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***Your Fathers, Where Are They? And The Prophets,
Do They Live For Ever?***

de
Dave Eggers

Kësar MANJOO

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Sous la direction de
Monsieur Alain GEOFFROY
Professeur des Universités
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***Your Fathers, Where Are They? And The Prophets, Do They
Live Forever?***

***Quant A Vos Pères, Où Sont-ils? Et Quant Aux Prophètes,
Ont-ils Vécu Pour Des Temps Indéfinis ?***

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The numbers appearing in between brackets are the page numbers of my translation. For my work I used a Hamish Hamilton edition of Dave EGGERS's *Your Fathers, Where Are They? And The Prophets, Do They Live Forever?*, Great Britain: Penguin Books, 2014. The numbers appearing with the letter B as (B85), for example, are from the book.

“Win, the ‘yes’ needs the ‘no’ to win, against the ‘no’.”

Jean Pierre Raffarin, 2nd May 2005

THE AUTHOR

Dave Eggers was born in Massachusetts on March 12, 1970. He is the author of several works as a writer, an editor, a screenwriter and a publisher. He lost both his parents who died of cancer in their fifties, five weeks apart in 1991 and 1992. He was 21 when he had to look after his brother who was only 8 years old, as his older brother and sister could not shoulder that responsibility. This brought him to write his first book *A Heartbreaking Work Of Staggering Genius* in 2000, a memoir which became a best- seller winning 6 awards amongst his other highly acclaimed works. In 2008, when he obtained the TED Prize for his contributions in encouraging community members at joining local public schools, he was named as one of “50 visionaries who are changing the world.”

Your Fathers, Where Are They? And The Prophets, Do They Live Forever?, a novel about America’s place in the world, was published in 2014. The novel was short-listed for the 2016 International Dublin Literary Award. Among his most acclaimed works are *What Is The What: The Autobiography Of Valentino Achak Deng*, a finalist for the 2006 National Book Critics Circle Award and winner of France’s Prix Médicis, *Zeitoun* (2009), winner of the American Book Award and the Dayton Literary Peace Prize, *A Hologram For The King*, finalist for the National Book Award 2012. In 2013 he published *The Circle* of which a film was made and released in 2017 starring Emma Watson, John Boyega and Tom Hanks. To the same extent, he founded “Mc Sweeney’s”, an independent publishing house, named after his mother’s maiden name, *The Believer*, a monthly journal edited by his wife Vendela Vida, *Wholphin*, a quarterly DVD magazine, and *Dr. and Mr. Haggis-On-Whey* which he writes together with his younger brother under a pseudonym. He is also the author of *The Future*

Dictionary Of America, Created In Darkness By Troubled Americans and *The Thinking Fan's Guide To The World Cup*, an essay about the U.S. national soccer team and is likely to be the new editor of *The Paris Review*. In 2016 he published his sixth novel *Heroes Of The Frontier*. Furthermore, he has created "826 Valencia", a non-profit writing and tutoring centre for kids aged 6-18 in San Francisco and has won a \$250,000 Heinz Award which he gave to his non-profit organization "826 National" and "The Teacher Salary Project."

THE BOOK

Your Fathers, Where Are They? And The Prophets, Do They Live Forever? is particular in itself in the sense that it is written entirely in dialogue form and is composed in a constant questioning, a soul-searching inside a series of duologues, which is quite exceptional with modern English-language writers. With such a mode, the work can be instituted as a step forward to getting the striving reader, who is in search of some sort of incentive in overcoming all apprehension in the reading adventure, involved within the sphere of the English-speaking universe as it is so simple. Keeping track within the context, it can be said that the writer has given reasonable thought about directing his work the way it is presented so that it could, some day or other, be inscribed among the plethora of available bibliographical references, if such is not the case yet. All things considered, and with all proper reserves, such an affirmation should not however be regarded as the writer's main objective, mind you! We are above all in the presence of a nice fiction. In endorsing what has just been put forward, we can carry on to intimate that through Eggers's piece of work the reader, without doubt, gets more implicated with the straightforwardness delivered in natural conversation through the medium of impulsive response and retaliation. In pushing our observation further ahead, we should however keep in mind that, at all events, there is no quibbling upon the reader in the process as the same effect is produced whatever the language may be, by the way. The question of the degree of interest the story contains as to the final outcome ought not to be the reader's main concern. This being said, we could, by all means, validate the fact that, through the work of Dave Eggers, who is also a screenwriter, we are being carried away in live expression, in both the arts form, where physical and expressive talents are required, and on the literary sphere, capable of bringing about special effects, if not

really trippy ones, as to role techniques. And what are role techniques other than role play; what is role play other than the natural being; in short, the genuine projection of oneself in society?

Into the bargain, I would open a parenthesis to say that the book could be instituted as a landing for the non-native wavering English speaker who is looking out for fluidity and simplicity of expression in the language at a time when, generally speaking, diverse European expressions, mainly English incidentally, are sought in the attempt of establishing diversity and not staying walled up in the communication process; furthermore, there appear to be, should we say, a quest for some related uniformity of expression among the communities standing up in and as, not only the European Union, but also beyond, leading on to other shores with the same stimulus, in a period where multi-lingualism seems to be the trend in this twenty-first century. It unquestionably follows then that, due to globalization, many a time and oft we are, doubtless, getting soaked in some Anglo-Saxon cosmos, principally, - be it on TV, through the internet, on advertising billboards, pamphlets, product denominations and so on and so forth - in our day-to-day discourse inside which anglicist references are making their way all by themselves without seeking anyone's permission. Consequently, one finds oneself in the process of finding a way out in some foreign expression in one's endeavor at impressing kith and kin, and subsequently in the attempt at opening oneself up to a larger public to simply discard the feeling of being left out in the modern world, undeterred though by our unyielding will at remaining stout with our own mother tongue globally enough!! This is where the question of honor would also jot in, where pride and self-esteem are at stake. In justification to this statement, we only have to cast a glance at our political leaders beautifully elbowing their way through thick and thin on the international platform to make their effort at seeming issued from the latest batch look more up-to-date and meaningful. Which just goes to

show that when you are a politician you only have to say things the way you want, provided you say it and get applauded in your search of scores in the public opinion. Globally speaking and with no joking stuff behind, we know what it is all about when the matter is oriented towards the non-initiated ordinary citizens trying to pave their way through those types of meanders which can't serve as lessons with regards to their pressing desires at communicating in oral form outside their own environment. It should be specified, however, that oral delivery is often equal to taking the liberty of fending for the best solution for oneself and one's vis-à-vis in a particular situation at one precise moment provided one makes oneself understood. If words are not available at one particular moment, then gestures or signs take on the relay. What is also foremost in oral communication is that we are face to face with the other person. In such a configuration lots of messages pass on voluntarily or not through the incidence of eye contact or facial expression, in the middle of our wordings, among other means, which would definitely give more significance to what is being said or told as all that have just been said are part and parcel of the oral phenomenon.

To come back to our subject matter pertaining to the book, we can trace out that through this novel the author has centered on one major interrogation: How to bring his public in close association with feelings, a significant ingredient rooted in the human genome? Through the reading exercise, all of us would almost agree that not much is seen with the eye but much is visualized in the cradle of imagination. What matters then is that feelings are perceived. As a result, nothing would be left pending as the reader can enter into the fantastic process of picturing everything and events within the mind. And what comes and stays there can seldom be erased. As our story unveils itself, it becomes obvious that the reader would effectively be

plunged in, at a good measure and directly enough, as to the simplicity and the common and familiar way of voicing out concerns and retorting proportionately. These are implicitly nothing else than decent discussions between two people at a time inside the oral phrasing medium and meant at being reasonably poised, in support to the main protagonist's moral and principled mode of living, with no vulgarity despite the occurrence of frequent cursing bound to shoot up and quite permissible through dialogues such as these, without losing sight of the fact that the initiator cares for his vernacular and takes offence at the least swearword fired at him. Which brings us to mention that the author has however cared about guarding the literary dimension of the book in other respects. The text is a novel with a fiction not divided into chapters as one would expect. The main task is, since the first page, set at grasping the reader's curiosity, no doubt. We are here to read but we are consequently brought into an activity that transforms us into onlookers endowed with an alert and bustling intellect not only eager to know what will happen next but also enthusiastic at discovering which modes or shapes will be adopted in the development of common conversation and discussion.

As far as structure is concerned with regards to the book, we pass through sections all along that open every time under the heading of a building serving as decor denominated under a number, corresponding to the places where we find our protagonists. We would thus be moving from one building to another. We have 16 segments like these with no kind of intermission whatsoever. We are being led in seven of those buildings, and are constantly shuttled back and forth each of them except one. They are situated on a former military base, now closed and abandoned, with no apparent issue for posterity. This sense of decorum could, on the other hand, explain the feature that the work has scored an almost 4-star rating upon 5 among the public.

Prior to flying over the substance of our story, it would be good to specify that the reader is discarded from monotony and is given the opportunity of treading through different

encounters where one is going to meet a range of characters starting with Thomas, the hero, leading us through a maze of derelict, authoritarian, profligate, disgraceful, opportunistic but also innocent temperaments. His different interviews bring us in front of a sample of individuals therefore, in whom he wishes to gain confidence with good answers for his country's advancement as he is utterly disappointed and profoundly hopes in a personal revenge otherwise, that would act as a warning for future generations. The way Thomas grants his 'guests' with consideration, however, flashes some soupçon on the reader's feeling of being in the presence of an electoral campaign in which every candidate is treated equally. True to his word, Thomas shackles everyone the same way, a precision which he never fails to bring out whenever some sign of pity is urged from him, and allocates each one with the same convenience of expressing themselves, roughly managing them with the utmost care and attention inside harsh discussions.

SUMMARY OF THE STORY

By way of outline we can draw out the picture of a young man deranged by quite significant deceptions and events that have impregnated his own self with severe hindrances on his personal ontogenesis throughout his growing up and hence, is perturbed with man's schemes towards him, up to the point that every minute that has passed by has seen its share of frustration accumulated upon him. Thomas hastens in casting doubts over his environment. He is in search of some faith or honesty in humanity which he qualifies as filth with idiotic talking, having dirty thoughts and just proper at making noise in the middle of which he can't relax and think:

“When I picture the landscape bare, free of all human noise and filth, I can relax.”(62). He considers above all that, being a graduate, he has been ignored and looked down upon by each and everyone, as to the examples set by his uncle who made him work in his factory, or one of his detainees, the congressman who looks upon him with superior complex, playing thus with his impulsiveness, which he instinctively denounces :

“My uncle made me work in his factory. ...I had a college degree and he made me work on the floor, next to a bunch of Eastern European women.” (36).

“See, you [the congressman]'re being so condescending...” (50).

He estimates that his faculty has remained unused and unexploited as to its true value, thus rendering him, much to his disappointment, equal to a waste for his country in his pride as a young man. Such a state of things has, consequently, left him with ‘a skull fastened one turn too tight’, an expression thrown at him twice and by two different characters in the book (47, B198), all crowned with never-ending disturbances poisoning his life:

“These headaches are messing with my life...” (46)

so much so that he has come to question himself about his own soul and existence so far as to accordingly fling responsibilities and blame on one and all, starting with his fellow-countrymen and culminating to the American decision-makers themselves:

“You, the government...should have known that we needed a plan.” (63)

if not mankind at large, when he stipulates

“Don’t you think the majority of the chaos in the world is caused by a relatively small group of disappointed men?” (59).

“You should have sent us somewhere and given us a task.” (63)

He considers that the authorities have failed in getting him rallied to some meaningful cause for his country to such an extent that he gives the impression of having been radicalized when he wants to wipe society away by setting everything on fire:

“Sounds you had a radicalized moment, son.” (61)

“You’re capable of radical acts.” (B88)

He seizes the case of one of his former school mates Kev, the astronaut, a very hard worker who has, in spite of graduation after graduation, failed in attaining his goal: that of navigating through space on the Shuttle, a project removed by the government.

“...where are you in your life now. You’re sure as hell not on the Shuttle.” (29)

This quotation is a rude remark containing enough drive meant at embarrassing his buddy with his vain expectations to such a point as to make him laugh on the other side of his face, a situation which can be retorted to his own case and in which he does not wish to remain isolated. His situation can effectively be paralleled with that of Kev as he has the same kind of deduction for himself when he addresses the congressman who ‘represents’ the government:

“You said that I should play by the rules...And I did it. So where am I?” (55, 56).

As a result, he has reached the point of no return up to that of finally questioning his own existence. Considering the example with Kev and that of his other buddy Don Banh, assassinated for no reason by the police, he ultimately philosophizes on the conclusion that he has wasted time living in the period he is finding himself:

“I showed up two hundred years late for the life I was supposed to live.” (211)

Struggling with the sense his life has taken, he regrets everything that has happened during his existence and wished he could go back in time as time has been wrongly synchronized for him. This kind of idea has always teased his mind for on page 73 he already had the cheek of affirming that twenty years back would have been the ideal period for not only himself but his captives as well:

“You should have been brought here sooner. Twenty years back. You don’t belong with people just as I don’t belong with people.”

Such a testimony reminds us of H.G.Wells’ famous ‘Time Machine’ which could perhaps have helped him in realizing his wish of going back through time. But fortunately for him, with such an unrealistic wish, at no moment are we hinted with indications that he would be bent towards suicidal inclinations or taken up with killing incentives as one would expect in such a canvas. Tacitly clothed in the stuff of a survivor, he believes he would have his revenge and succeed in the end. When one of the characters asks him if he would dare kill himself, he answers:

“That’s not what I mean. I’ll be gone.” (B89)

Despite his motives, he does not even dare hurt any of his captives physically in spite of his dominating posture in front of them, which could well have made him fraught with danger in face of the average folk. But strangely and luckily enough, his dangerousness is cushioned by his moral principles.

In his struggle, he protests about having grown up on his own inside a far-off, drug-addicted and delirious intimate milieu which he fiercely condemns and with no true parental figure relevant at protecting and guiding him. The damage caused on his internal psyche is made clear by one of the characters uttering the following lines in an attempt at fighting back his indictments and justifying all possible goodwill in protecting him.

“On your fourth birthday, you hid in the garage. At your eighth-grade graduation, you stayed in the parking lot... You never joined the big group activities. I would buy you tickets to everything...you would stay home.” (B96)

In the same respect, after having turned out into contradictorily being of a slack nature despite all he does, Thomas is eaten up by his repulsive attitudes. Even towards the woman he has fallen in love with he cannot make the first move:

“I couldn’t talk to her...I’ve never been within reach of anyone I coveted.” (B109) thus rounding up the previous statements.

To give thickness to his personality however, he consoles himself with mentioning that he is a “moral and principled man” through practically every section of the book. He also sustains that he is invincible, “unstoppable” (B132) in his project of holding hostages in view of rocking the authorities whom, he argues, won’t be able to catch him, as he has plans which are not his but devised for him by destiny and which are simply infallible. Being thus gifted according to him, he even believes at one point that he is irresistible, as per the episode with his girlfriend who, in line with what he says,

“... made the first move” (B122)

on seeing him at first glance.

So, to disprove his sluggishness, he starts by overturning all good principles and sets himself out in a way pertaining to his own . . . Instead of sitting down idling and languishing helplessly on his fate, in the attempt at proving his worth, he shakes himself off, takes the bull by the horns, goes forward and trumps up a method of getting people, more or less sound and clear-headed, discuss with him, snapping his finger at whatever consequences all he does may arise, as matters stand. He thus goes ahead directly and poses himself face-to-face with individuals in search of understanding or whom he considers responsible for what has happened to him and to some of his friends or have botched their own lives with beliefs and who, on top of all, would have otherwise refused to consider his grievances any other way round, should he have continued to stay and live on the passive side of things. How does he proceed? The wall-paper in which Thomas sets himself and carries everyone is the midst of waste represented by a military barracks abandoned by the state and the authorities. He wants to make use of each of the buildings, give meaning to them, in his own way, at least symbolically and confines each of his captives separately in those buildings to express his despair and disgust, in the heart of wilderness, lost money and funds. As to the latter point he specifies:

“We just spent five trillion dollars on useless wars.” (41)

“But couldn’t we just sell bonds to pay for Social Security, education for all?...but then we turn around and there’s a billion dollars for Afghani warlords.” (58)

and carries on searching for justifications, under a collection of mutual shocks through swearwords, in particular, and reciprocating loud enough with the precise intention of putting a name on all the damages done to him and to his friends and for which everyone from bottom to top must be answerable so that the ‘vise around his head’ (B85) starts easing. In complete isolation true to his character, he undertakes to obtain redress or avenge injustices regarding

events that have been upsetting and preoccupying him as a young American who has been living inside fruitless expectations.

Right from the start his method gives the full measure of his state of mind which is not only one of folly but also one of boldness when he pinpoints his friend Kev, the astronaut, whom he has chained as his first captive:

“...you didn’t answer any of my letters...” (18)

or his fifth one, a policeman:

“I’ve written letters to the department and never got an answer.” (B136)

thus transmitting on a permanent basis the sentiment of frustration and waste swarming inside the young man’s brain and immediately deduced by another member of his collection of hostages, the hospital receptionist, further on:

“But I can understand your frustration...” (B179)

in an attempt at cooling him down and getting him to control himself, when he precisely seems to be on the verge of throwing a punch somewhere.

He therefore finds no logic in the reasoning power of his elders and contemporaries and wants situations that have occurred and remained pending on the human scale be revised or remedied before it is too late for the generations to come. The said buildings become some sort of private booths where Thomas is the sole protagonist listening to his victims and reprimanding them *in private* just as the priest in church confessionals. At the same pace, he impersonates himself as being some sort of a Saviour invested with some mission just like Jesus Christ suffering on the cross, and concerning which one of his captives remarks:

“Other kids were drawing spaceships or Grateful Dead skulls or penises, but you were drawing crucifixes.” (B101),

or Moses in front of the Red Sea:

“...I picture myself parting all these people like Moses with the Red Sea.” (62)

Conversely, the novel is quite a fresh one, in the sense that the abductions and enquiries happen today, in our century, precisely at our time of existence. What is the intrigue then? Again Thomas, the main character, is on his way cross-examining individuals under some particular method as said earlier. That of chaining up all his witnesses one by one in a situation that has become unbearable for him, and ‘interrogating’ them with the ultimate background view of challenging and ultimately shaking the authorities through some third parties as no dialogue is possible, as he has stressed.

“I knew there’s no other way any of you guys would sit down to talk to me.”(B136).

To put everything in a nutshell, Thomas is in search of repairing the injustice from which he has suffered and transforming the condescension dumped upon him into some honorable consideration for his person and threatening everyone with what he is capable of doing while securing himself from all possible and sudden physical counterstrokes flying from whatever sides as he does not lose sight, ‘smart but nuts’ as he is, that the discussions or his acts would be liable to produce violent responses. Such would be the maturing of the plot, lodged inside self-contained fluidity of speech, the tit-for-tat sort of verbal backlash discharged somewhat automatically in nothing else than duologues from people chained to a post, an invitation inside an *adventure* tinged with suspense in wait of an outcome to be carried forward section after section inside the book.

*Your Fathers, Where Are They? And The Prophets, Do
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BUILDING 52

—I did it. You're really here. An astronaut. Jesus.

—Who's that?

—You probably have a headache. From the chloroform.

—What? Where am I? Where is this place? Who the fuck are you?

—You don't recognize me?

—What? No. What is this?

—That? It's a chain. It's attached to that post. Don't pull on it.

—Holy shit. Holy shit.

—I said don't pull on it. And I have to tell you right away how sorry I am that you are here under these circumstances.

—Who are you?

—We know each other, Kev. From way back. And I didn't want to bring you here like this. I mean, I'd rather just grab a beer with you sometime, but you didn't answer any of my letters and then I saw you were coming through town so— Really, don't yank on that. You'll mess up your leg.

—Why the fuck am I here?

—You're here because I brought you here.

—You did this? You have me chained to a post?

—Isn't that thing great? I don't know if you'd call this a post? Whatever it is, it's incredibly strong. This place came with them. This was a military base, so there are these weird fixtures here and there. That thing you're chained to can hold ten thousand

BATIMENT 52

—Je l'ai fait. Ca y est, t'es bien là, l'astronaute. Nom de Dieu.

—Qui êtes-vous ?

—T'as sûrement mal à la tête, à cause du chloroforme.

—Quoi ? Où suis-je ? C'est quoi cet endroit ? Qui êtes-vous bordel ?

—Voyons, tu ne me reconnais pas ?

—Non, franchement ! Et c'est quoi ça ?

—Ca ? C'est une chaîne, attachée à ce pylône. Ne tire pas dessus.

—Bordel de merde, bordel de merde.

—Je t'ai dit de ne pas tirer dessus. Je dois tout de suite te dire combien je suis navré que tu sois ici en de telles circonstances.

—Mais qui êtes-vous ?

—On se connaît, Kev. Depuis un bout de temps. Et je ne voulais absolument pas t'emmener ici comme ça. C'est que, j'aurais bien préféré prendre une bière avec toi un moment quelque part, mais tu n'as daigné répondre à aucune de mes lettres. Puis je t'ai vu descendre en ville, donc— Je t'en pris, ne tire pas aussi violemment dessus. Tu vas t'écrabouiller la jambe.

—Pourquoi suis-je ici, merde ?

—T'es ici parce que je t'ai emmené ici.

—Vous avez fait ça ? Vous m'avez enchaîné à un pylône ?

—N'est-ce pas extraordinaire ? Je ne sais pas si on devrait appeler ça un pylône. Peu importe, c'est du solide. Ce lieu est tel que tu le vois. C'était une base militaire. Voilà pourquoi tu vois ces aménagements bizarres ça et là. Cette chose à laquelle tu es attaché

pounds, and just about every building here has one. Stop pulling on it.

—Help!

—Don't yell. There's no one for miles. And the ocean's just over the hill, so between the waves and the wind you'd barely hear a cannon fire from here. But they're not firing cannons anymore.

—Help!

—Jesus. Stop. That's way too loud. This is all cement, man. Hear that echo?

—Help! Help!

—I figured you might yell, so if it's going to be now, just tell me. I can't stay here while you do that.

—Help!

—My respect for you is plummeting.

—Help! Help! Help! Hello—

—All right. Jesus Christ. I'll be back when you're done.

•

—You done?

—Fuck you.

—You know, I've never heard you swear before. That's one of the main things I remember about you, that you never swore. You were such a serious guy, so precise and careful and upstanding. And with the crew cut and those short-sleeve button-downs, you were such a throwback. I guess you have to be if you want to be an astronaut — you

peut contenir cinq milles kilos, et presque tous les bâtiments ici en possèdent une. Arrête de tirer dessus.

—Au secours !

—Ne hurle pas. Il n’y a personne à plus d’un kilomètre. Et au-delà de la colline c’est l’océan. Alors, entre le bruit des vagues et celui du vent, t’entendrais à peine péter un canon d’ici. En plus, ça fait longtemps qu’on n’en tire plus.

—Au secours !

—Arrête, Nom de Dieu. Tu cries un peu trop fort là. C’est du béton ça. T’entends l’écho qu’ça fait ?

—A l’aide ! A l’aide !

—J’imaginai bien qu’ t’allais hurler de toute façon. Si c’est maintenant, dis-le-moi. Je ne resterai pas planté là à t’entendre.

—A l’aide !

—Le respect que j’avais pour toi est en train de s’estomper.

—Au secours ! Au secours ! Au secours ! Eh oh !

—Très bien, Seigneur Jésus. Je reviendrai quand t’auras fini.

•

—Ca y est, t’as fini ?

—Vas te faire foutre.

—Tu sais, je ne t’ai jamais entendu dire de jurons avant. C’est une des principales choses que j’ai gardé de toi. Jamais tu ne disais de gros mots. T’as toujours été un type tellement sérieux, tellement droit, soigné et probe. Et avec ta coupe militaire et ta chemisette bien boutonnée, t’as toujours été un tel exemple. Dans ton métier

have to be that kind of tidy. Have that kind of purity.

—I don't know you.

—What? Yes you do. You don't remember?

—No. I don't know anyone like you.

—Stop. Just think about it. Who am I?

—No.

—You're chained to a post. You might as well guess. How do we know each other?

—Fuck you.

—No.

—Help!

—Don't. Can't you hear how loud it is in here? You hear the echo?

—Help! Help!

—I'm so disappointed in you, Kev.

—Help! Help! Help!

—Okay. I'm leaving till you get your shit together.

•

—Now are you done? It's cold out there at night. The wind comes up the bluff and the Pacific— I don't know. It gets bitter. With the sun out it's almost balmy, but when it drops it gets arctic quick. You must be hoarse. You want some water?

—

d'astronaute, je pense qu'il en faut bien, cette espèce d'apparence bien soignée, cette espèce de pureté de l'être.

—Je ne vous connais pas.

—Mais si, tu me connais. Tu ne te rappelles pas ?

—Non. Je ne me souviens pas vous avoir vu.

—Oh ! Réfléchis un peu. Qui suis-je ?

—Ch'ais pas.

—T'es attaché à cette potence. Tu pourrais bien faire un effort. Comment est-ce qu'on se connaît ?

—Merde.

—Allons.

—Au secours !

—S'il te plaît. Tu ne vois pas que tu nous casses les oreilles ? T'entends l'écho ?

—Au secours ! A l'aide !

—Tu me déçois tellement, Kev.

—Au secours ! A l'aide ! Au secours !

—D'accord. Je m'en vais jusqu'à ce que tout soit clair dans ta cervelle de merde.

•

—Ca y est, t'as fini maintenant ? La nuit il fait froid dehors. Le vent monte à pic depuis le Pacifique, un froid de canard, j'te dis pas ! Quand il y a du soleil, la température est bien douce mais quand ça descend, on se croirait dans l'Arctique. T'es sûrement enroué. Tu veux un peu d'eau ?

—

—I'll just leave this bottle here. Drink it when you want. That's why I left your left hand free.

We'll be here awhile, so just know I'll make sure you eat and have whatever you need. I have some blankets in the van, too.

—How'd you get me here? Were you the guy moving that couch?

—That was me. I saw that trick in a movie. I can't believe it worked. You helped me move the couch into the van, and I tased you, then I used some chloroform and drove you here. You want to hear the whole thing? It's pretty incredible.

—No.

—You can't really park very close to this building we're in, so I dragged you out of the van onto that cart there—you can see it outside. It was already here, and it works perfectly. I could push an elephant on that thing. So I got you onto that cart, then I pulled you a quarter mile from the parking lot to this building. To be honest, I'm just still dazed thinking that all this worked. You've got me by, what, thirty pounds, and you're definitely in better shape than I could ever be. But still it worked. You're a fucking astronaut and now I have you here. This is a great day.

—You're nuts.

—No, no. I'm not. First of all, I'm sorry. I never thought I'd do something like this, but everything lately made it necessary. I've never hurt anyone in my life, and I won't hurt you. I would never harm you, Kev. I want you to understand that. So you don't need to

—Je te laisse cette bouteille, là. Bois-en quand tu veux. Je t'ai laissé la main gauche libre exprès. Nous allons rester ici un moment. Sache seulement que je veillerai à ce que tu sois nourri et qu'il ne te manque de rien. J'ai aussi des couvertures dans la camionnette.

—Comment m'avez-vous emmené jusqu'ici ? Était-ce bien vous le type qui déplaçait ce divan ?

—C'était bien moi. J'ai vu ce coup-là au ciné. Je n'arrive pas à croire que ça ait pu marcher. Tu m'as aidé à porter le divan jusqu'à la camionnette, puis je t'ai tasé, ensuite j'ai employé du chloroforme et t'ai emmené jusqu'ici. Tu veux entendre toute l'histoire ? C'est absolument incroyable.

—Non.

—Personne ne peut s'approcher trop près de ce bâtiment-ci avec voiture. Une fois hors de la camionnette, je t'ai catapulté dans cette espèce de chariot que tu vois là, dehors et t'ai tiré jusqu'ici. Il était déjà là et fonctionne parfaitement bien. J'aurais pu y faire monter un éléphant et le pousser sur cette chose. Je t'ai donc mis sur ce chariot, je t'ai tiré sur à peu près trois cents mètres du parking jusqu'à ce bâtiment. Pour être honnête, j'en suis encore tout hébété à penser que tout cela ait bien fonctionné. A une quinzaine de kilos près, je confirme que c'est toi le meilleur comparé à moi. Toujours est-il que ça a marché. Toi, l'enfoiré d'astronaute, je t'ai là. Aujourd'hui c'est un grand jour.

—Vous n'êtes qu'un cinglé.

—Pas du tout. D'abord, j'en suis désolé. Jamais n'avais-je pensé faire quelque chose de ce genre, mais tout ce qui s'est passé dernièrement a rendu cela nécessaire. Je n'ai jamais fait de mal à qui que ce soit dans ma vie, et je ne te ferai aucun mal non plus. Jamais je ne te blesserai, Kev. Je veux que tu comprennes cela. Donc, il est inutile de te

struggle or anything. I'll let you go tomorrow after we talk for a while.

—You're really fucking nuts.

—I'm really not. Really. I want you to stop saying that, because I'm not. I'm a moral man and I'm a principled man.

—Fuck you.

—Stop saying that, too. I don't like you when you swear. Let's get back to remembering me.

Do you?

—No.

—Kev, stop. Just look at me. The sooner we get through all this, the sooner I can let you go.

—You let me go and I'll kill you.

—Hey. Hey. Why would you *say* that? That doesn't make any sense. You just set yourself back *hours*. Maybe more. I was planning to let you go later on tonight. Maybe tomorrow at the latest. But now you've got me scared. I didn't picture you as a violent type. Jesus, Kev, you're an astronaut! You shouldn't be going around threatening people.

—You've got me chained to a post.

—Still. What I did to you was methodical and nonviolent. It was a means to an end. I wanted to talk to you, and you haven't answered my letters, so I didn't think I had a choice. I really do apologize for having to do it this way. I've been in a strange place lately. I was getting these migraines, I couldn't sleep. Holy shit, the pressure! The questions were piling up and were strangling me at night. Have you ever had that, where you're lying there, and the questions are just these asps wrapping themselves around your throat?

—You are so fucking nuts.

débattre ou quoi que ce soit. Je te laisserai partir demain après nous être entretenus un moment.

—Vous n’êtes qu’un cinglé de merde.

—Aucunement. Je veux que tu arrêtes de dire ça car je ne suis vraiment pas un cinglé. Je suis un homme de bonne moralité, un homme de principe.

—Je t’emmerde.

—Là encore, je t’arrête. J’aime pas quand tu dis des jurons. Essaie de te souvenir de moi. Tu te souviens de moi ?

—Non.

—Kev, arrête. Regarde-moi bien. Dès qu’on aura tout mis au clair je te laisserai partir.

—Libère-moi et je te pète la cervelle.

—Eh, oh. Pourquoi parles-tu ainsi ? Ca n’a pas de sens. Tu vas encore y rester des *heures*.

Peut-être plus. Moi qui voulais te relâcher dès ce soir, ou demain au plus tard. Mais à présent tu me donnes la frousse. Jamais je ne te considérais comme un type violent. Doux Jésus. Kev, t’es astronaute, toi. Tu ne devrais pas passer ton temps à faire ainsi peur aux gens.

— Tu m’as enchaîné à un pylône, canaille !

—Soit. Mais moi, je procède avec méthode, ce que j’ai fait est dénué de toute violence.

C’était un moyen pour y arriver. Je voulais te parler, moi, mais tu n’as pas répondu à mes lettres, alors tu ne m’as pas laissé le choix. Je m’excuse vraiment d’avoir agi ainsi. Je me suis trouvé dans une situation étrange ces derniers temps. J’avais de ces migraines qui m’empêchaient de dormir. Putain ! La pression quoi ! Les questions s’entassaient dans ma tête et m’étranglaient la nuit. Cela t’est-il déjà arrivé à toi, allongé là avec les interrogations qui te serrent à la gorge comme des aspics ?

—T’es qu’un cinglé de merde.

—You know what, Kev? I'm not. But I have to say, right when I said *asps* I knew it was a mistake. Someone like you hears that word, the specificity of it, and you think I'm some obsessive weirdo.

—But you're not.

—See, the sarcasm, too. That's new. I remember you being so sincere. I privately admired that. I don't like this new edge. Now listen, I think you can tell I have my faculties together.

—Even though you kidnapped me and brought me here.

—Exactly *because* I brought you here—successfully. I made a plan, executed it, and I brought an astronaut to an abandoned military base one hundred and ten miles away from where I abducted you. That makes me a pretty competent person, correct?

—

—Kev. You work for the government, right?

—I work for NASA.

—Which is a government agency. And every day the government is bringing some enemy combatant to some undisclosed location to interrogate them, right? So what's wrong with me doing the same thing?

—So I'm an enemy combatant.

—No. Maybe that was a poor comparison.

—Buddy, you'll be in prison the rest of your life.

—I don't think so. Only dumb people get caught.

—And you're a brilliant criminal mastermind.

—Tu sais quoi, Kev ? Je ne suis pas cinglé. Mais je dois dire quand j'ai dit *aspics* ce n'était pas ça au fait que je voulais dire. Quelqu'un comme toi qui entends ce mot avec sa spécificité me prendrait tout de suite pour un cinglé obsédé.

—Que tu n'es pas, bien sûr.

—Vois aussi ton sarcasme un peu. Ca c'est nouveau. Je t'ai toujours connu comme quelqu'un de bien sincère. Je t'admiraais bien en moi-même. A présent, je déteste ce nouveau penchant que t'as. Maintenant écoute. Je pense que tu dois bien savoir que j'ai tous mes esprits bien en place.

—Bien que tu m'aies kidnappé et emmené ici.

—Tout à fait *parce que* j'ai réussi à t'emmener jusqu'ici. J'ai élaboré mon plan, je l'ai exécuté, et j'ai emmené un astronaute jusqu'à une base militaire désaffectée à près de deux cents kilomètres de l'endroit où je t'ai enlevé. Tout cela démontre bien ma compétence en la matière, exacte ?

—

—Kev. Tu travailles pour le gouvernement, n'est-ce pas ?

—Je travaille pour la NASA.

—Qui est un agent du gouvernement. Qui transporte chaque jour un combattant ennemi jusqu'à un lieu secret pour l'interroger, exacte ? Alors, qu'y-a-t-il de mal à ce que je fasse la même chose ?

—Je suis donc un combattant ennemi.

—Non. La comparaison n'est peut-être pas de même niveau.

—Tu passeras le reste de ta vie en prison, mon vieux.

—Je ne le pense pas. Il n'y a que les cruches qui se font prendre.

—Et pour ce qui est du crime, toi, t'es plutôt brillant.

—No. No, Kev. I've never done anything illegal in my life. Isn't that amazing? I really haven't. The great crimes are committed by first-timers. I see you looking around. Isn't this place great? How cool is it that we're actually on a military base? You recognize this stuff? Look around. This was some kind of artillery storage building. I think they would fasten the cannons or whatever to these posts so they could move back and forth to absorb the kickback. I'm not really sure, but why else would they have these posts here?

—I'm going to fucking kill you. But the cops will kill you first.

—Kev, that won't happen.

—You don't think there is a massive manhunt to find out what happened to me?

—Don't be conceited. You were never conceited. You were one of those guys who knows he's smart and strong and destined for great things, but you also knew it wasn't going to help you if you advertised it to the world. So you had a nice kind of public humility thing working for you. I liked that. I understood your whole gambit, but I liked it and respected it. So don't blow it with the "I'm an astronaut" bravado.

—Fine. But you're still dead. They'll find me in twenty-four hours.

—No, they won't. I texted three people from your phone, telling them all you were in different places. I told one of your NASA coworkers you had a death in the family. And I told your parents you were on a training assignment. Thank god for texting—I can impersonate you perfectly. Then I turned your phone off and threw it away.

—There's a hundred things you haven't thought of.

—Non. Non, Kev. Je n'ai jamais fait quoi que ce soit d'illégal dans ma vie. N'est-ce pas formidable, ça ? Jamais, vraiment. Les grands crimes ne sont commis que par les novices. Je te vois en train de chercher partout. N'est-ce pas merveilleux cet endroit ? Comme c'est cool d'être sur une vraie base militaire. Tu reconnais bien l'affaire ? Regarde. Ce bâtiment servait de dépôt d'artillerie en quelque sorte. Ces pylônes retenaient les canons ou trucs de ce genre de manière à contenir les contrecoups, je pense. Je n'en suis pas tout à fait sûr mais pour quelles autres raisons auraient-ils planté ces pylônes ici ?

—Je vais te tuer, bordel. Mais les flics l'auront déjà fait de toute façon.

—Kev, cela n'arrivera pas.

—Tu ne penses pas un peu à la gigantesque chasse à l'homme en ce moment pour me retrouver ?

—Ne sois pas prétentieux. Tu n'as jamais été prétentieux. Tu étais de ceux qui savent bien qu'ils sont rusés, puissants et destinés à accomplir de grandes choses, mais tu savais aussi que cela ne servait à rien de le montrer à tous. Donc tu avais cette sorte d'humilité envers les gens qui jouait en ta faveur. J'aimais bien ce côté là en toi. Je comprenais bien le sens de toutes tes grandes manœuvres, je l'appréciais bien et le respectais. Ne vas pas ainsi tout foutre en l'air avec ta bravade 'Moi, l'astronaute'.

—Super. Mais t'es déjà mort, toi. Ils vont me retrouver en moins de vingt-quatre heures.

—Mais non. J'ai utilisé ton téléphone et j'ai texté trois personnes leur disant que tu étais dans des endroits différents. J'ai dit à un de tes collègues de la NASA qu'il y avait un décès dans ta famille. Et j'ai dit à tes parents que t'étais en stage de formation. Dieu merci que ça existe, les textos—je peux entrer dans ton personnage parfaitement. J'ai ensuite éteint ton téléphone avant de le jeter.

—Il y a mille choses auxquelles tu n'as pas pensées.

—Maybe. Maybe not. So are you wondering where you are? This whole base is decommissioned and falling apart. No one knows what to do with it, so it's just standing here, rotting on billion-dollar land. You can't see it from here, but the ocean is about a half mile down the slope. The views are incredible. But on this land there are just these crumbling old buildings. There are hundreds of them, and twenty more like this one, all in a row. I think this one was used to test chemical weapons. There's one nearby where they taught interrogation methods. And the ones like this, they all have these posts you can hook things onto. Why are you looking at me like that? Does that mean you recognize me?

—No.

—Yes you do.

—I don't. You're a fucking lunatic and I told you, I don't know lunatics. My life's been charmed that way.

