

Lisez les documents A et B.

**Document A**

[Frederick and Jette Meisenheimer left Hanover in 1904 to start a brand new life in America. They have settled in a village called Beatrice in Missouri.]

In what little spare time he had, Frederick began to study English. He borrowed books from Dr. Becker and read for an hour each morning. Every week he bought the town's newspaper, the *Beatrice Optimist*, and slowly worked his way through it, dictionary by his side. He listened closely to conversations at the tavern, eager to grasp the language's strange vernacular<sup>1</sup>. Frederick was an assiduous student. A year after their arrival in America, he had amassed a fair vocabulary and was rarely caught out by the army of irregular verbs that lurked in ambush. But for all his hard work, Frederick had no gift for English. After the dour rigidity of his native tongue, its anarchy unnerved him. There was always a glimmer of apprehension in his eyes when he spoke, as if every sentence were a high wire from which he was liable to topple<sup>2</sup> at any moment. His unease made him retreat from the perils of idiom. He adopted a cautious, formal mode of speech, although this wasn't just because of his fear of opaque colloquialisms: English was the language of his family's future. It deserved to be spoken with respect, not sullied with lazy elisions and cheap slang. As he listened to the alien words form themselves in his mouth, his heart would swell with pride.

Because Frederick loved America. He loved its big open spaces, the sunsets that drenched the evening sky in blistering color. He loved the warmth of the people. Above all, he loved the smell of promise that hung in the air. Europe, he could see now, was slowly suffocating under the weight of its own history. In America the future was the only thing that mattered. Frederick turned his back on everything that had gone before, and looked ahead into the bright lights of the young century. Here a man could reinvent himself. His determination to learn a new language was his own path toward such reincarnation. German became just an echo of his past.

Jette was not so lucky. Joseph's birth, rather than directing her eyes toward the future, instead turned her gaze back toward the home she had left behind. Motherhood changed everything that she thought she knew. Everything was now refracted through the prism of a new mother's love. She stared down at Joseph as he slept, and knew that she would be destroyed if he ever left her. Suddenly, remorse flooded through her as she thought about her parents, alone now on the other side of the world. [. . .] It had been her idea to come to America, but now she began to wish that they had never left. As she watched Frederick eagerly immerse himself in his new country, she kept her homesickness a guilty secret.

Unlike her husband, Jette learned scarcely a word of English. Almost everyone in the town still spoke German, and she found her old language a welcome comfort in the face of the strange parade of foreign customs outside her front door.

Alex George, *A Good American*, 2012

<sup>1</sup> vernacular: the language spoken in a particular area or by a particular group

<sup>2</sup> to topple (here): to lose balance and fall down