

PRAISE FOR  
*THE GREENLAND BREACH*

“Original and harrowing.”

—*Cosmopolitan*

“Bernard Besson takes the eco-thriller to a whole new level. Masterfully paced and wondrously prescient, here is a cautionary tale where colorful characters battle both man and nature to save the planet from a combination of the two. Equal parts Clive Cussler and Michael Crichton, the story charges out of the gate and speeds in relentless fashion to a wholly satisfying finish.”

—*Jon Land, bestselling author of the Caitlin Strong series*

“This is cousin to thoughtful works such as Buckell’s *Arctic Rising*, but the narrative’s tone and tendency toward grand spectacle resembles more lurid thrillers like *The Day After Tomorrow*... Besson constructs a complex plot and confidently portrays the grandiosity as it unfolds.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“For those who enjoy a rollercoaster of a ride with thrills galore, this book certainly delivers. For the James Bond fan, there are plenty of sophisticated gadgets, fiendishly complex puzzles and clever use of technology. If you look beneath the glossy, high-paced surface, there is a thought-provoking plea to re-examine the way we live and act today. Global warming is but one of the culprits in this story. Corporate and personal greed, national pride, inflated egos and lack of concern for the future of humanity are all equally to blame. Yet the author conveys this message without any preaching, simply by recounting an exciting adventure.”

—*Crime Fiction Lover*

“Bernard Besson clearly doesn’t do things by halves. Everything about *The Greenland Breach* is on a grand scale—global powers playing with global stakes, quite literally. A thrilling scenario of a potential disaster on the grandest scale, this book is modern, escapist fiction that entertains while cautioning readers on the importance of climate awareness.”

—*Book Lover Book Reviews*

## MORE PRAISE

“Suspense is omnipresent from beginning to end. The story navigates between climate change, subsequent natural disasters, corporate rivalries, murder, espionage, mysteries and love. Besson progressively weaves a web that entraps the readers. Each page make you want to turn the following one quicker to find out what happens next.”

—*Culture et Plaisir par la lecture*

“This book is rather like one of these slightly more upmarket chocolates. It has a thick outer layer and something completely different as a filling.... It hits the sweet spot of enjoyment.”

—*Thinking about books*

“A thrill ride that often felt too real to be fiction that is contained in the pages.”

—*I am, Indeed Blog*

“*The Greenland Breach* was a heart-pounding adrenaline-filled thriller that I hated having to put down to eat and sleep. Right away, I felt myself being sucked into the story line.... It damn near took my breath away. I would recommend this book to fans of Clive Cussler, Michael Crichton and overall fans of thrillers that have a lot of action, adventure and laughs to balance of the seriousness of the story.”

—*Turning the Pages*

“It was fascinating to read a story set on the background of global warming and cyber conflicts, with all the ugly intrigues and fights such a situation could easily lead to in a not too distant future.... If you feel bored in your little corner of the Earth and are eager for adventure, read this smart book now!”

—*Words and Peace*

“The prose is taut and fast-paced, as befits a thriller, and you can tell that Monsieur Besson really knows his stuff. Yet it has more poetry to it than some American thrillers I have recently read. The beauty and severity of Greenland is lovingly described, as is the community feel of the Montparnasse district in Paris, where the Fermatown posse work and live. In conclusion: buckle up tightly, you are in for a roller coaster of an exciting read.”

—*Finding Time to Write*

# The Greenland Breach

**Bernard Besson**

Translated from French by Julie Rose

LE FRENCH BOOK 

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First published in France as *Groenland* by Odile Jacob  
©Odile Jacob, January 2011

English translation ©2013 Julie Rose  
First published in English  
by Le French Book, Inc., New York  
[www.lefrenchbook.com](http://www.lefrenchbook.com)

Translated by Julie Rose  
Copyediting by Amy Richards  
Proofreading by Chris Gage  
Cover designed by David Zampa

ISBNs:

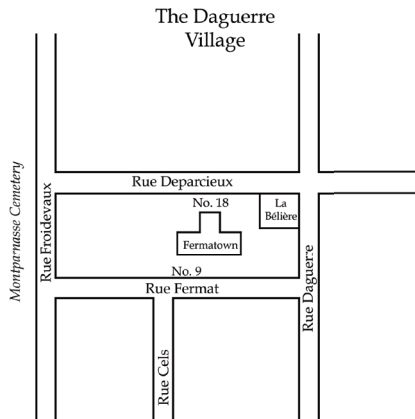
Trade paperback: 978-1-939474-07-0

Hardcover: 978-1-939474-13-1

Kindle: 978-1-939474-94-0

Epub: 978-1-939474-95-7

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Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.



# 1

## SUNDAY

*GREENLAND, THE NORTH FACE OF HAFFNER BJERG, 6:30 A.M.*

Lars Jensen felt the ground tremble beneath the snow. He straightened up and abandoned his position, petrified by what he was seeing to the west, toward Canada. The last phase of global warming had begun just as a big red helicopter flew past from the east. It doubtless belonged to Terre Noire, the Franco-Danish oil-and-gas company that was carrying out geological surveys.

From the rocky slopes of Haffner Bjerg, events were taking an unimaginable turn worthy of Dante. With a sound as ominous as the crack of doom, the Lauge Koch Kyst had begun to tear away from Greenland and plummet into Baffin Bay in the North Atlantic Ocean. A colossal breach a mile and a half deep was opening up in the middle of the island continent. The trench ran for miles, as if an invisible ax had just split the ice cap in two.

Terrified, Lars backed away, forgetting what he had come to the top of the world to do. He'd guessed that his presence on the slopes of Haffner Bjerg had something to do with the death of the Arctic. The advance wired from an anonymous account on the island of Jersey was every bit as incredible as the cataclysm under way.

A mist shot through with rainbows rose from the depths of the last ice age. Behind the iridescent wall, thousands of years of packed ice raked the granite surface and crashed into the sea, stirring up a gigantic tsunami. He pressed his hands to his ears to muffle the howling of Greenland as it began to die.

It took Lars awhile to get a grip. His hands were still shaking as the thunderous impact reached him. It was even more frightening than the ear-splitting sound. Greenland was plunging into Baffin Bay. In a few hours, the coasts of Canada and the United States would be flooded. He fell to his knees like a child, overcome by thoughts that had never before crossed his mind. An abyss was opening inside him, and it was just as frightening as the one in front of him. It wasn't until his fitful

breathing slowed and his lungs stopped burning that he was able to get back to the tawdry reality of his own situation.

He lay down again on the hardpacked snow. With his eye glued to the sight of his rifle, he found the trail that the dogsled had taken from the Great Wound of the Wild Dog. That's where the team would emerge, heading for Josephine and the automated science base that sounded the great island's sick heart. The Terre Noire geologists were known for their punctuality, but at two thousand euros an hour, he would wait if he had to. Say what you like, the end of the world was good business.

*PARIS, FOURTEENTH ARRONDISSEMENT, 18 RUE DEPARCIEUX, 11:30 A.M.*

John Spencer Larivière put the phone down and shot Victoire a triumphant look. It was an expression she didn't like.

"What's got into you?" Victoire asked.

"North Land's offering me a hundred thousand euros for a mission. I've got a meeting tomorrow with Abraham Harper's wife, Geraldine."

"Where?"

"She'll let me know at the last minute."

"What kind of a job?"

"She didn't say."

"She's obviously going to ask you to investigate their European rivals, Terre Noire, Nicolas Lanier's outfit. I don't like it, John. Don't go looking for trouble. Don't forget you're French. Remember where you come from."

"Still, a hundred thousand euros..."

