

“ Wind does not complain : man only can hear,
moaning of time into,
the moaning of wind. ”

Octavio Paz — *The Literate Monkey*

Arnaud

First of all, a dim glow appeared behind the dark curve of the Earth, then, some fleeting rays lighted up the atmosphere and the sun sprang out of nowhere, as the plane flew down to meet it. A stewardess immediately rushed along the aisle to draw curtains, to prevent the Paris-Delhi business class passengers from being disturbed.

Arnaud stopped her with a smile. He wanted to contemplate this glorious sunrise. He could still be amazed at such a natural daily show, even though he was an experienced manager, right in the prime of life. Not so deep in himself, the child he used to be lay dormant.

That might be the reason why he had planned his tour to visit his Asian customers with the opportunity to stop for a fortnight in India. Two weeks to meet up with his long lost father !

Arnaud sighed, all this suddenly seemed so pathetic. But he hadn't been able to find any more free time in his overbooked schedule and, most of all, he dreaded that the whole story would be nothing but a ridiculous hoax.

The air hostess offered him a cup of coffee that he accepted with pleasure. Arnaud straightened up his seat and unfolded the flap in front of him. Sipping his coffee, he studied the mysterious letter he had received the month before. He read it for the umpteenth time :

“ My Dear Arnaud,

The transformation has been going on for several days now and I don't really know what is going to happen to me. Perhaps I won't be able to write any more, to think anymore, to be the human being I used to be anymore. I don't know. So, I prefer to send you these few words in case I am unable to do so later.

I have sent the same letter to your sister Emily, but I doubt she'll give any credit to it... She is not as adventurous as you are. ”

Arnaud stopped reading, thinking : was he still the bold young man that this man — his father? — pretended to remember? No, he wasn't, definitely not... Bitterly, Arnaud touched his chubby face and pinched the rolls which fattened his belly. All the business meals and a too sedentary life has transformed the sporty figure of the young man he would never be again. Arnaud felt a twinge of sorrow. Was he the man he used to dream of becoming? To avoid answering the question he kept on reading the letter :

“ You were a teenager when your mother and I parted. Emily and you went to live with her and I followed other roads. Shortcuts to be more precise. Ways that don't lead anywhere... or at least where people don't intend to go. That's how I arrived here, where I live now and I am not unhappy. They have let me

experience an outstanding adventure. An adventure from the depths of time that only the Sons of the Wind are lucky enough to experience.

I'm enthusiastic, really enthusiastic, but there may be nothing left of my being in a few days. As long as the transformation hasn't ended, nothing is sure. There have been so many failures and so few elected... ”

Arnaud stopped for a while again. He didn't like this extract, he considered these were the words of a lunatic, a madman who was in a deep mystic crisis. He had wondered if he wasn't caught up in foul scheming organized by the lobby of religious fanatics who were anti-abortionists. His company actually produced various contraceptive products. It regularly underwent attacks by zealous militants who were spurred on by their leaders' inconsequential speeches.

“ My dearest son — for you will always be my dearest son, in spite of the distance and the ups and downs of life — I include what I wrote after we had split up, a few pages which were a sort of psychotherapy. Forgive the style please and some of the extreme expressions that now and then came to my mind when your mother, on her own accord, decided to leave me. I don't bear her a grudge any longer. Luckily, I have got over it. In fact she has allowed me to blossom beyond my wildest dreams... ”

Arnaud remembered, shamefully, how his mother, his sister and he had abandoned his father in a dangerous and depressed state of mind. He now realized, being himself in his forties, how a man became fragile and vulnerable when he went over this fateful age. It was Arnaud's turn to face his own mid-life crisis, this painful turning point when you understand that youth has gone away and time is speeding along.

It was the moment to review the situation : he knew he was at his best. He was at the high point in his career, he had important decision-making powers and more than enough money. The zenith of his life appeared to suit him all right, but he sensed it was nearly the moment when dusk would break in.

Hadn't he read some scientists' new hypothesis that the mid-life crisis could simply be linked to the brain-ageing process ?

A symposium of highly qualified researchers had described this pathology as “*difficulties in concentrating, in getting ideas together and expressing them clearly, in deciding things, a decline in intellectual abilities, an inability to obtain results, difficulties in investing in future projects, a loss of interest in everyday tasks, in socializing, a lack of energy and an extreme tiredness.*” These scientists had noted that such symptoms were very often linked with a lack of some neurotransmitters, especially dopaminergic.

Was he also going to suffer from a lack of dopamine, a substance which has such an important role in so many

cerebral processes ? And in that case, what was going to happen to him ?

Arnaud had been scared ; he had then started to wonder. All that had started with a very tiny crack in the perfect veneer of his life. His mother had started to suffer from Alzheimer's disease and all of a sudden he was standing right at the crossroads of two generations : his kids for one who didn't need him any longer, and his mother whom he had to look after.

Then, one day, what he had buried deep inside for ages sprang out, in the shape of a strange letter from an unknown person who said he was... his own father. The unanswered question repressed in his subconscious had then reappeared with a painful acuteness : what had this father they had so miserably thrown away become ?

At that time, if Arnaud hadn't been so deeply entangled in his teenage worries, he might not have abandoned his father and he might have given him some of his youthful strength or simply his love. But at that time, he had been a selfish bloody idiot, that's all... Arnaud felt tears welling up in his eyes. The attentive stewardess came to him :

“ Do you feel all right ? she asked, worried.

- Yes, I do... thanks so much ”, he answered with a little smile, meaning just the opposite.

He carried on reading, knowing in advance the words his... father... had wanted him to know.

“ I know you will doubt this is true. I can hear you tap on your calculator to add up figures and find out my age. Yes, you’ve read right, I’m over seventy ! And I’m still here... and will be for a long time. Because... but I will only tell you, if you come to see me. Whatever condition I am in then ! I’ve left an envelope for you in the monastery, in case I am unable to speak to you... ”

At that point that was pure madness. Arnaud blocked on these last words : monastery, inability to speak.

What did it all mean ?

Each time he felt an intense scare. His mother was slowly losing her memory and his father — if the man was really his father — seemed to have a stange degenerative disease.

With such a family mental illness, Arnaud started worrying about his own. “Shouldn’t I try to meet this guy to be able to find out the truth about all this ? ” he wondered once, waking up in a sweat after an awful nightmare.

That was the reason why he had made up his mind to go on this journey.

Or, at least these few days off from his long arranged business trip. Business will always be business and *time is money*.

Arnaud took the brown envelope and intensely scrutinized it. The stamp showed it had been posted in Leh. After some rapid investigation he found out it was the most important city in Ladakh, a province in the

north of India, in the Indus valley at an altitude of eleven thousand two hundred feet.

He took out the faded, battered, stained copybook, then he kept on reading through his father's diary : “ *It was on a gloomy evening...*