



NUDNY
NOVINY

Praha (Prague)
JP. Galligan

NUDNY NOVINI

Third in the series:

GALLIGANSTRAVAILS, a guide for the common traveller

Volume One: PARIS, Chronique Enneusis

Volume Two: MADRID, Chronica Abburida

NUDNY NOVINY, by JP. Galligan (c. 2001)

DEDICATION:

for L.L.S.D.

[Mozne Je Vesechno, Dekeu

(I know you know who you are)]



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EPITAPH

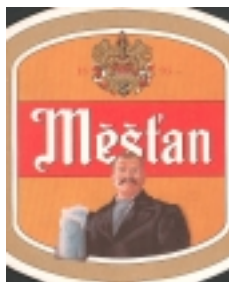
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Taxi Praha

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Jui Blazej, driver

“GOODLUCKSTANDBYME”



Chapter ONE

Berty zepravy, takove jake jsou

(Accept the information at face value)

10.11.01 - 12:12PM

Ruzne Airport, Prague

Gate 32, Flight OK050

Departure: 12:35PM

Prague to JFK

Settling into my seat, I check my notepad, a 4x5 paperback notebook that I picked up in a corner store, my first day in Prague, in which I've written down everything I've done, or needed to do over the past ten days. On the page headed Sobota (Saturday) Listopad (November) 10, I'd written "CSA Airlines, Praha to JFK, 1:30PM."

This is typical. For some reason I always miscalculate departure times. Just ask my daughter Lydia. London to JFK, San Juan to JFK, Paris to JFK. JFK to Chicago. The list goes on and on. Luckily, I'd given Steve a copy of my itinerary last night, for safe keeping and true to his word, he came to Belgicka, 3, the apartment in the Vinohrady district



a good 20 minutes before the time we actually needed to leave for the airport. That gave us time to drive past “Fred&Ginger”, Frank Gehry’s signature building, on the banks of the Vltava River, just south of the new, Stare Mesto, part of the old, Nove Mesto, section of Prague.

We pulled Steve’s Skoda four-door wagon into the first available parking spot and I jumped out and ran across Rasinovo street to get a good prospect on the building. The sun was streaming in from behind, which put the structure into an interesting silhouette, the sun shining through the glass crown on Fred’s head. Snip, snap. A few quick grab shots of the river, swans, the tram and some of the 11th century buildings surrounding Gehry’s fantastic modernist construction, then we were back on the main street headed north to the airport. Cruising past Karluv most (Charles Bridge), we drove across Manusev most, one of the main bridges, and climbed a hill which is surmounted by Prazsky hrad (Prague Castle) and I made some pictures out the window. Turning around, I was able to get good pictures of Prasna vez Mihulka (the Powder Tower), Petrinska rozhledna (Petrin Tower), Staromestska mostecká vez (the Old Town Bridge Tower), Chram Matky Boží (the towers of the Church of Our Lady before Týn), Novomestska radnice vez, (the tower of New Town Hall), and finally Katdrála sv. Víta, Václava a Vojtěcha (St. Vitus, St. Wenceslas and St. Adalbert Cathedral) off in the distance.

Unfortunately, it was a whirlwind tour, but fortunately, I did see everything with enough time to spare, that I arrived at the airport thirty minutes early. Hardly like the Albany Airport, where I arrived two-hours and forty minutes early because, when I called to ask, they told me I needed to be there three hours before departure to insure that I cleared all of the necessary requirements for international travel, in these times of heightened security.

Lillian got me there early and then it took 11 minutes to check in, so I had a few hours to kill. Luckily, Sharon was working in the airport gallery, so I hung out and helped her proof-read the text for her upcoming exhibition of wacko collections that people in the Capital District, many of them artist friends, have assembled over the years: toy trucks, weather vanes, old trains, old dolls clothes, wooden dinosaurs, etc. Everything representing one or another obsession on the part of the collectors.



"You did?"

"Yes," she says, "not a lot, but definitely snow, on the ground, near my brother's house, where I was visiting, on the outskirts of Prague."

"That is odd," I reply, "but I saw some snow myself yesterday, and I really froze my butt."

"How's that?"

"I was up on the top of the Prague TV Tower, the tallest structure in the city, on a hill in the Jarlslov district."

"Yes, I know it," she say, "but what were you doing there, having dinner."

"Nei," I answer, "I wasn't inside the observatory, I was outside, on the roof, taking photographs."

"You're a photographer?"

"Right, that's why I was in Praha, to do some photography."

Anyhow, I'm out on the roof on a 50x50 foot platform which has a one foot high perimeter wall around it, leaning over the edge, trying to get the best birds-eye-views of the city, and trying not to lose my balance, when my foot slipped and I found myself sliding on some snow."

