Jan Palach in Prague

Thereza tells him to call her 'Jenny,' her English name, the name she once chose from a list in a school workbook. In German class she was Hilda, she tells him—he should take what he can get. “Can I call you Theresa?” George bargains. “Tess?”

Thereza shakes her head. “I’m just—Jenny, in English. Jenny, when I’m with you.” She smiles and squeezes his leg under the table, as if he should feel honored that she has a name just for him, just for the person she is when she is with him. The restaurant has wide, wooden tables, and Jenny’s hand does not reach farther than his knee.

George wonders if this means that Thereza is really someone else entirely, someone she does not wish him to know or speak with or touch. He thought he was going on a dinner date with Thereza Lenhartova and she turns out to be a Jenny. Bait and switch: George feels a little cheated.

“What if I asked you to start calling me Jiri?”

“Jiri?” Jenny laughs. “Don’t be stupid.”

“It’s the Czech ‘George.’ I know it is. My landlord told me.”

“You can’t even pronounce it. You are not allowed to have a name you can’t pronounce. There are rules.”

“Are there?”

“Definitely. Definitely rules.”

“Then who is this Jenny person?”

“Oh, she is very English. She drinks tea and eats biscuits and says ‘How do you do?’ just like she learned in her lessons.”

“And who is George?” George asks her.

“He has a big American house, with a white fence, and a car he drives every day to work. He has a dog that is yellow and happy. So American! I think he has a wife, too—but she is not so happy.”

“The dogs are brown,” George says. “Two Airedales.”

“And the wife?”

“Oh, she’s happy sometimes. Just not with me.”

They’d met the night before, at the Chateau, a bar George’s landlord had suggested pulling a pile of pamphlets and maps out of a drawer in the apartment kitchenette and penning little red Xs on popular expat clubs, hospodas and restauraces. The landlord was Austrian, friendly but businesslike; he knew how extortionate his weekly rates were for the studio apartment in the Mala Strana. He assumed George was a tourist, vacationing in style. George didn’t know what he was, what he was doing or how long he might stay.
If he wanted a second week in the flat, the Austrian said, he should call by the end of the weekend. George said he'd have to get a phone. The Austrian said he might want one anyway, but George didn't know what that meant until Thereza was handing him her business card in the basement of the Chateau. The room was packed, the music painful, and Thereza leaned forward to shout in his ear that the blood-red room was newly remodeled. “Before, there was nowhere to dance,” she said. “Do you like to dance?”

George did not like to dance, had never been able to dance, but was unsure how to explain that to this woman, half his age, fully his height, half again more attractive than anyone who'd ever stood this close to him at a bar. Her hair was long and brown and her eyes deliberately sleepy, outlined in dark makeup. He looked down at her business card but couldn't read it in the dim light.

“Maybe I should go find my friends,” she said, not unkindly.

“I do—I will—” George lifted the business card in the air like an auction ticket and then brushed it past his ear, as if he meant to both call her and flag her down.

“Yes. Call me. We don't have to dance,” she said, and eased her way around him into the crowd, her fingertips touching his arm and then sliding down his tongue like Thereza's fingers on his arm. Walking back to his apartment, marveling at the shapes of statues against the sky, the curls of Baroque facades lit unevenly by streetlamps and moonlight, he kept an eye out for a cell phone store.

George's rental was wall-to-wall IKEA, new and pale and clean-lined. The front windows looked out on Kampa Island, the wooden waterwheel on the Čertovka canal, trees with autumn's last leaves clinging dead to their branches. A rank of brocaded town houses stretched to the north and south of George's building. The air was fresh and very cold and George opened the windows and pretended to be an exiled nobleman. He turned on the satellite television and pretended to be rich. He picked up his new, secondhand phone, loaded the credits from a plastic phonecard, and told himself: You are a rich, exiled nobleman. You are George of Nosticova Street. A beautiful girl gave you her phone number and she is waiting for you to call her.

