

TEN STORIES BY

# GUY DAVENPORT



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*A Table of Green Fields*

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*A Table of Green Fields* includes ten stories, variously about the painter Henry Scott Tuke, the mathematician James Joseph Sylvester, Kafka, Thoreau, along with some imaginary Frenchmen and Scandinavians, among others. Calculating the infinite in the finite, tracing geometries of desire, placing the obdurate world in an uncustomary light, each of these stories opens out its own world. Without giving up the plot or character of the traditional short story, Guy Davenport's inventions are complex events in which ideas and cultural history are a kind of music to which the characters dance. Despite the fractal, syncopated *collage* of his narrative style, Davenport's prose is objective, terse, and transparent. A constant theme in this book is the transmission of the past as an imaginative act; hence the title, Falstaff's dying vision of "a table of green fields," probably a mishearing of his recitation of the Twenty-third Psalm, corrected by editors to "he babbled of green fields," a symbol of all fiction, an art that must be exact about the uncertain.

*(continued on back flap)*

A NEW DIRECTIONS BOOK

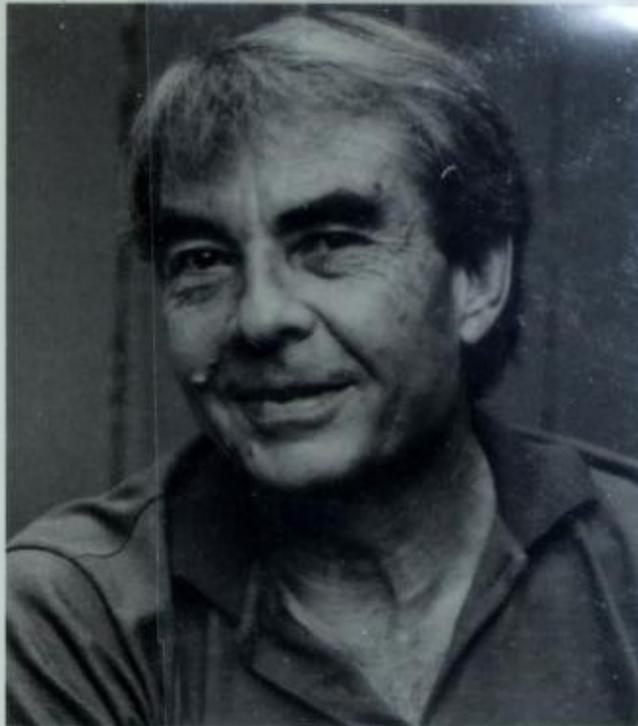


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*(continued from front flap)*

"Guy Davenport is among the very few truly original, truly autonomous voices now audible in American letters."

—*The New Yorker*

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"Mr. Davenport has a brilliant maze of an imagination. . . . His poetic, incisive sentences flicker like pieces of a stained-glass window spread neatly on the page."

—*The New York Times Book Review*

*Cover painting, "August Blue," by Henry Scott Tuke, courtesy of the Tate Gallery, London / Art Resource, New York; design by Gertrude H. Laughlin*

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# *A Table of Green Fields*

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*Also by Guy Davenport*

FICTION

Tatlin!

Da Vinci's Bicycle

Eclogues

Trois Caprices

Apples and Pears

The Bicycle Rider

The Jules Verne Steam Balloon

The Drummer of the Eleventh North Devonshire Fusiliers

ESSAYS

The Geography of the Imagination Every Force Evolves a Form A Balthus Notebook

POETRY

Flowers and Leaves Thasos and Ohio

TRANSLATIONS

Archilochos Sappho Alkman: Three Greek Poets

The Mimes of Herondas

Anakreon

Herakleitos and Diogenes

# GUY DAVENPORT

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*A Table of Green Fields*

TEN STORIES

A NEW DIRECTIONS BOOK

Front cover: Tuke, Henry Scott (1858–1929), - 'August Blue,' 1893

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## August Blue

### 1

On the way to school, just past the bird market, there is one of the largest fig trees in Jerusalem. It was believed by some to be as old as the temple and to have a special blessing on it whereby its figs were fatter and sweeter than any others in the world, except, of course, those in the Garden of Eden. They were, in color, more blue than green. The milk that bled from its stems when you pulled one of its figs cured warts, the quinsy, and whooping cough.

Schoolboys could see this great fig tree. A red wall, however, kept them from helping themselves to the occasional fig, even though Roman law said that a traveler, or a child, could pick an apple, pear, or fig, for refreshment, without being guilty of theft, and the Torah was equally lenient and understanding of the hunger of travelers and boys.