—Kev. I really want to get started. So we're either going to get started the way I hope we can get started, with us talking, or I'll tase you, get you in line a bit, and then we'll get started. So why not just talk to me? Let's go about this like men. We have a task ahead of us and we might as well do it. You were always all business, getting things taken care of, moving on. I expect that kind of efficiency from you. Now where am I from? How do you know me?

—I don't know. I've never been to prison. I'm assuming you escaped from somewhere.

—C'est bien possible. Mais est-ce que tu commences à te rendre compte où tu es vraiment ? Cette base est hors d'usage et est en train de se désagréger. Nul ne sait quoi faire avec. Donc elle est simplement là, en train de sombrer sur un terrain valant quelques milliards. L'océan, que tu ne peux voir d'ici, est tout au bas de la pente à environ huit cents kilomètres. Ce qu'on peut voir est incroyable. Mais sur ce terrain il n'existe que ces vieux bâtiments croulant ; il y en a des centaines et une vingtaine d'autres comme celui-ci, tous alignés les uns après les autres. Je pense que celui-ci était utilisé pour tester les armes chimiques. Il y a un autre non loin d'ici où ils formaient aux méthodes interrogatoires. Et dans ceux identiques à celui-ci, il y a ces pylônes sur lesquels tu peux accrocher des trucs. Pourquoi me regardes-tu ainsi ? Est-ce à dire que tu me reconnais à présent ?

—Non.

—On dirait que oui.

—Pas du tout. Vous n'êtes qu'un cinglé de merde et je te l'ai déjà dit, je ne connais pas de cinglés. Ma vie est ainsi faite.

—Kev. Je veux vraiment qu'on parle sérieusement. Soit nous commençons de la manière dont j'espérais, c'est-à-dire en discutant, ou alors je te tase pour te recadrer un peu, et on discute après. Pourquoi donc ne pas parler tout simplement ? Procédons en tant qu'hommes. Nous avons une tâche à accomplir, il faut l'accomplir. T'as toujours été quelqu'un de sérieux, veillant à tout, un fonceur. J'attends cette espèce de bonne volonté de ta part. Maintenant, dis-moi d'où je viens, comment tu me connais.

—Je n'en sais rien. Je n'ai jamais été en prison, moi. Je pense que t'as dû t'échapper de quelque part.

—Kev, you see that taser there? If you decide not to talk with me then I tase you. If you yell for help, I leave the building till you shut up, then I come back and tase you. It's so much better if we just talk.

—And then what? You kill me.

—I couldn't kill you. I've never killed anything.

—But if I tell anyone about this, you're in prison for ten, twenty years. Kidnapping an astronaut?

—That's my problem, not yours. Obviously, you're locked to a post, so I have the upper hand in terms of *when* someone finds you and how far away I can be by the time you are found.

Kev, I don't mean to be a dick, but can we get started? Obviously I have this whole thing figured out. I brought you this far, and I managed to get you chained up. I mean, I'm not an idiot. I've been planning this for a while. So can we start?

—And if I talk to you then you let me go?

—I won't harm you. You'll be rescued eventually. I leave, I send a message to someone, telling them where you are, and they come to find you. By then I'm on my way. So one more time before I get angry. How do we know each other?

—College.

—Ah. There you go. College. You remember me?

—No.

—Kev, c'mon.

—I don't know.

—But you knew I was from college.

—I didn't know that. I guessed.

—C'mon. Think.

—Kev, tu vois bien ce taseur là-bas ? Si tu ne te décides pas à parler, je te tase. Si tu cries à l'aide, je quitte le bâtiment jusqu'à ce que tu te taises, je reviens et je te tase. Ce serait beaucoup mieux si nous parlions tout simplement.

—Et après ? Tu me tues.

—Je ne pourrai pas te tuer. Je n'ai jamais tué.

—Et si je raconte tout ça, tu en prends pour dix, vingt ans. Tu kidnappes un astronaute, toi !

—Ca, c'est mon problème, pas le tien. Toi étant verrouillé à un pylône, il est donc clair que c'est moi qui déciderai *quand* est-ce qu'on te retrouverait et où je serai, moi, quand on t'aura trouvé. Kev, je ne me prends pour un inspecteur de police, mais est-ce qu'on pourrait commencer ? J'ai manifestement tout bien calculé. Je t'ai bien traîné jusqu'ici, et j'ai réussi à t'enchaîner. C'est que je ne suis pas un imbécile. J'ai bien réfléchi à tout. Alors, est-ce qu'on peut commencer ?

—Et si je te parlais, tu me laisserais partir ?

—Je ne te ferai aucun mal. On viendra te sortir de là. Moi je pars. J'envoie un message pour dire où tu es et on vient te chercher. Entretemps, moi je serai loin. Donc, encore une fois, avant que je ne m'énerve, comment est-ce qu'on s'est connu ?

—A la fac.

—Ah! Voilà ! A la fac. Tu te souviens de mon nom ?

—Non.

—Kev, allons !

—Je ne sais pas.

—Mais tu sais qu'on a été à la fac.

—Je ne le savais pas. J'ai juste deviné.

—Allons. Réfléchis.

—Bob?

—You know my name isn't Bob. No one's name is Bob.

—Dick?

—Dick? Oh, I get it. That's a name you're calling me. Listen. I want to think you're a nice guy, so just tell me you remember my name.

—Okay. I remember you.

—Good. And my name is. . .

—Steve.

—No.

—Bob.

—Bob again? Really?

—Rob? Danny?

—You really don't know! Okay, let's walk through it, slowly. Was I from undergrad or grad school?

—Undergrad.

—Thank you. I was three years younger. Ring a bell?

—No.

—Think Intro to Aerospace Engineering. You were a TA.

—There were a hundred and twenty kids in that class.

—But think. I stayed after a lot. I asked you questions about time travel.

—You used to wear Timberlands?

—Aha. There you go. And my name is . . .

—Gus.

—Bob ?

—Tu sais que je ne m'appelle pas Bob. Personne ne s'appelle Bob.

—Dick ?

—Dick ? Ah, je comprends. Crétin, Andouille, Tête de Nœud. C'est comme ça que tu veux m'appeler. Ecoute. Je veux bien croire que t'es un type sympa. Donc, dis-moi seulement que tu te souviens de mon nom.

—Ok. Je me souviens.

—Bien. Et je m'appelle...

—Steve.

—Non.

—Bob.

—Encore Bob ? Décidément ?

—Rob ? Danny ?

—Vraiment, tu ne sais pas ! Ok, on va y procéder, doucement. J'étais en première année ou en licence ?

—Première année.

—Merci. J'étais de trois ans ton cadet. Ca te dit que' que chose ?

—Non.

—Pense à ta première année en Ingénierie Aérospatiale. T'étais assistant pédagogique.

—Il y avait quelques cent vingt élèves dans cette classe.

—Mais réfléchis bien. J'étais encore là longtemps après. Je te posais des questions sur le voyage dans le temps.

—Tu portais du Timberlands ?

—Aah. Ca y est. Et je m'appelle. . .

—Gus.

—Close! Thomas.

—Thomas? Sure, I remember. I could never forget you. So Thomas, why the fuck do you have me chained to a post?

—Kev, did you know Neil Armstrong died today?

—Yes, I did know that.

—How did that affect you?

—How did that affect me?

—Yes, how did that affect you?

—I don't know. I was sad. He was a great man.

—He went to the moon.

—Yes he did.

—But you won't go to the moon.

—No. Why would I go to the moon?

—Because you're an astronaut.

—Astronauts don't go to the moon.

—They don't go anymore.

—No.

—Right. And how do you feel about that, Kev?

—Jesus Christ.

—I have a taser, Kev. You're better off answering.

—I didn't care about going to the moon. It hasn't been a NASA priority for forty years.

—You wanted to be on the Shuttle.

—Yes.

—I bet you wonder how I knew that.

—Presque ! Thomas.

—Thomas ? Mais bien sûr, je m'en souviens ! Comment pouvais-je t'oublier ? Eh bien Thomas, pourquoi, bordel, me retiens-tu attaché à un pylône ?

—Kev, savais-tu que Neil Armstrong est décédé aujourd'hui ?

—Oui, je le savais en effet.

—Qu'est-ce que cela t'a fait ?

—Ce que cela m'a fait ?

—Oui, qu'est-ce que cela t'a fait ?

—Je ne sais pas. J'étais triste. C'était un grand homme.

—Il a été sur la lune.

—En effet.

—Mais toi, tu n'iras pas sur la lune.

—Non. Pourquoi irais-je sur la lune ?

—Parce que t'es astronaute.

—Les astronautes ne vont pas sur la lune.

—Ils n'y vont plus.

—Non.

—Bien. Et qu'est-ce que tu penses de ça, Kev ?

—Seigneur Jésus.

—J'ai un taseur, Kev. Tu ferais mieux de répondre à ma question.

—Je m'en fichais bien que d'aller sur la lune. Ca n'a pas été une priorité de la NASA depuis quarante ans.

—Tu voulais être sur la Navette.

—Oui.

—Je parie que t'es en train de te demander comment j'ai su cela.

—No, I don't.

—You're not curious?

—Every astronaut wanted to go on the Shuttle.

—Sure, but I know how long you've wanted it. You told me one day you were going to go up in the Shuttle. Remember that?

—No.

—You probably said that a lot. But I remember it so well. It was so steady, you were so sure. You inspired me. You asked me what I wanted to do with my life. I think you asked me just so you could answer the question yourself. So I said something about being a cop or FBI agent or something, and do you remember what you said? This was right outside Moore Hall. It was a crisp fall day.

—I said I wanted to go up in the Shuttle.

—Exactly. Do you really remember, or are you just humoring me?

—I don't know.

—Kev, you really better take this seriously. I take this seriously. I went through a fuckload of trouble to get you here, so you must know I'm serious. Now with all the fucking seriousness, do you remember that day when you looked me in the eye and told me you were absolutely sure you would go up in the Shuttle?

—Yes, I do.

—Good. And now where are you?

—I'm in a military base chained to a post.

—Good. Good one. But you know what I mean. I mean, where are you in your life now?

You're sure as hell not on the Shuttle.

—Non, pas du tout.

—T'es pas curieux ?

—Tous les astronautes voulaient aller sur la Navette.

—Ca c'est sûr, mais je sais depuis quand tu y aspirais. Un jour tu m'as dit que t'allais partir sur la Navette. Tu t'en souviens ?

—Non.

—Tu l'as dit plusieurs fois probablement. Mais je m'en souviens si bien. C'était tellement concret dans ton esprit. Tu m'as inspiré, du coup. Tu m'avais demandé ce que je voulais faire de ma vie. Je pense qu'en faisant cela, tu voulais pouvoir y répondre toi-même. J'ai alors dit que je voulais être flic ou agent FBI ou quelque chose de ce genre, et tu te souviens de ce que t'avais dit ? C'était dehors, près de Moore Hall. Il faisait frais par ce jour d'automne.

—J'avais dit que je voulais monter dans la Navette.

—Exactement. Tu te souviens vraiment, ou tu dis ça juste pour me faire plaisir ?

—Je n'en sais rien.

—Kev, vaut mieux que tu prennes cela très au sérieux. Je suis sérieux. Je me suis donné un tas de mal, merde, pour t'emmener jusqu'ici, tu dois donc comprendre que je suis sérieux.

Maintenant, bordel, avec tout ce que cela comporte de sérieux, te souviens-tu du jour où tu m'as regardé droit dans les yeux en me disant que tu étais absolument certain de monter dans la Navette ?

—Absolument.

—Bien. Et où est-ce que tu te trouves maintenant ?

—Dans une base militaire, enchaîné à un pylône.

—Bien. Très bien dit. Mais tu comprends bien où je veux en venir. Où est-ce que tu te trouves maintenant avec tes bons projets, hein ? Pas dans la Navette, en tout cas.

—The Shuttle is decommissioned.

—Right. A year after you became an astronaut.

—You know too much about me.

—Of course I know about you! We all did. You became an astronaut! You actually did it. You didn't know how much people were paying attention, did you, Kev? That little college we went to, with what, five thousand people, most of them idiots except you and me? And you end up going to MIT, get your master's in aerospace engineering, and you're in the Navy, too? I mean, you were my fucking hero, man. Everything you said you were going to do, you did. It was incredible. You were the one fulfilled promise I've ever known in this life. You know how rarely a promise is kept? A kept promise is like a white whale, man! But when you became an astronaut you kept a promise, a big fucking promise, and I felt like from there any promise could be kept. That all promises could be kept—should be kept.

—I'm glad you feel that way.

—But then they pulled the Shuttle from you. And I thought, Ah, there it is again. The bait and switch. The inevitable collapse of anything seeming solid. The breaking of every last goddamned promise on Earth. But for a while there you were a god. You promised you'd become an astronaut and you became one. Just one thing after another, except that one year, which I'll ask you about later. I know a few things about that one year.

—Jesus Christ. You know, I keep thinking I'll wake up. I mean, I know this is a nightmare, but it's one of those ones where you can't wake up.

—Kev, you talking to yourself now?

—La Navette a été mise hors service.

—Exacte. Un an après que tu sois devenu astronaute.

—T'en sais sur moi !

—Bien sûr que j'en sais sur toi. Tout le monde en savait sur toi. T'es devenu astronaute. C'est bien réel. Tu ne pouvais pas savoir à quel point les gens avaient les yeux braqués sur toi, n'est-ce pas, Kev ? Notre petite fac avec, quoi, cinq mille étudiants, la plupart des imbéciles, sauf toi et moi ? Et t'as fini par arriver jusqu'au MIT, par obtenir ton master en ingénierie aérospatiale, et t'es dans la Marine également ? Putain, je te jure ! T'étais mon héros, vieux. Tout ce que tu voulais faire, tu l'as fait. C'était incroyable. T'étais la seule personne que j'ai jamais connue, ayant réalisé ses grandes espérances. Les engagements tenus sont rares, tu le sais. Un engagement tenu est comme la baleine blanche, mon vieux. Et quand t'es devenu astronaute, c'était une espérance que tu réalisais, une grande espérance foutrement incroyable. Du coup, je me suis rendu compte qu'à partir de là, toute promesse pouvait, devait être ainsi réalisée.

—J'en suis heureux que tu la ressentis de cette manière.

—Et puis ils ont saboté ton projet de Navette. J'ai tout de suite alors pensé, et revoilà. Le leurre et la diversion. L'inévitable effondrement de ce qui semblait bien concret.

L'effondrement de l'ultime putain d'espérance sur terre. Mais t'as été un dieu pendant un temps. Tu voulais devenir astronaute, tu l'as été. Ainsi coup après coup, sauf qu'une année, à propos de laquelle je vais t'interroger plus tard, je sais que certaines choses s'y sont passées.

—Seigneur Jésus. Tu sais, je continue à penser que je vais me réveiller bientôt. Je me dis que c'est un cauchemar, et je le sais. Mais c'est un cauchemar au cours duquel il n'est pas facile de se réveiller.

—Kev, tu parles tout seul maintenant?

—Go fuck yourself.

—Kev, I'm really serious about the swearing. Stop it. I don't like it from you. I really don't, and I won't accept it. I will actually do what I can to stop you from cursing more.

—Fuck you.

—Kev. Last warning. I honestly mean it. You must know by now I'm a man of some resolve. When I determine to do something, I do it, just like you. I brought you here, and I have a taser here, and I'm sure I can find some other tools around that will be unpleasant. And the fact that I've never done anything violent in my life will not be good for you. It'll make me messy, and I'll make mistakes that a more experienced person would not.

—You say you'll release me tonight?

—I'll let you go as soon as I can. As soon as I'm satisfied.

—Okay. Let's do it then.

—Really?

—Yup. Let's start.

—Good. You know I'm a moral man.

—Of course you are.

—I am. I'm a man of principle, just like you.

—Right.

—Good. You know, now, finally, *finally*, I'm seeing the exact guy who got through MIT and the Navy and all these academies and became an astronaut. This is how you did it. You set a goal and you accomplished it. And this is just like that. I gave you the parameters and now you'll work within them, execute the plan, and move on to the next step. I love that about you. You're *still* my hero.

—I'm glad. Let's do it then.

—Vas te faire foutre.

—Kev, à propos des jurons, je ne plaisante vraiment pas. Arrête. Venant de toi, non. Je ne l'accepterai pas. Je ferai n'importe quoi pour t'empêcher d'en dire davantage.

—Va te faire enculer.

—Dernier avertissement, Kev. Je tiens à ce que je dis. Tu dois bien te rendre compte que je suis ferme là-dessus. Quand je décide de faire quelque chose, je le fais, tout comme toi. Je t'ai emmené ici, et j'ai mon taseur, là. Je peux tout à fait trouver d'autres moyens, là, et encore plus désagréables. De plus, vu que je n'ai jamais été violent dans ma vie, cela pourrait être fâcheux pour toi. Je pourrais devenir très méchant, je pourrais commettre des erreurs qu'une personne plus expérimentée ne commettrait pas.

—T'as dis que tu me relâcherais ce soir ?

—Je te laisserais partir dès que possible. Dès que j'aurais eu ce que je voulais.

—Ok. Allons-y.

—Vraiment ?

—Ouais. On y va.

—Bien. Tu sais que je suis un homme de bonne moralité.

—Tout à fait.

—Je le suis. Je suis un homme de principe, tout comme toi.

—D'accord.

—Bien. Tu sais que, maintenant, enfin, oui *enfin*, je perçois le vrai type qui est passé par le MIT et la Marine et toutes ces académies avant de devenir astronaute. Tu l'as fait. Tu t'es fixé un but et tu l'as atteint. Et c'est comme ça. Je t'ai fourni les paramètres, tu vas y travailler, exécuter le plan et passer à la prochaine étape. J'adore cela en toi. T'es *toujours* mon héros.

—J'en suis ravi. Allons-y.

—But don't be overanxious. This has to unfold naturally. I don't want it to be perfunctory.

—Right.

—Your answers have to be truthful. The questions might even hurt. If I think you're doing some political non-answer kind of bullshit, you will stay here till I get some straight, maybe even painful answers, okay?

—I understand.

—Okay, good. So we're going to go through things for a few minutes. I've read about your path but I need to hear it from you. You ready?

—Yes.

—You were on the baseball team all four years in college, and you still got a 4.0. Is that correct?

—Yes.

—How the hell did you do that?

—I didn't go out. I went to college to study and get to the next step.

—When did you know what the next step was?

—Before I started college.

—So before you started college, you knew what you would do after?

—Of course.

—What do you mean, of course? No one thinks that way.

—A lot of people do. I had to. The second I got to college, twenty thousand others who wanted to be astronauts were already ahead of me.

—How?

—T’empresse pas trop, cependant. Tout ceci doit se révéler de manière naturelle. Rien ne doit être superficiel.

—D’accord.

—Tu dois être sincère dans tes réponses. Mes questions pourraient bien te heurter. Si j’estime que tu es en train de t’esquiver tel un politicien proférant des foutaises, tu restes là jusqu’à ce que j’obtienne des réponses franches, et peu importe qu’elles soient pénibles à entendre, d’accord ?

—Je comprends.

—Très bien. Nous allons donc pénétrer dans le fonds des choses pendant quelques minutes. J’ai lu ton parcours mais je dois tout entendre de toi. T’es prêt ?

—Oui.

—Tu étais dans l’équipe de base-ball durant les quatre années de fac et tu faisais du 4.0. Exact ?

—Oui.

—Comment faisais-tu bordel ?

—Je ne perdais pas trop de temps. J’allais à la fac pour étudier et atteindre le palier suivant.

—Quand savais-tu que t’avais atteint le palier suivant ?

—Avant même de commencer.

—Donc avant de commencer la fac, tu savais jusqu’où tu allais ?

—Bien sûr.

—Que veux-tu dire par bien sûr ? Personne ne pense de cette façon.

—Mais si ; beaucoup le font. Et j’étais bien obligé. La minute où j’étais à la fac, vingt mille autres aspirant-astronautes étaient déjà en avance sur moi.

—Comment ça ?

—Maybe they went to a better college. Maybe they were part of a demographic NASA didn't have well represented. Maybe they didn't have asthma when they were kids. Maybe they had better connections.

—Did you really have asthma?

—Until I was twelve.

—Then what?

—Then I didn't.

—I didn't know that was possible.

—It is.

—You had totally diagnosed asthma with an inhaler and everything?

—Yes.

—And then no more inhaler, no asthma?

—None.

—See, you are a *god!* I love that.

—It happens sometimes. Many young people see their symptoms disappear with dietary changes or a change of climate.

—And now you're talking like an astronaut again. Thank you. "Young people, dietary changes." That's what an astronaut would say. He wouldn't say "kids," and he would do what you did, which was turn your own story into something about the Youth of America. I love that. You are good. Did they give you special PR training at NASA?

—I haven't gotten that far.

—Okay wait. Hold that thought. We'll get there. But first I want to back up. We're gonna talk about the steps. You knew you were in undergrad to get your engineering degree. Was it in—
What kind of engineering was it in?

—Peut-être qu'ils venaient d'une meilleure école. Peut-être qu'ils faisaient partie d'une démographie mal représentée à la NASA. Peut-être qu'ils n'avaient pas contracté d'asthme étant petits. Ou peut-être qu'ils avaient des relations.

—T'avais contracté l'asthme, toi ?

—Jusqu'à l'âge de douze ans.

—Et après ?

—Après, plus rien.

—Je ne savais pas que cela était possible.

—Si.

—Tu avais été parfaitement diagnostiqué, avec inhalateur et tout ?

—Oui.

—Et puis plus d'inhalateur, plus d'asthme ?

—Rien.

—Tu vois, tu es un *dieu* ! J'*adore*.

—Cela arrive des fois. Beaucoup de jeunes voient leurs symptômes disparaître en adoptant des régimes alimentaires ou par un changement de climat.

—Et voilà que tu parles à nouveau comme un astronaute. Merci. « Les jeunes, les régimes alimentaires ». Voilà ce qu'un astronaute dirait. Il ne dirait pas « les gamins », et il ferait comme tu viens de faire, c'est-à-dire transformer ta propre histoire en quelque chose ayant rapport avec la Jeunesse de l'Amérique. J'*adore*. T'es pas mal. Ils t'ont formé en RP à la NASA ?

—Je ne suis pas allé jusque là.

—Bon, attends. Arrêtons-nous là. Nous y reviendrons. D'abord je voudrais qu'on revienne un petit peu en arrière. Parlons des étapes. Tu savais que tu étais en première année de diplôme d'ingénieur. C'était— en quoi déjà ?

—Aerospace engineering.

—And you're somehow a catcher on the baseball team. How the hell did it happen?

—I played in high school, and walked on the team.

—So you weren't on a scholarship?

—I was on a partial academic scholarship.

—No!

—Yes.

—See, I'm so glad we did this. I'm so glad I brought you here, because already my faith in humanity has been partially restored. Here you were on the baseball team, and all this time I figured you were in college on a baseball scholarship, and that's why you played four years while your real priority was grades and getting to the next step. But now I find out that the catcher for the fucking baseball team was on an academic scholarship! That is perfect. That is astounding.

—Well, I wasn't good enough to get a full ride with baseball.

—But you *played*! I watched you play. You started our senior year, when the other guy, what's his name . . .

—Julian Gonzalez.

—Right, when he transferred, you played every game. And you still kept a 4.0. I mean, did the rest of the team think you were some kind of freak?

—They did.

—Why, because you didn't go out at night, screw girls and all that?

—Basically.

—But then you *did* screw a girl!

—Génie aérospatiale.

—Et tu es attrapeur dans l'équipe de base-ball en quelque sorte. Comment est-ce que c'est arrivé, bordel ?

—Je jouais au lycée, et j'ai joué les utilités dans l'équipe.

—Tu n'étais donc pas boursier ?

—J'étais boursier académique partiel.

—C'est pas vrai !

—Et oui.

—Tu vois, je suis tellement heureux qu'on soit là. Je suis tellement heureux de t'avoir emmené ici, car déjà ma foi en l'humanité a été en partie établie. Tu étais donc dans l'équipe de base-ball, et moi qui pensais que tu étais boursier en base-ball. C'est la raison pour laquelle tu as joué pendant quatre ans alors que ta vraie priorité était les diplômes, passer à l'étape suivante. Et là je découvre que l'attrapeur de cette putain d'équipe de base-ball était boursier académique. C'est parfait. C'est ahurissant.

—Et bien, je n'étais pas assez bon pour m'impliquer davantage en base-ball.

—Mais tu *jouais* ! Je te regardais jouer. Tu commençais la terminale quand l'autre gars, comment s'appelle-t-il. . .

—Julian Gonzalez.

—Exacte, quand il s'est réorienté, tu as joué à tous les postes. Et tu faisais toujours du 4.0. C'est-à-dire, est-ce que le reste de l'équipe te considérait comme une sorte de phénomène ?

—Oui.

—Pourquoi donc ? Parce que tu ne sortais pas le soir, tu ne baisais pas . . . et tout ça ?

—En somme.

—Mais t'as *quand même* baisé une fille !

—What?

—Oh shit. Sorry. I didn't mean to jump into this. But I know about Jennifer and the, you know.

—What?

—We'll get to that later.

—Fuck you.

—I told you it might get uncomfortable.

—I'm done with this.

—Okay listen. I'm sorry. We were really cooking there. Please, I won't bring up Jennifer. I already know about all that anyway. I asked around and I think I got the story.

—You got what story, asshole?

—Don't fuck with me, Kev! You did two things wrong just now. You threatened me and you swore again.

—I didn't threaten you, but I will. I will fucking tear your head off.

—See, this is such a disappointment. Is that what held you back—your temper? Don't pull on that chain.

—I get mad when people chain me up and ask me about my girlfriend from a hundred years ago.

—I bet you get mad a lot. Especially now. Yeah, you have a lot to be mad about. And I do, too. That's fine. That's understandable. See, that's another way we're similar. We both execute our plans, and we both have heavy gears turning in our heads that threaten to crush our skulls.

—Oh god, you're so nuts! Holy shit.

—Pardon ?

—Ah merde. Désolé. Je ne voulais pas trop m'en mêler. Mais je suis au courant pour Jennifer et, ce que tu sais.

—Quoi ?

—Nous en reparlerons plus tard.

—Salaud.

—Ca pourrait blesser, je te l'ai dit.

—J'n'en ai rien à foutre.

—Bon, écoute. Je suis désolé. Ca s'est bien passé jusqu'à maintenant. S'il te plaît, je ne parlerai plus de Jennifer. Je connais déjà tout de toute façon. Je m'en suis informé et je pense connaître toute l'histoire.

—Quelle histoire, espèce d'enculé ?

—Ne fais pas chier, Kev ! Tu viens de commettre deux erreurs. Tu m'as menacé et t'as encore juré.

—Je ne t'ai pas menacé, mais je vais le faire. Je vais t'exploser ton putain de crâne.

—Tu vois, t'es tellement décevant. Et qu'est-ce qui te retiens...ton tempérament ? Ne tire pas sur la chaîne.

—Je m'emporte quand on m'enchaîne et qu'on me parle de ma copine d'antan.

—Je parie que tu t'emportes bien souvent. Là, en particulier. T'as de quoi être furieux en ce moment. Moi aussi, figure toi. Mais ça va. On peut comprendre. Tu vois, c'est une autre façon de voir que nous sommes pareils. Nous exécutons tous les deux nos projets et nous avons tous les deux les méninges prêts à péter dans nos crânes.

—Seigneur, t'es tellement cinglé ! Bordel.

—If you say that again, I'm tasing you, Kev. Not because I want to, but because you calling me nuts, blah blah, it's boring. You've called me nuts twenty times and it hasn't improved your situation. And I'm getting tired of your distractions. I just want to get through this without hurting you, okay?

—

—Okay, now back to the narrative. After college there was that lost year, and then you went to MIT. Was that the same thing, where you knew what you were there to do?

—I was getting a master's in aerospace engineering. Of course I knew what I was there to do. I wasn't getting some degree in basket making.

—Okay, fine. So MIT was what, two years?

—Three.

—Wow, you're already in school for seven years. You know what I was doing after undergrad?

—No.

—My uncle made me work in his factory. Can you imagine that? I had a college degree and he made me work on the floor, next to a bunch of Eastern European women. How fucked up is that?

—I don't know, Don.

—Thomas.

—Sorry. Thomas.

—Wait. You remember my friend Don?

—No.

—Répète et je te tase, Kev. Et non pas parce que je le veux, mais parce qu'à force de t'entendre m'insulter, j'en ai pris l'habitude et ça devient lassant. Qualifier un kidnappeur de cinglé, et bla, bla, bla, c'est lassant. Tu l'as fait une vingtaine de fois et cela n'a rien changé pour toi. Et je commence à en avoir marre de tes crises de folie. Je veux simplement tout mettre au clair sans te faire de mal, d'accord ?

—

—Ok, revenons à notre histoire. Après la fac, il y a eu cette année sabbatique, ensuite tu as rejoins le MIT. C'était pareil, c'est-à-dire que tu savais pourquoi t'étais là ?

—Je préparais mon master en génie aérospatiale. Bien sûr que je savais pourquoi j'étais là. C'était pas pour me spécialiser en vannerie.

—Ok, parfait. Donc le MIT c'était quoi, deux ans ?

—Trois.

—Punaise, sept ans déjà à la fac ! Tu sais ce que je faisais moi après ma première année.

—Non.

—Mon oncle me faisait travailler dans sa fabrique. Tu penses un peu ? J'étais diplômé d'université et lui me faisait travailler à même le sol, à côté d'une bande de femmes issues d'Europe de l'est. Dans quelle merde m'a-t-il foutu ?

—Je n'en sais rien, Don.

—Thomas.

—Pardon. Thomas.

—Attends. Tu te souviens de mon ami Don ?

—Non.

—I think you might. That is so weird that you said Don. Don was your biggest fan. You remember him? He was usually with me. He went to the same school as you and me.

—I don't remember him.

—For a couple of years at least. He was Vietnamese American? Really good-looking guy?

—I don't know, Thomas. It's been a long time.

—But he was always with me. There's a reason you just mentioned his name. That can't be a coincidence.

—I think it was a coincidence. I'm sorry.

—Jesus, that is weird. Don's been on my mind all the time lately. You know he died?

—No, I didn't. I didn't know Don. But I'm sorry he died.

—It was a while ago now. God, two years or so. This is so eerie, because I swear Don really admired you. I mean, he had more of a NASA jones than even I did. He asked about you a lot in school, after I found out you were trying to get on the Shuttle. He asked about you after school, too. It was more him, actually, who kept reminding me about you. It was one of the things we always talked about. He knew when you joined the Navy. I'd call or he'd call and we'd talk and pretty soon one of us would say, Hey, how's Kev Paciorek doing? You know, just a check-in. I think he would have loved to be an astronaut, himself. But who ever heard of a Vietnamese-American astronaut, right?

—There are Asian-American astronauts.

—Je pense que oui. C'est tellement bizarre d'avoir prononcé le nom de Don. Don était ton plus grand admirateur. Tu te souviens de lui ? Il était avec moi la plupart du temps. Il a fréquenté la même école que nous.

—Je ne me souviens pas de lui.

—Pendant au moins deux ans. Il était vietnamo-américain ? Un gars vraiment charmant ?

—Je ne sais pas, Thomas. Ca fait longtemps.

—Il m'accompagnait toujours. Il y a bien une raison que tu aies prononcé son nom. Ca ne peut pas être une coïncidence.

—Je crois que c'est une coïncidence. Suis désolé.

—Seigneur Jésus, c'est étrange. Il n'y a pas longtemps Don occupait mon esprit continuellement. Tu sais qu'il est mort ?

—Non. Je ne connaissais pas Don. Et je suis désolé qu'il soit décédé.

—Ca fait déjà un bout de temps maintenant. Seigneur, deux ans et quelques. Qu'est-ce ça a l'air sinistre ! Car je te jure que Don t'admirait beaucoup. Il faisait plus gars de la NASA que moi. Il parlait beaucoup de toi à l'école, après que j'eusse appris que tu voulais aller sur la Navette. Il prenait aussi de tes nouvelles après l'école. C'était plutôt lui, en fait, qui te ramenait à mon esprit. T'étais souvent parmi nos sujets de conversation. Il savait quand t'avais rejoint la Marine. On s'appelait, on parlait et c'était sûr qu'au moins un de nous dirait, « Eh, comment va ce Kev Paciorek ? », juste pour parler de toi, quoi. Je pense qu'il aurait adoré être astronaute lui-même. Mais qui a déjà entendu parler d'un astronaute américain d'origine vietnamienne ?

—Il y a des astronautes américains d'origine asiatique.

—But back then, none, right? No one who looked like Don. And he didn't have the most stable home life. I think you have to be from some kind of solid family unit, right?

—My parents were divorced.

—Oh yeah. I knew that.

—Listen, I'm sorry I mentioned his name. It was an accident. I'm really sorry he died so young.

—That's okay. Yeah. I mean, that's fine. But I'm convinced there's a reason. You don't remember his face? He had these dark eyes, this big white smile? God, this is weird. I'm . . . I'm just going outside for a second.

•

—Sorry about that. Crap is it cold out there. It's the wind off the ocean that gets you. And the lack of humidity. There's nothing to the air here, nothing held in it, no heat or water or weight. It's just this set of steel blades that churns over the ocean and up the bluffs and across these hills. It was different where you grew up, right Kev? I mean, there was humidity there. You didn't have to rush to get your winter coat the second the sun dropped.

—So I take it you live around here?

—I can't really talk about where I live, can I, Kev? We should really get back to your story. Sorry I had to take a walk. I just needed some time to figure some things out, and I think I did. So you were saying that after MIT, what?

—I joined the Navy.

—As what?

—As an ensign.

—Mais à l'époque, non, d'accord ? Personne ne pouvait ressembler à Don. De plus, il n'avait pas de vie de famille très stable. Je pense qu'il faut être issu d'une cellule familiale solide, ok ?

—Mes parents étaient divorcés.

—Ah oui, je le savais.

—Ecoute, je regrette d'avoir prononcé son nom. Je n'ai pas fait exprès. Je suis vraiment navré qu'il soit décédé si jeune.

—C'est bon, ok. Ca va, je veux dire. Mais je suis persuadé qu'il y a bien une raison. Tu te souviens de son visage ? Il avait ces yeux noirs, ce large sourire éclatant ? Jésus, c'est étrange. Il . . . il faut que j'aïlle dehors un instant.

•

—Désolé vraiment. Ce qu'il fait froid dehors, merde ! C'est le vent de l'océan qui t'envahit ainsi. Et aussi l'absence d'humidité. L'air ici ne contient rien, aucune température, pas d'eau, aucune consistance. Rien que ces lames d'acier qui battent l'océan, et le souffle qui remonte à travers les monts et falaises. Là où tu as grandi, c'était différent n'est-ce pas Kev ? Il y avait de l'humidité, je veux dire. T'avais pas besoin de te précipiter sur ton imper dès que le soleil disparaissait à l'horizon.

—A t'entendre, je comprends que tu vis dans le coin.

—On ne peut pas vraiment parler de là où je vis, n'est-ce pas, Kev ? Nous devrions, en fait, reprendre notre histoire. Désolé, j'ai du aller faire un tour dehors, histoire de réfléchir un peu plus. Cela m'a été bénéfique, je pense. Tu disais donc qu'après le MIT, quoi ?

—J'ai intégré la Marine.

—Comme quoi ?

—Comme porte-étendard.

—Where was this?

—Pensacola.

—Were you flying planes or what?

—Yes, I was reporting to the Naval Air Training Command.

—But you flew, right?

—A few years later I went to Test Pilot School at Patuxent River.

—That's in Maryland. Right. I knew that. So you were testing planes then? Flying?

—I was flying F-18s and KC-130s.

—Those are what, fighter jets?

—Yes, the F-18 is a twin-engine tactical aircraft. A KC-130 is a tanker that provides in-flight refueling.

—You sound like yourself again. All that jargon spewed out so fluidly and confidently. You never had doubts about yourself, or any of these numbers or theories or equations. That was how you were as a TA, too. You remember the professor in that class?

—Schmidt.

—Right. Remember he used to jog to class? He'd be wearing a sweatsuit to class, and he'd stand up there, meandering all over the place. I think he'd had a lot of trouble in his life, right?

—I don't know.

—So that's a yes. And he went through the material pretty well, but he seemed to question the point of it all. I don't think he liked academia. He wasn't doing significant research, was he?

—The man is dead. I don't know the point of questioning his state of mind during that class.

—C'était où ?

—A Pensacola.

—Tu pilotais les avions ou quoi ?

—Oui, je faisais des comptes rendus pour le commandement de formation des troupes aéronavales.

—Mais t'étais aussi pilote ?

—Quelques années après j'ai rejoint l'école des pilotes d'essai à Patuxent River.

—C'est au Maryland ça. Je connais. Tu testais les avions donc ? Et tu pilotais aussi ?

—Je pilotais les F-18 et les KC-130.

—C'est quoi tout ça, des avions de combats ?

—Oui, le F-18 est un avion bimoteur stratégique. Le KC-130 est un avion ravitailleur qui fournit du carburant en vol.

—Là tu redeviens toi-même. Tout ce jargon vomit comme ça avec tant d'assurance. Tu n'as jamais douté de toi-même, ou de ces chiffres, de ces théories ou de ces équations. T'étais aussi comme ça quand t'étais assistant pédagogique. Tu te souviens du professeur de la classe ?

—Schmidt.

—C'est ça. Il faisait son jogging pour venir en classe, tu te rappelles ? Il faisait cours en survêt. Il était là et il errait sur place. Je pense qu'il avait un tas de problèmes, non ?

—Ch'ais pas.

—C'est donc un oui. Mais il se débrouillait pas mal tout en semblant tout remettre en question. Je pense qu'il n'appréciait pas le monde universitaire. Il n'était impliqué dans aucune recherche significative, n'est-ce pas ?

—Il est mort le bonhomme et je ne vois pas l'importance de s'interroger sur son état d'esprit de l'époque.

—I think he was really sad. He talked about losing his wife, as if she'd been taken away from him by some shadowy army that should be held accountable. But it was cancer, right?

—I believe so.

—But she must have been sixty, like him, right? You hit sixty and all bets are off. Wait, weren't you stationed in Pakistan for a while?

—After Monterey. I went to the Defense Language Institute for a while.

—For what? Arabic?

—Urdu.

—So you speak Urdu.

—I do. Not as well as I used to.

—See, this bends my mind. Catcher on the baseball team, 4.0. MIT for engineering. Then you speak Urdu and become an astronaut with NASA. And now it's defunded.

