**Romanian writers’ group**

Natalie Lazăr -Germany

Daniele Pantaleoni – Italy

Jorge Gonzalez - Spain

Abbas Bilal - Sudan

Prince Deep - India

Richa Saxena - India

Ahmed Rashidi Hassan - Egypt

Edwina Vochoţ – Czech Republic

**The Escape**

*Natalie Lazăr*

*Germany*

I lean my forehead against the window. It rains outside. When the train gathers speed, raindrops fall diagonally and cut the flat landscape into stripes. This morning I wanted to get to a remote place - far from university, from parents, and all the usual stuff. Secretly I bought a ticket Hamburg – Den Haag, the very next departure. The train stops. We have arrived.

In front of the railway station I get on a tram as in a trance. Next stop Scheveningen says the blue sign from above the driver. I stand. I don’t look to anyone. I have no doubts about that: they can see it on my face, they can read my escape. I am positive about that. Why do they all stare?

After each stop the tram empties. People will get home at five in the afternoon. I am no exception: I get home from university or from school at the same time. It has always been that way. Nothing has changed. I notice how the driver watches me. I am positive I’ve got a sign on my forehead. I look around the carriage. No one stays on the tram. This is a dead end. I blush and get down fast. The driver greets me nodding.

The street lights glimmer in the remaining grey daylight. It smells of fish or algae. Unexpectedly, the encounter gives me the shivers: the North Sea. Never before have I seen it so wild. I get very cold. The storm tears my clothes apart. I start walking along the water line. I can feel sand in my eyes. I can’t see a thing. An immense solitude overwhelms me.

A month ago the feeling that I was to lose something invaded me; a feeling of paralysing fear, growing from day to day and turning into lethal solitude.

I think I can hear a seagull. I can feel its rapacious cynical eyes.

“Nothing new under the sun, that’s the problem!,” I suddenly explain to the bird out loud, in case it is flying next to me. I admit that I myself don’t know why I am disappointed with my life. The waves cry out even louder. I can hear a scream. Might that be the seagull?! I hope so. Suddenly I stop walking. “Disappointed! That’s it! Disappointed with me because *I* could not change anything, *I* did not have the guts to break with the routine.”

The blow of the wind weakens. I search for the seagull on the horizon; I can see the night undulating gently with the waves.

**Olga**

*Daniele Pantaleoni*

*Italy*

One of the rooms on the ground floor of the Hostel G4 was well-known as Madam Olga’s shelter, the superintendent. The room of the authority was lit by a lamp that shed dim reddish light that made you think you stepped into an absurd badly decorated Chinese restaurant. The room consisted of: a desk, a couch, a fridge, a colored TV set, a heater, a mirror. Your attention would automatically be drawn to the right, to the desk that was sheltering a pile of paperwork, some framed photos, a cup with hot instant coffee, and an ashtray absolutely full of Snagov cigarette butts. Beyond this smoke releasing curtain, a human figure was looming: well-built, curly haired, full-bosomed, with finished teeth like the cigarette hanging between her lips: Madam Olga The Superintendent or The Boss, for short!

Her look resembled closely the reputation she was enjoying between the residents of the Hostel G4. These people thought of her as a sort of Ugly Hag of the Campus, a highly-corrupted person with the habits of a Communist Security general that ruled over the destiny of many students and young teachers who were searching for campus accommodation. My future as a resident in the hostel did not depend on Olga, so I could have a less serious relationship with her. When I would enter her office to pay the rent or to get a phone call, I felt as if I was submerging in a film by Kusturica and, as a result, I would start playing my part. Half joking, I would ask for a rent discount or, to make her laugh, I would mispronounce Romanian words and compliment her on the high quality of her coffee. At times Olga would ask me whether I could buy strange things for her from Italy: perfumes, baby nappies for her grandson, cosmetics. I would always tell her that I was only going to Italy in 3-4 month’s time and how was her grandson going to do without nappies for so long? Or meanwhile, she could be invited somewhere to a party, and how could she go without wearing makeup? Olga would comment on my naughty remarks and then would add: “You listen to this wicked Italian!”

I ran into Olga in a supermarket several years after that. By then I already left G4. “Daniele, how are you?” she asked me smiling. I could not see in her mouth the black stomatological remains of the old days, but some shining white false teeth, the product of a long and exhausting career as a Boss.

