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## Sofia's Story in Translation: Leaving Shanghai

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The AALITRA Review  
A JOURNAL OF LITERARY TRANSLATION  
No. 9, November 2014



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# Sofia's Story in Translation. Leaving Shanghai

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“Sofia’s story. Leaving Shanghai”, written by Isabelle Charpentier, is one of five short stories appearing in a collection entitled *Expatriées*, released in 2013 by the French publisher Mon Petit Éditeur. All the stories in the collection are written by women and all take expatriation – moving to another country and adapting to another culture – as their central theme.

Sofia, married to a successful businessman with whom she has two sons, describes in powerful detail the upheavals involved in her family’s move to Shanghai when her husband is posted there by the company he works for. Throughout the story the sense of joy and wonder at discovering a new country and culture is juxtaposed with the difficulties entailed in adapting to daily life in China and the strain that this imposes on family relationships (in particular, Sofia’s relationship with her adolescent son Guilhem). Underpinning the adventure and novelty of the family’s move, there is a pervasive sense of uprootedness that is never far from the surface. At the end of the story, Sofia evokes movingly the overwhelming sense of loneliness that threatens to engulf her.

One of the most striking features of the author’s writing style (and the most challenging from the translator’s point of view) is the use of long and detailed lists that appear at intervals throughout. For example, in the paragraph that begins “Petit carnet de rien du tout...” Sofia’s emotional response to events and experiences in Shanghai is described with startling force and intensity through an analysis of her writing style, as evidenced by the contents of her diary. This is reflected in the lists of verbs used in the assessment of her diary entries (“c’était dans le cahier que ses mots finissaient par échouer pour crier, dénoncer, ou décrire, les dates s’y bouscullaient, son écriture, fine et légère glissait, s’enfuyait, courait...”). The challenge here was to reflect the cumulative emotional intensity of the paragraph in a way that sounded natural in English without losing any of the force of the original. It was important that the style we chose (both in terms of syntax and vocabulary) reflected the ambivalent, sometimes “messy” nature of Sofia’s experience in the same way as the French. At the same time we needed to reflect the lyrical, almost poetic nature of the closing lines (“attraper le rêve, se souvenir du refrain et du rythme, du camaïeu du ciel et de la chanson du vent...”).

In terms of other translation difficulties, the “stand-out” passage in the story was the long paragraph beginning with the words, “Shanghai, la Verticale, l’arrogante Amante...” and ending, “un rêve collectif de nouveaux défis repoussés de jour en jour”. This passage represents a personification of the city of Shanghai, in which Sofia describes its hugely complex and contrasting nature. The beginning of the paragraph was particularly challenging as it starts with a list of sixteen adjectives evoking the negative aspects of the city (“...bruyante et grouillante, crachante et éructante, sale, malodorante, polluée...”). It was impossible to convey the meaning and crescendo-like nature of this list in English without making changes to the syntax of the original. For this, we employed a number of Chesterman’s strategies such as transposition (“It hissed and belched” to render “crachante et éructante”) and paraphrase, such as the use of a whole

phrase to translate an adjective. For example, we expanded the two adjectives “souffrante, éventrée” into a sentence composed of two phrases: “In the throes of a physical torment, it was being ripped apart”. This is followed by a list consisting of thirteen adjectives that evoke the positive aspects of Shanghai, and which begins: “mais aussi, multiple et immense...” Again, we felt it necessary on occasion to modify the syntax of the French by employing paraphrase, clause structure change, and remetaphorization. Thus we translated the three adjectives “marchande, déroutante et souriante” as “a business city with a disarming smile”. Such changes involved something of a balancing act in which we had to be mindful of not compromising the powerfully descriptive force of the French.