—It's not defunded. The funding is going elsewhere.

—Into little robots. WALL-Es that putter around Mars.

—There's real value to that.

—Kev, c'mon. You know you're pissed.

—I'm not pissed. I knew what I was getting into.

—Did you? You really thought that in 1998, when you said you wanted to go up the Shuttle, that the whole program would be killed twelve years later? That they'd be parading the shuttles around the country like some kind of dead animal?

—People liked that.

—Je pense qu’il était vraiment malheureux. Il parlait du fait d’avoir perdu sa femme, comme si des mystérieux militaires l’auraient enlevée à lui et qu’il tenait pour responsables. Mais c’était le cancer au fait, non ?

—Je crois que oui.

—Mais elle devait avoir soixante ans comme lui, non ? Quand t’arrives à soixante ans, tous tes espoirs s’envolent. Attends, t’étais pas en garnison au Pakistan un moment ?

—Après Monterey. J’étais à l’institut de langues à la défense un moment.

—Pour quoi faire ? Apprendre l’arabe ?

—Apprendre l’ourdou.

—Donc tu parles ourdou.

—Oui. Mais pas aussi bien qu’avant.

—Vois-tu, cela me tord l’esprit ! T’as été attrapeur en équipe de base-ball, 4.0. T’as été au MIT pour devenir ingénieur. Tu parles ourdou, t’es devenu astronaute avec la NASA. Et à présent plus rien est financé.

—C’est pas que rien n’est plus financé. C’est que les fonds sont consacrés ailleurs.

—Dans des petits robots. Des WALL-E qui broutent autour de Mars.

—Cela a toute son importance.

—Kev, voyons. Tu sais qu’on t’a envoyé chier.

—On ne m’a pas envoyé chier. Je savais bien où je mettais les pieds.

—Ah oui ? T’es en train de me dire qu’en disant, en 1998, que t’allais partir sur la Navette, tu savais très bien que tout le programme allait être foiré douze ans après ? Que les Navettes allaient être paradées dans tout le pays comme des sortes de dinosaures ?

—Les gens aimaient bien ça.

—It was sick. Instead of the Shuttle actually flying anywhere, they flew it around on top of a 747. It was a joke. Just to send home the point that the whole thing's defunct, that our greatest engineering triumph needs to go piggyback on some other plane. It was pathetic.

—It was just a show, Thomas. Nothing to get upset about.

—Well, I'm upset. Why aren't we on the moon now?

—As we speak?

—What happened to a colony on the moon? You know it's possible. I heard you talk about it in some interview.

—Well, it is possible. But it costs a lot of money, and we don't have that money.

—Of course we do.

—Who says?

—We have the money.

—How do we have the money?

—We just spent five trillion dollars on useless wars. That could have gone to the moon. Or Mars. Or the Shuttle. Or something that would inspire us in some goddamned way. How long has it been since we did any one fucking thing that inspired anyone?

—We elected a black president.

—Fine. That was good. But as a nation, as a fucking world? When did we do anything remotely like the Shuttle, or Apollo?

—The Space Station.

—Mais c'est dingue. Notre Navette se baladant sur le dos d'un 747 au lieu d'effectuer de vraies missions. C'était une blague au fait. Nous faire croire après que tout le machin est à présent révolu, que notre grand triomphe d'ingénierie électrotechnique doit maintenant se promener à dos d'avion. Qu'est-ce que c'est pitoyable !

—C'était rien que du spectacle, Thomas. Pas de quoi être bouleversé pour autant.

—Eh bien, pour être bouleversé, je suis bouleversé. Pourquoi ne sommes-nous pas sur la lune aujourd'hui ?

—Au moment où nous parlons ?

—Notre colonisation de la lune, qu'est-elle devenue ? Tu sais bien que c'est possible. Je te l'ai entendue dire dans une interview.

—Oui, c'est possible. Mais ça coûte beaucoup d'argent, et nous n'avons pas cet argent.

—Si, nous l'avons.

—Comment ça ?

—Nous avons l'argent.

—Comment ça, nous avons l'argent ?

—Nous avons dépensé cinq milliards en guerres inutiles. Cela aurait pu être investi en projets lunaires. Ou envers Mars, ou la Navette ou quelque chose qui nous aurait apporté de l'inspiration d'une quelconque putain de manière. Ça fait combien de temps déjà que nous n'avons réalisé que' que chose ayant vraiment produit une quelconque inspiration, putain ?

—Nous avons élu un président noir.

—Très bien. C'était bien. Mais comme nation, comme univers de merde ? Qu'avons-nous fait récemment de similaire à la Navette, ou à Apollo ?

—La Station Spatiale.

—The International Space Station? Are you kidding? I never liked that thing. Floating up there helpless like some space kite.

—Then you don't know what you're talking about. A lot of very useful data has come out of the ISS.

—I know you have to toe the party line there. That's fine. We both know it's bullshit. The ISS sucks and you know it. It's a box kite in space. So that's where you're headed now? I heard about that. Is that where you're going?

—That's my best bet now.

—But you have to get on a Russian rocket to get there.

—Seems that way.

—Now we have to buy seats on Russian rockets! How fucked up is that? Can you imagine? What kind of inverted fucked up world, right? We start the space race because the Russians strike first with Sputnik. The competition drives the entire process for a decade. We get to the moon first, then we go back again and again, and we keep innovating, reaching, and it's beautiful, right? It coincides directly with the best years of the last fifty.

—I don't know about that.

—Well, whatever. It worked. And now we kill it all, and we pay the Russians for a backseat on their rockets. You couldn't a sicker ending to the whole story. How do the Russians have money for rockets and we don't?

—They've prioritized differently.

—They've prioritized correctly.

—What do you want me to say?

—La Station Spatiale Internationale ? Tu plaisantes ? Je n'ai jamais apprécié cela. Se mettre à flotter dans l'air, impuissants comme des espèces de cerfs-volants de l'espace.

—Tu ne sais donc pas de quoi tu parles. Nous avons reçu beaucoup de données utiles émanant de l'ISS.

—Je sais bien que tu dois faire tout ce qu'on te dit de faire. C'est très bien. Nous savons tous les deux que c'est des foutaises. L'ISS est à chier et tu le sais. C'est un cerf-volant cellulaire dans l'espace. Donc voilà où t'en es. Je l'ai entendu dire. C'est ça ton but ?

—C'est mon meilleur pari.

—Mais tu dois t'installer dans une fusée russe pour y aller.

—C'est comme ça.

—Et voilà. On doit maintenant s'acheter des places dans des fusées russes ! C'est complètement barjo. T'imagines ? Quel foutu monde complètement à l'envers, dis-donc ! Nous avons commencé la course à l'espace parce que les russes y ont été avant nous avec leur Spoutnik. La compétition a duré une décennie. Nous sommes les premiers à toucher la lune. Nous nous y rendons plusieurs fois, nous innovons, nous visons plus haut. Extraordinaire, n'est-ce pas ? Cela correspond bien avec nos plus belles années durant ces cinq dernières décennies.

—Je n'en suis pas sûr.

—Peu importe. Tout a bien marché. Et maintenant nous foutons tout en l'air et nous payons aux russes des places arrière pour voyager dans leurs fusées. Il n'y a pas plus mauvais feuilleton que le nôtre. Comment font les russes pour avoir les fonds pour leurs fusées et pas nous ?

—Ils identifient différemment leurs priorités.

—Ils identifient correctement leurs priorités.

—Que veux-tu me faire dire ?

—I want you to be pissed.

—I can't do anything about it. And I'm not about to trash NASA for you, chained up like this.

—I don't expect you to trash NASA. But look at us, on this vast land worth a billion dollars.

You can't see it, but the views here are incredible. This is thirty thousand acres on the Pacific coast. You sell some of this land and we could pay for a lunar colony.

—You couldn't buy an outhouse on the moon.

—But you could get a start.

—Not likely.

—You know what? Hold on a second. What time is it?

—

—I guess it's hard for you to check. I think I have time. I have an idea. Hold on a sec.

Actually, you'll have to hold on a while. Maybe seven hours or so. I think I can do this. And here's some food. It's all I brought. And some milk. You like milk.

—Where are you going?

—I know you like milk. You drank it in class. You remember? Jesus, you were so pure, like some fucking unicorn.

—Where are you going?

—I have an idea. You gave me an idea.

—Je veux que tu dises qu'on t'a envoyé chier.

—Je n'y peux rien. Je ne vais pas flinguer la NASA pour te faire plaisir, enchaîné comme je suis.

—Je ne te demande pas de flinguer la NASA. Mais tu te rends compte ? Nous sommes sur un terrain qui vaut des milliards. Les vues ici, que tu ne peux voir certes, sont incroyables. Trente mille hectares longeant le Pacifique. T'en vends une partie et on se paye une colonisation sur la lune.

—Tu ne vas pas t'acheter une dépendance sur la lune ?

—Ca n'aurait été qu'un début.

—Pas du tout vraisemblable.

—Tu sais quoi? Attends une seconde. Quelle heure est-il ?

—

—Ah, c'est vrai, tu ne peux pas voir l'heure. Je pense que j'ai le temps. J'ai une idée. Attends une seconde. En fait, tu vas devoir attendre un moment. Peut-être sept heures ou plus. Je crois que je vais le faire. Voici de la nourriture. C'est tout ce que j'ai pu apporter. Et un peu de lait.

Tu aimes le lait ?

—Où vas-tu ?

—Je sais que tu aimes le lait. Tu en buvais à l'école. Tu te souviens ? Bon Dieu, t'étais tellement innocent, comme une sacrée licorne.

—Où vas-tu ?

—J'ai une idée. Tu m'as donné une idée.

BUILDING 53

—First of all, sir, I want to apologize. I didn't want to bring you here, but I really couldn't think of any way around it.

—Who are you?

—We've met once, but I don't know if you'd remember. But it doesn't matter so much who I am. I just want to apologize for bringing you here. I didn't have any intention of doing this, but then circumstances conspired to make it necessary. I have this astronaut next door, and he was talking about what happened to him and the Shuttle, and we were talking about the moon, and colonies there, and about government priorities, and then I had this idea that someone like you would have some of the answers that we needed. And I knew you'd retired out this way, so I had to go and get you and bring you here.

—Holy Christ on a cracker.

—Again, I'm really sorry.

—You planning to harm me?

—I'm glad you asked that, sir. The good news is I'm not planning to harm you. The shackles are just a formality. It's not like I think you're dangerous or anything, given your disability. But I had to shackle the astronaut, because he could kill me if he wanted to, and then it seemed like the safest bet to shackle you, too, and the posts are here in every building, and I had a boxful of handcuffs, so it was all pretty convenient.

—I don't understand any of this.

—Well, the chloroform will keep your head a little cloudy for a while. But I just want to say I'm very honored to have you here. I respect your service to the country, both as a soldier and as a congressman. That's why I gave you the couch. There are couches all

BATIMENT 53

—Tout d’abord, monsieur, je voudrais vous présenter mes excuses. Je ne voulais pas vous emmener ici, mais je n’avais pas vraiment d’autres solutions.

—Qui êtes-vous ?

—Nous nous sommes rencontrés une fois, mais je ne sais pas si vous allez vous en souvenir. Mais qui je suis n’a pas tellement d’importance. Je veux seulement m’excuser de vous avoir emmené ici. Je n’en avais pas l’intention, mais les circonstances ont contribué à le rendre nécessaire. Il y a l’astronaute à côté. Il parlait de ce qui était arrivé à lui et à la Navette, et nous parlions de la lune et des colonies là-bas, et des priorités du gouvernement. Puis, j’ai eu l’idée que quelqu’un comme vous pourrait avoir quelques-unes des réponses que nous recherchons. Comme je savais que vous étiez à la retraite, il fallait que j’aie vous chercher et vous emmener ici.

—Sacré nom d’une pipe en bois.

—Encore une fois, j’en suis vraiment désolé.

—Vous avez l’intention de me faire du mal ?

—Je suis heureux que vous posiez la question, monsieur. La bonne nouvelle, c’est que je n’ai pas l’intention de vous faire de mal. Les chaînes, c’est juste une formalité. C’est pas que je vous considère comme quelqu’un de dangereux ou autre, vu votre handicap. Mais je devais enchaîner l’astronaute, car il pouvait bien me tuer s’il le voulait, et vous enchaîner aussi me semblait être la meilleure des garanties. Les pylônes existent dans chacun des bâtiments et une caisse pleine de menottes, tout ça convenait parfaitement.

—Je n’y comprends rien.

—Eh bien, le chloroforme va vous maintenir quelque peu dans le flou un moment. Mais laissez-moi vous dire que je suis très honoré de vous avoir ici. Je respecte votre dévouement pour le pays en tant que soldat et en tant que député. C’est la raison pour

over the place out here, just dumped in the street like the place got looted. Is it comfortable enough?

—How the hell did you get me here?

—Sir, I don't mean any disrespect to you, but a man your age, and with your, you know, missing limbs, you were a lot easier than the astronaut.

—Wait, what, son? You have an astronaut out here?

—Yes sir. I mentioned that before. He's fine. I haven't harmed the astronaut and I won't harm you.

—Kid, you look like a pretty clean-cut guy. Do you have any idea how serious this is?

—I do, sir. I really do. I don't take it lightly. But like I said, I didn't think I had much choice but to bring the astronaut here, and when I was talking to him, all these questions came up and so many of them had answers only someone like you could provide.

—How's that, son? Questions?

—Well, as a congressman . . .

—I'm no longer in office, you realize.

—I know that, sir. But you were in office a good long while, and I'm sure that you've had expertise with some of the questions I have.

—And you brought me out here to answer them? You ever hear of a telephone or e-mail or whatnot?

—Well, sure, but that might have taken a long time. And after I took the astronaut, I figured I only have a certain window before I'm caught or found or something

laquelle je vous accorde le canapé. Il y en a partout ici, balancé à tort et à travers comme si le lieu avait été mis à sac. Il est confortable au moins ?

—Comment m'avez-vous emmené jusqu'ici, sacrebleu ?

—Monsieur, vu votre âge, et aussi votre handicap des membres, et avec tout le respect que je vous dois, il m'a été beaucoup plus facile avec vous qu'avec l'astronaute.

—Attendez, qu'avez-vous dit, fiston ? Vous avez un astronaute ici ?

—Oui monsieur. Je l'ai déjà dit. Il va bien. Je ne lui ai pas fait de mal et il en sera de même pour vous.

—Jeune homme, vous me semblez un gars correct et bien soigné. Mais vous vous rendez compte de la gravité de la situation ?

—J'en suis bien conscient, figurez-vous. Ce sont des choses que je ne prends pas à la légère. Mais, comme je l'ai déjà dit, je n'avais pas beaucoup le choix, je pense, quant à celui d'emmener l'astronaute ici. Durant ma conversation avec lui, des questions ont surgi et beaucoup d'entre elles ne pouvaient être répondues que par quelqu'un comme vous.

—Comment ça, fiston ? Des questions ?

—Eh bien, en tant que député...

—Je ne suis plus en exercice, vous vous en rendez bien compte.

—Je le sais bien, monsieur. Mais vous l'avez été assez longtemps, et avec l'expérience qui est la vôtre, je suis certain que vous avez les réponses à mes questions.

—Et vous m'avez transporté jusqu'ici pour y répondre. N'avez-vous jamais entendu parler de téléphone, d'e-mail ou autres ?

—Ah ben, certainement, mais cela aurait pris du temps. Et après m'être saisi de l'astronaute, je me suis rendu compte que ma marge de manœuvre était devenue

else happens, so I thought I might as well get it all figured out in one fell swoop.

—And why me again ?

—Yes, sir, that's a fair question. But again, once the astronaut and I started talking, in the back of my mind I thought, Well, I bet Congressman Dickinson would have something to say about this. I knew you'd retired around here, and given you're retired, I figured you wouldn't have a security detail anymore.

—So you could kidnap me.

—Well, yes. Again, I'm so sorry. I really don't like the word *kidnap*.

—You were the guy who came to the house to rewire the phones?

—Yeah, I just needed a way into the house, and, you know, it worked. I figured it might not be very difficult, given you're in a wheelchair. I was hoping no one else was home. I waited a bit until—Was that your daughter?

—My wife.

—Oh, sorry. She was very young. Okay, good. Congratulations. That's very good. That's nice. So I had to wait until she left. How long have you been together?

—Son, you are batshit crazy.

—I'm really not.

—Of course you are. But when you showed up that day, you looked like a nice clean-cut guy. We talked about the 49ers.

—They're really having a good year, aren't they? And I really am a clean-cut guy. I'm just stuck in a tight spot right now. These headaches are messing with my life, and the

restreinte avant que je ne me fasse prendre ou arrêter, ou qu'il ne m'arrive quelque chose d'autre. J'ai donc pensé tout mettre au point d'un seul coup.

—Et pourquoi moi, donc ?

—Ah oui. C'est une bonne question, monsieur. Je redis que pendant que nous parlions, moi et l'astronaute, je me suis dit au fin fond de mon esprit—Tiens, je parie que le député Dickinson aurait des choses à dire à ce sujet. Je savais que vous alliez prendre votre retraite et étant donné que vous êtes maintenant retraité, je me suis dit que vous n'aviez plus de garde du corps, du coup.

—Et que vous pouviez me kidnapper donc.

—Ben oui. Je m'excuse encore une fois. J'aime pas beaucoup le mot *kidnapper*.

—C'était vous qui étiez venu chez moi pour soi-disant refaire les câbles du téléphone ?

—Ouais. Il fallait bien trouver un moyen pour entrer et cela a parfaitement bien marché. Je m'étais dit que cela n'allait pas être très difficile, vu que vous étiez en chaise roulante. Je n'espérais voir personne d'autre chez vous. J'ai attendu un peu jusqu'à ce que— C'était votre fille ?

—Ma femme.

—Ah, pardonnez-moi. Elle est très jeune. Bien. Félicitations. Très bien. Super. J'ai dû donc attendre jusqu'à ce qu'elle fût partie. Depuis combien de temps êtes-vous ensemble, dites donc ?

—Mon garçon, mais t'es un dératé de cinglé toi !

—Pas du tout.

—Bien sûr que si. Mais quand t'étais venu ce jour-là, t'avais l'air d'être un chic type. Nous avons parlé des *49ers*.

—Ils se débrouillent bien cette année, n'est-ce pas ? Mais moi, en vérité je suis vraiment un chic type. C'est juste que je me trouve étroitement coincé en ce moment. Ces

ceiling just seems to be lowering on me every day. But just yesterday, with the astronaut, I felt like I was on the verge of something. I was breathing better. And I know you'll help me even more. So can we start?

—Start what, son?

—I just have some questions. Once I ask them, you're free. Especially if you answer them honestly. And I know you will; I've admired your candor and integrity since the beginning. And again, I'm very humbled by your service to this country. I know it must have been quite a sacrifice to lose two limbs in Vietnam.

—Son, I know that you're a confused young man, and I want to help you. I saw a lot of people like you back in the day, especially when I rotated back to the States, so I know where you're coming from. I really do. If anyone understands the mind of a young man whose skull is fastened one turn too tight, it's me. But I want to say for the record that I think you doing it this way is deplorable and bizarre, and you would be best off cutting your losses and calling this quits.

—Nah, I'd rather not.

—If you left right now, and told the authorities where we are, I would personally see to it that you were treated with some compassion. That you got some help.

—See, but *you're* the help I need. If you cooperate, I will be helped. I don't need medicine or therapy. I need my questions answered.

migraines sont en train de me pourrir la vie et plus ça va plus l'étaiu semble se resserrer autour de moi. Mais pas plus tard qu'hier, avec l'astronaute, j'ai senti comme si je touchais au but. Je respirais à nouveau tout d'un coup. Et je sais que vous allez m'aider bien davantage. Donc, est-ce qu'on peut commencer ?

—Commencer quoi, mon garçon ?

—J'ai tout juste quelques questions. Une fois que je vous les aurai posées, vous serez libre, si vous y répondez avec sincérité bien sûr. Et je sais que ce sera le cas. J'ai toujours apprécié votre franchise et votre intégrité. Et aussi, votre dévouement pour ce pays est une bonne leçon d'humilité pour moi. Je comprends que cela a dû être pour vous une dure épreuve, le fait d'avoir perdu vos deux membres au Vietnam.

—Mon garçon, je sais que vous êtes un jeune homme perturbé, et je veux vous aider. J'ai vu plein de gens comme vous particulièrement à l'époque où je faisais l'alternance aux Etats-Unis. Je sais donc, moi, d'où vous venez. S'il existe quelqu'un qui puisse comprendre l'état d'esprit d'un jeune homme dont le cerveau est envahi par une seule idée fixe, c'est bien moi. Mais pour la postérité, laissez-moi vous dire que la façon dont vous vous y prenez me paraît bizarre et déplorable et qu'il vaudrait mieux pour vous de ne plus perdre de temps et de moyens et de vous en tenir là pendant qu'il est encore temps.

—Non, je préfère pas.

—Si vous le faites maintenant et vous dites aux autorités où nous sommes, je veillerai personnellement à ce que vous soyez traité avec tous les égards et que vous receviez assistance.

—Mais c'est *vous* l'assistance dont j'ai besoin. Si vous coopérez avec moi, vous serez cette assistance. Je n'ai besoin d'aucun médicament, d'aucune thérapie. J'ai besoin qu'on réponde à mes questions.

—What kind of questions, son?

—Not all that difficult. Basic stuff. You'll know the answers.

—

—So we're ready?

—Hell.

—Great.

—For the sake of getting this over with.

—Okay. Okay. My first question—and the main one—is, Why isn't my buddy Kev Paciorek in space?

—Pardon?

—He's an astronaut. The guy next door.

—You kidnapped your buddy?

—It's all worked out now. He gets it.

—What's that?

—I've known him fifteen years. We understand each other. And back when we were in college he looked me in the eye and he said, Someday I'm going up in the Shuttle. At the time, I thought, Bullshit, no way. But then he kept getting closer to it. He cleared every hurdle. He was fucking Jesus. He walked on water, water into wine, everything. He did everything they told him to. Joined the Navy. MIT, grad degrees. He speaks Urdu for fuck's sake. And all because he wanted to go up in the Shuttle or maybe to a lunar colony. And then twelve years later he becomes an astronaut, and a few months later, they kill the Shuttle, and they defund everything NASA does, and so instead he's waiting in line to maybe get a ride on some shit-ass Russian rocket to some piece-of-shit Space Station full of pussies.

—Son, did you really kidnap me to talk about the Space Shuttle?

—Quels genres de questions, mon garçon ?

—Pas si difficiles. Des trucs simples. Vous connaissez les réponses d'ailleurs.

—

—Alors, vous êtes prêt ?

—Merde alors.

—Super.

—Juste pour en finir.

—Ok, ok. Ma première question— la plus importante — est, Pourquoi mon pote Kev Paciorek, n'est-il pas dans l'espace ?

—Pardon ?

—L'astronaute. Le gars d'à coté.

—Vous avez kidnappé votre pote ?

—Ca y est. Il commence à comprendre.

—C'est quoi tout ceci ?

—Je le connais depuis quinze ans. Nous nous comprenons tous les deux. Quand nous étions à la fac, il m'avait dit droit dans les yeux, « Un jour j'irai dans la Navette ». A l'époque, je me disais que c'était du baratin, des bobards. Mais il s'en est rapproché. Il a vaincu tous les obstacles. Il niquait tout le monde, comme Jésus, putain. Il marchait sur l'eau, a changé l'eau en vin, et tout. Il a réalisé tout ce qu'on lui a demandé. Il a été dans la Marine, au MIT, il a eu ses titres universitaires. Il parle ourdou, nom d'un chien. Tout ça, parce qu'il voulait être dans la Navette ou peut-être dans une colonie lunaire. Douze ans après il devient astronaute, et puis, en quelques mois ils remballent la Navette, tout est gelé à la NASA. Et maintenant, il attend son tour d'être mis sur une putain de fusée russe pour finir dans une quelconque station spatiale de merde pleine de mottes.

—Mon garçon, tu m'as kidnappé rien que pour parler de la Navette Spatiale ?

—Mainly, yes.

—Holy Jesus.

—Kev said he was going to be an astronaut, and he did everything he was asked to do to become one. But now it means nothing. That just seems like the worst kind of thing, to tell a generation or two that the finish line is here, that the requirements to get there are this and this and this, but then, just as we get there, you move the finish line.

—Now son, just so I understand. You're saying I'm the one who did this, that I personally moved the finish line?

—I think you were in a position to hold the line.

—You do see me sitting here, do you not? Do you see a man who is missing two key limbs? Do you think a man missing two key limbs and a thumb, all of them taken in a piece-of-shit foreign war, is part of the machinery you're talking about? You think I'm the enemy?

—Well why were you in Congress if you weren't part of the machinery?

—I was in the machinery to try to *fix* that machine, you dummy! Why the hell do you think there were a half-dozen Vietnam vets on the Democrat side of things in the Senate and House? Someone had to talk some sense down there.

—How did it happen, by the way? I know I should know, but I don't.

—How did what happen?

—What happened to your leg and arm? Sorry to be so indelicate.

—En particulier, oui.

—Nom de Dieu.

—Kev disait qu’il voulait devenir astronaute et il a fait tout ce qu’on lui a demandé de faire pour le devenir. Et maintenant, tout ça n’a plus aucun sens. C’est la pire de chose qui puisse arriver que celle de dire à toute une génération que la ligne d’arrivée est là, que les conditions requises sont ceci, cela et cela et une fois celles-ci remplies, que se passe-t-il ? Et bien, vous repoussez la ligne d’arrivée.

—Mon garçon, juste pour comprendre. T’es en train de dire que c’est moi qui aie fait ça, que c’est moi qui ai repoussé la ligne d’arrivée ?

—Je pense que vous y étiez bien placé pour la maintenir.

—Tu me vois, assis là, n’est-ce pas ? Est-ce que tu vois bien un homme qui a perdu deux membres vitaux ? Tu penses vraiment qu’un homme ayant perdu deux de ses membres vitaux et un pouce dans une putain de guerre étrangère faire partie de la manigance dont tu parles ? Tu penses que c’est moi l’ennemi ?

—Et bien que faisiez-vous au Congrès si vous ne faisiez pas partie de la manigance ?

—J’étais dans le mécanisme pour justement essayer de *réparer* cette machine, idiot !

Pourquoi, merde, penses-tu qu’il y avait une demi-douzaine de vétérans du Vietnam du côté démocrate du Sénat et au Parlement ? Il y fallait bien quelqu’un pour parler en connaissance de cause.

—Comment est-ce que cela s’est passé au fait ? Je sais que j’aurais dû le savoir, mais ce n’est pas le cas.

—Comment est-ce que quoi s’est passé ?

—Qu’est-ce qui s’est passé pour votre jambe et votre bras ? Désolé d’être aussi indélicat.

—I don't think you're in danger of being confused with a man of delicacy or subtlety, son.

Before I tell you, I should ask, did you happen to bring any of my prescriptions here? I need them for my stumps and for my arrhythmia.

—I grabbed what I could. I didn't have much time. They're in the duffle bag behind you. I also brought the bottle by your bed. Which was a surprise to me, that you have a bottle of gin by your bedside. That seemed like some kind of cliché, the aging vet drinking himself to sleep.

—Now you actually *are* being indelicate. That's really none of your goddamned business, kid. And just because there was a bottle by the bed doesn't mean this is some kind of long-standing habit or ritual.

—Fine.

—I don't know why I am explaining myself to you.

—You're right. No need. It's not why you're here. And anyway, I understand if you need some help getting to sleep. I haven't had to go through what you did, I haven't really seen fuck-all compared to you, and I need eleven hours every night to sleep six or seven. So I would never judge.

—Thanks. That's a comfort.

—No problem.

—Son, in your head, is this what qualifies as bonding?

—See, you're being so condescending, and I didn't want you to be that way toward me. Do you think I'm somehow inferior because I wasn't part of some war? Because I wasn't drafted and grew up in peacetime and never had to struggle the way you have?

—Je ne pense pas que tu risques d’être confondu avec un homme de délicatesse ou doué d’ingéniosité, mon garçon. Avant d’aller plus loin, je devrais te demander si t’as pensé à apporter mes médicaments ? J’en ai besoin pour mes moignons et mon arythmie.

—J’ai saisi ce qu’il m’était possible de prendre. J’avais pas beaucoup de temps. Ils sont dans le sac de paquetage derrière vous. J’ai aussi pris la bouteille près du lit. Ca m’a surpris en quelque sorte de constater que vous gardiez une bouteille de gin à votre chevet. Cette idée du vétéran vieillissant obligé de se saouler pour fermer l’œil m’a tout l’air d’être une sorte de cliché.

—Là, c’est *vraiment* bien indélicat de ta part. Ca ne te regarde absolument pas, putain. Le simple fait d’avoir une bouteille à son chevet ne veut pas dire que c’est un rituel ou une habitude ancrés en soi.

—Bien.

—Je ne sais pas pourquoi je suis en train de me justifier comme ça en face de toi.

—Vous avez raison. Faut pas. Vous n’êtes pas là pour ça. D’ailleurs, je comprends que vous en soyez dépendant pour vous endormir un peu. Moi, je n’ai pas eu besoin de faire comme vous, je n’ai jamais réellement vu de foutrement pareil comparé à vous. Moi, j’ai besoin d’au moins onze heures chaque soir pour finalement ne dormir que six ou sept heures de temps. Alors moi, juger les autres, jamais.

—Merci. Ca me rassure.

—Y a pas de souci.

—Mon garçon, est-ce bien, dans ta tête, ce qu’on pourrait appeler de la sympathie.

—Voyez, vous êtes en train de me traiter avec condescendance, et je ne veux pas qu’il en soit ainsi. Vous pensez que, d’une manière ou d’une autre, je suis inférieur parce que je n’ai participé à aucune guerre ? Parce que je n’ai pas été désigné, parce que j’ai grandi en temps de paix et parce que je n’ai pas eu autant de mal que vous ?

—No. I don't.

—I do.

—*You* do?

—I do. I grew up next to this base, sir, and my father was a contractor here. And I'm pretty sure that I would have turned out better, if we'd been part of some universal struggle, some cause greater than ourselves.

—And you think Vietnam was that?

—Well, no, not necessarily.

—So what the hell are talking about? Do you know how fucked up most of the men who came back from Vietnam are? You're damned lucky your dad didn't have to fight. You wanted to be part of that?

—No. No, not that exact conflict. But I just mean . . .

—You wish you were part of some wonderful video game conflict with a clear moral objective.

—Or something else. Something else that brought everyone together with a unity of purpose, and some sense of shared sacrifice.

—Son, judging just by the fact that you're kidnapping people and chaining them to posts, I knew you were confused. But in actuality your brain is plain scrambled. One minute you're complaining about your astronaut buddy who didn't get to ride on a cool spaceship, and the next you're saying you wish you'd been drafted. I mean, none of this squares, son. What exactly brought you to this point?

—Mais non.

—Moi, si.

—*Vous*, si ?

—Moi, si. J'ai grandi non loin de cette base, monsieur, et mon père était fournisseur de l'armée ici. Et je suis tout à fait certain que mon sort aurait pu être meilleur à moi et à tous ceux que je connais si nous étions partie prenante d'un quelconque effort universel, une quelconque cause supérieure à nous-mêmes.

—Et tu penses que le Vietnam l'a été ?

—Ben, non, pas nécessairement.

—Mais alors, de quoi parles-tu, merde ? Sais-tu à quel point la vie de ceux qui sont revenus du Vietnam a été bousillée. Dis-toi que t'as de la chance que ton père n'ait pas eu à aller se battre. C'est de ça que tu souhaiterais faire partie ?

—Non, pas exactement ce conflit-là. Mais simplement...je veux dire...

—T'aurais souhaité faire partie d'un formidable conflit genre jeu-vidéo coiffé d'un objectif moral clair.

—Ou autre chose. Quelque chose d'autre qui aurait amené tout le monde dans un rassemblement pour la cause, dans un esprit de sacrifice mutuel.

—Mon garçon, rien qu'à te voir en train de kidnapper et attacher des gens à des poteaux, il est clair que t'es un peu désorienté. Mais en réalité t'as l'esprit complètement écrabouillé. D'un côté tu te plains que ton pote d'astronaute n'ait pas eu sa place dans un vaisseau spatial en bonne et due forme, de l'autre tu dis regretter de ne pas avoir été choisi. Tout ça ne tient pas debout, mon garçon. Qu'est-ce qui t'a précisément conduit à tout ceci ?

—I don't know. Actually, I think I do know. It's because nothing's happened to me. And I think that's a waste on your part. You should have found some kind of purpose for me.

—Who should have?

—The government. The state. Anyone, I don't know. Why didn't you tell me what to do? They told *you* what to do, and you went and fought and sacrificed and then came back and had a mission . . .

—Kid, do you know how I lost my limbs?

—That's why I was asking before. I assume you saved lives. You got a Bronze Star and . . .

—No. I didn't save any lives. I was eating lunch.

—What? No.

—I lost my limbs because I was eating my lunch near the wrong dipshit who hadn't secured his grenades.

—That can't be true.

—Listen. I was alone, eating my lunch. This kid had just rotated in from Mississippi, and he was some idiotic bumpkin with too much energy. He thought we were friends, so he came running toward me, pretending he was charging at me like a moose. Just some dumb thing young men do. A grenade fell off his uniform, the pin was pulled, and it rolled directly to me and landed at my feet. I just had time to turn my head away when it went off. That was the moment of unified purpose and shared sacrifice that separated me from my limbs.

—That's depressing.

—Yes, it is depressing. So when I got back I tried to talk some sense into anyone who thought going into some country on the other end of the world to exert our will would

—Je ne sais pas. Au fait, je crois savoir. C'est parce que rien ne m'est arrivé à moi. Et je pense que ça a été une erreur de votre part. Vous auriez dû trouver quelque chose de significatif pour moi.

—Qui aurait dû ?

—Le gouvernement. L'état. N'importe qui, je ne sais pas moi. Pourquoi ne m'a-t-on rien demandé ? Ils vous ont demandé à *vous*, et vous êtes parti, vous avez fait la guerre, vous vous êtes sacrifié, vous êtes revenu, vous avez accompli une mission...

—Gamin, tu sais comment j'ai perdu mes membres ?

—C'est ce que je voulais savoir depuis le début. Je suppose que vous avez sauvé des vies. Vous avez obtenu au moins une médaille de bronze pour et...

—Non. Je n'ai pas sauvé de vies. J'étais en train de prendre mon déjeuner.

—Quoi ? Non.

—J'ai perdu mes membres parce que j'étais en train de déjeuner à côté d'un connard qui n'avait pas désamorcé ses grenades.

—C'est pas vrai.

—Ecoute. J'étais seul, en train de déjeuner. Ce petit gars revenait juste du Mississippi. Cet idiot de plouc avait beaucoup trop d'énergie. Il m'a pris pour un de ses amis et a couru vers moi. Il a feint m'attaquer tel un orignal, tu sais, ce genre de ringardise que font les jeunes. Une grenade est alors tombée de son uniforme et a roulé droit jusqu'à mes pieds. La goupille était tirée. J'ai juste eu le temps de tourner la tête quand elle a explosé. C'était ça l'instant de rassemblement pour la cause et pour le sacrifice mutuel, et qui m'a privé de mes membres.

—C'est déprimant.

—Oui, c'est déprimant. Donc après mon retour, j'ai essayé de dissuader tous ceux qui croyaient au fait que se rendre à l'autre bout du monde pour exercer ses devoirs était

be a cute idea, and the main problem with a cute idea like that is that these plans are carried out by groups of nineteen-year-olds who can't tie their shoes and who think it's great fun to run around goofing with grenades poorly secured to their uniforms. Wars put young men in close proximity to grenades and guns and a hundred other things they will find a way to fuck up. These days men in war get themselves killed far more often than they get killed by someone else.

—I guess.

—Do you understand the difference, son?

—I think so.

—Because I look at you and wouldn't trust you with a book of matches. You've got a head full of rocks, kid. And there are a hundred thousand others like you in the desert right now, and it's no wonder they're killing civilians and raping women soldiers and shooting themselves in the leg. I don't mean to besmirch the character of these young men and women, because I know most of them are the salt of the earth, but my point is that they should be kept safe and kept out of the way of dangerous things. Young men need to be kept away from guns, bombs, women, cars, hard alcohol and heavy machinery. If I had my way they'd be cryogenically frozen until such a time as we knew they could get themselves across a street without fucking it up. Most of the men I served with were nineteen. I'm fairly certain that when you were nineteen you couldn't parallel park.

—Do you know that we met once? It was when I was fifteen. Do you remember Boys State?

—Of course. I voted to refund it every year it came up for renewal.

une idée astucieuse. Le problème majeur avec ce genre d'idée astucieuse est que ces projets-là sont entrepris par des jeunes d'à peine dix-huit dix-neuf ans qui ne savent même pas encore lacer leurs chaussures et qui croient que c'est marrant que de courir comme des imbéciles avec des grenades mal désamorçées, accrochées à leurs uniformes. Les guerres rapprochent trop les jeunes des instruments de guerre au point que ceux-ci trouveront moyen de tout foutre en l'air. De nos jours les hommes de guerre se tuent tout seul beaucoup plus que d'être tués par quelqu'un d'autre.

—J'imagine.

—Tu comprends la différence, mon garçon ?

—Je crois que oui.

—A te regarder, jamais je ne te ferai confiance ne serait-ce qu'avec une boîte d'allumettes.

T'as la tête bien dure toi, fiston. Et comme toi il y en a une centaine de milliers en ce moment dans le désert, et nul doute qu'ils sont en train de tuer des civils, violer des femmes soldats, se péter la patte à coups de carabine. Je ne souhaite nullement ternir l'image de ces jeunes hommes et femmes, car je sais que la plupart d'entre eux sont le sel de la terre mais ce que je veux dire c'est qu'ils doivent être sécurisés et préservés de tout ce qui pourrait s'avérer dangereux. Les jeunes doivent être préservés des armes, des bombes, des femmes, des voitures, de l'alcool dur et des machineries lourdes. Moi, je les aurais gardés au frais jusqu'à ce qu'ils aient atteint une maturité suffisante pour ne pas tout merder. La plupart des soldats avec qui j'ai travaillé étaient dans leur prime jeunesse. Je suis tout à fait certain que quand t'avais leur âge t'aurais eu le même genre de comportement.

—Savez-vous qu'on s'est déjà rencontré ? J'avais quinze ans. Vous vous souvenez des Boys State ?