**Tunnels in Madrid**

*Jorge Gonzalez*

*Spain*

Never before that tunnel had I felt such perfect darkness. I was scared to make any steps ahead because I had the feeling that any moment then that emptiness before me could become un unpredictable wall and I could not even hold on anything around me, as we would undertake such adventures in our school breaks, I could not lean against the dirty damp side walls and then go back to classes all soiled and muddy. In the ninth grade I was fourteen year old and it was the first time I had experimented the liberty of trying out new sensations, without the impediments placed by my parents. The area between our school and Ciudad Universitaria was a place so rich in vegetation that the first year of liberty, when we didn’t have to stay within the schoolyard in the breaks, was to me the first sign that life was more than a boring succession of ordinary facts. I and two schoolmates would go up in the trees and climb the walls of the American Museum, jump over fences for the simple pleasure of discovering what was behind them.

So we discovered the tunnels which, after our first examination in complete darkness, we explored with flashlights and lighters, and so one day we came across an empty and half-deserted building of the Medical School, in an old lab where they would store on shelves samples of human organs kept in jars of formol. Later I learnt that those tunnels had been the first line in the defense of Madrid when in 1936, with Franco at the gates of the city, the Madrilians refused to surrender to him, and so for the next three years, the general had been persecuted constantly but remained invincible, and so he had to conquer the rest of Spain to have the capital under his rule. Unlike me, the heroes of the tunnels did not fight the possibility of a wall that would stop them from their way, but real enemies that would murder them mercilessly.

For me that was my first encounter with the unknown, without having to listen to my parents’ cries behind (Jorje, watch out! It’s dangerous!); that experience I have never forgotten and I always remember it every time I’m driving into a new country or when I’m venturing into a new city, overwhelmed by an sudden and subtle attack of panic, but enjoying the satisfaction of having to use up all my strategies to feel once again the anxiety of being alive.

**My street**

*Abbas Bilal*

*Sudan*

This is where I used to live, in Karthum, Sudan, in the Northern part of the city. It’s a small street with 10 houses on either side. The houses are old; some are built from bricks and some from clay. My street has no asphalt, no sewage system, practically when it rains, lakes are formed.

In front of my house, my dad used to deposit and work on huge generators that belonged to the Sudanese army. Nine children the same age as me were living there. We played together everyday, we made cars out of tin cans and wheels out of rubber flip-flops. Everybody made something different, a tractor, a F1 racing car, trucks, family cars. After we had finished to creating our pieces of art, only then the real competion started.

**Our maid**

*Abbas Bilal*

*Sudan*

It’s our maid. She was in her mid-thirties, a bit fat and dark skin. She was wearing traditional Sudanese clothing, very large, so when you unfold them you could see an endless bed sheet, with loud colours and flower-like patterns. Her head was semi-covered and some white hairs, recently dyed with henna, were showing underneath her head scarf and laso the tattoo om her right hand smelled of henna. She was wearing golden bracelets, which where covered by her long traditional Sudanese clothes and the bracelets were clinking and making that sound like the one made by a metal spoon hitting a heater. She was seldom unsure of what she wanted from life, bombarded by so many thoughts that were crossing her mind. When you met her, she appeared to be that kind of person to whom you can safely leave your flat keys and take care of your kids as if they were hers.

One day, my mother was very sad because personal objects of sentimental and financial value where missing. When our maid came to do her duty, she saw my mother sad, sitting on her chair and working on some dresses. She was puzzled indeed to see my mother drop intentionally the scissors on the table. My mother brust into tears and told her the whole story to get some comfort. Suddenly my mother started laughing at the maid‘s jokes. Not long after that my mom saw the bracelets that were showing underneath the maid’s sleeve. Then the maid remained speechless and started stumbling and said...sorry.

**The basket court**

*Prince Deep*

*India*

Time passed so fast that it did not made me realized too. Today I can recall my father’s word: “It’s the actual length and when you will gain height, you won’t have to jump high to shoot the ball in basket.” “Yes, Dad now I don’t have to jump so high to shoot the ball.” I could say that when I finished the 1st year of University.