On a fine morning in the month of Tishri, Daniel, Yaakov, and Yeshua, having inspected finches and quail in cages, and leapfrogged in the narrowest streets, shouted at by merchants, gave their usual longing looks at the fig tree.

—If only figs, Daniel said, knocked down like apples, and if we had a pole.

—But they don't, Yaakov said. And they wouldn't fall in the street, anyway.

They sighed, all three.

—Figs and dates smushed together with ewe milk, and roasted barley sprinkled on top, Yeshua said.

—Figs and honey, Daniel said.

—Figs just so, juicy and ripe, said Yaakov.

—What do you say to the donkeys? Daniel asked.

It was a game of Yeshua's to stop along the way to school and whisper into donkeys' ears something quick and confidential, with a knowing smile. The donkeys never failed to quicken, lift their ears, and stare at him.

—Behold the grandfather of all jackrabbits! he would say out loud.

—I tell them something they think I don't know, Yeshua said. I spoke to the quail, too.

—Yeshua's *meshuggeh*.

—Want a fig? Yeshua said. One for each of you. Close your eyes and hold out your hands.

—You've got figs for recess?

—No, I got them off the tree back there.

Daniel looked at Yaakov, Yaakov at Daniel.

—So don't believe me, Yeshua said.

With a flourish of his hand he showed them a plump blue fig in his fingers. He gave it to Daniel. Another twirl and wiggle of fingers, and there was a fig for Yaakov.

—Holy Moses!

—Don't swear, Yeshua said. There's Zakkaiyah looking up and down the street for us.

They ran to the school gate, herded in by their teacher, Zakkaiyah, whose beard was combed and who smelled of licorice. They sat on cushions on a clean wooden floor, in a semicircle before Zakkaiyah, who sat on a stool.

—*Alef*, Zakkaiyah said.

—It's an ox, said Daniel.

—It comes first, a boy named Nathan said.

—So listen, said Zakkaiah.

He explained the derivation of *alef* from the old Phoenician alphabet, and talked about the versatility of a set of signs that could graph speech, contrasting it to the barbarous syllabaries of the Egyptians and the Assyrians.

—Greek is an even further advance. Their *alpha*, however, is not our *alef*. They have letters for their vowels, and use their *alpha* for one of them. Micah, what letter comes next?

—*Beth*.

—Yeshua! Zakkaiah said, are you chewing something?

—A fig.

—And what kind of manners is it to eat figs when we are learning the alphabet?

Nathan, who had just been slipped a fig by Yeshua, tucked it inside his blouse and looked innocent. Amos, who was also eating a fig passed back to him by Yeshua, swallowed his whole.

—And what is *beth*, Micah?

—But Teacher, Yeshua said, we have not learned what is to be known about *alef*, and here we are hastening on to *beth*. Zakkaiah's mouth fell open.

—So? he said. You want me to forget that you were having a late breakfast rather than paying attention to the lesson?

—Oh no, Teacher.

—I'm listening to what you have to say about *alef*, if you're quite through eating figs.

Yeshua worked his fingers in the air until there was a fig in them.

—Have a fig for yourself, O Teacher. And another. And yet another. They are from the great tree down the street, and are the juiciest and tastiest figs in all Jerusalem.

Zakkaiah stood with the three figs in his cupped hands, staring at Yeshua, speechless. He looked at the figs and he looked at Yeshua.

—My father sent them to you, O Teacher. They are good for the bowels, he says.

A silence.

—I will thank him when I see him, Zakkaiah said in a soft voice.

—*Alef*, Yeshua said. I will recite about *alef*.

There was an uneasiness in the class. Zakkaiah was obviously thinking several things at once.

—*Alef!* Yeshua said in a voice pitched bright. In the *alef* there's a *yud* up here, and a *yud* down there, with a line between. As with all boundaries, this line both joins and separates. The *yud* above is the Creator of the universe, of the earth, the sun, the moon, the planets, and the stars. The *yud* below is us, the people. The line between is the Torah, the prophets, the law. It is the eye for seeing what we can of the Creator. He is evident in his work, the world.

—You are reciting a commentary, Zakkaiah said, but whose? —I'm making it up, Yeshua said. The Creator made us creators, too. Look at the spider knitting its web and at the bird building its nest. Every work has a maker.

—Is it the blessed Hillel your father has taught you?