A list of a different sort appears in a short paragraph towards the end that encapsulates the juxtaposition and contrast that lie at the heart of Sofia’s experiences. It begins with “Tout cela, soudain, ne lui semblait plus qu’un leurre...” At this point in the story Sofia is overwhelmed by depression, seeing her family’s privileged position as no more than an illusion, and painfully aware that the people, places, and things she holds most dear are far away. In order to highlight this feeling, she uses the word “contre” four times to contrast the perks of life in China with the absence of the things that matter. This sentence posed various challenges for us – repetition of the word “contre” could clearly not be mirrored successfully by repeated use of the English word “against”. In our translation we paraphrased the word “contre” (in the order in which it appears) as: “in order to combat...”; “as a bulwark against...”; “as a buffer against...”; and, finally, as “to compensate for...”. Our aim was to translate the sentence in a way that was both faithful and imaginative, reflecting the concise style of the French while also conveying the poignancy of the contrasts that form the essence of “Sofia’s story”.

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**Sofia.**

**Et puis, quitter Shanghai...**

Isabelle Charpentier

Le claquement violent de la porte fit sursauter Sofia... Mardi. Déjà mardi. Cette journée de plus lui sembla soudain être sa première journée de moins... Un regard périphérique lui confirma l'ampleur de la tâche. Comment s'y prendre? Elle avait toujours été farouchement hostile à toute sorte d'organisation; ne pas prévoir, aller là où le cœur bat plus vite, rester libre de son temps, pouvoir dire oui au dernier moment, sans agenda, utiliser sa mémoire, sa meilleure alliée, pour résister à la folie galopante du monde...

Derrière la vitre sale, le bassin était immobile et magnifique. Le vent fou de la veille avait finalement eu raison des dernières petites feuilles du saule; il était nu à présent, et, privé de ses petites écailles vertes, il semblait fragile et parcouru de frissons. Le bassin, lui, s'était paré de toutes ces feuilles tombées mortes et leur offrait une ultime parade: aidé du vent léger et des leurs mauves du ciel de l'aube, il avait dessiné sur l'eau sombre, des arabesques d'argent.

Son regard se brouilla.

Perdue dans ces jeux de reflets, elle n'avait pas perçu ce goût amer envahir sa bouche. La nausée la secoua... comment affronter cette nouvelle épreuve, plonger à nouveau vers l'inconnu ... Elle se laissa glisser sur le sol.

Une musique délirante et lointaine lui vrilla violemment le cerveau... son corps se cabra. Allongée sur le vieux tapis de laine saoudien, au milieu du désordre habituel et rassurant, elle avait dû dormir.

Le jardin était déjà dans l'ombre. Amnésie passagère, parenthèse, pause. Le son discordant de « La lettre à Élise » version électrobuzzée lui arracha une grimace digne de son grand-père.

**Sofia's story.**

**Leaving Shanghai**

Isabelle Charpentier

The door slammed loudly, making Sofia jump. Tuesday. Tuesday already! One more day that suddenly felt like one day less... A glance around the room brought home to her the daunting nature of the task ahead. How should she go about it? She had always been fiercely opposed to organizing her life in any way: refusing to plan ahead, acting on impulse, living from day to day, saying yes to things at the last moment and not bothering with a diary. Her memory, her closest ally, was her defence against the frenzied pace of the outside world.

Beyond the grimy window lay the pond in its majestic stillness. The gusting wind of the previous evening had finally blown the remaining delicate leaves from the willow tree; its branches were now bare and, without its covering of fragile green scales, the tree looked vulnerable... subject to the whim of the slightest breeze. By contrast, the pond was adorned with fallen leaves – one last chance for them to show off their gorgeous autumn colours. The reflection of the leaf-strewn pond had traced swirling silvery motifs on the dark water, an effect made more noticeable by a gentle breeze and the purple glow of dawn.

Her eyes misted over.

Absorbed by the dancing patterns on the water's surface, she had not noticed the increasingly bitter taste in her mouth. A sick feeling in the pit of her stomach took hold of her. How could she face this new challenge and take a step into the unknown yet again? She let herself slide down to the floor.

Frenetic music coming from somewhere in the distance pierced her consciousness with ear-splitting force. She sat bolt upright. Lying on the old wool rug bought in Saudi Arabia, surrounded by her familiar clutter, she must have fallen asleep.

