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Sentences on
Wonderment

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I.

(blind folk in a chair lift) A man called Malcsik saw some blind folk in a chair lift. A couple, they were a couple, he told everyone: a man and a woman, about thirty. It's not easy to tell the age of the blind, of course. Their bodies look younger as a rule, but there is a touch of the old about their manner. They take their time. Their deodorants are strong, quite surprisingly strong, and Malcsik thought he understood why. In the days following the event Malcsik told everyone that the blind couple began by buying their tickets like anyone else. The employee at the base station in Zugliget didn't so much as look up and was about to sell them standard tickets. He was already turning the cash turntable with the tickets in the tray. According to Malcsik, ticket vendors always spin those turntables round too fast. So the turntable was already turning when the blind couple said they would rather have the concessionary tickets. A bit of an argument ensued, because the chair lift operator wasn't prepared for blind folk, so the ticket vendor tapped the price regulation table with a fingernail. Malcsik stressed that the blind folk didn't – indeed, couldn't – see the ticket vendor's donkey jacket, which was at least three sizes too big. That was something only Malcsik could see. It was the blind man who spoke to the ticket vendor,

in his account. He was telling all and sundry that in the heat of the argument the woman produced their documents. She looked like someone who believed in the power of documents and who, while the other did the talking, silently produced the papers, just to be on the safe side. Malcsik didn't merely recount the way the blind couple argued, he also imitated them. They argued in a low voice, with a monotony that was hard to bear – as though one had to listen to their self-assured huffing inside a bell jar. In the end they got their concessionary tickets and headed for the bullwheel, the point where you get into the chair lift. The man tapped with his stick to the right, the woman to the left, so they – according to Malcsik – reconnoitred everything within a 180-degree radius with their white tentacles. In moments they found themselves at the bullwheel, where the chairs turn from the downward direction and go upwards. An accident was only just averted. Malcsik recounted to his acquaintances how the ticket vendor, in that donkey jacket three sizes too big – it was almost bulbous – at first just leaned back in his seat, sorting the banknotes in the till, arranging the ticket blocks by the sponge pad, and adjusting the table of charges in the booth window's metal frame. He was no doubt unsettled that he had lost an argument. By the time he leapt from his seat and tore open the door of his booth the blind couple were already hovering by the empty swaying seats. Malcsik recounted to all and sundry that the blind couple were trying to gauge the distance between the seats with their sticks. They

held their sticks out in front of them and counted the number of times they made contact. They calculated that they had two seconds to step between two chairs arriving one after the other. Not a lot but not too little either. By the time the ticket vendor got to the bullwheel, accompanied by a public transport employee, the blind couple were about to step between the chairs. As a matter of fact, their calculations were quite accurate. As Malcsik said, not even the x-es painted on the ground escaped their attention. They sensed exactly where they were situated – so perhaps no accident would have ensued. The ticket vendor arriving agallop in his bulbous donkey jacket looked like a parachutist mid-jump, Malcsik recounted. And the trousers of the public transport employee were too short, but then the blind couple, Malcsik pointed out, had no way of knowing what ungainly garb the public transport company foisted on its employees. The ticket vendor snatched the blind couple out of the way of the moving chairs, while his colleague gave them a tongue lashing as if it were not for money that they were sold those two tickets. One, Malcsik thought, extends them a little finger but the blind would right-away take his whole arm, across the metal turntable. Then, after the incident, they patched things up. The public transport employee, mollified, took the blind woman's arm, while the ticket vendor – still sulking a bit – took the arm of the blind man. They led the couple to either side of the chairs. They asked them to fold their sticks, emphasising that travelling with a stick extended made them accident-prone and was

therefore forbidden. They seated the two in the next chair, snapped the safety bar down across their laps, then nodded as they watched their departure with a satisfied mien. Malcsik was travelling in the chair behind, pondering whether it was forbidden because it was dangerous or if it was dangerous because it was forbidden. He got a whiff of their deodorant. At first they were silent. A good thirty seconds passed without them saying anything. When they breathed in the fresh mountain air Malcsik could see their feeble shoulders rise slightly. How beautiful, they said, but according to Malcsik even this was uttered as though inside a bell jar, in a huff. They couldn't find the leg-rests for a long time, Malcsik said, and their lower legs dangled in the air. They leaned towards each other and embraced. At one point the woman put out her hand, to try and touch a twig. And the man, defying the prohibition, unfolded his stick and recklessly tapped with it underneath and to the side, almost touching one of the pillars. Blind folk in a chairlift, Malcsik thought, behind them. When the blind couple's chair jumped over a roller, they thought that it was their chair alone that was swinging. That they were completely alone in the world with that swing. Soon they started to enjoy the rhythmic jolts. They calculated that it took their chair ten seconds to cover the distance between two rollers and began to anticipate the burst of sudden acceleration followed by the slow-to-abate swinging, like irrepressible children. That's these blind folk for you, Malcsik told everyone. When they reached the upper stop there was no one

to help them off. Because the Zugliget people obviously forgot to ring up the Jánoshegy staff, so there was no one waiting for the blind couple. They didn't expect to be getting off so soon, thinking that no one in their right mind would take a chairlift for just a few short minutes, having taken three quarters of an hour to get there and forking out 1200 forints to an unprofitably-run company simply to get where they were. By the time they realised where in fact they were, they had already passed the bullwheel and were headed back down at the same concessionary rate. For ten whole minutes I was obliged to smell their pungent unguents, Malcsik fumed later, not daring to transgress the transport regulations to leap from his chair before it reached the bullwheel. His gaze followed his blind couple enviously as they departed in their swinging chair. People of youthful looks but a touch of the elderly in their manner, as they took their time, Malcsik kept saying of them to all and sundry: a man and a woman. One, he said, believed in the power of argument, the other in the power of documents. Well, there you have it: blind folk in a chair lift.



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