Victoire moved closer. Ever since John had set up his own business, he had agonized over not being able to measure up. They were in the red. She rarely saw him smile these days. She slipped her hand into his pants and confirmed what she'd already guessed. "That Canadian woman has an effect on you."

"She does not."

"Come here, you idiot."

They had met working in the government intelligence agency Hubert de Méricourt directed. Victoire and John wanted to have a baby, which was why they had quit together to start Fermatown, their own strategic- and criminal-analysis company. As the daughter of a Cambodian Khmer Rouge survivor and a French diplomat, Victoire bore a heavy legacy. After a spectacular nervous breakdown and a period of uncompromising psychoanalysis, getting pregnant had become

her obsession. She wanted a son who would look like his father, a good-looking hunk, five feet eleven, with irresistible blue eyes and the blond mane of a movie star. John was a real man with simple ideas, a gentle giant who could massage her feet while getting his Cambodian and Cantonese hopelessly mixed up.

They left the media room and stepped into the space they called the confessional, where they settled into the welcoming arms of the black sofa. Their clothes soon lay where Fermatown's rare clients sat. John kneaded that supple body yet again and made Victoire's cheeks glow. She opened her eyes wide and encouraged him with her dancer's hips. They grabbed pleasure by the handful as though it were the last time. Or the first.

Putting aside their old wounds and disappointments, they made sweaty love, falling off the sofa and onto the teak floor. Now they were nothing more than two balls of rage. Watching as though he were outside himself, John pinned her delicate wrists to the floor and prepared his assault. Wildly, he thrust faster and faster, and, when the moment came, he grunted like an animal, shooting into this flesh that was torn, as he was, between two continents and two histories.

Out of breath, they slid next to each other. And then, holding hands and looking up at the ceiling, they started bickering again.

"With a hundred thousand euros, we could redo the kitchen and get new cars."

"A hundred thousand euros and a bullet in the head. Don't go there, John."

"I'll send Luc to Le Havre. That's where Terre Noire has its lab. I saw something on television. They sent one of their ships to inspect the lava that spewed into the ocean the last time Eyjafjallajökull erupted in Iceland. It wouldn't hurt to find out more."

"This is way beyond us. Everything about the North Pole reeks of ashes and disaster."

"I want to go there."

"You just want to prove to yourself that you can still stick your neck out and act like an idiot. You're worried about what your former colleagues think—all those people we wanted to get away from."

"I'm sick of sitting around reading CVs all day. I didn't start Fermatown to fact-check biographies and trawl through social networks looking for witnesses."

"Typical man. Too proud to ask the agency to pay us an hourly rate."

"You're starting to annoy me!"

John bounded to his feet and ran upstairs to the bathroom. Victoire was right, and that put him in a foul mood. Ever since Afghanistan,



he had failed at everything. He couldn't even get her pregnant. He punched the railing of the staircase to the third floor. He had inherited this rambling four-story duplex and garden from an aunt. The property was situated between the Rue Déparcieux and the Rue Fermat, just outside the village on the Rue Daguerre.

This poisoned chalice of a gift had won Victoire over and tipped the scales in favor of her decision to leave the agency. John's aunt, Alicia Spencer, had been an eccentric American sculptor who had split her time between Montparnasse in Paris and Princeton, New Jersey. She had filled the lawns of Princeton with her creations, melted down and molded in the kiln that took up a whole room on the first floor. John had barely known her, but his aunt's presence could be felt on all four floors of this place, which was also Fermatown's headquarters. Pierre de Fermat, the mathematician who had given his name to the street, had helped baptize the firm John had started, which offered strategic advice and did criminal investigations. Unfortunately, there were a lot more unfinished sculptures and metal-cutting machines within Fermatown's walls than there were meaty investigations and consultations paid in full and on time. The sleepy old house was anxious for clients the same way a taxpayer yearned for a tax break. Victoire was not going to keep him from grabbing their first real job.

*THE COMMAND BRIDGE OF THE BOUC-BEL-AIR, 6:50 A.M.*

Le Guévenec went to the screen and peered at it. It had been one disaster after another since they had left Le Havre. Surely this one would be the last. Terre Noire's geostationary satellite was filming the events live. The whole Lauge Koch Kyst crust had broken away from Greenland at 6:31 a.m. and had slid into the ocean, taking the village of Nugsuaq and its two hundred inhabitants with it. The ice had shattered into dozens of floes, each the size of a Paris arrondissement. And all that ice was driving a monstrous wall of water ahead of it.

Filmed from an altitude of twelve thousand feet, the *Bouc-Bel-Air* looked like a toy sitting in a puddle, but the camera picked up every detail. The two cages holding the bears saved from global warming were perfectly visible, as were the lifeboats and the yellow submersible attached to the rear deck.

The giant wave moved at an alarming speed. White spots in front of it caught the captain's eye. "What's that?"

"Icebergs, Captain."

"That big?"

“Yes.”

Despite its powerful engines, the *Bouc-Bel-Air* could not escape the disaster. The shock wave was moving faster than the ship and would inevitably catch up to it. “How long before impact?” Le Guévenec asked in a controlled voice.

“Five minutes. Maybe six,” the first mate replied.

He didn’t have a lot of time to decide how they would die. The barometer, which had been stuck on good weather for hours, annoyed him, but he didn’t let it show. Every shipwreck hid something incongruous, some overlooked detail nobody cared about.

Le Guévenec stroked his cheeks and thought about Isabelle. It didn’t surprise him that he didn’t feel anything. He was going to die as he had lived. Stupidly and without hate. Was he capable of feeling anything real? Even death didn’t move him. What would he feel in the face of that horror? Was there anything worse than this indifference to everyone and everything? Le Guévenec didn’t like himself much, and he wouldn’t be sorry to go. Professional decency and a seafarer’s exactness were his only reasons for deliberating. He made his decision.

“Port side, all the way!”

The captain of the *Bouc-Bel-Air* would face the wave head-on. The ship meant for scientific research groaned from top to bottom and in less than three minutes managed to point its bow at its destiny. Le Guévenec brought his binoculars to his eyes and stared death in the face. The mates around him were silent. Each sailor, pupils dilated and lips dry with fear, had his eyes fixed on the horizon. “It” finally appeared. Right in front of them.

“My God...”

An ocean above the ocean was hurtling toward them. Sharp crests like the peaks of the Alps shook convulsively between roiling chasms. The mass was driving mountains of ice. The monumental icebergs created by the cataclysm crashed against each other ahead of the massive wall of water.

The men on the bridge followed their captain’s lead and attached their safety belts to the metal rails. An immense white pyramid, jagged with deadly edges, sailed past a few yards away on the port side before disappearing.

Day turned to night. The wail of the wounded ocean filled the crew with terror. The ship plunged bow-first into the valley of water that separated it from hell and kept going down. Then it steadied and straightened with an ominous sluggishness. Straight ahead, less than five hundred yards away, an enormous wave came at them like a combine harvester bearing down on a single stalk of wheat.

Terror set their bodies on fire and distorted their faces. The huge thing filled the world. It seemed to pick up speed. The water blew the windows and doors out and tore up everything that wasn't welded to the deck. Le Guévenec stopped thinking and felt himself swept away, with the boat attached to his belt, in a gigantic whirlpool of icy black mud. The descent into the underworld took a long time. The roiling water shook his body and made his limbs useless. He was nothing more than a dislocated thing at the bottom of an ice-cold vat.

Death tasted of salt. Standard for a seaman. But it wasn't exactly what he had imagined. Why all the dull, metallic sounds? Le Guévenec felt something move beneath him and found himself flying on the bridge of the Bouc-Bel-Air, chucking his guts up like a tuna on the deck of a trawler. The sea was full of debris and flowed around him like lava. He dragged himself toward the bulkhead, his hands gripping the safety rails, and managed to pull himself up.