"That sounds dangerous," she says.

"I suppose, but sometimes you've have to go to the edge for your art."

"You're an artist?"

"Of a sort," I tell her. "I do photography, computer graphics, installations of pictures and other objects, make constructions, and try to put as much of it as possible on my website."

"The web is great, isn't it?" she says.

"For me, sure."

"No, really," she says, "I got my tickets for Prague using the web. Jan, my ex-husband, got me the tickets by using an on-line auction. You go there, pick your destination, and then make an offer on the tickets. Just for fun

FRANKFURT

PARIS



Chapter TWO

Prvni dousek povzbudichut na celou lahev.

(A first sip whets the appetite for the whole bottle)

"Excuse me, I think that is my seat."

I am shaken from my reverie by a petite woman in her mid forties, with close cropped hair. I've got my stuff all over her seat, next to me.

"Pardon." I reply, "I'll move this right away."

"Nei problem," she says.

I grab take my drink from her tray table, grab my stuff and she sits down next to me.

"It's certainly a beautiful day out today," I tell her.

"Yes it is, and it's been beautiful the entire ten days I've been in Prague," she says. "Except for yesterday and the night before, when it was rather cold. In fact," she continues, "yesterday I saw snow."

I offered \$50 for Prague, but of course it was rejected, so I just kept upping my bid by \$100, until finally, for \$450, I got the tickets. Of course you don't know until you confirm your bid, which airline you'll be flying. As you can see, I got Czech Airlines, but they're good. Well, they're better now, than they were ten years ago, the last time I flew home."

Chapter THREE

Musel Jsem pres vedcit tatu, aby souhlasil vice za vzdelani.

(I had to twist my dad's arm to get him to agree to pay for more education.)

"You're from Prague?" I ask.

"Yes, I was born here, in Liben, across the river from Holesevice. I left Prague in the 70's with my husband, now my ex-husband, to get away from the repressive government of those days. We moved to Texas and then to Chicago, which has a large Czech population, I lived on Kedzie and Cermak."

"I know the area," I tell her.

"Yes?"

"I went to art school in Chicago, in the 70's. The American Academy of Art, downtown, beneath the "EL"."

"You mean that beautiful elevated subway. It looks alot like the trams of Prague except the tracks are way up above the street," she says.

"How did you end up in Chicago?"



"I was raised in Kenosha, in Wisconsin, north of Chicago, and when I graduated high school, I chose to move to Chicago."

"I've been to Kenosha," she says.

"You have?"

"Yes, we used to have to drive there to retrieve our nephews or our neighbors sons, who had gone to Kenosha to drink. There were much more liberal drinking laws in Wisconsin than in Chicago."

"I remember."

"So," she continues, "we'd drive, in the middle of the night, retrieve the drunken boys; well, actually we'd stuff them in the back of the car, then we'd find a motel and stay the night. I remember Kenosha as a beautiful city on the shore of Lake Michigan, which looks a lot like the ocean."

"Orson Welles was born in one of those houses on the lakeshore," I tell her.

"Really?"

"Anyhow, I used to travel around Chicago alot, riding the train, or the bus, taking photographs and exploring, so I was in your neighborhood many times. I remember it being a very eastern-european part of town, with lots of interesting resturants and shops."

"Yes," she replies, "but after a while we left, my husband, well my ex-husband, and I and moved to Palm Beach where we live now, well, not together, you understand."

"Uh-huh."

Chapter FOUR

Dostal povyseni zato, ze poslouchal sve ho sefa.

(He got the promotion by licking the bosses boots.)

"So," she says, "what were you doing outside on the Telivizni Vez?"

"I've been working on an art project. It's complicated to explain,"

I tell her, "but basically, I was trying to get a signal picture of Prague which would somehow represent the ancient, 1000 year old city and, at the same time, suggest the new epoch in Prague's development, which is really comparatively in its infancy."

"And?"

"On one of the first days, at lunch, I was walking to my friend Steve's office, situated just below the tower, I looked up and saw these gigantic baby figures climbing up the legs of the tower and balanced on the edge of a few of the projecting observatory chambers. 'That's it,' I said to myself, 'I've got to get up there and take a closer look.' I snapped a few pictures, from the ground, and hurried over to Steve's."

"Who is this Steve?"



"An old friend, from my Albany, where I live now, who moved to Prague ten years ago. He's been working in film, radio, voice-overs, dubbing, translating, and most recently as the public relations person for the largest internet provider in Europe, Tskali."

"I know them," she says, "that's the provider my brother-in-law uses."