Shadows had crept into the garden. A temporary loss of memory, a hiatus, a rupture in her stream of consciousness. The grating notes of *Für Elise* (remix version) contorted

Maudite sonnette! Dehors, quelqu'un s'impatientait. D'un coup d'œil au miroir, elle croisa le visage hagard d'une femme aux traits tirés et aux cheveux en bataille. Un geste rapide rattrapa sa coiffure, elle se pinça les joues, respira profondément et ouvrit enfin la porte.

-NiHao. ! Taitai...!!

-Ha !!... oui, oui, bien sûr!

-NiHao, NiHao... !!

Le large sourire édenté du jardinier la rendit confuse. Elle se sentit tellement lâche et médiocre. Le petit homme chétif au costume de toile vert pâle se tenait bien droit, attendant qu'on lui explique ce qu'il devait faire.

Deux heures plus tard le bassin était vide, les poissons commençaient à suffoquer dans les bacs de plastique, elle dut se presser de les transporter chez leurs amis.

Ce fut là son premier chagrin, la première coupure vers un autre monde, la disparition du bassin et des poissons, si chers à son cœur.

Le vent s'était levé et le ciel s'assombrissait. Sofia ne s'en aperçut même pas. Assise en tailleur au milieu du salon, elle s'était enfin décidée à faire le tri du contenu de sa vieille malle.

Cette malle de bois recouverte de cuir rouge foncé, au vernis écaillé et ornée d'un joli fermoir oxydé vert-de-gris, recelait une multitude d'objets et de souvenirs hétéroclites accumulés au cours de ses voyages. Lettres et cartes postales, enveloppes vides joliment timbrées, dessins et mots d'enfant, dossiers colorés, photos, stylos et crayons, vieux pinceaux, articles de presse et pages de magazines arrachés à la hâte, petits papiers pliés recouverts de mots griffonnés devenus illisibles, listes d'adresses, de choses très importantes « à faire et à ne surtout pas oublier », petits bouts d'étoffes multicolores accrochés aux cartes de visites des magasins du « Fabric Market », et bien d'autres choses encore...

Elle sortirait, une à une, chaque chose, à sa droite: « pour la poubelle », à sa gauche:

her features into a pained expression reminiscent of her grandfather's.

Oh no! The doorbell. Someone was outside getting impatient. Glancing in the mirror, she saw the weary face of a woman with drawn features and hair sticking out in all directions. She quickly smoothed her hair, gave her cheeks a pinch, and took a deep breath before opening the door.

'NiHao. ! Taitai...!!'

'Oh!! Yes, yes, of course!'

'NiHao, NiHao...!!'

The gardener's broad toothless grin embarrassed her, making her feel weak and inadequate. The slight little man in his faded green canvas overalls was almost standing to attention, waiting for his instructions.

Two hours later and the pond was empty. The fish had been transferred to plastic tubs and were struggling for air. She had better not delay taking them to their friends' house.

That moment – the disappearance of the pond and the fish that were so dear to her – signalled her first heartbreak, the first in a series of ruptures before announcing a new world.

The wind had picked up and the sky was growing dark but Sofia was oblivious to it. Sitting cross-legged in the middle of the living room, she had finally made up her mind to sort through the contents of her old trunk.

The wooden trunk, bound in dark red leather with peeling varnish and an ornate rusty lock, contained an assorted collection of objects accumulated during the course of her travels. Letters and postcards, envelopes bearing exotic stamps, notes and drawings from children, coloured folders, photographs, pens and pencils, old paintbrushes, newspaper clippings and pages ripped out hastily from magazines, folded bits of paper covered in illegible scrawl, lists of addresses, "to-do" lists, swatches of multi-coloured fabric stapled to the business cards of traders in the Fabric Market... all these and many other things besides.

One by one she would sort each item into a pile: on her right, "bin"; on her left, "unsure";

« il faudrait voir », puis devant elle: « à conserver définitivement »... Elle commença rapidement à se débarrasser des listes, des vieux stylos, de tous ces petits morceaux de vie. Cela devait aller vite, surtout ne pas s'attendrir, et ne garder que l'essentiel. Être efficace et pragmatique. Des qualités qui lui faisaient froid dans le dos, et que, grâce à Dieu, elle ne possédait pas! Aujourd'hui, elle allait se forcer et surtout, ne pas commencer à perdre son temps avec des enfantillages.