The vessel had survived, but it was a mere shell of its former self. The barometer, still indicating good weather, was the only thing that seemed to be intact. The darkness suddenly lifted, and a blinding light lit up the heap of ruins. Le Guévenec could see the first mate's bare feet sticking out from under a gangway. The door was gone. The officer was no longer moving. Le Guévenec shook one of his legs and then examined himself. He was all there. The Bouc-Bel-Air was pitching on a calm sea. He snapped open the ring that held him to the rail and crawled toward the bare feet.

The first mate's head had hit the side of the gangway. Blood was running from his half-open mouth. No hope. Le Guévenec got up and started taking his clothes off. There was no one else on the bridge. The others had been swept away. His survival depended on finding dry clothes in the cabinet above his bed, and fast. He went downstairs to the lower deck. Dread took over, when, half-naked, he opened the door to his cabin.

Still in shock, he didn't immediately comprehend the drama that rushed at him. The boatswain was there, holding his severed forearm, which was oozing blood. Le Guévenec recognized the watch. He had seen it on the Spaniard's arm when he'd caught him trying to hide a box in the hold.

The boatswain, whose hair had suddenly gone white, stared at him in a way that no one had ever stared at him before. His inhuman cry matched that of the polar bear that had gotten out of its cage and hunted the man down. Le Guévenec was just in time to see the bear disappear, a big red stain on its fur. He grabbed the mutilated man, pulled him farther into the cabin, and locked the door.

He seized a cloth and handed it to the victim. Blood was spurting fitfully from the open wound. The pale white bone stuck out like a leek from the torn flesh. It took some cajoling to persuade the seaman to let go of his detached forearm and put it on the sink.

Le Guévenec removed his belt and tried to tie a tourniquet around the severed arm. But then, in the bathroom mirror, he saw the wounded man's back, and he almost vomited. The bear had literally boned the poor bastard, whose pink lungs looked like delicate sponges, still breathing on either side of his exposed spine, until they slowed and stopped. Le Guévenec passed his hand over the dying man's forehead, the same man who had betrayed his trust. "Everything's going to be all right."

He laid his body on the floor of the cabin and closed his eyes. Then he took out his cell phone. After several seconds, he reached Terre Noire's headquarters on the Champs-Élysée and spoke with the chairman's personal secretary. "This is Le Guévenec, the captain of the *Bouc-Bel-Air*."

"You're still alive?"

"Tell Monsieur Lanier we're in distress."

"We're sending you help from Nuuk. Who's screaming like that?"

"A bear."

"How are Romain Brissac and the other scientists?"

"I'm going down now. There might be other survivors."

"What about the ice cores?"

"I'll worry about them later."

Le Guévenec hung up and dumped his wet rags before putting on his ceremonial uniform, the only dry clothes he could find in the waterproof cabinet. He slipped an oilskin over his fisherman's jersey, then wiped his feet and put on new boots. He cocked an ear before opening the door a crack, his heart beating fast. The bear had vanished, leaving behind a bloody trail diluted by seawater. He followed the tracks all the way to the command bridge. Blood had dripped over the helm and the navigational instruments, but the barometer was still stuck on good weather. The predator had taken one of the external staircases and gone back to the other bear. Le Guévenec saw them a few yards below him, going round and round on the bow. He looked up and saw a launch that had been cut in two by the tidal wave and rammed into a transmission mast on the poop deck. He gripped the hull and, with what little strength he had left in his arms, made a temporary barricade to keep the bears from climbing back up.

Next, he crawled to the stairs that led to the wardroom of the scientific mission that the *Bouc-Bel-Air* was to take back to France after

its Greenland expedition. How many men had survived the tipping of the boat?

After an interminable descent into the icy depths, he managed to force open the door to the dining room. A flickering emergency lamp lit the room. Everything was in disarray. A man with a bandage on his forehead looked at him as though he were from another planet. Le Guévenec recognized him as the mission biologist, who doubled as a doctor. Unable to speak, the scientist pointed to the bodies of two men lying facedown on the floor. The large pool of blood and seawater left no doubt as to their condition.

“What about Brissac?” asked Le Guévenec.

The biologist turned his head toward a scientist in one of the metal chairs around the large table. Romain Brissac was staring at the two dead men. Le Guévenec went over to him. The Nobel Prize-winning chemist sensed his presence and looked up. “How did you do it?”

Le Guévenec did not understand the question, but he saw the blood running over the director of the scientific mission’s hand, which he held close to his chest.

“You’re hurt.”

“It’s nothing. Take me to the samples.”

Brissac’s mettle was as strong as the *Bouc-Bel-Air*’s tempered steel. He refused the captain’s help and limped toward the gangway. Le Guévenec followed. The ice cores the ship was taking to France were the most precious cargo carried on the high seas since the invention of sailing. The two men went into the wrecked belly of the *Bouc-Bel-Air*. The refrigerated hold containing the samples was locked behind an armored door capable of resisting a rocket attack.

Brissac and Le Guévenec were the only ones who had the code needed to open the room, and each had only half of the code. Terre Noire didn’t put all its eggs in one basket. The stakes in terms of potential energy were a million times higher than all the nuclear arms on the planet. Brissac and Le Guévenec entered their halves of the code. After a few troubled seconds, the door opened, and they anxiously stepped inside.

The flooding and the break in the main electrical circuit had set off the automated lighting system in the refrigerated hold. The blinding light contrasted starkly with the darkness that covered the rest of the *Bouc-Bel-Air*. Exhaling clouds of condensation, the two survivors advanced and found dozens of cylinders securely clamped to the walls. They leaned over the cylinders of ice, each a good ten inches in diameter. Recovered 7,710 to 7,720 feet below the surface of Greenland’s ice sheet in the region of Avannaa, the samples contained the archives

of the world's climate for the last hundred and fifty thousand years. Glaciologists had never before been able to go back much further than a hundred and twenty-thousand years.

"They're intact."

Le Guévenec turned to Brissac. The scientist was mesmerized by the find they had brought out of Greenland's depths. Right there in front of them, the collected ice held the secrets of the Eemian period, the holy grail of glaciologists and climatologists. Beginning a hundred and thirty-one thousand years ago, the Eemian period was characterized by a sudden warming of the planet that lasted fifteen thousand years. Hippopotamuses frolicked in the Rhine River valley. The water level was eighteen feet higher. Whole regions like the Paris Basin, the south of England, and Denmark were submerged. And then, suddenly, the Earth had reverted to ice before warming up again eight thousand years before Christ.

"You don't look so good."

Through the fog of his own breath, Le Guévenec could see the bluish tinge on the face and the dark circles under the eyes of the world's most famous and most controversial climatologist. Heart attack. Luckily, the *Bouc* was equipped with defibrillators.

"Where in God's name are they?"

*PARIS, MONTPARNASSE, THE INDIANA CLUB, 12:30 P.M.*

The patrons turned their heads toward the couple who had just swept through the door. Victoire was sporting a short tartan kilt and a pink shirt she'd bought at the Silk Road, a fashionable shop on the Rue Daguerre. Her dark eyes, laughing and intelligent, didn't know how to sulk. John, who was wearing white pants and had a navy-blue sweater draped over his shoulders, followed in her wake, displacing a mass of air in proportion to his bulk. The two were stunning and always aroused curiosity. Even fondness. Every Sunday at the same time, the founding members of Fermatown would come to the Indiana Club to play pool. Luc, the third partner, dressed in black, was sitting under a green light at the last table. Standing at his side, a sculpted young Adonis in tight jeans and a mauve polo shirt was staring intently at the colored balls.