—Who is Hillel? The alphabet is all pictures. You can look at them and see what they are: a house, a camel. The *alef* is a picture of the whole world. Cool water on dusty feet, that's a grand thing, and the smell of wood shavings and a crust dunked in wine, and honey, and dancing to the tabor and the flute. These good things belong down here, but they come from up there. That's why there's a line between the top *yud* and the bottom *yud*. Everything has a fence, so we can know where it is. A house has rooms, a garden has a wall.

Zakkaiah sat on his stool, hard. He stuck the fingers of his left hand into his beard. His right hand held three figs.

—But the fun of the line between the *yuds*, Yeshua went on, is that it's a fence only if you look at

that way. It is really a road, and like all roads it goes both ways. You have to know which way you're going. ~~Look at the anemones that make the fields red all of a sudden after the first rain of the winter season.~~ The grand dresses at Solomon's court were not such a sight, and they were made with loom and needles, whereas the master of the universe made the anemones overnight, with a word. You can get near the line with much labor, or you can cross it with a step.

—I told you Yeshua's *meshuggeh*, Daniel whispered to Yaakov. —Why don't you eat your figs, O Teacher? Yeshua asked. I have more.

On a blustery late afternoon in March 1842, Professor James Joseph Sylvester of the University of Virginia was walking along a brick path across the lawn in front of Jefferson's Rotunda. He had been brought from London to teach mathematics only the November before, and still wondered at the neoclassical buildings set in an American forest, and at the utilitarian rowhouse dormitories, at the black slaves who dressed the students and carried their books to class. He taught arithmetic and algebra from Lacroix's serviceable manual, trigonometry, geometry, the calculus differential and integral. Next term he was offering a course from Poisson's *Mechanics* and Laplace's *Mecanique celeste*.

He was a member of the Royal Society. At age twenty-seven he had distinguished himself with so brilliant a series of mathematical papers that he had been invited to come to Virginia. Jefferson's plan was to bring the best minds of Europe to dwell in his academic village, as he liked to call it. And now Jefferson was dead, leaving his faculty of European geologists, chemists, linguists, historians, and mathematicians to carry on his work of civilizing Virginia and her sister states.

Professor Sylvester's problem was one he had never before met. His students, all healthy, strapping young men from the richest of families, were illiterate. They knew nothing. He could scarcely understand a word they said. They came late to class, if at all, accompanied by their slaves. They talked with each other while Professor Sylvester lectured. The strangest thing about them was that they did not want to learn. Take Ballard. He was from Louisiana, some great plantation with hundreds of slaves. He was a handsome lad, beautifully dressed. Yet if called upon, he would say:

—I could answer that, Fesser, if I wanted to, but frankly I'm not minded to do so.

—Is this not insolence, Mr. Ballard?

—If you were a gentleman, Fesser, you'd know how to talk to one, now wouldn't you?

A roar of laughter.

He had gone to the faculty. They told him that the students had reduced Jefferson to tears, that they had shot three professors already, that he had best deal with them as patiently as he knew how. There was no support to be expected from Charlottesville, which was of the opinion that the faculty was composed of atheists, Catholics, Jews, Jesuits. A Hungarian professor had had to leave town in the dark of night.

They dueled, and fought with Bowie knives. They drank themselves into insensibility. They came to class drunk. When Sylvester tried to find out why this was allowed, he was reminded that the students were aristocrats.

—Mr. Ballard, will you rehearse Euclid's proofs for the Pythagorean theorem of the right triangle?

—Suck my dick.

He had had to ask what the words meant, and blushed. On the advice of a fellow professor he had bought a sword cane. One never knew. He was paid handsomely, but what worried him was that the papers he had been writing were harder and harder to finish. He was famous for averaging one mathematical paper a month. He knew that he had the reputation among his peers of having the most fertile genius of his generation. He was a Mozart of mathematics. He was finding it embarrassing to keep up his correspondence with the few men in Germany, France, and England who understood his work. These barbarian louts with their slaves and dueling pistols were making him sterile, and they tore at his soul more than their childish disrespect and leaden ignorance.

Why were they here, at a university, at least a university in name and intent? The French professor was slowly losing his mind, as none of his students had learned two words together of French. They gambled all night, knifed each other at dawn, drank until they puked.

And on this March afternoon Professor Sylvester found himself approaching the brothers Week

Bill and Al, or Mr. William and Mr. Alfred Weeks, gentlemen, as he must address them in class. They wore yellow and green frock coats, with flowery weskits. They were smoking long black cigars and carried their top hats in their hands.

—You ain't a-going to speak to us, Jewboy?

Thus William, the elder of the brothers.

—Sir! said Sylvester.

