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Here and There with Igal Sarna

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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 NAPSÜTÉS BEN)

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