The son of a technology whiz from Lyon, Luc had followed in his father's footsteps. After his father's business went bust and he'd died a tragic death, Luc had allowed Hubert de Méricourt to scoop him up. But Luc was uncomfortable in the official intelligence milieu because

of his bisexuality and unconventional ideas. He asked for clearance to go somewhere else, where he could think and work outside the box.

Méricourt gave permission, and because he admired him, he put Little Luc, as he was called despite his six-foot-two height, in touch with a celebrity in the field—John. Luc and John met at Les Invalides, in the ground-floor office that was the lair of the head of France’s shadow diplomacy.

“Little Luc,” Méricourt had said, “let me introduce you to John Spencer Larivière, who’s just back from Afghanistan, where he was a member of the ground intelligence team. He’s like you. He wants a bit of fresh air. Team up with him. You won’t regret it.”

A little surprised, John didn’t waste any time trying to figure out exactly what Méricourt’s interest in this professional marriage might be. Luc flourished in John and Victoire’s company, demonstrating outstanding talents.

Concentrating on his shot, Luc had stopped breathing. His cue slid between his fingers. The ball rolled straight toward one of the sides before changing direction and hitting another ball the same color, immediately propelling it into a corner pocket.

“Bravo.”

“Not bad, huh?”

Luc tossed a lock of black hair out of his dark eyes and looked up at the two other members of Fermatown.

“I’ve got something to tell you,” John whispered.

“Don’t worry, he’s German. He doesn’t understand a word of French.”

“Where’d you find him?”

“In Berlin, at a hackers conference. He’s a totally inoffensive geek. Eh, Hermann, you’re harmless, aren’t you?”

The young German cracked an approving smile. There was no ambiguity about the fascination the visitor from across the Rhine felt for the tall, dark young man who was teaching him how to play pool. And a few other things. Victoire didn’t let any of her annoyance at the unexpected presence of the stranger show, but she led Luc to the other side of the table so the guy could not overhear her whispering. Luc leaned in close.

“We’ve been sought out by Geraldine Harper, the head of North Land, Terre Noire’s rival oil-and-gas prospectors. We came to talk to you about it. We don’t know what she wants yet, but she’s ready to put a lot of money on the table.”

Luc raised an eyebrow and smiled. He moved farther away from the German and set up his shot. Fermatown ran like clockwork, but because of the financial crisis, clients were few and far between. Luc

didn't want to return to the Boulevard de la Tour Maubourg and ask Méricourt for his old job back. "I know why Geraldine Harper called John," he said.

"Why?"

John and Victoire stared at their colleague in disbelief. Luc chalked his cue and raised it over the green baize. He aimed it at a corner of the large room and shouted to the bartender, "Sound, maestro!"

All three of them looked at the Indiana Club's plasma screen, where images of the latest global catastrophe were being relayed over and over again. There was footage of a ship drifting in a field of ice. In the United States and Canada, the East Coast was holding its breath, waiting for the wave to hit. No one had prepared for this, unlike the eruption of Eyjafjallajökull and the fires in Russia. Panic was spreading from one city to the next all along the Atlantic seaboard. Luc let John and Victoire immerse themselves in the situation and then added his own commentary. "It happened this morning, while you were so busy."

Victoire lowered her eyes. Luc made her laugh, but sometimes he disconcerted her. He was like her, blended, double-edged, not quite fitting in. His expression turned serious.

"The ship's red and black. Those are Terre Noire's colors. It's called the *Bouc-Bel-Air*, and it's probably going to sink. CNN reckons it was heading back to Greenland after prospecting in the Barents Sea. It seems that one of the people onboard is Romain Brissac, who won the Nobel Prize for chemistry and has some hard-hitting ideas about global warming." Luc took a breath and cut to the chase a little smugly. "I guess North Land would give anything to know what the *Bouc-Bel-Air* is carrying. That's what she's going to ask you."

"Little Luc, you're a genius!"

"How much is she offering?" Luc asked.

"A hundred thousand euros," John replied.

"You can ask for double that. The world's falling apart, and whatever the *Bouc-Bel-Air* has in its hold must be priceless."

"Victoire won't hear of it. She thinks it's a lousy deal. Terre Noire is a Franco-Danish company. She doesn't want us working for its rivals, the Canadians."

Luc studied Victoire. That sweet smile was like the surface of a lake, one whose depths he rarely saw. Despite the confidence she inspired in him, he still hadn't managed to figure her out.

"We didn't leave the agency to live on government pensions."

Victoire shrugged.

"Let's go and get some air."



Luc took leave of his German and joined the others outside on the Rue Froidevaux. They turned onto the Rue Fermat and walked past Number 9, one of the two entrances to Fermatown, and found themselves back in the village. On Sundays and holidays it was closed to cars from one end to the other. Passing La Bélière, the restaurant where Luc played piano on Wednesday nights, they waved to Colette and Krisna, who were posting the daily specials on the sidewalk. At the corner of the Rue Gassendi, John looked up hopefully at the building that housed the studios of Jean-Luc Miesch, the director of *Streamfield*, who had promised him a role. In her final years in Montparnasse, Alicia Spencer had redesigned the studio façade in a fanciful style that reminded him of the Sagrada Família in Barcelona.

Flanked by Luc and Victoire, John walked in the middle of the road, freed of cars but cluttered with Velibs, Paris's popular rent-a-bikes. Geraldine Harper's industrial espionage mission for North Land and the hundred thousand euro advance rendered them speechless, puzzled, and suspicious. At the Rue Boulard, John was the first to break the silence. "She didn't exactly say it'd be espionage."

"Like that's the kind of thing you spell out on the phone," Victoire shot back, laughing.

"I'm going to buy some cheese, and then we'll go home. We've got work to do. We'll have lunch another time."

They stopped in front of the *fromager*. John had saved the cow sign one night, when some kids had set upon it. They were planning to put it in their truck and sell it to a collector. In three punches, Major John Spencer Larivière, fresh from the hills of Afghanistan, had KO'd the three hoods before allowing himself to be arrested by the local cops. Ever since this valiant exploit, the members of Fermatown were served first in the shops of the Daguerre village.

"And what would the lady and gentlemen like today?"

"Three small *chavignols*."

"I'll put a little bottle of chardonnay in with that, like the other day. On me."

"Thank you," John replied, avoiding Victoire's glare.

Believe it or not, John had discovered chardonnay in the American army canteens in the middle of Taliban country. He'd brought the habit back to Fermatown, much to Victoire's dismay. Her taste in wine was a tad more sophisticated.

*AVANNAA, THE NORTH FACE OF HAFFNER BJERG, 8:50 A.M.*

Lars Jensen stopped to study the wall of mist rising from Greenland's ripped insides. Looking through the scope of his rifle, he drew a bead on the strange green pyramid six hundred feet below that was supposed to lure the target. Since he had arrived, no one had come out of what looked like the entrance to a sort of man-made cave on the brink of the Great Wound of the Wild Dog. The structure brought to mind some sort of catheter sticking into the sick ice cap.

Large pools of water resembling man-made ponds stretched north from the foot of Haffner Bjerg. Dark moldy-looking splotches clung to the edges of the lakes. Neither the wind nor the cold could chase away the smell of putrefaction coming off these fermenting cesspools. Lars had had plenty of time to observe the phenomenon, protecting his nostrils with a mask he'd picked up during the last outbreak of bird flu.

The dark-green blotches were seething with tiny, nearly imperceptible bubbles. Greenland was rotting before his eyes. His cell phone rang and flashed the number they'd agreed on. Lars adjusted the angle of his scope to see the trail. A few minutes later, a dogsled appeared in his line of fire. He took a deep breath, wedged the butt of his rifle against his shoulder, and waited a few seconds. The driver raised his hand above the team of dogs and signaled for them to slow down.