—Yes, Fesser Jew Cockney, said Alfred. If you're going to teach rithmatic and that damn calc'lus shit to gentlemen, you ought to take off your hat to them when you meet us on the lawn, oughtn't h Bill?

—Sir! said Sylvester.

—May be, said William Weeks, that if we pulled the fesser's Jew hat down over his Jew chin, he remember next time to speak to gentlemen.

Sylvester drew his sword from his cane with one graceful movement, and with another drove into Alfred Weeks's chest.

Alfred screamed.

William ran.

Alfred fell backward, groaning:

—O Jesus! I have met my fatal doom!

Professor Sylvester coolly sheathed his sword, tapped it on the brick walk to assure that it was firmly fitted in his cane, turned on his heel, and walked away. He went to his rooms, packed a single suitcase, and walked to the posthouse to wait for a stage to Washington. This he boarded, when it came.

Alfred Weeks writhed on the brick walk, crying like a baby, calling for instant revenge. William came back with a doctor, who was mystified.

—Have you been bit by a m'skeeter, son? They ain't no wound. There's a little tear in your weskit as I can see, and a kind of scratch here on your chest, like a pinprick.

—You mean I ain't killed dead?

Sylvester retrenched in New York City, where he practiced law. The mathematical papers began to be written again. He was called to the Johns Hopkins University, where he founded the first school of mathematics in the United States, where he arranged for the first woman to enter an American graduate school, where he argued with Charles Sanders Peirce, and where he introduced the Hebrew letters *shin* and *teth* into mathematical annotation.

Years later, the great Georg Cantor, remembering Sylvester, introduced the letter *alef* as a symbol of the transfinite.

### 3

As we descended westward, we saw the fen country on our right, almost all covered with water like a sea, the Michaelmas rains having been very great that year, they had sent down great floods of water from the upland countries, and those fens being, as may be very properly said, the sink of no less than thirteen counties; that is to say, that all the water, or most part of the water of thirteen counties falls into them.

The people of that place, which if they be born there they call the Breedlings, sometimes row from one spot to another, and sometimes wade.

In these fens are abundance of those admirable pieces of art called duckoys; that is to say, places so adapted for the harbor and shelter of wild fowl, and then furnished with decoy ducks, who are

taught to allure and entice their kind to the places they belong to. It is incredible what quantities wild fowl of all sorts they take in these duckoys every week during the season, duck, mallard, teal, and widgeon.

As these fens are covered with water, so I observed too that they generally at this latter part of the year appear also covered with fogs, so that when the downs and higher grounds of the adjacent country were gilded by the beams of the sun, the Isle of Ely looked as if wrapped up in blankets, and nothing to be seen, but now and then, the lanthorn or cupola of Ely Minster.

#### 4

Now the bike that was idling down the sheepwalk to the cove as sweet as the hum of a bee was Brough, we saw, Willy and I. The rider of it lifted his goggles, which had stenciled a mask of clear flesh on the dust and ruddle of his face. A long face with shy blue eyes it was, and his light hair was blown back. He wore a Royal Air Force uniform and was, like we judged, a private.

Willy asked if he was lost or had come on purpose, after naming the bike a Brough and the uniform RAF, showing that he knew both by sight.

—Right and right, the motorcyclist said.

He spoke Oxford.

—I'm here on purpose if I've found Tuke the painter's, though I shan't disturb him if he's busy. I wrote him last week.

—Aye, the penny postal, I remembered. He was interested in it. —Name's Ross, the cyclist said.

—Sainsbury here, Willy said. My mate's Georgie Fouracre.

We all nodded, fashionable-like.

—Mr. Tuke, I said, is down yonder, in the cove, with Leo Marshall, painting of him in and out of a dory. If your postal named today, he'll be expecting you. We get the odd visitor from London, time to time, and some from up north and the continent.

So we rolled the motorbike down to Mr. Tuke and Leo. The canvas was on the easel, the dory on the strand, and Leo was drawing off worsted stockings, brown as a nut all over.

For all of his having the lines of a Dane, this airman Ross was uncommonly short. The crinkle of Mr. Tuke's eyes showed how pleased he was. His blue beret and moustache, his French blouse and sailor's breeks made one kind of contrast with the tight drab uniform Ross seemed to be bound in, with no give at all anywhere, and horse-blanket tough, and Leo's want of a stitch made another.

Ross was interested in the picture on the easel, which was the one that got named *Morning Splendour*, two of us in a dory and me on the strand as naked as the day I came into the world. It hangs in Baden-Powell House, in London, bought by the Boy Scouts. The color harmonies are the same as those of the more famous *August Blue* that's in the Tate.