He told her that he had come to Prague, Praha, for a conference and now was playing tourist. She asked if he was American and when he said 'yes' she said, I thought... something and Thereza said, “Would you like to?…”

“Sure,” she said. “But English, you all like to…”

George wondered if she was accustomed to something wittier, something softer, an apartment where no one ran 15Ks with graying runner's body, the legs gone stringy or soft; there, he could say so.

That afternoon George went to the firm on the business card and she wished to enter into him, a sweet rabbit. There was Jenny, shiny dark hair dootona listed below. Along with thereza Lenzbértova, Feasibility Analyst with Novak/Holanda, and she wished to meet him.

At the Hostinec Hostina George's change, Jenny him only so far. “Would you like to…?”

George bends, folds her a smile as she el she's pint glass an’ him, himself to wonder for holds out the razor edge of his mother, a judgment his, and think, “You’re a rich, exiled nobleman. You are George George. You are George George. You are George George.”
Austrian said, he should have to get a phone. But George didn't know where to start. Thereza Lenhartova's business card in the blood-red room was painful, and the music painful, and he couldn't dance," she said. "Do you want to dance," she asked. "Yes," said George, not unkindly.

"I'm ready in the air like an auctioneer," she meant to both call him and tease him. "I'm longing to both call her and ease her way into his apartment, marveling at the details of Baroque facades and an eye out for a cell phone card, but couldn't say, and eased her way into his apartment, marveling at the details of Baroque facades and an eye out for a cell phone card, Thereza Lenhartova, and sliding down his tongue his American and when he said 'yes' she said, I thought so. George asked if it was a good thing or a bad thing and Thereza said it was just a thing.

"Would you like to have dinner sometime?" he asked. "A drink?"

"Sure," she said. "But you must choose the time. Germans, Americans, English, you all like to eat at different hours, I never know when."

George wondered how many men of how many different nationalities she was accustomed to entertaining. He wondered for the first time if she might be a prostitute, if this might all be a terrible misunderstanding. He wondered if, when she asked if he was American, he should have said something wittier, something rueful. He squared his shoulders, there in his apartment where no one could see him, and tightened the muscles of his runner's body, the legs he knew were lean and strong. On the weekends he ran 15Ks with graying men whose wiriness had stretched to gristle, bodies gone stringy or soft; that was not George, not yet, and he was proud that he could say so.

That afternoon George paid for ten minutes at an internet café, searched the firm on the business card, and found a staff page with thumbnail pictures. There she was, Thereza Lenhartova in slightly pixilated glory, her shiny dark hair double-toned and her business degree and contact information listed below. Along with relief, George allowed a breath of excitement to enter into him, a sweaty-palmed, quick-hearted thrill for his first date in twelve years. Thereza Lenhartova was not a prostitute. She was a Feasibility Analyst with Novak/Hrbac and Associates, she was lovely and multilingual, and she wished to meet George for dinner.

At the Hostinec U Kocoura, as they wait for the waitress to bring George's change, Jenny-Thereza asks him how much he's seen of the city so far. "Would you like if I took you sightseeing tomorrow? I am a good guide. When I was a student I worked at the castle, giving tours."

George nods, folds an impressively large tip for the waitress under Thereza's pint glass and catches her hand in his. "I'd like that very much," he says, brushing his thumb across the tops of her knuckles. As they part ways at her tram stop, she kisses George on the tip of his nose. He allows himself to wonder for a moment if she's simply mis-aimed, but then she throws him a smile as sweet as a Jenny and as baffling as a Thereza over her shoulder as she climbs up into the streetcar.

The next morning, George stands shaving in front of his bathroom mirror, and thinks, "You're making a fool of yourself." But it isn't an organic thought, a judgment he would pass on himself. He hears some other voice saying it, his mother, his wife. He stands in front of the bathroom mirror and holds out the razor and scolds his reflection, chides "George. George George. You are making a fool of yourself." Then he shrugs, and notices a twist to his lips he isn't sure he's seen since he asked Marci to
marry him, or maybe not since Steph Spetzer and the Junior Prom and the hotel after-party, his expression for an anticipation so acute it looks like it's making him a little bit ill. When he meets Thereza at the Metro station, she asks if he's feeling all right.