Lars gently pressed the trigger with the index finger of his right hand. The shot left the barrel with a dull sound, and he felt the recoil against his shoulder. He took another breath. The Inuit had rolled backward. With one leg strapped in the sled, the poor man was being dragged along like a dislocated puppet.

Lars aimed at the passenger stretched out in his anorak. The second victim was still unaware of the drama unfolding. The next shot had a less spectacular effect. The man's head just rolled to the side. The third bullet followed immediately, more for form's sake than real necessity. Lars knew the first two hits were final.

The dogs surged ahead, then stopped outside the entrance to the pyramid. The barking ceased and was soon replaced by heart-rending wailing that rose all the way to Haffner Bjerg despite the gusting wind. Lars aimed at the leader of the pack, a magnificent animal, and fired. As it crumpled to the ground, he discharged ten more times.

After a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree survey, he fired up the snowmobile and left his shooting point. His employers were very specific about the next step in the plan. Straddling his vehicle, he raced down the slope and was at the scene in less than a minute. He approached the passenger he had just shot, lifted the man's hood, and removed his

sunglasses with gloved hands. He took a photo of his victim and sent it to the e-mail address they had given him. He did the same with the Inuit.

In terms of cryptography and data protection, his client was at the top of his game. Nothing to fear on that front. What worried him was the completely unexpected nature of the circumstances, which no one had given him the lowdown on. He looked toward the west, still stunned by what he had seen. Columns of water and mist rose to an unimaginable height, blocking the horizon like an enormous wall. The men he had just killed knew the reasons behind these natural events. Lars would have liked to know, too.

Surprised by death, his victims looked tranquil. The nearly transparent blue eyes of the passenger were fixed on the sky. A frozen red stain branded his forehead, a forehead that looked intelligent. Too intelligent, no doubt. Lars envied them for leaving the planet before he did, and he told himself that he had done a good deed.

*PARIS, 18 RUE DEPARCIEUX, 1:30 P.M.*

John, Luc, and Victoire walked back to Fermatown via the Rue Deparcieux, which was parallel to the Rue Fermat. Surrounded by a garden visible from the sidewalk, the huge house usually cost a fortune to heat. But winter hadn't arrived this year. Global warming had saved Fermatown's finances.

The sun had set the neighborhood ablaze. Spring would be a scorcher. John told himself there had to be a way to accept Harper's offer. There was no point in resorting to espionage to find out what Terre Noire was hiding. Ninety percent of all corporate information was freely available to the public, especially in France. All you had to do was ask the right people the right questions and search the appropriate databases. As was his habit, John quickly glanced up and down the street before unlocking the garage door. They savored the semi-darkness of this space, where they parked the two cars and the two motorbikes that constituted Fermatown's fleet. He left Luc to close the door behind them and bent down to Caresse, the Persian house cat. "Come here, gorgeous," he said as he picked her up.

They took the spiral staircase up to the second floor. When they reached the big main room, Victoire asked the touch screen wall to light up and display the news channels. Hubert de Méricourt had asked Fermatown to test this latest technology before installing it in the agency's offices at Les Invalides. The prototype was nine feet high and

six feet wide. The wall responded to fingerprint and voice command. It could show television channels, websites, newspapers, and documents from databases and had a host of apps.

Forgetting the cheese and wine, they stood glued to the screen. After inundating Baffin Island and the Labrador coast, the Greenland tsunami was heading for the mouth of the St. Lawrence River. Boston and New York were filled with scenes of panic. The most predictable of catastrophes was taking the world by surprise. Several Canadian ports had been submerged by a wave more than twelve feet high. The number of victims was still unknown, but a Quebec channel was talking about scores of deaths and extensive damage. Photos of two faces kept popping up on the news channels: the climatologist and Nobel Prize winner Romain Brissac and Loïc Le Guévenec, captain of the *Bouc-Bel-Air*.

“Shall we?” Luc asked.

“Go ahead.”

Of the three of them, young Luc was the trailblazer, clearing their way by looking at problems from unexpected angles. More than a few times, John and Victoire had been impressed by Luc’s unusual approach to situations that the cautious administrators at Les Invalides would never have thought of. In general, the administrators hated creativity. With a flick of his hand, Luc erased all the TV screens.

He brought up a mauve background. Like a croupier at a blackjack table, he fanned out the photos of Loïc Le Guévenec and his ship, taken both before and after the catastrophe.

“Let’s start with the captain. If we stick to the facts, we have a man who must know a hell of a lot about what’s behind the disaster and the secrets of the North Pole. These are two subjects that would interest Mrs. Harper, since her husband runs North Land, the large rival oil-exploration company.”

“The captain looks like a real fun guy.”

Victoire approached one of the photos that Luc had just posted and pulled up some more pictures. The touch screen wall brought up several shots taken from public and private databases in the merchant navy.

“He’s not very talkative, but he looks honest. If I had a dangerous and confidential mission, I’d give it to this Breton,” Victoire said, studying Le Guévenec’s face.

“You’ve always had a thing for sailors,” John quipped.

“French marines pulled my mother out of the South China Sea. Le Guévenec looks to me as steadfast as a stone monument in a storm.”

“We need to find out what he knows. This guy’s the key,” said Luc.

“If he’s still alive,” John replied.

Luc asked the wall for the latest images of the *Bouc-Bel-Air* and opened a window dedicated to news flashes. It quickly became apparent that the ship was listing but hadn't sunk. Luc selected a bright color from the bottom of the screen and moved a red arrow to another part of the screen, where he opened a site dedicated to Terre Noire. North Land's French rival often made the news in relation to earth sciences. He brought up satellite photos of Le Havre and asked for a display of the corporate profile, based on annual shareholder reports. The role played by the captain and his ship quickly became clear. The maritime branch of Terre Noire, whose headquarters were on the Champs-Élysées, employed Le Guévenec. Luc displayed the phone numbers and picked up one of the disposable cell phones that Fermatown kept in reserve for tricky operations.

"I'm calling Terre Noire."

"You're crazy!" Victoire cried.

"If we want to know what the *Bouc-Bel-Air's* got in its bowels, we might as well ask the captain. Then we won't be going around in circles. John can make the recording and see if Harper's interested in the conversation. We're not going to spy on the guy. We're just going to talk to him, to comfort him."

John shook his head, but ever the good manager, he stood back. Luc amused and interested him. Victoire looked dubious.

"Let him be," he told her.

Luc switched to speakerphone and waited for someone to pick up. First he got a recorded message: "You've reached the offices of Terre Noire. A member of our staff will answer your call shortly."

Luc waited to get a human being on the line and when he did, he was both courteous and authoritative.

"Hello, could you please transfer me to your crisis team?"

"What are you talking about?" sputtered the woman on duty. "It's Sunday."

"I understand," Luc responded. "My call is urgent. Please put me through."

"Just a moment, I'll connect you to someone."

John and Victoire sighed in relief, and Luc motioned to them to be ready to take notes and pull up information on the screen.

"This is Claudine Després. Who's calling please?"

"This is Marc Racine. It's about the events in Greenland."

"Call back later. We're not giving out any information just now."

"I don't want to ask you anything. I'm calling with urgent information for Captain Le Guévenec."

The person on the other end of the line hesitated.

“What kind of information?” she asked in a shrill voice.

“Medical. His health depends on it. I’m his doctor, and I’ve just seen my patient’s condition on television.”

“Hold the line.”

The three heard whispering brought on by Luc’s request. Terre Noire’s headquarters seemed to be in a shambles.

“What kind of medical information?”

“I’m his attending physician, and I’m bound by professional confidentiality. I’ve got a plane to catch in half an hour. Give me a number quickly where I can reach Captain Le Guévenec. He’s in danger of dying.”