This visit of Ross's was a summer morning in 1922. And a nice little watercolor came of it, of Ross undressing for a swim. Except that it isn't Ross.

What was it about him? He was at ease with us, as many are not, but he wasn't at ease with himself. Tuke got on with his painting. He posed Leo with a leg up on the dory.

—And your hand on your knee, just so. Turn a bit so that the light runs gold down your chest and left thigh.

He explained to Ross how he made quick watercolor studies, light being fugitive.

—There's nothing here, you know, but color. Light on a boy's back can be as mercurial as light on the sea.

Ross, it turned out as they talked, knew a lot about painters. He said that Augustus John is a crack draftsman but that of light and air he knows nothing.

Tuke smiled, and then he laughed, with his head back.

—These modernists. Ah, yes.

—And Wyndham Lewis paints a world that has neither air nor light.

—Do you know Lewis?

—I've met him. I dropped over his garden wall one evening. He was drawing in a back room. I introduced myself. It gave him quite a start. A childish trick on my part, but it amused him immensely. He fancies eccentricity.

He mentioned Eric Kennington, Rothenstein, Lamb. At one point Tuke gave him a very hard stare.

When Willy and I undressed, horsing around, as was our way, Ross paced as he talked with Tuke holding his left wrist and wrenching it, as if he were screwing it off and on. He talked about Mantegna's bathing soldiers, which we had a print of in the studio, and a bathing place called Parson's Pleasure at Oxford. He was like a professor with a subject. One thing reminded him of another, and he thought out loud about it.

—Oh yes, well, Eakins in America. No one can get near him, Tuke said.

—Things return, Ross said. Here in the autumn of time you are recovering a spring which we have forgotten in our culture, a spring we know about in Greece and in the late Middle Ages.

Did Tuke know a man named Huizinga? A Dutchman. —Meredith, Tuke said, has a lovely scene of boys bathing, in *Feverel*.

It was Leo, stretching between poses, who asked Ross why, if he was as educated as he sounded, he wasn't an officer.

—Cowardice, probably, Ross said.

—Leo didn't mean that in an untoward way, did you, Leo?

—Lord, no.

The sea had taken on a wonderful green brightness, a shuffling of silver, and the sky was glorious in its blue. Willy had swum out, dog-paddling. Tuke had removed his scarf. I was beginning to ponder what this visit of the little soldier Ross was all about. Tuke seemed to know things about him that I didn't, and to be keeping a secret. A confidence, perhaps I should say.

Willy did a devil dance on the sand, to get warm.

—We've often turned fair blue with cold for Mr. Tuke, he said.

In many of the pictures where we all appear to be toasty brown in fine sunlight we were actually freezing our ballocks off.

—Will you pose, Aircraftsman Ross? Tuke said abruptly. I covet your profile.

—I wonder, Ross said with a smile that was also a frown.

—We're a kind of *comitatus* here, Tuke said. Friends, all. The vicar, who likes to visit at tea usually when the boys are still half undressed, has his doubts about the propriety of it all.

—Eats his doubts in muffins, Leo said, and drowns 'em in tea.

—He reads Housman, and Whitman.

—But brought back the Edward Carpenter we lent him without a word to say about it.

I liked the mischief in Ross's eyes as he listened to all this. —We are hypocritical dogs, we English.

—Decent, Leo said, patting his trunklements.

—A naked English lad is as decent as a calf, Willy said. Though the best painting I've posed for is fully clothed with Mary Baskins in the apple orchard.

—For which, Tuke said, I hope to be remembered, if at all, that and *August Blue*.

—It is insufferably egotistical, Ross said, unbuttoning his tunic, to assume that one cannot possibly be understood by another, or for that matter by people at large, but there is that residuum of privacy at our center which we do despair of exposing to the world's mercy.

Tuke thought that over carefully, very interested, you could tell by the cock of his head.

—True, he said. We aren't quite ready to admit that we are all alike, all human. And in our sameness we are wonderfully different.

His tunic open on an Aertex vest, Ross sat to unwind his leggings and to pull off his glossy hobnailed boots.

—I'm wondering, he said, what I've come here to find. I'm forever, I think, looking for one thing or another. When I first saw your painting, Tuke, I recognized a fellow spirit, and life is not so long that we can afford to put off meeting one's kin.

He shed his trousers, which had a complexity of buttons and flaps. Naked as Willy, Leo, and I, he seemed little more than a boy with a shock of hair and shy blue eyes. There was something wrong with his balls, as if they hadn't come down properly, or were stunted.

