

ANDRÁS PETÔCZ

*here and there with igal sarna*

IN THE FIRST FEW DAYS

(AZ ELSÔ NAPOKBAN)

in the first few days, then in the first few weeks,  
i was scared to death people would realize  
i can't really speak english, and then  
what would people say, i thought, then,  
in the third day of my stay, my new  
bathroom- and kitchenmate arrives, igal sarna  
from tel aviv, thin, in some blue suit  
sitting there, in the lobby, then already  
the social center of the place, he's talking  
and talking, we found out we'd share the bathroom  
and kitchen, i think because of my terrible english  
i'd be pulling teeth to cultivate social relations  
with him and the others, and still things  
just rolled right along, this thanks to igal,  
even i myself could be found in the crowd  
within seconds, we spent every moment together  
and he spent every moment talking, always  
explaining something, his english isn't  
perfect either, and i'm surprised, i had guessed  
everyone in israel speaks this stuff perfectly,  
whatever, then he starts telling stories,  
how his parents escaped poland to tel aviv  
during the war, and he shows us pictures, he  
speaks mainly about his father, who just died not  
long ago, and there we are: iowa, in the common  
kitchen of two small college dorm rooms, and we some-  
how talked *everything* over, *travelers*  
*lost over oceans and mountains, hungry*  
*for sharing a conversation, restless—*

FOUR QUARTERS

(NÉGY DARAB NEGYEDDOLLÁROS)

i got four quarters on  
me, looking now into  
the pool hall, there's  
hai, the kid from vietnam,  
i am about to play with  
him, true enough, it will be  
a challenge, he thinks he's pretty  
smart and very polite, but actually  
suave and crafty, sneaky, just  
smiles all the time, *keep smiling*,  
say the americans, not that he's  
american, no, not at all, but he sure  
learned to smile, because he was seven  
when they kicked the life out of the american  
troops in vietnam, so  
that's my worthy opponent, and  
he thinks he's just great,  
and he hates losing;  
he incorporates all the gags in  
the interest of the win, continues  
formal jungle combat. he'll shoot  
from behind, if needed.  
i'm right there in vietnam, i  
think, just more calm, and just softer  
so i lose every time;  
then it turns out that the warrior's  
little sister goes to school in new  
york, one of his old girlfriends from  
back home works in l.a., thin and  
just gorgeous, honest vietnamese  
beauty, she even visited the  
sad warrior once, and  
that night you couldn't sleep  
from the sound, a royal  
ruckus all night, from  
the room next door, they were  
disgustingly happy for each other,

me, i'm not happy for them, nevermind,  
i'm selfish, i have no sense  
of friendship, the next morning  
he comes out with "you  
were very noisy," and there must  
have been some "young lady" at my  
place last night, he tells everyone,  
all the while his girl, true  
asian beauty, is walking long  
thighs around, shopping for extra  
food of all sorts, and everyone's  
making fun of me, they leave him  
alone, what's more, he starts off  
telling us about hanoi and saigon, and  
even says something about budapest, how  
*we, too, and they, too*, and at this point  
i have no idea how to react,  
tonight, *i have to beat this guy* at pool,  
and i do beat hai, at pool, that night—

HER NAME WAS RACHEL  
(RÁCHELNEK HÍVTÁK)

she wore a yarmulke on her head  
her name was rachel, and  
was part of some religious,  
christian society,  
eighteen years-old, still  
a virgin, she introduced herself  
this way to everybody, it took  
the place of a handshake, the fact  
that she's a virgin, and that the guy  
with whom she would be together for the  
first time is also to be a virgin, they  
would enter this way into matrimony, and  
after the ceremony everyone  
will be happy and they'll take  
part in each other's development for  
men are animals, in general, and

only want to rape women, she  
stated this quite crisply and nonchalantly,  
after some small talk, and igal  
asks her exactly how her name  
and her yarmulke and her religious  
circle all fit into the same puzzle, and  
what she's looking for hanging out with  
all these older men, so, yeah,  
we had a nice little chat, drank darn near  
half a bottle of wine between the three of  
us, then about one a.m. she didn't really want  
to leave, and she says she wonders if mahmoud,  
the palestinian writer, is already asleep, and  
she actually wanted to knock on his door,  
and start some conversation, to which igal quickly  
reacted that if she continues this behavior  
we're going to have to file sexual abuse  
charges, and she was sort of stunned, and  
that's how finally, towards one-thirty,  
she got the hell out of the floor hallway—

