

Village Voices

In Our Own Words

Volume 12 Number 109

September 2018

PUZZLES

by Kevyn Malloy

Bending over the pieces of color, pure
and mixed
Look at the shape or the white space
around
Turn, ponder, let your eyes go hazy
with fog
The straight edges crossing the
jagged bit

Put the greens and blues on separate
trays
Stack them at side and top in
organized reach
When your brain begins to whirl and
sputter
Find the reds and yellows where they
meet in peach

The frantic turns peaceful, quiet, and
serene
Hours of undetected minutes go by
unsigned
Some nights you have to leave it, still
mystery
Sending echoes down the hallways of
your mind

ARYAN PLEASURES

by Gaby Kopelman

In 1935, Hitler promulgated the Nuremberg Race Laws, stripping German Jews of German citizenship and reducing them to the status of “Nationals,” subjects whose rights were severely curtailed. My family was Jewish, but not German—my father was a Russian émigré who’d left Russia in 1917. He was thus labeled “Stateless,” as were my Lithuanian mother and even I, born in Berlin in 1928. The racial laws applied to us as well, because we lacked a state to protect us.

For all Jews, charts were issued going back several generations. These charts defined in great detail exactly who was and who was not a Jew. A full Jew was one with three Jewish grandparents; anything less was taken care of by the two grades of *Mischling*, persons of mixed race. In tone and effect, these regulations were not unlike the Jim Crow laws of the American South. Above all, Jews were forbidden to marry or have any sexual relations with Aryan Germans.

Germany's 1935 Nuremberg Race Laws, as well the many other racial decrees that were passed subsequently, were not restricted to important matters. As did the Jim Crow laws, these reached down into the very crevasses of our daily life, excluding no Jewish woman, man or child, banning even such trivial childish pursuits as ice-skating, swimming and going to the movies.

Even Berlin's parks became a forbidden pleasure. For the Jewish students of my small Lutheran school, the little park facing the school, heretofore a favorite playground, became strictly off-limits. I still remember watching from the school's balcony as, amidst all that greenery, a group of workers installed the first *Judenbank*, a brightly painted yellow bench labeled "For Jews Only."

It was therefore an important event in our family when, in 1936, the year of the German Olympics, my mother managed to regain her Lithuanian citizenship. Undoubtedly, this was achieved by bribery and corruption on the part of my Lithuanian grandfather. For a bit more of the same, I, too, though Berlin-born, was eventually written into her passport as a Lithuanian national.

All this took time. It was a long, drawn-out process, involving many hours of waiting in the antechambers of ministries and consulates for this, that or the other document to be

processed. During those hours, my mother, always clutching a new set of papers, lost her usual good cheer and grew anxious and white around the nostrils—my mother's nostrils, finely delineated in contrast to my own potato-end of a nose, were always an indicator of mood. On these occasions, my mother would bring out the sugar cubes and the bottle of Valerian, the popular pre-World War II tranquilizer that she always carried with her. Carefully holding an eye-dropper, I would deposit that beetle-brown drop of Valerian onto a sugar cube. Once in a great while, I was allowed a tiny crunch of the stuff myself. It had a nasty, bitter taste, but I didn't let on and begged for it, usually to no avail, every time.

Finally one day, after many visits to one official or another, my mother and I emerged triumphant: we were Lithuanian citizens at last! Foreigners! Nothing, no one could touch us! We went straight to the KDW, Berlin's largest department store, where we bought two lapel pins, small Lithuanian flags, enameled green, red and yellow, and very pretty. It was a thrilling moment—I recall it vividly. I loved my little flag, and from that day on, never ventured anywhere without it securely fastened to my lapel.

Soon thereafter, my mother and I even went to the local cinema, the *Lichtspiel Haus*, a grand cinema at the *Ferbelliner Platz*, with the lapels of our jackets of course properly beflagged. Needless to say, this had to be kept a strict secret

from my Jewish friends who no longer had access to the movies. I remember little of the film, “Riders of the Pampas,” except that there were cowboys and that it featured a horse named “Chicolindo.”

