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ADULT FICTION



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Adult Fiction

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

Founded in 1981 in Ottawa, Canada, L'Interligne explores, publishes, and markets Franco-Canadian literary works — with a priority on Franco-Ontarian works — that stand out for their contemporary concerns and stylistic originality. L'Interligne boasts a rich catalogue of poetry, novels, short stories, and drama. The publishing house inspires vocations and fosters connections between authors and their readership; above all, it is committed to reinventing, one book at a time, what it means to live and create in Canada.

This portfolio brings together some of the best works by French-Canadian authors published by Éditions L'Interligne. We believe that these original, inspired and powerful stories will appeal to adult readers who enjoy plots that unfold all around the world and who are interested in discovering the remarkable richness of the French-language cultural diversity.

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Une absente

Roxane Nadeau

UNE ABSENTE ROXANE NADEAU

ROMAN

L'INTERLIGNE

Novel, 151 pages, 2025 | ISBN 978-2-89699-852-4

S U M M A R Y

In a parallel version of Rimouski where the Internet has failed, two trans teen girls explore their identity through a clandestine electronic network called WAVE. When one of them disappears, the other dives into the digital archives, polluted by artificial intelligence, to find her friend.

Part psychological thriller, part novel about friendship and identity quest, *Une absente* (*Absentee*) explores marginalization, memory and the pitfalls of technology. Set in rural Québec, *Une absente* is a sensitive and compelling novel giving voice to those who are often made to be invisible.

A U T H O R

Roxane Nadeau was born in Rimouski. She is a poet, novelist and literary critic. She also specializes in digital marketing and currently lives in Trois-Rivières. *Une absente* is her first novel.

In eight days

Today is the multi-stage fitness test, the beep test in PE class. P is on the lookout, standing on the line with a dozen other students, all wearing gym clothes. BEEP. She runs, huge strides, towards the other end of the gymnasium. Fast, but not too fast, to keep her energy up. Slow, steady breathing, but not too slow because her blood requires lots and lots of oxygen.

When she reaches the other side of the gym, she waits. BEEP. Run. BEEP. Run. Until she's exhausted.

Some students, out-of-shape, are starting to give up. P is relieved to hold out a little longer than those first few losers: she gained a lot of endurance by riding her bike since her parents never give her a ride.

There are only about ten runners left, almost all boys, when P chooses to stop fighting against the fire in her lungs and starts walking to recuperate.

Fifteen minutes later, the winner of the race is crowned and everyone scatters to the locker rooms.

P is more comfortable changing in one of the unused shower stalls. As she pulls the curtain closed, someone opens it.

"Are you changing in the showers?"

P places her hands in front of her crotch. Reflex. Even if she barely had enough time to kick off her running shoes. The person talking to her is a perfect stranger. He looks older than her: the locker rooms are used by many different gym classes on this side of the school.

"Yeah," simply answers P.

The intruder turns to yell out to someone behind him:

"Yo, Kev! Check it out! He's smart, he's gonna change in the shower stall."

The person he is talking to appears in front her: a redhead who has threatened P before, but who she doesn't know either.

"Is it because you don't want people to see you naked?" asks the redhead who probably answers to "Kev".

"Uh..."

P is baffled by the question, trapped in the too-small space.

"Hey, nice necklace. Can I see it for a minute?"

She whispers excuses as she tries to hide the silver chain under her sweaty t-shirt collar. Kev's friend suddenly grabs the necklace between his fingers. It breaks and pinches P's neck.

"Ow! Fuck."

She manages to grab hold of her necklace so they don't steal it.

"What's the problem here?"

A tall and blond young man approaches. He towers above the strangers. It's Welliam. The guy P fell in love with the moment she laid eyes on him. She can't believe he's defending her, since they've never actually talked. He doesn't even look at her, keeping his eyes focused on the other two boys, talking to them in a casual manner.

"Nothing, we were just asking," answers the first intruder, the one who started all this, before running off with his friend.

"Thanks, you didn't have to do this."

"No worries."

"Wait, Welliam... Take it."

The boy is silent. His eyes are green and he's standing there shirtless. However, P is strangely indifferent to that fact. She untangles the chain in her palm, this trinket she thought was essential to her overall look, and holds it out to the boy she likes. Welliam stands there, arms crossed.

"I know what you guys are scheming. I saw you in the soccer team's photo. And I know you want my chain because of the CURRENT challenge list."

"Wait... Your name is P, right? You accused me of sending you a message or something."

"Just take it, I don't care. Honestly."

For the first time, Welliam seems to be displaying sincere emotion: a mix of confusion and shame.

"Keep it," he says.

He turns around and leaves without saying another word. P closes the shower curtain again. Her heart is beating fast, frightened. And her heart is also broken, her fantasies of love that always seem to turn to nightmares once confronted to reality. At least, Welliam didn't deny it this time, he actually said the name of the network where his mysterious message led.

P finishes changing without any further interruptions. She throws her damp clothing in a plastic bag she then stuffs in her backpack, next to the broken chain. P wishes she could throw the broken piece of jewelry away, but she's afraid of getting rid of the only thing that proves all of this wasn't a dream. She waits a few minutes to be sure the two bullies and Welliam are gone. She keeps an eye out for the redhead, more easily spotted. Seeing nothing, P leaves the locker room to meet up with Laurence on the school's third floor. Her best friend is just coming out of class.

"How was French class?" asks P.

"I fell asleep. I went to bed at 4am because I found this WAVE website with every South Park episode for free. It's really cool! How was gym class?"

"Hm... It was the beep test. I'm exhausted."

P wants to tell Laurence what happened in the locker room, but she doesn't know how. Should she make it shocking? Romantic? Mysterious? She ends up describing the event in a few sentences, sticking to the facts as much as she can: the two bullies, the broken necklace, the weird discussion with Welliam who was changing in the same locker room.

Laurence pulls P by her sleeve towards the wall, away from the surge of students in the hallway.

"Okay, so you saw Welliam shirtless? How does he look?"

"Hm... cute. He has abs. And some sort of tribal tattoo on one of his pecs."

"Hot. And what did you say about CURRENT?"

"I was able to get in, or at least log in and see the page with the weird message."

"Hey! You used to lecture me because I wanted to see it. Does that mean you found your social identification number?"

"No. I was able to login without it from my computer."

"It's not supposed to work like that..."

Speaking in hushed tones like Laurence had started doing, P describes what she remembers about the page, including the mention of a few data dumps related to the challenges. In these challenges, people had to perform crazy tasks, like finding an object or a piece of clothing or putting on a show in a public or private setting. With all of them, you had to provide proof of what you did in exchange for honours and prizes.

“Maybe we could join in too? Is it a lot of money?”

“From what I can gather, it’s not much. And there’s stiff competition; it’s not just teenagers using this. It looks weird.”

“Weird? I’m surprised you’re the one worried about this.”

Taken aback by the sarcastic remark, P drops the subject without answering.

It’s getting harder everyday for the two friends to find something to do during their lunch break. For the past few weeks, the two of them have been trying to establish a new record of distance for their lunchtime walk, without then being late for their afternoon classes. Today, Laurence suggests they head out to Beauséjour Park. P quickly regrets agreeing, her legs tired and sore from the gym class fitness test.

“If you could change your name, legally, would you do it?” she asks.

Laurence is silent for a moment before answering.

“If you want to use a girl’s name and have all an ‘F’ on all of your cards, you have to surgically transition. At least, that’s the way it was when Valariat did it back in 2005. It’s not like going from ‘Guntram’ to ‘Bernard’, say.”

“I don’t really see why someone would switch from one ugly name to another...”

“Short answer: yes. I would change my name to Laurence officially if I could. In the meantime, I can still take hormones. And T-blockers. Hey, did I show you my new piercing?”

Laurence lifts her tuque and pushes back her raven-black hair to show her right ear. Her earlobe is adorned with a small shiny hoop.

“Uh? Doesn’t the right ear mean you’re gay?”

“What? No. My parents didn’t want me piercing both of my ears like a girl, so that’s the compromise we settled on. I’ll just have to put in an earring with a gemstone when it’s healed.”

P is sad her mother wouldn't even let her buy colourful clothes when they went back-to-school shopping. She was scared her daughter would be bullied. It's not as though dressing in all-black ever protected her from taunts. Her black hoodies could have worked for an emo look but always ended up having some graffitied logo or an image of a dragon, which ruined the vibe. If she could choose, P would have loved to dress like Laurence, even if it made her a target for homophobes.

The sidewalk is covered in wet snow and soon, the girls realize they won't be able to walk far. P works hard to keep pace with Laurence despite her sore thighs. They reach the gate of Beauséjour Park, but can't go any further. P has never actually been to the edge of Beauséjour Park, where the paved bike paths meet the dirt trails of a forest getting progressively denser, blurring the frontier between the park and the wilderness.

"I just really hate this statue," says Laurence, standing in front of a sculpture by Roger Langevin, one of many erected in Rimouski.

It depicts a woman – big butt, big breasts – pulling a triangle towards her as it's being pushed upright by two muscular guys. Their bodies are shapeless. For P, the woman's silhouette brings to mind the word "fertility", a sacred statue from the Stone Age. The men are a little crooked, built like farmers.

A snowball lands right on the forehead of one of the statues. Laurence whoops. The two start piling snow around the stone people, as though they were dressing them with clothes.

"That's what you'll look like if you start hormones," says P.

P presses two mounds of snow to the stone torso of one of the male figures, giving him breasts. Laurence doesn't seem to think it's funny to be compared to an androgynous monster.

"And you'll have a little ass like this," says Laurence, shaping her own mounds of snow and pressing them to the backside of the statue in front of her.

"Wait, do hormones give you more butt, or less?"

"Valariat told me you gain so much butt when you go on hormones."

"I didn't see Valariat wrote to us?"

"No, I called her, we spoke for an hour or so last night. She told me how things were living in Montreal when she was our age. She also told me about the queer movement but, honestly, I didn't understand much."

“Okay,” says P, disappointed.

“She also told me about this makeup that hides your five o’clock shadow.”

P is a bit overwhelmed, surprised Laurence and Valariat are so close.

“We should head back to school,” says P. “Can you write down Valariat’s number in my day planner when we get there?”

“Maybe you should ask her for it yourself. She might not want to give it to everyone.”

“Whoa... Okay, stupid... keep your number!”

Laurence realizes silently she acted like a bitch and tries to change the subject.

“You said Welliam broke your nice silver chain?”

“Actually, his friend Kev and What’s-His-Face did. But I think they’re working together, the three of them.”

“Let me see it, please.”

P hands it over. Laurence takes a cardboard jewelry box from the pocket of her ski jacket. Inside, a shiny hoop rests on a bed of padding.

“I had already bought the pair when my parents forced me to pierce only one ear. I thought I’d keep it, just in case I break the other one. But surgical steel is pretty strong. Maybe the hoop could serve another purpose.”

With difficulty, Laurence works her hoop and the chain together, her fingers almost completely frozen, before finally declaring triumphantly:

“Fixed it!”

“Wow, you’re awesome!” says P. “Can you fasten it?”

Her fingers are definitely frozen now and Laurence takes almost as much time fastening the chain to her friend’s neck than she did repairing it.

“Done! It’s not exactly like it was, but I like the style. It should hold for a while.”

“It’s perfect, thanks. I feel like I’m getting my identity back.”

“Oh, before I forget. Do you want to come over for dinner Thursday for my birthday? We’re having raclette! My birthday is Wednesday but since you have a piano lesson, I don’t mind pushing it.”

“Yes!” answers P, without really knowing what raclette is, thinking it’s probably some sort of rich people meat.

They don't talk much on the way back to school, they're too out of breath. When they get to the school parking lot, P says she needs to run to the pharmacy to pick up something. Laurence heads inside to get to her class on time.

After getting suspicious looks from the Jean Coutu cashiers, P returns to her classroom. She's ten minutes late and she heads to her desk by the wall under the angry gaze of her teacher. P hates being the centre of attention. As she takes her notebook out of her backpack, her hand brushes the box of hair dye that just cost her a third of the money in her bank account. For the rest of the class, she can't help but smile, dizzy with freedom.

Dévorés

Charles-Étienne Ferland

DÉVORÉS CHARLES- ÉTIENNE FERLAND

ROMAN

L'INTERLIGNE

Novel, 210 pages, 2018 | ISBN 978-2-89699-590-5

S U M M A R Y

In a dystopian North America, a terrible wasp-like insect devours everything, pushing the horror even further by attacking humans. It's hell on Earth: misery, chaos, and desolation plague the survivors, who must fight over what is left. One last hope remains: an island in Lake Ontario could have escaped the disaster. But how to reach it? The risk is enormous, but Jack has nothing more to lose. Suddenly alone, facing his destiny, he devises a plan to reach the shores of Main Duck Island. *Dévorés* (*Devoured*) depicts a hellish world where human beings have to survive, despite the odds. Filled with twists and turns, the story makes for a thrilling read. Shivers guaranteed.

A U T H O R

Born in Montreal in 1992, Charles-Étienne Ferland is a writer, actor, musician and biologist. He holds a master's degree in insect ecology from Guelph University.

3. The myth of haven

Every afternoon, Jack wakes up still hoping the last few months were only a bad dream. He knows full well he is mistaken when he hears the wasps buzzing, as they crawl behind the wood planks nailed to the windows, excited about the tin-canned humans inside. He knows it as he breathes in the fetid stink of putrefied flesh in the streets. The bodies of those who hadn't been able to hide and had been torn to pieces by the insects. So, he stays in bed. It has become a habit, despite his fear. He closes his eyes and tries to forget. But atrocities like these can't be forgotten.

