

THE BELGIAN TRANSLATOR

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The writer was very surprised when he found out that his book was going to be translated in Belgium and he was very worried when he found out that the translator wanted to meet him in person. Wait, meet him? You mean she was going to come to Brazil? When? Why?

From the day that he found out for sure that the translator was coming the writer didn't talk about anything else. He told his friends that he couldn't sleep because all he could think about was her arrival.

“What does this woman want from me?”

And why is she coming to Brazil? If she had any doubts about the book, why didn't she use email? She had used email to say that she was coming. Why doesn't she just use it to say whatever it is she wants?

Little by little the writer started to get mad – mad at the Belgian translator, mad at the Belgian publisher, mad at his own book. Why translate that book? It was a tiny, insignificant novel. Nobody read it in Brazil. And nobody had heard of this publisher. Why didn't they just leave it in peace?

The writer's friends said that it was a good thing to have a book translated. He would become known internationally.

“I don't want to be known!”

What language do they speak in Belgium, anyway?

“French in the south. And in the north they speak a dialect of Dutch.”

That just increased the writer's irritation. He didn't even know into which language the book was going to be translated – French or Dutch? The translator's emails were all in English. She called the book “your marvelous book”. What about his book was marvelous? She just didn't understand, that was it. She had interpreted it wrong. She was seeing symbols where there weren't symbols, hidden messages where there weren't any. And

she was coming to see what he “really” was trying to say in his pointless book. That was it. Now he understood what she really wanted.

The Belgian woman was coming to look deep into his soul. But he didn't want anyone looking into his soul.

The writer played with the idea of sending her an email saying, “Malaria epidemic. I can't get out of bed or have any visitors. Don't come.” But he gave up on that idea. Instead, he decided to ask his friend Romauldo for help. Romauldo was a dentist, and unlike the writer, he looked like an intellectual. He wore a scarf in the summer as well as in the winter. He smoked a pipe. He would meet the Belgian woman as if he was the writer. He could open his soul up to the writer and agree with all of her interpretations.

Romauldo agreed. All he asked was that the writer give him a quick summary of the book because he hadn't read it.

“I know,” said the writer. “No one did.”

Romauldo and the Belgian woman met together a week later. They met in his apartment, where she noted the obvious absence of any books.

“I don't read,” Romauldo explained in the little English that made it past his pipe, “so as not to be badly influenced.”

When she returned home the Belgian woman sent the writer an email saying that she had gained a completely new perspective on the book after meeting with him, especially all of the dental allusions that she hadn't noticed the first time she read it. Romauldo still won't tell the writer what it was he told the translator and so the writer will only know the result of their conversation after he reads the Belgian translation.

That is, of course, if it's not in some dialect of Dutch.
