

Assises de la
34^{es} Traduction
à Arles LITTÉRAIRE

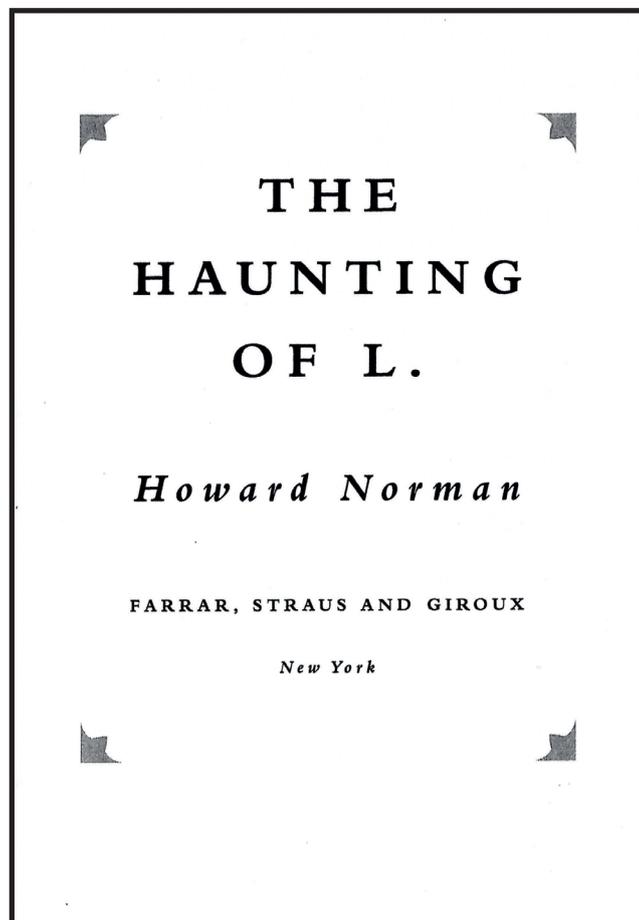
Samedi 11.11.17 > 10h30 - 12h30

ATELIER Anglais (US)

avec **Mona de Pracontal**



Seront à traduire, au choix, les extraits 1 et 2 indiqués.



legs up to her knees, and that it had been that way since childhood. "I always thought—when I was six or seven—that my knees were full of ice or something like that. Strange what a child will think. That my knees kept everything below them cold. I may have dreamt it, I don't remember." Though she kept a nightshirt close at hand, Kala slept with nothing on except for woolen fisherman's socks, sometimes two pairs. In fact, just before dinner on March 12 I'd accompanied her through the blizzard to Springs All-Purpose, a store at the bottom of Morris Street, where Kala purchased three new pairs of socks. I often took a walk with her. During one, she asked to see the house I'd lived in, and I quickly said, "It burnt down. It burnt to the ground." It was a lie that caused me such remorse that the following week I visited my mother's snow-covered grave in the Robie Street cemetery and apologized out loud.

Extrait 1

The evening of March 12 had gone like this: Kala and I had returned from Springs All-Purpose at about five o'clock. It was already dark. We each set our boots by the fireplace in the sitting room, to the left of the front door, directly across the foyer from the dining room. Kala then went upstairs to her room. Then, at seven o'clock, I met Kala and Vienna for dinner. I don't know, really, how we managed to remain so civil, this little ritual of ours. Having dinner together, I mean. Yet we did maintain a certain civility—for a time. One night, while I was working side by side with Vienna in the darkroom, he said, "Despite what's happened between us three, I do hope you and Kala continue to join me

for dinner. It's not so much to ask, is it, to let a man, for an hour or so, be absolutely certain of his wife's whereabouts?"

When Vienna asked that, I felt he was being so civil he was about to explode. He was capable of instilling such tension in a single sentence, I often felt that the first word of that sentence was a match lighting a fuse. That as long as he kept talking, we'd be all right. His silences, however, made me want to dive under the table.