After a few minutes, Jack gets up. He throws on a pair of jeans and a button-down with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows. He circles the couch where Frank is still sleeping and heads to the bathroom to wash up, using a bit of room-temperature rainwater. In the mirror, he can see his face is even thinner now. His cheeks are hidden behind the bushy beard he hasn't bothered shaving for weeks. His long brown hair hangs limp in front of his tired green eyes. He always tells himself he's going to cut them the next day, but he never does.

He finishes washing up and walks back to the bedroom they use as storage, the walls covered in shelves. Under a thin layer of dust, canned food, granola bars, dry pasta, rice, peanut butter, juice and dehydrated legumes are crammed together. In a corner, piles of kindling are gathered. He selects his ration of one can and brings it to the table where he opens it by candlelight. It was the group's decision: an allotment of one can per day. Nothing more. September was almost over. Already, they were afraid of winter.

The sun would soon set on the gloomy city, plunged in darkness for almost two months now. And the insects would disappear.

A few dusky sun rays shine through the gaps in the planks, illuminating the suspended dust motes. The table faces the living room, at the back of which a low table separates Jack's bed and Frank's couch. Open packets of cookies are scattered between the piles of clothes and blankets. Since Jack and Frank share the main room, Maddie and Chad sleep in the bedroom next to the storage space. That way, the couple has a little bit of privacy.

Maddie and Chad come out of the bedroom. They light up two more candles. Just enough to make out Maddie's pale skin, the dark circles under her blue eyes and her tied-back auburn hair; Chad's short dark hair, his hairless face and his brown eyes. Chad lights the camping stove and makes coffee, a rare luxury. Maddie puts on a cardigan and goes up to the roof to check the cages. She had set up cages to trap animals who would wander in, attracted by table scraps. Sometimes, the cages were empty. Other times, she came back with a squirrel, one of a few opportunistic animals who managed to survive this urban catastrophe pretty well. Boiled, it was an *haute cuisine* experience.

Frank's hand reaches out from under the pile of blankets on the couch to grab a packet of cookies on the side table.

"Empty," he growled, throwing the bag against the wall.

Frank yawns and stretches theatrically to let everyone know he's up. He crawls out from under the blankets, his too-big hoodie hiding his mass of thick curls.

"Mezzo cappuccino with whipped cream, and a hint of cinnamon and chocolate!" he yells, pretending to be excited as he sits in front of his cup of black coffee. "Where are the paninis?"

His jokes had stopped landing after the second week of cohabitation. No one was in a mood to laugh. Maddie comes back empty-handed from checking the cages. When Jack's spoon scrapes the bottom of his can, he leaves the table to sit at the workbench with his journal. He could have stayed with the others to chat, but two months had passed since the terrible event and the group had gone through all of the conversation topics they could think of. Sometimes, they played cards or a board game, but most often, they read the books they found while digging through the ruins of the city. Bookstores were treasure troves, asking to be discovered.

Jack had started keeping a daily journal. He kept track of the things happening every week. It kept him busy.

"I can't believe you're doing this," says Frank between two sips of coffee.

"What? The journal?"

"You can call it a daily log or a diary, Jack, it's not like anyone is going to read it one day. Last I heard, more than half of the planet's population has disappeared. People died of hunger and disease or because of those fucking bugs. But hey, listen, I'm not going to be the one to keep you from daydreaming."

Jack had one reason to keep a journal he hadn't told the others. Not even Frank. Truthfully, maybe he didn't really understand it himself. The others came to accept that journalling was his ritual, that it was his way of coping with death's omnipresence. After all, everyone had their thing. Physical survival is one thing. Keeping sane was another thing entirely. For instance, Chad regularly spoke to his family members, despite them being dead from epidemics. Maddie spent hours looking at her childhood photos. Deep down, Jack thought if someone found this journal one day, they would know he had existed.

"It's dark out," observed Maddie. Jack, lost in thought, startled. "Get your bags! Let's see if we can find something to eat."

Before all this, the streets of Côte-des-Neiges had been filled with students. Kids played in the schoolyards. Men and women walked to the metro, the bus stop or to work. These days, the ruined streets were empty and the only job left was to not die of starvation. They had to find as much food as possible. There was little left: only what had been forgotten by the people who ran away from the city. Some things had also been left behind by those who had died after the mutation, or by those who were killed by mercenaries, their provisions not yet pillaged.

During the day, the outside was a forbidden zone. The insects ruled the streets, flying in disorganized swirls. They flew into buildings and cars; there were so many of them. Their noise reminded Jack of the sound of race cars. With flies added to the mix... Streets filled with decaying human corpses were incubators for a plethora of necrophagic maggots. At night, a heavy silence blanketed the city. Jack didn't know where the insects took refuge. They seemed to simply fly off and disappear until the next morning, always inevitably present to greet the rising sun.

From the outside, the apartment looked innocuous. A red brick building, bathed in moonlight, its windows either shattered or boarded up. A few cracks on the wall kept score of the earthquakes. Fortunately, the foundation was still holding up. You couldn't say the same about other houses in the neighbourhood.

From the fifth floor, the building's last story, you could see anyone approaching. The apartment hadn't been attacked by gangs yet. It was said gang members preferred to stay by the water, near the dilapidated Old Port hangars. People fished. This new insect had devoured crops and people, but had been more lenient towards aquatic ecosystems. Overfishing had been stopped by the mutation, and because of the decreasing human population, fish was on the menu again. However, the price to pay was high to have the right to actually fish and, in any case, the group wasn't equipped to fight against those who patrolled the shores. The two times they tried to acquire a firearm; they were given useless pieces of garbage. And you still had to find bullets, which was far from easy.

The early fall had stripped the trees bare. The leaves cover the bodies and the trash that was still scattered on the asphalt. The damp leaves don't make a sound as they walk over them. It had rained recently. It didn't seem to bother the wasps. Even through rain and snow, they flew with Sisyphean persistence. Indifferent. Cars with busted windows were parked haphazardly. Some were even burned or crushed by trees. Planks boarded up the windows of most buildings. Trash, televisions and shopping carts, strewn about. A few plots of grass here and there, left untended, covered in tall weeds. Nature slowly taking back the land.

The little group knows its nightly routine well. Jack and Frank take on the houses on one side of the street, while Maddie and Chad take the other. Each of them has two flashlights, which they use as little as possible, to avoid being seen and to preserve the batteries. They aren't the only ones scavenging. Others are doing too, looking for the same things. And since everyone was fighting for survival, you had to stay alert and keep your distances from all the other survivors.

"Guess what I want to eat today," whispers Frank as he turns a doorknob.

The locked door refuses to budge.

“What?” answers Jack, knocking twice.

Frank grabs a stick from the street as Jack rips out a plank nailed across the door window. Usual protocol.

“A huge poutine, real greasy, with lots and lots of cheese to wash down the cappuccino,” growled Frank, as he smashes the glass.

“Welp... who knows? Maybe today’s your lucky day.”

Frank reaches his arm through the broken window to unlock the door. The place is silent. The only sound they can hear is the faraway whine of a stray dog. A few times, Jack and Frank had entered houses where people were living. It was rare. In those cases, they would just avoid confrontation. There was plenty of trouble all around, best not to add to it. On a map, Jack had jotted down the streets they had cased. A legend of lines, circles and crosses identified the locations searched, inhabited, or demolished.

This brick house, partially swallowed by climbing vines had probably been built in the 20s, with its metal roof and two dormer windows on the second floor. It wasn’t really a house; more of a mansion. A modern addition had been built on the side of the building. The luxurious interior was decorated with wooden furniture. A cast-iron stove, period appropriate, was facing brown leather couches, giving the living room an air of sophistication coupled with a rustic cabin vibe. On a wall beam, lines and dates tracked the growth of a child across the years. What child could hope to grow up in a world like this? thought Jack.

“Come see what I found in the pantry! We haven’t found a stash like this in a while!” Frank calls out excitedly from the kitchen.

“What?” answers Jack from upstairs where he went to check out the bedrooms. “I’m coming.”

“Canned pineapple, clementines, red kidney beans!” says Frank, handing over his latest find to Jack. “And even a bottle of port! Oh, come here, my darling. I can’t believe it. Wait, that’s not all. There must be a month’s worth of food stashed in the back. It’s perfect! We’ll eat like kings! Wouldn’t take much to be the Château Frontenac! Jackpot! Get it? Jack...”

“Come upstairs. You’ll understand.”

P R E S S

“This novel catapults us into a near-future with intelligence and pertinence, what most American films lack.”

ICI Radio-Canada Ottawa-Gatineau

“Officially, *Devoured* is a post-apocalyptic speculation novel. But it’s safer to say it’s a really good suspense, to ease-in readers who would be wary of the genre. This novel is a must-read!”

Journal de Montréal

H O N O U R S

More than 3000 copies sold.

B Y T H E S A M E A U T H O R

Métamorphoses

Novel, 192 pages, 2017

ISBN 978-2-89699-714-5

Finalist for the Trillium Book Award for Fiction, 2018.

L'odeur du gruau

Alexis Rodrigue-Lafleur



Novel, 248 pages, 2018 | ISBN 978-2-89699-617-9

S U M M A R Y

They are in their twenties and they gravitate around the café Aux aurores: Judith, the barista; Béatrice, her colleague; Frédéric, the cook; Paul, an attractive client; and Léa and Carl, Judith's roommates. They don't know yet that these friendships will last a lifetime, for better and for worse.

Their stories are told at three different stages of their lives, up to their forties, and through the years, the group evolves, moving closer and further apart. At every turn, patterns repeat, never-healed wounds reopen, grief persists, and love sometime changes shape. Are we destined to face the same challenges over and over again, while death permeates the air around us like the familiar smell of oatmeal?

In this first novel, Alexis Rodrigue-Lafleur observes with tenderness and lucidity the merciless passage of time on relationships once-thought indestructible.

A U T H O R

Influenced by his work in the museum sector, Alexis Rodrigue-Lafleur establishes parallels between literature and visual arts. He considers writing as a form of manual labour, and chooses words as his main material.

At the end of the evening, we put the “Closed” sign on the door. With the few ingredients he has access to, Frédéric prepares a salad that has more panache than the ones they serve to clients during the day. When evening falls, he can finally let his culinary imagination run wild in the little kitchen where, during the day, he only gets to prepare sad sandwiches, and the simplest soups and stews, because the owner is not looking to impress anyone with original gastronomy. The watchword is simplicity. And no exaggerating on portions, please. If Frédéric is talented, here, we make sure it never shows. The boss is keen to keep his profit margin up – a pretty comfortable profit margin at that.

There are five of them left after closing, and the boss left an hour ago. He might be a cheapskate but he trusts them. They are enjoying the food Frédéric was able to make, even with so little left. As they clean up, they play the music as loud as it can go. It’s a good way to let off steam after having endured the generic and insipid music that plays in the café all day long.

After they leave, they head out to Cosmic, one of their favourite bars. Decked out like a B-movie sci-fi flick set. Aliens invading Earth saddled on flying monsters. Astronauts fighting marine creatures on faraway planet. The bar serves cocktails with names like Sputnik, Apollo, Proxima Centauri, Mars Attack or the Eye of Jupiter.

A larger group gravitates around the café group. For the first time outside of work, Paul and Judith are in the same location. Here, Judith sees Paul in a new light. He becomes a little more real and the reality moves closer to him becoming a dream. His proximity makes her nervous. Plasters a smile to her lips. Freezes her thoughts. To initiate first contact, she goes for it, breaks the ice. She tells everyone around the table how a customer tried to show off earlier today. She ropes Paul in. Turns him into the hero of the story. “That guy didn’t

know what he was saying, right?” Paul smiles. Humble but flattered. He adds in a detail or two. That guy’s face! He left without grabbing his change. The group laughs. What a dweeb, that guy!

They ask the DJ to play the bar’s usual song to start the evening on the right foot: David Bowie’s *Space Oddity*. It matches the decor. Those who know the song sing. Some act out the original choreography. Everyone is happy. Bodies fill the dance floor. The evening takes off.

Eyes darting. Eyelids lowering. Innocent gestures that don’t mean anything, but tell everything. Applied Bio 101. The seduction methods of the young adult specimens. She feels his gaze on her. She feels his eyes on her skin. She feigns carelessness. Nonchalance. She laughs louder than usual. Throwing her head back as she laughs. Filled with the kind of euphoria that makes her trembles and reddens her cheeks. Sublime. A sublime instant. Delicious between her lips. The unique taste of thirst. Heat like a balled-up fist in her belly.

Nervousness makes her shiver. Judith hesitates, doesn’t know if she should act. She’s afraid to let her mask slip. She glances over to Frédéric, making sure he isn’t standing too close, making sure he’s not looking in her direction, misinterpreting her behaviour. Everything would be easier if he wasn’t there. A mix of fear, taboos and desire. An explosive mix. She knows she wants Paul, but she doesn’t know what to do, how to act. The courage to communicate. To let him know. She clings to her girlfriends to find the courage she’s lacking. Caricatures with them the things she would do to him. Acts out, alone on the dance floor, the movements their bodies long to do together.

The storm brewing doesn’t go unnoticed by Béatrice, an old friend who works at the café with Judith. She feels the wind rising. The atmospheric pressure dropping drastically. Free electrons sparking. Judith leaving Judith behind. Freeing herself, revealing herself, revealing her gifts. Especially the gift of spreading joy around her, of communicating her energy to others. Around her, people laugh, dance, drink, have fun.