—Certainement. J'y ai apporté ma contribution pécuniaire à chaque échéance annuelle.

—I went.

—You went to Boys State?

—In Sacramento. 1994. I did all the Boys State things—watched the legislature, learned about democracy, saw some politicians speak. I even ran for lieutenant governor in that mock election.

—How'd you do?

—I lost. I was asked to quit.

—Why?

—Doesn't matter. They were probably right.

—What'd you do?

—There was an essay component to the whole thing, and I thought it would be good to sign mine in blood. Like Thomas Paine.

—I don't think Thomas Paine . . . Anyway. They didn't like that?

—I guess not. They were nice enough about it after I explained myself. But they made me withdraw.

—I can see you're a fan of grand gestures, though.

—Sometimes. I guess so. But that's how we met.

—In Sacramento?

—No, but through Boys State. There was a parade through Marview on the Fourth of July, and you rode in the back of a convertible. I don't know what you were doing out here, but you were in the same car as me. It was some old vintage car, and that year's local Boys State reps were in the car with you. You were exotic that year because you'd come all the way from Wyoming. You remember?

—J'en faisais partie.

—De Boys State ?

—Oui, à Sacramento. En 1994. J'ai tout fait là-bas — j'ai observé l'élaboration des lois, j'ai appris la démocratie, j'ai assisté aux discours de certains politiciens. J'ai même été candidat dans ce simulacre d'élection pour être lieutenant gouverneur.

—Comment cela s'est-il passé ?

—J'ai perdu. On m'a demandé de ne pas y rester.

—Pourquoi ?

—Aucune importance. Ils avaient probablement raison.

—Et qu'est-ce que t'as fait ?

—Il y avait surtout un sujet de dissertation, et je me suis dit qu'il vaudrait mieux signer le mien de sang. Comme Thomas Paine.

—Je ne pense pas que Thomas Paine. . . De toute façon. Ils ne l'ont pas apprécié je parie !

—Je crois que non. Ils l'ont bien pris après que je m'en suis expliqué. Mais ils m'ont demandé quand même de partir.

—Je vois que tu admires les gestes significatives tout de même.

—Ca arrive. Mais voilà comment on s'est rencontré.

—A Sacramento ?

—Non, mais à travers Boys State. Il y avait un défilé à Marview le 4 juillet, et vous étiez à l'arrière d'une décapotable. Je ne sais pas ce que vous y faisiez, mais vous étiez dans la même voiture que moi. Une voiture d'époque, et cette année-là les représentants des Boys State étaient dans la voiture avec vous. Vous étiez très particulier cette année-là car vous aviez fait tout le chemin revenant du Wyoming. Vous vous en souvenez ?

—Sure, I guess; I mean, I’ve done a couple hundred parades over the years, so I don’t know if

. . .

—But no one ever comes to Marview. We’re just forgotten. People see this broken-down military base and assume anything near it is toxic and dead. I don’t know. Maybe it is. Sometimes it is.

—I remember the day being bright.

—I love you for that, sir. Sometimes it was bright here. It really was. This was always some kind of model for diversity and a strong middle class and all that, then the base closed and it all fell down a few notches after that. It’s like steroids, right? You ever know a guy on roids?

—I believe so.

—They get huge and the muscles get shiny, right? But when they stop, it all sinks like mud. Round shoulders, potbellies. Saggy breasts.

—Okay.

—But you were right. That day of the parade was bright. And I was sitting next to you, with another kid. We rode for a few hours together through Marview. I even helped you get in and out of the car. You dropped an ice cream cone someone got you and I helped you clean up, wiping your shirt and pants and . . .

—Okay. I remember you.

—So you remember what you said to me that day?

—No, son. I doubt that I do.

—You said that I should play by the rules.

—Okay. I said that to a lot of people.

—Je crois que oui. Enfin, j’ai fait des centaines de défilés durant des années, et donc je ne sais pas si. . .

—Et maintenant plus personne ne se rend à Marview. On nous a oubliés. Quand on considère cette base militaire détruite, on se dit qu’il n’y a plus de vie autour et que tout est toxique. Je ne sais pas. C’est peut-être vrai. Des fois, c’est vrai.

—Ce jour-là le soleil brillait.

—J’adore quand vous le dites, monsieur. Tout brillait ici, des fois. Vraiment. Une sorte d’exemple de diversité, avec une classe moyenne forte et tout. Puis on a fermé la base et après quelques défilés tout a disparu. C’est comme les stéroïdes, n’est-ce pas ? Vous avez connu des gars sous stéroïdes ?

—Je crois que oui.

—Ils s’enflent de muscles scintillants, n’est-ce pas ? Et quand ils arrêtent, ils deviennent tous flasques. Les épaules s’arrondissent, ils ont la bedaine, la poitrine avachie.

—Ok.

—Mais vous aviez raison. Ce jour de défilé était bien ensoleillé. Et j’étais assis à côté de vous avec un autre jeune. Nous avons roulé quelques heures dans Marview. Je vous ai même aidé à monter et à descendre de voiture. Vous aviez laissé tomber le cornet de glace que quelqu’un vous avait apporté et je vous avais aidé à tout essuyer, chemise, pantalon. . .

—Oui, je m’en souviens.

—Vous vous souvenez donc de ce que vous m’aviez dit ce jour-là ?

—Là, non mon garçon. J’en doute fort.

—Vous m’aviez conseillé de toujours bien respecter les règles.

—Ok. Mais j’ai dit cela à pas mal de gens.

—And I did it. So where am I?

—And this is some failure of the formula? That you didn't arrive at what you expected to be? And that your astronaut isn't on the Shuttle? That somehow this puts in question the entire framework?

—Yes sir, that's my thesis.

—Well, I have to say, that is a cockamamie thesis. That's like saying that if you lose a certain football game that the sport itself is flawed. Son, not everyone can win the game. Some people play it poorly. Some people quit. Some people don't even read the playbook. And some people expect the rest of the team to carry them into the end zone.

—No. What I'm saying is that you moved the end zone. And you turned the grassy field into mud.

—I don't know what to say to all that.

—You changed the rules.

—We did not change the rules.

—It just seems chaotic.

—You think it's more chaotic now than *when*? The fucking frontier days? *Then* it was perfectly organized, kid? When people were sleeping on hay and eating squirrels?

—No. But during postindustrial . . .

—Post goddamned *what*? When you had to save a month for a radio? When having indoor plumbing was a sign you'd arrived? Jesus Christ, son, the worst thing your predecessors ever did for you young pricks was to succeed. We made everything so easy that you cry yourselves up a storm every time there's a pebble in your path.

—C'est ce que j'ai fait. Et où suis-je maintenant ?

—C'est un quelconque échec de la formule ? Le fait de n'être pas parvenu au but recherché ? Le fait que ton pote d'astronaute ne soit pas dans sa Navette ? C'est une manière de remettre en question un cadre tout entier ?

—Oui monsieur, c'est la thèse que je soutiens.

—Et bien, je dois dire que votre thèse est farfelue. C'est une façon de dire que quand on perd un match de foot, le sport lui-même est faux. Tout le monde ne peut pas gagner, mon garçon. Il y a certains qui jouent mal, d'autres qui abandonnent, et d'autres qui ne connaissent même pas les règles du jeu. Et il y a certains qui comptent sur les autres membres de l'équipe pour les mener au but.

—Non. Ce que je veux dire c'est que vous avez déplacé le but. Et vous avez transformé le terrain tout vert en boue.

—Là, je ne sais pas quoi te répondre.

—Vous avez changé les règles du jeu.

—Nous n'avons pas changé les règles du jeu.

—Tout a l'air bien désorganisé.

—Tu penses que c'est désorganisé maintenant par rapport à *quelle période* ? Cette sacrée époque de la frontière ? *A cette époque* c'était alors parfaitement organisé, gamin ? La période où les gens dormaient sur du foin et mangeaient les écureuils ?

—Non. Mais durant la période postindustrielle. . .

—Post *quoi*, bon sang ? Quand on devait économiser tout un mois pour se payer une radio ? Quand avoir la tuyauterie intérieure chez soi voulait dire qu'on avait réussi ? Nom de Dieu, la pire des choses que vos prédécesseurs n'aient jamais fait pour vous les petits cons, c'est de réussir. Nous avons tout rendu tellement facile que vous faites une tempête dans un verre d'eau à chaque fois qu'un galet se trouve sur votre chemin.

—Okay, at least tell me this: Is it all the same money?

—Is what all the same money?

—The money that could have saved the Shuttle, and the money we send to random countries, that we use to remake unchangeable countries ten thousand miles away.

—Is it the same money?

—Yeah, is it? I mean, you guys complain about not having money for schools, for health care, that everything's broke and we have government shutdowns and every other goddamn thing, and then we look up and you're spending 150 million on air-conditioning in Iraq.

—Listen, you're preaching to the converted here.

—I don't want to be preaching. I'm *asking*. I don't know how that works. Where does the money come from? You guys fight over pennies for *Sesame Street*, and then someone's backing up a truck to dump a trillion dollars in the desert.

—So you're asking where does the money that finances wars come from?

—Yes.

—You're smart enough to know that. We create the money. It's not a standard part of a year's budget. There isn't a line item for war.

—So is it true that we're essentially borrowing money from the Chinese to finance these wars?

—Oh shit. No. But we create and sell bonds, and people here and elsewhere, for example in China, see these bonds as a good investment. And no doubt the Chinese like the leverage it gives them, holding so much American debt.

—D'accord, mais au moins dites moi : il s'agit bien du même argent ?

—Quoi le même argent ?

—L'argent qui aurait pu sauver la navette, et celui que nous envoyons comme ça au hasard des pays, celui que nous utilisons pour refaire des pays inaltérables à quinze mille kilomètres de chez nous.

—Si c'est le même argent ?

—Ouais, c'est ça ? Ecoutez, vous autres les gars, vous vous plaignez d'une part de ne pas avoir suffisamment d'argent pour les écoles, les soins médicaux, que tout est en faillite, il y a les corps paraétatiques qui ferment et d'autres foutus trucs. Et que voit-on d'autre part? Vous dépensez 150 millions pour la climatisation en Irak.

—Ecoute, là tu es en train de prêcher un converti.

—Je ne cherche pas à prêcher qui que ce soit. Je me pose la question. Je ne comprends pas comment ça marche. D'où vient l'argent ? D'un côté vous, les gars, vous vous disputez quelques cents pour des dessins animés, de l'autre quelqu'un est entrain de garnir tout un camion pour aller déverser des milliards de dollars dans le désert.

—Donc tu te poses la question d'où vient l'argent qui finance les guerres ?

—Oui.

—T'es assez malin pour le savoir. Nous créons cet argent. Ca ne fait aucunement partie classique du budget annuel. Pas une seule ligne n'est consacrée à la guerre.

—Donc est-ce bien vrai qu'on est en train d'emprunter significativement aux chinois pour financer ces guerres ?

—Mais non, merde. Nous créons et vendons des titres. Les gens ici ou ailleurs, en Chine par exemple, considèrent ces titres comme un bon investissement. Et il n'y a pas de doute que les chinois apprécient ce que le ratio d'endettement américain leurs rapporte.

—But couldn't we just sell bonds to pay for Social Security, education for all? I mean, everyone wrings their hands about cutting or saving some microscopic government program, and *Where oh where will we get the money?*—but then we turn around and there's a billion dollars for Afghani warlords. I mean, I know I'm stupid not to understand this, but I don't.

—The problem with all those things you mention, education and whatnot, is those are chronic problems, as opposed to acute problems. We fund the things that are urgent, that everyone can rally around and more or less agree upon. And everyone agrees on funding the troops that are stationed abroad. You fund some advisors, then you inch it toward full engagement, and pretty soon no one wants to be the one denying body armor to our young people in uniform. So we find the money. We sell bonds, we borrow money. But will we get that kind of momentum to borrow money from China to pay for some national education reform? No. That's not an acute problem. If there were an alien invasion tomorrow, and the only way to win against the aliens would be to fully fund Head Start, then sure, we would find that money.

—So it's not a matter of possibility, but of will?

—What's that?

—Will.

—Of course. Everything is a matter of will.

—My mom always said that.

—Well, she was right.

—Mais ne pourrions-nous pas tout simplement vendre ces titres pour alimenter la sécurité sociale, financer l'éducation, les hautes études pour tous ? Mais voilà, on se tord les mains pour réduire ou économiser sur de tout petits programmes gouvernementaux, tout en se demandant *Où, mais où aurons-nous l'argent ?* Et puis d'un coup de baguette magique, on trouve un milliard de dollars pour les seigneurs de la guerre en Afghanistan. C'est stupide de ma part, n'est-ce pas, que de ne rien y comprendre, mais effectivement je n'y comprends rien, j'en suis bien désolé.

—Le problème avec tout ce dont tu parles, l'éducation et autres, c'est que ce sont des problèmes chroniques par opposition aux problèmes graves. Nous finançons les choses urgentes autour desquelles les pensées gravitent, autour desquelles les gens seront plus ou moins d'accord. Et tout le monde est d'accord pour financer les troupes postées à l'étranger. On paie quelques conseillers, puis petit à petit on se fraye un passage vers un engagement total, après quoi plus personne ne veut plus se désengager envers nos jeunes en uniforme. Il faut alors trouver l'argent. Nous vendons des titres, nous empruntons. Mais aurons-nous le même dynamisme que celui d'emprunter de la Chine pour financer une quelconque réforme nationale liée à l'éducation? Non. Ca, ce n'est pas un vrai problème. Si demain nous avons à faire face à une invasion extraterrestre, la seule façon de vaincre les extraterrestres serait d'être entièrement prêts dès le départ, et là, c'est sûr, nous trouverons l'argent.

—Donc ce n'est pas une question de possibilité mais de volonté.

—Quoi donc ?

—De volonté.

—Bien sûr. Tout est question de volonté.

—C'est ce que ma mère a toujours dit.

—Eh bien, elle a raison.

—Not often.

—Son, did you bring me here to talk about your mother?

—But don't you think there should be a plan for people like me, for the guys you were talking about, the vets whose brains are scrambled?

—What sort of plan?

—Don't you think . . .

—What, son?

—Don't you think the vast majority of the chaos in the world is caused by a relatively small group of disappointed men?

—

—

—I don't know. Could be.

—The men who haven't gotten the work they expected to get. The men who don't get the promotion they expected. The men who are dropped in a jungle or a desert and expected video games and got mundanity and depravity and friends dying like animals. These men can't be left to mix with the rest of society. Something bad always happens.

—Something bad like this. Like you bringing me here. I agree.

—When I see these massacres at malls or offices, I think, There by the Lake of God go I.

—Grace of God.

—What's that?

—Pas toujours.

—Mon garçon, tu ne m'as pas emmené ici pour parler de ta mère ?

—Ne pensez-vous pas qu'on devrait mettre sur pied un quelconque projet pour les gens comme moi, pour les gars dont vous avez parlés, pour les vétérans qui ont eu le crâne brouillé ?

—De quel ordre ?

—Ne pensez-vous pas . . .

—Quoi donc, fiston ?

—Ne pensez-vous pas que la grande majorité de chaos dans le monde est causée par un groupe relativement restreint de déçus ?

—

—

—Je ne sais pas. C'est bien possible.

—Ceux qui n'ont pas eu le boulot qu'ils attendaient. Ceux qui n'ont pas obtenu la promotion qu'ils espéraient. Ceux qui ont été lâchés dans la jungle ou le désert en attente d'exploits genre jeux-vidéos mais qui, en retour, n'ont constaté que des banalités, des dépravations et leurs camarades mourir comme des chiens. Ceux-là, on ne peut pas les laisser avec le reste de la société. Il en résulte toujours de fâcheuses conséquences.

—De fâcheuses conséquences comme là maintenant. Toi, me retenant ici. Je suis d'accord.

—Quand je vois ces massacres perpétrés au milieu des halls de magasins et bureaux, je me dis, Là près du Lac de Dieu je me promène.

—La Grâce de Dieu.

—C'est quoi ?

—It’s “There but for the grace of God.”

—No. It’s “there by the Lake of God.”

—It’s “grace of God.”

—It can’t be.

—Son. It is.

—I’ve always had this picture in my mind of the Lake of God. And you walk by it.

—There’s no Lake of God.

—It was like this huge underground lake, and it was dark and cool and peaceful and you could go there and float there and be forgiven.

—I don’t know what to tell you, son. I’ve been teaching the Bible for thirty-eight years and there is no Lake of God in that book. There’s a Lake of Fire, but I don’t think that’s the place you’re picturing.

—See, even that.

—Even what?

—Even that’s a sign that the world has misused people like me. How could I not know that, the difference between the Lake of God and the Lake of Fire?

—I don’t know if that misunderstanding is symptomatic of a societal failure. You got your lakes confused.

—But it is symptomatic. You and I read the same books and hear the same sermons and we come away with different messages. That has to be evidence of some serious problem, right? I mean, I shouldn’t have been left to live among the rest of society. There were so many days I looked at it all and wanted it wiped away, wanted it on fire.

—C'est « Là mais par la grâce de Dieu ».

—Non. C'est « là près du Lac de Dieu ».

—C'est « grâce de Dieu ».

—C'est impossible.

—C'est bien ça, mon fils.

—Je me le suis toujours figuré ainsi dans mon esprit, le Lac de Dieu. Le long duquel nous nous promenons.

—Il n'y a pas de Lac de Dieu.

—C'était comme cet immense lac souterrain. Il faisait sombre et frais. Tout était paisible. On pouvait s'y rendre, s'y mettre à flot et être pardonné.

—Je ne sais pas quoi te dire, mon garçon. J'enseigne la bible depuis trente-huit ans et il n'y a de Lac de Dieu nulle part dans le livre. Il y a un Lac de Feu, mais je ne pense pas que ce soit l'image à laquelle tu te réfères.

—Voyez-vous, même cela.

—Même quoi ?

—Même cela est un signe que le monde a abusé des gens comme moi. Comment pouvais-je ne pas le savoir, la différence entre le Lac de Dieu et le Lac de Feu ?

—Je ne sais pas si cette erreur est un indice imputable à un quelconque échec sociétal. Tu confonds les lacs.

—Mais c'est un indice imputable. Nous lisons le même livre, vous et moi, nous écoutons les mêmes sermons et nous repartons avec des messages différents. C'est bien la preuve qu'il y a un grave problème quelque part, non ? On n'aurait pas dû me laisser vivre avec le reste de la société. Je l'ai observée pas mal de temps et je voulais tout balayer, tout mettre en feu.

—Sounds you had a radicalizing moment, son. Were you beaten as a child, something like that?

—No sir.

—Saw some terrible thing that changed you?

—Do you remember the other guy with us in that car that day?

—No, I can't say that I do.

—You don't? It was unusual for our town to have a kid like that. He was half Vietnamese. Don Banh. You remember a kid like that?

—I'm sorry, I don't. He was a friend of yours?

—He's dead now.

—I'm sorry to hear that.

—He was shot.

—He was a soldier?

—No. Just in his backyard.

—I'm sorry, son. That's too young. I'm truly sorry.

—I'm not saying that was some radicalizing moment for me. I feel like I had some fairly apocalyptic thoughts before that.

—Most young men do.

—I've tried to explain these thoughts to people but they get scared. They don't understand. Or they pretend they don't understand.

—Try me.

—Well, every day, about half of every day I'm among people in a city, I picture my arm sweeping across the city, wiping it all clean. Like it was a model set up on a card table, and I could just sweep it all onto the floor. Okay?

—On dirait que t’as subi un effet de radicalisation, mon fils. Est-ce qu’on t’a battu ou quelque chose de ce genre quand t’étais petit ?

—Non monsieur.

—T’as été témoin de quelque chose d’affreux qui t’aurait changé.

—Vous vous rappelez de l’autre gars qui était dans la voiture avec nous ce jour-là ?

—Je ne peux pas l’affirmer.

—Vous ne pouvez pas ? C’était exceptionnel pour notre ville d’avoir un gars comme lui. Il était moitié vietnamien. Don Banh. Vous vous rappelez d’un gars de ce type ?

—Non, j’en suis désolé. C’était un ami à toi ?

—Il est décédé à présent.

—Je suis désolé d’entendre ça.

—On lui a tiré dessus.

—Il était soldat ?

—Non. Il se trouvait tout simplement dans son arrière-cour.

—J’en suis désolé, mon fils. Il était bien trop jeune. J’en suis vraiment désolé.

—Je ne suis pas en train de dire que j’ai subi là un effet de radicalisation. Il me semble que j’ai eu des idées tout à fait apocalyptiques avant cela.

—C’est le cas pour la plupart de jeunes.

—J’ai essayé d’expliquer ces idées aux gens mais ils en sont terrifiés. Ils ne comprennent pas ou font mine de ne pas comprendre.

—Essaie avec moi.

—Eh bien, tous les jours, une bonne partie de la journée je me trouve dans une ville avec des gens. Je me vois en train de balayer la ville avec mon bras, tout nettoyer net. C’était comme une maquette posée sur une table et il suffisait pour moi de tout balayer et tout balancer par terre. Vous voyez ?

—Okay.

—You want to hear more?

—Sure.

—I'll be walking down some crowded street and I'll start boiling inside and I picture myself parting all these people like Moses with the Red Sea. You know, the people disappear, the buildings dissolve and when I'm done there's all this empty space, and it's quieter, and there aren't all those people and all their dirty thoughts and idiotic talking and opinions. And that vision actually gives me peace. When I picture the landscape bare, free of all human noise and filth, I can relax.

—Maybe you should live in that country.

—That's not funny. I mean, that's not the solution. I just wish I could function better in rooms, in buildings, in a line at the grocery store. And sometimes I do. But sometimes it makes me so fucking tense. I need to get out, drive awhile, get to the ocean as fast as I can.

—Son, I'm realizing I don't know your name.

—Thomas.

—Thomas, nothing you say is unprecedented. There are others like you. Millions of men like you. Some women, too. And I think this is a result of you being prepared for a life that does not exist. You were built for a different world. Like a predator without prey.

—So why not find a place for us?

—What's that?

—Find a place for us.

—Who should?

—Je vois.

—Vous voulez que je continue ?

—Certainement !

—Je descendais une rue bondée et commençais à entrer en ébullition à l'intérieur de moi-même et je me vois ouvrir un passage aux gens comme Moïse avec la Mer Rouge. Vous savez, les gens disparaissent, les immeubles fondent et à la fin il reste toute cette espace vide. C'est plus calme, il n'y a plus tous ces gens aux pensées malsaines, discutant de leurs idées stupides. Et cette vision me procure de la tranquillité en fait. Quand je vois ce paysage libéré de tout bruit et de toutes les ordures humaines, je suis détendu.

—Tu devrais sans doute vivre à la campagne.

—C'est pas marrant. C'est pas la solution, je veux dire. J'aurais aimé être plus à l'aise à l'intérieur d'espaces clos, en immeubles, dans une file à l'épicerie. Je ressens cela des fois. Mais des fois ça me rend nerveux, putain. J'éprouve alors le besoin de sortir, de faire une escapade en voiture, de rejoindre l'océan aussi vite que possible.

—Mon garçon, je me rends compte que je ne connais pas encore ton nom.

—Thomas.

—Thomas, tout ce que tu dis n'est pas sans précédent. Il y a d'autres gens comme toi. Des tas de gens. Des femmes aussi. Et je pense que, dans ton cas, c'est la conséquence d'être voué à une vie qui n'existe pas. T'es fait pour appartenir à un monde différent. T'es comme un prédateur sans proie.

—Pourquoi donc ne pas avoir trouvé un endroit où nous caser ?

—Quoi ?

—Un endroit pour nous.

—Qui aurait dû trouver ?

—You, the government. You of all people should have known that we needed a plan. You should have sent us all somewhere and given us a task.

—But not to war.

—No, I guess not.

—So what then?

—Maybe build a canal.

—You want to build a canal?

—I don't know.

—No, I don't get the impression you do.

—You've got to put this energy to use, though. It's pent up in me and it's pent up in millions like me. The only time I feel right is when I'm driving, or once in a while during a fight.

—So you box.

—No.

—Oh. Let me see your hands.

—They're messed up right now.

—That they are. Son, who are you fighting?

—I don't know. People.

—Do you win?

—Win what?

—These fights.

—No. Not really.

—Thomas, you know we can't round up every confused young man and send them to some remote region. Even if I agreed with you, which I do, to some extent at least. I

—Vous, le gouvernement. Vous autres, auriez dû être les premiers à savoir que nous avions besoin d'un projet particulier. Vous auriez dû nous avoir envoyés quelque part et nous avoir donnés une tâche à accomplir.

—Pas la guerre.

—Non, je ne pense pas.

—Quoi alors ?

—Construire un canal, peut-être.

—Tu veux construire un canal ?

—Je ne sais pas moi.

—Effectivement. J'ai pas l'impression que tu saches quelque chose.

—Vous devez pourtant mettre cette énergie en branle. Elle est réprimée en moi et elle est refoulée à l'intérieur de milliers de gens comme moi. Le seul moment où je me sens bien, c'est quand je conduis, ou parfois quand je me bats.

—Alors tu boxes ?

—Non.

—Ah ! Fais voir tes mains.

—Elles ne sont pas en bon état en ce moment.

—Effectivement. Fiston, contre qui te bats-tu ?

—Je ne sais pas. Des gens.

—Tu gagnes ?

—Je gagne quoi ?

—Les combats.

—Non. Pas vraiment.

—Thomas, tu sais qu'on ne peut pas rassembler tous les jeunes désorientés et les envoyer dans des quartiers éloignés. Même si j'étais d'accord avec toi, et je le suis, du

mean, this is why so many soldiers stay in the Army and why so many prisoners end up back in prison. They cannot hack polite society. They're bored and they feel caged.

—But there's no evidence of a plan, sir.

—What plan?

—Any plan. I mean, wasn't that what Australia was all about? Some convict colony? We could have done that on the moon. All I ever wanted to do was get off this fucking planet and go to the next one, but there's no way to do it. And Don, too. He didn't belong in regular society after what happened to him.

—I don't understand. After he died?

—No, before that. All along I knew what was going to happen. I knew something would happen but I didn't know what. I mean, that's when I first got the idea for all this. We used to mess around here at this base. We'd ride through these buildings on our bikes, and when we were older we'd sit around drinking here, and when Don was losing his shit a little, and he did a few rehabs, I used to think, You know, if you could just shackle him inside one of these buildings for a while, you know, keep him safe, dry him out, then maybe he could make it.

—Okay. I understand that. I truly do.

—But he was always just out there. In the world. Doing the wrong things, never doing anything I told him to do. I always knew what he needed to do, and I'd make a step-by-step for him, I'd even write that shit down. I'd write down a plan! A two-year plan, a five-year plan. And he wouldn't even attempt it. I couldn't make him do anything. I couldn't keep him in rehab. I couldn't lock him up. You know once I left him in jail for a month instead of bailing him out, because I thought it might be good for him? Jail was

moins dans une certaine mesure. C'est dire la raison pour laquelle autant de soldats restent dans l'armée ou autant de prisonniers reviennent en prison. Ils ne peuvent pas demeurer dans la société civilisée. Ils s'ennuient et se sentent paradoxalement enfermés.

—Mais il n'y aucune espèce de projets, monsieur.

—Quels projets ?

—N'importe lequel. N'est-ce pas ce qu'a été l'Australie ? Une sorte de colonie pour détenus ? On aurait pu en faire sur la lune. Tout ce que moi je voulais faire c'était de quitter cette foutue planète et aller sur une autre, mais il n'y a pas moyen. Et Don également. Il ne pouvait pas rester dans une société en règle après ce qui lui était arrivé.

—Je ne comprends pas. Après sa mort ?

—Non, avant. J'ai toujours su ce qui allait se passer. Je savais que quelque chose allait se produire, sans savoir quoi au juste. C'était l'instant où je commençais à avoir toute cette idée. Nous faisons les fous ici dans cette base. Nous roulions à motos à travers ces bâtiments et des années après nous traînions ici, nous nous mettions à boire, et quand Don déconnaît quelque peu et faisait de la désintoxication, je me disais, si seulement je pouvais l'enchaîner quelque temps dans un de ces bâtiments pour le sécuriser, le désintoxiquer, peut-être qu'il allait pouvoir s'en sortir.

—Ok. Je comprends. Oui, je comprends.

—Mais il était là, dans ce monde, faisant tout ce qu'il ne fallait pas, n'écoutant jamais mes conseils. Moi, j'ai toujours su ce qu'il devait faire. J'étais prêt à le guider pas-à-pas, même lui écrire ce foutu truc, lui tracer le plan ! Un plan biennal ou quinquennal. Mais il n'allait pas le suivre de toute façon et je ne pouvais pas l'y obliger non plus. Je ne pouvais pas le maintenir en désintoxication. Je ne pouvais pas l'enfermer. Vous savez, une fois je l'avais laissé en taule pendant un mois au lieu de le sortir d'affaire, car je

the safest place.

—Sometimes it truly is.

—I know he'd still be alive if I'd thought of this earlier, if I'd have brought him here and just locked him in one of these buildings until he had his shit straight.

—I understand that, too. This is familiar ground for me.

—I'm just pissed at myself I didn't think of it sooner.

—Of chaining your buddy to a pole.

—Right.

—But you know that's not a durable solution.

—Then what is?

—I don't know. Rehab? Therapy?

—C'mon. Get serious.

—

—Really, why don't we have some kind of plan for people like this? I guess the main government plan is to lock them all up, and I understand the impulse to keep apart from decent society. I get that. But then there are guys like me and Don, who haven't really done anything wrong, and there are soldiers like the ones you fought with, who come back with these terrible ideas and murdering skills, and there's no place for any of us. We've been out in the wilderness and tasted raw meat, and now we can't sit at the table using utensils. There's got to be someplace for us. A place like this would actually work. This place is 28,000 acres, bordering the ocean. The ground's fertile enough. I mean, you set this land aside for people like us, and I bet you'd reduce crime in this country by half.

pensais que c'était la bonne solution ? Je pensais que la prison était le meilleur endroit pour lui.

—Des fois c'est vraiment le cas.

—Si j'y avais pensé plus tôt, si je l'avais emmené et enfermé ici dans un de ces bâtiments jusqu'à ce qu'il ne déconne plus, il aurait été toujours en vie, je le sais.

—Je le comprends aussi. C'est un terrain qui m'est familier.

—Je me fous en pétard contre moi-même que de ne pas y avoir pensé plus tôt.

—D'avoir enchaîné ton copain à un pylône ?

—C'est ça.

—Mais tu sais que ça ne pouvait pas être une solution durable.

—Qu'est-ce qui pouvait l'être alors ?

—Je ne sais pas. La désintox ? Les soins ?

—Allons. Soyez sérieux.

—

—Vraiment, pourquoi n'avons-nous rien prévu pour des cas comme cela ? Je sais bien que le principal dessein du gouvernement est de les enfermer tous, et je comprends bien cette volonté de les tenir à l'écart de la bonne société. Je comprends bien cela. Mais alors, il y a des gars comme moi et Don, qui n'avons rien fait de mal, et il y a des soldats comme ceux avec qui vous avez combattu, qui reviennent avec ces idées atroces, ces techniques meurtrières, et pour nous il n'y a aucune place. Nous avons vécu dans le désert et nous avons goûté à la chair crue et maintenant nous ne savons pas nous tenir à table, fourchette à la main. Il y a sûrement un lieu pour nous quelque part. Un lieu comme celui-ci nous conviendrait bien. 28,000 hectares qui bordent l'océan. C'est un terrain assez propice. C'est-à-dire que si vous consacrez cet endroit aux gens comme nous, je parie que le nombre de crimes dans ce pays se réduirait de moitié.

—Where are we, did you say?

—I can't tell you that.

—Thomas, what difference does it make?

—Okay. We're at Fort Ord.

—Fort Ord? Like near Monterey?

—You should have deduced that, anyway, sir. There's only one base this big on the coast of California.

—Shit. This is where I did my basic training. You know this is a public place? There'll be hikers through here at first light.

—See, that's so sad.

—What is?

—That you don't know this park is closed. The whole place is locked for the foreseeable future. Budget cuts. The gate at the highway is closed. I just snapped the lock with bolt cutters and put a new one on.

—And the budget cuts are my fault, too.

—No one had a plan for anything. I guess that's the crushing thing, the thing that drives us all crazy. We all think there must be someone very smart at the controls, spending the money, making plans for our schools, parks, everything. But then it's guys like you, who are just guys like me. No one has a fucking clue.

—So we're out here alone?

—I haven't seen a soul here in days.

—It's a beautiful spot.

—You probably didn't see the ice plants out there, but they're everywhere, a dozen colors. They look like some stupid rainbow puked everywhere. And the light is so white

—Où sommes-nous, as-tu dit ?

—Ca, je ne peux pas vous le dire.

—Thomas, qu'est-ce que ça change ?

—D'accord. Nous sommes à Fort Ord.

—Ford Ord ? Comme près de Monterey ?

—Vous devriez le savoir de toute façon, monsieur. Il n'existe qu'une base de cette superficie sur la côte californienne.

—Merde. C'est là que j'ai effectué ma formation de base. Tu sais que cet endroit est public ?

Il y aura des randonneurs dès la première lueur du jour.

—Voyez, qu'est-ce que c'est navrant !

—Qu'est-ce qui est navrant ?

—Le fait que vous ne sachiez pas que le terrain est clôturé. Tout l'endroit est verrouillé en prévision de l'avenir. Les coupures budgétaires. Le portail du côté de l'autoroute est fermé. J'ai fait sauter les verrous avec un coupe-boulons que j'ai remplacé ensuite.

—Et les coupures budgétaires relèvent de ma faute également.

—Personne n'a pensé à quoi que ce soit. C'est ce qu'il y a de plus accablant à mon avis, c'est ce qui nous rend tous dingues. Nous pensons tous de manière sûre qu'il y a un malin aux commandes, contrôlant les dépenses, élaborant des projets pour nos écoles, nos jardins publics et tout. Mais, en fin de compte, ce sont des gars comme vous, qui ne sont que des gars comme moi. Nul n'a une quelconque idée de merde.

—Nous sommes donc tous seuls ici ?

—Ca fait des jours que je n'ai vus d'âme qui vive ici.

—C'est un joli coin.

—Vous n'avez probablement pas vu les plantes de glace ici, mais il y en a partout et en une douzaine de couleurs. Elles ont l'air d'un arc-en-ciel ridicule déglobillé un peu

here, so weightless and white. Part of me wants to stay here.

—But the longer you keep us here, son, the more likely you'll die here.

—You mean they'll kill me here?

—Son, you must know that's a distinct possibility.

—I know.

—An ever-growing possibility.

—Yeah, I know.

—The longer you keep us here, the more it becomes a near certainty. They will find you, for sure. That is for damned sure. Then they'll do a raid. And because no one will be watching out here, in the middle of nowhere, hell, some sniper might just shoot your head off for fun.

—I know, I know.

—Matter of fact, I *know* that is how it'll go down. I really don't think you'll be taken in alive.

—Yeah, I guess. But things are really clarifying for me out here. I feel like this is really helping me. I'm sorry for the circumstances but I have to say that this has been really helpful so far.

—I don't know what to say to that.

—At first it was just supposed to be Kev, but now having the two of you out here is really making a difference.

—Who's Kev again?

—The astronaut. I thought I just needed to talk to him. But then it came to a point where I had questions for you, and your answers have been really illuminating.

partout. Et la lumière ici est si blanche, si légère, si claire. Une partie de mon âme voudrait bien y demeurer.

—Mais plus tu nous retiens ici, mon garçon, plus vraisemblable est-il que tu vas y laisser ta peau.

—Vous voulez dire qu'ils me tueront là.

—Fiston, tu dois savoir que c'est une probabilité réelle.

—Je le sais.

—Une probabilité plus que grandissante.

—Ouais, je le sais.

—Plus tu nous retiens ici, plus cela devient une certitude. Ils te trouveront, c'est sûr. C'est sûr à crever. Ils effectueront un raid et en l'absence de badauds, au milieu de nulle part, bordel, ils pourraient, avec un sniper, t'exploser le crâne par pur plaisir.

—Je le sais, je le sais.

—A vrai dire, je sais moi comment ils s'y prendront. Et ils ne te prendront sûrement pas vivant.

—Ouais, je le pense bien. Mais les choses sont en train de s'éclaircir pour moi loin ici. Je pense que tout ceci est à mon avantage. Je suis désolé des circonstances mais je dois dire que jusque là tout m'a été vraiment utile.

—Je ne sais plus quoi te dire.

—Au départ ça ne devait être que Kev, mais la présence de vous deux fait bien la différence.

—C'est qui encore, Kev ?

—L'astronaute. Je pensais ne m'entretenir qu'avec lui mais à un moment donné il a fallu aussi que je vous interroge et les réponses que vous m'avez fournies sont très éclairantes.

—Okay.

—And I don't mean to be rude, but now I have to go for a while. As we've been talking I've been thinking of someone else who should be here. I think I should get him while there's time.

—Son, please don't bring anyone else to this place.

—Just this one guy. I think you'd understand if you knew who he was.

—No, I wouldn't. There's no cause for bringing anyone else here. Please, just let us go, turn yourself in, and I can tell the police you were a decent enough young man. I promise to advocate for the best outcome here. I think you need help.

—I know I do. It's just a matter of what kind of help. I'll be back in a bit. Here's your pills. You need water for the pills?

—Yes.

—Okay, I'll just put it here. And here's some granola bars. You're probably hungry. I'll be back in a little bit.

—Son.

—I got to go. But again, I just want to say how sorry I am that you're here under these circumstances. My respect for you could not be greater and I'm really thankful for your kindness so far.

—Son.

—See you soon.

—Ok.

—Et je ne voudrais pas être brutal, mais je dois maintenant vous laisser un moment. Au fil de notre conversation, la présence ici de quelqu'un d'autre m'est venue à l'esprit. Je pense que je vais le chercher pendant qu'il est encore temps.

—Fiston, je t'en prie, n'emmène personne d'autre ici.

—Rien que ce gars-là. Je pense que vous comprendrez dès que vous saurez de qui il s'agit.

—Non, certainement pas. Il n'y a pas de quoi amener d'autres gens ici. Je t'en prie, libère-nous, rends-toi, et je dirai à la police que t'es un jeune homme tout à fait correct. Je te promets de témoigner pour la meilleure des issues. Je pense que t'as besoin d'aide.

—Je le sais. Mais tout dépend de quel genre d'aide. Je serai de retour dans peu de temps. Voici vos cachets. Vous avez besoin d'eau avec ?