—Sit on the sand, Tuke said. I can do a crayon study fairly quickly.

—The sun feels good.

—Have you been drawn by any of these artists you've talked about?

—John. He did me in pencil. Kennington, pastel.

—Would it be a liberty, Leo said, as I had wanted to say, to pry into how a private in the RAF is set up on painters, sitting for them and all?

—There goes Leo again, Tuke said, drawing the thinnest possible line between good manners and intelligent curiosity.

—Oh, I don't mind, Ross grinned. The answer, Leo my fine fellow, is that I'm not Aircraftsman Ross 352087. The Brough is real, and the 352087 is real, and the uniform is real enough for the RAF. For the rest, I was born an impostor.

—Look straight ahead, and slightly up, Tuke said. I do hope the vicar doesn't turn up. He's well up on things, if you see what I mean.

—I don't, I said without thinking.

Tuke and Ross exchanged smiles.

—He would most probably recognize Private Ross.

—You're playing a teasing game with us, I said. Vicar, of all people! He didn't know Lord Gowen when he was here with Frank or that French writer with the square face.

—Ross is different, Tuke said.

—Oh, I'm not afraid of the vicar, Ross said. I've got being an impostor down to an art. I've posed for a painter who didn't recognize me in the street the next day. The trick is to feel that you're nobody and act accordingly.

—You've got to tell us, Leo said. You've gone too far not to.

—But, said Ross, there's really nothing to tell. I could tell you that my name is Chapman, which happens to be true, and you're none the wiser, are you? Things in this world are like that. A block whose name you know as Ross turns out to be named Chapman. It's worth Fanny Fuck All, as we say in barracks. Georgie Fouracre is Georgie Fouracre. You know who you are. You will beget strapping boys like yourself, and sit by your own fireside, you and your good wife.

—Mary Baskins, Leo said, more fool her.

—You lost your hopes with her by belching in church. Sounded like a bullfrog, and Vicar lost his place in Deuteronomy.

—But Vicar would recognize Chapman here, from the papers, from the pictures, from knowing

him?

~~—I've said quite enough, Tuke said. I've got the profile. What about a bathe, what say?—~~

Tuke was out of his clothes in the shake of a lamb's tail. Ross swam well, effortlessly. It was Willy who said later that he did everything with style, as if there was the one right way of doing a thing.

We had no towels, and were sitting and drying in the sun when there were steps down the path, and here was Vicar, shouting jovially, using a wholly unnecessary broly as a cane, fanning himself with a cream panama.

—Oh! I say.

—You've seen us mother-naked before, Vicar, Leo said, giving Willy's ribs an elbow.

—Oh, I say! Of course, of course. A painter of lads must have lads to paint. If I'm intruding, I shall beat a prudent retreat, what what?

—Not at all, Tuke said. As a matter of fact, I have been making a watercolor study of a visitor who came on that motorbike, and whom I'd like you to meet.

—I noticed the motorbike, yes. The etiquette of meeting a gentleman in a state of nature is an interesting one which our nannies rather passed over lightly.

Ross rose with an easy dignity and shook Vicar's hand.

—The Reverend Button Milford, Tuke said. Aircraftsman Ross. He has sat for John and is kind enough to like my work.

—Ever so pleased, I'm sure, said Vicar. Don't get dressed on my account. A classical education gives one a taste for the, ah, pastoral, don't you know.

Vicar dithered about, causing Leo to search the horizon for, as may be, a ship. And then asked:

—Were you, Ross, in this late, and one hopes last, terrible war? But of course you weren't: you're too young.

—I was indeed in the war, Ross said. And it is not the last.

A little girl, hustled into her pram by an officious nurse, discovered halfway home from the park that her doll Belinda had been left behind. The nurse had finished her gossip with the nurse who minced with one hand on her hip, and had had a good look at the grenadiers in creaking boots who strolled in the park to eye and give smiling nods to the nurses. She had posted a letter and sniffed at various people. Lizaveta had tried to talk to a little boy who spoke only a soft gibberish, had kissed and been kissed by a large dog, and had helped another little girl fill her shoes with sand.

And Belinda had been left behind. They went back and looked for her in all the places they had been. The nurse was in a state. Lizaveta howled. Her father and mother were at a loss to comfort her as this was the first tragedy of her life and she was indulging all its possibilities. Her grief was the more terrible in that they had a guest to tea, Herr Doktor Kafka of the Assicurazioni Generali, Prague office.