It was not an enjoyable experience. In my mind’s eye, I can still see my mother sitting tensely on the edge of her seat, one hand inside the half-opened handbag resting on her lap, knuckles white, her hidden fingers gripping her new passport, ready to pull it out at once, should anyone challenge our right to be sitting there, enjoying such Aryan pleasures.

But no one did.

A VERY, VERY SHORT MYSTERY NOVEL

by Jay Vawter

FROM LAST CHAPTER . . .

There was something about him that she could not quite grasp, something, well, mystifying.

He pushed open the door and said, “Ya need some help?”

“I want to go home, just go home,” she responded weakly.

Taillights slowly disappeared over the horizon.

CHAPTER TWO

Now, nearly three years and a

beautiful baby daughter later, they were still in awe of the fate that had brought them together by the roadside on that dark and stormy night.

His old Chevy and somewhat crude language, “Ya need some help?” gave her pause about getting into the car with him, but when she leaned into the open door, she was surprised to see a charming smile and pleasant demeanor.

She was desperate to go home, so she took a deep breath and got in.

He had been a star athlete, honor student, and even a journalist on the high school paper. He received early acceptance to the University of Chicago and became the youngest person ever to earn a doctorate there.

His prizewinning thesis on astrophysics focused on the asteroid that crashed into the Yucatan 66 million years ago with the energy of millions of nuclear weapons, nearly ending life on Earth.

Now a top researcher at NASA, he was the nation’s leading expert on tracking asteroids. The nearest approach in recent years was only 17,000 miles, well inside the moon’s orbit.

That evening when he returned home late, she could tell at once that he was very disturbed.

“Hon,” he said. “We have a problem, a very big problem. This thing is huge, and all of our computer simulations show it on a dead track toward Earth.

The nuclear folks say there is nothing in their arsenal large enough to move it.”

Six weeks later a dark shadow slowly enveloped the city.

To be continued . . . or not.

EPILOGUE

As they stood in a park near their home holding hands, the sky steadily darkened.

It was the first total eclipse of the sun they had ever seen.

The asteroid had passed harmlessly into the void of the universe a few days earlier. When the asteroid was first sighted and the computers had shown it on a direct track to Earth, they had missed a small but critical factor, the gravitational pull of Jupiter, the largest planet in the Solar System.

Although only a slight nudge when the asteroid was still far from Earth, by the time it reached the Blue Planet that angle had widened enough for it to pass by easily, as a basic course of high school geometry would tell us.

As the sun reappeared, he gently said, “Sweetheart, let’s go home.”

THE END

FREE AT LAST: A SOUL-STIRRING VISIT by George Kurz

Upon arriving in Atlanta in 1981 for a scientific meeting of ophthalmologists, I found myself with a free afternoon, enough time to visit the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial. I had known about King’s leadership in civil rights, heard some of his speeches and seen him in the news, but never had I seen him in person.

Two years previously, I had discovered Coretta Scott King’s book *My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr.* in the living room of the home in Tanzania where I had stayed that summer. I was immediately fascinated by her stories, beginning with the trip to Sweden where King received the Nobel Peace Prize. Coretta King’s description of her own childhood, as well as Martin’s, was especially meaningful to me as I realized that they each grew up in the same country and at the very same time as I had. But what a different world it was for them—growing up black—compared with mine! I had developed an admiration for both of them. There was no doubt about how I would spend that afternoon. I was determined to visit the King Memorial.

I boarded a city bus and asked the driver to tell me where to connect with the subway train to the Memorial. The bus was hot and crowded. I stood most of the way. As virtually the only white

person aboard, I was somewhat apprehensive at first, but nothing out of the ordinary or threatening happened. At a downtown intersection, the driver instructed me to get off, cross the street, go downstairs into the subway station and take the eastbound train. I was grateful. The station was modern, spacious and attractive. This subway line was but three years old. Its cars were streamlined, among the finest I had ever seen. I disembarked at the second stop, King Memorial.

