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TRADUCTEUR D'UN JOUR « Polar australien »

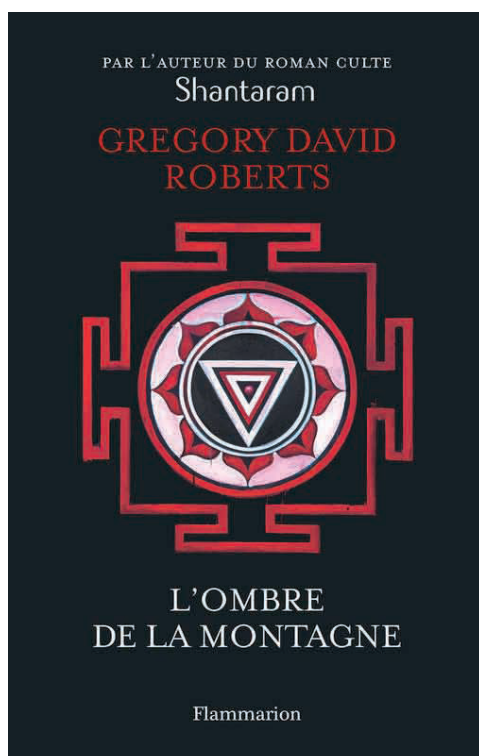
« L'Ombre de la montagne » de Gregory David Roberts

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## Extrait 1 (V.O. chapitre 12, p. 113-115)

When the previous headman of the slum retired to his village, he nominated Johnny Cigar as his successor. A few voices grumbled that Johnny wasn't the ideal choice, but the love and admiration everyone felt for the retiring headman silenced their objections.

It was an honorary position, with no authority beyond that contained within the character of the man who held it. After almost two years in the job, Johnny had proven himself to be wise in the settlement of disputes, and strong enough to inspire that ancient instinct: the urge to follow a positive direction. For his part, Johnny enjoyed the leadership role, and when all else failed to resolve a dispute, he went with his heart, declared a holiday in the slum, and threw a party.

His system worked, and was popular. There were people who'd moved into that slum, because there was a pretty good party every other week to settle a dispute peacefully. People brought disputes from other slums, to have them resolved by Johnny. And little by little, the boy born on the pavement was Solomon to his people.

"Arun! Get down to the mangrove line with Deepak!" He shouted. "That flood wall collapsed yesterday. Get it up again, fast! Raju! Take the boys to Bapu's house. The old ladies in his lane have no plastic on the roof. Those fucking cats pulled it off. Bapu has the sheets. Help him get them up. The rest of you, keep clearing those drains! Jaldi!" Fast!

The tea arrived, and Johnny sat down to drink with me.

"Cats," he sighed. "Can you explain to me why there are cat people in this world?"

"In a word? Mice. Cats are handy little devils."

"I guess so. You just missed Lisa and Vikram. Has she seen your face like this?"

"No."

“Hell, man, she’s gonna have a fit, yaar. You look like somebody ran over you.”

“Thanks, Johnny.”

“Don’t mention,” he replied. “Hey, that Vikram, he doesn’t look too good either. He’s not sleeping well, I think.”

I knew why Vikram didn’t look too good. I didn’t want to talk about it.

“When do you think?” I asked, looking at the black, heaving clouds.

The smell of rain that should-but-wouldn’t fall was everywhere in my eyes, in my sweat, in my hair: first rain, the perfect child of monsoon.

“I thought it would be today,” he replied, sipping at his tea. “I was sure.”

I sipped my tea. It was very sweet, laced with ginger to defeat the heat that pressed down on every heart in the last days of the summer. The ginger soothed the cuts on the inside of my mouth, and I sighed with pleasure.

“Good chai, Johnny,” I said.

“Good chai,” he replied.

“Indian penicillin,” I said.

“There is ... there is no penicillin in this chai, baba,” Johnny said.

“No, I mean – ”

“We never put penicillin in our tea,” he declared.

He seemed offended.

“No, no,” I reassured him, knowing that I was heading down a dead-end street. “It’s a reference to an old joke, a joke about chicken soup, a joke about chicken soup being called Jewish penicillin.”

Johnny sniffed at his tea charily.

“You ... you smell chickens in the tea?”