"Actually, it's funny, that he's a P.R. guy, because that's what his character was when he was still living in the states, in Miami. He had a part on "Miami Vice" where he played the P.R. guy for Don Johnson's character's wife, played by Gloria Estafan."

"I know that show," she says. "I watched it when we first moved to Florida, and I've seen it a bunch of times, late at night, on re-runs, like Nik-at-Night, or something. Actually, I even saw it the other night, at my brother-in-law's house, dubbed into Czech."

"Yeah, I noticed that the TV was full of old american shows, but everything has been dubbed. I suppose that's some of the work Steve was doing, but I don't know that he ever dubbed himself from the "Miami Vice" appearances. That didn't last all that long for him, and then he left Miami, for Prague. Now, he's married to a Czech woman, Jitka, they have a two year old son, Pavel, and are expecting a daughter early next year."

"That's nice."

Chapter FIVE

Pre zident odmiti s polvpracovat s obchodnim magnatem
(The President refused to play ball with the businessman.)

"Speaking of Czech TV," I continue, "before I came here, I was determined that I would see the naked weather lady..."

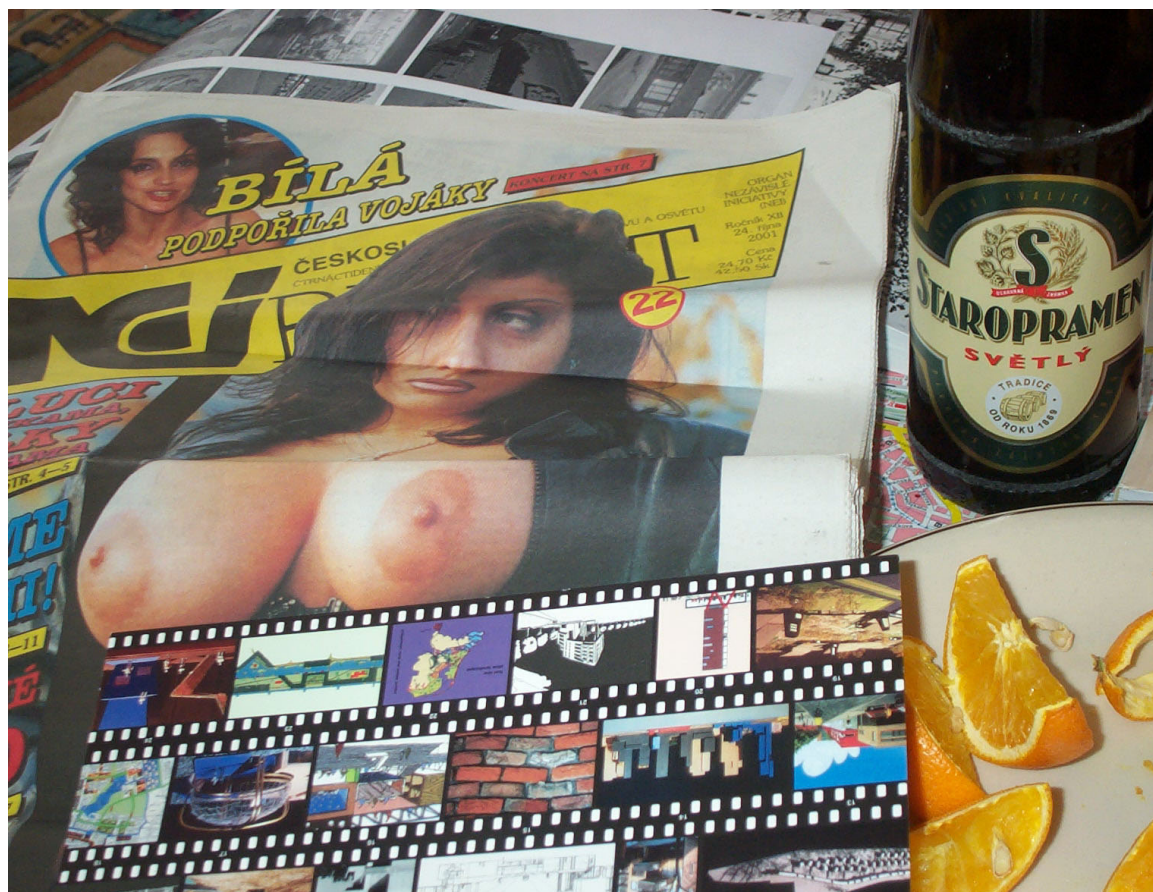
"Oh, you mean 'Pocasicko'," she says.

"What's that mean?"

"Little weather. It's a very short program, on the NOVA station, right before a really racy program called 'Pericko'."