It was a chilly, gray day. I had only a thin raincoat. I buttoned it up and started on my way. The area I was passing through was a dingy, rundown neighborhood with warehouses and scattered old houses, quite a contrast from the attractive subway. I wondered about the wisdom of walking alone through this neighborhood. Was I in a place where a lone white person might be unwelcome?

I felt relieved to reach an intersection with a busy street, Auburn Avenue. On my right was the Ebenezer Baptist Church where I knew from Coretta King's book that Martin had preached. Finding that gave me a sense of coming home, perhaps because I felt so in tune with what Dr. King had stood for. I rounded the corner and proceeded past the church.

Just beyond the church was the King Memorial itself. It seemed so simple—just an open rectangle along the

sidewalk, about the length of a tennis court. The white marble tomb of Martin Luther King rested at the center of a circular island within a large reflecting pool. Seeing it above ground came as a surprise to me. A wreath lay at the foot of the tomb.

I watched as a group of eight or ten black people was leaving the island via a gangplank. It appeared that anyone could go out on the island, but to my disappointment, one of the men slid the gangplank away and put it aside. I lingered on the sidewalk, my eyes fixed on the words inscribed across the foot of the tomb, facing the street for all to see. I read, emblazoned on the marble: "Free at last, Free at last, Thank God Almighty, I'm Free at last." I was deeply moved. My heart pounded. I wanted to cry. In spite of the apprehension I had experienced on my walk from the subway station, I was now very glad I had made the journey.

At one end of the pool was a simple stone chapel with open doorways. I walked over close to the chapel which the group of black people had entered. A guide inside was explaining something about the chapel. A guard stood outside with a walkie-talkie in his hand. "Is this a private group?" I asked him, hoping to be invited inside to hear more about the chapel.

"Yes, it is," was the guard's only reply. Disappointed, I backed off and waited. As soon as the group left, I walked in. Inside was an unadorned square room

with bare walls and a bench on each of two sides. While I was alone inside, it struck me what a great man Martin Luther King, Jr. was—a man whom God had used to change the course of history for the better. At that point, a strong desire welled up within me to do something significant in my own life to change the course of history for the better. I stood in silence and drank in every moment.

I emerged from the chapel and paused at a spot as close to the tomb as I could get. I wanted to go onto the island and walk around the tomb, but the distance across the water to the island was too great to step across or even jump if I had been so audacious as to try. I thought of moving the gangplank into position to span the gap, but decided not to risk a run-in with the Atlanta police. Ordinary citizens like me needed to remain at a distance.

Inside a building at the far end of the memorial there was a reception area, gift shop and bookstore. To my surprise, I found a supply of old copies of Coretta King's book on sale for only \$3 each! A saleslady explained that they were not secondhand as I had assumed, but had recently been found stored away in the church. For two years, I had wanted to finish reading Mrs. King's book, but had been unable to obtain a copy in local bookstores. I looked over the posters with quotations from Dr. King and was struck by the depth of his thinking. I

browsed among the books by and about Dr. King and bought two, including the one by Coretta King.

Before leaving, I signed the guest register. I noticed that the two people who had signed ahead of me were from Zambia. According to the saleslady, one of them was the Zambian ambassador. Moreover the group that had visited the memorial ahead of me had included Mrs. King herself. Imagine! I hadn't even recognized Coretta King! And she had most likely been the guide who had been speaking inside the chapel!

Outside, I paused to read the words inscribed on Dr. King's tomb once more and pondered their meaning. Most likely he was looking forward to a day when all people in our nation could experience the kind of freedom I had grown up taking for granted. But now it seemed that he was saying from the grave that it was only there that true freedom from racial discrimination could be found.