Béatrice thinks she knows what had this effect on her friend. So, she maneuvers accordingly. Offers her seat when necessary, in order to bring the interested parties together, or to keep the undesirables away. Begins conversations at the right moments. Pushes away the spoilsports. And that especially means diverting

Frédéric's attention. So, she pretends to flirt with him. Plays the game without conviction, without drive. Just enough for him to look away from Judith. The bare minimum to distract him. To prevent him from seeing what's happening on the dance floor. Be a diversion. Her eyes locked onto his. Insistent. It doesn't matter if she succeeds or not. To be fair, she hopes she fails. It would make things awkward at work. Simply divert his attention. For now. For tonight. Without thinking of the consequences. There is no tomorrow. There's only this bar, this night; their whole lives are playing out here and now. We'll see. Anyhow, she knows all of her efforts are in vain. Frédéric's eyes are constantly on the lookout for Judith. He only half-listens to what Béatrice is telling him. He feels none of the heat radiating from her café au lait skin. Ignores her vanilla smell, her larger-than-life smile.

P R E S S

“A novelist is born.”

Le Devoir

“A poignant tale, woven from the little joys and tragedies of six friends, linked for life.”

Le boulevard du livre

B Y T H E S A M E A U T H O R

Rêve-creux

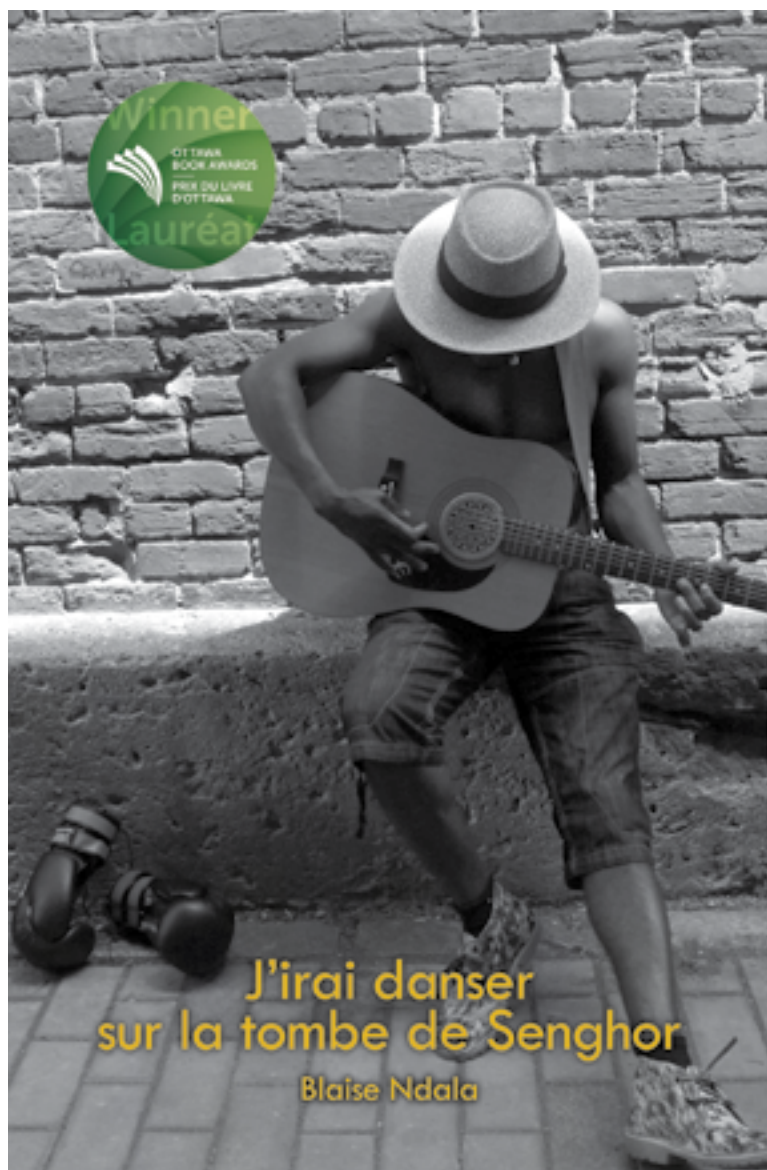
Novel, 248 pages, 2021

ISBN 978-2-89699-753-4

Winner of the Prix Émergence AAOF 2023.

J'irai danser sur la tombe de Senghor

Blaise Ndala



Novel, 464 pages, 2014 | ISBN 978-2-89699-431-1

S U M M A R Y

We already know the outcome of the 1974 fight between Mohammed Ali and George Foreman in Kinshasa. What is not widely known, however, is the background to the “battle of the century”, this unlikely story which took place on African soil. Forty years later, *J’irai danser sur la tombe de Senghor* reveals the socio-political background of a nightmarish and otherworldly society at the end of the colonial era. Music, mischief and magic cross path in the life of Modéro, a reluctant hero.

A U T H O R

Blaise Ndala was born in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In 2003, he moved to Belgium to study law. He came to Canada in 2007, settling in the Ottawa region, where he worked as a civil servant. *J’irai danser sur la tombe de Senghor* is his first novel and earned him a City of Ottawa Award.

As if under the protection of a benevolent cloak, the heat had stopped at the doors of the changing rooms. There was a breeze in the green-and-white painted room that had drifted into the stadium when the metal doors were opened. A few hours earlier, Don King's men had arrived on the scene to supervise the final adjustments for the Africans. The fallen champion's men remained seated in a semi-circle, with the exception of the Master himself and Roy Williams, his sparring partner, with whom he had spent countless hours preparing in the past three months. Like the rest of the audience, Roy had trouble concealing his nervousness. And the tic that contorted his neck and made his head swing repeatedly from left to right was not likely to let the cat out of the bag.

In other words, there was a death row atmosphere in this dimly lit part of the basement of Kinshasa's May 20 Stadium. It was as if suddenly everyone around the Master was helplessly witnessing the evaporation of the energy that had bolstered them for months against the worrisome predictions of the American sports press. No one had forgotten the *New York Post*'s scathing "Kinshasa: Chronicle of a Foretold Humiliation", which the *Dallas Morning News* had echoed with its: "Day of Reckoning for the New Mouthpiece for Civil Rights". In the same spirit, *Esquire* magazine had published a piece by one of the country's most respected columnists that had made more than a few waves a week before he left for the heart of Africa. The columnist had predicted that the world would witness the end of the legend embodied by the man who had "gotten in the ring with such rare and insolent talent that it could last only as long as the transit of a comet". So, between warm-ups, he picked up the phone and called the man who never missed an opportunity to question his reputation. Speaking of himself in the third person, he informed his correspondent that when the day came, and in front of

the world press, “the comet” would gladly teach him to respect the only mortal whose talent was written in the stars and who would not be associated with mere transitory glory.

As the media frenzy reached fever pitch in the expectant African stadium, the Master had no intention of letting his friends introduce doubt – and its inevitable corollary, fear – into the venue through their silence and apathy. In the place where he awaited this fight of his life, as he laboured to create the sports prodigy that the whole planet expected, he had to show unshakeable conviction. A conviction embodied in one who had stolen the sacred fire. Since the flame that burned within him, the flame that he would once again have to convey to his little world, as he had always managed to do in the past, was his faith in himself. This faith which, over the years, had paved the way for a career like no other. A faith he knew how to transform into an almost irrefutable truth. He was the best, the tallest, the most formidable, the most feared and the most beautiful... In short, everything that ordinary people honoured and extolled.

The fact that a segment of the elite, which had elevated itself as the Alpha and Omega of the noble art, continued to deny him absolute and eternal consecration in no way undermined his certainty. On the contrary, he was even convinced, on Wednesday, October 30, 1974, in the heat of that tropical night, in an African country where he had been welcomed as a native child, that he would offer the world his own definition of the word “revenge”. The former kid from Louisville, Kentucky, who had become the king of the ring, doubted that there could be a better place on the planet from where he could look down on the racist warmongering America that had conspired to knock him off the pedestal.

That pedestal. To climb it again. To stay there. Against all odds.

“What’s going on, guys? Hey! Did somebody die?” he asked after a short solitary warm-up.

He was coming and going under the overhanging beams, from which half a dozen weak light bulbs had been hung. To shake himself out of his funk, he approached the group and started jumping on his toes as he did in the ring, punching the air. He was shadow boxing, fake-punching each member of the audience with a jab from the left, which would always stop less than an inch from the

target's face. When he approached the last person sitting near the emergency exit, the man pulled back, eyes wide and panic-stricken. The Americans laughed. They were accustomed to his pre-fight ritual. This was not the case with the special advisor to their distinguished African host, whom the Master allowed to witness these last moments before the long-awaited assault.

"Ah! Mr. Special Advisor is scared!" the Master said. "I hope George isn't going to do this to us, right? I didn't come to the land of my forefathers just to see him pass out on the first step. I want to see him dance; I'm going to make him dance. And when I say dance..."

Some faces relaxed under the spell of his legendary magnetism, but there was still a long way to go. Had he been summoned, the Angel of Serenity would unfortunately have taken his time in the streets of Kinshasa, depriving the group gathered around him of his precious halo.

Drew Bundini Brown remained impassive. The trainer from Florida looked like a priest who realized in the middle of the service that he might run out of wine for the Blessed Sacrament. Was he haunted by the echoing voice of the Haitian fortune teller that he had secretly visited in New York's Brooklyn neighbourhood? In his memories, the last words uttered by the octogenarian were not the kind that fortify you at the end of your journey. The closer he got to the moment of truth, the less confident he felt. But his long and rich experience had taught him that fights were won – or lost – well ahead of time. The outcome was always determined in advance, by a host of causes that were rarely understood in those minutes before the first bell rang.

"Are you scared too, Captain?" the Master prodded him, without stopping.

Bundini didn't answer. Lost in his thoughts, he was busy opening a large black bag. Angelo Dundee, the second coach, was cleaning his glasses and had his head down. He was the one best acquainted with that day's adversary since he had worked for him a few years back. Beside him, the technical manager Jabir Herbert Muhammad was nodding and saying his rosary. He looked like a salesman in a souk deserted by tourists. Normally so chatty, always ready with the funniest jibes at the drop of a hat, even he seemed frozen in place now that the countdown had begun.

As for Ron Baxter, the journalist from the Chicago Chronicle who had followed the Master for a week, he finally surrendered to the atmosphere around him. He was thinking of the bet into which he had let himself be drawn a few weeks earlier, suddenly aware that the potential defeat of this man standing in front of him might upset him for reasons other than financial: he recognized a part of himself in the strange fate of this loudmouth whom nothing and nobody seemed to faze.

— Don't worry, Champ; everything's under control. We're going to have a party for him tonight, the boxer's brother, Rahman Ali, said with a knowing smile. We'll show him that you're the boss of him and that he was wrong not to learn even a tenth of your lessons. You know what I mean?

— You're too generous, bro. Way too generous. He didn't even learn a hundredth of what he saw me do since the time he was a little kid. He was pissing his pants when he watched me throw the gods he loved to the mat. What a mummy!

For the first time, faces lit up. The audience joined together in laughter and it was as if a rainbow had suddenly appeared, keeping the weather at bay. Outside, like cannon fired from an offshore warship, came the rumble of a coming storm. There was nothing more common than a tornado after a sunny October day on the banks of the Congo River, which had been renamed Zaire by the Colonel-President, the one his compatriots reverently called the "Guide to the Revolution of Authenticity". "All that was missing was this damned weather!" Bundini couldn't help muttering as he approached his protégé to hand him a white towel. The latter ripped it out of his trainer's hands and quickly tied it around the trainer's neck as if he was trying to strangle him.

— You don't dare admit that you're afraid of this mummy who's as good at boxing as a quadriplegic in a marathon!

— Laughing at quadriplegics shows a lack of class, my friend, murmured the coach, without trying to free himself. And it's not like you.

The Master stared into his eyes for a few seconds, then let go before lightly hitting his chest twice as a sign of contrition:

— May Allah forgive me, he whispered, looking up to the heavens. All that was needed was a sign from Heaven. One would be enough. No nuances. Unequivocal.

He went to unfold what he had chosen to wear for entering the ring. It was a long robe made white silk, decorated with a black pattern that the other seated members of the group could not identify. As he was about to put it on, Bundini shook his head to indicate that it was not the right outfit. The Master opened his mouth to reply, but changed his mind at the last moment. He extended his hand. The coach then unfolded a robe that he had prepared for the occasion, also white but decorated with green, yellow and red stripes at the hem. The colours of the host country. A map of Zaire, in the same colours, was sewn onto the back at chest level. It was no less than a replica of the jacket Bundini was wearing: same colours, same patterns. With a wave of his hand and smiling for the first time since they had entered the stadium, he indicated the similarity to the boxer – but this failed to elicit even the slightest sign of enthusiasm.

— Come on, Champ! You're going to put it on, aren't you? I chose it for you myself. I ordered it especially for you and this memorable occasion. Go ahead, man!

— And here I'd have bet that it was the Guide of Zaire himself who'd presented it to me!, the master said sarcastically.

He winked at the Special Advisor who was present, thinking of all those times at home when his first wife would fight with their six-year-old daughter. As the discussion between the coach and the athlete got bogged down, the Zairian dignitary noted that the latter was even more capricious than his own offspring. In fact, when his eldest daughter liked a particular dress, all of her mother's attempts to make her wear something else were to no avail. A deadlock that only her father, always lavish with his compliments, managed to diffuse. He finally overcame his hesitation and approached the two Americans.

— Champ, he stammered, with a smile that he tried to make warm and natural, if you will allow me, and without wishing to criticize his tastes, which I find remarkable, I think Mr. Bundini tips the scale more towards the symbolic than the aesthetic. My opinion, with all due respect, is that you should wear the robe you have chosen yourself. It is more attractive and has a certain air that is almost priestly... I mean, something that fits with your characteristic charisma.

— Did you hear that? replied the Master, surprised. I would have bet that the Guide's trusted man would choose the colours of the national flag!

