

What the Eyes of Beata Daury Saw

A novel by
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CHAPTER II
It's a girl!

The story presented here could take place in any French seaside community, and the reader and listener may imagine it where they will.

However to make things simpler, we'll place it in Nesson, a coastal town on the Atlantic Ocean in mainland France, more or less equidistant between Douarnenez and Biarritz.

And, to be even more specific, the town follows the shore for six kilometers along a pedestrian promenade bordering the beach. It's surface area, which begins at the top of the beach, is 19 square kilometers and is made up of pine forest that has lent itself naturally to the construction of buildings and access roads. Lastly, it is traversed by the thin ribbon of the Lauve river. They say that twice during the last century, during exceptionally high tides, the Lauve rose high enough to join the ocean, but under normal circumstances it's simply the domain of the local canoe and kayak club.

Starting with the May holidays and until the start of school in September, the average population of Nesson, as estimated by the tourist office – open all day without interruption during the summer, and the first Wednesday afternoon of the month, except on holidays, from 2 to 3pm for the rest of the year – at 2,500 inhabitants. Enough to people the long, golden beach and the nautical activities proposed there, as well as the campground, a few hotels, restaurants, bars, ice cream shops, boutiques of all kinds, the church and all the other amenities on offer.

During the off-season there are approximately 480 inhabitants in residence, an average only effected by rare births, arrivals, and the occasional death. The residents are grouped in part along the length of the charming town of Nesson, and the rest in large homes among the

piners reached by a network of perfectly maintained roads.

This particular autumn, all the various inhabitants of Nesson came and went, in thought or on foot, just like you and me, and just like those who read or listen to this story, those who will never know it; those who are happy, have been happy or force themselves to be happy, are unhappy or try to be a little less so.

Having decided once and for all to not take upon herself all the troubles she witnessed, Marie Langla had filed the meeting described above in a distant part of her memory.

But even if she hadn't done so, it would have, in any case, been far from her thoughts, because the next Friday of that autumn will long remain in memory, as the one the residents of Nesson have come to call, in an obviously contradictory way: the day of the night wind.

On that day, the mayor, Simon Dentraiche, was at the end of his third term and had called an early, informal meeting in his little office at the City Hall. Present that morning were Julien Lavaure, the municipal advisor for Social Affairs, and Rémi Lizon, the advisor for urban planning.

As at every meeting of this kind during the last several months, he started by reminding them with a smile that it was time to "make room for the young!" and start thinking seriously about who would replace him.

He looked wearier than ever that day, however, and Julien and Rémi listened to him with more empathy and attention than usual.

"It's really getting very serious.

Another warning from the Prefecture arrived late last night...

Yes, it's a warning of strong gusts, and not gale force winds.

Yes, there's a low coefficient and an outgoing tide.

And no, there's no risk of a tidal wave.

But you both know that we have elderly people in town who don't necessarily have handphones... they won't get the warning sent by sms...

I took care of Soleilsun, you know, the subsidiary of Thalassosun. Once again, they've planned their Wednesday Back-to-School program for a day just before the equinox. Always the same! They plan their beach activities either just before the equinox or just before the solstice...but they left the beach perfectly clean, no complaint there, and they promised to come back for those temporary, chestnut fences they use to mark off their games. The truck was overloaded and they'll pick them up once the winds have passed.

Julien, could you go by Mrs. Ramier's to help close her shutters, and remind her to stay inside? And, of course, if you think of someone else... Mr. Lacroix maybe? His fracture is still pretty recent...I know you'll do your best...

And you, Rémi, would you go by and check the "No Entry" signs at the Thalasso construction site? Make sure they're well-attached and can't fly off.

And, speaking of which, we should put the delays at the Thalassosun site on the list of topics to discuss...the manager at the Hotel Beauséjour came to me again to complain. It seems that their attempts to draw sea water for their thalassotherapy pools are taking an

inordinate amount of time. There's been constant noise, night and day for the last two years, and his clientele isn't happy. Then there's the coming and going of all those trucks... There will certainly be damage to the roads. And, just between ourselves, those protective walls they put up make it look like a prison. It's not very pleasant for anyone in town..."

It was late in the afternoon that the inhabitants of Nesson began to hear the rustle of the wind...

Soon after there was a kind of shuddering...

And then, it began to blow...

...The wind blows, the branches of the trees start to wave, the seamstress closes her shop – it's too bad for the clients, but during the off-season there aren't many anyway – and she walks away quickly, anxious to get home...

The wind blows, taking with it a few remaining leaves, rust-colored pine needles, some bits of paper...

The wind blows, and the few shops remaining open lower their shutters...

The wind moans, and the two restaurants that stay open Friday and Saturday nights post signs saying "closed due to weather," there are no lights on inside...

The wind whines, and Julien Lavaure takes a mental inventory ... Yes, he's visited all the isolated and at-risk residents, and now he can go home himself...

The wind groans, and Doctor Daury has finished his rounds, reminding his last patient, old Mr. Fernando who has trouble staying put, that he has everything he needs at the house, to not go out for any reason, and "one pill every four

hours, don't forget". He then leaves to join his waiting family...

The wind gusts, and Rémi Lizon has finished inspecting the signs at the construction site, whose colors cover the entire range of gray, while little Cristelle Gallois – as luminous as her name - sneaks quietly out of the house. She's going to photograph the wind- the houses in the wind, the beach in the wind, the construction site in the wind. In tones of gray she's going to capture the ivory, mother-of-pearl, slate, anthracite, and all these with her silver photographic film!

The wind whistles and – what luck for her! – knocks down one of the protective barriers at the site of the enormous future thalassotherapy complex...

The wind blusters, and the sun is setting. Soon it will be night...

Now the wind howls, and there's another sound, sharper but so brief and faint that it won't be heard. And such a gentle fall won't be heard either...

The wind screams, the night is black, and here and there we can make out overturned rubbish bins rolling in all directions – the Prefecture hadn't told anyone not to put them out – and trash bags dance in the wind...

The wind roars, and happily for Olivier Morin and Fernand Ramirez, it's almost over, all is well, their shift is about finished. Other cops from the Station will take over now...

One shouts to the other that they should still swing by the Thalasso site, even if nobody's there at night – not even a light for a guard, if there happened to be one. Pretty stingy, right?

The other one yells back, “okay, but let’s hurry!
We’re almost there!”

....

“Stop! Stop! Stop, I say! Stop! ... That’s not a
trash can!... It’s a person!

The squeal of the tires can’t be heard over the
sound of the wind.

Nor can one cop saying to the other,

“It’s a girl! Come on, help me move her!”

And then, inside the van,

“Don’t worry...”

“...My...”

“Yes, yes, we have your camera...we’ll get to
that later...first we’ll take you to the closest
clinic, at La Source. It’s only 30 kilometers,
we’re almost there...they’ll take care of
you...we’ll take your statement tomorrow, when
you’re feeling better...”

“It’s...”

“Don’t worry, we called for reinforcements,
they’re on their way, probably there already.
With no one on the roads they’ll have made
good time, they’ll catch them...
...I don’t want to frighten you, but you should
know that they’ve hurt you pretty badly...”

“But it’s...”

“Don’t say anything...it’s obviously causing you
pain...Really, it’s not a good idea to try to speak
right now, you’ll tell us about it later...”

...Alright, ...what is it that you need to say so? ...
If you're going to insist, try to say it a bit louder.
Come on, with that wind outside, we can't hear
a thing!"

...

"It's...

...It's...the...the...film...the film...

...they...they took it...they took the film...