A fine drizzle was beginning as I finally departed. I passed the Ebenezer Baptist Church, turned the corner, and retraced my path back to the subway station. Several old black men said "hello" to me. I replied to their greetings without hesitation. This time, I felt no apprehension about walking through the neighborhood. My mind was too full of the words I had read on the posters in the bookstore and on the tomb. Perhaps

King's words had helped to free me of my apprehension.

I wished I could have spoken with Coretta King and told her how much her book had meant to me. I uttered a silent prayer of thanks for the life of this man so sadly shortened by an assassin's bullet at 39 years of age. I thought of his words, "If a man has not found something worth giving his life for, he is not fit to live." Was he talking about having such a passion for justice or some other noble cause that we put our whole life's energy into it? Or did he mean that we must be willing to die for it? His own life exemplified not only the former, but, tragically, the latter as well.

The following days of scientific meetings were busy and full. But the strongest impact during my time in Atlanta that year remained the visit to the King Memorial.

“BEAM ME UP, SCOTTIE”

By Doug Meaker

These four words are the bane (and blessing) of my existence. The expression was invented in the late 20th century as a convenient way for screenwriters to change venues. Much the same as Shakespeare did in asking his audience to imagine the same square platform as the English Royal Court, or the French Court, or the

Agincourt battlefield, only this time we are aided by some sparkles and ghostly images. The other use for this device was to get the protagonists out of a jam, much the same as we solve predicaments in bad dreams by waking up.

But that was then and this is now, five centuries on. And, while my name isn't Scottie but is Xanafu Wringlefus, the idea, expression and name have stuck to the Chief Engineer of a Starship. They say that science and engineering follow the lead of sci-fi; this is such a case.

But it hasn't been and isn't as easy as that simple expression implies. I leave the operation of the ship, with its hyperdrives slipping through wormholes to different dimensions, etc., to my junior officers. As more recent graduates of the academies, they probably have a better feel for that technology than I do anyway, just so we get where in the universe the Captain says we are supposed to go when we are supposed to get there. I reserve the touchy matter of the Transporter Room to myself because I "grew up" with it and it's still as much an art as a science.

Learning how started very simply: finding out how to move an object such as an iron bar (one element with simple dimensions) from one place to another—first from one room to another and then from somewhere outside to a specific place inside. This was difficult to learn reliably; there were many bruises and much ducking to avoid

getting hit by the transported object. There were also problems making sure the bar was exactly what was started with.

After that, they moved on to more complicated molecular structures such as pieces of wood. Then they were ready to take on living, animate objects such as bugs and animals. One of the problems was to transport only the object(s) desired and not the surroundings; one does not need the bale of hay along with the calf—or maybe one does. Transporting living creatures was very challenging—how do you make sure to get all those thousands of complex organic chemicals in the right amount, right structure and right place? That took centuries.

Finally, they were ready to move on to sentient beings with training, thought and memory, all of which need to be preserved for the process to be of any use in exploring new, different worlds. They started with dogs and horses and finally bit the bullet and tried it out on human volunteers. And so here we are: “Beam me up, Scottie.”

That’s not to say there haven’t been glitches and mishaps along the way. They are still possible. Why, only last year we had one experience of trying to beam up an interesting specimen animal from a planet when the process experienced a lightning strike—frequent on that planet. The result was a mess! We had to taser it and we got

it all—we think—before we cast it over the side. Thank the stars we weren’t transporting crew members! But we’ve labeled that planet “You don’t want to go there.” Partly because of the risk of lightning and partly because we don’t know exactly what we left there.

So that’s a bit to fill you in on transporting—easy to say but hard and still risky to do.

“Scottie”

THE IRISHMAN by **Barbara Osterman**

Sean, the Irishman, disheveled from
his night on Galway,
steadied by his thornwood cane,
is blind to the glance of his eager dog.
One sweep of arm will send her flying
over rockbound hills,
a magic force to bring his sheep back
home.