— Champ, you are a child of this country, replied the counsellor in impeccable English. (*He held his gaze and seemed flattered by being so close to one of the most powerful men in Africa.*) The Guide told you about it himself and everyone in this locker room knows it, including Mr. Bundini. In the streets of Kinshasa, it's not "*Foreman, boma yé!*" that the people chant, it's "*Ali, boma yé!*" Ali, kill him, finish him off! Do you need a map of Zaire on your heart to conquer your people's heart once again? I doubt that.

That's when Gene Kilroy intervened. He was the chief financial officer and must have feared that this intrusion by the Zairian would disrupt the harmony between the coach and his protégé. With only thirty-five minutes to go before the most important fight of his whole career, it didn't seem to be for the best:

— I can't help but doubt, Mr. Special Advisor, that your boss would approve of your advice if he were here. The champion would do well to accept his coach's gift.

— All right, guys, the Master cut in. You're going to let me decide. I am the champion... I mean, the real one. At least no one here in the stadium, or outside it, would dispute that, right? And I want to continue being the champion I want to be, and not the champion that others would like me to be, by the grace of Allah the Merciful. I want to continue to choose what I want to wear today, and tomorrow, as well as what I want to eat and how I want to eat it. I want to have the last word on the names I intend to wipe from the history of boxing. And I want to decide how I will get there. Understood?

He had let the robe given to him by his coach drop to his feet and placed his own over his left shoulder, after casting a sharp look at his brother who was watching the scene. He then went to sit at the massage table. They watched him put on his high-top white boxing shoes and signal to his doctor, Ferdie Pacheco, that he was ready for his routine check-up. When Ferdie stepped away after a few minutes, the Master got to his feet, moving back and forth, performing that famous dance which had contributed to his legend around the world. He seemed to get off on taunting an invisible and unmoving opponent. "Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee. Your hands will not strike what your eyes have not seen," he shouted in English. He

1. In Lingala, the most widely spoken language in Kinshasa.

followed an invisible path, zigzagging between the big pillars that supported the bleachers above them, then shot a right jab less than a centimetre from his corner man's left retina.

— Hey Cap! It's rumba night. We're going to dance!

Bundini remained silent.

— Am I supposed to party? You didn't want my robe. You rejected my gift. If someone had told me that only an hour ago...

— Don't worry, man, the Master replied. Tonight, you'll have the greatest gift you've ever had or will ever have in your whole damned life. Tonight, you will hear this traitor George Foreman calling for help from the gods of Africa. But the African gods are of no help to anyone who drops his pants in front of the enemy, and who mistreats his mother's daughters and sons. The Bantu gods are on Mohamed Ali's side because Mohamed Ali is at home in Kinshasa – and tonight he'll have the last word, right? Come on now, move, he said. *Fly like a butterfly...*

— *Sting like a bee*, Drew Bundini Brown finished, giving up. The two men then embraced.

— *Motherfucker!* the coach shot out, smiling.

Within minutes, Mohamed Ali had gone from friendly relaxation to concentration. Dressed in white, he retired to an adjacent room to pray with his brother and with his manager Herbert Muhammad. Twenty-one minutes now separated him from his fight with the world heavyweight champion, George Edward Foreman. Foreman was a Capricorn too, but seven years younger and with forty victories under his belt – including thirty-seven by knockout – and still undefeated. Big George had very little left to prove. A natural prodigy. A machine in the service of pain. A mountain of muscles that wiped out all his opponents, without exception, by the fifth round.

P R E S S

“With this book, Blaise Ndala explores many aspects of post-colonial Zaire. The underlying political and social tensions are woven throughout. It has some of everything, with easy dialogue, lively prose and endearing characters. It is a good read and a very entertaining novel.”
Ici Radio-Canada Nord de l’Ontario

“Through light-hearted and meaningful dialogue, the novel *J’irai danser sur la tombe de Senghor*, which won the Ottawa Book Award in 2015, invites readers to follow Modero’s path.”
Le National (Haïti)

“[...] what gives it its strength and originality is the way in which the author puts himself in the shoes of Modero, a talented young musician who leaves his village of Banza to try his luck in a city where the singer Zaïko Langa Langa reigns supreme. Finally, Mohamed Ali, superbly evoked, is merely a pretext: what emerges from this book is a delicious rendering of Kinshasa the Beautiful with its musicians, its bars and its superstitions.”
Le Soir (Belgium)

H O N O U R S

Finalist - Prix Trillium 2015

Finalist - Prix littéraire Émergence 2015

Finalist - Prix Christine-Dumitriu-van-Saanen 2015

Winner of the City of Ottawa Award - Creative Writing, 2015

Rights sold to Vents d’ailleurs (French): France, Switzerland, Belgium and French-speaking Africa

Rights sold to Other Press (English): World except Africa

Film adaptation by director Rachid Bouchareb (*Cheb*, winner at the Cannes Film Festival; *Poussières de vie*, nominated for an Oscar for Best Foreign Film; etc.) is in progress

Russian translation, BookLand Press.

Le petit Abram

Philippe Simard



Novel, 168 pages, 2016 | ISBN 978-2-89699-539-4

S U M M A R Y

Le petit Abram features an endearing boy who, through his personal diaries, shares his disenchantment with the rigid values of his village and his plan to flee to Europe in the wild hope of making his fortune there and returning to marry Zaema.

Without prejudice or bias, this highly novel deals with the distressing fate of these young people who are tempted to emigrate to Europe.

A U T H O R

Philippe Simard was born in Ottawa and lives in Quebec. He holds a PhD in literature and teaches at the Cégep de l'Outaouais. *Le petit Abram* is his first novel.

What I like best about school is walking there with Zaema, and especially walking her home in the evening afterwards.

She and I walk more slowly than the others, we let them all get ahead of us, and when they turn the corner to get onto the main street, we know that it's just the two of us now, that there is nobody to see us. I gently take her hand. And we walk forward, swinging our arms, just like that, as slowly as possible, to make it last a long time, so that we don't have to turn the corner too quickly, but we don't stop either, because we don't dare, it's not allowed.

Zaema is a girl like no other. I promised her I would propose to her the day I have enough money to buy a car. Rich people always have a nice car and the really pretty girls, it's a well-known fact, only marry rich people.

She told me she would like the car to be red, because it's the colour people notice most. If that's what she wants, I agree! She wanted to know when I would get it, and I didn't know what to say to her. I felt that she wanted me to reassure her, or swear to her: "It won't be long, believe me, I will soon have our car, and I will go to your parents right away to ask for your hand."

I think she would have preferred that I give her a more precise date, that I reassure her that the car would be outside her door on a specific day next week, guaranteed. But I don't want to lie to her. I want her to understand that our problem is not an easy one. The truth is, I do not know when I'll be able to come back, with the car and the money and everything. It is hard to predict. I said: "I'll do everything I can to get back quickly, but God knows how many weeks, how many months, how many years it may take me! But I swear to you, I will come back, I will do everything, everything." We stopped and she looked at me without saying a word. I saw in her eyes that she believed me. It was one evening when we were

coming home from school as usual. The sun was setting behind the houses and the alley was half in shadow, half in sun. It was the time when the birds were flying between the walls and calling to each other from the rooftops. She approached slowly, her eyes were like mirages. She touched her lips to mine... It's a memory that words cannot describe, they can only scratch the surface. But it lives within me like an oasis in the desert.

Obviously, Zaema does not really know what it means to leave the village, to leave the country, to find a place where there is work, to find a job that pays well, and to save a lot of money. It will not be easy at all. It will be hard. I know that I will suffer. But there is no point in explaining it all to her, in discussing the danger involved in going alone, in crossing countries that we do not know, that no one here knows. There is no point in telling her that I am afraid. I prefer that she not worry too much, and above all that she not lose hope, even if I do not return as quickly as we would like. She must wait for me.

Maybe I should show her all this on a map, so that she knows where I am thinking of going, and the routes that I will be traveling. Then she would understand that it is not in the next village and that I cannot get there and return in a few days. I will ask the teacher if he would lend me the large map that he keeps rolled up in the corner of the classroom. That way, she will see that I am not kidding, that these are not just empty words, that I am serious, that I am committed. You do not risk your life for love if you are not really in love.

In the end, it is just a matter of money. If I cannot amass a good amount, Zaema's parents will never let me marry her. They already have someone in mind, someone who is rich, which I know because my parents were talking about it the other day. They knew this because my mother knows Zaema's mother pretty well. They always chat when they run into each other at the market. They were in the living room after dinner, while I was helping my aunt in the kitchen. My mother said, lowering her voice (though I could still hear):

"Did you know that little Zaema has a serious suitor? They had him over last week with his parents, and everyone thought Zaema was very pretty.

— Well, he's just one suitor. It doesn't mean anything. There will be others, for sure. When a girl is pretty, she can afford to wait.

— I don't know. It looks serious. He is the son of a second cousin from the city, on his mother's side. Apparently, the family runs a furniture store and they are pretty well off. They arrived in a new car...

— Hmm. That doesn't mean it's going to work. Anyway, don't tell Abram, it would just hurt him for nothing.

— Why don't we go to their house, too, and offer them our son? He's worth as much as the son of a second cousin from the city, isn't he? Don't you think it's time we did something?

— We could always do that... But all we have to offer is our poverty. Zaema's parents would turn us down for sure. So let's at least avoid the shame.

— We should try anyway...

— There is no point. When a girl is pretty, parents can afford to be picky.

— You know very well that Abram is not just another boy. He would make a perfect husband for Zaema.

— Abram is an excellent boy. I am very proud of him. But think about your own daughter. If you could choose the best match for Hava, wouldn't you choose a rich cousin from the city, if one were to show up, by some miracle?

— It's not the same thing. Abram and Zaema have known each other forever.

— It's normal to want the best possible match for your daughter. It's in the family's interest.

— It's sad, though. They already like each other.

— That's not the reason people get married.

— I know."

The easiest way would be for Zaema and me to be allowed to choose as we please. But that's not how it works. And it forces me to do something big, something that may be beyond my ability. I don't know what I am getting into, I don't know anything.

How do other people manage to accept it when things don't work out the way they want? In any case, I shouldn't just stand here, watching things happen, without saying anything, without doing anything, as if I have already given up, as if I was already dead.

When they see my new car, Zaema's parents will thank God that they know me, and they will say to me, as if they were talking to

a gentleman from the city: “But where were you all this time, Mr. Abram?” They will give me their daughter to marry, right there, without waiting one more minute. Then, all that will remain will be the wedding itself. It will be a wedding that the village will remember for a long time since we will invite everyone to come and celebrate with us.

That is my dream. Our dream, Zaema’s and mine.

To avoid any risks, and also to make things go faster, I am going to send them one or two photos from where I will be. One will be of my new car, with me in the car holding the money. I will also write them a beautiful letter on fine paper to convince them not to give their daughter’s hand in marriage to anyone else but me, so that they will at least wait until my return and give me a chance. I am going to write all this with a nice new pen: “I have a lot of money, I am serious, I will be there soon, I am on my way...” And other things along those lines so they can see that it is not a joke. I will also put a good amount of money in the envelope, so that they will believe me. And I will even send them the pen.

I know Zaema’s parents a little. They like me. And if I have money, I am sure that they will wait for me. I don’t see why they wouldn’t wait for me. I mean, they won’t really have a choice. I will write a figure at the bottom of the letter, a large figure, to impress them. It will be all the money that I will bring back with me. They will know that it is not just for show. And with God’s help, it will be in the bag.

But if despite all that they still refuse to give me her hand, I, Abram, swear that I will take Zaema away in my car and we will both go and live somewhere else, in a place where there will be nobody to tell us what to do, where there will be the ocean and sand and springs and trees. Zaema told me the other day that she dreams of seeing the ocean, so I am going to take her there, all the way to the vast ocean, in my new car. And there, God willing, I will marry her.

But if everything goes as Zaema and I hope and dream it does, things will be simpler. Her parents will agree, they will wait until I return, there will be no problem, and we will not have to go and live anywhere else.



When Uncle Moussa gave me notebooks to write in, it was so that I could copy verses from the Book or sentences that I wanted to remember, so I did not think I could use them for anything else. Anyway, all the children in the village already learn by heart many sentences that the teacher gives us from the Book, and we must be able to repeat them without mistakes. For that, I always used the little coloured notebooks that they give us at school at the beginning of the year. Because you do not joke around with the lessons. You just need to know them. There's nothing to think about. Otherwise, the teacher will get angry for sure. And if it is obvious that you have not put in enough effort to learn properly, then he punishes you.

Like Aaron the other day, when he made a mistake in reciting the verses. He should have said:

“The souls of the righteous are in the hands of the Lord.” But he said, “The hands of the Lord are in the souls of the righteous.” We all burst out laughing and the teacher was not happy at all. Aaron said, “I am sorry, Sir, I wasn't feeling well last night, I couldn't study, I was sick, I swear...” We believed him, we could see in his face that he was telling the truth. It's not like Aaron to make up stories. But the teacher did not want to believe him, and struck Aaron on the hands with the reeds. Just twice, that's true, but it still stings afterwards, that's for sure. The worst part is that the teacher told his parents, and that night he was punished again, and had to stay in his room until the next morning, without any food or drink. Let's just say he won't forget that particular verse anytime soon.

Luckily, it's easy for me to memorize sentences, so learning them doesn't bother me too much, even if I often don't really understand what I'm repeating. Those who wrote the Book weren't thinking about guys like us, at least they didn't write it so that we could read it by ourselves and understand it all the first time. There are almost always things we don't get. The teacher explains it as best he can... and I know that he explains it well, I mean he spends the time and even answers all the questions... if we have any, but often we don't, and it's not because we understand it. Actually, we keep quiet because we don't want to show him that we didn't get it. We learn and repeat everything, and we avoid asking questions. The teacher has explained several times that there are things we have to know without trying to understand them. So we tell ourselves that it's normal not to understand everything we

learn, even though that's not very motivating. The teacher promised us that when we are older, we will be happy that we know all kinds of important sentences by heart, because they will advise us what to think, what to say and what to do. And that, he insisted, is reassuring for a man who knows nothing about the world outside his village.

