



Source: Damien Cave, 'Shiite's tale: how gulf with sunnis widened', *New York Times online*, 31/08/07.

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Writer/s: Shaune Lakin

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There is a small icon on the wall. Not a print of a Girodet, as he had expected.

He had assumed the whole town would be given over to Girodet. But instead it was like any other workaday French place. The *pâtisserie* he went to sold stodgy *pudding*; he hadn't even noticed whether the buildings around the town were interesting. The woman who gave him a lift from Orleans couldn't imagine why he wanted to come here. 'It's the birthplace of Girodet', he said more than once. She got it, but even so was perplexed. 'It's uninteresting', she replied, in a way that left him unsure if she was referring to the town, or the fact that Girodet had been born here.

It was mid-afternoon, and Saturday. When the woman from Orleans dropped David off, there was no one around. The area near the canal was completely deserted. It was like those Saturdays during winter at home, when the whole town seemed to be watching a game somewhere. His pack was heavy; all he could do was think about finding a place to stay. And this place seemed good enough.

David looks at the icon from his bed. He doesn't recognise the saint; it doesn't look particularly French. The room is strange: there are four beds and just one window, and the walls are yellow; it certainly doesn't appear too interested in presenting itself as 'French'. He's never seen a room in a boarding house, but he imagines this is what it would be like. It feels not-quite-institutional and not-quite-personable: a bit more than simply functional, but without character. As he thinks about this, he starts to feel the weight of his body fall into the mattress. The skin of his lower back has been rubbed raw by his pack; the pain, for a moment, seems to fade away.

A tall, dark-haired man comes into the room. He says 'hello'. Not 'bonjour', but 'hello'; and in an odd manner. David had become used to the Parisian way of saying 'hello'. This sounded more English than that. He pronounced the 'h' in the manner of an English speaker. Actually, it was almost Irish, with a strong emphasis on the first part of the word.

David can't tell whether the young man is a resident or the owner's son, who he guessed to be Moroccan, since he can see no other luggage. But the man appears to be very comfortable in the room, as if he sleeps here. This makes David uneasy, although he doesn't quite know why. 'Where are you going?' the young man asks. It was a weird accent alright. Not quite French, not quite English. 'Going?' David asks in turn. He now feels really uncomfortable. This sensation is a product of both his

general uneasiness with the young man, and also his question. He has only just arrived. 'I don't know. I just got here'. Perhaps he should have stayed in Orleans, as the woman had advised.

The young man takes off his boots and lies on the bed in the other corner. He seems bored, with his left leg dangling over the bed's side, and his fingers pressing his lips into a pout. But he remains confident. He asks David what he is doing here, and then listens to his story of coming to the town because a painter he really likes was born here. The young man has never heard of Girodet. He has been in the town for three months now, and not once has he been to the museum or heard Girodet's name. He currently makes tyres, he says, by now sitting up on the bed, with both feet on the floor. 'Who's Girodet?' So David tells him about this great painter, and how he was one of many great young painters who lived in France at the time.

The young man—whose name David didn't catch; it might have been Mustafa, but he is now too embarrassed to check—is not especially captivated by the story of Girodet. But he is interested in David's account of hitching from Chartres to see Girodet. 'So where will you go when you leave here?', he asks again, leaning forward. David is not particularly interested in talking. His back is sore and he just wants to look at the icon. But he suggests maybe Auxerre, on his way to Dijon. The young man is interested in Auxerre: he says he has wanted to go there for a while, and suggests that they go together. David knows he should be flattered, that this tall young man wants to spend time with him, but he's not. He is confused as to how the conversation—and this friendship—has so quickly turned to this.

The young man continues to talk about what he might do afterwards. He could go to Dijon as well, and then to Lyon and Marseilles. He has relatives in Marseilles, and he might stay there a while. He says that David should go to Marseilles as well; his relatives are very welcoming. His face is bright and earnest as he says this; he looks beautiful. He means every word.

But David closes his eyes. He thinks about leaving this place in the morning, and then going to the museum to look at paintings. He thinks he'll stay somewhere else tomorrow night; a place where he can just lie down and think about what he's seen and what he'll do the following day. He'll also need to make a sign.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Shaune Lakin.