Anyway, Mrs. Sorrel showed us to our usual window-side table. She was a tall, slightly stooped woman about sixty years of age, I would guess, with gray hair pinned up in circular braids. Always acting the gentleman, Vienna pulled Kala's chair out for her, waited until she sat down, then sat down himself. He always sat next to Kala. I sat directly across from Vienna. Odd how, even in the face of tremendous betrayal and under insidious restraint, his little rituals kept going. Holding out a chair, asking, "And how was your walk, dear?"

Once we were all seated, Mrs. Sorrel said, "I hope you enjoy your dinner, you three. Excellent lamb stew tonight. And, special treat, we have pearl onions. Mr. Linn, there was developing fluid on the kitchen floor again. Merely a footprint's worth, but still—I don't mind you working through the night most every night, it's just—" She cleared her throat. "Well then, *bon appétit*. My son Freddy's waiting tables as usual." She returned to the kitchen.

"She always surrounds her complaints with niceties," Kala said. "I admire Mrs. Sorrel's talent with people. I don't have that talent."

"It's an innkeeper's talent," Vienna said. "The position requires it."

"Still, it seems to come naturally to her," Kala said. "Her chattiness. The way she looks you in the eye."

"Perhaps the way to put it," Vienna said, "is that your talent lies with more than one person at a time."

"What do you mean?" Kala said.

"Your lectures. Your ability to stand up and speak in front of an audience. Your *public* talent. I'm sure Mrs. Sorrel couldn't manage that."

We each of us ordered the stew. After Freddy, a sullen man about thirty years old, half dropped, half set our plates down, he went outside for a cigarette. In plain view of our table, he leaned against the wall, flicking ashes, staring at the snow. "According to the newspaper, these are some of the coldest nights of the century," Kala said. "And yet look at Freddy. He's out there with no hat or scarf or gloves. Glutton for punishment—that's his type, isn't it. That's the type Freddy is. Poor Mrs. Sorrel."

Kala took a bite of stew, looked at me, and said, "Peter, has Vienna told you his promising news?"

"What promising news?" I said.

"Quite promising," she said. "My husband's finally received a reply from his benefactor, Mr. Radin Heur, in London. Actually, it's from a man who works for Mr. Heur. A miracle any letter's gotten through in this weather. I simply can't believe the stinging of it, Vienna, your not telling Peter the promising news." She looked directly at me again. "You see, Peter, Mr. Heur is quite interested in determining—yes or no—the *authenticity* of the photograph Vienna took of the airplane wreck up in Churchill. The one that by the grace of God I survived. The photograph of the *aftermath*

of that plane wreck, I mean. I'm sure in your letter you sent Mr. Heur that you described the photograph beautifully, dear."

"Kala, I think that's quite enough," Vienna said.

"Mr. Heur intimated a large sum—if the photograph's verified as authentic," Kala said. "Isn't that how it was put in the letter?"

"Verified as authentic," Vienna said. "That's precisely how it was put."

"If there isn't some—*manipulation*," Kala said. "Some *technique* responsible for showing visible souls rising from those poor shattered Eskimo bodies." She lifted a piece of lamb with her fork, then let it drop again onto her plate. "And to think how narrowly I escaped. To think it might have been *my* soul rising, Vienna. How dreadful to think it. Really, I'm losing my appetite. Peter, I would bet Vienna has the letter in his pocket. Do you have it in your pocket, dear?"

"I happen to, yes," Vienna said.

"And since so much money is at stake—" Kala said.

"How much?" I said.

"My assistant here doesn't need to know business details," Vienna said.

"Oh, that's where you're mistaken," Kala said. "Because you risk Peter feeling left out." She looked at Vienna while speaking to me. "Peter, the letter mentioned the sum of twenty thousand dollars Canadian." She now reached across and took hold of Vienna's wrist, which she often did when about to defy him. "In the least, enough to get us out of debt to Mr. Heur, and then some."