#### NEW YORK, MADISON AVENUE

if you were to say new york, i'd say  
madison ave, it's nighttime, i'm heading  
downtown towards 31st, i'm looking for  
a sandwich, or something, and have no idea  
how i could possibly find some way home,  
from the garbage bags i'm stumbling around  
between right now, i'm with some arab character  
named mahmoud, my name's mahmoud,  
he says, mahmoud shuqair, he says,  
i'm a palestinian from jerusalem,  
he says and smiles, the rain pelts down  
around us, i'm tired, we duck into some fast  
food joint, he just smiles, i really like  
this arab guy, i think to myself, i'd never  
want to hurt him, and then igal sarna shows  
up, i haven't seen him in years, i'm igal

sarna, he'd said once, years ago, i'm igal  
sarna, he says, from tel aviv, and now he hugs  
this palestinian, to my surprise, i just  
stare at this foreign scene, too  
struck by it, you know him, i ask him, you  
guys know each other, i ask, kind of  
surprised, there in the streets  
of new york, in the night, then  
suddenly alone i stay, on the corner of  
31st and madison, i don't care so  
the rain just floods down my face—

WHAT OLGA IS KNOWN FOR  
(OLGA ARRÓL NEVEZETES)

olga is known for not being able to  
speak english, just russian  
and always smiles surreptitiously, and  
otherwise is rather refined, and reserved  
and all, and looks at men with great under-  
standing, as if she knows well why we  
look at her with great understanding, so,  
olga doesn't speak english at all, can only communicate  
with anastasia, who, on the other hand, speaks english in  
such a way that you would think that many times  
in her childhood in new york, in central park, she  
was almost raped, and otherwise is exactly like  
a little pig, puffy and sweet, endlessly  
dreams of bernardo, she has wild, erotic dreams  
about bernardo, and one time she dreamed about  
taking bernardo's prick into her mouth, and then she  
told everyone about her dream, everyone except  
bernardo, of course, and so we told everything, that is,  
to bernardo, and he just laughed about the whole thing,  
he's actually not interested in women  
at all, poor anastasia has no idea, what disillusionment  
it would be if she knew, and olga doesn't  
even know, of course, just because she doesn't  
even speak english, because we've tried already

many times to tell her, i will never forget igal's  
gesticulations with which he attempted to explain this to her,  
that bernardo and joe and so on, she  
just looks at him, not taking in a thing, shakes  
her head, and when she finally understands,  
she still just looks at him, and doesn't want  
to believe him, doesn't want to think that all of  
anastasia's dreams are in vain, all those beauties  
and all that good that she dreams of, *all those happy  
fancies for nothing, for nothing,  
for nothing, for nothing—*

#### IOWA CITY

i'm going down some unknown street to its end, in  
search of some unknown house, it's nighttime, next  
to me strides some unknown *young woman in a purple  
wig*, we converse in english, it's nighttime, a  
hot end-of-august night, and i don't think that this  
stroll is ever going to end, and i don't think i want to  
put any end to this night, in the end of summer,  
nothing happens, it's just unbelievable that  
i'm here in this far-off land, this far-off  
wilderness, unbelievable that everything  
is nonetheless so familiar, and everything  
is the way it is, the unknown road, that it's  
familiar to me, the unknown city, too, and the night—

#### IN THE EARLY LIGHT (REGGELI NAPSÜTÉSBEN)

it's dawn, in my insomnia, i  
don't know what to do next, igal  
is rumbling in the kitchen, he wants  
me to wake up, but i don't feel much  
like having a conversation with him at  
six in the morning, bugs me, all that rumbling  
and it feels good to hear it, and suddenly

i'm asleep again, in a dream, i'm walking around  
tel aviv, on the beach, i feel the soft, warmth  
suck onto my bare feet as i walk, it  
feels nice, *mazl tov*, i hear, and there's  
igal, a bottle of wine in his hand, you don't  
drink, i tell him, but today's a holiday, he  
says, your holiday, he says because you  
get a lot of luck, he says it like that,  
a lot of luck, he never says things like that,  
either, i'd never really seen him so worked up,  
emotional, i'm stunned, he just splashes his bottle  
around, and waves at me with a  
large, black hat, and for some reason, i  
start laughing, and i'm still laughing  
when, with eyes wide open, i  
gaze about the room,  
in a very early light—

*Translated from the Hungarian by Nathaniel Barratt*