Jenny—Thereza pays attention to what interests him most, cutting short the intricacies of Baroque architecture and pointing out instead the 27 tiled crosses in the Old Town Square that commemorate the beheadings of 27 Protestant noblemen; she takes him to the church where the paratroopers who assassinated Heydrich took sanctuary until they were all shot to death by Nazis. They see the black cross bubbling out of the cobblestones at the foot of the National Museum, where a young man set himself on fire to protest the Soviet invasion.

"So this is where he died," George whispers, inching his toes closer; he fights the urge to kneel.

"This is where he put himself on fire. He died later, in hospital. His friends, they were supposed to suicide too, and he told them no, please don't, the pain is so much, we did not think it will be so much pain."

George has already taken his camera from his pocket. He is looking at the charred cross through a viewfinder when Thereza says this and then he can't decide whether or not to take the picture.

They finish the day at the statue of the martyr John of Nepomuk, thrown off the Charles Bridge, where tourists close their eyes and make wishes. "Put your hand here and face north," Thereza tells him. "And it is sure that you will return to Prague someday."

George has already laid his hand on the brass cross, thinking he gets his choice of wishes; he doesn't know how he feels about returning to Prague. He has been here eleven days and some mornings he wakes up and never wants to leave. Other mornings he is convinced that this city has destroyed his life. He has to make a deliberate effort not to pull his hand away.

"Another day we can see pretty things," Thereza says. "I would like to show you some. But you seemed more interested in political things. Dead things."

George doesn't know what to say. He feels embarrassed now, exposed as a historical voyeur. But she takes the tram home with him anyway. "Very posh," she says, as he holds the door for her. "How much are you paying?"

George tells her, and she looks both amused and horrified. George takes her to his bedroom and she begins to undress. She is so pale he can see everywhere the webbing of her veins, trellised up her legs, down her arms, converging on the bottoms of her wrists, the backs of her hands. Her veins are dark blue and green and the effect is ghoulish, the web-marked white skin shining in the dark with what looks like some delicate disease. George joins her in bed and touches her, closes his eyes and presses down on her s

The next morning George wakes up to remnants of a foamcore corner with a laptop on top.

"What's all this?" she says, mobility aids, nebulizer, oxygen tank.

"My work. My preoccupation." George says, something fun. Like the camera.

George swallows, Melbourne, a week for another week in the same place.

George buys a guidebook and writes feasibility reports into the Czech Republic. He enjoys the statues of long-dead saints and ruined schoolhouse, tourists close their eyes and make photographs. George is now curious as to what is coming from. Thereza asks him if she is the one thing he has done all week and he is disconcerted that Georges called for business. He is curious about what he has to offer, and is uncomfortable if he has all the relation.

"But what else? What do you want me to say?"

"I don't know. The truth."

What George realizes is how much he knows and how much he has to offer, either
presses down on her skin with his palms, relieved that the feel of her is unmarred, smooth and anonymous and youthful. As they make love that night George can barely breathe under a wave of what he tells himself is love and knows is gratitude.

The next morning, as Thereza is leaving, she notices the crumpled remnants of a foamcore poster display, catalogs and flyers stacked in a corner with a laptop computer and a stack of CD-ROMs.

“What’s all this?” she asks, paging through material about oxygen tanks, mobility aids, nebulizers, drug administration options.

“My work. My presentation for the conference I told you about.”

“I see.” No wonder you want to take a holiday. I am away, this week, for business. I am meeting clients in Passau. But next weekend? Maybe something fun. Like the zoo. Do you like zoos?”

George swallows, nods, calculates how much he will owe the Austrian for another week in the apartment.

George buys a guidebook, researches field trips to take while Thereza writes feasibility reports for German retailers considering expansion into the Czech Republic. He takes the bus to Lidice, where little bronze statues of long-dead schoolchildren huddle in the foundations of their ruined schoolhouse, to the Terezin concentration camp where he watches vacationing couples try to decide whether they should smile in their photographs. George is not sure where his new concern with martyrdom has come from. Thereza asks him in front of the penguin exhibit at the zoo what he has done all week and he is ashamed to answer. She seems visibly disconcerted that George is a man of such insatiable appetites, that the corpses she offered last weekend were insufficient.