Mais, à la vue du joli cahier Indien, sa gorge se noua. Sa main resta suspendue. Elle se mordit la lèvre inférieure... Il était là, bien fermé, serré dans son ruban rouge, endormi tendrement tout au fond. Elle sut tout de suite, qu'elle ne tiendrait pas son engagement, il recelait tant de sa vie passée, qu'elle ne pouvait le laisser là sans l'ouvrir.

Au fond d'elle, le temps s'arrêtait déjà, sa montre cherchait un nouveau fuseau horaire, et elle savait que la nuit qui s'avavançait, se mêlerait au petit jour sans la ménager.

Les enfants étaient rentrés avec le crépuscule... entre chien et loup... une si belle expression pour qualifier cette transition magique, cet imperceptible basculement du jour contre la nuit. Avec lui venait toujours ces petits instants de vide, de rien entre la vie, puis la mort, des choses du jour...

Elle se redressa soudain, constatant que l'obscurité avait envahi tout l'espace, elle prit peur...

– Guilhem? Étienne?

– ...

– Étienne! Guilhem!

– Wwwwhoouuaaaaiis! Ça va, ça va! On est là! Qu'est-ce qu'il y a encore?

– Il est tard! Je n'ai pas vu passer l'heure! Descendez vite pour dîner. Je vais prép...

– Maaaa-maaaaan! On a dîné sans toi. Tu sais qu'il est déjà onze heures! Étienne dort depuis longtemps!

Vingt-trois heures! Guilhem disait vrai.

in front of her, “keep”. She quickly binned the lists, old pens... tiny remnants of everyday life. This shouldn't take long. Don't get sentimental – that was the important thing. Keep only what is important. Be methodical and businesslike – qualities that sent shivers down her spine and that she didn't possess, thank God! Today, however, she was going to be strict with herself, and, most importantly, not waste time on childish impulses.

Then her eyes alighted on the lovely notebook from India and she felt a lump in her throat. Her hand wavered and she bit her lower lip. There it was, tightly wrapped in its red ribbon, lying snug at the bottom of the trunk. She knew then and there that she would be unable to resist. So much of her past life was contained within its pages that she could not leave it there unopened.

Already she felt time slowing to a halt within her. Her watch was adjusting to a different time zone and she knew that she would not have a moment's peace until the advancing night had turned to dawn.

The children had come home at twilight. “Twilight”, such a lovely word, evoking the magical transition, the subtle transformation of day into night. Twilight was always marked by these moments when time stood still, when life, death, and daytime things seemed to merge into one...

Sensing the darkness that had encroached, she straightened up, suddenly feeling afraid.

“Guilhem? Etienne?”

No reply.

“Etienne? Guilhem?”

“Wh-a-a-a-t! Chill! We're here. What is it now?”

“It's late! I hadn't realized what time it was. Quick! Come downstairs and we'll have supper. I'll make us a...”

“Mum! Stop! We made our own supper. Do you realize it's already eleven o'clock?! Etienne's been asleep for ages.”

Eleven at night! Guilhem was right. She jumped up. Her back, hips and knees were killing her and felt stiff as a board. She had pins and needles in both feet. Flopping back on

Elle se leva d'un bond; son dos, ses reins, ses genoux, maintenant lui faisaient mal et lui semblaient en béton. Elle avait des fourmis dans les pieds; elle se renversa sur le canapé, se frotta, se massa les jambes et les chevilles, vivement.

Sur le pas de la porte, Guilhem la regardait ahuri.

– T'as un problème?

– ... des fourmis!

– Hé! C'est quoi tout c'bordel?

Le bel ado aux cheveux longs et emmêlés, haussa les sourcils et les épaules, réajusta les écouteurs de son Ipod et tourna le dos. Un jean trop large laissait apercevoir la moitié de son caleçon, son insolente et permanente provocation, et, d'une démarche lourde et nonchalante, il quitta le salon en chantonnant.