It’s a cool dawn of July Summers and I am standing at the place which I marked as a basketball court when I was in 6th grade of school. I remember before playing, my Dad and our neighbors use to park the cars at the side of street to make enough place for kids to play in Block. Looking at the marked floor, I could still smell the fresh paint when along with my neighboring friends I brought from the shop. We collected the money and choose the best quality paint. And now, we did not had a large enough scale to draw a semicircle on the floor which was the biggest problem to make sure how much points to be given if scored. We did not even know all the basketball rules but still we wanted a professional prototype.

My father finished fixing the basket in a permanent way by drilling holes in wall and applying cement thereafter and we were still thinking how to draw exact circles on the floor. “Hey! I have an Idea, when will Topographic Geography be used?? ” I screamed and we drew the markings by a grid method. That was fun. We marked the floor exact but today I think, “If markings were to be made by brush, used by our hands and marked on floor, how come we got the paint on T-shirt?” Perhaps that’s why we were called kids. Just a bit far from a halfway line I could see the stupid fenced grill which covered the lawn of my neighbors. It is having a sharp iron solid ends mounted as artificial flowers. They are still very sharp and were so before which was only responsible of making our dozens of basketballs deflate.

Today no one is standing on balconies of the building and the newspaper is being delivered in balconies by the newspaper boy. But just to the back of time some of our neighboring couples use to watch us from the same balconies while having their evening tea. Especially Mr. & Mrs. Singh, a newly wedded couple from the flat 140B uses to clap if anyone of us scores a miraculous shot. I could also remember the shouting, hooting and loud applauses of our while I am watching the basket which had some spider nets now. I guess no one is playing but the basket did not shake an inch even we threw millions of shots. Thanks to Dad. Generation changed and kids born in 21st century are not sporty enough besides they are comfortable with their cell phones, dating and relations.

Suddenly I heard the same voice “Oye!! Are you bringing yours or should I bring mine”? She is my neighbor friend talking about the basketball. We grew up together playing lots of stupid kiddish games and basketball after all here. She use to have Nike Basketball and I had Cosco but today where was mine I did not know. “I don’t have the Cosco, maybe lets shoot with nike” I replied. “Same old reason, afraid of getting your ball getting deflated by the fence.”She smiled and shooted the ball in basket. She was watching me from when, I did not notice. All the dirt and Spiders cleared off in the first stroke. “It’s been years and she still had the ball which we played with last time” That’s what girls like, saving the memories. Suddenly hearing the basketball thuds made my old friends gather and one of them who use to be late always for the game, was the first one today. We played and laughed again with same old spirits and saw the 4year old son of Mr. and Mrs. Singh clapping and screaming, rejuvenating our chilhood on the same court.

**My colleague**

*Prince Deep*

*India*

It seems like hours making me not able to concentrate on Romanian Echocardiography lesson much. In sooth, I needed a break, that’s when I packed up with a pen and started writing about him.

2nd October 2006, as I was to fill my flight number in my departing Immigration Form at Delhi International Airport I glanced at the flight information board for confirmation. I saw him first time standing beside his luggage with a face as if he is irritated by the flight officer. I approached to the same aisle of Austrian Airline check in and discovered that he is going Timisoara too. For me any Indian Passenger in flight OS602 with Timisoara boarding pass was to be a Medic student for sure. He looked to me quite spiritual as he was having a big red colored holy mark on his forehead at the hour of 1am. I sighed, and introduced myself to him. We shook hands but more of his attention was to his luggage. I felt his tension and offered him help to get his extra weight in flight, but instead of thanking he was sticked to his absurd behavior. I accepted his behavior as normal because of airport environment. Everyone is worried, who is carrying extra luggage without official help, unlike me!

By reaching Timisoara, I realized that I was to stay with him and other three colleagues in a four room apartment. These arrangements were made before our arrival by a common agent. Usually he was very nice and other colleagues but things changes in a month. He uses to get annoyed and angry very often, either it’s a reason to select a brand of rice from a supermarket or to counter on a topic relating medicine.

It was not our colleagues started hating him but nobody uses to like him. His arrogant behavior, time to time mood swings, even swearing sometimes made distances between him and us very long. Today, we call him a subject of Obsessive Compulsive Personality Disorder!

**Christmas party**

*Prince Deep*

*India*

“Let’s have last look! Do I look good enough?”