George has no idea how to explain it to her, doesn’t think she’d understand. He has asked her often what life was like before, under the Communists, and she always tells him that she was a child, that she remembers little, that life after the revolution is very nearly the only life she knows. “There was one kind of yogurt in the shops, and then there were eight,” she says. “It was hard to choose.” She is impatient with the topic but he keeps asking. It is important to him to feel like he is making her life better, like he is an after rescuing her from an inclement before. In truth, he knows she does not need him. She wears clothes bought on Narodni Trida, owns a cell phone the size of a credit card. George is unsure what he has to offer, and this seems like a test, a quiz question he can only ace if he has all the relevant information.

“But what else? What else is different now?”

“I don’t know. The shoes are better. What do you want me say?”

What George really wants are answers to questions he doesn’t have the nerve to ask, either because Thereza would be angry or worse, because
she might just shrug, shake her head ‘no.’ “Do you know anyone who was tortured?” he wants to ask. “Imprisoned? Informed on? Do you know anyone touched by fire?”

At the zoo Thereza tells him about the animals carried away in the summer floods three years ago, about the elephant who drowned with his trunk lifted high, his body already submerged, about the seal who was swept down the Vltava as far as Germany, followed by helicopter news crews and rescue teams. Thereza does her best, but these are not the kinds of deaths that interest George. After the zoo they take a tram to the Nove Mesto so Thereza can do some shopping. George pays for a blouse, a pair of shoes. She doesn’t ask and he doesn’t offer; he simply takes her selections out of her arms and carries them to the register. At the Metro station they hold hands in the middle of the platform, waiting for trains traveling in opposite directions. “I’d like to see you again,” George says. “Soon.” And it is only after Thereza says yes, after her train shouts out of the tunnel and opens its doors, that he hands her the shopping bags.

The evenings Thereza is busy, with work or with a life she does not care to tell George much about, he does not live in his apartment like a nobleman. He sits at his kitchen table with stacks of receipts, a calculator, his best guesses at the previous balance of his checking account, savings, the limits on his credit cards. He estimates the date SoluMed would have officially stopped paying him, and adds in Marci’s November pay as an accounts receivable manager. He tracks the shifting exchange rate between dollars and crowns. It is slipping, constantly, in favor of the crown. He looks around at his nobleman’s apartment and no longer feels rich. He leaves the windows cracked open, the sharp air and the sounds of the river, and turns off the satellite television, Sparta Praha vs. Tottenham Hotspurs. He’d thought maybe, if he stayed in Europe long, he should try to get into soccer.

So maybe you’re not a nobleman, George thinks. Maybe you’re an oppressed citizen of a Communist regime. Maybe you spent an entire winter eating cauliflower and boiled potatoes. George has bought several memoirs from The Museum of Communism and read them carefully. He goes to the local market and buys a wedge of rye bread, white cheese, harsh, Turkish-style coffee. He eats and reads that night about traveling to East Germany to buy oranges for Christmas. He thinks about asking Thereza to take the train to Dresden with him. They will go to the German department stores and while she shops he will take an elevator to the basement supermarket. He will take a single orange from the stacks of hundreds, cradle it in his pocket, and never tell her.