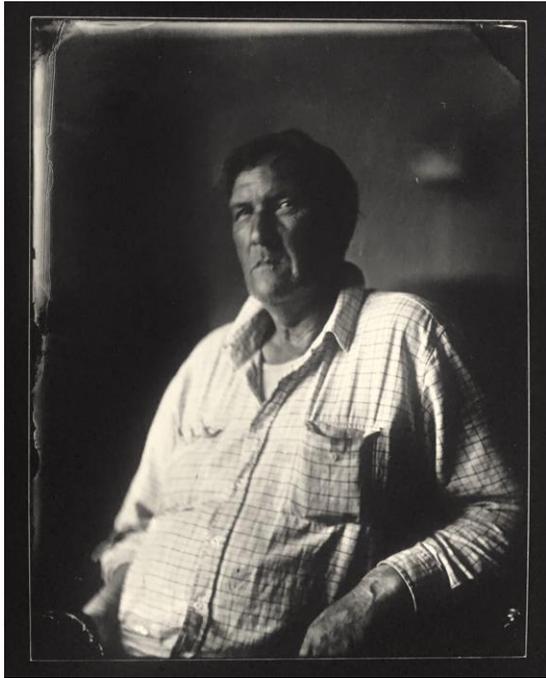
Sean, the Irishman,
huge frame hunching through
the cottage door,
thrusts forth a bag of turf,
his contribution to the warmth of tea,
then claims the shadow chair.

Sean, the Irishman, stands silent-tall,
one hand on rock-filled wall,
the other shading evening sun.
He gazes at the pale pink lake
and sighs as light reveals the one last
field of green.

Sean, the Irishman, leans at the bar,
hand clutching Guinness glass,
young women pulling at his sleeve,
he grins to hide his fear.

A few drinks on will find him
clutching waists
as he jumbles heavy-booted beats.

Sean, the Irishman, shaggy-knit
philosopher,
reaches out his hand to mine.
One tear appears as, in his lilting
voice,
he says, "I'll miss ye."



*The Irishman:
Sean Joyce, 1996,
County Mayo, Ireland
Photo by Barbara's daughter-in-law,
France Scully Osterman*

CROSSWORDS FOR DUMMIES

(A fill-in-the-blank poem)

by Anne Baber

What those puzzle makers go through
as they juggle the alphabet's letters
using words that none of us utters!
Oh, what would they do without ECRU!

Or the muse of poetry, ERATO?
Normandy town reduced to rubble: _ _ _ _ ?
Short for flooring before vinyl : _ _ _ _ ?
Or argot for therefore, ERGO?

Or that old SNL comic ARTE?
Nice time for an outdoor anisette: _ _ _ ?
The Abominable Snowman of Tibet: _ _ _ _ ?
Or before and against, ANTE, ANTI?

Or AROMA, a term for odor?
Or a song or a space, ARIA, AREA?
Or songstresses, EARTHA, ARETHA?
(Oh, Shrek's in vogue, like OGRE.)

Imagine the cruciverbalists' glee
coming up with new clues for ÉPEE
or top Reb General Robert _ _ _ _ .
And where would they be without ETUI?

How I wish that I'd known from the first
all the tricks up Will Shortz's sleeve
but nobody told me—that's my pet peeve
I didn't know formerly, formerly was ERST.

There's one more word that you must add,
if you're going to be a super solver,
if you'll never be stumped ever:
Oh, be glad you have EGAD!

GOT SOMETHING TO SAY?

Poetry & Prose
7 p.m., Penn Hall
Thursday, October 11, 2018

The poet James Russell Lowell said,
“Blessed are they who have nothing to
say
And can’t be persuaded to say it.”

If you, however, have something—
either poetry or prose—to say, please
take part in this delightful Pennswood
tradition.

Contact Paulina Wilker at 908-528-
0634 or paulinadearl@gmail.com by
Monday, October 1, to participate.

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