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The King

May 1995

The five Americans were without a care, drinking wine from plastic, liter bottles as they walked through the forest. In a glade in a glen, they came upon a group of mustached men. Each man wore a dark green hat. The men were laboring to push a cart loaded with wood up a slope.

The Americans weren’t aware that the men were Gypsies. The Gypsies supposed the Americans were from Germany. Had the Americans spoken, the Gypsies would have guessed they were from England—but not America. It was possible that no one from America had ever come to that remote place.

The Americans—three women and two men—set down the wine and their packs and helped the Gypsies push the cart. The load rolled right up to the path that angled through the glen. No word was exchanged, not even, “Köszönjük;” “Thank you,” in Hungarian.

The Americans were English teachers on a weekend excursion from Budapest. Of all of them, Lucy knew Hungarian the best. She had booked them a room in Új Huta, the village of their destination. Their plan for the following day was to wake up in Új Huta, take acid and trek to a castle.

When their wine was nearly gone, they realized they had lost the path that was supposed to lead to Új Huta. Ascertaining the stenciled trailmarkers they had been following must have been on felled trees, they squatted down and hunched over the map. Since they couldn’t determine which way they had come, they studied the map’s topographical lines and matched them to their surroundings. Several times they used this method to guess the direction of Új Huta.

The group marched over hills and through pathless valleys in search of the village. As fatigue set in, Justin or George, in flurries of frustration, would race ahead of the women to the top of the next summit, hoping for a sign of Új Huta, but none came forth. Exhausted, ridden with ticks and running out of daylight, they hiked back to the town where the bus had left them that morning. They had been looking forward to the trip for weeks. Returning to Budapest was out of the question.

A sudden storm drenched them as they entered the town. While they laid their things on the sidewalk to dry in the brilliant late afternoon sun, drunken townsfolk emerged unsteadily from their dwellings. In a country accent, a man informed them that no busses were leaving from there until the next day, nor was there any place for them to stay, except on benches in the train station.

On their way to the station night fell, and the temperature dropped by several degrees Celsius. George’s teeth were chattering. Eliza was feeling signs of her Crohn’s disease coming on.

Inside the draughty, unheated station, the group was shivering. A teenage passerby noticed them, hearing their English and George’s chattering teeth. She kept on going into the night, wondering what English speakers would be doing there. It occurred to her they must be stranded. She returned, hesitantly looked them over and then asked what they were doing. Lucy explained the situation in her passable Hungarian.
The girl was overcome with maternal feelings for the stranded souls in the cold night. She phoned her mother from the station’s pay phone. The group did not understand she was saying, but her tone of compassionate ardor was clear.

The girl’s mother soon arrived in a tiny car and drove them, in two shifts, to the nearest inn, which was in the next town, ten minutes away.

At the inn, the girl went with them to their room, to make sure they got all the way there. To express their gratitude to the girl, Maxine gave her a ring, right off her finger. They hugged. The girl swooned and was tearful. How important it is to appreciate noble girls.

George and Justin went to the inn’s lobby/bar to buy cigarettes. Mustached thugs in track suits were at the bar sullenly taking shots of Unicum. Such men at bars were common in Hungary. George was afraid of them. George was always afraid when people dressed and behaved the exact same as each other. Such people were governed by unpredictable forces.

In the morning the Americans hitched to Új Huta. Új Huta was one third of a tri-village area that included Óhuta and Harom Huta. A “huta” was a kiln. The prefixes to the village names meant “old,” “new” and “three.” The American’s village, New Kiln, was a dreamy, alpine place, aloft in the cool air of forested hills. The hotel they had planned to stay at was an aristocratic, turn-of-the-century chateau. They stopped and looked at it for a moment, lamenting yesterday, the day they had lost their way because Gypsies had felled the trees with the trailmarkers they had been following.

Sitting around a white table beside the local büfé (snack bar), they breakfasted on mimosa with white wine instead of champagne, hot dogs spiced with golden-brown mustard, and thick slices of bread. Afterward, they got a load of locally made wine that came in multi-liter plastic jugs and set out for the castle.