Well, these were the words in my mind when I was getting ready for the Christmas party organized by our university students. At last when I capped the perfume my roommate yelled, “Cab will be down in 2 minutes”.

“Let’s have a look on crowd”, my friend sighed in my ear; the automatic door slides and the two of our colleagues who were already before us at the venue screamed from the right side “Dudes! Merry Christmas”. We wished same and went inside the hall where the function was going to take place. Everyone was shining like a new penny. It looked as if I am at some big occasion. While ten minutes passed I noticed a casual dressed man in between tuxedos. “Oh my God, not him again!!” I whispered.

He was him again; I shocked as did not expect him to be such on such a good eve. He was wearing a cartoon printed T-shirt with blue jeans from which I could see threads coming out on his sport shoes. Last time I saw him shopping around city centre and enjoying Starbucks and very next day he was shouting in Class about the reviews regarding recent movies he saw in Cinema every Friday. That gave me an idea he is not from a poor family but all he was showing is dis-interest through his appearance. His way of walking with jerking shoulders simultaneously was making a disturbing image in the hall. His over grown beard was also not giving a genuine look amongst us.

Just when we were having the dinner, we saw him standing with some of our senior students and discussing loudly about Indian Politics while drinking a Cola. We smiled at each other and thought he is the same.

**The savior**

*Prince Deep*

*India*

The chirping of birds and sounds of flowing water from a nearby cascade was enhancing the time of dusk. I was slowly sipping my juice bottle in order to make it run till the evening ends. Small kids running, certain college students having fun and honeymoon couples posing in front of cameras was making me smile after every other minute.

I was sitting on a bench, while admiring the nature, I heard a feminine scream. I turned 180 degrees to witness what is going on. I saw a young boy struggling to pull a girl who slipped from the edge of cliff and was hanging on the branch of a tree. I rushed too with the crowd for any kind of assistance needed. By the time I reached the spot, the brave boy had pulled the girl alone. I could see a glaze in his eyes after receiving a big round of applause in his favor. He gave his water bottle to the girl and asked to drink while taking deep breath. He kept his hand onto the girl’s shoulder in order to console and satisfy her that all is fine now. He was also concerned about any injuries if the girl has received any. The way of his examining the girl put many questions in my mind: “Is he a doctor?, Is he getting over-friendly? Or is he flirting?? Huh!!

He was casually dressed, with an athletic physique and a video camera around his shoulder gave an appearance of a random tourist. As everyone dispersed a manager of nearby hotel offered him free dinner of that night. He became centre of everyone’s attraction. I sat on the bench and could see him advising the girl that how her high heel sandal on mountains risked her life. I could not hear their conversation but the girl immediately threw her sandal in valley. At last, after half an hour passed I could see a smile in between the rolling tears onto the face of beautiful lady. He did save her life but also cherished her at the time when she was psychologically scared. Later he went with his friends leaving the girl with her troop after an hour.

I’d always seen these kinds of scenes in movies. But this scene was not created, neither was he an actor who was to save the actress as per sequence nor were the emotions artificial. He was a hero, a real!

Next morning while having my morning tea I saw that boy’s picture with news on a local newspaper. His name was Prince Deep, a medic student and the girl who thanked him via press for saving his life was Tina.

**Unirii Square**

*Prince Deep*

*India*

India was never on Soccer Team list in any of big Championships. I loved to see the adrenaline rush soccer matches but what team to support for, I could never decide. Well, today I could support a team. Its Romania, I came here a year before to study Medicine but it has become a second home for me.

Its Romania vs Germany tonight and Unirii Square is the right place to enjoy the match. It’s my favorite place in whole town. This place has a central monument bisected by gardens and walkthroughs. It is a significant hub of many clubs, bars, pubs, discos and drinking lounges. The Municipal Corporation has layed benches alongside to sit relax and enjoy the environment.

There is a lot of rush tonight but finally I grabbed a bench to get seated with my friends. I heard lot of noises from the bars which are usually mounted on an artificial floor in open during summers. Many were clicking photos, posing, laughing, talking and enjoying drinks. The opening of cola/beer bottles, sound of glasses becomes a cheerful addition in environment. The sky was covered by lots of colorful Frisbees and down under kids were diving on grass to catch them. Smiles all over, one can never feel bored at a place like this. All of a Sudden the Church Bell rings, from a nearby cathedral as the clock strike 9pm. The evening was enhanced by these kinds of voices while the pigeons fly back to roof tops. Its seemed, as if everyone has gathered to enjoy the evening.