Elle aurait peut-être dû lui parler ce soir... lui dire qu'ils allaient bientôt repartir.

Non, c'était trop tôt... elle devait faire attention à la façon de le lui annoncer. Il fallait qu'elle y réfléchisse. La communication était devenue si difficile et si fragile entre eux depuis plus de deux ans maintenant. C'était une douleur permanente pour elle; une blessure sans cesse à vif.

Quelques cafés et quelques heures plus tard, elle était toujours là, trônant au milieu d'un désordre indescriptible. La nuit s'était installée. Le petit dossier Indien était posé et ouvert sur ses genoux croisés... Elle, calée entre les coussins moelleux du canapé et assise en tailleur sur le tapis, avait entrepris la lecture totale du cahier.

Seule, la petite lampe rouge l'éclairait dans toute cette noirceur nocturne, derrière les larges baies vitrées, le jardin silencieux se devinait à peine... une nuit sans lune et sans vent. L'encre du ciel s'était répandue partout et le silence qui l'accompagnait offrait à Sofia un écrin magnifique.

Au cœur de cette immobilité, sur un écran magique défilaient devant ses yeux les quelques années de leur vie passée à Shanghai.

Petit carnet de rien du tout, au début,

the sofa, she rubbed her body all over and massaged her legs and ankles vigorously.

Standing in the doorway, Guilhem looked on in disbelief.

“What's up with you?”

“Pins and needles!”

“Hey! What's with all the mess?”

The handsome teenage boy, hair long and straggly, raised his eyebrows, shrugged his shoulders, adjusted the earphones on his iPod, and turned away. You could see the top half of a pair of boxers above his baggy jeans – his trademark gesture of defiance. Dragging his feet, he left the room humming to himself.

Perhaps she should have had a word with him this evening... told him that they would be leaving again soon.

No, it was too early for that. She had to break it to him gently, rehearse carefully what she was going to say. For the past couple of years now communication between them had been so difficult, so strained. It was a source of constant heartache to her, like an open wound that refused to heal.

Several hours later, fortified by numerous cups of coffee, there she was still, surrounded by a scene of indescribable chaos. Night had fallen. The little Indian journal lay open across her knees. Sitting cross-legged on the rug, soft cushions from the sofa propping her up on either side, Sofia had started reading it from the beginning.

The little red lamp was the only source of light in the pitch black, with the tall glass windows giving only a hint of the silent garden beyond. Neither moon nor wind to interrupt the darkness. Inky blackness had crept into every corner and the accompanying hush was a perfect backdrop for Sofia's reading.

Enveloped by total stillness Sofia looked on as scenes from the family's life in Shanghai unfolded before her eyes, as if by magic.

It had started out as a simple travel journal – somewhere to jot down her first impressions of the place. Over time she had added to it: sketches, photos, descriptive passages written on the spur of the moment and pasted in here and there. She had written her own little poems,



juste pour noter ses premières impressions, elle y avait ajouté, peu à peu, des croquis, des photos, des pages écrites sur le vif puis recollées ci et là, des poèmes sans rime et des rimes d'ailleurs chaque fois que son cœur s'était enflammé ou serré trop fort ... c'était dans le cahier que ses mots finissaient par échouer pour crier, dénoncer ou décrire, les dates s'y bouscuaient, son écriture, fine et légère glissait, s'enfuyait, courait pour ne pas perdre la teinte, l'humeur et le plaisir, attraper le rêve, se souvenir du refrain et du rythme, du camaïeu du ciel et de la chanson du vent... une vie dans sa vie... mais aussi, et surtout, la vie des autres.

[...]