—Oui.

—D'accord, voilà. Et aussi quelques barres de muesli. Vous devez avoir faim. Je serai de retour dans peu de temps.

—Mon garçon.

—Il faut que je parte. Mais encore une fois, je suis désolé que vous soyez ici en de telles circonstances. J'ai un très grand respect pour vous et je vous remercie vraiment pour votre gentillesse jusqu'ici.

—Mon garçon.

—A bientôt.

BUILDING 54

—Do you know why you're here?

—No. Where am I?

—I'm not telling you that.

—How did you get me here?

—It wasn't hard. I waited for you to bring out the recycling.

—Oh my god.

—You're locked to that post, and you'll stay there until we're done.

—Don't hurt me.

—I have no plans to do that. This is a deposition.

—A deposition.

—I think you know what it's about.

—I don't. Who are you?

—Maybe you could guess.

—You want me to guess?

—I want you to guess why you're here. There's no way the astronaut or the congressman knew why they were brought here, but you really might have an idea. I actually think you already know.

—I don't.

—You do, though.

—Sir, I don't know what you want.

—Sir? Wow, I like that. I like you calling me *Sir*. Thank you. That actually helps me see you in a more favorable light. Now do you remember me?

—No, I don't. My head hurts so much. And I can't see that far.

BATIMENT 54

—Savez-vous pourquoi vous êtes ici?

—Non, où suis-je ?

—Je ne vous le dirai pas.

—Comment m'avez-vous emmené ici ?

—Ca n'a pas été difficile. J'ai attendu que vous sortiez le recyclage.

—Oh, mon Dieu.

—Vous êtes verrouillé à ce pylône et vous y resterez jusqu'à ce qu'on aura terminé.

—Ne me faites pas de mal.

—Je n'en ai pas l'intention. Ce ne sera qu'un témoignage.

—Un témoignage.

—Je pense que vous savez de quoi il s'agit.

—Mais non. Qui êtes-vous ?

—Vous pourriez deviner.

—Vous voulez que je devine ?

—Je veux que vous deviniez pourquoi vous êtes ici. L'astronaute et le député ne pouvaient pas savoir, eux, pourquoi ils ont été emmenés ici, mais vous, vous pourriez vraiment avoir une idée. A vrai dire, je pense que vous êtes déjà au parfum.

—Mais non.

—Vous l'êtes malgré tout.

—Monsieur, je ne sais pas ce que vous cherchez.

—Monsieur ? Purée, j'aime bien ça. J'aime quand vous m'appellez *Monsieur*. Merci. A vrai dire, cela m'aide à vous voir sous un angle meilleur. Alors, vous vous souvenez de moi ?

—Non. J'ai terriblement mal à la tête. Je ne parviens à voir aussi loin.

—Are these yours? I found them in my bag and I didn't know whose they were. You didn't wear glasses when I knew you.

—You were a student?

—Yes. I was a student in your class. Sixth grade. Ah, I just saw something in your eyes. Some flash of fear. Now do you know why I'm here and you're here?

—No. I don't.

—Okay, now you're defiant again. I heard that about you. I heard you were good. You passed lie detector tests and everything. And the thing is, you really might be innocent. No one knows for sure. That's why you're here.

—

—Now you're not talking. Does it feel weird to be chained to a post?

—

—You really should answer. I haven't had to use the taser yet, but I would use it on you. You're the first one I would not mind using it on.

—Sir, what are your plans for me?

—Again, I love the *Sir*. I really do. But I have to say, that penitent tone makes you seem more guilty. You should consider that.

—Please, will you tell me what your plans are for me?

—My plans are to ask you questions and for you to answer them.

—Okay. And then what?

—And then I let you go.

—You'll let me go?

—Tout ceci est à vous ? Je les ai trouvés dans mon sac et je ne savais pas à qui ils appartenaient. Vous ne portiez pas de lunettes quand je vous ai connu.

—Vous étiez étudiant ?

—Oui. J'étais votre élève. En sixième année. Ah ! Je viens d'apercevoir quelque chose dans vos yeux. Comme un mouvement de peur. A présent, vous savez pourquoi nous sommes là, vous et moi ?

—Non.

—Ok, vous continuez à me défier. J'ai appris que vous êtes comme ça et que vous étiez pas mal en la matière. Vous avez réussi aux tests de détecteur de mensonges et tout. Et ce qu'il y a c'est que vous pourriez bien être innocent. Personne ne sait au juste. Voilà pourquoi vous êtes là.

—

—Vous ne dites rien. Ca fait bizarre que d'être enchaîné à un poteau ?

—

—Vous devriez vraiment me répondre. Je n'ai pas encore eu besoin d'utiliser le taseur, mais je l'utiliserais sur vous. Vous serez le premier sur qui je l'utiliserais sans gêne aucune.

—Que voulez-vous faire de moi, monsieur ?

—Encore une fois, j'adore le *Monsieur*. Vraiment. Mais je dois dire que ce ton de pénitent vous donne l'air encore plus coupable. A méditer.

—Pouvez-vous me dire ce que vous avez envie de faire de moi, s'il vous plaît ?

—J'ai envie de vous poser quelques questions auxquelles vous devez répondre.

—D'accord, et après ?

—Et après, je vous laisse partir.

—Vous me laisserez partir ?

—You and the astronaut and everyone else will be let go. I have a real astronaut three buildings over. He's an honorable man. And I have a former congressman. He gave me the idea to find you, indirectly at least. He's an honorable man, too. You, though, I don't know. Well, I do know. You're not an honorable man. I know that much. At the very best, you're just sad and twisted. Maybe just lonely. But I think you're more than that. I think you're a monster. Now do you know why you're here?

—I think you should just explain it. I don't want to guess.

—You don't want to guess. Okay. Now you just painted yourself into a corner. That means you did other terrible things. You did so many terrible things that you don't know which of them this is about. That's what you just revealed to me. You said that you don't remember *what* you did to me. That it could be any number of crimes.

—I didn't say that.

—You didn't need to.

—Please. Let's stay specific here. I don't remember you, but I trust now that you were a student at Miwok Middle School. Were you one of the students who filed a complaint against me?

—Ah, now suddenly you're all business. Good. You acknowledge that complaints were lodged against you.

—There were seven complaints. Nothing was proven.

—But you left teaching.

—Yes. It was impossible to stay under those circumstances.

—Circumstances you created.

—Vous, l’astronaute, tout le monde sera libéré. Je tiens un véritable astronaute trois bâtiments plus loin. C’est un homme d’honneur. Et j’ai un ancien député. C’est lui qui m’a donné l’idée, indirectement du moins, d’aller vous trouver. Lui aussi est un homme d’honneur. Quant à vous, je ne sais pas. Ou alors, je sais. Vous n’êtes pas un homme d’honneur. Ca, je le sais. Au mieux, vous n’êtes qu’un malheureux tordu. Peut-être un peu esseulé. Mais je crois que vous êtes plus que ça. Je pense que vous êtes un monstre. Et maintenant, vous savez pourquoi vous êtes là ?

—Vous devriez simplement me l’expliquer. Je ne veux pas deviner.

—Vous ne voulez pas deviner. Ok. Eh bien, vous venez de vous mettre dans une impasse. Ce qui veut dire que vous avez fait d’autres choses effroyables. Vous avez fait tellement de choses effroyables que vous ne savez même pas de quoi il s’agit ici. C’est ce que vous venez de me révéler. Vous avez dit ne pas vous souvenir de ce que vous m’avez fait à moi. C’est révélateur des crimes innombrables que vous avez peut-être commis.

—Je n’ai pas dit ça.

—Nul besoin de le dire.

—S’il vous plaît. Précisons bien les choses. Je ne me souviens pas de vous mais je crois savoir maintenant que vous étiez élève au Miwok Middle School. Est-ce que vous étiez parmi les étudiants qui avaient porté plainte contre moi ?

—Ah !!! Là vous devenez génial tout d’un coup. Super. Vous admettez qu’il y a eu des plaintes déposées contre vous.

—Il y a eu sept plaintes. Nulle n’était justifiée.

—Mais vous avez quitté l’enseignement.

—Oui, il m’était impossible de rester en de telles circonstances.

—Des circonstances que vous avez créées.

—There was no trial and there was no hearing.

—God, it's like you have it *rehearsed*. I guess you have to. If you talk to a cousin or nephew and they ask you why you left teaching, you have to recite this stuff about “allegedly” and “no hearing” and all that. What did you tell your parents?

—My father is dead. But my mother knows the truth.

—“My mother knows the truth”! Wow. That is a revealing comment. What is the truth, Mr. Hansen?

—The truth about what?

—Yes! You are brilliant! You know how to turn it back to me, to make sure you don't say anything too broad. You don't want to say, for example, that you didn't mean to touch that one kid in the bathroom, because maybe I don't *know* about that one kid in the bathroom. This is fun, Mr. Hansen! You're more fun than the others. I have to draw this out. I have to make sure I don't rush it. Okay, let's see. Do you remember the late eighties, Mr. Hansen?

—I remember the late eighties.

—Watch the attitude, Mr. Hansen. You're tied to a post. You're ten miles from the nearest highway. I could bludgeon you and you'd never be found. You know this?

—Yes.

—And you're really the first one in this whole process I would actually hurt. I'm guessing you can tell I don't have much to lose, right?

—Yes, I can sense that.

—Il n'y a eu ni procès ni comparution.

—Seigneur. Comme si vous aviez tout appris *par cœur*. Je pense qu'il le faut bien de toute façon. Si vous vous trouviez en face d'un cousin ou d'un neveu et qu'ils vous demandaient pourquoi vous avez quitté l'enseignement, il vous incomberait de réciter ces trucs d'« allégations » et de « non comparutions », et tout. Qu'avez-vous dit à vos parents ?

—Mon père est décédé. Mais ma mère connaît la vérité.

—« Ma mère connaît la vérité ! » Sensass ! Appréciation révélatrice ! C'est quoi la vérité, Monsieur Hansen ?

—La vérité au sujet de quoi ?

—Eh oui ! Vous êtes remarquable ! Vous savez comment tout rétorquer sur moi pour ne pas trop en dire. Vous ne voulez pas admettre, par exemple, que vous ne cherchiez pas d'attouchement sur ce gamin dans les toilettes, car je ne suis sans doute pas *au courant* de cette histoire. C'est une plaisanterie, M. Hansen ! Vous êtes plus marrant que les autres. Vous allez m'obliger à vous faire un dessin. Je ne dois rien précipiter. D'accord, on va voir. Vous vous rappeler la fin des années quatre-vingt, M. Hansen ?

—Oui, je me souviens de la fin des années quatre-vingt.

—Faites attention à vous, M. Hansen. Vous êtes attaché à un pylône. Vous êtes à une quinzaine de kilomètres de l'autoroute la plus proche. Je pourrais vous matraquer et personne ne vous retrouvera. Vous savez ça ?

—Oui.

—Et vous serez vraiment le premier dans tout le processus à qui j'administrerais une raclée. Je suppose que vous vous rendez bien compte que je n'ai pas beaucoup à perdre, n'est-ce pas ?

—Oui. Je le ressens bien.

—“I can sense that.” That is great. Yes. I’m risking a lot here. Having you and the astronaut and everyone out here. But Jesus, so far, it’s been so worth it. I’ve learned so much. It’s like all the pieces are coming together. The one thing I’m kicking myself about is that I didn’t do this sooner. You should have been brought here sooner. Twenty years ago. You don’t belong with people just like I don’t belong with people.

—I trust you have someone you’re seeing? A professional?

—Don’t talk to me that way. You know I’m making sense. I’ve done an unusual thing here, but I’m not irrational. You know that. Your undergraduate degree was in psychology. But I guess that never means anything.

—No. Not in my case.

—Isn’t that funny, the undergrads who major in psychology? It’s like half of every college, these psych majors. They have no idea why they’re studying psychology. It’s like majoring in faces, or people. “I’m majoring in multiple-choice questions about people.”

—Right.

—See, still with the attitude. You have a smarmy way about you, you know that?

—

—Were you always that way? I can’t remember.

—I don’t know.

—You should be making yourself more appealing, not less, don’t you think?

—I suppose so.

—But even your phrasing is smarmy. “I suppose so.” Who talks like that?

—« Je le ressens bien. » Génial. Oui. Je suis en train de risquer gros là. Vous retenir, vous, l'astronaute et tout le monde ici. Mais Seigneur Jésus, tout ça a bien valu la peine jusqu'à présent. Je n'ai jamais autant appris. C'est comme si toutes les pièces sont en train de se mettre en place. La seule chose contre laquelle je me retourne c'est de ne pas m'y être pris plus tôt. J'aurais dû vous emmener ici bien avant. Vingt ans avant. Vous, tout comme moi, n'avons pas de place parmi les gens.

—J'ai l'impression que vous agissez sous l'influence de quelqu'un. Un professionnel ?

—Je vous interdis de me parler de la sorte. Vous savez que je suis logique. J'ai fait quelque chose d'inhabituel là, mais je ne suis pas irrationnel. Vous le savez. Vous avez eu votre premier diplôme en psychologie. Mais je suppose que cela ne veut absolument rien dire.

—Non, pas dans mon cas.

—C'est marrant, n'est-ce pas, les étudiants qui se spécialisent en psychologie ? La moitié des étudiants à la fac se spécialisent en psychologie, sans savoir pourquoi. C'est comme si on se spécialisait dans les visages ou les personnes. « Je me spécialise dans les questions à choix multiples sur les gens. »

—D'accord.

—Voyez, toujours cette attitude. Vous avez un comportement obséquieux, vous savez ?

—

—Vous avez toujours été comme ça ? Je ne m'en souviens plus.

—Je ne sais pas.

—Vous devriez vous montrer plus pathétique, et non l'inverse, ne pensez-vous pas ?

—Je pense que oui.

—Même votre façon de parler est obséquieuse. « Je pense que oui ». Qui parle comme vous le faites ?

—I can't help the way I talk.

—Of course you can. Now stop being so smarmy.

—I will try.

—Now that: "I will try." You really should just say "I'll try." Use contractions. Contractions will make you sound more like a regular human being.

—Okay.

—Are you one of those assholes who says *either* with the long *i*?

—No.

—That wasn't convincing. I bet you are. You know who says *either* with the long *i*?

Assholes.

—Sir, I want to do whatever I can to help you. Why did you bring me here?

—But how can I be surprised that you're an asshole. I brought you here *because* you're an asshole.

—So you were one of the complainants?

—No.

—But you were in my class?

—Yes. Remember me?

—I might if you give me your name.

—No, asshole. But I remember you being the fun teacher. Was that your goal, to seem like the cool one, the fun one?

—I don't know.

—You dressed like us. Or tried to dress young at least. I remember you wearing Jordache jeans. Do you remember wearing Jordache jeans?

—Je ne peux m’empêcher de parler comme je le fais.

—Bien sûr que vous le pouvez. Arrêtez, je vous prie, d’être aussi obséquieux.

—Je vais essayer.

—Et encore : « Je vais essayer. » Il faut tout simplement dire « J’essaierai. » Utilisez les contractions. Les contractions vous donneront plus l’air d’un être humain normal.

—Ok.

—Etes-vous de ces enfoirés qui épèlent *mec* avec un *q* ?

—Non.

—Je n’en suis pas convaincu. Je parie que oui. Savez-vous qui sont ceux qui épèlent *mec* avec un *q* ? Les enculés.

—Monsieur, je voudrais bien faire tout ce qui est en mon pouvoir pour vous aider. Pourquoi m’avez-vous emmené ici ?

—Mais comment puis-je être surpris que vous soyez un enculé ? Je vous ai emmené ici *parce que* vous êtes un enculé.

—Donc vous étiez un des plaignants ?

—Non.

—Mais vous étiez parmi mes élèves ?

—Oui. Vous vous souvenez de moi ?

—Je pourrais m’en souvenir si vous me dites votre nom.

—Non, enculé. Mais je me souviens de vous comme étant le prof rigolo. C’était ça votre but, avoir l’air décontracté, rigolo ?

—Je ne sais pas.

—Vous portiez des vêtements comme nous. Ou vous essayiez, du moins, de vous habiller comme les jeunes. Je me souviens que vous portiez des jeans Jordache. Vous vous souvenez avoir porté des jeans Jordache ?

—I don't know.

—You wear Jordache jeans and don't remember? That's not something you forget. That's a full commitment. They were made for women, so when a man wore them, it was all-out.

There was no half-way to those pants. That's a major life decision you wouldn't forget. Now tell me if you wore Jordache jeans.

—I believe I did.

—See, where does a worm like you come from? First you wear Jordache jeans. Then you deny it. Then, when you admit it, you say, "I believe I did."

—Sir, what does this have to do with anything.

—It has everything to do with everything. You were trying to insinuate yourself. You were trying to garner our trust. You were trying to seem like us, our age, harmless, cool.

—I don't know about that.

—Then you could get the babysitting jobs.

—

—Right?

—

—Do you remember babysitting for Don Banh?

—Yes.

—Good. That was good. A straight answer. You did overnights.

—Yes.

—Je ne sais pas.

—Vous portiez des jeans Jordache et vous ne vous en souvenez pas ? C'est pas quelque chose qu'on oublie ça. Si on le fait c'est en toute connaissance de cause. C'était des vêtements pour femmes et quand un homme en portait, c'était le comble. Il n'y a pas d'à peu près avec ces pantalons. C'est une décision tellement majeure dans sa vie qu'on n'oublierait pas. Dites-moi si vous portiez ces jeans Jordache.

—Je crois que oui.

—Voyez-vous ça ! Où a-t-on vu un gars aussi minable que vous ? D'abord vous portez des jeans Jordache. Ensuite vous reniez la chose. Puis quand vous l'admettez, vous dites, « Je crois que oui ».

—Monsieur, qu'est-ce que cela a à voir avec tout ceci ?

—Cela a tout à voir. Vous essayiez de vous infiltrer parmi nous. Vous essayiez de tromper notre confiance. Vous essayiez de nous ressembler, d'avoir notre âge, d'avoir l'air innocent, d'être décontracté.

—Mais je n'en sais rien moi.

—Pour pouvoir ensuite faire du babysitting.

—

—Exacte ?

—

—Vous vous souvenez avoir fait du baby-sitting avec Don Banh ?

—Oui.

—Bien. C'est très bien. Réponse directe. Vous restiez la nuit.

—Oui.

—When their parents were gone for a week or whatever, you would stay with the kids, feed everyone, tuck everyone in at night, sleep over. You remember?

—Yes.

—What were the Banh kids' names?

—Don, John, Christina, Angelica.

—So you remember them.

—Of course I do.

—Funny how selective your memory is.

—

—Do you remember me coming over while you babysat?

—No.

—You liked to wrestle. I remember coming over one night and walking into the basement and you were there wrestling with Don and John. You were all sweating.

—

—So why the wrestling, Mr. Hansen?

—Were we clothed?

—What?

—Were we clothed?

—Yes. You were. So what?

—I just want to stick to what happened and what you saw. If we're going to do this, I want to stick with facts, and not conjecture and insinuation.

—I can't believe this. You're on the offensive.

—I'm trying to keep us factual.

—Quand les parents étaient absents pour la semaine ou plus, vous restiez avec les enfants, vous les nourrissiez, les mettiez au lit pour la nuit, et vous couchiez. Vous vous rappelez ?

—Oui.

—Comment s'appelaient les gamins de chez Banh ?

—Don, John, Christina, Angelica.

—Donc vous ne les avez pas oubliés.

—Bien sûr que non.

—Curieux. Comme votre mémoire est sélective !

—

—Vous vous rappelez quand j'arrivais pendant que vous gardiez les enfants ?

—Non.

—Vous aimiez bien la lutte. Je me souviens arriver un soir. J'étais descendu à la cave et vous y étiez, en train de jouer au catch avec Don et John. Vous étiez tout en sueur.

—

—Pourquoi jouer au catch, M. Hansen ?

—Etions-nous tout habillés ?

—Hein ?

—Etions-nous tout habillés ?

—Oui. Et alors ?

—J'aimerais juste qu'on se focalise sur ce qui s'est passé et sur ce que vous avez vu. Si on va parler de ça, j'aimerais qu'on se focalise sur des faits, et non faire des conjectures ou des insinuations.

—Mais c'est pas vrai. Vous passez à l'offensive.

—J'essaie de me baser sur des faits.

—Good. Good, motherfucker. I want to be factual, too. Good.

—So let me ask you a question.

—You're going to ask *me* a question?

—May I?

—May you? Mother may you? Fuck yeah, go ahead.

—Did your father ever wrestle with you?

—You weren't their father.

—But did your father wrestle with you?

—Yes. Probably. I didn't see him much after I was six.

—And where was the Banhs' father?

—I don't know.

—He was gone. I was the primary male presence in their lives.

—So you thought, These poor fatherless boys need a grown-up man to take them into the basement for some sweaty wrestling.

—I did everything a parent would do. When they were in my care, I fed them, got them ready for school, made sure they brushed their teeth. And we played any number of games, including just horsing around.

—You know what? You shouldn't say that. Horsing around implies things you don't want to imply. You sound guilty with words like that.

—Thomas, what is it that you think I did?

—Wait. Now you know my name?

—I've been scanning my mind. And I found you.

—Bien. Bien, enfoiré. Moi aussi je veux me baser sur les faits. Bien !

—Donc laissez-moi vous poser une question.

—Vous allez me poser une question à *moi* ?

—Vous permettez ?

—Si je vous permets ? Sainte-Marie, si je vous permets ? Putain, mais allez-y.

—Est-ce que votre père a déjà joué à la lutte avec vous ?

—Vous n'étiez point leur père.

—Mais est-ce que votre père a joué à la lutte avec vous ?

—Oui, probablement. Je ne l'ai plus beaucoup vu depuis l'âge de six ans.

—Et où était le père des enfants Banh ?

—Je ne sais pas.

—Il était parti. J'étais la seule présence masculine dans leurs vies.

—Et vous vous êtes dit, « Ces pauvres gamins qui n'ont pas de pères ont besoin d'un homme pour les emmener à la cave et y transpirer dans du corps-à-corps ».

—J'ai fait tout ce qu'un parent aurait fait. Quand ils étaient sous ma protection, je les ai nourris, je les ai préparés pour aller à l'école, je les ai fait faire leurs toilettes. Et nous avons aussi joué à toutes sortes de jeu y compris jouer au con.

—Vous savez quoi ? Vous ne devriez jamais dire cela. Jouer au con sous-entend des choses que vous ne voulez pas dire clairement. Vous vous rendez coupable en disant des mots comme ça.

—Thomas, qu'est-ce que vous croyez que j'ai fait ?

—Attendez. Et vous connaissez mon nom, comme ça, tout d'un coup ?

—Je cherchais dans mon esprit, et je vous ai trouvé.

—Oh shit. You are terrifying. The way you said that. “I found you.” Do you know how you sound? I don’t want you using my name.

—That’s fine. But again, what do you think I did?

—The same thing all the complainants said you did.

—Did you ever read the complaints, Thomas?

—I told you not to use my name.

—I’m sorry. Did you read the complaints?

—I read *about* them.

—What do you think they said?

—That you diddled kids. That you’re a molester.

—Do you really think the complainants said that?

—Yes.

—And if the complainants said that, they would just let me walk away? No charges? No prison.

—It was a different time.

—It might have been a different time, but if I’d been accused of molestation, they would not have allowed me to just retire and live in the next town over.

—So why did you quit teaching?

—I had to quit. The insinuations were distracting to everyone.

—So you quit on your own volition? To save everyone from distraction?

—That’s correct.

—No one asked you to quit?

—Et merde. Vous êtes terrifiant, vous ! La façon dont vous le dites : « Je vous ai trouvé ».

Vous savez de quoi vous avez l'air ? Je ne veux pas que vous prononciez mon nom.

—Très bien. Mais encore une fois, que croyez-vous que j'ai fait ?

—Ce que tous les plaignants ont dit de vous.

—Avez-vous au moins lu les plaintes, Thomas ?

—Je vous ai dit de ne pas prononcer mon nom.

—Désolé. Avez-vous lu les plaintes ?

—J'en ai lu quelque chose.

—Que pensez-vous qu'elles disaient ?

—Que vous embobinez les enfants. Que vous êtes un agresseur sexuel.

—Vous pensez vraiment que les plaignants ont dit cela ?

—Oui.

—Et si les plaignants ont dit cela, on m'a tout simplement laissé partir. Aucune charge ?

Aucune condamnation ?

—L'époque était différente.

—Il se peut que l'époque fût différente, mais si on m'avait accusé d'agression sexuelle, on ne m'aurait pas laissé simplement prendre ma retraite et vivre dans la ville juste à côté.

—Alors, pourquoi avez-vous quitté l'enseignement ?

—Il le fallait. Les insinuations mettaient tout le monde mal à l'aise.

—Donc vous avez quitté l'enseignement de votre propre gré ? Pour empêcher que les gens ne fussent mal à l'aise ?

—C'est ça.

—Personne ne vous a demandé de partir ?

—No one did. We all discussed it, though, and I was the first to bring up the possibility of me resigning.

—You brought it up.

—I believe so.

—You “believe so.” Hansen, your mouth keeps making mistakes. Okay though. I want to get back to all that. But let’s walk through this first. Do you remember me coming to your house?

—No.

—God. I feel like hitting you so badly.

—I don’t remember. Did you come to my house?

—I did.

—Okay.

—It’s not okay, Mr. Hansen. What the fuck is a “math party”?

—

—See. Now you’re scared. You fucking sick fuck.

—Stop. Don’t get ahead of yourself.

—Don’t get ahead of myself?

—I’m sorry for my tone. But you said you would stick to facts, and what happened, and what you personally saw.

—Right. It was 1989. I was eleven. I was with Don Banh and Peter Francis. Do you remember inviting us over to your house for a “math party”?

—Yes.

—Yes?

—Yes.

—Personne. Nous en avons tous discuté quand même, et j'ai été le premier à proposer l'éventualité de ma retraite.

—C'est vous qui l'avez proposée.

—Je pense bien.

—Vous « pensez bien ». Hansen, vous n'arrêtez pas de dire des bêtises. Bon admettons. J'aimerais bien y revenir. Mais d'abord nous allons considérer ceci. Vous vous rappelez que j'étais venu chez vous ?

—Non.

—Seigneur. J'ai bien envie de vous cogner une baffe.

—Je ne m'en souviens pas. Vous êtes venu chez moi, vous ?

—Oui, moi.

—Ok.

—Il n'y a pas de ok là, M. Hansen. C'est quoi, merde, une « partie de maths » ?

—

—Vous voyez ? Vous avez la trouille. Vous chiez dans votre froc.

—Arrêtez. Ne vous laissez pas emporter.

—Vous me demandez de ne pas me laisser emporter ?

—Je m'excuse du ton. Mais vous avez dit qu'on allait rester sur les faits et sur ce qui s'est passé, et sur ce que vous avez vu personnellement.

—Bien. C'était en 1989. J'avais onze ans. J'étais en compagnie de Don Banh et Peter Francis. Est-ce que vous vous souvenez nous avoir invités chez vous pour une « partie de maths » ?

—Oui.

—Oui ?

—Oui.

—Well shit. That is fascinating. You said yes! That is amazing. Well, that's the first time you've demonstrated some spine. So you do remember it.

—I remember it. But I don't specifically remember you being at my house.

—Okay, fine. But what the fuck is a math party, Mr. Hansen?

—I fed you kids, and we did math homework.

—Really? That was it?

—That was the primary purpose.

—Well now you're a liar again. That was the primary purpose? That was the primary purpose? Don't fuck with me. You're saying that your great idea was to invite sixth-grade boys over to your house and teach us math? That this couldn't be done after school or in a classroom or anything vaguely appropriate? That it had to be at your house, at night, and we had to sleep over? That this was a great idea? The primary purpose was math?

—Yes. I taught math, and this was a way for some students to catch up on concepts they didn't understand.

—Why did we sleep over, Mr. Hansen?

—I don't know. Probably because you all were having fun.

—How many beds were in that house, Mr. Hansen?

—In the house I lived in then?

—Yes.

—I don't know.

—I'm about to kick you in the head.

—Three.

—Good. Do you remember where we all slept that night?

—No.

—Putain ! Comme c'est passionnant ! Vous dites oui comme ça ! C'est incroyable. C'est la première fois que vous démontrez du courage. Vous vous en souvenez donc.

—Je m'en souviens. Mais je ne me souviens pas particulièrement de vous, chez moi.

—Bon, d'accord. Mais qu'est-ce que c'est, bordel, qu'une partie de maths, M. Hansen ?

—Je vous donnais à manger, vous les gosses et nous faisons des devoirs de maths.

—Vraiment. C'était ça ?

—C'était le but principal.

—Eh bien, vous mentez encore une fois. C'était ça le but principal ? Le but principal ? Me faites pas chier. Vous êtes en train de dire que votre idée géniale c'était d'inviter des gamins en classe de sixième chez vous pour leur enseigner les maths ? Que vous ne pouviez pas le faire après les heures de cours, dans une salle de classe ou dans un lieu plus ou moins approprié ? Qu'il fallait le faire chez vous, le soir, et que nous devions découper ? Que ça c'était une idée géniale ? Que le but principal était les maths ?

—Oui. J'enseignais les maths moi, et c'était une façon pour certains élèves de se rattraper sur des concepts qu'ils n'avaient pas bien compris.

—Pourquoi fallait-il rester la nuit, M. Hansen ?

—Je ne sais pas. Peut-être parce que vous vous amusiez bien.

—Combien y avait-il de lits dans cette maison, M. Hansen ?

—Dans la maison où je vivais ?

—Oui.

—Je ne sais pas.

—Je vais vous balancer mon pied en pleine figure.

—Trois.

—Bien. Vous vous souvenez comment nous avons dormi cette nuit-là ?

—Non.

—Don't make me get up.

—I'm assuming you're upset because you slept in my bed.

—Why the fuck did we sleep in your bed, Mr. Hansen?

—I don't know. I'm guessing we fell asleep watching a movie. That's the real reason why you kids wanted to come over, because I'd let you watch scary movies.

—I didn't like scary movies.

—Well, then I don't know why you came over. Why *did* you come over?

—I came over because my crazy mother heard Don was going, and she thought you'd help me with my math. She thought it was some honor to come to your fucking math party. Did you rape us, you sick fuck?

—No.

—Mr. Hansen, I haven't harmed anyone out here. But you're making a strong case for getting your head kicked in.

—I didn't hurt you. I didn't even undress you, any of you.

—You didn't undress us.

—No. I promise you. I did not.

—Okay. I want to table that for a second. We'll come back to the clothes. First I want to get back to the beds. Don told me he came to four of your math parties. And each time he remembers being carried to your bed and then to another bed where he woke up. Why did you move him around?

—He probably remembers wrong. The kids typically fell asleep in my bed.

—Ne m’obligez pas à me lever.

—Je suppose que vous êtes troublé parce que vous aviez dormi dans mon lit.

—Pourquoi, putain, avons-nous dormi dans votre lit, M. Hansen ?

—Je ne sais pas. Je pense que nous nous sommes endormis pendant que nous regardions un film. C’était la principale raison pour laquelle vous, les gosses, vouliez revenir, parce que je vous laissais voir des films d’angoisse.

—Je n’aimais pas les films d’angoisse, moi.

—Eh bien, je ne sais pas moi pourquoi vous veniez. Pourquoi veniez-vous *au fait* ?

—Je venais parce que ma dingue de mère avait appris que Don y allait, et elle a pensé que vous alliez m’aider avec les maths. Elle a cru en un quelconque honneur que de venir à votre partie de maths de merde. Vous nous avez violés, espèce de sale con ?

—Non.

—M. Hansen, je n’ai blessé personne ici. Vous êtes en train de vous mettre en situation d’être tabassé à coup de pied dans la gueule.

—Je ne vous avais fait aucun mal. Je ne vous avais même pas déshabillé, aucun d’entre vous.

—Vous ne nous aviez pas déshabillés.

—Non. Je le jure. Non.

—Ok. On va reporter la discussion pour l’instant. Nous y reviendrons en ce qui concerne les vêtements. Je voudrais d’abord revenir aux lits. Don m’avait dit qu’il avait été présent à quatre de vos parties de maths. Et il se souvenait avoir été porté dans votre lit à chaque fois et qu’il se retrouvait dans un autre lit à son réveil. Pourquoi le transportiez-vous ainsi ?

—Il se trompait sans doute dans ses souvenirs. Les gamins s’endormaient systématiquement dans mon lit.

—Watching movies.

—Right. And then I'd carry them to the guest room.

—Well that sounds positively innocent.

—I know it doesn't sound innocent.

—How *do* you think it sounds?

—I think it sounds inappropriate.

—Did you know it sounded inappropriate *then*?

—Yes.

—So why did you do it?

—Why did I invite you over for movies?

—Yes.

—I was lonely.

—That's it?

—Thomas, are you planning to harm me?

—No. I don't know. Maybe. I'm vacillating between wanting to harm you and feeling bad for you. Why?

—Thomas, if you give me your word that you won't harm me, I can fill in the details of the night you spent at my house. I understand why you'd want to know what exactly happened. I can do that. But I won't do it if you're going to kill me irregardless.

—That's not a word. You should know that. You're a teacher.

—What's not a word?

—Irregardless. It's just like saying *either* with the long *i*. You think you sound smarter, but you sound stupider. You should just stick to regular words. Don't stretch.

—En regardant des films.

—Exacte. Je les portais par la suite dans la chambre d'amis.

—Eh bien tout ça a l'air bien innocent.

—Je sais bien que ça n'a pas l'air innocent.

—De quoi ça a l'air d'après vous ?

—Je pense que ça a l'air inadapté.

—Vous le ressentiez comme ayant été inadapté à *ce moment-là* ?

—Oui.

—Pourquoi le faisiez-vous alors ?

—Pourquoi je vous invitais pour voir des films ?

—Oui.

—Parce que je me sentais seul.

—C'est ça ?

—Thomas, allez-vous me faire du mal ?

—Non, en fait je ne sais pas. Peut-être. J'hésite entre vouloir vous faire du mal et avoir pitié de vous. Pourquoi ?

—Thomas, si vous me donnez votre parole que vous n'allez pas me faire de mal, je pourrai vous dire en détail tout ce qui s'est passé la nuit où vous étiez chez moi. Je sais pourquoi vous tenez à savoir ce qui s'était passé exactement. Je peux le faire. Mais je ne le ferai pas si vous cherchez à me tuer avec de la non-insouciance.

—C'n'est pas une expression ça. Vous devriez le savoir, vous qui êtes professeur.

—Qu'est-ce qui n'est pas une expression ?

—La non-insouciance. C'est comme si vous écriviez *mec* avec un *q*. Vous pensez avoir l'air plus élégant, mais vous avez l'air plus idiot en fait. Vous devriez vous tenir aux mots simples. N'étirez pas les mots.

—Okay. Sorry.

—Don't be sorry. Just be smarter. You want to know whether I'll guarantee your safety. Well, let's see. I have to say . . . no. I can't guarantee anything. I don't owe you that.

—Thomas, I didn't harm you. I didn't harm Don.

—I don't believe you. And don't say my name.

—Okay. Then why did you bring me here?

—What do you mean?

—You went to a lot of trouble to get me here. But you're rejecting my offer to fill the gaps in your memory. I want you to have peace with this. You're not the first former student to come to me wanting to know about those nights.

—And what did you tell them?

—The same thing I'm telling you. That what I did was inappropriate but that nothing terrible happened. You were not raped.

—See, this is what I don't understand. Why risk your job and going to jail and everything else to bring boys to your house if you weren't going to rape us?

—I told you. I was lonely. And it wasn't just boys.

—You brought girls, too?

—Thomas, I need your assurance you won't harm me, and that you'll let me go. I have people in my life who count on me and who need me. My mother lives with me. She's ninety-one. I feed her. I'm guessing it's afternoon now, so she'll already be wondering where I am.

—D'accord. Mes excuses.

—Ne vous excusez pas. Soyez plus élégant tout simplement. Vous voulez avoir des garanties sur votre sécurité. Eh bien, voyons. Je dois dire . . . non. Je ne vous garantie rien du tout. Je ne vous dois rien à ce sujet.

—Thomas, je ne vous ai fait aucun mal. Je n'ai fait aucun mal à Don.

—Je ne vous crois pas. Et ne prononcez pas mon nom.

—Ok. Alors, pourquoi m'avoir emmené ici ?

—Que voulez-vous dire ?

—Vous vous êtes donné beaucoup de mal pour m'emmener ici. En même temps vous rejetez mon offre de vous aider à combler vos trous de mémoire. Je veux vous tranquilliser là-dessus. Vous n'êtes pas le premier de mes anciens élèves à venir vers moi cherchant à obtenir des précisions au sujet de ces nuits.

—Et que leur avez-vous dit ?

—La même chose qu'avec vous. Que ce que j'ai fait était inadapté mais que rien n'était aussi dramatique. Vous n'avez pas été violés.

—Voyez, c'est ce que je ne comprends pas. Pourquoi avoir risqué votre poste, avoir risqué la prison et tout le reste, en entraînant des gamins chez vous si vous n'aviez pas l'intention de les violer ?

—Je vous l'ai dit. Je me sentais seul. Et il n'y avait pas que des garçons.

—Il y avait aussi des filles ?

—Thomas, promettez-moi que vous ne me ferez aucun mal et que vous me libérerez. Il y a des gens dans ma vie qui dépendent de moi et ont besoin de moi. Ma mère vit avec moi. Elle a quatre-vingt onze ans. C'est moi qui lui donne à manger. Je suppose qu'il se fait tard à présent et qu'elle doit être en train de se demander où je suis.

—You know, Mr. Hansen, you just made a tactical mistake. You fucked up, you fucked with the minds of however many kids who were under your care, and now you're making demands of me.

—I didn't mean it to come off like a demand. I was just trying to give you a sense of the other people in my life. You had an experience with me twenty years ago, but much has happened since.

—Okay, I understand you were trying to humanize yourself there. I know. If I know about your ancient mother, it supposedly makes it harder for me to harm or kill you. But in this case that's stupid. I already know you're a human being. And I know that you're a monster. And now I know you have a ninety-one-year-old mother, who we both know has lived a long life, and besides, she raised a twisted man. So I'm not overflowing with sympathy.

—You won't guarantee my safety.

—No. But I will say that if you tell me everything, and if what you tell me seems credible, then I'll be more likely to leave you alone than if you keep telling me about your ninety-one-year-old mother who raised a pederast.