The Fermatown trio was crowding around the phone in feverish anticipation. On the other side of the Seine, on the Champs-Élysées, another team, caught off guard, was attempting to make a decision in a hurry. After a few minutes, someone responded by giving the cell phone number of the *Bouc-Bel-Air’s* skipper. Luc thanked him and started to breathe again.

He entered the number on the wall and made the call by tapping it twice. Then he pulled a web cam up, just in case Le Guévenec appeared.

“If he shows, *you’re* the one who’ll have to play doctor,” Luc told John. “I’m too young. I’ve got no credibility.”

John accepted the challenge and stepped up to the virtual window. Victoire planted her hands on her cheeks and listened to it ring. She couldn’t believe what was happening. Those two were going to drive her nuts. How could a soldier like John let this kid lead him by the nose?

A face the color of cement appeared in the middle of the touch screen. The captain of the *Bouc-Bel-Air* seemed out of breath. John stood squarely in front of him.

“Who are you?” asked Le Guévenec.

“Marc Racine. I’m a doctor. Headquarters has permitted me to call you to offer remote medical and emotional monitoring. How are you feeling?”

“Bad, exhausted.”

“What do you need?”

“To get back in touch with Nicolas Lanier as soon as possible. I have some extremely serious things to tell our chairman. It’s unbelievable. Nobody can be bothered to get him for me!”

“We’ll take care of it. What else can I do?” asked John.

Caught off guard, Loïc Le Guévenec stared at the man speaking to him.

“Reassure my wife, Isabelle. I still haven’t had time to warn her. If I tell her everything’s okay, she won’t believe me. But if *you* tell her...”

“Could you give me her number?”

John chose another color and wrote the number the captain gave him on the wall.

“Be careful. Her nerves are more fragile than mine.”

“Don’t worry. We’ll send someone to see her immediately.”

“Thank you. Call me back later. I’m very busy.”

The image of the captain vanished, along with his voice. The three members of Fermatown moved away from the wall, amazed by what they had accomplished. In less than ten minutes, they had gotten right in the middle of the action.

“Now what?” asked Victoire.

“Luc will call Isabelle Le Guévenec and try to find out what’s eating her husband. If we can satisfy Geraldine Harper’s curiosity, we collect the jackpot!” declared John.

“Drop it. You’re acting like kids. You’re nuts. This whole thing has smelled fishy from the beginning!” Victoire said, aggravated by the two men.

She felt like she was on the edge of an abyss, with two idiots in tow, about to leap into a trap set by either a jealous rival or a foreign secret service.

“Why would North Land suddenly take an interest in us? We’re nothing on the geostrategic chessboard.”

“That’s precisely why: we won’t arouse suspicion.”

John put on his stubborn look, the one he had worn trudging up and down the hills of Afghanistan, she imagined.

*AVANNAA, THE NORTH FACE OF HAFFNER BJERG, 9:50 A.M.*

When his phone vibrated after he had sent the pictures of the two dead men, Lars knew his instincts were right. The mission wasn’t over yet. Something told him it was as rotten as the ice cap’s breath. The cataclysm had definitely changed the deal. His contact was bestowing another two hundred thousand euros on him for an extra job he already regretted accepting. Who said he was just a killing machine?

After making sure the money had been transferred to his account in the Channel Islands, he started the snowmobile and reluctantly sped downhill. The unbearable smell forced him to put a wool balaclava over his mask. He pulled up to the pyramid, which was made of plastic and reinforced with steel plates. An opening on one side served as the

entrance to a tunnel that sank into the depths of the ice cap. He took a few steps into the milky light coming from the transparent walls. The tunnel was big enough for a large snowplow. He placed a hand on the wall of ice and continued inside. The sloping floor led to a bend. The light along the archway was green. He quickly saw why. Translucent algae were growing on the ice, clinging to the curved walls here and there. But most of it lay dead on the ground. The sight of all these dying plants made his skin crawl.

He kept going, past tall racks of long plastic tubes that contained ice. There were hundreds of tubes. Terre Noire was taking samples from the deepest part of the ice sheet to remove any doubt about the cooling and warming of the planet and the consequences. After passing the tubes, he found himself in front of a transparent cabinet six feet tall and twenty inches deep. Computer screens blinked behind fogged glass.

Electrical cords in all colors ran out of the cabinet, connecting it to both the floor and the roof. Measuring instruments that looked like seismographs sat cheek by jowl with tape recorders and supercomputers. All of this hardware was surely hooked up to Terre Noire's land and sea laboratories, which sounded Greenland's innards around the clock. On the seismograph, he found the exact time and path of the cataclysm. The graph paper wasn't big enough to register the violence of the shock. A few yards from the cabinet, a kind of turbine hummed softly, no doubt powering the whole system. The tunnel continued farther into the guts of the continent.

He found the box where they had said it would be and gently lifted the tarpaulin. The machine was in its slipcover, next to maintenance tools. Teams came here to read the instruments and hack away at the archway, which regularly buckled and warped. The tunnel was subject to immense pressure, judging by the outgrowths that poked like fingers up from the ground and down from the roof. Some had been sawn off. The walls exuded a sticky liquid like bleached blood. On either side, a thin trickle of water ran downward to the ice cap's wounded guts. He was walking inside a cadaver whose lymphatic fluid was draining into a horrific invisible orifice.

Although the hardest part remained to be done, Lars was relieved to get out of the tunnel. He went to the snowmobile and unfolded a clear plastic bodysuit that he put on over his clothes. Then he pulled the chain saw out of its cover. The motor started without a hitch. The two men and the eleven dogs spurted geysers of blood and flesh as he cut them up. The snow all around the sled turned scarlet. Lars suddenly remembered a wild chant he had sung on the beaches of Jutland. He started singing the first verse to loosen up a bit.



It took an hour to cut up the two men and the team of dogs. There was no one on the horizon. Once the work was done, Lars checked his cell phone to see if the information on his snowmobile's biometric radar was right. Throughout the operation, the system hadn't recorded any source of heat within a five-mile radius. No witness, utter solitude. After he burned the plastic bodysuit and tossed the saw into the flames, he started the snowmobile again and left the doomed slopes of Haffner Bjerg. Another mission was waiting for him in Nuuk.

*BAFFIN BAY, THE ENGINE ROOM OF THE BOUC-BEL-AIR, 10:45 A.M.*

Le Guévenec felt relieved by the call from the doctor at Terre Noire headquarters. He had never been impressed with the firm's warmth or concern for his welfare. The planet had to go haywire, and the *Bouc* had to get practically shipwrecked for them to finally ask him how he was doing. He had a keen desire to kick the arses of the snooty little creeps of the Champs-Élysées.

Exhausted, Le Guévenec and his chief engineer returned to the turbine and tried once again to start the least-damaged engine. A clanking noise and acrid smoke signaled a return to life at last in the depths of the *Bouc-Bel-Air*. They wouldn't make record time, but at least they had enough power to glide along the coast to Nuuk.

Le Guévenec looked at the ladder that led to the upper decks and thought about the bears. The female had skinned the boatswain alive. The excited male had ripped the head off one of the surviving sailors with a swipe of his paw. Driven mad by the blood, the two animals were going round and round on the deck, barring the way to the armory, where there were guns capable of putting an end to the massacre. The noise of the engines finally covered their roaring. The *Bouc-Bel-Air* was moving again. The captain looked at his greasy, blackened hands and, for the first time since he'd been sailing, wiped them on his trousers. His ceremonial uniform. The pain in his hip, which had tormented him for several days, returned instantly.