“No, no, it’s a joke. I grew up in the Jewish part of my town, Little Israel. And, you know, it’s a joke everybody tells, because Jewish people are supposed to offer you chicken soup, no matter what’s wrong with you. You’ve got an upset stomach, have a little chicken soup. You’ve got a headache, have a little chicken soup. You’ve just been shot, have a little chicken soup. And in India, tea is like chicken soup for Jewish people, see? No matter what’s wrong, a strong glass of chai will fix you up. Geddit?”

His puzzled frown cleared in a half-smile.

“There’s a Jewish person not far from here,” he said. “He stays in the Parsi Colony at Cuffe Parade, even though he’s not a Parsi. His name is Isaac, I believe. Shall I bring him here?”

“Yes!” I replied excitedly. “Get the Jewish person, and bring him here!”

Johnny rose from his stool.

“You’ll wait for me here?” He asked, preparing to leave.

“No!” I said, exasperated. “I was joking, Johnny. It was a joke! Of course I don’t want you to bring the Jewish person here.”

“It’s really no trouble,” he said.

He stared at me, bewildered, trapped in a half step away, uncertain whether he should fetch Isaac-the-Jewish-person or not.

“So ...” I said at last, looking at the sky, “when do you think?”

He relaxed, and scanned the clouds churning in from the sea.

“I thought it would be today,” he replied. “I was sure.”

## Extrait 2 (V.O. chapitre 1, p.3-5)

The Source of all things, the luminescence, has more forms than heaven's stars, sure. And one good thought is all it takes to make it shine. But a single mistake can burn down a forest in your heart, hiding all the stars, in all the skies. And while a mistake's still burning, ruined love or lost faith can make you think you're done, and you can't go on. But it's not true. It's never true. No matter what you do, no matter where you're lost, the luminescence never leaves you. Any good thing that dies inside can rise again, if you want it hard enough. The heart doesn't know how to quit, because it doesn't know how to lie. You lift your eyes from the page, fall into the smile of a perfect stranger, and the searching starts all over again. It's not what it was. It's always different. It's always something else. But the new forest that grows back in a scarred heart is sometimes wilder and stronger than it was before the fire. And if you stay there, in that shine within yourself, that new place for the light, forgiving everything and never giving up, sooner or later you'll always find yourself right back there where love and beauty made the world: at the beginning. The beginning. The beginning.

“Hey, Lin, what a beginning to my day!” Vikram shouted from somewhere in the dark, humid room. “How did you find me? When did you get back?”

“Just now,” I answered, standing at the wide French doors that served the street-front veranda of the room. “One of the boys told me you were here. Come out, for a minute.”

“No, no, come on in, man!” Vikram laughed. “Meet the guys!”

I hesitated. My eyes, bright with sky, couldn't see more than lumps of shadow in the dark room. All I could see clearly were two swords of sunlight, stabbing through closed shutters, piercing swirling clouds, scented by aromatic hashish and the burnt-vanilla of brown heroin.

Remembering that day, the drug-smell and the shadows and the burning light cutting across the room, I've asked myself if it was intuition that held me there at the threshold, and stopped me from going in. I've asked myself how different my life might've been if I'd turned and walked away.

The choices we make are branches in the tree of possibility. For three monsoons, after that day, Vikram and the strangers in that room were new branches in a forest we shared, for a while: an urban woodland of love, death and resurrection.

What I remember clearly, from that flinch of hesitation, that moment I didn't think was important at all at the time, is that when Vikram stepped from the darkness and grabbed my arm, dragging me inside, I shivered at the touch of his sweating hand.

A huge bed, extending three meters from the left-hand wall, dominated the big rectangular room. There was a man, or a dead body, it seemed, dressed in silver pyjamas and stretched out on the bed, with both hands folded across his chest.

His chest, so far as I could tell, didn't rise or fall. Two men, one on the left of the still figure, one on the right, sat on the bed and prepared chillum pipes.

On the wall above, directly over the head of the dead or deeply sleeping man, was a huge painting of Zoroaster, the prophet of the Parsi faith.

As my eyes adjusted to the darkness I saw three large chairs, separated by two heavy antique chests of drawers set against the far wall opposite the veranda, with was a man sitting in each of them.