That is what the Book is ultimately for: it explains everything – life, death, the world, and other things, too. It tells us what God expects from us. We don't have to think about it. We just have to know it. The first duty of boys like us is to obey. We don't need to ask why. The sentence that the teacher often repeats on this subject is the same one that the priest repeats at temple: "Follow those who guide you." And he adds: "It is God who gives men their place in the world. If you respect the authority of your father, of the priest, of your teacher, of all those whom God has placed above you, in truth, it is the will of God Himself that you respect."

Our fathers, on the other hand, their first duty is to ensure that the traditions are maintained. If I understand correctly, that mainly means not changing anything, but really, never, ever changing our forefathers' way of thinking and of doing things. Basically, our fathers, too, must accept everything without asking why.

I learn my lessons well. I am a good student. At any rate, that is what the teacher always says to my father when they meet at temple. My father tells me that. The teacher congratulates him on how well he is educating his son.

It is important to me that my father think I am a good student. It prevents a lot of problems. If I did not do as well, he would start watching me more closely, as he did with my older sister Hava a few years ago, when she got even worse grades than usual. Hava was never very good at school but that time she had really hit bottom. So he didn't want her to go out with her friends during school breaks, and even made her do her homework in front of him in the living room. But that didn't last long. My sister started getting better grades right away. Being watched by my father drove her crazy. She tried harder to do well. When my father saw that, he relaxed a bit.

I am careful, I do what I am told, I work well, and I know that makes my father proud. He sometimes talks about it to people who visit the house, I sometimes hear him bragging about it to the neighbours. When my father is happy with us, life at home is so much easier.



But since I decided to leave, I do not care about school anymore. My head is full of things that prevent me from listening, thinking and working like I did before. I will do whatever it takes to make sure the teacher does not notice. I am doing as well as I did before, but my heart isn't in it anymore.

Fortunately, I have my friends. It feels great to play football in the backyard, to run without thinking about anything, except not letting myself be thwarted, throwing passes and scoring.

It's true that sometimes we play other games for a change, like last month, after the holidays, when we almost all received marbles as gifts, because there were cheap ones available at the market. So we played marbles. But playing with marbles doesn't last long since we quickly get tired of having to gather them and carry them around in our pockets. In the long run, too, we miss moving. I mean, marbles aren't really a sport. So we went back to playing football. But before we did, because we didn't want those marbles anymore, we got rid of the ones we had left. We went to the dump behind the scrap dealer's house. We pulled out our slingshots, formed a line, and attacked the rats. It is not easy to hit a rat with a marble. They are fast and they run off after the first round of shots.

Last year, Daoud managed to kill one, a big one, but it had lost it tail. To scare the other rats, we impaled it. I know that is the right word because I asked the teacher and I remember his funny expression when he answered me. So we impaled the rat on an iron rod that we found in the garbage can. But when we went back in the evening after school to see if it was still there at the end of the rod, we saw that it was gone and Faarid said that the other rats had probably eaten it, because they like eating each other. We didn't contradict him since we thought it was a logical explanation. Anyway, Faarid knows about rats because his father works at the market and he kills a lot of them.

Yes, I am always happy to see my friends, even if school doesn't mean anything to me anymore.

Above all, I am more interested in learning how to recite the Book. I know it is very important to read it and to know it. That is the most

important thing in the world, after God. I know that. And I would not want to be the only one who does not know it. They say that there are people in the country who can recite it in its entirety without looking at it, and they certainly deserve to be admired for that. But if someone asked me, “What about you, Abram, what would you like to know?” If I could answer truthfully, I would say that I would like to know the names of all the birds in the sky and all the fish in the sea and all the animals that live in the plains, in the mountains, in the deserts and in the forests. And to know by heart the geography of the whole world.

You cannot travel if you do not know the names of the other countries, if you do not know the locations of the borders, roads, mountain crossings, valleys, rivers, bridges, cities and villages, and all the extraordinary things you will doubtlessly see when you travel.

There is a proverb that you hear often in the village: *Crossing the desert without knowing the springs is like crossing a forest with your eyes closed*. Even though there have not been any forests in the region for a long time, it shows that travelers must know in advance where they are going if they hope to get there. But you cannot really say that our teacher teaches us geography properly. We all look at the map together two or three times a year, and it is only to show us the locations mentioned in the Book, or those that appear in the stories of country’s history.

To really learn something by looking at a world map, you should not listen to what the teacher says. You especially should not pay attention to what he points to with his finger. Instead, you should look around, I mean anywhere else, and see where the land ends, where the oceans begin, where the mountains and rivers and deserts are – all of that – but you should also see how the land is divided up, how many countries there are, what their names are, and notice their shapes, their sizes and how they are grouped together, because the Earth is not square and it is not smooth either, and moreover, it is filled with water. And there are countries in all corners of the map!

I would also like to learn other languages, like Uncle Moussa did when he went to university in France. He knows a lot of things that the men in the village will never know, simply because he has traveled.

But since the last war, we hate everything that is not from here. So at school we study only the things that everyone already knows,

and we especially avoid talking about other peoples, even though we know that they exist and live all around us.

The priest visited us in the classroom once to explain us that we should be satisfied with learning how to recite the Book. Apparently, nothing else is really important, since it will never be useful to us here in the village.

“God talks to you through the Book,” he said, raising his voice, as if to impress us. “The words of the Book are His words.”

Daoud raised his hand to ask if God spoke only our language, or if He spoke other languages, too. The priest did not really know what to say and turned to the teacher with a surprised expression. Daoud added: “Logically, there should only be one language of God, right? So how do our enemies talk to Him?”

We were very happy that Daoud had the courage to ask that question. We were curious, too. In any event, he was clearly not trying to provoke the priest. He asked very politely, even if he was a bit insistent, truth be told.

After the priest left, the teacher got angry with Daoud, as if he had said words that we don’t say, as if he had blasphemed, and he got five strokes of the cane on the palm of his hands, which hurt. There were tears running down his cheeks, like two streams in the sand.

Now, we no longer dare to ask questions about the things we learn or do not learn in school. We recite the Book, and that’s all. It is not up to us to decide, we understood that. Until we are grown up, all we can do is obey.

P R E S S

“With *Le petit Abram*, Philippe Simard has published a touching first novel.”

Nuit Blanche

“This very short novel will immerse you in a touching world. Abram is an endearing character who repeatedly makes us think.”

La bibliomaniaque

“This book is full of bright highlights and deep questions presented in the light and brilliant words of a man who is approaching the end of his childhood. We let ourselves be carried away by the inspirations of dreams, departures and the escape from poverty.”

La recrue du mois

“There is something of the philosophical tale, almost a fable, in this first novel by Gatineau’s Philippe Simard.”

Le Droit

H O N O U R S

Winner of the Prix du journal Le Droit, 2017.

B Y T H E S A M E A U T H O R

La galerie des portraits

Novel, 296 pages, 2022

ISBN 978-2-89699-750-3

La coureuse des vents

Louenas Hassani



Novel, 272 pages, 2016 | ISBN 978-2-89699-503-5

S U M M A R Y

Evangeline (or Addis), a Franco-African historian and poet, is a pure product of hybridity. She is a woman who investigates her roots, who follows the tracks to shed light on her origins.

Humanity, in all its greatness and misery, unfolds in front of our eyes in this novel – whether the action is set in Ethiopia, in the mountainous regions of the Central Sahara, the Sudan, Tel Aviv, Kabylia, Algiers, France or Morocco.

A U T H O R

Louenas Hassani is an Algerian-Canadian of Kabyle origin. He left Algeria in 2001 to continue his studies in Paris. In 2006, he immigrated to Quebec. He is currently working as a teacher in Ontario. *La coureuse des vents* is his first novel.

So many things predestined Addis for that meeting. The journey of Father Gilbert, her adopted father, a White Father steeped in Africa. The innumerable identities within her. Her passion for human memory. So many things that kept building bridges within her. Between her and herself. Between herself and the world.

As a Berber, she knew it from the beginnings, from the cypress, so to speak. From the very first books she had read, she had immersed herself in the world of free men, those who were threatened with extinction, always weaned, forced to suckle at the breast of a step-mother. She was soon deep in the myth of the founder of the tents, Tin Hinan, the queen, the natural equal of men.

She inquired about the nomads who were stopped, those hungry men, dedicated to wandering and begging in Tamanrasset, Agadez, Djanet, Niamey... She knew almost everything about the wandering people: the desert, all the deserts; the wrecking ideologies; the servitudes; the traps of a sedentary life.

Addis was a searcher through History; she devoured books on colonization to understand the hidden reasons for reification, expropriation in the name of gods, idols and men. She wanted to know everything about the condition of mankind, its trajectories, literature, sociology, anthropology, philosophy...

To a certain extent, because black blood flowed through her veins, she could not ignore the slave trade, the famous slave markets where the “burned faces” were sold alongside salt and spices. As a French woman, she was passionate about the history of her adopted country, from ancient times to the present day. In love with poetry, she was also naturally a fan of Aimé Césaire, Mahmoud Darwich, Federico García Lorca, Adonis, Arthur Rimbaud and Pablo Neruda, of all those *fire thieves* who mould us with azure and birds. In sum, she was nourished by tales and myths as well as by academics and reason.

She had long hesitated between studying literature or history. Moreover, now that she was teaching, she knew that it was a good thing that she was being paid to tell the stories of men's memories. When she earned her accreditation to become a history teacher, the chair of the review board, a renowned historian, immediately saw in her a reader in love with the Middle Ages and had mockingly asked her the question:

—Who was it that said “we are more manipulated and determined by facts, events and powers than we are able to take control of our own destiny and that of society?”

— Jacques Le Goff, replied the examinee at once.

— Fans of Jacques Le Goff and Marc Bloch are easily recognizable, added the medieval historian.

Addis was aware that sooner or later she would have to go out on the road, follow the trails and collect the clues.

When she received the letter, she wrote these significant words on the envelope:

“Do I know myself? How many others are within me? Isn't the Other also me? I am both myself and the Other. A metaphor for the encounter. And between the Other and me is the road. The symbiotic road. The distance to be abolished. Build a bridge on it. To better arrive at myself. To the quintessential I!”

And at the bottom of the letter, she added:

“P.S. Why do men find it hard to demand bridges?”

In the fertile duality of history and poetry, Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* and *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* had, early on, crystallized the young woman's fierce curiosity. A curiosity that required her to go follow each question through, with her heart in one hand and the scalpel of historical surgery in the other.

Thus she did not understand how the land of Hugo and Voltaire, of Zola and Montesquieu, the country of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the French Revolution, the homeland of the Enlightenment that had elevated mankind, could have allowed so many men and women to be objectified.

She was only 13 years old when she first saw the images in a documentary series about the Shoah (the Extermination) and the “Final Solution”. She still had no idea that Jewish blood was flowing in her veins, the historical blood, because she did not believe in a Jewish

gene but rather in the history that builds a sense of belonging, that rallies around common interests... She was far removed from the Beta Israel¹ within her, or from the Falasha community, the Amharic word for “exiled”. She did not understand how modern societies built on the ruins of the defeat of fascism, with collective memories permeated by utopia, by the victory of the best in mankind, could now gas, throw into mass graves, maim and murder men, women and children for the simple reason that they were what they had not chosen to be: Jews.

She had thus naturally revisited aspects of the horror; a story made up of figures, dates, stories, statistics, diagrams, photographs, documents, pieces of cloth, hair, secret letters, confessions, tears, talismans, sighs, poems, myths, feelings, cowards and heroes... and the questions kept rushing around in her head, like a restless herd. She soon found herself grappling with the Israeli-Palestinian question, with the definition of the concept of nation, the myth of the Promised Land, religions, truths and righteous wars. Have not the oppressed people of yesterday become the oppressors of today? Is not legitimacy always on the side of power? In what way is the consciousness of modern or post-modern man more elevated than that of the Homo sapiens species?

She had even come across a book about the segregation of Sephardic and Falasha Jews in Israel. Does a Moroccan Berber feel closer to a Muslim Moroccan or to an Ashkenazi Jew? And does the nation-state, those areas drawn on maps with rulers and lines by lazy soldiers, as in colonized countries, contain the plurality and complexity of men?

Evangeline, since she did not yet know that her first name was Addis, realized that the more one reads, the more one builds bridges to the Other, the more the identities no longer meant anything. And strangely enough, the more one reads, the more one knows that one is ignorant, and the less one knows, the more one thinks one knows everything!

1. *Betä Esraél*, the closest transcription of the Ethiopian pronunciation, has given way to a more Israeli form: *Beta Israel*. The Falasha or Felasha, formerly inhabitants of Ethiopia, are now referred to in Israel as “Ethiopian Jews” (Lisa Anteby-Yemini, *Les juifs éthiopiens en Israël. Les paradoxes du paradis*, Paris, CNRS Éditions, coll. Centre de recherche français de Jérusalem, “Hommes et sociétés”, 2004.)

She had read one day that a renowned physicist had said on his deathbed that he was going to die ignorant of the countless possibilities that the future held for science and scientists. Fanaticism came from ignorance, from unquestioned truth, from tribes embedded within men, from beings who had never properly visited the Other.