—I'm not a pederast.

—You invited boys to sleep over and you're not a pederast?

—I acted inappropriately, I know this. But there are degrees to everything.

—You're so sick.

—Thomas. You're a smart guy. And given you've chained me to a post, I know you understand moral choices that are a bit off the beaten path. So I hope you'll understand what I mean when I say that there is a good deal of grey in the world. It's not a popular

—Vous savez, M. Hansen, vous venez de commettre une erreur de tactique. Vous avez merdé, vous avez carotté l'esprit à je ne sais combien d'enfants qui étaient sous votre garde, et vous êtes maintenant en train de me faire des supplications.

—Je ne voulais pas que cela ressemble à de la supplication. J'essayais simplement de vous faire comprendre ce que les autres représentent dans ma vie. Vous avez vécu une expérience avec moi il y a vingt ans, mais beaucoup de choses se sont passées depuis.

—Ok, je comprends qu'en racontant tout cela vous essayiez de montrer votre côté humaniste. Je le sais. Maintenant que je sais quelque chose sur votre vieille mère, il va être apparemment plus difficile pour moi de vous blesser ou vous tuer. Mais dans ce cas, tout ceci est stupide. Je sais bien que vous êtes un être humain. Et je sais aussi que vous êtes un monstre. Et à présent je sais que vous avez une mère de quatre-vingt onze

ans. Nous savons tous les deux qu'elle a eu une longue vie, et qu'en plus, elle a élevé un homme tordu. Donc, n'attendez pas de moi que je déverse de la sympathie sur vous.

—Vous ne me garantissez aucune protection.

—Non. Mais je dirai que si vous me dites tout et que si ce que vous dites semble plausible, je pourrais alors vous relâcher à l'inverse du fait que vous me parliez continuellement de votre mère qui a quatre-vingt-onze ans et qui a élevé un pédé.

—Je ne suis pas pédé.

—Vous invitez des jeunes garçons à coucher chez vous et vous n'êtes pas pédé ?

—J'ai agi de manière inadaptée, ça je le sais. Mais il y a des degrés à tout.

—Vous n'êtes qu'un malade.

—Thomas. Vous êtes un gars sympa. Et vu que vous m'avez enchaîné à un poteau, il est clair que vous reconnaissez bien les choix moraux qui sortent un peu des sentiers battus. Mais j'espère que vous comprendrez mon propos quand je dis qu'il y a bon nombre d'idées noires dans ce monde. Ce n'est pas ce que l'on croît de manière

belief, I know, but most of the world is grey. I know that if a man touches a boy's ass once, he can be labeled a pedophile forever, but that's not fair, either. We've lost all nuance.

—We've lost all nuance? We've lost all nuance? You want to talk about nuance now?

What the fuck does this have to do with nuance?

—You've brought me here because you assume that because I invited boys to sleep over, that I raped them. But I did not do that.

—So why bring them to your house? That's the part I don't get.

—Thomas, tell me something. You're a single man?

—Yes.

—Are you straight?

—Yes.

—Have you brought women back to your apartment?

—Yes.

—Did you have sex with each one?

—What? No.

—Then why bring them home?

—That's a stupid analogy.

—Did anyone ever mistake your intentions?

—What do you mean?

—When you got them home, was there ever confusion about your intentions? Did anyone ever think you planned to force your will onto them?

—No.

générale, je le sais, mais le monde est trop morne. Je sais que si un homme touche le cul d'un garçon ne serait-ce qu'une fois, il peut être catalogué comme étant pédophile pour toujours, et ça, c'est pas du tout raisonnable. Nous avons perdu toute notion de nuance.

—Nous avons perdu toute notion de nuance ? Nous avons perdu toute notion de nuance ?

Vous parlez de nuance maintenant ? Qu'est-ce que la nuance a à voir ici, merde ?

—Vous m'avez emmené ici parce que vous insinuez que j'ai violé des garçons après les avoir invités à dormir chez moi. Ce que je n'ai pas fait.

—Mais pourquoi les avoir emmenés chez vous ? C'est ce que je n'arrive pas à comprendre.

—Thomas, dites-moi. Vous êtes célibataire ?

—Oui.

—Etes-vous un gars réglo ?

—Oui.

—Avez-vous pris des femmes chez vous ?

—Oui.

—Avez-vous fait l'amour avec chacune d'elles ?

—Quoi ? Mais non.

—Alors, pourquoi les avoir prises chez vous ?

—C'est stupide comme analogie.

—Est-ce qu'il y eu des gens qui se sont trompés sur vos intentions ?

—Que voulez-vous dire ?

—Quand elles sont entrées chez vous, est-ce qu'il n'y a jamais eu confusion sur vos intentions ? Aurait-on raconté que vous vouliez les obliger à se soumettre à vous ?

—Non.

—I assumed not.

—Fuck you.

—But you could have. That could have been your intention.

—No. It couldn't have been.

—But maybe something goes wrong. Maybe you brought twenty women to your apartment, and let's say each encounter was safe and consensual.

—Yes. They were all.

—But what if the twenty-first encounter wasn't? What if, during that one encounter, you both were drunk and there was confusion about consensuality? And later she accused you of date rape. If you're arrested, or tried, or even just accused, immediately there's doubt about the other encounters, the other twenty, right? Who knows what your intentions were. Maybe you raped them all. Or maybe you tried to. To the outside world, and to all the women who had consensual relations with you, your intentions are suddenly unclear, even in hindsight. Suddenly, to everyone, you're capable of terrible things.

—Not possible.

—But of course it is. An accusation alone puts your entire character in doubt. This is how it works. An accusation is ninety percent of it. Anyone can ruin anyone with an accusation. And people are only too happy to be able to write someone off, to throw them into the pile of the depraved and subhuman. One less person. There are too many people, the world is too crowded. We're suffocating, right? And clearing some of them away lets us breathe. Each person we throw away fills our lungs with new air.

—Je pensais le contraire.

—Allez vous faire foutre.

—Mais vous auriez bien pu. C'était peut-être votre intention.

—Non. Impossible.

—Et si quelque chose n'allait pas. Vous avez peut-être pris vingt femmes chez vous, et disons que chaque rencontre se passait bien, qu'elles étaient toutes consentantes.

—Oui. Elles l'étaient toutes.

—Et si la vingt-et-unième ne l'était pas ? Si durant cette rencontre vous étiez souls tous les deux et qu'il y ait eu confusion à propos de consentement ? Et qu'après, elle vous accusait de viol. Si vous étiez arrêté, ou traduit en justice, ou même simplement accusé, cela aurait immédiatement généré des doutes à propos des autres rencontres, les vingt autres, n'est-ce pas ? Comment savoir quelles étaient vos intentions ? Peut-être que vous les avez violées toutes. Ou du moins essayé. Pour le grand public et envers toutes celles avec qui vous avez eu des relations consentantes, vos intentions ne sont soudain pas claires, même avec du recul. Et là, tout d'un coup, pour tout le monde, vous êtes capable de choses inimaginables.

—C'est pas possible.

—Mais bien sûr, c'est tout à fait possible. Une simple accusation met toute votre personnalité en doute. C'est comme ça que ça marche. Une accusation fonctionne à quatre-vingt dix pour cent. On peut ruiner quelqu'un par une simple accusation. Et les gens ne pourraient être que tout contents de pouvoir mettre une croix sur quelqu'un, le jeter parmi les pervers, les sous-hommes. Un de moins. De gens il y en a trop, le monde en est trop débordé. On étouffe, ok ? Se débarrasser de quelques-uns nous permet de mieux respirer. Chaque débarras d'humain nous remplit les poumons d'air frais.

—You're getting off topic.

—I don't think so. You have to realize that you're a victim of this thinking, too. You heard something about me about me, and you brought me here, fully expecting me to conform to your idea of a throwaway person. But I'm not a throwaway person, am I?

—I don't know yet.

—But we put no value on each other, do we? There are too many people. There are too many people in any given city, any given country. Certainly there are too many people on this planet, so we're so anxious to throw away as many of them as possible. Given any excuse at all, we can erase them.

—

—What if there were only ten of us on Earth? What if there were only ten people you had to choose from who had to help rebuild civilization after some apocalypse?

—Oh Jesus. What's your point?

—My point is that if there were only ten people on Earth, there's no way that you would think I was dispensable. If I had wrestled with Don and had kids over to my house, you would never think those crimes so unforgivable that you'd send me away. I would still be useful. You'd talk to me, you'd work it out. But with so many people, no one is worth so much. We can clear away wide swaths of people like they were weeds. And usually we do it based on suspicion, innuendo, paranoia. Whole classes of people. Including anyone vaguely associated with pedophilia. They don't get fair trials, they're

—Vous changez de sujet de conversation.

—Je ne pense pas. Vous devez vous rendre compte que vous êtes, vous également, une victime de ce genre de pensée. Vous entendez quelque chose à mon sujet et vous me traînez jusqu'ici en espérant me voir me conformer à votre idée d'être un rebut de la société. Mais je ne suis pas un rebut de la société, moi !

—Je n'en suis pas tout à fait sûr.

—Nous n'accordons aucune valeur à qui que ce soit, n'est-ce pas ? Il y a trop de gens. Il y a trop de personnes dans telle ville ou tel pays. Il y a certainement trop de gens sur cette planète, alors nous tenons à les balancer au maximum. Aucune excuse pour qui que ce soit. Il faut les effacer.

—

—Et si nous n'étions que dix personnes sur cette terre ? Et s'il n'y avait que dix personnes parmi lesquelles choisir pour aider à reconstruire la civilisation après un cataclysme quelconque.

—Grand Dieu. Mais où voulez-vous en venir ?

—Je veux faire ressortir que s'il n'y avait que dix personnes sur cette terre, je ne serais pas celui dont on pourrait se passer, diriez-vous. Si j'avais joué des mains avec Don, si j'avais pris des jeunes garçons chez moi, jamais vous ne m'auriez repoussé, même si ces crimes étaient impardonnables. J'aurais toujours été d'une quelconque utilité. Vous m'auriez parlé, vous auriez cherché une solution. Mais avec autant de gens, nul n'est tellement indispensable. On peut se débarrasser de tas de personnes comme des mauvaises herbes. Et nous le faisons généralement suivant des soupçons, des allusions grivoises, la paranoïa. Des catégories entières de personnes. Y compris des gens sommairement associés à la pédophilie. Ceux-là ne reçoivent pas de jugements

sent away, and when they try to come back, they can't even live. They live under bridges, in tents, huddled together.

—I don't know what this has to do with you and boys.

—I'm not a rapist. You're presupposing that anyone I brought into my house I intended to rape. But that wasn't the case. Just as it wasn't the case that you intended to have sex with every woman who ever entered your home. Your argument is circumstantial.

—But why bring the kids to your house? Why not just meet them after school?

—Why don't you meet every woman in, say, a public park?

—Because I might want some privacy?

—Am I, too, allowed privacy?

—Not with kids.

—Is any adult allowed to be alone with any child?

—Yes. Listen. You made whatever point you meant to make. And I don't care. Now you have to tell me about the tailor game.

—The what game?

—See? Your face just tensed up. You didn't think I'd remember. Do you remember the measuring tape?

—Yes. The tailor game was inappropriate.

—Tell me what happened.

—I had a measuring tape and we measured each other's arms and legs and shoulders.

—You don't think that's sick?

—It's inappropriate.

équitables ; ils sont incarcérés et quand ils tentent de revenir, ils ne peuvent même pas survivre. Ils vivent alors sous des ponts, sous des tentes, blottis les uns contre les autres.

—Je ne vois pas ce que cela a à voir avec vous et les garçons.

—Je ne suis pas un violeur. Vous présumez que je voulais violer tous ceux que je prenais chez moi. Mais ce n'était pas le cas. Tout comme ce n'était pas le cas que vous faisiez l'amour avec toutes les femmes qui entraient chez vous. Vous vous basez sur des présomptions.

—Mais pourquoi emmeniez-vous les enfants chez vous ? Pourquoi ne pas simplement les avoir vus juste après les cours ?

—Et vous, pourquoi ne voyez-vous pas les femmes dans un jardin public, par exemple ?

—Par discrétion, sans doute.

—Et moi, n'ai-je pas droit à la discrétion ?

—Pas avec des gosses.

—Ca n'existe pas, un adulte seul avec un enfant ?

—Ecoutez ! Vous avez précisé tout ce que vous avez voulu préciser. Et je m'en contrebalance. Maintenant vous allez me parler du jeu du tailleur.

—Le jeu du quoi ?

—Ben, vous voyez ? Vous palissez grave. Vous pensiez que j'avais oublié. Ca vous dit, le centimètre ?

—Ah ! Le jeu du tailleur aussi était inadapté.

—Dites-moi ce qui se passait.

—Je prenais un centimètre et on se mesurait les bras, les jambes et les épaules.

—Ne trouvez-vous pas ça débile ?

—Inadapté.

—I can't have anyone crouch near me without thinking of you holding that measuring tape against my leg. When people kneel down to tie their shoes anywhere close to me I think of you.

—That couldn't be my fault.

—Of course it's your fault! You think I had a problem with all that before you and your fucking tailor game?

—Okay, I'm sorry.

—That's it. You're sorry?

—I'm sorry, but tell me this: Did I touch you?

—I have no idea. I assume you did.

—But there you go again. Your mind is filling in what didn't happen. You're filling in with what you *assume* were my intentions. But I never touched any of you kids.

—But you wanted us to touch *you*.

—That's not true either.

—You had us measure your inseam, too, you fucker. Why would you have us measure your inseam if you didn't want us to touch your dick?

—Do you remember touching me there?

—No, but I assume we all did. I remember looking up at you and you were looking at the ceiling, like you could barely contain yourself. You were about to jizz.

—Thomas, I admit it was a little thrill when you would measure my inseam, but I didn't actually have any of you touch me. I did not touch you and you didn't touch me. It was all highly inappropriate, yes, no doubt about it. But I was acutely aware of the law, and I

—A chaque fois que quelqu'un est accroupi à côté de moi, je ne peux m'empêcher de penser à vous tenant ce centimètre contre ma jambe. A chaque fois que quelqu'un se penche quelque part non loin de moi pour se lacer les chaussures, je pense à vous.

—Ca ne pouvait pas être de ma faute.

—Bien sûr que c'est de votre faute ! Vous pensez que j'en étais habitué avant vous et votre putain de jeu du tailleur ?

—D'accord, j'en suis désolé.

—C'est ça, vous êtes désolé ?

—Je suis désolé, mais dites-moi, est-ce que je vous avais touché ?

—J'n'en ai aucune idée. Je présume que oui.

—Et voilà que ça reparte. Vous avez l'esprit bourré de choses qui ne se sont pas produites. Vous vous bourrez le crâne de ce que vous *présumez* avoir été mes intentions. Mais je n'ai jamais touché à aucun d'entre vous, les garçons.

—Mais vous vouliez que nous vous touchions, *vous*.

—Là encore, ce n'est pas vrai.

—Vous nous faisiez aussi mesurer votre entrejambe, connard. Pourquoi nous faisiez-vous mesurer votre entrejambe si vous n'aviez pas envie que nous touchions votre bite ?

—Vous vous rappelez m'avoir touché à cet endroit ?

—Non, mais je présume que nous l'avons fait tous. Je me souviens avoir levé les yeux vers vous. Vous fixiez le plafond comme quelqu'un qui pouvait à peine se contrôler. Vous étiez sur le point d'éjaculer.

—Thomas, je reconnais que ça me faisait un petit quelque chose quand vous mesuriez mon entrejambe, mais jamais je ne vous ai fait toucher à quelque partie de mon corps. Ni moi ni vous ne nous sommes touchés les uns les autres. Tout ça c'était hautement inadapté, oui, aucun doute là-dessus. Mais j'étais parfaitement au courant de la

did not break any laws. It wasn't rape. It wasn't assault. I acted inappropriately, and that's why they asked me to resign, which I did. And that was the correct punishment. I didn't belong in a school, and it was decided I should leave, and I did.

—So you went on to do it elsewhere.

—No, I did not. You have to stop making these leaps. I'm not part of some larger narrative. I'm me. I am one person, and my story is absolutely unique. I don't conform to any established modus operandi. I'm not a priest who was shuffled around from church to church or whatever narrative has been established in your mind. I was asked to resign, and I did, and I was relieved.

—You were *relieved* ?

—I was. Being around all of you was too much of a temptation. But once I left, the temptations were removed.

—That is really hard to believe.

—But you must believe it. I'm chained to a post, and I'm telling you the truth.

—But it defies belief. It defies all known pathology. A pederast who just reforms himself? It's not possible.

—Thomas, do you know anything about addiction psychology?

—No.

—Well, this conversation is reminiscent of my time in AA. For a while, probably while dealing with my own proclivities, I was occasionally drinking too much. And my AA friends were convinced I was an alcoholic. They brought me to meetings, and they

législation, et je n'ai enfreint à aucune loi. Ce n'était pas du viol. Je ne me suis pas livré à des violences sexuelles. J'ai agi de manière inadaptée, et c'est la raison pour laquelle on m'a demandé de prendre ma retraite, ce que j'ai fait. C'était la sanction idéale. Je n'étais affecté à aucune école. On a décidé que je devais partir, et je suis parti.

—Et vous êtes parti continuer ailleurs.

—Non. Vous devez arrêter avec vos dérives. Je ne veux pas faire partie des racontars. Moi, c'est moi. Je suis un être humain et mon histoire n'appartient qu'à moi. Je n'ai pas à être en conformité avec un quelconque *modus operandi* bien établi. Je ne suis pas le prêtre qui traîne les pieds d'église en église ou un quelconque récit enfoui dans votre esprit. On m'a demandé de me retirer, je me suis retiré et j'ai été soulagé.

—Vous avez été *soulagé* ?

—Je l'ai été. Circuler parmi vous tous était une tentation trop forte. Mais une fois parti, toutes les tentations avaient disparu.

—Vraiment difficile à croire.

—Mais vous devez me croire. Dans l'état où je suis, enchaîné à un pylône. Je dis la vérité.

—Mais cela va au-delà de toute croyance. Il va au-delà de toute pathologie. Un pédé qui se réforme comme ça? Ce n'est pas possible.

—Thomas, est-ce que vous connaissez quelque chose sur la psychologie de la dépendance ?

—Non.

—Eh bien, cette conversation me rappelle la période où j'étais aux Alcooliques Anonymes. Pendant un temps, probablement la période où je me préoccupais de mes inclinations, je buvais trop par moment. Et mes amis de l'AA étaient convaincus que j'étais alcoolique. Ils m'emmenaient dans des réunions, et insistaient à ce que j'arrête

insisted that I quit drinking for good. But I was not an alcoholic. They couldn't accept that even though I used alcohol to cope sometimes, it didn't mean I was out of control or that alcohol was hampering or altering my path through life.

—I don't know what this has to do with you and your tendencies toward boys.

—The point is that it's similarly polarized. The thinking is similarly flawed, and it makes people crazy. Tell me, do you have any friends who are alcoholics?

—Yes.

—Are they all the same?

—No.

—Do they all go on three-day benders and kill people in drunk-driving car accidents?

—No.

—Do they all lose their jobs and families because they can't quit drinking? Because they're drinking twenty-four hours a day?

—No.

—So are you sure they all have the same disease?

—I don't know.

—If I walked into an AA meeting and suggested that I had a “problem” with alcohol but was not an alcoholic, they would run me out of the building. And yet maybe I do have a small problem. Maybe, twice a year, I have one more drink than I should, and I say something I regret. Maybe, once or twice a year I pass out, alone, at home, after drinking too many Manhattans. Once a year I drive home when I should take a cab. Am I an alcoholic? Many would say yes. Many would say you either are or are not. They

avec l'alcool pour de bon. Mais je n'étais pas un alcoolique. Ils ne voulaient pas admettre que bien que je prenais de l'alcool des fois pour m'en sortir, cela ne voulait nullement dire que j'étais hors de contrôle ou que l'alcool entravait ou changeait mon cours de vie.

—Je ne vois pas ce que cela a à voir avec vous et vos goûts pour les jeunes garçons.

—C'est que ça se polarise de la même manière. L'idée nui de la même manière, et cela rend tout le monde dingue. Dites-moi, avez-vous des amis qui seraient alcooliques ?

—Oui.

—Sont-ils tous pareils ?

—Non.

—Vont-ils tous se bourrer dur et conduire en état d'ivresse pour tuer des gens ?

—Non.

—Est-ce qu'ils perdent tous leurs emplois et leurs familles parce qu'ils ne peuvent pas arrêter de boire ? Parce qu'ils boivent vingt-quatre heures d'affilée ?

—Non.

—Donc êtes-vous certain qu'ils ont tous attrapé la même maladie ?

—Je ne sais pas.

—Si j'arrivais à une réunion des AA et déclarais que j'avais un « problème » avec l'alcool mais que je n'étais pas alcoolique, on me chasserait hors des murs. Et pourtant, il se peut que j'aie effectivement un petit problème. Il se peut que deux fois dans l'année je prenne un verre de trop et que je dise quelque chose de regrettable. Il se peut qu'une fois ou deux par an je tombe ivre mort, seul, chez moi, après avoir pris trop de Manhattan. S'il arrive qu'une fois dans l'année je prenne la voiture pour rentrer chez moi alors que je devrais le faire en prenant un taxi, suis-je pour autant un alcoolique ? Certains diraient oui. D'autres diraient soit oui soit non. Ceux-là se réfèreraient

use that old chestnut, *You can't be a little pregnant*. You know that one?

—Yes.

—It's trotted out in situations where nuance is unwelcome.

—Like yours.

—Right. I'm not an alcoholic, and I'm not a rapist. I'm a flawed person who has wandered into territory that could be very dangerous, but I wandered back to a less problematic path.

You can call me a sick man. I am. You can say I did a number of things I should not have done. But I am not a rapist and not a pederast. And I have never touched any naked part of a child, nor have I asked them to touch any naked part of me.

—But you twisted the minds of many people.

—Did I?

—Of course you did.

—Can I give you a corollary?

—Can you give me a corollary?

—Yes.

—Sure. Give me a corollary, you sick fuck.

—When I was growing up there was a house on my street that was overrun with foliage. You could hardly see the house through all the trees and ivy. But this house was known by us kids as the place where you could go and get candy. You could just knock on the door and this older woman would invite you inside and you could choose candy from a bowl. Now this, today, would seem wildly inappropriate, right?

volontiers à la vieille blague, *Il y a des choses que l'on ne peut pas faire à moitié*. Vous connaissez ?

—Oui.

—Cela a été rabâché dans des situations où la nuance n'était pas de mise.

—Comme la vôtre.

—Tout à fait. Je ne suis pas un alcoolique, et je ne suis pas un violeur. Je suis un désorienté qui s'est aventuré en de territoires éventuellement très dangereux, mais j'ai pu, par la suite, regagner des sentiers moins problématiques. Vous pouvez dire que je suis un malade. Je le suis en effet. Vous pouvez dire que j'ai fait bon nombre de choses qu'il ne fallait pas. Mais je ne suis pas un violeur et je ne suis pas pédé. Je n'ai jamais touché aux parties privées d'un enfant ni ai-je demandé à un enfant de toucher à mes parties privées.

—Mais vous avez détourné l'esprit de beaucoup de gens.

—J'ai fait ça moi ?

—Mais bien sûr.

—Puis-je vous fournir un corollaire ?

—Si vous pouvez me fournir un corollaire ?

—Oui.

—Bien sûr. Donnez-moi un corollaire, espèce d'enfoiré.

—Dans une rue où je vivais quand j'étais enfant, il y avait une maison qui était envahie de plantation luxuriante. On pouvait à peine apercevoir la maison à travers arbres et lierre. Mais nous les enfants, nous connaissions bien cette maison comme l'endroit où on pouvait avoir des bonbons. Quand on frappait à la porte, une femme âgée nous faisait entrer et nous tendait un saladier plein de bonbons. Ce geste, de nos jours, paraîtrait outrageusement inadapté, n'est-ce pas ?

—Yes.

—And telling that story to anyone, which I've done over the years, has always provoked disgust. People assume that any child walking inside that place was a victim and that the woman had some ulterior motive. That there were cameras somewhere, that there was some sick purpose to her inviting us in. It all fits some narrative that's now so well established that it's crowded out all other possibilities. There was the green-shrouded house, the gingerbread look of it. You assume dark and terrible things are happening inside. But they weren't.

—How do you know?

—Because they never did. I've talked to a dozen others who knew the house and went inside and nothing ever happen to any of them. The lady just wanted it to be Halloween every day. She was lonely. But we could never accept that now. We categorize everything with such speed and finality that there's never any room for nuance. Let me posit that the mind-twisting you speak of comes from outside, not within. That is, those who want to name things, to sweep them into categories and label them, have swept your experience into the same category as those children who were actually raped, those who were lured into showers and thrown against the wall and had a grown man's penis inserted into their rectum repeatedly.

—See, just your ability to talk that way . . .

—Thomas, this is important. Is playing tailor fully dressed the same as having a penis thrust into your twelve-year-old rectum?

—Oui.

—Et le fait de raconter cette histoire, ce que j'ai fait durant des années, a toujours suscité de l'écœurement. Les gens se disaient que tout enfant qui y entraît était une victime et que la femme avait des arrière-pensées. Qu'elle avait des caméras dissimulées quelque part, qu'il y avait des intentions malsaines derrière ces invitations. Tout cela convient aux préjugés bien établis qu'il ne laisse plus de place aux autres possibilités d'interprétation. D'un côté il y avait la maison couverte de verdure, de l'autre son aspect tarabiscoté. On se dit alors qu'il se passe des choses effroyables à l'intérieur alors que tel n'était pas le cas.

—Comment pouvez-vous savoir ?

—Parce que cela n'a jamais été le cas. J'ai eu des conversations avec des gens qui connaissent la maison pour l'avoir visitée et il n'y s'est jamais passé quoi que ce soit. La dame voulait seulement jouer à Halloween tous les jours. Elle se sentait seule. Mais jamais personne n'accepterait cela aujourd'hui. Nous cataloguons tout à un tel rythme et avec une telle finalité qu'il n'y a plus de places aux nuances. Posons comme postulat que le détournement d'esprit dont vous parliez était issu de l'extérieur et non de l'intérieur. C'est-à-dire que ceux qui veulent mettre un nom sur les choses, les reléguer en catégories, les étiqueter, ont, à coups de balai, fourré votre aventure dans la même catégorie que celle de ces enfants qui ont été effectivement violés, qui ont été appâtés sous la douche, ont été acculés aux murs et qui ont eu le pénis d'un homme inséré plusieurs fois dans le rectum.

—Voyez un peu le talent avec lequel vous dites les choses. . .

—Thomas, c'est important. Est-ce que jouer au jeu du tailleur tout habillé la même chose que mettre un pénis dans le rectum d'un enfant de douze ans ?

—See, you are sick. Only a sick fuck could have said that.

—I'm trying to make clear the difference between what I did and what an actual rapist does. I couldn't even undress you boys. Doesn't that make clear that I'm not the same kind of monster?

—Maybe you're a different kind of monster. But you're still a monster.

—I won't accept that. You came over to my house. Don came over to my house. We watched movies. We played tailor. Then you fell asleep on my bed. You woke up and went home. That is the work of a monster?

—Absolutely. We trusted you and you had other intentions toward us. You used us.

—And what would you call what you're doing to me?

—I'm asking you questions. You harmed me, and this is the least amount of payback imaginable.

—How about the astronaut? You kidnapped him to ask him questions. But he did nothing to you.

—Don't worry about the astronaut. I haven't harmed the astronaut. You're the only one I would even think of harming.

—You would be harming someone who harmed no one.

—That is fucking insane.

—I did nothing but imagine them.

—So you admit that you got sexual excitement from children.

—Of course I did. Don't you ever see a woman on the street and later masturbate thinking about them?

—

—Voyez ça. Mais vous êtes malade. Il n’y a qu’un malsain d’enfoiré qui pourrait dire ça.

—J’essaie de vous faire comprendre la différence entre ce que j’ai fait et ce que fait un véritable violeur. Je ne pouvais même pas vous déshabiller. N’est-ce pas suffisamment clair que je ne suis pas le même type de monstre ?

—Vous êtes peut-être un différent type de monstre, mais vous êtes toujours un monstre.

—Je n’accepterai jamais cela. Vous êtes venu chez moi. Don est venu chez moi. Nous avons regardé des films. Nous avons joué au tailleur. Vous vous êtes endormis dans mon lit. Vous êtes repartis le lendemain. C’est cela le travail d’un monstre ?

—Absolument. Nous vous avons fait confiance alors que vous aviez d’autres intentions à notre égard. Vous avez abusé de nous.

—Et comment qualifierez-vous ce que vous êtes en train de me faire à moi ?

—Moi je vous pose des questions. Vous m’avez fait du tort et c’est la moindre de choses possibles que je vous demande en retour.

—Et l’astronaute ? Vous l’avez kidnappé pour lui poser des questions alors qu’il ne vous a rien fait.

—Ne vous inquiétez pas pour l’astronaute. Je ne lui ai fait aucun mal. Par contre, vous êtes le seul à qui je pourrais penser faire du tort.

—Vous feriez du tort à quelqu’un qui n’a rien fait à personne.

—C’est démentiel, putain.

—J’ai rien fait. Je les imagine seulement.

—Vous convenez donc que vous étiez sexuellement excité par la présence d’enfants.

—Bien sûr. Et vous, ne vous est-il jamais arrivé de voir une femme en chemin et de vous masturber par la suite en pensant à elle ?

—

—Well, I do the same thing. My fantasies might be sick, but I can't make it work any other way. The machinery of my mind is what it is. And mine is warped; it is societally unacceptable. But I know that touching a child, that acting on these desires, is wrong, and I have done nothing illegal.

—You don't buy child porn.

—I don't anymore.

—You don't *anymore*?

—When I was younger I did. But I realized how it impacted actual children, so I stopped. The last time I saw an image of a naked child was 1983.

—So since then you just see a boy on the street and then imagine him naked?

—Not exactly.

—Then what exactly?

—This level of detail isn't useful, is it?

—This level of detail is exactly why you're here.

—Okay. I think of a boy measuring my inseam.

—Oh god. Like how old is this boy?

—The same age as you were. Eleven, twelve. That's why we played the game.

—So you could store up those images for later masturbation.

—Yes.

—And all these years since, you're still thinking of Don Banh measuring your inseam.

—Not so much him. Listen, I know it's sick. I wish my brain worked in a different way. I know it's wrong, that it's considered sick. But none of this extends beyond the

—Eh bien, moi aussi c'est pareil. Mes fantasmes peuvent être débiles, mais c'est plus fort que moi. Les rouages sont ainsi faits dans mon esprit. Et les miens sont tordus ; en société c'est inacceptable. Mais je sais que toucher à un enfant, agir selon ces envies-là, c'est mauvais, mais je n'ai rien fait d'illégal.

—N'achetez-vous pas de la pornographie infantine ?

—Plus maintenant.

—*Plus* maintenant ?

—Quand j'étais plus jeune oui. Mais je me suis rendu compte à quel point cela pouvait affecter les enfants eux-mêmes. Alors j'ai arrêté. La dernière fois que j'ai vu l'image d'un enfant nu, c'était en 1983.

—Donc depuis cet instant, quand vous voyez un enfant dans la rue vous l'imaginez nu.

—Pas exactement.

—Exactement quoi alors ?

—Ce point de détail n'est pas opportun, ne voyez-vous pas ?

—Ce point de détail est exactement la raison pour laquelle vous êtes ici.

—D'accord. Je pense à un jeune garçon en train de mesurer mon entrejambe.

—Mon Dieu. Et ce jeune garçon aurait quel âge ?

—Comme vous à l'époque. Onze, douze ans. C'est pourquoi nous jouions ce jeu là.

—Vous pouviez donc conserver ces images pour vous masturber plus tard.

—Oui.

—Et depuis toutes ces années, vous pensez encore à Don Banh en train de mesurer votre entrejambe.

—Pas tellement lui. Ecoutez, je sais que c'est débile. J'aurais aimé que mon cerveau fonctionne d'une autre manière. Je sais que ce n'est pas bien, que c'est considéré

confines of my head, Thomas. I swear to you.

—So that's it? For twenty years, you just think of boys measuring your inseam? No action taken?

—That's right. Listen. I am sorry that you came to my house. And that Don came to my house, and anyone else. I can never rectify the fact that I acted inappropriately and that I scarred you kids in some way. But again, there are limits to the blame I can assume for whatever else happened in your lives after that.

—But why Don?

—Don was from a certain kind of home. You must know that those who seek to be close to boys seek out those whose parents are missing or inattentive, or who have certain blind spots.

—So Don's mom thought this was some great honor, that you'd invite him over to your house.

—Yes. She trusted me, and she valued my mentorship.

—Your mentorship. Holy shit.

—Again, you'll find it unacceptably complex, but I spent many hundreds of hours with Don and his brother, and most of that time was in the role of a parent. I cooked for them, I helped them with their homework, I took care of them. I was a male figure in their lives where there was no other.

—A male figure who masturbated thinking of them measuring your inseam.

—Yes.

comme malsain. Mais rien ne va au-delà des limites de mon esprit, Thomas. Je vous le jure.

—Donc, voilà ! Pendant vingt ans vous ne faites que penser à des gamins qui mesurent votre entrejambe ? Et vous ne faites rien ?

—C'est exacte. Ecoutez. Je regrette que vous soyez venu chez moi. Et que Don soit venu chez moi, et tous les autres. Jamais je ne pourrai corriger le fait d'avoir agi de façon inadaptée et le fait de vous avoir fait porter des cicatrices d'une certaine manière. Mais encore qu'il y a des limites quant aux responsabilités que je pourrais supporter pour tout autre chose qui vous soit arrivés dans vos vies après.

—Mais pourquoi Don ?

—Don venait d'un certain type d'environnement familial. Il faut que vous sachiez que ceux qui recherchent à se rapprocher de jeunes garçons, recherchent en fait ceux dont les parents sont absents ou négligents envers eux, ou qui ont certains défauts.

—Donc la mère de Don considérait cela comme un honneur que vous invitiez son fils à venir chez vous.

—Oui. Elle avait confiance en moi, et appréciait que je fusse son mentor.

—Que vous fussiez son mentor. Bordel de merde !

—De plus, vous allez trouver cela d'une complexité inacceptable, mais j'ai passé des heures et des heures avec Don et son frère, et la plupart du temps j'étais dans le rôle d'un parent. Je leurs préparais à manger, je les aidais avec leurs devoirs, je m'occupais d'eux. J'étais l'élément masculin dans leurs vies quand il y avait nulle autre présence.

—L'élément masculin qui se masturbait tout en les imaginant mesurer son entrejambe.

—Oui.

—You're right. It's unacceptably complex. And so wait—was I one of these kids, too? With the parents who were absent and had blind spots?

—I don't know.

—But you do. Don't worry about offending my mom.

—I don't remember your mom, but I assume that at the time, I had a sense that your home was not as strong as others.

—So I was a target. Did you make a list or something?

—A list?

—Of targets. Kids you had identified as potential sleepover participants.

—Yes.

—Yes? You said yes?

—Because this was so long ago, and because I want to be completely candid with you, and because this was part of a life I abandoned and for which I have only shame, I will continue to be honest with you. I had a list every year of the new sixth graders who I designated as potential guests at my house.

—Based on just the parental situation?

—That, and height, hair, looks.

—What kind of looks?

—Any boys who were too tall or developed weren't part of the list. I liked long hair. There were parameters physically, and then I cross-referenced that with the parental factors.

—And this ended up being a list of how many every year?

—Vous avez raison. C'est d'une complexité inacceptable. Et donc, attendez—étais-je moi aussi l'un de ces gamins ? Dont les parents étaient absents et qui avaient des défauts ?

—Je n'en sais rien.

—Si, vous le savez. N'ayez crainte si ça va à l'encontre de ma mère.

—Je ne me souviens pas de votre mère. Mais je présume qu'à l'époque, je sentais bien que chez vous ce n'était pas aussi solide qu'ailleurs.

—Donc, j'étais une cible. Vous aviez préparé une liste ou quelque chose de ce genre ?

—Une liste ?

—De vos cibles. Des gosses que vous aviez identifiés comme des participants potentiels au couchage.

—Oui.

—Oui ? Vous avez dit oui ?

—Parce que c'est tellement reculé dans le temps, et parce que je veux être entièrement sincère envers vous, et parce que cela faisait partie d'une vie que j'ai abandonnée et pour laquelle je n'ai que honte. Je veux rester honnête avec vous. Chaque année j'avais une liste des nouveaux élèves de sixième que j'avais identifiés comme les invités potentiels chez moi.

—Vous vous basiez principalement sur la situation des parents.

—Cela, mais aussi la taille, les cheveux, les traits.

—Quelles sortes de traits ?

—Les garçons trop grands ou développés ne faisaient pas partie de la liste. J'aimais bien les cheveux longs. Il y avait aussi les paramètres physiques que je mettais en rapport avec les facteurs parentaux.

—Et cela cumulait en une liste de combien chaque année ?

—Maybe eight, ten kids.

—And these you would invite over.

—Yes.

—And of them how many would come over?

—Maybe three, four.

—And that was enough?

—Yes. And from the three or four, I might get closer with one.

—One like Don.

—Right.

—And when did you start babysitting for them?

—A few months later. Don's mom was going back to Vietnam to visit her family, and she asked me to stay with the kids.

—Lucky you.

—Yes.

—And I was on your list, too.

—I assume so.

—But somehow I didn't get to the next level.

—Well, presumably your parents . . .

—It was just my mom.

—Either your mom sensed something weird about the sleepovers or you did. You said you came over just once?

—Yes.

—That usually meant that there was a sense from someone that it was not right.

—Peut-être huit ou dix.

—Et ceux-là vous les invitiez chez vous.

—Oui.

—Et parmi eux combien venait chez vous ?

—Peut-être trois ou quatre.

—Et cela suffisait ?

—Oui. Et parmi les trois ou quatre, je pouvais me rapprocher davantage de l'un d'eux.

—De quelqu'un comme Don.

—Exacte.

—Et quand aviez-vous commencé à leur faire du babysitting.

—Quelques mois après. La mère de Don partait rendre visite à sa famille au Vietnam et elle me demandait de rester avec les enfants.

—Vous alors, vous aviez de la chance !

—Et oui.

—Et j'étais sur votre liste également.

—Je présume.

—Mais pour une raison ou une autre, je ne suis pas parvenu au palier suivant.

—Eh bien, sans doute que vos parents. . .