Le Guévenec left the engine room, trying to put the pain out of his mind. Amid indescribable chaos, he made his way toward the front hold. The ship had been shaken like a cocktail, and water was streaming everywhere. The safety spotlights, hesitantly coming on again, dimly illuminated a scene of desolation. After a glance behind him, he opened the door and stepped into the hold.

A steel box marked with the Terre Noire logo had intrigued him. And he hadn't liked the Spaniard's look. He had suspected him from

the day Christophe Maunay, the company's human resources manager, had sent him to replace the previous boatswain. Le Guévenec tucked the box under his arm and started climbing the ladder that led to the upper deck. After slipping on the rungs several times, he reached the hatch and lifted it to survey the situation. The way was still blocked. The two bears were coming and going from port side to starboard in an unending to and fro. A few feet away, the decapitated head stuck to the base of a launch was watching him with salt-reddened eyes. A black tongue hung out of the toothless mouth, which was now invaded by flies. Where did they come from?

He vomited violently without trying to stem the flow of bile that burned his mucous membranes. The main thing was not to pass out, not to fall to the bottom of the hold. He hung on and waited for nature to do its work without daring to look at the state of his uniform. After the final heave, he wiped his nose on his sleeve and slowly climbed down the ladder. Then he beetled along the internal gangways, hugging the walls. The hardest part was navigating the list with his debilitated back. His sciatica would soon be flaring, as well.

Now he had to find out how his passengers were doing. He crossed the dining room, which had been turned into a sick bay, and asked after the wounded lying on makeshift stretchers. The smell was unbearable. He greeted the expedition's biologist who, with the aid of an able-bodied sailor, was trying to get a bit of heat into this mausoleum. From the hold, they had brought up some gas canisters that had been spared by the tidal wave.

In the flickering light, Le Guévenec looked for Brissac, having saved the man from a heart attack with the defibrillator. He felt someone grab his arm. Looking down, he didn't recognize the expedition's scientific director at first. Brissac was lying on a cabinet that had been laid on the floor to serve as a makeshift pallet. The biologist and the sailor doing duty as a nurse had compensated for the incline of the ship by sliding volumes of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* under the cabinet. Leaning over his swollen face, Le Guévenec listened to the incoherent words coming from the man's cracked lips, something about algae and ice cores.

Le Guévenec thought he heard the name Isabelle. Like the captain and his wife, the Brissacs lived in Le Havre, Terre Noire's registered port, so Le Guévenec didn't give the scientist's mention of Isabelle's name much thought. All of a sudden, the man grabbed Le Guévenec's lapel.

"The South is heading north," Brissac said. "You understand, it's monstrous. It's the South's fault."

Le Guévenec nodded, although he had no idea what the man was talking about, and tried to be reassuring.

“We’re going to look after you, Romain. We’ve asked for help.”

Brissac looked at him and attempted to add a few words, but they wouldn’t come out right. Le Guévenec made an effort to smile. He gently disengaged the hand that was clutching his pea jacket and took stock of the situation with the doctor. Three of the six members of the scientific mission were dead. Two, of which Brissac was one, were seriously impaired.

“If I’ve got it right, you’re the only one who’s okay.”

“Yes.”

Le Guévenec approached the expedition’s botanist, who was sitting in a chair with one arm in a sling, his head covered in bandages.

“How do you feel?”

“I’ll be fine, Captain. When do you expect the ship to go down?”

“We’re not going down. You’ll be evacuated.”

Le Guévenec wanted to find something to say that did justice to the circumstances, but the words refused to come, as usual. He turned on his heels and walked away instead.

Dealing with the havoc and the injured and restoring the *Bouc-Bel-Air*’s nerve centers had worn him out. He retreated to his bunk, collapsed, and slept like a log until his cell phone woke him up. It was Nicolas Lanier, executive chairman of Terre Noire.

“I’m on board a helicopter. We’ll touch down on the *Bouc-Bel-Air* in ten minutes. My presence must remain a secret. You’ll be the only one on the platform to meet me.”

“In any case, there aren’t many of us left.”

Le Guévenec had trouble taking in what he’d just heard. Lanier’s arrival was even crazier and more improbable than the cataclysm he’d just been through. He suddenly thought of the two bears. The wild creatures were hemmed in on the foredeck between the prow and the central forecastle. No danger on that side.

“The platform aft is clear. The tidal wave swept everything away.”

“I can hardly hear you.”

“That’ll be fine.”

Le Guévenec looked at his suddenly mute phone. Where could this helicopter be coming from?

“That’s all we need.”

Nicolas Lanier was renowned for his rapid decision making. The young head of Terre Noire had been an enigma from the moment he took the job.

Le Guévenec's lower back was killing him as he left his cabin to go back to the platform, located aft, over the stern. He was greeted on the bridge by icy snow falling from an utterly cloudless sky. Around the *Bouc*, chunks of pack ice stretched as far as the eye could see, like fragments of a giant's broken dinner plate. Le Guévenec registered the jerking motion the ship was now making. The driveshaft of the propeller had to be hitting something in the bowels of the boat.

He climbed up the ladder that led to the platform, maintaining his grip on every rung with gloved hands. Once there, he discovered that the raging sea had swept everything away. There was absolutely nothing left.

He lifted his head when he heard the noise of rotor blades and spotted the Eurocopter. It was red and black, Terre Noire's signature colors. Le Guévenec signaled to the pilot and got out of the way.

The huge machine described a wide circle above the *Bouc* and then hovered in position over the drop zone. The engines revved and then dropped as the aircraft descended. Le Guévenec was nervous about its landing on the incline, but the pilot put his machine down as though he were planting a kiss on a swollen cheek. He cleverly pointed the nose of the copter at the pitched slope so that the two landing skids touched the bridge at the same time without tipping the machine over.

Le Guévenec appreciated the maneuver. Terre Noire was renowned for the skill of its pilots. And its sailors. He waited for the blades to stop rotating with a well-oiled hiss and stepped forward. The door slid open, and the sole passenger, his face hidden in the hood of a yellow oilskin, leaped to the ground.

"Hello, Captain."

Lanier, looking guarded and older than his age, shook his hand. The tall sandy-haired man aimed the piercing eyes of a Scandinavian warrior at Le Guévenec. Steering a strategic oil-exploration company between a world adrift and an uncertain future was as perilous as navigating between icebergs.

"I've reserved my first mate's cabin for you. It's free."

"Thank you."

Le Guévenec led Lanier along the bulwark, then through the leaning gangways of the *Bouc*. With the oilskin covering his head, the Terre Noire head officer looked like a dripping-wet yellow ghost. They didn't pass anyone. The first mate's cabin was next to the captain's.

Le Guévenec opened the door and, after a glance down the corridor, shut it behind them.

"We haven't had time to clean up."

"Doesn't matter."

"I'll get you a gas canister and a portable heater. There'll be a bit of hot water in an hour," he said.

"That'll be perfect."

"The shower should work."

The two men sat down on either side of a table and adjusted their bodies to the table's lean. Lanier unbuttoned his oilskin and scanned the room. The look on his face conveyed that he fully understood the cataclysm that the *Bouc* and its crew had been through.

"How's Brissac?" Lanier asked.

"Heart attack, fractures, delirium."

"Did he say anything about the ice cores?"

Le Guévenec made an effort to remember the climatologist's disjointed words. Lanier looked at him the way a shipwrecked man looked at the lifebuoy on top of the wave.

"What did he say?"

"The South is heading north.' I didn't really know what he was trying to say."

"He said that? Are you sure?"

"Yes."

Terre Noire's chairman winced like a boxer taking a hit and shook his head. His curls framed a sweaty, rough-hewn face that was animated by a ferocious will. His gray-blue eyes took in every nook and cranny as if he were searching for something.

"Don't repeat that to anyone. Not to anyone, you hear me?"