Nothing concerned the young woman as much as solving the mystery mankind. Not even the men around her who suffered the torments of unattainable love, who languished in grief at seeing this body with its delicate lines that did not seem to have those worldly desires. When reminded that she was beautiful, she replied with a sardonic laugh that with the mixture came the gift of hosting the finesse of all the continents.

Though her entourage insisted on the grace of her youthful body, the unfathomable azure of her eyes, the curly hair that fell down her forehead like suggestions of an amorous invitation, she passed through the age of desire with an indifference that was not even indifference for her. Even though she had had a few short ephemeral relationships, that lover of poetry was quick to fall out of love. As for the rest, she knew that fate was a blind camel.

However, Addis could also afford to devote herself to sport or leisure as she pleased. She really lacked for nothing. She had even studied at the Paris Conservatory. She was a world away from the girl found in the far reaches of the desert, inside a cypress tree. She played the piano and the flute, the guitar and the oud. She swam, did gymnastics and athletics... and she volunteered for many years at Emmaus Solidarité, the organization created by Abbé Pierre.

Father Gilbert knew that all these experiences would sooner or later trigger existential storms in his daughter's heart. One day, she would want to follow in her family's footsteps and unfortunately he personally would not be able to help her. His health made it no longer possible. He was seriously ill.

P R E S S

“This is a book that I do not hesitate to recommend to people interested in the human condition and the place of mankind in today’s world. It is well written and the themes of political Islamism, peace, diversity and the subjugation of women by religion are very topical.”
Le sanctuaire de Pénélope

H O N O U R S

Finalist for the Prix Québec-Ontario, 2017.

B Y T H E S A M E A U T H O R

La république de l’abîme
Novel, 272 pages, 2017
ISBN 978-2-89699-563-9

L'homme qui venait de nulle part

Gilles Dubois



Novel, 316 pages, 2018 | ISBN 978-2-89699-623-0

S U M M A R Y

Hidalgo Garcia finds an abandoned notebook in which his cousin relates a strange encounter with a vagrant in Central Park. The man claimed to be a prisoner in a medieval French village, imprisoned for 200 years within a single second.

The non-stop action in this ambitious fantasy novel shatters our certainties about time and space.

A U T H O R

Coming from France to work as a police officer at Expo 67, Gilles Dubois liked Canada so much that he never left. Of the nine novels he has published, eight have been finalists or winners of Canadian and European literary awards.

Princeton, New Jersey (United States), January 2014

My name is Hidalgo Garcia and I am 32 years old. I have been married for 12 years to Samantha, a Texan redhead with big green eyes. I adore her. She is magnificent, though the word does not do justice to her true inner beauty. The beauty of her soul!

We have three daughters: Catherine, Josiane and Jennifer, aged 6, 9 and 11 respectively. The children are adorable, just like their mother. We live in New York City where we founded an advertising agency called Vast Horizons, which has been ranked “the second most effective New York company of its kind.”

Six months ago, we inherited a house that is several hundred years old, built on a vast twenty-six acre wooded estate in New Jersey, a state that includes the southern and western suburbs of New York. This unexpected gift came to us from a distant cousin of my mother’s by marriage. His name was Jerry Steinmeyer, an American of German origin, a biologist who was well-known in the international scientific community. Like everyone else, I had heard about his work, but I did not know about our family connection. The house, though dilapidated, had endured the passage of time with a certain style. To me, it was an interesting old thing, built of carved stone, with huge ceiling beams and exposed beams in the walls. Seen from afar, even from very far away, surrounded by a light fog (I am being sarcastic here), it was magnificent, at least to my dear wife who recognized its beauty, even beyond the ravages of time and the rubble strewn across the floor of its many rooms. Infinite class is what my charming Samantha saw in this “noble ruin”, which she instantly called it, as she decided that it absolutely had to become our second home.

— Just a bit of work here and there, this sweet romantic said playfully, and our mansion will be stunning.

— Unless the wind blows it down before that!

She did not respond to my sarcasm, but that same week, with her impeccable sense of humour, she had personalized envelopes printed. In addition to the address, they were adorned by a proud motto that was just her style:

The Noble Ruins
Garcia Family
Samantha, Catherine, Josiane, Jennifer... and Hidalgo
157 Stamford Street, Princeton, NJ

Dearest Samantha! (Sam in private.) She never missed an opportunity to mock.

My name at the end of our mailing address, after the ellipsis, as if forgotten, was a swift little kick to my pride. If she expected me to get angry, she must have been disappointed, because I didn't make the slightest disparaging remark, though I indulged in sulking for part of the morning, for almost twenty minutes. At least that!

About this abbreviation: Sam. I have always wondered why parents tried to find harmonious, even unusual names for their children, in order to transform them into nicknames that are sometimes ridiculous, barely ten minutes after the child is born. Like Catherine who will become Cat, or "the cat", Jennifer... Jenny, Thomas-John will be T.J., and as for William, well, I haven't figured out yet how it is transformed into Bill. Not to mention the absurd John Johnson, Bird Birdie and Smith Smithy. Those poor children who have to carry that burden all their lives because of their parents' deficient humour. But let's skip over parental quirks and lack of imagination.

Come to think of it, was Sam's mockery a deliberate show of wit? I often wondered with her about the deep motivations behind her actions and comments, even the most innocuous ones. Yet I was hesitant about her idea to make this our second home, at least at first... but one day soon, lovingly refurbished, it would become our permanent residence, as my charming wife wanted it to be. God help us!

Most certainly, this old pile had been a venerable witness to the American War of Independence (1775-1783) and to the Civil War (1861-1865) – which, incidentally (as we were informed by Jennifer,

who had just learned it at school) led to the deaths of well over 600,000 people, while the Second World War (1940-1945) only claimed 292,000 American lives". Only! she said. Innocent child. Except that restoring it would require an enormous investment, not only in monetary terms, but also in the physical energy necessary for the work. For many months, even years, we would spend all our holidays there, brush and trowel in hand. Was it worth it?

"Sometimes it is better to throw away a beautiful toy that is broken rather than go broke repairing it," the mischievous Josiane informed us in that serious manner which endears her to all those who have the pleasure of meeting her. At least that little pixie was on my side.

Samantha insisted. I couldn't make up my mind. I was a city man. Born in the heart of New York City. I loved its hardworking people moving along the sidewalks in compact clusters, like exhausted bees returning to their hives. I was comfortable in this liveliness, and its familiar sounds! Living in the country didn't really tempt me. On top of that, it would take at least 2 hours, in traffic, to get to New York from the country. But the dilapidated building and my wife joined forces to break down my ultimate reluctance, the travel time in traffic from New York. Sam won quite easily, I must admit, which surprised me. Her final and irrefutable argument being:

"I spent forty-seven dollars to have personalized envelopes printed with the address of this magnificent residence. It would be a shame to have spent that money for nothing."

Was she making fun of me?

So was the plan to restore this ruin and to move in permanently one day soon? Why not, after all? The area was pleasant and the charming Samantha was persuasive... And then we could spend our holidays there with the girls. With almost unanimous enthusiasm, we decided to start work at Easter, during the children's school break.

To create suspense with a hint of mystery, I would like to be able to claim that it was during the restoration work, when I knocked down an unsightly plywood panel in the basement, that I discovered my cousin's famous notebook in a cleverly hidden cavity.

It did not happen that way, unfortunately for the horror film fans. I have no vengeful ghost to introduce at this stage. Later, after reading the manuscript in question, I would easily claim that this story

contained enough twists and turns. It would be ridiculous for me to add to any. In short, it was on the desk Jerry had set up in the basement to work in peace that I found the story that would change our lives to the extent that it completely upset them.

The last entry was four days before the tragic crash of a Boeing on landing, which killed ninety-eight people, including my cousin Jerry.

The handwritten book was a simple school notebook, covered with dense handwriting, in a very neat style with nicely drawn letters. After flipping through a few pages, I thought for a moment that it was an old academic composition by an author whom I presumed to be my cousin. The story seemed fantastical, or fanciful, depending on the degree of imagination applied to the story. However, the dates I found in the first paragraphs of the introduction were sufficiently straightforward. The text was recent. It recounted a fact that seemed to come straight out of legend. A document that, for fear of being ridiculed, the author had signed with the pseudonym John Doe, a name that the American police and social services attribute to those whose identity they cannot prove, including amnesiacs and bodies without identity papers that are found on the streets.

Comparing the writing with invoices and several handwritten documents found in the first-floor library, I concluded without a doubt that it was Jerry's work.

My first impression, after having read a few paragraphs, was based solely on the personality of my unknown cousin. If such a prominent scientist had not dared to present it to the public, who would believe a modest designer of advertising models like me? Just like Samantha, who later would only laugh as she went through it, anyone who might one day have this story in their hands would only doubt its authenticity. I thought about destroying it, but I was unable to do so. After all, it could be true! Ah! Just kidding!

Before letting my cousin and benefactor, Jerry Steinmeyer, start his account of this strange journey, I would like to add that I have given a lot of thought to the delicate dilemma of having his manuscript in my possession. Should I make it known or get rid of it? From the little I have read of it, it is so amazing – some would say fascinating – that I should, in truth, probably hide for ever. Yet, if what he is recounting is true, that would make it too important a document for me to let it collect dust on a shelf in the garage. I thought of sending it to Jonas

Fielding, an old friend who is a journalist with the *New York Times* and a former lieutenant in the United States Marine Corps with whom I fought in Afghanistan. I was curious to know what he thought of it. I would give myself another month to think about it.

Then, I would leave it in God's hands!

Chapter 1

I must admit that I was very intrigued by my cousin Jerry's "notebook", signed John Doe, which I will now share with you. From what I learned about him from his lawyer when he read Jerry's last will and testament, in addition to being a highly respected researcher, my cousin was a renowned chemist and an expert in popularizing scientific research, as well as a lecturer who was in great demand around the world.

Armed with his vast knowledge, my cousin was certainly not a prankster in search of attention, although one cannot be sure of anything when it comes to matters of the mind. What motivates people to seek attention is sometimes surprising. I will therefore turn things over to my cousin now, with the introduction of his notebook.

Foreword by Jerry Steinmeyer, author of the manuscript

This story, although certainly strange, is nevertheless such as I present it. It comes to me from a young man in his thirties who says his name is Al, whom I met while I was wandering through Central Park in New York, on the morning of May 28, 1987, while walking my two Labradors.

Going through a handful of scribbled sheets, on which he had jotted his jumbled thoughts, as well as a few anecdotes, he told me, or at least he read to me, a story which, in my humble opinion, I

frankly thought was unreal. He was reading in a monotone voice, rarely remembering the facts, or when and where they had occurred. He told me of events that seemed to be coming from a labyrinth in which he himself had gotten lost. He gave me only parts of truncated accounts, without any conclusions. It was as if he were being read a text that did not concern him, written by another person and representing events that he had not experienced himself.

Incredibly, I was the one who had to explain to him what had probably happened, as a psychiatrist would have done. Proceeding with his incoherent tale, he told me that he no longer remembered what he was like before this adventure had begun. He was thus unable to give me his address, his profession, or even his name, except for “Al”, no doubt an abbreviation. He knew, however, that his partner’s name was Elsa and that she was also his cousin.

On that subject, I was skeptical. How could one remember one thing and not another? It was insane! Selective memory? Maybe.

To better understand Al’s story, to accept it as truth, was not an easy task. A unique solution presented itself: follow this character’s path during the “unusual journey” that he was about to undertake through space and time. It should be emphasized that Al didn’t know what had set him on this fantastic path. For one simple reason: he had forgotten everything about his past. He could not tell where he came from, or where he was going through time. Al relied only on his notes to present me with his story.

At first, I obviously saw my interlocutor as a tormented but harmless soul. I didn’t dare classify him as mentally ill just yet. Since he spoke clearly and his sentences were coherent and perfectly constructed, denoting a certain erudition, I listened to him.

He assured me that he could not stay with me very long for a reason that I could hardly imagine: according to him, he traveled between the centuries, thrown back through time, here and there, as on the whim of a cosmic wind. He claimed to have been to New York several times before, coming from a century he could not identify, driven by an obscure purpose but a very specific reason, which he could not explain either. Nevertheless, he was convinced that he had an important task to perform in this part of the city.

Among other things, he assured me that he had been in Central Park on March 24th and 25th, as well as on July 18, 2014.

That was a little too much... we were in 1987!

Even with a very open mind, it was a lot to swallow. I had to hold back so as not to burst out laughing in his face.

He also told me that he was obsessed with the idea that the century from which he had just come might “take him back” without warning. In fact, to better explain the expression “take him back”, he had used the term “to be sucked into a parallel universe”.

My fairly sound intellectual background in the various sciences, including extensive research on quantum mechanics and string theory, inevitably made me a skeptic. It is a major step to affirm that humanity’s dream of going for a stroll in the past, or the future, is already within our grasp and actually make possible the jump in time traveling. Nevertheless, this smooth talker almost succeeded in sowing a doubt in my mind, placing an incredible possibility in front of me. According to him, time travel was feasible. He asked me to imagine the existence of people a hundred and fifty years ago, in a world lit by candles, with no running water. How would they have reacted when confronted with trips to the moon or the invention of the telephone and the television? “Ridiculous!” they would have said unanimously. They would have been wrong. “It is by refusing to recognize limits that science will make progress,” my strange companion claimed.

He told me that he was physically manipulated by a dominant force at the heart of the space-time continuum. According to him, he would jump without transition from one era to another. To his knowledge, there was nothing that could slow down the process or suggest how he could reintegrate his own time. His story reminded me of the ghost of a man returning to the scene of his murder in search of a Good Samaritan who would free his distressed soul, thus allowing him to find everlasting peace. Nothing more than a movie!