"That's funny," I say, "they rhyme. But, tell me about the weather show. I was never able to find it, mostly because I couldn't interpret the TV Guide, at least by name, I didn't know what I was looking for, and Steve doesn't watch TV."

"Actually it's very simple," she says. "First you see a window, from the outside, looking in, curtains on both sides, then a naked women shows up, in the window. There's no sound, just her, and then, she stoops down, the camera moves in closely,



and she picks up her panties, and puts them on, rather seductively.”

“Hmmm...”

“Meanwhile, at the bottom of the screen, you see a scrolling bar, which is starting to give the weather statistics. Rain, snow, cold, hot, whatever, and the women continues to dress, until finally, as the weather data is finishing, she’s fully dressed, appropriately for that day’s weather. And then, a man comes out and... you know, I can’t remember now, if he’s dressed, and then gets undressed, or the other way around. I was watching with my father, he’s 75. He watches this show every night. But the one you want to see comes right after the weather, also on the NOVA, which, by the way is the station that’s owned by the Czech man, Zelezny, the one who just ran off to hide from the police, who are looking for him because of his dealings with the american businessman, the important perfume man who sometimes goes quail hunting with Mr. J., my boss in Palm Beach...”

“You mean the owner of Revlon?” I ask her.

“Yes. That’s him,” she says, “he’s suing the Czech government for 30 billion crowns...”

I do a quick calculation in my head. Divide by three and multiply by ten.

“Whoa, that’s almost 100 million dollars,” I tell her.

Chapter SIX

Dychtíve čekala na telefon od svého přítele.

(She waited with baited breath for her boyfriend to call.)

She continues, "that station, NOVA, has another, much steamier show, right after the weather show, 'Pocasicko' . A game show called 'Pericko', little feather, you know, like the kind you'd use to tickle someone under the nose. 'Pericko' sounds a lot like pechko which, if you don't know, is a dirty word in Czech for a woman's sex..."

"How funny," I tell her. "Steve used to do a radio show, when he first came to Prague, an early morning drive time show..."

"Talk?" she asks.

"Right," I say, "and music, and humor. He had a part of his show where he'd give examples of those kinds of words. Sound dirty in English but normal in Czech, and vice-versa. But, tell me about the game show..."

"Six men and two women are on the stage, with a hostess," she explains. "The women talk to the hostess about their boyfriends and then they play the paper and

rock game, we call it “Snick/Snack”, and the one who wins picks one guy who reminds her of her boyfriend. Meanwhile, all these young men have taken off their shirts. Oh, and the women are sitting on chairs which look like lips...”

“Lips?!”

“Uh-huh, soft, red, pliant. Then, the couple get down on the floor, on a circular rug in the center of the stage, and make sex. I couldn’t believe it!”

“Me either,” I tell her. “Then what?”

“Well, I don’t know,” she says, “my father switched the channel.”

“To what? Football?”

“Hockey,” she says, “By the way, my name is Eva.”

“Nice to meet you, Eva,” I tell her. “My name is Jan, though while I’ve been here in Prague, I’m being called Jan [ed. pronounced like “yawn”].



"Or Honza," she says. "That's what I call my husband."

"You mean your ex?"

"Oh no, my husband now, though my ex-husband is Jan, too. There's a lot of Jan's in Prague; it's like the national name. My ex-husband's mother called him Honzecka."

"All my life I've been the only Jan around, so I've really enjoyed these days. Normally I get called Jack, Dan, John and lots of other variations..."

Chapter SEVEN

Jeho budoucnost byla ponechána osudu.

(His future was left hanging in the balance.)

"So Jan," she asks me, "how did you end up on top of that tower freezing your butt? And why weren't you dressed warmer?"

"Who knows?" I say.

"I'd say it was bad planning... but, go on."

"Alright. So, I ask Steve about the babys and he says that they are the work of the most well known and notorious artist in Prague, DavidCerny, who got famous for painting a soviet tank, left over from the occupation, pink. Actually, I'd heard about that, somewhere..."

"I loved that," she says, "and of course there's his version of the statue of Prince Wenceslas riding the horse, in Wenceslas Square..."

"Yes, I saw that one from a distance," I tell her.



“But you should have seen the other version,” she continues, “he made one where the horse hangs upside down, the neck long and the head and the tail almost touching the floor. Prince Wenceslas still rides the horse, only this time he’s sitting astride the stomach, flag held high. The inscription on the original statue says, in Czech, ‘MILUJTE SE PRAVDY KAZDEMU PREJTE’, Be true to yourself and to others, in english. But on this artist’s version, the inscription reads ‘MOZNE JE VSECHNO’, Everything is possible,” she says.