Mais gare à l'envoûtement et à la douceur de l'expatriation. De découvertes en curiosité, les facilités et les ultra-privilèges, l'innocence et la méconnaissance ne devaient pas masquer la douleur, la difficulté de vivre, et la non-liberté de tous ceux que nous croisions quotidiennement: les chinois, ce peuple aux qualités étonnantes. « *Savoir résister pour rester libre* »... Libre? Ce mot résonnait étrangement dans ce contexte où personne ne semblait oser parler ici directement de Liberté. Il y avait les mille et une anecdotes vécues et notées çà et là, les balades au cœur de l'immense ville: Shanghai, la Verticale, l'arrogante Amante, la fière, bruyante et grouillante, crachante et éructante, sale, malodorante, polluée, souffrante, éventrée, boueuse, collante, grise et poussiéreuse, blessée, mouillée et détrempée par les pluies incessantes... mais aussi, multiple et immense, brune et active, marchande, déroutante et souriante, brumeuse, douce et caressante, envoûtante, charmeuse et attachante... Les vélos et leurs capes de pluie de toutes couleurs; les hommes en costumes sombres si souvent, les petits enfants emmaillotés l'hiver, aux joues écarlates comme des pommes d'amour, à la peau si sèche, à la bouche petite et rouge comme une fleur de

as well as quoting other people's poetry, every time something had fired her imagination or had moved her to tears. Words spilled over each page, expressing her need to cry out, to denounce, to describe. Entries followed each other in quick succession. Her delicate handwriting, flowing freely, broke free of constraints, gathered speed in order to capture a nuance, a mood, a fleeting moment of pleasure... in order to pin down a dream, to recall a chorus and a rhythm, the blue of the sky and the song in the wind. It was testimony to her own inner life but also, and most importantly, testimony to the lives of others.

[...]

But the charm and enchantment of living in a foreign country tell only one side of the story. Excursions, perks, and special privileges, coupled with a lack of experience and awareness, should not mask the pain, hardship and lack of freedom that blight the lives of all those with whom we come into daily contact: the Chinese, a people with remarkable qualities. "To be free you must stand firm"... Free? The word sounded a discordant note in a country where no one seemed to dare speak openly about freedom. She thought of the numerous anecdotes that she had committed to memory and then to paper, trips made to the heart of this enormous place they called Shanghai – "the Vertical City", "the Arrogant Concubine". It was a proud, noisy city, swarming with people. It hissed and belched; it was filthy, smelly, polluted. In the throes of a physical torment, it was being ripped apart. Muddy, sticky, grey, dust-covered; the city was buffeted by relentless rainstorms that dampened and drenched it by turns. At the same time, it was vast and multi-faceted, swarthy and bursting with life – a business city with a disarming smile, swathed in mist, gentle and caressing, bewitching, charming, appealing. The bicycles with their colourful rain covers; the men in their customary dark suits; the small children wrapped up against the winter cold, their ruddy cheeks like love

coquelicot, à l'iris noir et brillant derrière leurs paupières fendues presque closes. Les nouveaux quartiers d'affaires se répandaient, partout des chantiers, des grues, des engins de forage et d'extraction, des camions, des centaines de milliers de camions bleus aux remorques si longues, rouillées et tordues, aux pneus usés et aux chargements énormes défiant souvent les lois de l'équilibre, des ouvriers partout travaillant le jour comme la nuit, par tous les temps réalisant des routes, des ponts, des aéroports et des tunnels, des gratte-ciel... pas de répit dans cette mégapole... un rêve collectif de nouveaux défis repoussés de jour en jour.

Sofia revivait à la lecture ses ressentis vifs et ses peurs intérieures. Le chinois fut trop difficile, elle ne le parlerait pas, ce fut une grosse déception, et elle le savait, cela la mettait d'emblée hors jeu.

Alors il restait la découverte, celle toute personnelle qui ne peut que regarder et essayer de comprendre un peu, sentir vibrer les choses, observer, être attentive et humble, accepter sans juger, sans rejeter, tenter de partager et surtout être patiente.

Les voyages en Asie rythmèrent bientôt la vie de la petite famille. Le résultat dans sa tête, comme sur le papier, ressemblait à un jeu de piste, à un message curieux, puzzle codé top secret de mots magiques, ne parlant d'Amour qu'aux initiés.

[...]

Tout cela, soudain, ne lui semblait plus qu'un leurre, qu'un mensonge. Des voyages contre un silence, des souvenirs et des photos magnifiques contre l'absence, une jolie et grande maison contre une attente, des amitiés exotiques contre un désert familial.