"You can count on me."

"What about the Eemian samples?"

Le Guévenec realized he was alluding to the ice cores again.

"They're intact."

"Good. No one must know I'm here. I'm going to try to get some sleep. You should, too. You look beat."

"That's what I was about to do," Le Guévenec replied.

He left the cabin and went back to lie down. What he had just read in Lanier's eyes did not augur well. After the Lauge Koch Kyst catastrophe, the *Bouc-Bel-Air* would doubtless be the last ship to carry irrefutable proof of what had happened one hundred and thirty-one thousand years earlier and of what was happening to the planet at that very moment.

*LE HAVRE, 6:50 P.M.*

Luc reassured Isabelle Le Guévenec by phone, promising to call on her the next day. Then he went to the port and headed for the zone reserved for ore carriers. Terre Noire's ships docked in that part of the port and sometimes unloaded rocks and sediments taken from all over the globe. In the minds of many people, the Franco-Danish oil company was linked inextricably with the death of Greenland. And in the space of a few hours, one of its ships, the wounded *Bouc-Bel-Air*, had become the worldwide scapegoat for climate change.

You didn't need to be a rocket scientist to figure out that a spirit of vengeance drew the crowd that had gathered at this spot on a Sunday evening. The multicolored flags and balloons in the colors of innumerable eco-organizations were playing cat-and-mouse with the police amid tear gas and sirens.

The authorities were trying as hard as they could to keep people from climbing aboard the *Marcq-en-Barœul*, the *Bouc-Bel-Air*'s twin. Luc mingled with the demonstrators and curious bystanders, eavesdropping on conversations. Everyone was following the live coverage of the tidal wave arriving in New York and flooding Manhattan. The center of the Big Apple looked like a huge poster for a Hollywood sci-fi blockbuster. But this was real. The first floors of the island's skyscrapers were bathing in water, just like the Statue of Liberty, standing lonely and shrunken on the horizon. That image was going around the world and produced a horrible feeling of powerlessness in everyone who was watching. Something final had happened.

Because the alarm had been sounded in time, the tidal wave had cost no more than a few hundred lives. But scientists were debating among themselves about how the water would recede. No one could agree on whether the billions of tons of ice that had tumbled into the ocean would cause a permanent rise in the sea level. Theories clashed, as they had during the global financial crisis. Feeding the millions of displaced people was clearly going to be a second catastrophe, one that would be much more serious than the first. Luc put his phone in its sheath and watched what was going on around him. Whatever the end of the world might look like, Fermatown had at least been paid properly to figure out its mysteries. Geraldine Harper's call to John couldn't be explained outside the events taking shape.

A giant of a man who had climbed onto the roof of a van was haranguing the sailors guarding the *Marcq-en-Barœul*. His muscles bulging, the ponytailed eco-warrior was calling for Nicolas Lanier, the media-shy head of Terre Noire, to make an appearance. Luc moved closer

to the red and black hull of the ship to size up the situation and home in on any undercover operators who might be hoping to go unnoticed. His instinct, always on the alert, told him that Fermatown was not the only firm on the prowl. Terre Noire knew too much not to be watched and dissected by all the intelligence agencies and private spy outfits on the planet.

He spotted a banner held up by the Northern Peoples Congress and, close by, exactly what he was looking for in the features of a sculpted blonde poured into a scarlet dress. The Valkyrie from the Northern Peoples had more Normandy locals around her than newly independent Greenlanders. She seemed to be verbally wagging her finger at the Terre Noire sailors, as if the melting of Greenland were their fault. The mob needed someone to blame. Luc elbowed his way over to her.

Wherever he was, Luc knew how to spot the sender and the receiver of coded information. Two-legged creatures communicated via pre-verbal ancestral codes. Looks and gestures had not changed an iota since the days when humans lived in caves. Whether it was around a board of directors' table or a fire where meat was being roasted on a spit, the nonverbal communication was the same. Luc knew instinctively that he had to bump into blondie if he wanted to find out more about Terre Noire.

He was less than ten yards away, when things turned nasty. Eco-warriors had just tossed grappling irons onto the rails of the *Marcq-en-Barœul* and were attacking the ship. Onlookers, meanwhile, were hurling projectiles at the sailors.

In response, the crew had turned two fire hoses on the assailants. The powerful jets of water sent the Northern Peoples packing. Red Dress found herself soaked from head to toe. Night was falling on Le Havre, and the air was chilly. Luc grabbed a flag abandoned on the ground and took advantage of the disarray. The god of war was offering him an opportunity that would not occur twice. The god of love wasn't far off, either. Eros and Thanatos.

He rushed toward the frozen-stiff siren and offered her the hospitality of his banner.

"You can't stand there like that!" he said.

Chilled to the bone, dripping wet, and abandoned by her fellow eco-warriors, the valiant blonde accepted the drape. Luc took her hand and dragged her off between two shipping containers on the wharf.

"I'll turn around. Get your clothes off."

Luc turned his eyes toward the battlefield and held the banner, to give her privacy. Wary, she took off her dress, wrapped herself in it, and thanked him.

“That looks even better than the dress.”

“Really?” she answered with a Scandinavian accent.

She leaned over to wring out her thoroughly soaked hair.

“My motorcycle’s only a hundred yards away,” Luc said, aware that it was more like a mile. “I’ll take you home.”

She gave him a grateful look. Behind the two of them, the police were rushing to the aid of the sailors on the *Marcq-en-Barœul*. The Northern Peoples and their allies were losing the battle and scattering in all directions.

“Let’s go.”

He took her hand and led her toward the spot where he had parked his machine. Finally, it came within sight.

“Are you Swedish?”

“Danish.”

“What are you doing in Le Havre?”

“I’m defending the interests of the Inuits of Greenland. I thought that was obvious. Is your motorcycle much farther?”

“There.”

“It’s a Harley-Davidson?”

“Yes. Hop on behind me, and hold on.”

Through the thin material of the banner, Luc felt the Danish woman’s shivering body pressed against his back. He fired up.

“I’m staying at the Mercure. My name’s Connie.”

“I’m Luc. Like the evangelist.”

“You do have the look of an apostle.”

Just listening to her Danish accent was worth the trip. Luc was already allowing himself to feel excited. The end of the world wasn’t all bad. Twenty minutes later, they made a noteworthy entrance at the hotel. Holding her dress and underwear, Luc followed his red flag. Connie retrieved her magnetic card from the reception desk, smiling quite comfortably. She got into the first elevator and pressed the button for the top floor. Their eyes fixed on the elevator doors, they were no doubt thinking the same thing.

Five minutes later, Luc found himself in an expansive suite offering an unimpeded view of the port and its surroundings. In the distance, he recognized the lights of Honfleur and Trouville. Before she stepped into the shower, Connie opened the refrigerator and invited him to take whatever he liked from an array of alcoholic drinks. Defending the Northern Peoples looked like a nice little moneymaker. This was getting more intriguing by the minute.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Bernard Besson, who was born in Lyon, France, in 1949, is a former top-level chief of staff of the French intelligence services, an eminent specialist in economic intelligence, and honorary general controller of the French National Police. He was involved in dismantling Soviet spy rings in France and Western Europe when the USSR fell and has real inside knowledge from his work auditing intelligence services and the police. He has also written a number of prize-winning thrillers, his first in 1998, and several works of nonfiction. He currently lives in the fourteenth arrondissement of Paris, right down the street from his heroes.

## ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR



Julie Rose is a prize-winning, world-renowned translator of major French thinkers, known for, among other works, her acclaimed translation of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, which was published by Random House in 2008. She has translated twenty-eight books, including many French classics, and writes on the side. She lives in her hometown of Sydney, Australia, with her husband, dog, and two cats.

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