Finally the administration turned on the big LCD display for the match. This displaying of match was free and is placed for promotional purposes for tourist enhancement. People screamed while Romania played. I could see a young kid dressed in Romanian Jersey was screaming on top of his voice whenever the ball is with Romania. I could also hear the word, Deutschland! Deutschland! Timisoara is a student city with mixed European culture blend. So, there were German supporters too. The 90 minutes filled the place with screams, hooting, horns etc.

The result of match did not biased people. In the End I see people from different countries enjoying with each other and cracking jokes like every evening.

**My house**

*Richa Saxena*

*India*

I was 9yrs old when we had shifted to our new house. It was a big house, bigger than my previous located at the corner of the road. It was surrounded by parks on the three sides but unfortunately on the fourth side was the main bus-stop of the area. I was never a quiet person so I always loved the horns of the buses. I also loved the smell of diesel from the buses. But as time passed I too grew up. My studies started to grow up as well. Soon those horns started to irritate me as I could not concentrate well with the noise all the time. I prayed “oh god! Please stop this noise forever and forever.” And finally God listened to my prayers. There lived an Advocate right next to our house who complained of the noise pollution in a Residential area and soon the Bus-stop was removed. Now, after so many years have passed by when I go back to my house for holidays I have started missing those horns and the smell again. I miss the shouting of the travelers, noise at the ticket counters, drivers yelling at people to board rapidly. I miss all those faces which I once saw which had become a part of my life. I again ask god “when can I see them back again”, but I know this can never happen as now stands a big building in place of the stop.

**Timisoara’s Center**

*Richa Saxena*

*India*

The one place that fascinates me in Timisoara is the City Centre or Centru as called here. This is the one place were I forget all my problems and indulge in the surroundings. One can hear children shouting, people talking and pigeons flapping their wings while flight. You can see people feeding the pigeons, children playing and enjoying their Mc Donald meal, parents running after children, taking care of them and young couples deeply in love. Today I can also see the graduates of the Polytechnic University happy and satisfied, clicking photos and enjoying their graduation. There are also a bunch of school children with their teacher roaming around sipping a drink or enjoying an ice-cream. I wish I could be young again. I can smell the burgers of Mc Donald’s, the Shwarma and the chicken of KFC. Oh! My mouth is watering now. I can also smell Pastries and Patties all around and yes, the new hot-dog counter. Feels as if I am in heaven. I touch the benches, a bit moist from the morning dew. i sit down and suddenly comes a pigeon near me. I touch him and he relaxes. I then hold him in my arm but since I am scared at the same time, I let him off. I then go to the fountain in the middle and touch the cold waters there. I love the smell when water falls on mud. Can't resist it. I can taste the fresh air as I yawn while standing there. I want an ice-cream right now! I go and buy a vanilla flavored one from the nearby shop and start enjoying it. Here comes a child running toward me. Oh! He bangs into me and I drop my Ice- cream. I did not mind. In turn I was happy as my friend bought a shwarma for the two of us in place of ice- cream. I love Shwarmas of Timisoara. And then we went back home, gorging on our Shwarmas full of mayonnaise.

**The doctor**

*Richa Saxena*

*India*

He was standing in the dark corridor of the Gynecology hospital, in his white coat and with the attitude of a doctor. We were all supposed to see a cesarean surgery. Everybody was over-excited as it was our first time except for him. “What could be the reason?” I stood wondering. And then suddenly I heard him saying “I am now bored of such surgeries.” Somebody asked “but why?” “My mom is a gynecologist”, he said proudly and added that he had assisted his mom many times during such surgeries. There was a shine in his eyes. He looked at everyone with broad-opened eyes and cooled head. But this was short-lived. Suddenly after a few seconds he became a little upset. I could see lines of tension on his forehead. He wanted to go home. He was not interested in attending the operation but he had to wait for his friend as she was excited about the surgery. He would have to wait for 2 more hours, this thing was disturbing him. His gestures were as if he knew everything about gynecology (it felt as if he knew more than the doctors present there). He wanted to pass his time so he started talking to everyone around. Then suddenly our assistant doctor called us and we all went inside the operating room. He was the last one to enter the room. He stood near the window of the room, least interested, looking outside, at the ceiling, at the patient and other colleagues while chewing a gum. And so I moved my concentration from him to the woman who was undergoing with immense pain along with the happiness of giving birth to a child.