Beyond the outskirts of the village, they stopped by the side of the road and dropped the acid. A few minutes after it began to take effect, George had to poop. George always had to poop when he was in nature. Nature was like a laxative for him.

After explaining the situation to his friends, George traipsed into the woods. Once the road was out of sight, George perched his bottom on a small, fallen tree. As George relaxed through a cramp, he got distracted for a minute contemplating the organic spirit of American Indians. George was prone to such reveries. They were symptomatic of latent psychosis.

George had been worn down from the wars fought to free himself, first from his parents, who had pulped his identity—and then from his pulped identity. He had spent years harnessing his mind in order to participate in society. He had to be rigidly self-controlled to manage it, but had the persona of someone who was not. He had long hair, wore secondhand clothes, smoked, drank coffee, liked to party, played in a band, spoke frankly about bodily functions, and loved people enjoying being alive.
Sitting there, on the log, George focused on staying focused on pooping. George didn’t want his friends to have to wait for him. George’s bowels were gurgling. He had hot flashes and cramps. He moaned and leaned forward queasily. When the poop was finally on its way, Lucy yelled George’s name. His anus clenched up, burning hot. “George! George! George!” she kept calling through the woods, sounding like a car alarm.

“AAAAAAAAHHHHHHH!” George screamed to make her shut up.

When George rejoined the group, George asked Lucy, “Why were you yelling for me?”

“Because you were gone for so long,” she said, laughing crazily, her pupils dilated. Lucy was his girlfriend.

Walking on, they emerged from the pine forest to a scene of gentle green hills rolling out to the horizon. The hills were well-proportioned for making echoes. For a while, they amused themselves shouting and listening to the hills their bouncing voices. Following the echoes, they left the road and walked into the hills. In a few minutes the world behind was out of sight and nature enveloped them.

In a spacious hilltop meadow they tumbled in the grass and invented games. They called the meadow "the alien landing strip" and played in the sunshine.

They had to reach the castle a few hours before dark so that the Lucy, Maxine and Eliza could find accommodation and so Justin and George could locate a train to Budapest to make it to work on Monday. Too soon it was time to leave the meadow to follow responsibility back to the serpentine road turning through the hills.

A kilometer back toward civilization, they came to a hamlet called Mogyórocska (Little Peanut). The local folk were drunken, elderly and wearing black mourning clothes. A Polski Fiat coasted to a stop in the grass beside the hamlet shop. A collegiate-looking couple stepped from the tiny car. The boy was suited, in black, and the girl had on a black dress so short it was up to her fender. Her legs were clad in nylons and black, chunky high heels. George marveled at the pair, juxtaposed with the age of the locals, the mark of death in their colorless clothes, and the elysian hills extending all around without end.

Justin and George stepped inside the hamlet shop. Behind the counter, two schoolgirls came into view. They wore everyday clothing. Women in black, as old as roads, were looking on from chairs backed against the walls. At first, the Americans didn't see them because their pupils—dilated even outdoors—were slow to register forms in the dearth of light. Being American guys on acid, they were totally alien in the shadowy environment. In a subtle way, there was no guarantee tripping Americans had the right to exist there at all.

George and Justin were not really men, but useless children pretending to be men so that people wouldn’t be mean to them. The most they could do to honor the women in the shop was use proper forms of Hungarian address in greeting, but they were tripping too hard to try. Their goal was to keep themselves together long enough to get what they needed and get out without seeming too weird. Edgily, they purchased wine and cigarettes.

A half hour outside of Little Peanut, Eliza and Maxine took off their shoes because their feet hurt. They continued barefoot on the pavement. From the cool shadows behind a large hill, the group emerged onto a sunlit summit. Twenty meters further they came upon a donkey fettered to a slab of concrete embedded and encrusted with rusted metal. The women thought the creature was
sweet. It spooked George. When the women approached to pet the donkey it jerked at its tether and brayed with alarm. “It doesn’t like us. Let’s stay away,” Maxine said to Eliza and Lucy.