During this alleged roaming between the past and the future, Al reportedly met a police officer named Rif Wilson in Central Park in 2014. In order to verify the truth of his statements, a quarter of a century later (here, I truly had to contain my amusement), I asked him to describe to me some new inventions from that time and to give me the name of the president. He was unable to do so, evidently. In fact, he did not present a single proof to support his delusional statements. He pretended not to have a job, but nevertheless, and to

my amazement, he produced a rather heavy purse filled with gold coins that were five or six hundred years old. When asked about this, he explained to me that he had recovered this fortune from a Spanish galleon when he was captain of a pirate ship. As he read these lines, written in his own hand, he burst out laughing, telling me that he had always hated being on the water.

I was indeed dealing with a lunatic. A con man? Hard to say. Should I have believed in this mess of incongruities? Really! A bewildering story. There was no other word for it. His account lasted about two hours. He only stopped it to drink at the Bethesda fountain in the park, refusing to eat even a few fries at the food truck on the street, a stone's throw away, for fear, he claimed, of forgetting to come back to me, as incredible as it may seem. At that moment in his story, I noticed a singular fact, something worth mentioning. Though the stranger had talked non-stop for two hours, the clock on the corner showed that only three minutes had passed. As for my watch, it had stopped, only starting to work again when the man uttered his last sentence. Strange coincidence.

If I say that I thought this man was a plain impostor, one may wonder why I wrote his words in a notebook. Good question. Probably because, when examining what I had just heard, the thought of an astrophysicist whose name I have unfortunately forgotten came to my mind: "The day when the imagination of researchers is curtailed, science will have to be thrown into the dustbin."

Let's be fair, deep down inside I wanted to believe him.

P R E S S

“Gilles Dubois’ writing is charming, and very accessible. It transports us into the author’s immensely fertile imagination. He is an author I am happy to have discovered, and I highly recommend him [...]”.

Les mille et une pages L&M

“It is above all superbly written and should be used as a model in a master class in French.”

Culture Hebdo

B Y T H E S A M E A U T H O R

Akuna-Aki, meneur de chiens

Novel, 374 pages, 2007

ISBN 978-2-923274-35-5

Winner of the Prix des lecteurs Radio-Canada, 2008.

L'enfant qui ne pleurerait jamais, tome 1

Novel, 248 pages, 2011

ISBN 978-2-923274-81-2

L'enfant qui ne pleurerait jamais, tome 2

Novel, 208 pages, 2013

ISBN 978-2-89699-383-3

L'enfant qui ne pleurerait jamais, tome 3

Novel, 280 pages, 2014

ISBN 978-2-89699-425-0

Gaucher.ère contrarié.e

V.S. Goela

GAUCHER.ÈRE CONTRARIÉ.E V.S. GOELA

ROMAN

L'INTERLIGNE

Novel, 168 pages, 2019 | ISBN 978-2-89699-626-1

S U M M A R Y

Thirteen characters form this extraordinary novel, including a transgender chef of Indian origin, a sommelier who does not drink alcohol and a retired dancer who hosts a TV reality show in Nunavut. The paradoxical trajectories of these characters, linked by food, art and gender fluidity, intertwine like threads of a multicoloured human tapestry. This non-linear, non-traditional work of absolute freedom defies all conventions.

A U T H O R

V.S. Goela draws creative inspiration from extensive travelling. Identity norms, within the context of Canadian multiculturalism, are at the centre of the author's literary practice.

1. The uselessness of pears

The pear is absent from my fridge, from my kitchen. Other fruits have priority.

Mangoes are no longer available, even pomegranates. The free market is not so free as to deliver my favourite fruits in winter, my winter essentials.

I dislike pears. Their colour is bland. They do not shine like the progression of subtle green towards the solid orange of my Indian mango or the ruby of my Afghan pomegranate; it is shy, it lacks strength, and it does not deserve my chasing it. Indeed, it does not have a matte finish to show a contemporary side.

The pear is ordinary. We eat it because it is available, convenient. Not out of passion. I do not mix it with my other ingredients anymore. I do not look for it. Ever.

Mylène

Mylène is a recidivist. At every hotel where she spends the night, she gathers soaps, shampoo bottles, shower gels, and the small shoe gloves to polish her black shoes. Being a flight attendant for a large airline company, she is fortunate to be able to travel for short and sometimes long circuits.

The job is laborious. You work in a metal tube where the air is dry, which means that you must constantly drink water, the air is recycled because it uses less aviation fuel, the food is mediocre at its highest, and for hours, a crew member talks constantly about his or her divorce, mortgage or cat. Depending on the crew, the job could

be quite unpleasant. Nonetheless, it is a way to make a living and do other things with your free time.

Every bottle of shampoo, shower gel, has a unique shape. Some are transparent and one can see the colour of the liquid. Others are veiled by opaque plastic and it is necessary to open the cap in order to discover its perfume, its tint.

Whatever the characteristic of the bottle, Mylène opened each one to determine whether the scent was acceptable: a hint of sandalwood, jasmine, citrus, musk, pure essential oil or an unbearable smell like skunk. On occasion the bouquet made her sneeze. In that case, the bottle remained in the hotel.

Hotel soap, aside from its odour, often has a size, a unique height, that is not often found in the pharmacies; the colour is quite ordinary, but the memory of the soap that is attached to the location, the city, the country, the culture, cannot be found in a store.

This month, Mylène is working stand-by. A colleague fell sick and cannot fly. The communication centre phones Mylène early in the morning to tell her that she needs to prepare for the Toronto-London-Delhi-London-Toronto route. The circuit starts this evening.

Richel

Richel is a retired dancer. He had the good fortune of a long career in musical theatre in many countries, except for Canada. Twenty years after his artistic exile, he returned to live in Toronto in a house, in a mixed neighbourhood, with his best friend. The arrangement works well: she is away half of the month for work, and during the weeks when she is in Toronto, the two friends spend a few days together. Richel opened a dance studio downtown and it is going well. He is the principal instructor and owner. The dance classes include a range of international styles (Bharata Natyam, Latin dance, flamenco, Celtic, Japanese, Inuit, etc.), classical ballet, modern dance, contemporary, tap and jazz. For this repertoire, Richel hired the best experienced teachers. His students attend auditions,

have roles in shows, they join international ballet companies, or they continue with classes in his reputable studio.

Richel is also the star of a TV series. A reality TV series. He knows very well that the quality of reality TV is not rich. But he participates in it for the laughs. He does not take it seriously, and this is obvious when you watch the first season. Above all, it is the premise of the series that he likes: a cruise ship that stops at several hamlets and villages in Nunavut.

This morning Richel is listening to music on his iPad, although the quality of the bass is pathetic. He could use turntables to listen to records on the speakers, but he prefers the metallic sound for his morning routines. Richel does not eat breakfast, but coffee is a must. Although he should be stretching, he skips this and watches the weather predictions on TV to decide when he should leave home to head to the studio. Richel does not teach everyday, but he goes to the studio each day to oversee the daily activities.

The apparatus in the living room is old, that is, from the 1980s, constructed with tubes in the interior, and without any computer abilities. Richel likes everything that is new, meaning a high definition TV, perhaps with an LED display, flat screen, as big as 100 inches, with the ability to play MP3s and illegally downloaded videos, that can be suspended from the wall. However he does not have such a TV because Mylène won the right to furnish the living room and she did not want the television to be the centre-piece since they have a charming stone fireplace. Richel agreed, but only because of the fireplace.

It is 10:00, time to go to the studio. Richel puts on his bag with the strap that crosses his chest and he heads to the subway. It takes him 20 minutes to arrive at the studio on Queen Street. Queen Street has changed a lot since his adolescence, and even more since he bought his studio. There used to be the alternative bookstore Pages, the Bamboo Club, Speakers Corner, street vendors of unique and gothic jewellery, but no Club Monaco, no Shoppers Drug Mart and no Gap. Certain establishments still remain, like the Queen Mother Café, the Black Market, the Second Cup, Fluevog, the shoe store

Groovy, the Rivoli, Steve's Music, Cameron House, and the Black Sheep where friends without identification cards or those who were under 19 years of age could drink beer on tap.

"Studio Richel" has a glass door and a large window that faces the street. From the exterior one can see the reception area where there is a sofa and two leather chairs. Inside, the space is long and there is a hallway that runs until Richmond Street where there is the back door. Beside the hallway are the dance studios with wooden floors, a barre in front of a massive mirror, and in a corner, a music system. This morning, they are listening to Erik Satie.

What temperature do you prefer the oven to be at?

LHR-DEL

After a 23 hour layover in London, Mylène and her crew prepare the cabin for the London-Delhi flight. The vegetarian meals are counted, the emergency equipment is in its place, the passenger list is noted, the signals with the pilots are confirmed, and the crew starts to receive passengers from two doors: those in business class take the front door, and those in economy class take the second door.

For the emergency exits, there are two doors in the back, two doors in the middle of the cabin, two doors in front... place your cabin baggage in the overhead bins above you... fasten your emergency seat belts.

We need oxygen when we fly higher than 8,000 feet in the air. Therefore, the air in planes is maintained at 8,000 feet.

On the tarmac at Heathrow, we could see a true international air park: Air Mauritius, Kenya Airways, Swissair, Air India, Pakistan International Airlines, Emirates, Thai, Cathay Pacific, Air Seychelles, Aeroflot, Kuwait Airways, the Air France Concorde, South African Airways, BWIA, Korean Air, Varig.

This morning, the crew is behind a Concorde for take-off number two. Have you ever been behind a Concorde while waiting in line on the runway? Mylène's plane is a Boeing 747-400, not small.

When the Concorde was ready to leave, its incredibly powerful engines roared and the 747-400 was trembling. One wonders if the Concorde's passengers felt ill during their flight, if they could handle the speed.

Mylène imitates the passengers' accents, not on purpose, in any language. Immersion.

After the announcements and take-off, after the steep climb, after the seatbelt light is turned off, after the plane reaches an altitude of 35,000 feet, the flight attendants unbuckle their seatbelts, leave their emergency seats such as the jumpseats, and they start to open the containers in the three galleys. Of course, every plane has a different configuration. Mylène's favourites are the 767 and 747-400. *I am loyal to Boeing.*

The oxygen, some oxygen, oxygen.

For this flight, the airline orders more vegetarian meals than other types. They also serve masala chai more than the regular black tea. A woman in «J» class, business class, sitting in the upper deck, asks Mylène if the flight attendants have any ginger or black cardamom in the galley. She wanted to add them to her spiced tea. Mylène explained that, unfortunately, they do not boil the spices with the tea leaves and that the spiced tea was prepared simply by adding boiling water in a tea pot with some masala chai tea bags made by a British company and with milk to lighten the colour, the flavour. Hence the passenger takes the masala chai that Mylène served and she takes out from her handbag a small plastic bag that contains a mix of powdered black cardamom, dried chopped ginger, and a clove. She shakes the little bag so that some of the particles fall into the caramel coloured solution in front of her. While sipping the liquid, this female chef watched a Hindi film from the 1980s with the lead actor Amitabh Bachchan on her personal TV.

These are Hindi films, not «Bollywood» films, a term that I detest, that is not accurate, that suggests an imitation, that devalues the native industry.

Turbulence.

Soma

Soma is invited to an international chefs competition in Delhi. Since her arrival in Canada, she has not returned to India. But within five short years of being in Toronto, Soma has become one of the most recognized chefs in the big city, even in Canada.

The competition organizers contacted the best new contemporary chefs from several countries, including India.

The theme of the competition is “Cooking without borders”. Each chef must use at least one ingredient from his or her country, two ingredients from a country that shares a border with his or her country, and at least three ingredients originating from India.

Soma will be the only transgender person. Unless there are others who are hiding it. The competition will be televised. She will wear a sari.

I am proud, but I do not have pride.

Sa’k

Only one other Canadian had been selected for the competition. His name is Sa’k. Sa’k is Micmac from the Gaspé region and he was brought over sea by the windmill winds of the Appalachians. He is the host of his own television show on First Nations cuisine, based in his community. It is part of the *FoodNetwork*-isation of the world. He also published a book of local First Nation recipes. His village receives many tourists in the summer, tourists who look for food demonstrations with regional elements. Off season, his studio acts as a restaurant for people in the area.

Sa’k lives in a tiny house with a hybrid style: contemporary and traditional. On the roof are a solar panel and pipes to catch rainwater

to send it to a large cylinder beside the house. There is a large window on each side of the house, each floor.

The main door opens into the living room where there are two chairs, a shelf with books, cupboards on the side of the stairs, a wood stove linked to a chimney, and a black leather couch. The couch converts into a double bed for guests. Otherwise, in the backyard, there is room for two tents. The floors are oak for sustainability.

There is no bathtub in the washroom, only a shower, a sink, a Japanese toilet with water jets, and lots of furniture to lay laundry on, towels, little hotel soaps, medication, creams, Q-tips, razors, tubes of toothpaste, toothbrushes, and Hello Kitty Band-aids.

Every step to go upstairs also has a drawer under each level. On the first floor, there is a large bed, a desk, and many shelves – the personal library. There is no basement.

The kitchen is the main room. Apart from his kitchen tools, Sa'k is rather minimalist. He has some usual clothes, books from university literature courses, a small tube technology television, photo albums, and letters from his childhood friends who had left the province, the country or the continent, to initiate a life of novel memories, elsewhere. Fortunately, Sa'k has a studio where he keeps his stainless steel pots, knives, blender, bowls, spices, *belan chakra*, frying pans, electric juicer, *tawa*, spoons, wok, *karahi*.

The house is arranged according to the science and principles of vastu.

I did not consult “Le guide culinaire” by Escoffier.

P R E S S

“For a very inclusive read that will open your mind to a variety of cultural practices, *Gaucher.ère Contrarié.e* by V.S. Goela will suit you perfectly.”

