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A piece of steak: Nouvelle noire (French Edition)

Jack London, Stéphane Prat, Noire sœur

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Si seulement Tom King avait pu manger un bon steak avant de monter sur le ring…

Il éprouva de nouveau une sensation de faim non satisfaite.
— Bon sang ! Ce que je mangerais volontiers un morceau de bifteck ! murmura-t-il avec un juron étouffé et en serrant ses poings énormes.
— J'ai essayé chez Burke et chez Sawley, dit sa femme en manière d'excuse.
— Et ils n'ont pas voulu te faire crédit ?
— Pas d'un centime, a déclaré Burke.
Elle hésita.
— Continue. Qu'a-t-il dit ?
— II m'a dit qu'à son avis Sandel te battrait ce soir, et que nous lui devions déjà une somme rondelette.
Tom King grogna, mais ne répondit point.

Cette nouvelle de Jack London, parmi les plus célèbres de cet écrivain, est sans doute l'un des textes le plus important, presque fondateur, de cette littérature dite de « ring ». London s'appuie sur sa longue expérience de praticien et d'observateur de la boxe. Au sortir du ring, Tom King n'a plus rien, que son corps usé, battu, douloureux et la faim qui le taraude toujours, comme la honte de rentrer sans le sou dans son foyer. Si seulement : « Ah, that piece of steak would have done it ! He had lacked just that for the decisive blow, and he had lost. »

Un classique de la littérature noire préfacé par Stéphane Prat

EXTRAIT

Écrire pour un simple steak, ou pour la gloire et l'argent facile, sans pour autant se trahir en offrant aux magazines la soupe réclamée, Jack London n'a pas eu le loisir de penser ce genre de paradoxe qu'il l'avait déjà résolu. Sa littérature d'autodidacte, alimentaire et affamée, est rapidement consacrée par les critiques. Ses récits de chercheurs d'or ou d'indiens du Klondike lui valent bientôt le titre de Kipling du grand Nord, comme les crapules de la Baie d'Oakland lui décernaient, adolescent, celui de prince des pilleurs d'huîtres. Parmi les plus réalistes de ses racontars, certains lui ont assuré aussi bien la gloire que la subsistance. A peace of steak en fait indéniablement partie. London l'intégrerait en 1911 dans son recueil de nouvelles le plus noire et pessimiste, Quand Dieu ricane.

A PROPOS DE L'AUTEUR

Jack London, né John Griffith Chaney, né le 12 janvier 1876 à San Francisco et mort le 22 novembre 1916 à Glen Ellen, Californie, est un écrivain américain dont les thèmes de prédilection sont l'aventure et la nature sauvage.

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