After the next turn in the road, the group was looking down into Fony (pronounced Foñ). All the structures in the village were cracked and eroded except for a whitewashed church that jutted indifferently into the sky, its steeple many times the height of the surrounding rooftops. The villagers themselves were way more plastered than their dwellings. A number were lying on the dirt streets. Others were eating grass. It was the type of place that spawned Budapest myths about country-people; myths such as the practice of cutting off a finger to get five thousand forints (thirty dollars) from the state health insurance.

As the strangers watchfully proceeded, the eyes of the village lingered on them with ire, as if there was something unacceptable about them. No one uttered a word. Once they were safely through, Justin said, “That was a crazy place.”

A few minutes later, three teenage boys, all on one bike, rode up from behind and stopped alongside the foreigners. Two of them hopped off. The shortest one made their acquaintance; asking where they were going, where they were from, what they did in Budapest and so forth. Lucy did all the talking. She liked meeting new people.

The short one did all the talking. He asked Justin questions, but Justin didn’t understand anything he was saying. He moved on to George, positioning himself between him and his friends. George tried to converse with the teen, but most of what he said was unintelligible to George. When he said so, the teen asked rhetorically, “You don’t understand?” and went on talking all the same.

Finally, George just ignored him, provoking a refrain of, “Hello! Hello! Hello! Hello! Four eyes! Hello! Hello! Four eyes! Hello!…” until George acknowledged him again. He demanded a cigarette from George. George obliged him.

The teen showed Lucy his tattoo. It read “King,” in English. He asked her, “What’s that say?”

“King.”

He said, “Who’s the King?”

“I don’t know.”

He leaned his tattooed shoulder toward her to make it more obvious who the King was, and repeated, “Who’s the King?”

“You’re the King,” she said.

“That’s right,” he said, “I’m the King…Who’s the King?”

“You’re the King.”

“That’s right. I’m the King. Who’s the King?” The game continued until the King was bored with it. He moved back to George and commanded another cigarette. George handed him one. The King tried talking to George, but George ignored him again. “Hello! Hello! Hello! Hello! Four eyes! Hello! Hello! Four eyes! Hello!” the King repeated.

For a half hour the King moved from one foreigner to the next, baiting and intimidating. The two, bigger boys just looked on. One of them was actually a gentle person. The other told Eliza and Maxine he was going to “fuck [their] feet,” which were still bare. They put their shoes back on.
There was a break in the harassment when all three boys crowded onto the bike to take advantage of a down-slope and rolled ahead of the group. They stopped to figure out some course of action. The King’s lackeys were bigger than Justin and George, the King smaller. It seemed very possible that the boys would become violent. Justin said he was a “chickenshit pacifist” and couldn’t fight. Otherwise, no one showed any fear. The wheat-colored countryside extended to the horizon in all directions. On the map they saw there was no intersecting road between Fony and the next village, called Vilmány. The decision was made to stay put and hail a car to ask for help, but no car came.

The teens doubled back, two on foot and one on the bike. The King shouted an order to stop to the one on the bike. He did like a disciplined soldier. While this was going on, the gentle boy made a circular motion near his ear, referring to the King for the group’s benefit. It was the vaguest consolation that he was aware of this.

The group started walking again. The harassment intensified. With Midwestern innocence, Lucy sternly told the King, “Please, be quiet. We are in nature.” This really agitated the King.

Maxine gave the boys granola bars as a peace offering. They were excited to get the treats. The King took a bite of his and spat it out. He said, “This isn’t food. It’s shit.” His lackeys spat theirs out, too, but sort of forlornly.

The King announced had a pistol back in Fony. As the Americans gawked helplessly at him, imagining being murdered on the vast, yellow plains, Maxine urgently alerted everyone that one of the boys had touched her breast.

The King had already gotten five cigarettes from George. He ordered another. This would have meant opening a new pack, which the King didn’t know George had. George said he was out. He muscled up to George and pounded his fist into his palm, threatening, “Give him another cigarette or I’ll beat your fucking face in.” George maintained he had none to give. George would rather have taken a blow than gone without nicotine.