La page ouverte

“I enjoyed it very much because of the diverse characters.”
Radio-Canada

H O N O U R S

Finalist for the Prix Émergence AAOF, 2021.

Celui qui avance avec la mort dans sa poche

Claudette Boucher



Novel, 244 pages, 2017 | ISBN 978-2-89699-575-2

S U M M A R Y

Sophie Plourde, an artist's agent, was murdered in the Jardin du Petit Pont de Bois. This tourist area, prized by ornithologists, is run by Irène Roblès, an 80-year-old Mexican woman. Among the tourists, employees, undocumented migrants, border officers and police officers is a murderer. *Celui qui avance avec la mort dans sa poche* deftly tackles the question of illegal immigration – a reality that is still not well understood.

A U T H O R

A novel and short story writer born in Quebec, Claudette Boucher is a teacher by training. After returning from Western Canada seven years ago, she now makes her home in Ottawa. *Celui qui avance avec la mort dans sa poche* is her third novel.

Stanstead, July 15th

The stream of water, though barely warm, did her a great deal of good. She let it run down her neck, then onto her legs, before making a move. Then she rubbed her shoulders vigorously, and as far as she could reach on her back, before putting a good amount of shampoo in the palm of her hand, with which she energetically massaged her scalp.

—You're back, Pierre-Benoît? she asked towards the room, under the noise of the hair dryer that had just been turned back on. Did you change your mind?

Rinsing her hair, she imagined him naked, his tiny genitals, postponing the moment when he would have to face the cold drafts in the room and the frigid cement floor. A smile played on her lips as she slipped her dripping head through the gap between the curtain and the ceramic wall of the shower.

With shampoo dripping into her eyes, she saw him in a kind of half-mist. And, stupidly, long before the scream reached her lips, it was on the gloved hand that held her bra and panties that her paralyzed brain stopped.

When the gaze behind the ski mask met hers, the whistling blade had already entered her flesh.

Chapter 1

Sherbrooke, July 16th

Backing onto two rivers and located on the corner of Dufferin and Frontenac, the Police Headquarters is a shapeless mass in the urban landscape, as aesthetic as a cube. You reach it after crossing a large parking lot, climbing a series of steep steps and going through a double glass door. Beyond a reception area, protected by a thick panel of Plexiglas, endless corridors lead to the police officers HQ – Station 441 – and, further on, to another unit in which a handful of detectives share a few square metres of a narrow and crowded room, covered with maps of the city.

After checking his watch under the powerful neon lights, the policeman was about to bring his chair closer to him when a note, attached to his lamp, caught his attention: the boss' wide and, for once, legible handwriting (it was usually an illegible scrawled mass), indicated an urgent situation.

— A nasty case, the chief warned his subordinate as soon as he entered the room, motioning to a chair.

Like two other perfectly identical chairs, it was on casters and facing the chief's desk.

— The victim, he said, is called Sophie Plourde. Twenty-seven years old. Artist's agent. Originally from Trois-Rivières, she accompanied her husband, Pierre-Benoît Lemaire, a professional ornithologist and photographer, to the region. Her body was discovered yesterday by the owner of the Jardin du Petit Pont de Bois in Stanstead, where the couple had settled, the place apparently being a bird watcher's paradise. Is that correct?

— Absolutely, confirmed the man who had been the butt of his colleagues' jokes since joining the detective unit. They claimed that he might forget his service weapon, but never his binoculars.

— The murderer used a classic hunting knife to commit his crime around 9:30 pm yesterday. So far it has not been found. Unless we get hold of it by searching the Tomifobia River that flows behind the Jardin du Petit Pont de Bois. The single stab, accurate and powerful,

was delivered to the cervical region. It caused a massive haemorrhage, fatal for the young woman who suffered from haemophilia.

— I thought only men exhibited the severe symptoms of this disease, said the captain's deputy.

His supervisor read what he had learned from the coroner.

— *“Genetically, haemophilia is located in the sex chromosome X. Because men only have one X, if they carry the gene, they necessarily express it completely. Women have two X chromosomes. A woman who has one chromosome carrying the gene and one healthy chromosome would therefore see it compensate for the deficiency of the affected chromosome. However, sometimes the healthy chromosome does not perfectly compensate for the deficiency. The haemophilia gene is therefore only partially expressed.”*

He added that according to the doctor, if Sophie Plourde had not had *“this reduced rate of coagulation factor”*, she could have survived her injuries.

— Do you think her killer knew that?

— I asked myself the same question, the chief replied, pushing two series of numbered photos towards his deputy.

The first one repeated the appalling mess of death from different angles and showed a naked woman's body. The second series of shots framed the last “talking” witnesses to the crime scene: toilet-ries, wedding rings, a Pierre Laurent watch, a gold chain with a ruby and a Stella McCartney Falabella handbag.

— And tampons, the chief pointed out with his index finger.

— Why so many? asked the investigator.

There were about ten of them.

— And see how they're positioned.

Perfectly aligned. Like toy soldiers in a row on the wooden bench before the shower, unlike the shampoo, towel, pumice stone and jewellery that were thrown on both sides of the electric blue Falabella bag.

— Any idea what would explain this? asked the investigator.

— Not really, said the chief.

At the same time, his subordinate extended his arm and gave the photos back to him.

— Assuming that the murderer searched the purse himself and extracted its contents, not caring about the expensive jewellery, what do you think he was looking for?

They listed a weapon, and drugs. They also suggested a compromising piece of paper, an important document.

— If you are thinking, as I did, about the passports, they did not move from the cabin occupied by the couple, the captain added.

— But the killer couldn't have known that.

— Indeed! the chief approved.

The post-mortem gynaecological examination revealed that the young woman had had unprotected sexual intercourse – vaginal penetration – for which the possibility of rape was ruled out. In the case of forced sexual intercourse without orgasm, it takes six hours for the male cells to spread. However, the doctor mentioned that he had started examining the body less than three hours after its arrival at the morgue and, by that time, the sperm had already begun to spread.

— A trace left, in all probability, by the murder weapon was found during the autopsy. It appears to be beeswax.

Left suspended in the air for a while, the inspector's pencil resumed its course.

— At one time, my mother used it to remove hair on her legs, he said while scribbling the information in his notebook.

— And mine has found nothing better to make her furniture shine for the past fifty years, the chief added.

As for the research he had carried out on the product, it had enabled him to learn that, as essential as baking soda or white vinegar, beeswax has over 300 possible uses.

— According to the husband...

At that point, the captain showed a leaflet bagged by the Régie de police de Memphrémagog (RPM).

— According to the husband, the handwriting on this note is his wife's. The first name Laura should refer to the owner of a restaurant with whom the victim made friends, Véro should be her twin sister, while Didier should refer to the husband's former agent. As for Hugo, he's an absolute mystery, as is the scribbling that follows the first name, but the big brains in the lab are already working on it.

He added that the guts of the Apple computer, as well as the hundreds of calls recorded on the victim's iPhone, were going to undergo the same treatment.

— I posted an appeal on our Twitter account to motorists, hikers, campers, fishermen and joggers who might have been in the vicinity of

the Jardin du Petit Pont de Bois yesterday. The message will be picked up by radio and television stations as well as newspapers. While your colleagues will, like you, like me, keep trying to get to the bottom of this brutal crime, the officers from Station 441, already in the field, will be knocking on doors in vicinity of the Jardin du Petit Pont de Bois. Snack bars, pubs and gas stations open late last night will be checked out to gather anything that staff and customers may have noticed, the chief continued.

Blowing intermittently on his cup to cool its contents, he interrupted his report to ask his deputy if he had any questions.

— No useable fingerprints?

The captain explained that all that could be said for now was that prints found in the shower room were too blurry to be used, due to the abrasives and detergents used by the staff at the Jardin du Petit Pont de Bois.

— If I remember correctly, the Jardin du Petit Pont de Bois had no surveillance cameras. Is that still the case? the deputy resumed.

— Unfortunately, yes.

The head of the detective unit closed a hardcover folder on which he placed the DVD of the crime scene before handing it over to his deputy, who was already standing.

— Hold it! said the chief.

Though he had already informed the others a few hours earlier, he broke the news to his deputy that a member of the Major Crimes Unit of the Montreal Police Service would join their unit to work on the case.

— Montreal's Major Crimes Unit! What do you mean? Is the victim the daughter of a big shot or what? the inspector exclaimed.

A ray of sunlight reflecting on the chief's glasses hid his eyes as he explained that, according to their hierarchy, the presence of this officer was justified by a desire "to ensure optimal results".

— Because that's not what we're aiming for? the other protested.

The captain took a sip of coffee, which relieved him of the need to answer.

— When? asked his subordinate, with his hand on the doorknob.

— Today. The captain's words were followed by another biting reply:

— Thanks for the trust!

— Look, Adam, maybe I'm being naive, but for myself I see in this... offer of collaboration the beginning of a good intention, the captain argued.

— Of the kind the road to Hell is paved with?

Once outside his superior's office, Adam Kovac, who usually appreciated bright mornings, never saw the sun kissing the facades of the buildings through the kitchenette window. However, as soon as the video shot the day before at the Jardin du Petit Pont de Bois was inserted into the DVD player, anything not related to a sheet metal roof and white painted concrete walls gradually lost its substance.

In his recollection of the Jardin du Petit Pont de Bois shower building, the structure had two doors. The one on the north corner had a stone sidewalk while its neighbour only had a dirt path. He was about to draw them in his notebook when he heard the call of a Great Horned Owl, as mysterious as the darkness it likes surrounding itself with, superimposed onto a sound that was a bit like the buzzing of an insect disturbing the night. Increasing the volume, he listened to the section again. This time, he was able to dismiss the hypothesis he had first considered; the late hour at which the events were recorded made it unlikely that the sound was coming from a gardener's device, such as a hedge trimmer.

Putting a headset on, he played the clip dozens of times. At the end, his saturated hearing no longer distinguished anything, and he still had not come up with a satisfactory explanation. Writing a note to remind himself to send the section to the experts, he looked back at his computer screen. He then turned his attention to the inside of the Jardin du Petit Pont de Bois shower building, a large room with walls that were bare, save for a mirror with damaged silvering in which the ceramic divider walls and the curtains of eight shower stalls were reflected.

As for the second unit, positioned to the right of a barred window, what first grabbed the attention was the sight of the tremendous amount of blood that seemed to be dripping from the walls. And the many shades of it.

Pure, clear and bright, in the neck area where the flesh had been butchered with a sharp weapon. Scarlet on the two delicate breasts that retained their perfect shape even in death, before darkening on the medical examiner's rubber gloves and appearing almost black in the jumble of long, wet hair.

The only areas spared from the red death were the face, which had taken on the colour of white chalk, and the cobalt blue eyes which had faced death wide open, their unbearable gaze witness to an unnamed terror.

P R E S S

“Claudette Boucher hooks us very quickly. We keep turning the pages, wanting to know more. It’s well written. It’s a good novel.”

Ici Radio-Canada Ottawa-Gatineau

“An exciting thriller, *Celui qui avance avec la mort dans sa poche* is also a thought-provoking novel.”

Nuit blanche

“I thoroughly enjoyed this book.”

CFLO FM

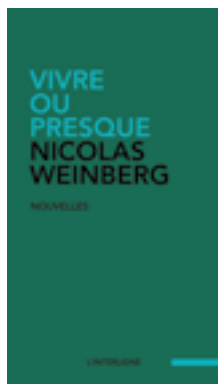
“We enjoy following this multi-layered story, in which police officers have real personalities, which sometimes bring them closer together and at other times pit them against one another.”

Le Journal de Montréal

“Boucher sets up the elements of an exciting investigation that sheds light on Sophie Plourde’s bloody death on a beautiful summer day in an idyllic, isolated and very strange place called the Jardin du Petit Pont de Bois.”

Voix plurielles

O T H E R T I T L E S



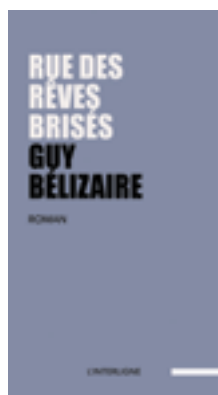
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A B O U T É D I T I O N S L ' I N T E R L I G N E

Founded in Canada's capital in 1981 to produce an arts magazine, L'Interligne is now in its 40th year. With an eclectic mix of genres, more than 300 exceptional novels and nearly 200 issues of the magazine *Liaison* (1978-2018), L'Interligne has become a fixture on the Canadian cultural scene.

Always on the lookout for authentic voices, L'Interligne focuses on multicultural works that stand out for their contemporary concerns and stylistic originality, and explores a wide range of approaches that connect authors with their audiences.

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C R E D I T S

Translation

Mishka Lavigne (Une absente, Dévorés, L'odeur du gruau)
Johanne Durocher Norchet (J'irai danser sur la tombe de Senghor,
Le petit Abram, La coureuse des vents, L'homme qui venait de nulle
part, Celui qui avance avec la mort dans sa poche)
V.S. Goela (Gaucher.ère contrarié.e)

Cover design

Chloé Leduc-Bélanger, digital collage, from Gordon Ross, From
Maine to Florida, N.Y. : Keppler & Schwarzmann, 1911, retrieved
from the Library of Congress, <www.loc.gov/item/2011648855/>;
and Alfred Chandler, “Camelia Japonica Pæoniflora Rosæ”, in
Illustrations and descriptions of the plants which compose the natural
order Camellieae and of the varieties of Camellia japonica cultivated
in the gardens of Great Britain, London, 1831, retrieved from the
Biodiversity Heritage Library, <[https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/
page/58682983#page/128/mode/1up](https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/page/58682983#page/128/mode/1up)>.

Design

Guillaume Morin

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