—Dear Lizaveta! Herr Kafka said. You are so very unhappy that I am going to tell you something that was going to be a surprise. Belinda did not have time to tell you herself. While you were not looking, she met a little boy her own age, perhaps a doll, perhaps a little boy, I couldn't quite tell, who invited her to go with him around the world. But he was leaving immediately. There was no time to dally. She had to make up her mind then and there. Such things happen. Dolls, you know, are born in department stores, and have a more advanced knowledge than those of us who are brought to houses by storks. We have such a limited knowledge of things. Belinda did, in her haste, ask me to tell you that she would write, daily, and that she would have told you of her sudden plans if she had been able to find you in time.

Lizaveta stared.

But the very next day there was a postcard for her in the mail. She had never had a postcard before. On its picture side was London Bridge, and on the other lots of writing which her mother read to her and her father, again, when he came home for dinner.

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Dear Lizaveta: We came to London by balloon. Oh, how exciting it is to float over mountains and rivers, and cities with my friend Rudolf, who had packed a lunch of cherries and jam. The English are very strange. Their clothes cover all of them, even their heads, where the buttons go right up into their hats, with button holes, so to speak, to look out of, and a kind of sleeve for their very large noses. They all carry umbrellas, as it rains constantly, and long poles to poke their way through the fog. They live on muffins and tea. I have seen the King in a carriage drawn by forty horses, stepping with precision to a drum. More later. Your loving doll, Belinda.

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Dear Lizaveta: We came to Scotland by train. It went through a tunnel all the way from London to Edinburgh, so dark that all the passengers were issued lanterns to read *The Times* by. The Scots all wear kilts, and dance to the bagpipe, and eat porridge which they cook in kettles the size of a bathtub. Rudolf and I have had a picnic in a meadow full of sheep. There are bandits everywhere. Most of the people in Edinburgh are lawyers, and their families live in apartments around the courtroom. More later. Your loving friend, Belinda.

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Dear Lizaveta: From Scotland we have traveled by steam packet to the Faeroe Islands, in the North Sea. The people here are all fisherfolk and belong to a religion called The Plymouth Brothers, so that when they aren't out in boats hauling in nets full of herring, they are in church singing hymns. The whole island rings with music. Not a single tree grows here, and the houses have rocks on their roofs to keep the wind from blowing them away. When we said we were from Prague, they had never heard of it, and asked if it were on the moon. Can you imagine! This card will be slow getting there, as the mail boat comes but once a month. Your loving companion, Belinda.

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Dear Lizaveta: Here we are in Copenhagen, staying with a nice gentleman named Hans Christian Andersen. He lives next door to another nice gentleman named Soren Kierkegaard. They take Rudolf and me to a park that's wholly for children and dolls, called Tivoli. You can see what it looks like by turning over this card. Every afternoon at 4 little boys dressed in red (and they are all blond and have big blue eyes) march through Tivoli, and around and around it, beating drums and playing fifes. The harbor is the home of several mermaids. They are very shy and you have to be very patient and stand still a long time to see them. The Danes are melancholy and drink lots of coffee and read only serious books. I saw a book in a shop with the title *How To Be Sure As To What Is And What Isn't*. And *The Doll's Guide To Existentialism; If This, Then What?* and *You Are More Miserable Than You Think You Are*. In haste, Belinda.

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Dear Lizaveta: The church bells here in St. Petersburg ring all day and all night long. Rudolf fears that our hearing will be affected. It snows all year round. There's a samovar in every streetcar. They read serious books here, too. Their favorite author is Count Tolstoy, who is one of his own peasants (they say this distresses his wife), and who eats only beets, though he adds an onion at Passover. We can't read a word of the shop signs. Some of the letters are backwards. The men have bushy beards and look like bears. The women keep their hands in muffs. Your shivering friend, Belinda.

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Dear Lizaveta: We have crossed Siberia in a sled over the snow, and now we are on Sakhalin Island, staying with a very nice and gentle man whose name is Anton Chekhov. He lives in Moscow but is here writing a book about this strange northern place where the mosquitoes are the size of parrots and all the people are in jail for disobeying their parents and taking things that didn't belong to them. The Russians are very strict. Mr. Chekhov pointed out to us a man who is serving a thousand years for not saying *Gesundheit* when the Czar sneezed in his hearing. It is all very sad. Mr. Chekhov is going to do something about it all, he says. He has a cat named Pussinka who is anxious to return to Moscow and doesn't like Sakhalin Island at all, at all. Your loving friend, Belinda.