It has been two and a half weeks since George let British Airways Flight 807 leave Prague–Ruzyně without him, just let it plow up into the air and sail westward while he tooled away at the Center hotel bar, his sardonic stories, his flippant jokes. The Prague Post for lunch; he packed his suitcase. He left messages with the boss, from the Phoenix, from a friend in Arizona. Life has become something of a hobby. He’s making other arrangements. Please stop calling this account here, he said, and another and another. He’s not the best idea, the Phoenix. He remembered his wife. He’d decided that he’d settle for tracing the fingers from the edge of the mailbox, gently describing a loved one’s body floating into the air. His twitched like antennas, his eyes the image of the past, something of a leaf in the sand bags to hold it in, something of a loved one’s body. “Why are you with me?” the question. “I’m too old.” “You’re not too old.” “I’m ugly.” “You’re not ugly.” “I’m out of shape.”
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British Airways Flight
sail westward while he sat nursing a beer at the Holiday Inn-Congress
Center hotel bar, his suitcase between his feet. When he finished the beer,
he asked to check back in to his room. “I’d like to buy another night,” he
said, and another and another until the desk clerk suggested that that might
not be the best idea, that after all the frantic calls from his wife, from his
boss, from the Phoenix Police Department, from a Dr. Stein whom George
remembered his wife suggesting as a couples therapist, that George had
become something of a burden on the front-desk staff. “Perhaps you should
make other arrangements,” the concierge suggested, and George combed
The Prague Post for listings, called the Austrian, counted his money and
packed his suitcase. He sent an email to his wife from an internet café on
a square named after the boy who set himself on fire. “I’m fine,” he wrote.
“Please stop calling the hotel. I’m not staying there anymore. No phone
at present. Love, George.”

In his previous life, the one he spent as a medical equipment sales rep­
resentative in Arizona, George found himself vibrating. He would take a
paper out of the fax machine and watch it tremble. His coffee shivered in
his mug and he wedged his knees under his desk like he might otherwise
float into the air. His elbows quivered like dragonfly wings, his fingers
twitched like antennas. He drafted catalog copy for the direct consumer
mailing, gently describing devices that could help caregivers perform what
a loved one’s body no longer could. George did this so well SoluMed
sent him to an industry conference in Prague to deliver a presentation on
making the sale. He had counted the days until the trip. He was a bird, a
mosquito, a balloon, a zeppelin. He was rising. There wasn’t enough ballast
in the sand bags to hold him to the ground. Still, it was only as soon as
he’d decided that he wasn’t going back, he couldn’t possibly, that he felt
finally, heavily, still.

One Sunday morning George goes for his run, down cobblestoned Nosti­
cova Street and through the park on Kampa island. Thereza is still in bed
when he returns, and he showers and crawls back under the covers with
her. George wishes he had coffee, a doughnut, the paper, in English. He
settles for tracing the veins at Thereza’s temples, the way they spread like
fingers from the edge of her eyebrows into her hair. “Why,” he asks her.
“Why are you with me?”
“I like you.” The question mark is palpable.
“I’m too old.”
“You’re not too old.”
“I’m ugly.”
“You’re not ugly.”
“I’m out of shape.”
“Ha. You want compliments. You are so bad as a woman. Shall I tell
you your legs, no, thighs, they are nice and slim?”
“Seriously. Why?”
“Men your age, you are always so polite.”
“That’s an explanation?”
“You like nice things. Good wine and food. Not always pivo and a
smažený syr at two in the morning.”
“I like fried cheese as much as the next guy.”
“No, you don’t. You like your clean apartment and your fine food. It’s
a good life, the things you like.”

George makes lists in his head of things his life no longer contains: a
wife, a job, a house, two dogs. In Arizona, at this moment, a neighbor is
saying, “Thank God there weren’t any children.” In Arizona, his mother­
in-law is saying, “You were always too good for him.” In Prague, George is
thinking: good table manners, decent taste, the illusion of modest wealth.
Was this really all it had ever taken?

George is disappointed in Letenska, where he has asked to meet. The
world’s largest statue of Stalin once stood on a concrete platform the size
of a football field high above the city. Now it is simply a concrete platform
the size of a football field, covered in graffiti and teenagers smoking weed.
George and Thereza sit with their feet swinging off the end that overlooks
the river. “My wife was having an affair,” George confides in Thereza. “She
barely bothered to hide it. She’d answer the phone and carry it to another
room and I’d know.”

“Bohužel,” Thereza says, sarcastically. “So sad.”

“Monogamy, George thinks. It always impresses him how good her
English is, how the right words always come, specific and erudite.
“It is boring story, the man in middle life, unhappy with his wife,
unhappy in his country, so he comes to Czech and everything is better.
Snore snore.”