**My bag**

*Richa Saxena*

*India*

I had just entered my teens. Felt as I had achieved everything in the world. I felt as if I entered adulthood. Now, I could do anything I wanted. I was old enough to take my own decisions. I could now make anything wrong, right. But I don't think my mother thought the same. For her I just had got a year older and nothing else. With the increased level of enjoyment and fun and also the time spent on the telephone increased, my interest in studies started to go down. I thought I had other more important works to do rather than study. Study can wait but my friends and their gossips can't. If I have to be in school, I got to be updated with the new gossips going around otherwise everyone would make fun of me. It was our unit tests, but I did not study. Thought we all would co-operate and cheat in the exam. After all we were big now. But somehow, that did not work out. When the results came I could manage to get just a 55% in those tests. I felt bad as I was always a bright student and scored above 90%. How would I show these papers to my mother? She would scold me. She would tell everything to father and if he is in a bad mood he would beat me up or ask me to stay out of the house with my hands up for a couple of hours as he always did. I decided to hide my papers in my school bag and kept the bag in my cupboard. Summer vacations began and I forgot about the results. Tomorrow was my brother's birthday so I along with my father and brother went for some shopping. We were busy shopping, suddenly called my mother on my father's mobile phone. I thought she had just called casually to ask about our whereabouts. But she wanted to talk to me. I thought she wanted to remind me of something. As soon as I held the phone, in a very sweet voice, my mother said “Child, I washed your school bag today!" At first I did not realize. After a few seconds I went pale and drenched with sweat. I had never had so much fear from my mother in my entire life. She then added," I am waiting for you at home." I gave the phone back to my dad and he came to know everything. My father told my brother too. I did not fail any exam, just got less marks but still my brother started to shout"Oh! My sister failed her exam. How shameful! How shameful!" I felt so irritated than I felt like slapping him. That day a chill ran through my spine. I then realized that mothers can find out anything and everything so one should not hide anything from them.

**Am Amin and The Cake of my Childhood**

Ahmed Rashidi Hassan

Egypt

 I got used to getting up early at weekends thinking of the cake. I get up first in the house, get dressed quickly and ask my father for some money, and then hurriedly go out to meet Am Amin the cake vendor; I always tried to come there first, but unfortunately never succeeded, I don’t know why, I always find him surrounded by many kids. He stands on a round stone so that he may be taller, always dressed in white clothes, with a white coat and a white tall hat. From a distance I can hear the noise of the children, mixed voices, *please, Am Amin, I was the first, please give me one more, please …please – I, please … give me the change, please…* then I approach a little, led by the vanilla smell that makes me fly and land among the children; I impatiently wait for my turn, and look at Am Amin through his round shop window. I can see him slicing the cake in the big baking plate; he looks to the children with his beautiful black eyes and smiles. Now I can see better his creole skin and his smile that seems to lighten his face. I hear many stories about Am Amin; I hear that he moved in our town about seven years ago because of the war, and he has no kids, that are why he loves kids so much. When he sees a penniless child, he gives him cakes for free. In short, he’s a pleasant but weird man; nobody ever knows his whereabouts. He would just show up in the morning with his cakes and disappear as soon as he finished. No one knows where he bakes his cakes, neither where he would have fun in the evening.

One summer night I didn’t sleep a bit, I just wanted to be the first in line at Am Amin. I left early. I was the only child in the street…but couldn’t find Am Amin. Later on the other children came one after another, like rain drops. We waited right there in the street until later that afternoon, but he didn’t show up and we didn’t know where to search for him. After three days we found out that he returned to his native town as the war was finished.

**My street**

Ahmed Rashidi Hassan

Egypt

 I used to live on a street, not very large, but crowded with clothes shops, food stores, and fruit stalls. This is how my street would always look like, and very fancy; street vendors from the country used to wear colored clothes in red, green, and yellow. I remember the smell of the street in the morning, a mixed smell of fruits, apples, bananas, oranges, and mandarins. In the middle of the street they would sell shawerma and kebab, and at the end of the street one could see the vendors with clothes for women, children, and men. At the weekend I always got a good chance to eat shawerma and look at the clothes to see what was new, what was in fashion, even if I didn’t have the money to buy clothes. On my street I enjoyed that nice combination: you could find it all in this very single place.