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Dear Lizaveta: Japan! Oh, Japan! Rudolf and I have bought kimonos and roll about in a rickshaw

delighting in views of Fujiyama (a blue mountain with snow on top) through wisteria blossoms and cherry orchards and bridges that make a hump rather than lie flat. The Japanese drink tea in tiny cups. The women have tall hairdos in which they have stuck yellow sticks. Everybody stops what they are doing ten times a day to write a poem. These poems, which are very short, are about crickets and seeing Fujiyama through the wash on the line and about feeling lonely when the moon is full. We are very popular, as the Japanese like novelty. Excitedly, Belinda.

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Dear Lizaveta: Here we are in China. That's the long wall on the other side of the card. The emperor is a little boy who wears a dress the color of paprika. He lives in a palace the size of Prague with a thousand servants. To get from his nursery to his throne he has a chair between two poles, and he is carried. Five doctors look at his poo-poo when he makes it. Sorry to be vulgar, but what's the point of travel if you don't learn how different people are outside Prague? Answer me that. The Chinese eat with two sticks and slurp their soup. Their hair is tied in pigtailed. The whole country smells of ginger and they say *plog* for Prague. All day long firecrackers, firecrackers, firecrackers! Your affectionate Belinda.

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Dear Lizaveta: We have sailed to Tahiti in a clipper ship. This island is all pink and green, and the people are brown and lazy. The women are very beautiful, with long black hair and pretty black eyes. The children scamper up palm trees like monkeys and wear not a stitch of clothes. We have met a Frenchman name of Gauguin, who paints pictures of the Tahitians, and another Frenchman name of Pierre Loti, who wears a fez and reads the European newspapers in the cafe all day and says that Tahiti is Romantic. What Rudolf and I say is that it's very hot and decidedly uncivilized. Have I said that Rudolf is of the royal family? He's a good sport, but he has his limits. There are no *streets* here. Romantically, Belinda.

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Well! dear Lizaveta, San Francisco! Oh my! There are streets here, all uphill, and with gold prospectors and their donkeys on them. There are saloons with swinging doors, and Flora Dora girls dancing inside. Everybody plays *Oh Suzanna!* on their banjos (everybody has one) and everywhere you see Choctaws in blankets and cowboys with six-shooters and Chinese and Mexicans and Esquimaux and Mormons. All the houses are of wood, with fancy carved trimmings, and the gentry sit on their front porches and read political newspapers. Anybody in America can run for any public office whatever, so that the mayor of San Francisco is a Jewish tailor and his councilmen are a Red Indian, a Japanese gardener, a British earl, a Samoan cook, and a woman Presbyterian preacher. We have met a Scotsman name of Robert Louis Stevenson, who took us to see an Italian opera. Yours ever, Belinda.

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Dear Lizaveta: I'm writing this in a stagecoach crossing the Wild West. We have seen many Indian villages of teepees, and thousands of buffalo. It took hours to get down one side of the Grand Canyon across its floor (the river is shallow and we rolled right across, splashing) and up the other side. The

Indians wear colorful blankets and have a feather stuck in their hair. Earlier today we saw the United States Cavalry riding along with the American flag. They were singing "Yankee Doodle Dandy" and were all very handsome. It will make me seasick to write more, as we're going as fast as a train. Dizzily, Belinda.

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Dear Lizaveta: We have been to Chicago, which is on one of the Great Lakes, and crossed the Mississippi, which is so wide you can't see across it, only paddle-steamers in the middle, loaded with bales of cotton. We have seen utopias of Quakers and Shakers and Mennonites, who live just as they want to in this free country. There is no king, only a Congress which sits in Washington and couldn't care less what the people do. I have seen one of these Congressmen. He was fat (three chins, I assure you) and offered Rudolf and me a dollar each if we would vote for him. When we said we were from Prague, he said he hoped we'd start a war, as war is good for business. On to New York! In haste, your loving Belinda.

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Dear Lizaveta: How things turn out! Rudolf and I are married! Oh yes, at Niagara Falls, where you stand in line, couple after couple, and get married by a Protestant minister, a rabbi, or a priest, take your choice. Then you get in a barrel (what fun!) and ride over the falls—you bounce and bounce to the bottom—and rent a honeymoon cabin, of which there are hundreds around the falls, each with a happy husband and wife billing and cooing. I know from your parents that my sister in the department store has come to live with you and be your doll. Rudolf and I are going to the Argentine. You must come visit our ranch. I will remember you forever. Mrs. Rudolph Hapsburg und Porzellan (your loving Belinda).

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