"Better if we discuss this later," Vienna said, almost wist-

fully, as if it were already a lost cause. Then, guaranteeing to rile him even more, Kala said, "Peter, be a dear and rub my feet. They're killing me." She arranged herself slantwise, still close to the table, but with her legs now set across my lap. "Don't think anything of this, Vienna. It's only that Peter's at a more convenient angle."

I was massaging her foot with my left hand. "I thought you were left-handed," Vienna said in a measured voice. "Can you manage with my wife's feet and still use your fork properly?"

I picked up my fork with my right hand and took a bite, carrot in broth. "Actually, I'm ambidextrous," I said. "I thought you'd noticed."

"Well, I notice some things and don't others, apparently."

"Look there," Kala said. "Freddy's on to his next cigarette." But neither Vienna nor I looked at Freddy.

"Perhaps my wife's feet are aching less now, do you suppose?" Vienna said.

I had my hand along Kala's thigh, and she said, "And since it is a fake. Since *Esquimaux Souls Risen from Aeroplane Wreck* is a complete fraud. An excellent title, by the way, Peter. Brilliant. Vienna, you should be grateful. Especially nice touch, the antiquated use of the French *Esquimaux*." This turn in the conversation seemed to pique Kala's appetite; she took three quick bites of stew. "Anyway, since the photograph's a complete sham, it's all the more interesting—No. No, that's not the word. Perhaps *nerve-racking* better fits the situation. Nerve-racking is more to the point. It's all the more nerve-racking that Mr. Radin Heur is suggesting that he send his very own personal photographic expert—

what's his name again, dear, the man who actually wrote the letter?"

Vienna shifted in his chair, took a sip of wine; his entire countenance relaxed when he now saw me press the loaf of bread to the breadboard with one hand, pick up a knife and cut a slice of bread with the other. "Bread, anyone?" I said.

"Not for me, thank you," Kala said. She turned, sat stiffly facing Vienna. I glanced down and saw her slip her shoes on.

Vienna didn't reply about the bread. He reached into his woolen suit coat's pocket. He always dressed formally for dinner—at all times, really. He took out the letter, unfolded it, scanned down the page, and said, "David Harp."

"David Harp. David Harp," Kala said. "Harp's a world-renowned verifier. Verificationist. That's the word he used to describe himself, a *verificationist*." She reached her knife over to a separate plate containing slices of tomato, cut a slice into three parts, then impaled all three parts on her fork and ate them. "He works for the British Museum, Mr. Harp does. He verifies photographs all day long, isn't that so, dear?" Kala hovered her fork over the remaining tomatoes but denied herself any more. "Oh, just read the thing, Vienna."

So Vienna read the one-page letter:

Dear Mr. Vienna Linn,

Your letter was offered for my expert opinion, under circumstances separate from my work at the British Museum. I read it with great interest.

I could even imagine a benefactor offering as much as £20,000, should circumstances warrant.

In my capacity as independent verificationist, then,

I shall arrive in Halifax on the liner *Winifredian*, March 18. I shall, as per your suggestion, register under my name at the Haliburton House Inn. I hope to then begin my work as soon as possible.

With all professional interest,
David Harp

"Notice he doesn't actually mention the name Radin Heur," Kala said. "But he works for Mr. Heur. This David Harp is the one Mr. Heur relies on. To determine the truth of things. To say fake or not fake."

"He'll see it's a fake right away," I said.

"The question is, what purpose might it serve David Harp to say it isn't," Vienna said. "Twenty thousand ~~dollars~~ split two ways, for example. If Mr. Heur relies on David Harp to the extent I believe he does, then he won't ask for a second opinion."

"What do you have to lose, except, eventually, your life?" Kala said.

We ate the rest of the meal in silence. Through the window Freddy saw that we were done eating. He came back inside and cleared away our plates. He smelled as if cigarette smoke had frozen on his clothes.

"Well then," Vienna said. He wiped his mouth with his cloth napkin, set the napkin down, pushed back from the table, and stood. "I'm off for a drink with my newfound friend, Sergeant Maitlin, of the esteemed Halifax Police Department. Where else would I be off to? And later there's work to be done in the darkroom. Sleep well, dearest."