As they passed over some train tracks, Vilmány came into view. The time to terrorize them was ticking away. The King said he was going back to Fony to fetch the pistol. He pantomimed drawing it, waving it around and firing.

A stone’s throw from the village, the King got in Lucy’s face, on her left side, and told her he was going to fuck her like a whore. It made George feel sick. He took hold of Lucy’s right arm to show them both that he was ready to protect her. As they entered the village, the King warned they’d be waiting for them and the boys backed off.

Straightaway, the group located a bus stop. The schedule showed that no more busses were coming that day. The first person they saw was a mild man in raggedy clothes, with few teeth, what Hungarians called a “peasant.” Lucy told the peasant about the boys. Almost in tears, but too proud to cry, George added that the boys were, “nagyon bunkó,” meaning something like, “very loutish.” Immediately after uttering the words, George worried they sounded effeminate or genteel. The peasant took all this in, but seemingly without concern and did not respond. Lucy told him the police should be alerted. As they entered the village, the King warned they’d be waiting for them and the boys backed off.

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The women, nearing middle-age, wore loose shirts, leggings and clogs, and smoked long, women’s cigarettes. They seemed more connected to the village than the enigmatic peasant. They went to look for someone to drive the panicked foreigners to the next town, but came back saying
everybody was too drunk to drive. Lucy reiterated the seriousness of the situation, and pointed out the boys, who could be seen in the distance, waiting for them.

“Are they black?” the women asked in a sensible tone.

The only black people the Americans knew of in Hungary were African students in Budapest. “No,” Lucy said, “They are from the village, Fony.”

“They are Gypsies! That’s what ‘black’ means. They’re black! Why didn’t you say so? Fucking Gypsies!”

“What about the trains? Do trains come to those tracks?” asked Lucy, pointing to the ones they had crossed en route to Vilmány.

“I don’t think so. Not now,” one of them said. Just then, at the corner of the horizon, the other spotted a short inter-village train with one passenger car. “My God! Look!” the village women exclaimed, “Here comes the train. If you run, you may catch it. Run! Run fast!”

As George was taking off for the train he dropped his pack so he could run faster and spouted out that he would make the train wait if he caught it. It was about a half kilometer to the stop. George sprinted heroically, as if chased by the murderous spirit of the Gypsies, but he didn’t come close to reaching it before it stopped briefly and pulled away without anyone getting on or off. George bent over with his hands on his knees and caught his breath, waiting for Justin to catch up to him. They continued to the stop and looked at the schedule. Another train was coming in an hour. They lit cigarettes and walked back to the village.

After they related the news about the train, Lucy reiterated to the Hungarian women that it wasn’t safe for the group to wait alone at the stop because the boys had threatened to harm them once they left the village. The women said, “We understand. You should have told us they are black. Fucking Gypsies.”

The sun was going down behind Vilmány. The women escorted the Americans for a few dozen meters, and then stopped to keep a watch on them from there till the train came.

At the stop, the group rested on the platform in the gentle evening light with their feet propped up on the rails. It was like heaven to be out of hell. They took photographs of the scene and spoke of feeling bound for life. Once they saw the train, and then boarded, their relief was deeper yet. The conductor’s eyes neutrally shined with sobriety and education.

At the station at the end of the line the group had a six-hour wait till the next Budapest-bound train. No workers were on duty at the single-room station. The room was spacious and clean. Hungarian train stations were always clean.

Outdoors there was no streetlight, headlight, house light or moonlight to speak of. The only indication that they weren’t in space was a saloon’s neon glaring fifty meters away in the pitch blackness. They would be able to buy cigarettes there. Justin and George tentatively stepped from the station into the darkness, wondering whether they ought to check it out. They saw silhouettes running through the glow of the neon and decided against it.

A fair-skinned, bearded man with a pack came in from the night. The group made his acquaintance. He was Polish, traveling by himself. They told him some of what happened earlier in the day. He said, “Yes. This is a wild place. It is like the Ukraine.”

