölti a napjait. Edgar odafent várja a TV előtt. Felismeri Samet, úgy néz ki, örül, hogy látja. Készségesen bólint, mikor Sam azt mondja: – Vedd a kabátod és már itt se vagyunk.

Sam egy új, világosszürke felöltőt és egy szürke sapkát vesz elő a szekrényből, aztán gondol egyet és elővesz egy kalucsnit is, hogy Edgar csillogó cipőjét óvja.

– Oké? – kérdezi Sam, de Edgar int, mintha azt mondaná: – Egy pillanat.

Egy tudósítást néz. Egy jóképű fiatal riporternő faggat egy idősebb asszonyt. Az asszony babákat gyárt. Tésztából. Különböző méretűek, de mindnek egyforma arckifejezése van, Sam véleménye szerint idióták. Edgar bele van feledkezve. Vagy talán a bozontos aranyhajú riporternő tetszik neki.

Sam állva várja a műsor végét. Aztán az időjárás-jelentés következik és Edgar int, hogy üljön le. Csakugyan, érdemes megnézni, milyen idő lesz, mielőtt sétálni indulnak. Sam úgy tervezi elmehetnének az Orange Street-re, ahol a jégpálya és a cseresznyefák helyén most egy nyugdíjasotthon van, aztán az öreg Kernaghan-ház és a Canadian Tire áruház felé. Az időjárás után



of dough. Though they are of different sizes, they all have the same expression, which is, in Sam's opinion, idiotic. Edgar seems to be quite taken with them. Or perhaps it is the interviewer, with her shaggy gold hair.

Sam stands until that's over. Then the weather comes on, and Edgar motions for him to sit down. That makes sense – to see what the weather is going to be before they start walking. Sam means to head up Orange Street – where a senior citizens' complex has replaced the skating rink and the cherry trees – and go around to the old Kernaghan house and the Canadian Tire lot. After the weather, Sam stays for the news, because there is something about a new tax regulation that interests him. Commercials keep interrupting, of course, but finally the news is over. Some figure skaters come on. After an hour or so has passed, Sam realizes there is no hope of budging Edgar.

Whenever Sam says anything, Edgar raises his hand, as if to say he'll have time to listen in a minute. He is never annoyed. He gives everything the same pleased attention. He smiles as he watches the skaters in their twinkly outfits. He seems guileless, but Sam detects satisfaction.

On the false mantel over the electric fireplace is a photograph of Callie and Edgar in wedding clothes. Callie's veil, in the style of a long-ago time, is attached to a cap trimmed with pearls and pulled down over her forehead. She sits in an armchair with her arms full of roses, and Edgar stands behind, staunch and slender.

Sam knows this picture was not taken on their wedding day. Many people in those days put on their wedding clothes and went to the photographer's studio on a later occasion. But these are not even their wedding clothes. Sam remembers that some woman connected with the Y.M.C.A. got Callie a dress, and it was a shapeless dull-pink affair. Edgar had no new clothes at all, and they were hastily married in Toronto by a minister neither of them knew. This photograph is meant to give quite a different impression. Perhaps it was taken years later. Callie looks a good deal older than

Sam meg akarja várni a híreket, mert lesz valami egy új adószabályról, ami érdekl. Természetesen reklámok szakítják félbe az adást, de végül a híreknek is vége. Műkorcsolya következik. Úgy egy óra elmúltával Sam rájön, hogy Edgart reménytelen kimozdítani.

Ha Sam beszélni kezd, Edgar felemeli a kezét, mintha azt mondaná: – Várj egy percet, nem tudok odafigyelni.

Semmi sem zavarja, mindenre ugyanolyan hálásan figyel. Mosolyog, ahogy a korcsolyázók csillogó ruháit nézi. Gyámoltalannak tűnik, de Sam elégedettséget is lát a szemében.

Az elektromos kandalló párkányán van egy fénykép, Callie és Edgar esküvői ruhában. Callie ódivatú fátyla egy gyöngy szegélyű kalaphoz lett rögzítve, amit a homlokába húz. Egy karosszékben ül, kezében rózsával, Edgar mögötte áll, karcsún, hűségesen.

Sam tudja, hogy a kép nem az esküvő napján készült. Szokás volt akkoriban, hogy az ifjú pár egy külön alkalommal ment el a fényképész stúdiójába esküvői ruhában. De ez még csak nem is a saját esküvői viseletük. Sam emlékszik, hogy egy asszony szerezte Callie ruháját a Katolikus Segélyező Egyleten keresztül, de az formátlan volt és tompa rózsaszínű. Edgarnak egyáltalán nem volt új ruhája és egy olyan pap eskette őket, akit egyikük sem ismert. Ez a fénykép egészen más benyomást próbál kelteni, talán évekkel később készült. Callie jócskán idősebbnek látszik, mint a tényleges esküvőn, arca szélesebb, súlyosabb, határozottabb. Sőt, némileg Miss Kernaghanra hasonlít.

Ez az, ami érthetetlen: miért fűtötték Edgart indulatok az első este Torontóban, amikor bejelentette, hogy összeházasodnak. Semmi szükség nem volt rá, legalábbis Sam szerint. Callie nem volt terhes, sőt amennyire Sam tudja, soha nem is várt gyereket. Talán tényleg túl kicsinek született és rendellenesen fejlődött. Edgar azt tette, amire semmi sem készítette: belement abba, ami elől megszökött. Büntudatot érzett, talán azt érezte, hogy vannak dolgok, amik elől nem lehet menekülni? Azt mondta,

on her real wedding day, her face broader, heavier, more authoritative. In fact, she slightly resembles Miss Kernaghan.