—Il n'y avait que ma mère.

—Soit que votre mère aurait pressenti quelque chose de bizarre avec les nuits passées chez moi ou c'était vous-même. Vous avez dit que vous n'étiez venu chez moi qu'une seule fois ?

—Oui.

—On pourrait en déduire normalement que quelqu'un aurait flairé que tout cela n'était pas bien.

—Were you ever scolded? Any dad who would have found out about this would have murdered you.

—No, not always. Some dads cooperated fully.

—God.

—But yes, it was easier when there were no dads in the picture.

—But so someone would question the sleepovers, and that kid would be removed from the rotation.

—Yes. Maybe in your case your mom . . .

—Not my mom. She was completely out of it.

—Well, then maybe it was you.

—I don't know. I wish I could remember.

—See? The fact that you can't remember proves that the harm to you was minimal.

—You're in no position to make assumptions like that.

—

—So you think there was something wrong with my mom?

—Excuse me?

—You targeted me because of my mom?

—I have no idea. I'm only saying that typically there was something missing at home that allowed me some degree of access.

—Okay. Okay.

—I've told you all I can.

—Your candor was helpful to your situation here.

—So you'll free me now?

—Ne vous a-t-on jamais réprimandé ? Tout père qui aurait découvert cela vous aurait assassiné.

—Non, pas toujours. Certains pères ont coopéré pleinement.

—Mon Dieu.

—Mais en l'occurrence, c'était plus facile quand il n'y avait pas de pères dans le tableau.

—Mais alors quelqu'un se serait interrogé au sujet de ces nuits passées chez vous et aurait retiré son enfant du circuit.

—Oui. Peut-être que dans votre cas votre mère. . .

—Pas ma mère. Elle y était complètement étrangère.

—Alors, c'était peut-être vous-même.

—Je ne sais pas. J'aurais aimé pouvoir m'en souvenir.

—Vous voyez. Le fait de ne pas vous en souvenir prouve que le mal qu'on vous a fait était minime.

—Vous n'êtes pas en situation de faire de telles suppositions.

—

—Donc vous pensez qu'il y avait quelque chose de pas normal chez ma mère.

—Pardon ?

—Vous m'avez ciblé à cause de ma mère ?

—Je n'en ai aucune idée. Je dis seulement qu'à la base il manquait quelque chose chez vous et qui m'a procuré un certain degré d'accessibilité.

—D'accord. D'accord.

—Je vous ai dit tout ce qu'il m'était possible de dire.

—Votre franchise a été en parfaite symbiose avec votre situation présente.

—Vous allez donc me libérer maintenant ?

—No.

—Non.

PREAMBLE TO THE COMMENTARY

Prior to the commentary which is to follow, if we are to go inside the three sections cared for in the translation procedure, we will say that Thomas has laid hands on three people that have played a significant role in his development into a tendentious character. In the first section, he puts us in relation with his buddy, the astronaut, who has worked for a whole string of qualifications and knowledge, in whom Thomas has always believed and admired as a star or even a god, "... you were a god." (30), "You are *still* my hero." (31), "See, you are a *god!*" (33), but who has not been able to fulfill his main objective due to unjust government measures which he defends in spite of everything: "And I'm not about to trash NASA for you,..." (43). The second section comes in with an important personality in his life, a veteran congressman who was a soldier in the army and whom he has very briefly rubbed shoulders with during his adolescence and whom he puts among the crafty people having contributed to himself and his friend's failure at reaching their coveted destinations, among other things. The third section brings to light a strange man who was one of his teachers with a crooked mind and who took advantage of both himself and one of his friend's weaknesses during the young periods of their lives. What follow afterwards are as exciting as the first three sections which I would not venture into disclosing in the present mission. I would just mention that in his daring adventure Thomas has succeeded in clamping four more people inside, among whom three women and a policeman. The rest may be left to the diligent reader keen at living through the events to observe their probable ripening. What I can say at this point is that we would be heading to a definite a climax in the coming episode which contains a certain degree of surprise, suspense and bewilderment. What follows next would indeed seem astounding to most readers and carries its degree of unexpectedness. Thomas is out again and like a bulldozer, he is going to charge

headlong and crush down all impediments and common sense as he believes himself to be the hero on the verge of defining his fate and coming off with some destiny. Who will be his next victim, can we now ask ourselves?

Eggers's strategy as a playwright is a refined one. He places his champion in the habitual dominating posture questioning his vis-à-vis with the element of what-next always pending. The reader's curiosity is titillated as to what will happen and will come out of the struggle and stays with these same questions till the end. As a hint, we are being introduced with an interrogation carrying a two-folded connotation which can be felt by the sensible, far-sighted reader. Firstly, addressing his next captive, it would be interesting to know that Thomas starts by asking:

“Do you know who I have next door?” (B83)

and makes a higher bid with

“You'll never guess”. (B83)

Of course, he plays sarcastically with his captive into giving him a good answer, but how would that be possible? Nobody would ever know who he has next door. We can deduce that Eggers's aim, at this point, is stealthily targeted at the reader, in that it is the latter who, in fact, has to guess as to whom Thomas is talking now. Into the bargain, we stay gliding high out, head into the clouds until we are left dumbfounded on discovering the opposite persona. The episode constitutes a point of no return, if we have to sort it out that way, due to the disconcerting unlikelihood it carries indeed.

On coming down to earth, we bluntly bump against the affirmation with regards to the state in which America's youth find or are finding themselves, as pointed out in the summary, notwithstanding whatever prosperity we may associate to the world's superpower which might be tilting on its waning side and which, I'm afraid, the author might be hinting. America would be diving towards the diminuendo where it's no

longer easy even for a white American to make money in his country on the one hand, contrary to the reproach addressed to Thomas: “You know how easy it is for a white man to make money in this country.” (B97) which we could furthermore relate as to its veracity concerning the other constituents of the American nation. The Don Banh episode is likewise evidence of the degrading spirit hovering above heads with the fact that just having a name of foreign origin would constitute simply in what the cop qualifies as a bunch of letters difficult to remember or pronounce (B142), alluding to the fact that racist sentiments are lively and risk at definitely taking hold of the coming generations up to the point of exploding in their faces. This particular episode would testify that the author is critical in his country’s youth because of the sickness that is trimming off and rotting away their minds due to what they are being made to digest in their day-to-day existence. It must be reminded that Eggers is one of the contributors in the elaboration of *The Future Dictionary of America, Created In Darkness By Troubled Americans*. The title is quite eloquent as to the spirit with which the work has been created. Through Thomas’s character, the feeling perspires that the country’s giving off pessimistic sentiments as to her future with her young people having no hope in their destiny. Their magnificent patriotic dream is being trampled upon. The malady divulged through Thomas’s character is an absolute reflection on this state of things. The unbelievable, if not irreparable mistakes Thomas does, make everyone wonder if we are not witnessing some forthcoming social malaise or unrest prone to blow up in not too far a future. Consequently, Eggers seems to send a warning to the whole world as to the dormant danger ready to spring out at any unexpected time: Still waters run deep?

This being said, let us now come to our next step which would consist in commenting some salient parts that are susceptible at arousing the reader’s interest as far as our three

translated sections are concerned. Whenever dialogues occur in narrating a text, it goes without saying that the reader will, for sure, come through expressions that pertain to colloquial and idiomatic images as dialogue is simply the way things are said in common language, at times diverting completely from the established linguistic norms that students have only learnt to respect when dealing with their dissertation exercises, so much so that a given text often turns out being incomprehensible if it is very much bent towards the oral dimension. But where would the complaint lie? Our 'business' as human beings consists in exchanging words with no alien but other human beings mainly. Dialogues are often impromptu words barely delved into as would be a dissertation, for example, because they are simply natural utterances and reactions that make society. Mankind is nothing more than the personification of oral culture. Oral society is talking and talking is communicating spontaneously and in rapid flows. We otherwise write to harmonize with culture and ethics. But for immediacy, availability of responses and results we better talk than write. Moreover, we know fully well where the oral scope leads to when dealing with the gift of tongues that remain in keeping with accents or local expressions, be it English, French, Creole or whatever means of communication. These same linguistic means can be put in the plural without risking any malapropism for if we go deep down we effectively come up with different *Englishes*, *Frenches*, *Creoles*, etc. if we dare say. Moreover, through the innumerable theses standing on the shelves at the library and browseable either on the internet or at the library itself, we have witnessed about the different levels of languages through the years and centuries, studied through some decades by our fellow students and we can imagine the headaches these levels of language have produced upon them when sorting out and pondering on the hitches and dilemmas. Mine will be based on a simple 21st century publication with no pretention at delivering sophisticated linguistic analysis but

just a hint of what and how I have felt inside this work. Which brings me to mention that my first part will consist in studying the colloquial and idiomatic expressions that appear in the text under consideration.

Whenever speech is formulated, an important ingredient that constitutes its well-being is very often the spontaneity with which it is delivered. With this specification, we can verify by ourselves how it operates in observing our own reactions face to our state of being prompted by speculations, for example. In our study we are going to observe in the second part how such a natural promptness occurs in particular situations.

Moreover, in travelling through the first three sections of our book, my attention has notably been drawn to the occurrence of the verb 'to get' which made a tilt on my mind. Very often, readers are puzzled by its very frequent occurrences and cast doubts as to its presence in contexts that do not correspond to the explanations they may have received in their first encounters with the word. But what must be bored in mind is that very often the verb suits perfectly as a panacea for a multitude of lapses in expression compared to the large vocabulary English has as a worldwide language and that it can however be easily related to the context that is under view. But the fact remains that despite its universality, English still proves itself as being lethargic at times in catching the right word for the right situation. This very question has always raised interrogations on the part of those rightly seeking enlightenment on this particularity in search of clarification as to its overflowing use not always perceptible at first sight because of its finesse at edging its way in and passing unnoticed, and the puzzles it moreover provokes all the same when associated with prepositions. Generally speaking, whenever the question is raised, the simplest sense given by teachers and grammarians in giving a quick answer is 'to obtain' or 'to come into possession of' as the simplest route towards explanation even when it means that more precision will have to be given in front of the

variants it is likely to arouse. That is why it would be interesting to make a dive through these zigzags in my third part in an attempt at bringing some light to all interrogations. A fourth part will consist in considering the general aspects of some facts as they appear in chronological order inside the book and which I feel would be appealing for discussion as they contain some significant considerations via vocabulary, syntax and grammar.

COMMENTARY

Colloquial and idiomatic expressions

We have stressed on the particular character this piece of work consists of, that is, oral words exchanged between individuals. Another particularity is that the textbook, as loyal as to the rules of conversational contact, does not go without recourse to idiomatic expressions inside its simplicity. We are accordingly going to note some details worth the detour in our enterprise at giving a coherent analysis of the forms composing the text. What would be eye-catching as a start is the sentence:

—“This place came with them.” (18)

Taken out of its context, the reader would wonder how a place would do the act of coming from somewhere and with somebody or something. ‘Them’ here refers to what has been mentioned as a post, being in fact a set of poles with chains strong enough to contain the effects discharged from exploding cannons, for example. But the place being several barracks it is clear that one pole for a whole combination of buildings seems ridiculous whereby the pluralized pronoun. Let’s give it thus in French:

« *Cet endroit est venu avec eux.* »

which would be the exact literal in translation. But such an expression does not fit anywhere for no place would have such a mobility in itself as to be able to move about, which is the sense of « *venir* ». Hence

« *Ce lieu est tel que tu le vois.* »

translates the notion of the state of being present comprised in « *venir* » and « *voir* » but as « *venir* » is inappropriate, it is being rendered by « *tel* ».

Let us now observe the expression:

—“Ring a bell?” (27)

The enunciation contains in itself two linguistic facts. We are going to deal with the first one. Apparently, when read as it is there is no question about the term and its understanding. But we have a question here. After his affirmation standing as a clue concerning his age:

“I was three years younger.” (27)

Thomas goes on with the term where ‘ring’ appears as a verb. The dictionary gives ‘ring’ as the act of (i) surrounding, (ii) encircling, (iii) seizing (person) by collar or (iv) collaring (an animal), among others and simply (v) giving forth a resonant sound, roughly speaking. Upon close observation, none of these definitions are likely to coincide with the context. The second fact is that it turns out to be an idiomatic expression surfacing into the sense of ‘to bring back vague memories’, with no bell giving sounds but just the head vibrating with thoughts, hence ‘Can you remember?’ or ‘Does that mean anything to you?’ or ‘Does it produce an effect on you?’ ‘Ring’ can also operate as a signal. I finally opt for it being translated as:

« *Ca te dit que’que chose ?* »

After that, we are to consider

—“Think Intro to Aerospace Engineering.” (27)

‘Intro’ in the United States is a technological class where students learn the fundamentals of aeronautics.

« *Pense à ton cours d’introduction en Ingénierie Aérospatiale.* »

But the statement, in my view, would suit better as:

« *Pense à ta première année en Ingénierie Aérospatiale.* »

where *< première année >* would correspond to the class itself whereas *< introduction >* gives the idea of something very brief spanning from a few minutes to a few months and nothing more.

We come to:

—“It was a crisp fall day.” (29)

This is no day falling crunchy. The sentence refers to the autumn season for Americans, during which leaves fall under the impact of cold weather being ‘crisp’, that is, gloomy but lively with the falling leaves, and biting whereby

« *Il faisait frais par ce jour d’automne.* »

—“The bait and switch.” (30)

The expression alludes to unethical selling techniques practiced in business where tricks are used in attracting potential buyers towards one product when in fact they are being lured by a different one bearing a higher price. With

« *Le leurre et la diversion.* »

Thomas goes into convincing Kev that he has been taken for a ride with his own destiny and diverted towards something else if not, so to say, empty space liable to procure him with disenchantment.

—“I...walked on the team.” (34)

is Kev’s affirmation specifying that when he was playing in the baseball team, he was quite an ordinary player. He walked on the team, meaning to say he was just a second fiddle.

« *... j’ai joué les utilités dans l’équipe.* »

reinforces the saying as to the fact that he played a minor role, he was just a stooge in the team.

—“... he had more of a NASA jones.” (37)

‘Jones’ is first of all a proper noun belonging to the male gender. It is also a slang American term, not to mention the different connotations with which it is being used besides. It can stand as a noun or a verb. The idiom comes about twice in the book. ‘To have a jones’ means ‘to have a strong desire or attraction for something or someone.’ ‘To jones’ is ‘to long for, to crave for (a drug).’ The second occurrence is situated in the fourth section, not translated in the present work, on page B104: “Are you already jonesing?” Thomas seeks out to understand whether his prisoner is not effectively craving for some drug. Prior to this cast, Thomas wishes to intimate regretfully of his friend Don’s laudable desire at being a member of the NASA crew, for his concern was much oriented towards such an institution, so much so that

« *Il faisait plus gars de la NASA.* »

Unfortunately, his Asian origin resulted in what has been discussed earlier and also what he and his mother had been boring and in what had happened to him afterwards. If we were to speak about the colour of skin and referring to Don Banh’s case, we would say that the guy would belong to the yellow race just as we have the Red Skins, the Blacks, the Whites, the Hispanics, etc.

When reminiscing about his dead friend, Thomas draws the observer’s attention on the dark eyes that he had, and

— “ ... this big white smile? ” (38)

with an intense emotion that he has to stop to regain his composure. It is obvious that the smile is taken with the figurative characteristics of being big and white, having nothing to do with some physical size or the colour of his skin. When sketching out the portrait, the reader pictures him as a young man with a large smile showing perfect white teeth thus projecting him as a happy youth brimming over with joy, thrusting forward

“... *ce large sourire éclatant?*”

which, in contrast, brings me back to page 30 to the

—“ ... white whale ... ”

formulated by Thomas which, as we all know, is a northern cetacean that turns white when adult. Inside the term, my master has it as an expression equivalent to the white wolf or the *white* blackbird, meaning something which is known to everybody or an object not easily obtainable. The allegory made to Kev's situation is clear enough in that the latter has rendered himself quite popular with his various successes and could well be assimilated to somebody who is unique in his kind as a white whale.

—“ ... a big fucking promise ... ” (30)

Being thus unique in his kind, Kev has instituted himself as an example of virtue and honesty to be followed by each and everyone. Thomas has turned into a believer in Kev up to the point of considering him as a hero, strengthened by the subsequent statements: “...you were my fucking hero, man” (30), “You're *still* my hero.” (31) or a god: “But for a while there you were a god.” (30), “See, you are a *god!*” (33). But the disappointment is immense for Thomas, ‘The inevitable collapse of anything seeming solid’ (30), when all those achievements turn out to be just hot air ensued after

« ... *une grande espérance foutrement incroyable.* » (I underline)

where < *foutrement* > stands for ‘fucking’, with ‘big’ spanning twofold upon < *grande* > and < *incroyable* >. Kev, like some Don Quixote fighting against the windmill, has been living for honour and devotion inside meekness: “You had a nice kind of public humility thing working for you” (24) until surprisingly the rug has been pulled out from under his feet. That is why Thomas wants him to admit that he has been conned.

—“You know you are pissed.” (40)

According to the dictionary, to be pissed, in its idiomatic sense, is to get blind drunk. Is Thomas saying that Kev has got drunk in illusions or is so dizzy or even blindly amazed by his personal achievements that he cannot see clearly what is happening to him or what his future is going to be? That does not alter the fact that my way of seeing it is that Kev has been bugged or he has been made to sweat his guts out in vain hopes or has been chasing rainbows. In that sense we would have:

« *Tu sais qu'on t'as envoyé chier.* »

Whenever one is engaged for some particular purpose, one has

—“ ... to toe the party line ... ” (42)

especially if one is professionally engaged for a particular mission. It unquestionably follows that the astronaut, who is a government official, has to respect the official opinions, ideas or attitudes as set down by the leaders of the group or groups. The expression engrosses ‘to toe’ which makes us think mainly about the large ‘finger’ on our foot. Upon order to stand to attention, soldiers must place their feet on the same line conforming to the exigencies of the military corps. The expression generalizes the saying into:

« ... *faire tout ce qu'on te dit de faire.* »

When we think about the word 'window' in its metaphorical sense, we immediately get the idea of a certain space that cannot be transgressed because of the limits imposed by its framing except if the onlooker moves to modify his field of vision.

—“ ... I figured I only have a certain window ... ” (45)

What is happening here is that Thomas is realizing that his liberty is getting restraint by his sphere of action, the frame of a certain window which he has, and not more, an affirmation backed up with:

—“... and the ceiling just seems to be lowering on me every day.” (46, 47)

Hence

« ... *je me suis rendu compte que ma marge de manœuvre était devenue restreinte ...* »

« ...*et plus ça va plus l'étau semble se resserrer autour de moi.* »

In this second translation line, it should be noted that the sense of continuity residing inside 'every day' is rather rendered by *plus ça va* instead of *chaque jour* or *tous les jours*.

But inside his difficulties, he continues to live with hopes which also bring him to calculate and realize everything in one single attempt:

—“... I might as well get it all figured out in one fell swoop.” (46)

« *J'ai donc pensé tout mettre au point d'un seul coup.* »

and

—“... I felt like I was on the verge of something.” (47)

given by

« ... *j'ai senti comme si je touchais au but.* »

The verb 'to figure', meaning 'to picture mentally, to imagine', occurs thrice on this page. We have seen the first two. The third occurrence is expressed in the following:

—“... I figured you wouldn't have a security detail anymore.” (46)

The verb that is occurring three times has to do with the process of thinking. Despite his impulsiveness and foolish schemes, Thomas takes time however to reflect on his observations or on what he is going to do. We are in the military universe. As a precaution, he has thus been questioning himself with regards to security details for people going about in such a universe:

« ... *je me suis dit que vous n'aviez plus de garde du corps, du coup.* »

We come to the stage where someone is trying to talk Thomas out of proceeding with his plans. Because of the peril at stake, he wishes him to be better off by

—“ ... cutting your [Thomas's] losses and calling this quits.” (47)

At the outset, I provided my version with:

« ... *il vaudrait mieux sauver les meubles et changer de méthode.* »

On second thoughts I believed it would be better to remain with simplicity and not give an idiomatic expression for another. Moreover, « *changer de méthode* » appeared as an encouragement for Thomas at going on thinking about other options in troubling himself and the whole community of people.

Having heard Thomas's admission that his window is narrowing in front of him and in view of his social position as a former deputy in politics, the congressman readily volunteers in helping Thomas out of the situation he is finding himself. In a fatherly stance he therefore advises him to spend no more time, money or effort on something

that will bring him no significant benefit and better give up all he has undertaken up to this time, and try to redeem himself. It would best for him

« ... de ne plus perdre de temps et de moyens et de vous en tenir là pendant qu'il est encore temps. »

The word 'pussy' dwells inside various connotations in literature. In such a case, the reader's role is to avoid misinterpretation with options, whether voluntarily or not, and to be elegant at picking the right one in order to bypass all misunderstandings. On page 34 we indeed arrive at:

—“...some piece-of-shit Space Station full of pussies.”(48)

The sorting out of 'pussies' in this context constituted some difficulty. The Space Station refers to the ISS, the space laboratory that very often comes in the limelight as it was the case when Thomas Pesquet, the French astronaut, was part of the crew for nearly seven months until June 2017. 'Pussies' could very well refer to feminine members participating up in the experiments. But the term preceded by the locution 'full of' rendered the case problematic and could turn it into the slang referring to *«minettes»* in the sense of beautiful girls. Such a denomination then does not make the case serious enough in the space mission. The second interpretation that comes to mind gives it, in American English, as an offensive word for a man who is weak or not brave. Upon analysis, due to Thomas's state of mind regarding his fellow citizens, it could well be an accusation as to the unmanly undertakings of his American counterparts whiling time away in “a box kite” (42), as he says. A third connotation would refer to lumps of earth collected from space, less common in usage and which I find more appropriate to fit in the kind of mission with the objective of analyzing clods for more profound development in space explorations. Hence :

« ... *une quelconque station spatiale de merde pleine de mottes.* »

Being an experienced soldier, the congressman does not omit the fact that most young people are the ‘salt of the earth’. But at the same time he is perfectly aware that many of them turn out to be so carefree that they mess everything. The passage on page 53 is a plea for both possibilities. He nevertheless goes on to stress that young people must not be fully trusted. Observing Thomas, the congressman categorizes him accordingly:

—“... when you were nineteen you couldn’t parallel park.” (53)

I take it to mean:

« ... *quand t’avais leur âge t’aurais eu le même genre de comportement.* »

meaning to say that if he gave him his car keys for example, as awkward as he is, he would doubtless go and crash the car down some cliff or ravine.

When we embark on the third section we would spontaneously assimilate Thomas’s venture as a revenge on somebody who has been abusing innocent people in their lives while keeping in mind that our main protagonist is a man morally acquainted with principles, as he repeatedly reminds one after the other. Thomas is now with one of his former teachers whom he is going to dominate from head to toe. The guy is so “sad and twisted” (71) that every word he pronounces goes against him. He represents a nice catch liable at confessing all his crooked deeds. Right from the start he arrives at a very uncomfortable situation that Thomas sticks to him like a leech and shoots him with:

—“Now you just painted yourself into a corner.” (71)

Mr. Hansen, the former teacher, is finding himself in a difficult situation of his own making that he cannot easily escape from. In his sayings Thomas sees that he is avowing not one but several crimes that he finds himself

« *au pied du mur* »

or

« *pieds et poings liés* »

In a simple version I, however, find it more convenient to say:

« *Eh bien, vous venez de vous mettre dans une impasse.* »

just as a policeman interviewing a culprit.

Further on, Thomas immediately senses that Hansen is illustrating himself as being all nuts by looking out at stupidly ducking the question of ‘truth’. Does he, as a former pupil, have to explain things clearer and in detail to a teacher? “I remember you being the fun teacher.” (74). Two pages earlier he already embarked on the ridiculous side of Hansen: “You’re more fun than the others.”(72). And goes on with:

—“I have to draw this out.”(72)

because Hansen brings his mother in the conversation and says she knows the truth. But on proceeding further on no one is able to make head or tail of what he says because the following second he cunningly isn’t anymore conscious of what truth he himself is talking about. Thomas is not supposed to dot his i’s and cross his t’s either and ironically retorts in the sense of « *Je dois tout faire ressortir* » or if we were not to forget the ‘draw’ effect, rather:

« *Vous allez m’obliger à vous faire un dessin.* »

As pointed out earlier, Thomas is a character who has been dwelling with inward feelings which are going to explode. It is obvious that his embarrassment is one combined with rage when he states:

—“The one thing I’m kicking myself about ...” (73)

The ‘kicking about’ is quite figurative in expression:

« *La seule chose contre laquelle je me retourne...* »

or

« *La seule chose que je me reproche...* »

but couldn’t we effectively picture him being on the verge of giving kicks and blows in every direction just to make way for that bad blood churning inside him?

Still choking with anger, Thomas is going to have a whale of time observing Hansen in front of him melting down in a servile attitude not worth of a teacher supposed to set virile examples of manhood. With Mr. Hansen, the pleonasm is not exaggerated as we are quite aware that in our postmodern era there exist members of the opposite gender who may be endowed with virile characteristics. A whole page is going to scroll with expressions meant at pushing the man back to the wall such as:

(a) —“... even your phrasing is smarmy.” (73)

(b) —“Are you one of those assholes who says *either* with the long *i*?” (74)

(c) —“... where does a worm like you come from?” (75)

Other examples come off as to Hansen’s legitimacy at being an official instructor: his behavior as such, but also his bad wordings which make Thomas want to spew out, his wearing women’s pants, for example or his statement: “you’re going to kill me irregardless.” (82), and so on. For each of the listed extracts above, I propose:

« *Même votre façon de parler est obséquieuse.* »

‘Phrasing’ refers to ‘way of talking’ here. The sentence could also give:

« *Vous parlez comme un lèche-botte.* »

(b) « *Etes- vous de ces enfoirés qui épèlent mec avec un q ?* »

is an equivalent here. This is purely a colloquial expression belonging to Thomas's own way of placing words and not to be found in dictionaries. I hope my translation has not scratched anything on the way. If this is the case, I apologize.

So, Thomas continues to stick to Hansen as being fun, ridiculous. Just as a leitmotiv, he strikes him again: "...I remember you being the fun teacher." (74)

« *Où a-t-on vu un gars aussi minable que vous ?* »

We all know what a worm is. Commonly speaking, the creepy-crawly gives the image of someone you do not like or respect, rightly turning Hansen into < *un gars aussi minable* >. I translate 'come from' by the verb < *voir* > using the very far away past tense here as it undoubtedly gives a more punching effect, much sought after, with an unsaid 'never' inside compared to < *venir* > which, as far as that goes, would keep the present tense, whereby:

« *D'où vient un gars aussi misérable que vous ?* »

quite acceptable at first sight.

In Hansen's struggle at fitting in some relevant proficiency, which he could perhaps claim afterwards, he uses the term 'grey' with some embellished shape. A small stocklist on our part will lead us to the expression 'he went grey over it' meaning 'he had difficulties'. A 'grey area' is an area referred to one that is unclear. Further on, the idiom 'men in grey suits' refers to powerful men not easily accessible to the common folk. In Hansen's expression

—“... there is a good deal of grey in the world.” (84)

grey isn't a color as such. The figurative 'grey' isn't difficult, however, at being interpreted as carrying the dark side of things. Its metaphorical sense also refers to an

important fraction of men in the world who are mysterious, arrogant or shady up to being dangerous. Hansen is finding himself in a very uncomfortable situation being tied in helplessness with Thomas ready to tear his limbs or “kick him in the head.” (80). His expression is not a refined one but at least he is trying to point out some psychological elements in the study of his abductor by referring himself to the world, however, and not to him directly, maliciously targeting him though.

« ... *il y a bon nombre d'idées noires dans ce monde.* »

In pleading for his crooked temperament, which he finally accepts, Hansen uses the expression

—“ ... You can't be a little pregnant.” (92)

which, in fact carries all the truth proper to the expression where a woman is either pregnant or not, where there can't be any in-between. It would be absurd to specify *« Je suis enceinte un tout petit peu »* or even *« Je suis presque enceinte »*. Hansen's saying alludes to the fact that in concrete situations as in the example he gives, one cannot proclaim oneself as being partly implicated. In his personal case, he means to say that one is either an alcoholic or not.

« ... *Il y a des choses qu'on ne peut pas faire à moitié.* »

But the fact of his situation being concrete is very likely a questionable one.

Spontaneity: a natural urge

One of the elements residing in the individual's soul is the characteristic at reacting spontaneously. The fact of being spontaneous is a distinctive feature of the human being. It is equal to reaction that is instinctive, automatic, often prompted by no motive. It can come out of anger, boastfulness, amusement or appearances. Through our analysis we have passed by some examples of automatic reaction. It can be beneficial as well as regrettable in the different episodes of one's life. Very often we come through events or consequences that are widely talked about due to unconscious volition. Spontaneity is sudden movement; it is reflex culminating to the will at showing one's competence or capacity in a given situation; the will to impress.

'Urge me no more, I shall forget myself', says Cassius to Brutus in the quarrel scene in Shakespeare's 'Julius Caesar', meaning to say 'If you provoke me, I'll kill you.' Having read our present novel, we know how many times the characters, Thomas and Kev mainly, are tempted at reacting regretfully.

To begin with, after having politely requested Kev not to pull on his chains on two occasions, Thomas has to reinforce with "Really, don't yank on that." (18). The term 'Really' resonates with impatience. 'Pull' gets magnified into 'yank' as we can measure the extent at which he is irritated by the sharp noise Kev is undoubtedly making with his chains, willingly or not. Moreover, the well known terminologies 'fuck' and 'you're nuts' poured forth all through are just examples of uncalculated spontaneity. Thomas, armed with his taser, menaces several of his captives at smashing them each time they play on his nerves. "If you decide not to talk with me then I tase you." (26). "I have a taser. You're better off answering." (28). "...I have a taser here, and I'm sure I can find some other tools around that will be unpleasant." (31). "But you're making a strong case for getting your head kicked in." (81). "If you don't then I tase you. I mace you."

(B136) “You don’t want me getting that taser.” (B138). It is clear enough that all these hammering out are meant at frightening and nullifying all incentives on the part of Thomas’s chained guests.

On pages 27 and 28 we have a series of counterblows. Thomas asks Kev to remember his name. But the latter, in his state of insubordination, plays with him in a provocative manner by calling him Dick, for example, veiled with the intention of holding him up to ridicule, as we know that the name stands for moron, dummy or dickhead with dick being a curse for the male organ; or Bob mentioned twice clearly on purpose, cunningly transformed into Rob. Kev is so inflexible in this distraction that Thomas has to surrender by finally saying his name ‘all by himself’ to put the brake on a never-ending taunt.

Impatience as well can lead to impromptu reactions. At some points, Kev reveals himself to be endowed with modesty which pushes Thomas at calling a spade a spade. Upon Kev’s hesitating attitude at talking about his love adventures, Thomas goes straight to “But then you *did* screw a girl!” (34) where the emphatic *did* would stand as daring. When the word comes out in the end, who cares? The fact remains that we are going to witness a series of counterstrokes and apologies from the one and the other. Thomas apologizes but Kev only retaliates with ‘Fuck you.’ (35) Subsequently on other provocations, curses fly out pronto on both sides with ‘asshole’, ‘Don’t fuck with me, Kev’ (35), ‘I will fucking tear your head off.’ (35). If there were no chains guarding the one, the situation would undoubtedly have worsened into kicks and blows and smashes or worse. Luckily, Kev’s state helps at calming him down to the point of having to maintain himself in a low profile always: “I get mad when people chain me up.” (35). For all that, we are not out of the woods yet.

Kev still goes on to believe that his future is paved with all the good intentions, which irritates his buddy Thomas as the latter has already made clear to him that he ought not continue to hope so naively. When Kev tries to take sides for the Russians in their space mission, Thomas retorts to correct him with the words which should have been ‘They’ve prioritized correctly’ (42) instead of Kev’s ‘They’ve prioritized differently’ (42). During this abrasive discussion Thomas fights Kev back taking reprisals with the same qualifying terms he used a few lines earlier: “You know you are pissed.” (40) but more biting this time and straight out: “I want you to be pissed.” (43) (I underline)

The subsequent scene so puts us in acquaintance with the congressman whose second utterance after “Who are you?” is nothing more than a curse wording in “Holy Christ on a cracker” (44) quite unusual to be formulated in normal talking. The reason I associate to it is that, first of all, there is his position as such, secondly he is handicapped and thirdly because of his age. All these factors must normally have contributed in rendering him ineligible at being carried off the way he has been. That is why his surprise is a double one illustrated by the style his cursing takes shape. It could be a diminutive for ‘Christmas crackers’ as a curse for testicles. Oral expression being what it is, the reference in French would never correspond exactly to the effect that is being looked for but the reader has fully grasped the shock it represents in magnitude for the congressman. Among the options that would have corresponded, we could give < *Que le grand cric me croque* >, < *Par tous les saints du ciel, mais je rêve* >.

Being helpless and pitiful in his situation, the only way to shake his snatcher is to utter cries of rage like “How the hell did you get me here?” (45) (I underline).

The congressman stresses on the seriousness of Thomas’s case: “Do you have any idea how serious this is?” (45) but the latter just responds with “I do, sir. I really do.” only

implying that he doesn't need to worry inordinately. In his attempt at enraging him otherwise, the congressman adverts to Thomas's childish side or his childhood pastimes indulged in computer games "You wish you were part in some wonderful video game conflict..." (51) (I underline). But Thomas is uncompromising as he simply goes on reinforcing the listing as calmly and provocatively as: "Or something else." (51). Thomas's foolishness is simply unrealistic to the congressman who can't believe his eyes: "You do see me sitting here, do you not?" (49) (I underline) if it were just at the sight of his missing limbs but in his determination we can stipulate that Thomas has lost the faculty of seeing anything and that he is even deaf at other people's states and sufferings. His spontaneity is a negative one according to all good principles. Thomas's stubbornness is blended with too much pride to be moved by other people's feelings and he even boasts into being "unstoppable" (B132) and believing his achievements as being engrossed inside concrete study equalizing academia, at which the congressman rebukes what he calls his 'thesis' as being "a cockamamie thesis" (56). Again in trying to prove his affinity towards research and high studies he attempts at referring to the history of his country during postindustrial period which the congressman immediately dissuades him into embarking on, for when he pronounces "postindustrial..." (56) he doesn't know what the word would mean: "Post goddamned *what?*" (56) is the congressman's sudden drive. At one moment, the congressman assimilates Thomas as being rather versed in religiosity: "Listen, you are preaching to the converted here." (57) which Thomas refuses to admit: "I don't want to be preaching. I'm *asking*." (57) in searching at regaining command of the situation.

In the following episode we are going to see how Hansen gets mummified with Thomas's dressing him down after the former having tried to resist against the

hurricane. As said earlier, we are in the presence of an individual who, having occupied the honorable post of teacher, is in fact stripped of all the qualities pertaining to his function in the background. Thus Thomas is going to make him avow all his crimes which have in fact remained unsettled or unpunished to the right extent, and in this task he is not going to leave him with the least opportunity of receiving some whatever graceful consideration, which Hansen tries to obtain in the end.

In his effort at gaining his abductor's esteem, however, Hansen is going to soothe him in a respectable, servile manner right from the start despite Thomas's young age compared to him, a fact that does not remain unnoticed by Thomas who is going to take advantage of such a show of reverence to drown him in his own words the best of ways. Hansen's "Sir" (69) releases a big "Wow" from Thomas who was far from expecting what, on the instant, resembles as a honorary title, let's say, coming from one of his ex-teachers, which pricks us into believing that roles are getting reversed. This veneration in fact serves Thomas at instituting an even more dominating perspective opposite his 'convict'. The "more favorable light" (69) Hansen projects will be a short-lived one the moment his affinity at being a liar is detected. In his quest, his pitiful tone does not work for him: "... that penitent tone makes you seem more guilty." (70). Very often, defense leads to aggressiveness. But in fact, Hansen is going to dwell on that spineless tone the whole of the scene and it is Thomas who, in front of Hansen's dull performance, is going to use his impulsive bend in view of speeding things up. We have seen the 'fun teacher' being a 'worm' of his kind, using 'smarmy' expressions and having pronunciation difficulties or making ill-constructed words. In addition to these defects Thomas flouts his host who has problems with his wordings and does not know how and when to make contractions: "I will try." "You really should just say "I'll try"." (74) because funnily enough, for Thomas, contractions will make him "sound more like

a regular human being.” (74). The spontaneity looked for in Hansen’s reactions makes him fall flat on his face with expressions like “I can sense that” (72), “I believe so” (79), “kill me irregardless” (82) which Thomas ironically finds “great” (73) for a teacher whose “mouth keeps making mistakes” (79) with words that do not exist: “That’s not a word.” (82), which the utterer himself has difficulty to discern: “What’s not a word?” (82). The “smarmy way” (73) about himself” renders Hansen prone to being “*relieved*” (90) after having been asked to retire and whose expression is unacceptable as it “defies belief.” (90) for “A pederast who just reforms himself?” (90). In his despair, Hansen has at least the capacity of creating surprises one after another. In attempting at giving some normal stance to his behavior he requests to give Thomas a corollary. The answer he receives: “Give me a corollary, you sick fuck.” (92) is fraught with astonishment, and his subsequent language “...having a penis thrust into your twelve-year-old rectum?” (93) renders him perfectly liable at being “...a sick fuck...” (93), “You’re so sick.” (84). By dint of receiving smashes from Thomas, Hansen is shrewd enough in the end with spontaneity at qualifying himself and his “warped” (95) mind as “societally unacceptable” (95) inside an “unacceptably complex” (96) being. We can say that within his crooked mind and behind his servility, with the one ace inside his sleeve: “There were seven complaints. Nothing was proven” (71), he is fairly talented at ultimately propelling the feeling that somewhere everyone is to be blamed: “There was no trial and there was no hearing.” (72), “And ... [the complainants] would just let me walk away? No charges? No prison?” (78) as the complainants and the judges themselves let him go, and parents could be held as his accomplices inside his deeds as they proved, according to his affirmation, to be ‘inattentive’ (96); he was, moreover, not always scolded as “Some dads cooperated fully.” (99) or “ ... there was something

missing at home that allowed [him] some degree of access.” (99) after giving Thomas to understand that “there was something wrong” (99) with even his own mom.

Get, Got: the “passe-partout”

I have already stressed on the part played by the verb “get” in common or even formal language. We are going to see how the expressions inside which the verb arrives at playing its ever-present role can be reinterpreted in other ways. In our first three sections it appears at least eighty-three times. It has not been possible to consider each of them because of the mass it represents but we can affirm without hesitation that its ubiquity is going to unfold a lot more in the subsequent pages.

