

VERSION ANGLAISE ET COURT THÈME

I. VERSION

The desire to write was stirring in Martin once more. Stories and poems were springing into spontaneous creation in his brain, and he made notes of them against the future time when he would give them expression. But he did not write. This was his little vacation; he had resolved to devote it to rest and love, and in both matters he prospered. He was soon spilling over with vitality, and each day he saw Ruth, at the moment of meeting, she experienced the old shock of his strength and health.

"Be careful," her mother warned her once again. "I am afraid you are seeing too much of Martin Eden."

But Ruth laughed from security. She was sure of herself, and in a few days he would be off to sea. Then, by the time he returned, she would be away on her visit East. There was a magic, however, in the strength and health of Martin. He, too, had been told of her contemplated Eastern trip, and he felt the need for haste. Yet he did not know how to make love to a girl like Ruth. Then, too, he was handicapped by the possession of a great fund of experience with girls and women who had been absolutely different from her. They had known about love and life and flirtation, while she knew nothing about such things. Her prodigious innocence appalled him, freezing on his lips all ardors of speech, and convincing him, in spite of himself, of his own unworthiness. Also he was handicapped in another way. He had himself never been in love before. He had liked women in that turgid past of his, and been fascinated by some of them, but he had not known what it was to love them. He had whistled in a masterful, careless way, and they had come to him. They had been diversions, incidents, part of the game men play, but a small part at most. And now, and for the first time, he was a suppliant, tender and timid and doubting. He did not know the way of love, nor its speech, while he was frightened at his loved one's clear innocence.

In the course of getting acquainted with a varied world, whirling on through the ever changing phases of it, he had learned a rule of conduct which was to the effect that when one played a strange game, he should let the other fellow play first. This had stood him in good stead a thousand times and trained him as an observer as well. He knew how to watch the thing that was strange, and to wait for a weakness, for a place of entrance, to divulge itself. It was like sparring for an opening in fist-fighting. And when such an opening came, he knew

by long experience to play for it and to play hard.

So he waited with Ruth and watched, desiring to speak his love but not daring. He was afraid of shocking her, and he was not sure of himself. Had he but known it, he was following the right course with her. Love came into the world before articulate speech, and in its own early youth it had learned ways and means that it had never forgotten. It was in this old, primitive way that Martin wooed Ruth. He did not know he was doing it at first, though later he divined it. The touch of his hand on hers was vastly more potent than any word he could utter, the impact of his strength on her imagination was more alluring than the printed poems and spoken passions of a thousand generations of lovers.

Jack London, *Martin Eden* (1909)

II. THÈME

On conseilla à un vieux juif russe de se choisir un nom bien américain que les autorités d'état civil n'auraient pas de mal à transcrire. Il demanda conseil à un employé de la salle des bagages qui lui proposa *Rockefeller*. Le vieux juif répéta plusieurs fois de suite *Rockefeller*, *Rockefeller*, pour être sûr de ne pas l'oublier. Mais lorsque, plusieurs heures plus tard, l'officier d'état civil lui demanda son nom, il l'avait oublié et répondit, en yiddish : *Schon vergessen* (je l'ai déjà oublié), et c'est ainsi qu'il fut inscrit sous le nom bien américain de John Ferguson.

Cette histoire est peut-être trop belle pour être vraie, mais il importe peu, au fond, qu'elle soit vraie ou fausse.

Pour les émigrants avides d'Amérique, changer de nom pouvait être considéré comme un bienfait. Pour leurs petits-enfants, c'est aujourd'hui différent : [...] plusieurs dizaines de Smith d'origine polonaise ont demandé à s'appeler à nouveau Kowalski (Kowalski et Smith signifiant tous deux *forgeron*).

Georges Perec, *Ellis Island* (1980)