That is the thing that can never be understood – why Edgar spoke up the first night in Toronto and said that he and Callie were going to be married. There was no necessity – none that Sam could see. Callie was not pregnant and, in fact, as far as Sam knows she never became pregnant. Perhaps she really was too small, or not developed in the usual way. Edgar went ahead and did what nobody was making him do, took what he had run away from. Did he feel compunction; did he feel there are things from which there is no escape? He said that he and Callie were going to be married. But that was not what they were going to do – that was not what they were planning, surely? When Sam looked across at them on the train, and all three of them laughed with relief, it couldn't have been because they foresaw an outcome like this. They were just laughing. They were happy. They were free.

Fifty years too late to ask, Sam thinks. And even at the time he was too amazed. Edgar became a person he didn't know. Callie drew back, into her sorry female state. The moment of happiness he shared with them remained in his mind, but he never knew what to make of it. Do such moments really mean, as they seem to, that we have a life of happiness with which we only occasionally, knowingly, intersect? Do they shed such light before and after that all that has happened to us in our lives – or that we've made happen – can be dismissed?

When Callie comes upstairs, he doesn't mention the wedding picture. "I've got the electrician downstairs," Callie says. "So I've got to go down again and keep an eye on him. I don't want him sitting smoking a cigarette and charging me."

He is learning the things not to mention. Miss Kernaghan, the boarding house, the skating rink. Old times. This harping on old times by one who has been away to one who has stayed put is irritating – it is a subtle form of insult. And Callie is learning not to ask him how much his house cost, how much his condominium in

összeházasodnak. De ők nem ezt akarták, legalábbis nem ezt tervezték. Az, hogy a vonaton mindhárman megkönnyebbülve összenevettek, nem azt jelentette, hogy valami ilyesmi megoldást előrevetítettek volna. Nevettek, ez minden. Boldogok voltak. Szabadok voltak.

Ötven évet késett, hogy rákérdezzon, gondolta Sam. Akkor a hirtelen meglepetés elnémította. Mostanra Edgar kiismerhetetlen lett, Callie pedig visszahúzódott sajnálkozó asszonyi állapotába. Sam emlékezetében megmaradtak a boldogságnak azok a pillanatai, amiket megosztott velük, de nem tudott mit kezdeni velük. Nem azt jelenti ez igazából, hogy boldog pillanataink csak alkalmanként találkoznak? Olyan fényt vetnek, hogy előtte és utána bármi történik életünkben, lényegtelenné válik?

Sam nem említi az esküvői képet, amikor Callie feljön a lakásba. – Megjött a villanyszerelő – mondja Callie –, úgyhogy le kell menjek megint, hogy szemmel tartsam. Nem akarom, hogy órábérbe cigarettázzon.

Sam már tudja, miről nem szabad szót ejteni. Miss Kernaghan, a panzió, a jégpálya. Régi idők. A sértés árnyalt formája, ha valaki, aki távolba szakadt, elmúlt időkről nosztalgiazik olyan ember előtt, aki el se mozdult. Callie is tudja, hogy neki illik érdeklődni: mennyibe került Sam háza, mennyibe a lakása Hawaii-ban, mennyit költött különböző utazásokra és mennyit a lánya esküvőjére. Tudja, hogy soha nem fog Sam anyagi helyzetébe belelátani.

Sam érzi, hogy Callie-ban valami más is motoszkál. Mélykékre festett szemében látja, hogy legszívesebben kérdezne valamit. Azok a szemek most egy élet sikeres küzdelmeiről árulkodnak.

Mit akarhat tőlük Sam? Ezen tűnődik Callie.

Sam arra gondol, azt kéne mondani, addig marad, míg ő maga rá nem jön mit akar. Talán bérlő lesz.

– Edgar nem akart sétálni – mondja Sam. – Végül is úgy látszik, nem akar.

– Nem – mondja Callie. – Nem akar. Boldog.

Hawaii cost, how much he spent on various vacations and on his daughter's wedding – in short, she's learning that she will never find out how much money he has.

He can see another thing she's wondering about. He sees the question wrinkling further the deep, blue-painted nests around her eyes, eyes that show now a lifetime of fairly successful efforts and calculations.

What does Sam want? That's what Callie wonders.

He thinks of telling her he might stay until he finds out. He might become a boarder.

"Edgar didn't seem to want to go out," Sam says. "He didn't seem to want to go out after all."

"No," says Callie. "No. He's happy."



A NAGYVILÁG DECEMBERI SZÁMÁBAN:

TÁRNOK ATTILA

Emlékidezés Alice Munro Nobel-díja kapcsán

ALICE MUNRO

A boldog lelkek tánca (Tárnok Attila fordítása)

Hangok (Szilágyi Mihály fordítása)

ANNE PORTER versei (Szilágyi Mihály fordításai)

CAROL BIRCH

Jamrach menazsériája (Lukács Laura fordítása)

VIVIAN LAMARQUE, ANTONIO SARTORI versei

(Gágyor Péter fordításai)

JULIA NAKOVA

Amikor mosolyognak a csillagok (Horváth Iván fordítása)

AHMAD ABDULMUTI HEGAZI verse

(Tüske László fordítása)

FÁZSY ANIKÓ

Németországról 1900–1939 – Kiállítás a Louvre-ban

MÓSER ZOLTÁN

Kontrasztok – A Bartók Béla gyűjtötte szlovák népdalokról

Helyet készíttetek – Szlovák népdal

(Vörös István fordítása)

TÜSKE LÁSZLÓ

Az egyiptomi Alá al-Aszwáni regénye 2002-ből

és a 2011-es „arab tavasz”

GÖMÖRI GYÖRGY

Edward Thomas és Békássy Ferenc