

David Thorpe

Les passeuses

A proposal from H  l  ne Baril

Between two rocks set high up, a head barely appeared. It was small, but the vastness of the landscape around it made it visible. The rocks formed a narrow frame, the sky and the vegetation another. At its feet, the ground broke apart into a dry carpet of pine needles and stones. It was winter. The landscape stretched into a desert of wood. Slender oaks seemed suspended above emptiness, and further away, pines raised their dark silhouettes. Pale lichen clung to the tops of the trees, and from its rock the head could observe the canopy, above the void.

The head remained still. It was hiding, perhaps, or waiting. Its gaze drifted into the landscape, and yet, in its mind, another world was forming, without clear contours. It saw itself as an old samurai at the twilight of the Edo period, sensing a battle whose shape eluded it, as if something were already awaiting it.

It had to move. Not remain watching. Enter the landscape, pass through it. The head had left behind a territory, and was already detaching from it. It still had to walk, to feel this space, to search for other living beings, if there were any, to move forward without knowing. And to carry something like an ornament, a medieval jewel from a slightly anachronistic noir novel.

The head descended from the rock with great caution. The granite slope seemed to hold it in suspension, and as it began its descent, step by step, it quickly lost control; soon, it no longer felt its feet touch the ground. Its strides were overtaken by gravity. The body moved faster than the will. Descending through the air, the fear of falling turned into a kind of pleasure. Below, the trunks of conifers stood, at first distinct, then increasingly dense, until they formed an almost compact mass. As it descended, depth seemed to dissolve; lines overlapped, flattened. Soon, nothing remained but a wall, a dense surface where verticals repeated endlessly. The scene appeared as a vegetal tapestry laid out there, indifferent.

The head finally stood on solid ground, enveloped in the strong smell of decaying earth. Twigs, leaves heavy with rain and mud, and moss formed a soft, uneven carpet. It entered the forest with audible steps, snapping twigs and rustling vegetation. The trunks drew closer together, and the space between them resonated. Light, slipping between their lines, wove another pattern. The branches completed the weave, multiplying verticals and diagonals. Space settled into a chiaroscuro tapestry.

The head opened its gaze, crossing the wall of Scots pines and Douglas firs, indifferent to its presence. Everything seemed fixed into a flat surface whose plasticity did not seek to seduce. The wind was blowing, the elements were vibrating, light flickering, and yet everything held in a strange stability. In the foreground, a figure emerged, difficult to grasp. Its clothing blended with the vegetation. Was it a soldier dressed in camouflage? Was it a body in rags? The face remained indistinct, the figure too still to be defined. The bark of the trunks seemed to turn into metal. The lines were nothing but spears, pikes, and points. Other silhouettes emerged: here, slowly extracted from a tangle of brambles; there, half emerging from the trunk of a larch. They seemed to gather themselves to breathe. A metallic clinking suggested a military presence. Were they wearing armor? Were they brigands? Did they form a group, or were they watching one another? Were they seeking refuge in this earthly forest? Had it become their place of exile, or had they not even chosen to be there? Were they even human? In the background, mist fell like dust over lichen-covered stumps. Clearings opened here and there, vertical streaks of light. Through one of them, the head thought it saw, in a flash, other silhouettes in single file, reaching a rocky outcrop, as if pursued.

Everything was visible and slipping away at the same time. It was as if something had taken place, without ever fully receding. The forest resembled a battlefield that had not yet formed, or had already passed its peak.

A territory undone and recomposed. A dangerous zone whose limits enclosed the gaze, almost like a cocoon. Another faint flicker of movement appeared, then another, to the left, to the right. Figures slipped from one position to another. Lines barely rose, fell back, rose again. A piece of cloth came loose, fluttering like a banner, then merged with the fallen leaves. A fragment of bark shifted sideways. Nothing quite held in place anymore. Nothing truly moved, and yet something persisted, working the surface. A shift, a slight displacement, as if lines and forms hesitated, came undone only to reform elsewhere. The image of the forest seemed to fold back onto itself, silently replaying its unfolding.

The head had been there for hours, perhaps, unable to measure time. It would have wanted to enter the scene, but nothing gave way. Everything held, at a distance.

Later, it returned. Several times, over the seasons. Always to look.

CAST AND CREW IN THE MAKING OF *LES PASSEUSES* AT LES BAINS-DOUCHES

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