Three boys, immediately identifiable as Gypsies, entered the station. They were a couple years younger than the threesome from before. An older, drunken Gypsy man followed them in. One of the boys smacked him in the face and the man went right back out. The boys shouted and
beat on garbage cans and the plastic windows, stalking menacingly around the room. Two Gypsy women with a baby came in. They huddled in a corner and shielded the baby from the boys. One of the boys walked up to the Americans and Pole to stare at them. He began ominously whistling a tune. The group pretended not to notice. George was thinking, “Fuck, fuck, fuck...” They were looking at six more hours of wrath—but the boys didn’t stay much longer. After all, it was getting late.

A train pulled into the station. Justin looked at the schedule to see where it was bound. It was going to Ukraine. Since it was an international train it would have a snack bar. The group had no food or water and their cigarettes were running low so Justin and George rushed aboard to purchase supplies. The train only sold junk food. They picked out a cake, some cookies, a two-liter bottle of Sprite and a pack of Marlboros. The prices were in deutschmarks. The cashier wouldn’t take their Hungarian money.

To his surprise, George had eight dollar bills in his pocket. There was no reason why he wouldn’t have known they were there, but he didn’t and there they were. The train could have pulled away at any moment. Had they dallied calculating the exchange rate of dollars to marks, there was a chance they wouldn’t be able to get off. George tossed the American money down on the counter in a crumpled pile and asked, “Okay?”

The cashier looked at the money as if it wasn’t what he really wanted. George and Justin turned and hurried off with the goods, touching down on the platform just as the train started moving.

The group passed the evening playing cards on the smooth, clean, concrete floor of the station and getting pasty mouths from the sugary sustenance.

When they arrived in Budapest the next morning, all except for George went home to their flats. George hustled to the underground and got on the subway to go teach. Thanks to the city’s first-rate public transportation, George was only five minutes late. He entered the classroom frazzled, dirty, and unshaven.

After finishing telling his class about the dramas of the weekend, George wished them a good summer and told them they could go. Before parting, the students presented George with a bottle of pálinka, a plum brandy, the national spirit.

Later in the day, standing with some ex-pat friends on a landing overlooking a quiet courtyard outside their flat—a flat George eventually moved into—he detailed the weekend from beginning to end, illuminating it with other stories from his life and reveries about the nature of evil. His friends listened attentively.
Author Notes

In 1998, when Amy George was still male, she undertook a quest that led her to communion with a higher state of being. Two years later, while living in monastic seclusion, her unconscious self suddenly became conscious, precipitating her unanticipated identification as female. In the years following, Amy changed sex physically. Since December of 2006 Amy has been writing “Ask the Dream Queen,” a dream-interpretation blog, for the online edition of the Cape Cod Times. In 2003 an excerpt from Amy’s memoirs, “Palinka: Lost in the Hungarian Countryside,” appeared in the Cape Cod Voice. In 2007, Amy’s memoir, “Call Me Sister,” was accepted for publication in Tarot World Magazine, for which Amy also writes reviews. In January 2008, Amy’s essay, “Borat: On the Soul of Comedy,” was published in Eclectica Magazine. In March 2008, a summary of Amy’s life-story was published on the cutting-edge, higher-consciousness website Reality Sandwich. In May 2008 Reality Sandwich featured “The Buddhas of New Zealand,” Amy’s essay on Paradise. In April 2008, a personal essay, “The Doctor and the Dominarix,” was accepted for publication in In Our Own Words: A Generation Defining Itself, a collection of Generation X writing.

About the Work

Half of my writing is autobiographical and the other half is dream interpretations and essays on esoteric subjects intrinsic to my life-story. Being firstly a memoirist, I have been jotting notes on the salient episodes of everyday experience, including selected pieces of dialogue, since I was a child. The more I know my life-story, the more aware I have become of what to keep and what to release in my writing. My writing and I grow symbiotically.

I have scribed six thousand pages of unpublished memoir in all. Of these, five manuscripts recount my life from 1992 – 2001, my most dynamic era. I periodically return to these manuscripts to make revisions, and find less room for improvement every time.

Anais Nin and Henry Miller both have been major influences for me.

Amy George on the Web

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