“You’ve obviously never had your heart broken.”
“Have you? Thereza asks. “Really?”
George has to think about it, but the answer comes: “I have. Really.”
“Then what does it feel like?”
“Like being set on fire.”
“And this is what you do when you are on fire. Instead of finding a
bucket of water, you run around the world in your little orange jog shorts.
You stay all over with fire.”

“Are you angry about that?”
Thereza shrugs, kids just seem silly, to know how bad it was.

“Staying with her, of course. A silly man.” She looks
at Žíkov Hill. “Sorry,” she says. “You're right. I need to be honest with me and I
should be honest with you.”

“No, you’re right. I need to know how badly it was. How badly,
when the whole world was laughing and you were crying. You
were making fun of me.”

“Well, I suppose it will have to be that way.”

“Are you making fun of me?”

“Don’t,” George says. It’s a Sunday dinner at an Icelandic
restaurant. He knew it was the landlocked heart of Europe,
so they are eating Icelandic pastries at the chandelier, drinking
with tickets to Gisela and playing with the intermission. They look
like children, but George is sweating with his head between
the sheets and eating yogurt.

“Do you think it was really quite good? I mean
Are you feeling better?”

Five weeks after George
The machine whirs and
confirm the balance of the pages refuse to load, the
and checks his email. The
joint checking account
the savings account in
and we’ll talk, she has
financing your midlife
Riding the tram back
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“I’m not sure I need a
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Instead of finding a

little orange jog shorts.

“Are you angry about something?”

Thereza shrugs, kicks her heels against the concrete like a child. “It just seems silly, to know of affairs and to be hurt and to live all the time

fire. You understand, that it makes you look very weak?”

“Staying with her, or coming to Prague?”

“No, you're right. It's the embarrassment of being set on fire and not knowing how badly it would hurt. It's knowing you're a chump, being hurt so badly, when the whole rest of the world is waking up in other people's beds

d a silly

Man.”

She looks at him, his gaze far off, across the city towards Zizkov Hill. “Sorry,” she says. “You are telling me because you want to be honest with me and I am being mean.”

“Don’t,” George says, alarmed, and makes it up to her that night with dinner at an Icelandic restaurant where they eat seafood flown fresh to

landlocked heart of Europe. He makes it up to her with coffee and pastries at the chandeliered café in the Obecni Dum. He makes it up to her with tickets to

Giselle, orchestra seats front and center, but she is twenty minutes late and the ushers make them stand in an upper gallery until the intermission. They look down at the dancers from a dizzying angle that makes

him sweat with vertigo. He sits on a plush ottoman in the lobby with his head between his knees. Thereza comes out at intermission. “That was really quite good. I did not think I will like the ballet, but this is nice. Are you feeling better?”

Five weeks after George arrives in Prague his ATM card stops working. The machine whirs and beeps and eats it. He goes to an internet café to confirm the balance of his checking account, the limit on his Visa. The pages refuse to load, the bank claiming he has a defunct User ID. He gives up and checks his email, finds a message from his wife. She has closed the joint checking account, reopened one in her name only; she has emptied the savings account into a 12 month CD under her name. Come home and we'll talk, she has written. I'm sorry for a lot of things. But I'm not financing your midlife crisis.

Riding the tram back to his apartment, George is terrified of pickpockets. He eyeballs a scruffy, dark haired kid near the door. A gypsy? He presses his wallet against his thigh, forgetting that almost everything inside

is useless. At the apartment, he returns a call from the Austrian. “I'm not sure I need a whole week this time. Would that be possible, to just buy a couple of days?”

“You have been a good tenant. Two days, we will say.”
George asks if he can pay by credit card this time, gives him the number of the one card he's always held in his name only, asks if the Austrian might be able to process a larger amount, let George have the difference in cash. "I'm such an idiot, I've forgotten my PIN," George says. "And so many of the places around here only take cash."

"That's Prague for you. And the villages are worse. I'm afraid I can't help."