“Yeah, I’d heard some of that,” I tell her. “What happened was, the next day, I’m in Holesovice, meeting with David Chisholm, an american expatriat architect who is leading an effort to convert an old brewery from the turn of the century, into a modern office, retail, art and entertainment complex...”

“In Holesovice?” she says, “You mean the Pivovaru Mestan?”

“Yes, that’s the one.”

“My father worked there, for many years, until it closed, about five years ago, just after he retired.”

"That's why I'm here," I say. "I've been investigating that project, which is being developed by some friends in New York, and the plan is, when I return, I make these investigations into an art work..."

"Like what?"

"Well, I'm still working on that," I tell her. "Anyhow, at lunch, with David, as he's explaining to me the difficulties of satisfying the demands of all those involved, a real collection of egos, he says; well, they've got two big name architects on the project. The man who did the 'Dancing House/Fred and Ginger' and a frenchman, Jean Nouvel."

"He's the one who made 'Zlaty Andel' isn't he?"

"You know this?"

"Everyone in Prague knows the building with the giant angel-man, and the facade covered with the poems of Apollinaire, Kafka and others; speaking about Prague."

"O.K.," I say, "So, I interrupt David to tell him about the babys, and he says 'you mean DavidCerny's 'Miminka'? David is a good friend of my partner, Vit, they went to the National Academy of Art, here in Prague. Do you need to talk with him?"

"I thought maybe he could help me get up there, next to the sculptures," I say.

"Here," says David, taking out his cell phone, "I'll call him for you."

David, the architect, hands me the phone, and I explain to David, the artist, what I want to do.

"No problem," he says, "I'll call the building manager and set up an appointment for you. What time do you want to go?"

"Anytime that's convenient," I say.

"No good," says David the architect. "If there's anything I've learned in the ten years I've been here, is you have to be precise. Give him a time."

"How about 10AM tomorrow?" I say.

"Done," says David the artist. "I'll call you right back."

"The next day, I'm on the promintory, taking photos, and I almost plunged over the edge, when I slipped on the snow..."

"Lucky for you," says Eva.

"Uh-huh."

Chapter EIGHT

Slysel jsem, ze Davide y Davide jsou... K certu, on je tady. "Ahoj Davide!"

I heard that David and David... Speak of the Devil, there he is. "Hi David!"

"Tell me more about this project," she says.

"Here, I've got a bunch of pictures," I tell her, pulling a ream of papers from my pack.

"Hmmm," she says, "it looks a little like both of those other buildings."

"That's it," I tell her, "It's like Fred and Ginger go dancing with the Golden Angel - a sort of threesome."

"Very interesting," says Eva. "But, this reminds me of a story," she continues.

"What does?"

"This movie they're showing. It's about the composer, Anton Dvorak."

"Oh yes," I say, "I saw it on the flight over. Dvorak is an aging man, still looking

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LOAN

for his big success, working with a group of young apprentice composers, when he is approached with a commission to write a requiem. The contractor, however, is El Diablo, the Devil himself. Anton's wife urges him to take the money which they need desperately. He does, but then spends the rest of the film regretting this choice and plotting to get out of the arrangement, meantime obsessively creating the composition. We watch him struggle with his conscience, his wife, his muse, all the while, the devil lurks around checking Dvorak's progress. To make a long story short, at the end, Dvorak finds a way to return the money, breaking the contract, effectively beating the Devil."

"Interesting," says Eva.

"But, what about your story?" I ask her.

"You're Irish aren't you?"

"That's right."

"What do they call those little green men, the tricksters?" she asks.

"Leprechauns."

"In Czechoslovakia, we have our own little green man, the Vodnik. He lives in the pond and sits on a willow tree. He wears a black tuxedo, and water drips from the tails of his jacket. What we call, the frak. He has long hair, and usually is rather ugly, like a frog. You can see him best under a full moon. He's sewing, buttons, or shoes, or maybe a jacket. The Vodnik is the subject of one of Dvorak's operas 'Rusalka', or maybe it's Smetana, sometimes I get them confused. In the opera, there is a young girl, in her twenties, living in the water which surrounds a castle where the young prince lives. The girl is a spirit, and sings to the prince. The sprite's singing is so beautiful that the prince is lured into the water where he drowns. The girl is the daughter of the Vodnik, who in the end, sings a song of impossible love. Do you want to see some pictures?" asks Eva.

"Of course," I reply.

Chapter NINE

Mam strasny hlad. Pojdme obedvat.

(I'm running on empty. Let's have lunch.)

