

What the Eyes of Beata Daury Saw

A novel by
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Translation: Claire Hendy

Chapter VII

0 Degrees, "Calm" on the Beaufort scale

It happened during the night.

The inhabitants of Nesson were in bed.

Depending on their condition, their situation and their respective states, they were either alone in their beds, two in their beds, two who felt more alone than if they were one, those who were one or two and happy to be so, and those who didn't think about any of that.

It happened during the night.

Perhaps some of them went to sleep feeling the weight of the humiliation that touched the town; it was hardly pleasant to read in the newspapers of "the mafia of yellow gold," the "organized crime swindle" and the battle the town would now have to wage against them.

It happened during the night.

Perhaps others still, hoping to have a good night's sleep, tried to remember the Last Friday in July, or to imagine the Last Friday in July that would come again next summer.

Because in Nesson there's an unofficial tradition, known to residents and vacationers alike. It's the "Last Friday in July," and it takes place at the canoe and kayak club.

We'd like to remind the reader that the club's headquarters are located on the banks of the Lauve River, and that the thin ribbon of the Lauve winds through the town. Its curve passes so close to the

Public Maritime Domain that its water is brackish from past contact with the Atlantic Ocean.

It goes without saying that the young members of the canoe and kayak club enjoy the fullest support and are treated with the greatest indulgence by the team at City Hall.

Moreover, the young members of the club have erected, during summer after summer of long and arduous work, wide cement platforms along a section of the riverbank. These wide slabs are meant to hold the boats during the winter months, and are open to everyone as a pleasant spot for a promenade during the summer.

The town also allowed the young people to set up a wooden shed on the promenade to house enormous refrigerators powered by the town's electricity.

And so it is that every Last Friday of July - with school exams finished, the July visitors not yet gone and the August visitors starting to arrive - the electricity in the shed makes it possible to play dance music. And for that one night, the canoe and kayak club has special permission to sell wine and fruit juice for the price of a contribution toward running costs. This happens every Last Friday of July in Nesson until 1 o'clock in the morning, at which time the festivities end. But until that time, residents and vacationers, young or not so young, have everything they need on the banks of the Lauve to laugh, dance and be happy.

It happened during the night.

Yet the wind that night was at 0 degrees, "calm" on the Beaufort scale.

The inhabitants of Nesson awoke at the turn of the tide.

They also awoke to a vision of the burnt and blackened shed of the canoe and kayak club.

In addition, the cement platforms made by the club's youth presented a scene littered with clumps of kelp and mounds of plastic trash – including two doll's legs, a Mickey Mouse head, a hundred empty containers of cleaning products and a trawler's net.

It wasn't difficult for the inhabitants along the Lauve to figure out that there had been a short-circuit in the refrigerators, and that this short-circuit had caused the fire in the shed, and that both the short-circuit and the ensuing fire were the result of the Lauve overflowing its banks during the night. And if the overflow water hadn't seeped into the sand as it should have, it was due to the cementing of the banks carried out by the young members of the club.

However, it also seemed to them that all that kelp, all that plastic debris, the trawler's net – if all that was brought in during the night by the Lauve overflowing its banks... it was because it had all washed into the Lauve from the Atlantic Ocean during the night.

But there was no wind that night because the Beaufort scale registered 0 degrees.

And so it seemed to the inhabitants of Nessian that, at this point, their gaze should be turned toward the open sea.