Sofia avait sombré intérieurement vers ce qui ne peut se dire. Elle referma son carnet, elle sentit des larmes couler sur ses joues. Un enfermement volontaire, au sein de sa propre famille dans cette geôle superbe lui avait semblé être la seule issue possible...

apples, their dry skin, their small red mouths like poppies, their shiny black eyes beneath almond-shaped lids. New business areas were springing up across the city – everywhere you looked there were building sites, cranes, drilling and mining equipment, trucks... hundreds and thousands of blue trucks with long, rusty, twisted trailers and worn tyres carrying immense loads that often defied the laws of gravity. All over the city workmen laboured day and night, come rain or shine, building roads, bridges, airports and tunnels... sky-scrapers. No time for rest in this huge metropolis – the symbol of a collective dream consisting of new challenges that had to be overcome day after day.

Reading all this, Sofia relived the raw emotion and inner turmoil of those early days. Chinese proved too difficult for her – she would never learn to speak it. She had felt this disappointment keenly, knowing that it would automatically relegate her to the sidelines.

But she had still been able to pursue a journey of discovery – a deeply personal journey in which she had been an observer trying to gain insight, to go with the flow, to exercise concentration and humility, to be non-judgemental, to attempt to participate. Showing patience was, above all, essential.

Before long, trips around Asia were a regular feature of family life. The upshot of this, in her head as well as on the page, was a sort of treasure hunt, a cryptic message, a top-secret code decipherable only to the initiated.

[...]

Suddenly it all seemed nothing more than an illusion... a lie. Journeys made in order to combat a deadly silence, mementoes and stunning photographs as a bulwark against absence, the lovely big house as a buffer against the pain of waiting, friends from different countries to compensate for a lack of family.

Sofia's mental state had deteriorated worryingly. She closed the journal to find tears running down her cheeks. Self-imposed imprisonment, albeit in a gilded cage and surrounded by her family, had seemed the only

Comment trouver la force maintenant de repartir vers de nouveaux horizons, de replanter le décor dans un autre quartier, une autre ville, un autre pays...

Au fond de la malle, un livre, un petit volume plein de souvenirs attira son regard, et fit naître un sourire sur ses lèvres mouillées de larmes... EXPATRIÉES brillait sur la couverture. Elle remonta le temps jusqu'à son séjour en Angleterre bien des années plus tôt, elle avait passé un an à Londres et avait connu des amies littéraires qu'elle retrouvait régulièrement au sein d'un atelier d'écriture. Elle avait aimé ces moments de partage et de création.

Elles avaient trouvé dans l'écriture le moyen d'exprimer leurs espoirs, leurs désespoirs, leurs fous rires et leurs peurs ou leurs élans passionnés vers la découverte d'autres cultures d'autres pays, leurs angoisses et leurs joies avec leurs enfants ou en les attendant... Décidément, elle ne dormirait pas cette nuit. Sofia se glissa dans son lit et prit le livre, à la lueur de sa lampe de chevet, elle se lança dans la lecture des souvenirs d'autres femmes, ses amies.

possible solution.

How would she find the strength now to leave again for pastures new, to make a home in another area of another city... in another country?

At the bottom of the trunk a book caught her eye, bringing a smile to her lips wet with tears. It was a slim volume full of reminiscences... the word EXPATRIÉES shone out on the cover in bold lettering. She cast her mind back to her stay in England many years earlier. She had spent a year in London and had made a number of literary friends with whom she met up regularly at a writing workshop. She had revelled in these moments of shared experience and of creativity.

Through their writing these women had found an outlet for their hopes, disappointments, their moments of hilarity... their fears. They had written about their passionate desire to embrace other cultures and other countries; the pain and joy of bringing up children or of awaiting the arrival of a newborn. She wouldn't be getting any sleep tonight – that was for sure. Sofia slid under the duvet and opened the book. By the light of the bedside lamp she immersed herself in reading about the experiences of other women – these women who were her friends.