These are pictures of my employer, and his wife. That's him and there is his painting, by Monet. Mr. J. was on '60 Minutes' the other day. About the painting. He bought it at Christie's art auction, or Southeby's, I get them mixed up. Now, there's a family which claims the painting was taken from them during the war, by the Nazis, or they sold it, to save themselves, now, they want it back. Mr. J. doesn't want to give it up. He says he has all he paperwork to prove its history."

"There must have been a lot of reporters at the house."

"No, he went to them. He doesn't like reporters at the house," she says, "and here, this is the swimming pool, indoors. I get to use it at night, after everyone is asleep, around midnight. It's beautiful at that time. Here's my dog, Asta, after the Thin Man's dog, and these are Mr. J.'s dogs, Lilly Sprite, and Sparky. This is my cat, Thinker, as you can see, she's very black. She was a stray when I found her, but now, she's like one of the family to us. And here is Mr. J., on one of his quail hunting trips in Scotland."

"Wow! It looks like they shot a hundred."

"Yes, they always get many, and we serve them at parties. I cook them.
That's my job."

"Do they dine formally?" I ask.

"Yes," she says, "I always set the table carefully. They like it elegant."

"What do you cook?"

"They like meatloaf, steak, potatoes, though Mr. J. is now on that diet."

"From a doctor?"

"No, from that book, Eakins, or Atkins, I get them confused. And here is my husband, Honza with my ex-husband, Jan. We're driving around Palm Beach."

"Both? Together?"

"Sure," she says, "it's O.K., They get along. They both like sports, and bars.
Here is a picture of the reindeer, for Christmas. Mr. J. had it made, from
plywood and I put little white lights around it."

"Interesting," I say.



Chapter TEN

Nakonec Stejne dostal, cosizaslouz.

(He eventually got his just deserts.)

"Do you know about Christmas in the Czech Republic?" Eva asks.

"Just a little," I tell her. "Steve and Jitka were telling me, but please, explain."

"Eva, that's me; my day is December 24. In the Czech Republic everyone has his name day. On the 24th we have three persons who come to your house to make a visit. Mikulas, the father. He has a bag of gifts and he is with Andel, who is good and nice, but also he is with Cert, who is not so nice. Cert carries a heavy metal chain and a long stick, with three points."

"A trident."

"Right. So they come to your house, knock the door, and you, the child, are hiding behind your mother's skirt, while your father opens the door and invites them in. Then, they ask you, one at a time, first Mikulas, "Have you been good?" And you're shaking, about to cry - but you whisper out "Yes...", very low.



And Mikulas gives you a chocolate. Then Cert, he says, "Have you been good?" And you can't speak. He says, "Did you bite your nails?" And you know you did, so you squeek, in a tiny voice, "Yes...", and he gives you a lump of coal."

"What's this picture?" I ask her.

"That's me, making dessert, for a party. We don't do such big parties anymore, maybe only 50 people now. But this dessert, it's a favorite. You take a nice clean glass bowl, fill it with fresh blueberries. Then you mix together some cream and sour cream and cover the berries. Finally, on top you sprinkle brown sugar. In a moment, the sugar melts. It's delicious."

"Sounds great, I'll have to try it. Eva, have you noticed that the sun is still right there, beside us?"

"Of course."

I've always thought that if you could fly fast enough or high enough, that you could match the rate of the earth spinning and then, instead of going somewhere, you'd just sit, in the air, moving over one location..."

"And did you go to the Charles Bridge?" she asks me.

"Yes," I lie.

"And you saw the statue of the prince who stands on the shore, below the bridge?"

"Uh-huh."

"And he waits for his country to call him, in her time of need."

"Go on."

"There's another like that, only it's more in the country, in the mountains, the Blanik mountains, and there are the Blanicti Rytiri, who live in the mountains, unseen, led by Jan Zizka (the one-eyed man) another Honza, who is the Vidce, the one in front, who absorbs the first blows - the leader, who waits for the nation's call."

"Given all that's happened to Czechoslovakia over the years," I say, "you have to wonder what it will take to make them emerge."



Chapter ELEVEN

Dite malem spadlo, ale ja jsem ho chytíl prave včas

(The baby was about to fall, when I caught her, just in the nick of time.)

The next thing Eva shows me is not a photo, but a printout from her computer.

“From some emails,” she says. “I get them all the time.”

This one says: I CAN ONLY PLEASE ONE PERSON PER DAY. TODAY IS NOT YOUR DAY. TOMORROW EITHER.

“Funny,” I tell her, handing her a printout of the picture of me, standing on top of the Praha TV Tower. Actually it’s two pictures, paired. On the right, I’m standing, frozen in the wind, next to one of the Cerny babys, perched precariously on the edge of the roof.