**Bucharest – Iasi route**

Ahmed Rashidi Hassan

Egypt

Right opposite from me sits a weird man, with black skin and black eyes. He speaks Romanian with an interesting accent to the girl next to him; they speak Romanian and other languages I don’t know. The girl is attracted by the black man, by how he speaks. Indeed he speaks interestingly, with his eyes and teeth that are in sharp contrast to his face. He looks smart as he talks and knows how to use his eyes, they sparkle when he really means things…one can really tell he’s got good sense of humor, plus, he’s got some clever reactions to jokes. Between his teeth you can see his smile sparkling. He might come from Africa, after his looks, or from France, because he pronounces “R” as the French, or he may be from America, as he’s bald and resembles American basketball players. He’s wearing this sports costume as sportsmen would do or he may be wearing that for practical reasons. Indeed this guy takes good care of him! Nothing seems to have escaped him … a bottle of water, orange juice, and some fruits; ready for a six hour train journey. Aha, that’s it, caught him, he must’ve forgotten his napkins! Oh no, they are right there, in his bag; now he’s prepared and very agile. But why on earth are our girls so attracted by foreigners, especially by these black men?

**The Black Church**

Ahmed Rashidi Hassan

Egypt

It was summer when I and some friends of mine decided to travel to Brasov. It was my first time there. I’d heard many things about it before and I’d dreamt a lot of going there and finally the time had come. The journey was so beautiful, rich in vegetation and the villages and the mountain appeared and disappeared constantly. The road was lined with nut trees that were sheltering us from the heat. It was so nice to see the villages at the bottom of the mountains that looked red like some mushrooms seen from above. Finally we reached the city centre. The centre was crowded with people singing, dancing, and eating. On the corner a tall building appeared, old and dark colored, as if it’d been burned. I approached and the closer I got, the bigger the building, as if it had no end. I learned it was a church. My friends told me it was the Black Church. Not far from the city centre, not far from the town noise either, and all of a sudden the church gives you peace and quiet, you hear no music and no concerts from the centre; it was as if its walls refused the music and the noise of the town people. Its gates and windows are old and of a dark grey colour; no window stays open, no door either. I could smell the stale air inside as it was creeping up the small doors and I startled because of so much quietness. It was extremely hot, but the walls were cold and I felt that life finished there; I turned around and I saw the people eating, dancing, and singing, but I was unable to hear the music and the smell of the food either… who turned the volume off? I could be watching a film of cartoons with the volume off! I felt it was gradually getting colder… I was cold… I ran back to the city centre… yes… now I hear the music and my colleagues and I sense the smell of food.

**The train trip**

Ahmed Rashidi Hassan

Egypt

I got to the railway station and caught the train in the nick of time, I hurried with my luggage, and finally got on the train when it started. I got into the sleeping car to find there a fat man with finely cropped hair. I said hello to him and in reply he asked me *why are you so late?* He was talking to me as if we’d shared the same things for a long time. I said nothing and tried to put my luggage in its place. But the man didn’t stop from asking me questions *where are you from? What do you do for a living? Are you here on business? Are you a student?* Many questions, indeed. I answered, but he wasn’t pleased with my answers; he thought I was lying to him! His clothes smelled of cigarettes and a stale smell of wine was coming out from his mouth …yuhh . He had some more two liter beer bottles and he drank and made noise when drinking; from time to time his face and eyes turned red. His face was sweating but he didn’t wipe it at all, as if he wasn’t feeling anything. He was fat. He prepared his bed to go to sleep. It wasn’t comfortable for either of us, because he kept on fidgeting while I sat still in my place, but when he turned from one side to the other I could feel his pillow and his ass… I could hardly wait for him to go to sleep and be quiet, that was it, and he finished his bed. How smelly were his shoes!!!

**Family Home**

*Edwina Vochoţ*

Czech Republic

When she got out in the street, she then realized which door she should have entered. Well-made, smooth, cold and slightly wet, that gate was just next to her. When she entered the hallway, she understood why I’d been telling her that mom was an excellent cook. The burning oil, the strawberry jam, and the heat made it difficult for her to breathe. I knew I’d surprise her. It was her first visit to my place.

