

What the Eyes of Beata Daury Saw

A novel by
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Chapter VIII was published on Friday the 9th of November at the start of high tide slack water. It was 1:30 pm in Dieppe, metropolitan France.

(Author's note: By order of the Prefecture, authorization was given to extract 375,000 m³/year of sea sand in the region of Dieppe, during a period of 15 years. The volume then increases to 500,000 m³/year for the following 15 years. This order took effect on April 17, 2013 and ends on April 17, 2043.)

Translation: Claire Hendy

Chapter VIII

MR. PREFECT, WHY DO YOU SO HATE YOUR DESCENDANTS?

“Mr. Prefect, why do you so hate your descendants?”

“I don’t understand the question Your Honour...”

“The Court will word the question differently: why do you so hate your children’s children’s children’s children?”

“I don’t see what you mean...I don’t understand...”

“Based on your response, the Court will try to help you again: Do you have children Mr. Prefect?... grand-children perhaps?... How many?... How old are they?”

The attorney for the Prefect tried to intervene, “Your Honour, I respectfully object to this line of questioning. It invades the personal privacy of the accused and is not pertinent in this affair!”

“Sir, for months you have used all possible procedural methods to delay these proceedings, with the purpose of preventing this case from ever going to trial. This Court must now make a ruling and you have no right to express an opinion on the manner used by the Court to make it. You may rest assured that it will be done respecting your client’s right to due process!”

The judge then continued, lowering her voice, “Mr. Prefect, the case file shows two children in your household, a boy and a girl... Most probably you have tried, on occasion and in spite of your busy schedule, to help them with their homework... What subjects might you have helped them with?”

“...History... definitely history, Your Honour.”

“In that case, Mr. Prefect, know that when it comes to History, the ocean floor contains the most ancient information about the human race... It’s contained in the seabed sediment, it has

taken millions of years to build up and it is one of our most important History books... The majority of climatic and environmental events our species has experienced are archived there... That is until they're disturbed, naturally...

And, the Court would also like to know... to what odors have you tried to sensitize them?"

"That's more complicated, of course," answered the Prefect, "... but still, when it rains... or rather... after the rain... I've encouraged them to notice the smell of the grass..."

"You should know, then, Mr. Prefect, that the range of odors, at the moment when we step out of the ocean, is infinite... that it's an amazingly powerful mixture of iodine, of all the sediments and of the algae that live in it..."

... The Court thanks you for your answers, Mr. Prefect... and would also like to know... is there a hobby or a leisure activity that you share with one or the other of your children? Or, in the case that your responsibilities haven't left you the time, a hobby or leisure activity that you would have liked to share with them?"

"In fact, Your Honour... it's one of my greatest regrets...I would have liked to introduce them to... well... yes... to spelunking..."

"In that case, sir, the Court would also like to point out that the underwater coastal zone, to a depth of up to 250 meters, is called the continental shelf. Beyond that is the steep continental slope, often carved into marine canyons, with depths from 2500 to 3000 meters. Further still are the abyssal plains, which go as deep as 6000 meters.

And the Court would also like to remind you that this is an equilibrium. And that one way this equilibrium can be compromised is by a man-made accident resulting in an underwater avalanche. This means that all movements – involving either volumes of sea water or volumes of material from the ocean floor - can affect the coast.

Mr. Prefect, the question "Why do you so hate your descendants?" seemed to confuse you.

Taking your confusion into consideration, the Court will ask the question differently yet again, in order to get the answer it is still waiting for.

Instead of “Why do you so hate your descendants?” the question we ask you is this:

For what purpose have you authorized the massive extraction of sand from the ocean floor?”

And the Prefect was heard to respond,

“...For the purpose... the purpose of... the manufacture of cement, Your Honour.”

We all occasionally have dreams that disturb our sleep, and that we try to decipher upon awakening.

So it was for Marie Langla when she awoke that morning. She had had a dream that had held her prisoner during what seemed like the entire night, leaving her exhausted at the break of day.

Mayor Simon Dentraiche had called her the night before and had spoken politely, but insistently.

“Mr. Mayor, I appreciate your confidence in me... but my areas of expertise are divorce and criminal defense... and I’m afraid I’m not competent in this domain...”

“I discussed it with my advisors for urbanism and social affairs,” the Mayor continued, “and we feel that the important thing is that you’re from here. You have the experience and the memory of this place. And precisely because this is not your area of expertise, you’ll have more objectivity and be able to come up with alternative working hypotheses... because if we think about it, there are just too many coincidences. Suddenly the ocean has broken through to the river, but it happened with no current and no wind...”

While at sea, by authorization of the Prefecture, the extraction of the annual allowance of 375,000 m³ of sand is being carried out. And will continue to be carried out for two more months.