“Jan,” she says, “in this picture you look just like the famous Czech movie actor, another Honza, Jan Triska. Triska means small twig, like a sliver. He made movies with Milos Forman, before Forman moved to Hollywood. Triska looks a lot like that french actor, Belmondo. I often get the two of them mixed up.”

The other photo, on the left shows the old part of Prague, Stare Mesto, but it is partially obscured by the baby, in the foreground. Not the whole baby, just its hind quarter, the butt.

"Eva," I ask her, "what is the Czech word, the sweet one, the one a mother would use when talking to her baby about this part?"

"That? Oh, we call that Prdelka, it's the diminutive of Prdel, a not very polite word in the Czech language - but this way, for the baby, the use is a good one."

"Oh," I say, "I get it. Like a predeliction..."



Chapter TWELVE

Nikdo prome nikoy nebude vic dulezitejse nez moje rodina, moje pokrevni pribuzenstvo.

(No one will ever be more important to me than my family, my flesh and blood.)

I bolt upright. Startled by a sound, from inside my head. I'm in bed. My bed?

I'm not sure. It's dark outside and in the room. I grope around, and grab a little statue of a man, I can feel his hat. I know him well. He wears a black suit, white shirt, black tie, he stands, one foot slightly in front of the other, hands behind his back. He has a small moustache and a white handkerchief in his pocket. His hat, a homburg is creased down the middle. His hands are clasped, behind his back.

I've looked and held him many times since I first found him in a botanica in Santa Olaya, Puerto Rico. I never learned his given name, but he is a doctor by profession. I call him Franz (Franco in Spanish).

Getting my bearings, I can hear Lillian breathing next to me, feel her warmth.

I've been dreaming, or dreaming that I was dreaming, or having two dreams at the same time, one next to the other, in different languages, simultaneously, one dream translating the other, like mirror images reflected back upon themselves.

I'm in all the mirrors, looking at myself, looking at myself looking at me. Where



am I really? I'm not sure, and where am I going? I don't know that either, but for the moment, hearing my daughter stir in her bed in the next room, thinking of my son, Shanan, turning over in his sleep, next to Stephanie, in the midwest, only a block from where I lived when I was his age, before I left him, taking myself east, to try something new; I'm ready; whatever happens.

CODA, 1

I go downstairs and use Lydia's computer to check my email. I don't find any answers to the notes I dreamed I was sending. I've got a couple of new messages, offering me exercises to make my penis bigger and three different notes with offers for Viagra substitutes. Then, at the bottom of the new notes for today, I find one from praxis@worldmail.cz:

Subject: Have not yet erased you from the memory of my cell phone
Date: Sobota 10 Listopad 2001 19:56:57 +0100

Jan: Just a note to welcome you home and to say how strange it feels that I won't see you tomorrow. As I said, you seemed less a tourist and more like another of my emigre friends here. It was terrific to see you and watch your work in progress. Hope that Prague found its way into your heart. Perhaps you already know Kafka's famous comment about the spell his native city casts: "Prague won't let you go. This mother has claws." They are buried deep in me.

The Mother of All Cities, they also call it, in addition to The City of a Hundred Spires.

It was another gorgeous sunny day today (cold), and we all went for a ride downtown on the subway at P's insistence. Looked around, hoping to see you capturing signs, shop windows, and anachronistic juxtapositions with your camera, but you were nowhere to be found...

Looking forward to your return.

Steve



CODA, 2

I pick up a book from the floor next to my bed, and grab the flashlight I use to read things in the dark, when everyone else is sleeping. It's Max Brod's translation of Kafka's 'Blue Octavo Notebooks', written, according to Brod, who found them among other things in Kafka's posthumous papers, on eight little blue octavo notebooks "of the kind we used to call 'vocabulary notebooks' at school..."

I turn to the page marked "November 10. Bed."

"Do not let Evil make you believe you can have secrets from it," he writes.

"Leopards break into the temple and drink in the dregs what is in the sacrificial pitchers; this is repeated over and over again, finally it can be calculated in advance, and it becomes part of the ceremony."



EPIGRAPH

Sedel jsem tam v dopravni zacepe na ceste k letisti, a citil jsem se bezmocne.

(There I was, sitting in a traffic jam, on the way to the airport, tearing my heart out.)







AFTERWORLD

by Steve Fisher

11.12.01 - Prague

Readers of Jan Galligan's recounting of his recent departure from Prague, entitled "Nudny Noviny", are advised to keep in mind the physical and emotional state the author was under during the entire length of his brief stay in the Czech capital. The combined effects of jet lag, his abrupt removal from Terrorland with its daily media onslaught of vitriolic patriotism and bio-paranoia replaced by the tranquility of living in one of Prague's most serene neighborhoods, as well as a sudden sensory subjugation to a bombardment of nine centuries of eye-popping architectural beauty at every turn undoubtedly severely affected his perceptions and recollections of the experience. Add to this the fact that the near-impenetrability of the Czech language presents the neophyte-visitor with a contextual labyrinth which would disorient even the hungriest allegorical laboratory rat on holiday, and...well, suffice to say that the author was, on the second to the last day of his visit, still unable to correctly pronounce the name of the district of the city which was the focus of his original artistic intent.