The first one on which we are going to step is “It gets bitter.” (20) With it we can attach “... it gets arctic quick.” (20). Thomas is preparing his friend Kev at familiarizing him with the weather they would be liable to face. ‘It’ refers to the weather. So we can give it as ‘The weather becomes bitter’ and it ‘changes’ into an Arctic climate. On page (22) we bridge on “Let’s get back to remembering me.” Here the verb ‘get’ is associated with the preposition ‘back’ which gives the idea of returning from some place.

Thomas’s intentions were to renew acquaintances with his buddy Kev. That is why he asks right from the start: “You don’t recognize me?” (18). But he has been distracted by Kev’s swearing provoked by the quite comprehensible unfavorable situation Kev is in. So, after having discussed about the swearing, Thomas now wants to come again to his primary intention; that of verifying if Kev remembers him, as they were former classmates. I feel that ‘get back’ can be substituted by ‘try’ as both are going to stir old reminiscences; so, ‘Let’s try to remember who I am.’ “...you’ve got me scared.” (22) means ‘you’re making me afraid’, ‘you’re frightening me’. In this case we can say ‘...you’ve made me afraid’. Or ‘...you’ve succeeded in scaring me.’ With “You’ve got me chained to a post.” (22) Kev wants to impart that Thomas has put him in a helpless situation and it is impossible for him to make whatever move. He has to surrender because Thomas is holding him: ‘You’ve held me chained to a post.’ As said earlier, the

verb serves for replacement. It is not surprising to find that the text would indeed be overflowing with the term. When dipping into the pages we come up to another set of 'get' on pages 25-27, for example "... I hope we can get started" (25). Thomas wishes to start as soon as possible with his project of receiving answers from his detainees. This is simply another way to say: 'I hope we can begin'. In the same flow we have "get you in line a bit" (25) which in fact could be said into simply 'put you in line a bit'. Again "... getting things taken care of" (25) where 'getting' can be replaced by 'having'. 'Get' also means 'become' in '... I get angry' (26). Inside the phrase: "Dick? Oh, I get it." (27) Thomas claims that he has understood: 'Oh, I understand.' When Kev speaks about the master's degree that he wished to obtain, it was just a matter of studies: "I was getting a master's..." (36) for 'I was studying for a master's...'. Kev's ambition was to travel on the Shuttle. When Thomas, who knows his friend well, says "...you were trying to get on the Shuttle." (37), the reference alludes to: '...you were trying to ride on the Shuttle.' Proceeding further on in our investigation we pitch into "...your astronaut buddy who didn't get to ride on a cool spaceship," (51) paraphrasable into '...who didn't succeed in travelling...'. On several occasions, Thomas has been specific about wishing to go up somewhere. On page 64 he stipulates: "All I ever wanted to do was get off this fucking planet." In this extract 'get off' has the sense of 'flee'. In our first steps at learning English language we were always made to remember the gesture of coming out of bed in the morning as the act of 'getting up'. When talking to Hansen, Thomas is driven to his wits' end by the latter, which makes Thomas retaliate with "Don't make me get up." (81), that is 'Don't provoke me', where Thomas is not at all in a state of having a nap in bed. In spite of Hansen's explanations, Thomas does not understand his bringing children inside his house. That is why he says: "That's the part I don't get." (85) meaning: 'That's the part I can't make out.'

General view

This section will consist in a session of observations as to the stance our two languages hold when compared with each other. With the translation of three sections of the book, I think there is enough material to carry on with the chronology of expressions as they have occurred through the pages. The edition I have used is a 2014 Hamish Hamilton paperback imprint of Penguin Books.

“You’re really here” (18) – “*Ca y est, t’es bien là.*”

Satisfaction in the tone, quite perceptible through English. Thomas wants to be sure that he is not dreaming. Could also give: *«Enfin, t’es là devant moi»*. Perhaps he has been waiting very long or he is proud of his personal strength and achievement of having brought a person as important as an astronaut.

“Who the fuck are you” (18) – “*Qui êtes-vous bordel.*”

Right from the beginning the exchanges embark on expressions tinted with common cursing as the speaker is alarmed at finding himself in no normal or ordinary situation. He is groggy in face of some danger that he feels to be hanging on his head and through which he won’t be able to do much whereby the rudeness of expression, prone to irritation, with no play on words if we are to think about his leg padlocked with chains.

“Who are you ?” (18) – “*Mais qui êtes-vous?*”

This question comes about for the third time within hardly ten lines. The speaker cools down a little bit and wishes to regain his temperance. I support that the *« Mais »* integrates itself fully in French to denote some degree of impatience from the speaker.

A third utterance of < *Qui êtes-vous?* > sounds as lacking in consistency and appears to be quite monotonous.

“You did this?” (18) – « *Vous avez fait ça ?* »

We are left to contrast Thomas’s form of address with Kev’s. He is calm and steady whereas Kev hasn’t recognized his interlocutor yet. We can infer that the latter would refuse familiarizing with what can be called his ‘guard’ if not ‘torturer’. On the other hand, Thomas knows his captive “from way back” (12), whereby the ‘thou’ deictic further reinforced by his dominating stance in this particular situation. ‘You’re here because I brought you here.’ – < *T’es ici parce que je t’ai emmené ici.* > (I underline), ‘That thing you’re chained to...’ – < *Cette chose à laquelle tu es attaché...* > (I underline), and so on.

“...it’s incredibly strong.” (18) – “... *c’est du solide.*”

The French < *du solide* > suffices amply, as translating the adverb as well into something like < *incroyablement solide* > would make it too heavy a case for the French reader. The partitive article < *du* > takes completely hold of the adverb, melting it within.

“...between the waves and the wind” (19) – « *entre le bruit des vagues et celui du vent.* »

You can’t put waves face to face with wind and expect something to happen without any more precision. On the contrary, the French most naturally carries forth the precision being all about sound and noise. Here it is a question of comparison between the noises that a cannon would make and those produced by the sea waves and the wind.

“That’s way too loud” (19) – « *Tu cries un peu trop fort là.* »

After having yelled, it follows that the protagonist is shouting. The French has to give concrete precision (étouffement) by employing < *Tu cries.* > On the other hand, < *C’est trop fort* > immediately followed by < *C’est du béton* > in the next utterance renders the translation too heavy with repetition.

“...Hello—” (19) – “*Eh oh!*”

The sweet English ‘Hello’ does not lend itself to our usual “Allo!”, proper with phone calls mainly. ‘Hello’ here acts as a signal for who hears. Hence the sweeter French < *Eh oh!* > as an equivalence suits the tone better.

“You done?” (19) – « *Ca y est, t’as fini ?* »

A two-worded question won’t do. Where the English *oversummarises* with a subject and no verb but a past participle as utterance, the oral character of the language is at its full heed. The French, on the other hand, needs consolidation to stand proper in refinement as language.

“...you were such a throwback.” (19) – “... *t’as toujours été un tel exemple.*”

We would be more concerned here with the lexeme ‘throwback’. The dictionary tells us a throwback as being a person or thing that shows the characteristics of sb/sth in the past. But Kev is a military figure who cannot be relegated to the past, as members of the army have to be set as ‘examples’ for others whatever the former’s position or situation, hence propped up by < *toujours* >, whatever the context. Moreover the auxiliary, enriched by < *toujours* > on the other wing, throws forward the idea of some continuous habit in the past, similar to ‘you used to be’.

“No.” (20) – *“Allons.”*

The ‘No’ is clearly an allusion to ‘Be reasonable’. Through dialogue < *Allons* > translates the notion, as a simple < *Non* > appears to be quite flimsy.

“Don’t. Can’t you hear how loud it is in here?” (20) – *“S’il te plait. Tu ne vois pas que tu nous casses les oreilles? »*

I perceive the ‘Don’t’ as a supplication, whereby the ‘S’il te plait’. Furthermore, < *Tu ne vois pas...* > is no perception by sight but rather ‘haven’t you noticed...?’ or ‘Don’t you realize...?’ The inference in French clearly indicates this; ‘how loud’, on the other hand, contains enough punch or violence in itself to give < *tu nous casses les oreilles* >, evoking the sensitiveness of the human auditory membrane. Furthermore, < *tu nous casses les oreilles* > fully coincides with the adjective “loud” with a present tense meant at rendering “it is in here” pleonastic.

“I’ll just leave this bottle here.” (21) – *« Je te laisse cette bouteille, là. »*

What seems to be an expression of the future tense here is none, as “will” is a modal auxiliary corresponding to immediate decision here. Furthermore, the comma in French is necessary to denote that < *là* > refers to the place where Thomas leaves the bottle and not at all to a demonstrative pronoun directed towards < *bouteille* >.

“I dragged you out of the van onto that cart there –you can see it outside.” (21) –

« Une fois hors de la camionnette, je t’ai catapulté dans cette espèce de chariot que tu vois là, dehors et t’ai tiré jusqu’ici. »

In French, the translation comes out beautifully enough implicating movement. The act of dragging < *tiré* > has to be associated with < *catapulté* > (onto) as the next move after

having placed Kev on the cart. Furthermore, “there” implicates that Thomas is precisely pointing towards the spot where the cart is situated, hence reinforced by *< que tu vois là >* as Kev’s attention is very likely to be attracted by the cart.

“I could push an elephant on that thing,” (21) – « *J’aurais pu y faire monter un éléphant et le pousser sur cette chose.* »

The Herculean characteristic evoked here could intrinsically be an allusion to personal effort pertaining to the American mode of life comprised in the American Dream where single-handed courage is what makes a “true” American. If we were to witness such a struggle, we would see the guy in the full “push” effort, deploying all his strength in getting the elephant up inside. Whereby the idea of not only *< pousser >* but also *< faire monter >*, both integrated in “push”, just like Hercules portrayed in the act of the two subsequent movements through the well-known peploses.

“You’ve got me by, what, thirty pounds,” (21) – “*A une quinzaine de kilos...comparé à moi.*”

With weights and measures, translation from English to French is bound to approximation rather. Furthermore, the sentence alludes to the difficulty which the protagonist was bound to experience in dealing with the transportation task.

“Fuck you.” (22) – “*Je t’emmerde.*”

As from now on, the *<tutoiement>* becomes tangible for Kev as this particular swearing embarks on familiarity rendered quite clear in French. He has to change strategy consequently, since his persecutor does not seem to yield. The reader is thence able to perceive that the only solution for him now is to put himself on the upper rung and

illustrate his posture as one of superiority in comparison with his kidnapper despite the unfavourable situation in which he is finding himself.

“I was planning...” (22) — « *Moi qui voulais...* »

“Etoffement” is absolutely vital here as the speaker wishes to emphasize the simplicity with which he wants to sort things out, endowed as he is with moral values as he points out subsequently. The < *Moi* > form contained in ‘I’ stresses the fact that he is no ordinary abductor. The same reflection is set two lines further down - and the subsequent paragraph - with < *Kev, t’es astronaut, toi* > the other way round this time, for the speaker is, again, anxious for a sensible and what should be for him an obvious outcome. < *Moi* > opposed to < *toi* > sorts the two protagonists out, in Thomas’s mind, as being men of quite a different cast in the midst of incomprehension dominating their time of existence. It glows out through the texts in both languages, and perhaps more comfortably in French, that Thomas volunteers in being some sort of a “Saviour” into which he wants to draw his friend in an attempt at establishing both of themselves in the posture of singularity as one body, an enterprise in which he succeeds in the end. Other examples of this kind of shaping abound and can be underlined at page 24 for instance: ‘But you’re still dead.’ – < *Mais t’es déjà mort, toi.* > (I underline). Kev’s motive is different. Still, sorting Thomas out, he disregards him and refuses to put himself on the same footing as Thomas, as for him the latter is already ‘seven feet deep down in earth’. Not only Thomas is a dead man but, true to his words, he is in an outer world. So Kev rebukes him as being outcast, apart in some supernatural, out of reach universe. The French is subsequently better at discarding him with < *toi* >. To particularize him from all living beings, Thomas is in fact all alone in his undertakings with one Kev not at all prepared to act side by side with him at this stage. ‘But you won’t go to the moon.’ (28)

– < *Mais toi, tu n’iras pas sur la lune.* > (I underline). We need not go far with this line to understand that Thomas is trying to impregnate Kev with revolt. How can the sincere flag-waver accept being cast aside so diametrically? We must not lose sight that the personal pronoun < *toi* > is self-sufficing. Thomas zeroes in on Kev who has wasted time putting faith in phantasmal beliefs. What must also be underlined is that the deictic < *toi* > is used to denote that in all these fantasies, Kev is the only one to be blamed. Hence, nothing would be clearer to the fact that Kev has been vainly giving hopes to himself, so much so that, to justify his embarrassment, he now starts by stipulating “Why would I go to the moon?” Paradoxically, he goes on to formulate that “Astronauts don’t go to the moon.” (28), suppressing all sense the sentence could contain. Hence

‘What are astronauts for, then?’, Thomas seems to claim. ‘What have you come to? What are you as a patriot? Shake your guts, man!!!’

could have followed in consequence. It perspires now that Thomas seems to be regretting that such an inclination had come to serve him as model at one period of his time. At the same go, on page 36 we have “I had a college degree and he made me work on the floor...” – < *J’étais diplômé d’université et lui me faisait travailler à même le sol...* > (I underline) or again at page 47, the congressman: “...so I know where you’re coming from.” – < *Je sais donc, moi, d’où vous venez.* > (I underline). On page 53 the group of words “If I had my way (they’d be cryogenically frozen...)” is rendered simply by < *Moi, (je les aurais gardés au frais...)* > (emphasis and parentheses added) which fully grasps the whole thing < *Si je le pouvais...* >. Other examples flourish. On page 64: “I always knew ...” – < *Moi, j’ai toujours su ...* > (I underline). In the third section we have: “... but you really might have an idea.” (69) – < *... mais vous, vous pourriez vraiment avoir une idée.* > (I underline). “He gave me the idea ...” (71) – < *C’est lui qui m’a donné l’idée...* > (I underline). “He’s an honorable man, too.” (71) –

« Lui aussi est un homme d'honneur. » (I underline). "... what you did to me." (71) –
 « ... ce que vous m'avez fait à moi. » (I underline). "That's not something you forget."
 (75) – « C'est pas quelque chose qu'on oublie ça. » (I underline). "I want to be factual,
 too." (76) – « Moi aussi je veux me baser sur les faits. » (I underline). "You are
 terrifying." (78) – « Vous êtes terrifiant, vous ! » (I underline). "You said yes!" (80) –
 « Vous dites oui comme ça! » (I underline). "I taught math,..." (80) – « J'enseignais
 les maths, moi,... » (I underline). "I didn't like scary movies." (81) – « Je n'aimais pas
 les films d'angoisse, moi. » (I underline). "I feed her." (83) – « C'est moi qui lui donne
 à manger. » (I underline). "They don't get fair trials." (87) – « Ceux-là ne reçoivent pas
 de jugements équitables. » (I underline). « A pederast who just reforms himself?" (90)
 – « Un pédé qui se réforme comme ça? » (I underline).

"You've got me chained to a post." (22) – « Tu m'as enchaîné à un pylône, canaille! »
 Kev is finding himself in a helpless and more and more pitiful situation when he says
 "You've got me". He becomes aggressive and prone to swearing, and to compensate his
 situation the 'bastard' formula does not appear to be excessive in the translation.

"But you're not." (23) – « Que tu n'es pas, bien sûr. »

This is a line perspiring of pure irony which has to be reinforced with < bien sûr >
 embraced quite significantly by 'But'.

"Which is a government agency." (23) – « Qui est un agent du gouvernement. »

It is obvious that the NASA cannot be described in French as an agency the same way
 as < agence > is. The organization can, on the other hand, be interpreted as a
 representative for the government.

“And you’re a brilliant criminal mastermind.” (23) – « *Et pour ce qui est du crime, toi, t’es plutôt brillant.* »

At this stage the outcome constituted an acute headache for me. In *Robert & Collins*, ‘mastermind’ is given as < *génie* > or < *cerveau* >. But transposing < *génie* > or < *cerveau* > would lead to sheer malapropism here as both of them carrying a rather positive connotation could not be juxtaposed with ‘crime’. Without recourse to my master, the translation would have risked unguided roaming.

“I’m going to fucking kill you. But the cops will kill you first.” (24) – “*Je vais te tuer, bordel. Mais les flics l’auront déjà fait de toute façon.*”

The state of mind in which Kev finds himself is one of uncontrollable agitation opposite Thomas’s calmness. Very much frustrated, he is compelled into staying in a low profile as he is in a deplorable situation and builds all his hopes on the probable outcome of being ultimately liberated by his *comrades* crouched somewhere just outside behind the bushes and ready to jump on Thomas, the prey. Through this line it becomes perceivable, on the other hand, that Kev is implicitly beseeching Thomas to undo his cuffs in order that he might break his neck or engage in some sort of a duel against him, proper and implicit to the well-known American Western films. But, in the same momentum, he knows quite well that Thomas is no fool to let him go. With this contingency, he only has to content himself with waiting for events to happen by themselves fortunately enough. In the translation process and on the grammatical level besides, the French version pictures the act quite interestingly as being already fulfilled, with the appropriate use of the future perfect tense whereas on the English side the task is still to come about. It implies that Kev has already reduced his hostage taker to

nothingness with the clear view of demoralizing him with verbal threat, if not fear, the meagre weapon at his disposal and with which he must sort out with some clever issue.

“You don’t think there is a massive manhunt... ?” (24) – « *Tu ne penses pas un peu à la gigantesque chasse à l’homme en ce moment... ?* »

Kev is trying to put significant stress on the naïvety with which Thomas is playing, attempting at making him feel guilty at some time. ‘You don’t think’ lies behind ‘Don’t you realize the consequences’. Hence, < *un peu* > translates the moral feeling that ought to be Thomas’s, he who has been going on stressing on the moral, principled side of his personality. Moreover, “there is” gives a picture of the great deployment that might be undergoing at this precise moment “*en ce moment*”.

“...one of those guys who knows he’s smart...” (24) – “*...de ceux qui savent bien qu’ils sont rusés...*”

The English singles out the protagonist as being a unique specimen. But to achieve this, the French makes use of the plural in order to integrate him inside a community of individuals and at the same time uplift him among those specific individuals.

“But you’re still dead.” (24) – “*Mais t’es déjà mort, toi.*”

To follow what has been stressed earlier, it can be noted here that Kev is repulsing Thomas and refuses to consider himself as being one of Thomas’s kinds. For him, Thomas is a dead man and rebukes him as being far away and apart in some supernatural and out of reach universe. The French subsequently has to render it with < *toi* > to differentiate him from all normal living persons as Thomas is particularly accompanied by no one else in his undertakings, and certainly not by Kev at this stage.

“No, they won’t.” (24) – *“Mais non.”*

Thomas needs to stun Kev by persevering with his calmness, if not cold-bloodedness.

He wants to denote that, being level-headed, he is in full command of what he is up to.

In French, the expression is an automatically spontaneous one in the sense of ‘you must stop dreaming’, which goes to show that everything has been well calculated and is flowing smoothly.

“Maybe. Maybe not.” (25) – *“C’est bien possible.”*

At one time I thought « *Peut-être bien que oui, peut-être bien que non* ». The adverb

“Maybe” stands as an auxiliary modal for possibility. I choose to translate the terms this way because I believe that < *bien* > fully contains the feeling of the doubt that can be sensed both in the positive and negative forms.

“I couldn’t kill you. I’ve never killed anything.” (26) – « *Je ne pourrai pas te tuer. Je n’ai jamais tué.* »

Here the modal ‘couldn’t’ is one denoting impossibility. But as the action is not accomplished, the future is bound to dominate in French. Further ahead ‘anything’ becomes superfluous in translation as both ‘anything’ and ‘anyone’ are self-contained inside the French wording < *Je n’ai jamais tué (qui que ce soit ou quoi que ce soit)* >.

“But you knew I was from college.” (26) – *“Mais tu sais qu’on a été à la fac.”*

“But you knew” meaning to say ‘you’ve just said’. It’s clear it’s not a past tense as this past is linked to the time they are talking. Moreover, as this exchange is in relation to our two protagonists in particular, the 1st person plural is understood and must be

maintained with 'on' for 'I'. It is clear that Kev is gradually getting a glimpse as to Thomas's affirmation:

“Why are you looking at me like that? Does that mean you recognize me?” (25) but, human psyche being what it is, he cannot give his blessing to his *enemy's* statement on sight and at one go, whereby supporting the earlier thesis that Kev refuses familiarizing with his 'torturer' (18 above –“You did this.”)

“But you won't go to the moon.” (28) – *“Mais toi, tu n'iras pas sur la lune.”*

It is clear with this line that Thomas is pricking Kev's feeling as the *patriot* who has been left on the border line. Again the deictic is meaningfully self-contained as Thomas is looking out at making Kev feel the waste of time into which he has been squelching, where the personal pronoun 'toi' must be divulged as a pinpoint wholly grasped through the translation, meant at pricking his nerves. Subsequently, it sticks out a mile that Kev has continually been dwelling on the dormant side of his personality, not realizing that Neil Armstrong has become famous for having fulfilled his *dream* contrary to him with his contradictory statement now “Why would I go to the moon?” somewhat revealing the consolation inside which he has finally enclosed himself in hope of better days. He has absurdly come to admit furthermore that “Astronauts don't go to the moon” contradictorily acknowledging that words have lost their meanings, that he has been swallowed up in passivity, even for a learned person such as himself. Hence

‘What are they for, then?’ seems to imply Thomas. ‘What have you done to your dreams? What has become of your *American Dream*? Shame on you!!!’

could have been a sequel to this part. Further on, Thomas seems to regret that such state of mind could have served him as model in his younger period of existence.

“I didn’t go out.” (32) – « *Je ne perdais pas trop de temps.* »

This sentence is explicit enough to deserve too long some comment. What is interesting is that the wording on the one side of the balance pan in relation to the other would not lend itself to the same extent in an otherwise different context. Let’s say that for a student who has a heavy workload of the consistency of Kev’s, going out fits hand in hand with erring, losing time unnecessarily. The French does not have to be precise as to the first detail, whence the direct leap onto the second flap of the statement.

“...but because you calling me nuts is so expected and so boring.” (36) – « *... mais parce qu’à force de t’entendre m’insulter, j’en ai pris l’habitude et ça devient lassant.* »

The sentence evokes the never ending curses Kev has recourse to in addressing Thomas in his attempt at offending him at some time. Because the curses have been recurring, I choose “*à force de t’entendre m’insulter*” which, according to me encloses the notion of continuity that would lead to something “*lassant*” indeed, although Thomas does not fail to stress on his unwavering state of mind. By the way, the next sentence of the translation brings in the expected precision. Moreover, the insults have become ‘so expected’ that Thomas has become used to them as a ‘habit’.

“No one who looked like Don.” (38) – « *Personne ne pouvait ressembler à Don.* »

Here the sentiment of discrimination is immediately felt when Thomas utters these words. The French would beautifully produce the notion of impossibility “*ne pouvait*” finely filtered through “who” on the reverse.

“...the sun dropped.” (38) – «... *le soleil disparaissait à l’horizon.* »

On the first instance, the translation gave < *le soleil disparaissait* >. But on a second thought, the “dropped” idea in fact integrates one of going down behind the horizon. From thence, the precision needed to be brought about in French, my argument being that if it were left as such, i.e. deprived of the distinguished precision, the image would have stayed blurred as to disappearing behind thick clouds or some mountain, for example, thus severing the notion of going down while disappearing after the day’s span.

“So I take it you live around here.” (38) – « *A t’entendre, je comprends que tu vis dans le coin.* »

Thomas has just been talking about the area where they are, which makes Kev believe that he is used to the sort of climate they are experiencing now as he describes the place and its state as a poet on the verge of revealing something about nature by the way. Consequently, “So” acts as a deduction given on the other wing by “*A t’entendre*” because Kev has been listening to Thomas’s ‘dithyramb’ and successively concludes by what he believes to have understood “...I take it”.

“You sound like yourself again.” (39) – “*Là tu redeviens toi-même.*”

Thomas is satisfied after having heard Kev revel with vocabulary proper to his own world, belonging to the sky adventurer. Now he wants to draw his awareness as to the words he has used pertaining to what he has achieved and which in fact will be of no use to him as everything has been defunded as far as Kev’s future is concerned, besides. His main disquietude here is to make him realize that he has been wasting his time, with a whole career remaining afloat despite himself. However, Thomas appreciates Kev’s

refinement and, with this line, stresses on his amazement for him, apt at being interpreted by: ‘Look! Are you conscious that you are or have been yourself every time’ as a man of science. Kev perhaps knows it and has cultivated an attitude at remaining satisfied inside humility and patience. Thomas instantly jumps at the opportunity and pushes Kev’s pride one step up in his search at getting him on his side. This whole lot is engulfed in one word: “*Là*” translating the admiration which Thomas wishes to impart to his buddy, however. We remember that he regards him as a hero for both himself: “You’re *still* my hero.” (31) and his friend Don: “Don was your biggest fan.” (37), “... I swear Don really admired you.” (37) reinforced by his mastery for numbers, theories or equations since his being a Teacher Assistant.

“The man is dead.” (39) – « *Il est mort le bonhomme.* »

Textually, the sentence would have given < *L’homme est mort* >. Delivered as such, the sentiment that can be drawn appears to be deprived of consideration for the dead man. But it so happens that the enunciation is one perspiring with sympathy for the man who must be respected for his state, in the first place, and for what he was, i.e. one of his or their teachers. Hence, < *le bonhomme* > helps alleviating all aggressiveness which would be felt in French but not so in English.

“You know you are pissed.” (40) – “*Tu sais qu’on t’a envoyé chier.*”

At this point, Thomas has succeeded in getting Kev say that the moon project has failed “It’s not defunded. The funding is going elsewhere.” (40). But what is revolting to him is that the latter refuses to admit that he has been used towards what appear now to have turned out into vain projects. Thomas stops beating about the bush as Kev’s persistence at remaining unturned by his words turns him wild with rage. Through his words, the

violence that has been undermining Kev's hopes is clear enough and ought to have been transparent inside the latter's conscience. That is why at this point the reproach is quite an uncouth one because Kev seems to be accepting his lot. Consequently, Thomas's wish is to shake Kev's dormant side and gain him to the cause for which he is fighting. By the way, Thomas will not leave the bit unchewed as he comes afresh with the same reproach fifty lines further down but uttered this time on a definite and wilder extent "I want you to be pissed" being scandalous enough especially after his having affirmed that everything done was in fact just a facade and that there was no need to turn the tables upside down: "It was just a show, Thomas. Nothing to get upset about."(41).

"I was in the machinery to try to fix that machine, ..." (49) – "*J'étais dans le mécanisme..*"

The reason why we are going to stay on this bit of sentence deserves some brief explanation. We have the word 'machinery' which is being used thrice here but not translated the same way because in the locutions "... is part of the machinery..." and "... if you weren't part of the machinery?" it is preceded by 'part of the'. Consequently, 'machinery' here alludes to tricks that have been going on, whence the translation into "*manigance*" whereas the third occurrence of the word is different in that the congressman is refusing to accept that he had been indulged in dishonest schemes. Thus "*mécanisme*" suits better in his role as repairer of machines.

"That can't be true." (52) – "*C'est pas vrai.*»

If we just took one second in literally saying < *Ca ne peut pas être vrai.* >, the affirmation with "can't" as a modal of impossibility preserved inside the translation, would mean that the congressman would be lying. But such a statement cannot be used

as he is precisely talking about a serious accident that cost him two limbs. And it so happens that Thomas is stunned by what he has just heard. His expression is rather an exclamation of surprise which could however give < *C'est pas possible.* > which continues to hold the element of surprise.

“... groups of nineteen-year-olds...” (53) – « ... *des jeunes de dix-huit dix-neuf ans...* »

It is clear that the congressman is referring to an average group of young people. The English version sticks to the one figure denomination whereas the French version extends the group as being between eighteen and nineteen years of age. Moreover, there is no pleonasm with the word < *jeunes* > as it correlates with the set of words. If, on the other hand, we were to use the word < *groupes* > we would still have to bring about the precision with < *groupes de jeunes* > conforming to the way the French would give it inside the correct saying.

“...shooting themselves in the leg.” (53) – « ... *se péter la patte à coups de carabine.* »

In this discourse, the congressman is almost categorizing young people as being irresponsible, following the various experiences he has had with them as a superior in the army, while he is fully conscious that he has one just in front of him, and whom he is *politely* not going to spare, because he has to bear his state of being prisoner of ‘a head full of rocks’. In the same way, not knowing how to manipulate weapons or their own fingers, the young soldiers sent to the desert are killing just as if they were playing some sort of games. The expression chosen is one of rage and fury. It is best expressed with negative words like < *péter* > in the sense of causing to explode, < *la patte* > for ‘leg’ to denote carelessness, < *à coups de carabine* > is not simply the act of shooting but

using weapons with no judgment to the extent that they are killing or almost killing themselves.

“...but then we turn around...” (58) – « *Et puis d'un coup de baguette magique...* »

It is a question of ‘miracles’ here. We can put ourselves in the common people’s shoes, busy attending to our own affairs and not expecting extraordinary things to happen overnight. But it is at that precise moment that billions of dollars appear miraculously for building castles in the air in the midst of everything having been said as to the precariousness of the situation in which the country is finding herself. The mentioning of ‘castles’ is not excessive with warlords benefiting from government grants. The imagery depicted by “turn around” is just one projecting surprise for everyone whereby the outright transposition.

“... that everyone can rally around...” (58) – « *... autour desquelles les pensées gravitent,...* »

The congressman tries to explain to Thomas how things function in the administrative domain which is not just a question of economic budget. Things that are readily funded to the detriment of other ones are those that go in the country’s interest at international level and the image that the country would be liable to project. Here it is all about honor for both the country and the people. When the question of honor is at stake the people are ready to vest all their interest in it and would simply forget about domestic measures. “So we find the money” (58) says the congressman convincingly enough. The prepositional verb ‘to rally around’ gives the idea of assembling or gathering, whereby < *graviter* > going better inside than < *grouiller* > for example. There are matters for which people show patriotic solidarity above everything else. “Everyone” is being

given as *les pensées* › which is the most vivid spot in the head when people have to decide about a capital issue.

“... these massacres at malls or offices,...” (59) – « ... *ces massacres perpétrés au milieu des halls de magasins et bureaux,...* »

Padding is necessary here, as the denominations remind us about the terrorist attacks at the World Trade Centre, for example, and if we stay on “...*ces massacres dans les centres commerciaux et les bureaux*” the case appears too frugal to be underlined. This is in fact what Thomas seems to be referring to, as the event together with others, are very present in everybody’s minds. Moreover the preposition ‘at’ is being transposed by the past participle *perpétrés* › to give depth to the act of committed massacres carrying a universal dimension.

“I’ll be walking down... I’ll start boiling inside... I picture myself...” (62) – « *Je descendais...et commençais à entrer en ébullition à l’intérieur de moi-même...et je me vois...* »

We have here a series of descriptions happening one after the other. Thomas has been living inside too much frustration that he is being invaded by hallucinations which he describes using expressions of future. The use of the modal “will” however does not indicate some project inside Thomas’s head. This is confirmed by the present tense on the one hand “I picture myself” and his vision of picturing, on the other hand, which hence is just a vision. It is in fact a comparison between what Moses undertook as a prophet and his dream of his being possibly incarnated in Moses in front of the Red Sea. We can however wonder if he is not viewing himself in the Apocalypse as the messiah who has come to raise the world to the conscience of the people’s acts, and clean it from

all ‘dirty thoughts’, whereby the use of an unreal future in “will”. We will also notice that the ‘will’ form is being given, without causing any discomfort, by the imperfect tense in French, as it is, again, the description of a dream.

“That’s a full commitment.” (75) – « *Si on le fait c’est en toute connaissance de cause.* »

Read as such, the translation does not seem to have anything to do with the original.

Let’s give it as: < *Ceci est un engagement total.* >, which now appears to be going hand in hand with the source language. The term < *engagement* > is a severe one. It is normally used when it has the objective of bringing about some serious consequences. Now, we are in the presence of a case where it is all about the freedom of opting for a choice of appearance in the public with no sort of prohibition prevailing. Thomas is talking to one of his teachers who shocks him in his role as such in front of his pupils. With such a backdrop, there ought to be some distance between the protagonists primarily instituted by the one who is supposed to set good examples for others. But what is happening is that everybody is brought to witness the contrary inside eccentric behavior. The teacher hence seems to be embarrassed when the point is raised and bluntly denies the fact, thus provoking the comment leading to its French equivalent here.

“... some sweaty wrestling.” (77) – « *...transpirer dans du corps-à-corps.* »

We know wrestling as being a fight in a ring between two individuals engaged in full bodily contact. A literal translating would have produced something like « *de la lutte transpirante* » or « *des combats de lutte collants de sueur* ». Here Thomas is perhaps not referring to some wrestling match in reality, as we see the resulting absurdity in

expression. We have been learning about Hansen's interest in debauched tendencies especially towards young children. Thomas is on the search of discovering the extent to which Hansen can or could push his 'luck' on them. It has effectively come out that the guy was very fond of young boys whom he engaged into playing with him in games that would have each one venture into touching bodies and parts in reciprocity. These amusements were defined by him as a 'math party' or 'tailor game' or 'horsing around'. The target language has modulated the adjective 'sweaty' into a verb and 'wrestling' not as the fight but as an activity in which bodies come into close contact.

“Are you straight?” (85) – « *Etes-vous un gars réglo ?* »

The expression could have multiple meanings or even be charged with innuendo. Is Hansen questioning Thomas about his honesty, his frankness, his cleanness in affairs or would he be sexually teasing him? Nobody knows. Is he enquiring him as being normal or not, as not being a homosexual, as being forthright or not? The translation could go from: « *Etes-vous franco sur toute la ligne?* », « *Etes-vous un gars correct?* », « *Etes-vous un type honnête?* », « *Est-ce que vous bandez bien?* » to « *Etes-vous normal avec les femmes ?* » and so on. It could be interpreted as an attempt at seducing him to obtain some grace and his liberty, who knows? But the fact remains that he is ultimately going to draw Thomas into saying something about his gallant relations with women in view of paying him back in his own coin.

CONCLUSION

If we were to say something about prose writing, the main factor that lies behind the style is that sentences occur on a continuous basis with significant paragraphs unwinding one after the other. With dialogues this characteristic cannot be followed to the letter as words are succinct and are spieled off in more or less rapid flows. Hence, this is one of the parameters the translator has got to cope with in trying to keep an atmosphere intact inside each wording in the target language. This means that words should be taken with a pair of tongs and examined through the telescope, just like the scientist inside his lab, for verification as to accuracy. This is what linguists designate as 'translation processes', where every expression has to be dealt with discernment so that the honest reader is not misled. If ever we do not obtain an exact representation of what is being expressed, we can wonder to what extent the whole projection may get altered. There is also the confrontation with very many colloquial expressions which could be delightful with flavor for the initiates. The automatism they release is not a blank one, in that such an exercise requires careful selection again, intended at keeping the reader inside the intrigue, if not the story that has been unthreading, but at least the labor that has come out through the assignment. What should be bored in mind is that choice of expression is not readily available at one go, in spite of everything. It has consequently come out through such an experience that translation consists in knowing oneself and one's capacity at grasping meanings and correctly interpreting oral and written stuff at whatever level, a personal asset that can neither be taken away from whoever it may matter nor is it transferable from one individual to another. Afterwards, we should never lose sight that, again, it is all about possessing the aptitude of projecting the right image first and foremost, through the narrow space of one's limits, as one's resources can never be proclaimed as being inexhaustible at whatever stage. Such an experience then

constructs the person into one being with one's own qualities and defects. If the same task is notwithstanding set on another individual, the reader is liable to find himself confronted to a different version of the same text. It all depends on the level on which the translator wishes to place his mode of viewing. We know quite well there is no single way of dealing with a text. Every reader or writer develops his own way of picturing events. What matters is the affinity with which one is endowed and the refinement that one will be able to give forth through one's work. My version has in fact been based on the simplicity with which expressions should be treated to keep the readability of the text on a fair level. Whether this objective has been attained would depend on the degree of appreciation it would receive. In my commentary, a fairly good amount of conditionals has been used in order to keep the floor open to criticisms. Honestly speaking, one may come to conclude that there is always room for the ambitious student to produce what he/she feels appropriate to one situation. Hence, language is malleable and this malleability may drive one at producing different moods according to the words chosen. A translation can turn out to be technical or non-technical, familiar, idiomatic or dialectal whereby the translator is bound to be careful about the way messages are transmitted to give expressions their correct orientation. On terminating this kind of work, one can proclaim oneself to have come with one theory. A good theory however is one that is disputable. With this premise in mind, the research worker is one who has to remain humble and be prepared to accept that whatever he has brought about is likely to be updated in more proper form some day or other. In all proposals, scientists know that they would always be learning and that despite all the energy one has put in revealing one's discoveries, propositions are liable at being pulled down at whatever time and looked out at being corrected. That is why we say that good theories are those that can be argued. Here we can jot in the fact that very many readers

have the tendency of looking out for a word-for-word version of their interpretation for their own satisfaction and for this reason we may tumble upon individuals who refuse to accept one version opposite another. With such prerequisites, the ground would be open to criticisms from whatever part in view of demonstrating issues better than what have already been considered.

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YOUR FATHERS, WHERE ARE THEY?

AND THE PROPHETS, DO THEY LIVE FOREVER?

We have here one man, a young American, who has decided to boost himself up into having certain things profoundly changed as he wishes to break the deadlock in which he is finding himself in a country whose grandeur is plummeting. He undertakes to confine a bunch of personalities and have them submitted to his interrogations because a vice around his head has been spoiling his life resulting in turning his head “one turn too tight”. To what extent will he succeed in having things done will depend on the readers’ perseverance at going through and accompanying him in his disappointments and setbacks. The book is a fiction about the United States’ exaggerated pride in its role as policeman, protector and model of humanity, according to general beliefs, while the country puts aside chronic problems such as education, social and environmental reforms to the great discomfort of ordinary people.

America’s youth

Racism

Space kite

Criminal mastermind

“Irregardless”

Government priorities

Waste

White whale

Budget cuts

NASA jones

Condescension

Useless wars

Sputnik

Bait & switch

Apollo

ISS

Neil Armstrong

Fucking promise