The only hobby Thereza has ever talked about is beach volleyball, of all things; she meets people once a week at BeachKlubPraha, a few sandy courts and a plywood cabana wedged into the yard of a junior high school near Pankrác Prison. George waits for her evening practice, counts the money left in his wallet and doesn't eat that day. It takes him half an hour of walking to find the BeachKlub from the Pankrác Metro station, and his stomach growls audibly as he watches Thereza play. It's much too cold to be standing still outside but the players are jumping and diving and Thereza sweats in shorts and a sports top. He hands her a water bottle as she comes off the court, and she begins to shiver immediately, gooseflesh flaring across her arms and legs. "What are you doing this weekend?" Thereza asks him, and George shrugs. "If you are free, I thought we might go to Dresden, maybe Berlin. Lots of sightseeing for you. Maybe some shopping?"

"Jenny. Thereza. I'm not a rich man," George says.

"I know, you are not made of money. Or you don't grow on trees, or something."

"It's not a joke. It's a—confession," he says, searching for the right word, and feeling a bit surprised that he's found it, he has: he has a secret to confess. "I'm broke."

"Really?"

George nods.

"Huh," Thereza says, one eyebrow raised. "Then I suppose we shouldn't go to Germany."

"I really can't afford it. I'm sorry."

"Will you go home now?"

"I don't know."

"Then where will you go?"

"I don't know."

"You need cheap places, Bratislava is very fine. Romania, Ukraine, the life there is very hard, so the prices very low. Go to the villages. My parents, they have a weekend house in Mokri. The restaurant there serves soup for eight crowns."

"I'm really broke, Thereza. I don't have the money to go anywhere else."

Thereza stares at him. "I'll pay it back."

"You have no job."

"I'll get one."

"Do prale. You are here, if there are anyone."

"How about your wife?"

"I can't. I mean, my parents are there."

"She can wire you in Siberia."

"My phone doesn't work."

"I won't be able to understand you."

"So?"

"I haven't eaten all day."

"Your empty bricho."

"Thereza, please."

"I told you to call me Jenny."

The other players are moving away but standing near the court in English they understand the ball hoop. She pulls her phone out and counts it, hands it to George. "You can see," she says. "You will have to call your wife soon."

"What if I don't want that he realizes how bad I am with me. Stay in my apartment, my name, which I have the time how impossible it is for her to. It's not even that, picture himself looking qualified for. Can't picture himself looking at home. He just won't still a choice to be made."

"You will be so hungry going back to America, I know, you! Cruel Czech girl, say to airport."
gives him the number.

And so he's afraid I can't

be. Romania, Ukraine,

vy fishing for the right

don't grow on trees, or

s, but standing close enough to hear. George wonders how much

she says, “You need money.”

“I’ll pay it back.”

“You have no job.”

“You can see,” she says. “All the cash I have this moment. You had better

call your wife soon.”

“What if I don’t want to go back?” It isn’t until George says it aloud

that he realizes how badly he wants Thereza to say, Stay in Prague. Stay

with me. Stay in my apartment that you have never seen, and call me by

my name, which I have never let you use. He understands at the same

time how impossible it is that she say it, and how much he has wanted

her to. It’s not even that he thinks they could live well together. He can’t

picture himself looking for a job here, can’t picture what he would be

qualified for. Can’t picture making pork and dumplings for Sunday din-

ners at home. He just wants to hear her say, Stay, and to feel as if there is

still a choice to be made.

“You will be so hungry, the plane ride will be happier. You will be

going back to America, but they will feed you. You will see her in Arizona

and you will say, Wife! My stomach is full now of frozen chicken, thank

you! Cruel Czech girl, she is debil, she gives only sandwich and bus fare

to airport.”
This much is true, George thinks. That as he gets on BA flight 807 two days from now with a ticket his wife has paid for, on the same flight he refused to board five weeks earlier, he will be thankful. He will soar towards London and Phoenix and when they bring him a plastic-wrapped sandwich, a thin foil tray, a tiny cup of soda, he will be agonizingly grateful.