She really liked the hallway. The smell of doughnuts mixed with the spray chamber made her feel at home. She got into my room. She was not exactly keen on lavender and vanilla, so she turned her nose up at the smell and made herself at home. She was very particular with everything around her. My perfume seemed very appealing to her. It immediately reminded her of her aunt. A sweet and old-smelling scent was spreading freely about the room. I knew for sure that she could no longer feel the smell of the newly-bought furniture. She dashed to the bathroom. She was attracted by the blue patterns on the tiles. You could feel the smell of a clean place and detergent. Just then I took the laundry out of the washing machine. Then I thought she had completely forgotten the doughnuts.

I serve her a tea in the living room. The hot steam gives off a mint aroma. I see her turning her nose again. I can feel a diffuse smell of lavender and vanilla. I get downstairs into the kitchen. Down the stairs I realize father had just put on the heating.

I can sense burning wood and smoke that gives me a nose itching. When I got into the kitchen, mom was cooking. Strawberry jam, fresh soup, carrots from grandma, and grilled chicken.

I’ve made it! Adela was really feeling at home.

**The Street of my Childhood**

*Edwina Vochoţ*

Czech Republic

"It was full of children, full of tall green trees, colorful flowers in pink, purple and red. The sweet smell was floating in the air. I very well remember the gigantic old cherry plum in front of the block. It was the greatest thing in my street. The red juicy mirabelles were fascinating me. But I was not allowed to climb up the tree. I was just over seven years and I was in great danger of falling down from the tree.

Well, I still keep in mind the warnings of my mother before going to work, "Don 't you get on that tree in my absence ..." And she went to work with fast steps leaving me in the care of my grandmother.

I had not dared to break my mother's word until one day when my grandmother was cooking and my mother had gone to work; I easily slipped off and I climbed up the tree. I was still hearing in the distance the tapping of my mother’s shoes.

With hair up in two pigtails, brave and bright, I climbed up the tree. After I ate several mirabelles, some were sweet, others, sour, my stomach began to hurt me. I looked down guiltily and I realized that I wouldn’t be able to go down.

Then I got the tree in my arms and I did let go. Only when I saw my clothes with blood running abundantly, did I realize that my whole face was skinned and full of blood. Being injured, scaring my mother, I escaped from being scolded. So today, I remember with pleasure of the street where everything is possible, where all children's dreams come true. "

**The blonde lady**

*Edwina Vochoţ*

Czech Republic

"I'm traveling to Timisoara. In one of the stations a lady gets on the train. She seems to be deeply engrossed in her thoughts. I think she must be very conceited! What could she be doing here wearing so much lipstick and this hairstyle? Could she be Romanian?.... Hmm, I don't think so! Her skin is too white! She’d rather look Russian! Or might she from Norway? Somewhere from the Northen parts anyway. Such white hands! Has she ever suntanned? And what is she doing here? Carrying so much baggage? And what about those square nails? Oh God, how many magazines is she carrying in her bag! Doesn't she have anything better to do? Uh, my eyes hurt! ... If only she would get that pink bag down!

She’s looking straight at me! Did she realize I was following her?

Oh, finally! Well, she finally put that bag down! ... .. Now why is she fidgeting on that chair? What is she doing with that phone in her hand? I think she must be calling her mother! I’d better be looking out the window before she realizes I’m staring at her blonde hair and her skin, so white! "

**The kitsch girl**

*Edwina Vochoţ*

Czech Republic

She was the mammy’s girl. She’s always liked to be in the limelight, but she did not know that scratching her head is as bad as chewing your nails. She didn't care about anything. She believed that money can buy anyone. She was so skinny and always tried to hide her bones in clothes with loud colors and rough materials. The tick- tock of her embarrassly high heels was awful. I saw her some time ago, but she has not changed at all. The same tangled hair loops, the same split ends, and disheveled bangs. She looks the same as a woman about 30 years of age, too skinny, with dazzling yellow hair, and with lips loaded with lipstick. Big eyes, with too light-colored mascara brought out her forehead about six fingers wide. She is that kind of person you can never be a friend with. Her too many cheap jewels gave away her blank character.