(Note to the author: HO-LESH-O-VIT-SEH).

It is therefore recommended that the reader suspend his or her expectations/hopes for accuracy in the author's portrayal of his recent experience and instead enjoy it simply as a sort of literary "goulash", as we who live in the Czech Republic enjoy that local dietary staple in our contented, beer-sodden delusion that it contains what purports to be beef.



For the sake of at least a semblance of truth, however, a few notes of correction/clarification follow:

- 1) The adjective “nudny” in the story’s title “Nudny noviny” (“The boring news” or “The boring newspaper”) should actually be “nudne” as it modifies a plural noun.
- 2) Nove Mesto (the “New Town”) is not a part of Stare Mesto (the “Old Town”); rather, they are entirely separate districts of the city.
- 3) No 11th century buildings surround the “Dancing Building” by architect Frank Gehry. The oldest surrounding structures are likely from the 19th century.
- 4) It is unlikely that the author was, in the five seconds which it took us to ascend the twisting hill leading to Prague castle, able to photograph all of the structures listed in his account, even more so since at least one of them (St. Vitus Cathedral) is not even visible from the hill.
- 5) The place identified by the Czech emigre character, Eva, as her place of birth (“Lidka”) does not exist, at least to the knowledge of myself or my Czech friends. If indeed it is “across the river from Holesevice [sic]”, it is perhaps Liben. “Lidka” is a brand of chocolate. Still, it is amusing to imagine this woman springing Athena-like from a bar of chocolate across the river from Holesovice (repeat note to the author: HO-LESH-O-VIT-SEH).
- 6) The neighborhood in which my office is located is “Zizkov”, not “Jaroslav”.
- 7) The name of my public relations firm’s client is “Tiscali” (the author’s version is amusingly shameful, however).



8) The role of the wife of Sonny Crockett (Don Johnson's character on "Miami Vice") was played by Sheena Easton, not Gloria Estefan.

9) All Czech diminutives of nouns, within their respective genders, "rhyme" because they all have the exact same endings.

10) No explicit sexual relations (within "the Clinton definition") are shown on the Czech television program "Pericko".

11) Eva's husband is not likely to be nicknamed "Honzecka". "Honzik" and "Honzicek" are the Czech diminutives of the name "Jan".

12) The inscription, "Milujte se, pravdy kazdemu prejte", appears not on the statue of King Wenceslas, but rather on the statue of Czech religious reformer Jan Hus.

13) The nation described a "Czechoslovakia" could use an "o" near the middle (Note: Prior to its division into two separate states on January 1, 1993, the nation had the longest one-word name of any country in the world.)

14) "Rusalka" was indeed composed by Antonin Dvorak, not by Bedrich Smetana (whose last name happens to mean "cream" and which is misidentified in the text as "Smetna").

15) St. Mikulas (St. Nicholas), the angel and the devil visit children on the evening of December 5th (St. Nicholas Day) not on Christmas Eve.



16) The author, contrary to his assertion of prevarication when asked, did indeed go to Charles Bridge.

17) The reference to Jan Zizka as “the one-eyed man” (in addition to being a rather perfunctory description of this legendary Hussite general) incorrectly describes him in Czech as “the Vidce”. In fact, is known as the “vojavudce”.

18) “Czechslovakia” again! Good lord.

19) If A is similar to B and B is similar to C, then A, we can infer, is similar to C. The progression, however, from the author’s face to that of the actor Jean Paul Belmondo seems (as least to yours truly) somewhat more dubious. However, we can perhaps attribute the character Eva’s remark to the distortions in perception produced by air cabin pressure at 30,000 feet.

Final note: Those wishing (for academic reasons only) to research the available list of Czech words which sound like dirty words in English — e.g., “horny”, “siti” (pronounced “shee-tee”) — and vice-versa (the innocuous English word “peachy” having a particularly vile meaning in Czech), are invited to contact the author of this afterword at the e-mail address indiscreetly provided in the main text.



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75Grand.com / galligan@sprynet.com

"Evocative, atmospheric, but, ultimately, much too, long..." Pierre Joris, poet

"JPGalligan is to Prague, what I am to Albany." William Kennedy, novelist

"Bull-shit." Saul Bellow, dean of American Letters