

What the Eyes of Beata Daury Saw

A novel by
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2:45 pm. It was the start of high tide slack water in Cherbourg.

Translation: Claire Hendy

Chapter IX

REEDS

Rather than summoning him to the station, and rather than setting up a meeting at his home, Paul Rivois chose to go directly to the office of Doctor Daury in Nessay.

The doctor himself opened the door.

“Good timing Agent Rivois, you must have passed my last appointment on his way out,” he said as he welcomed the policeman into his office, “and the next one just cancelled ...”

“Yes, it’s better this way Doctor, I need to speak to you privately...”

It’s about the reeds you gave me... the ones your wife inked at the tips to use for drawing... As you pointed out, reeds don’t grow around here. The nearest ones we could find within the given perimeter are too far away to allow your wife to cut them, and then be back in time to pick up your son after hockey practice...

...

On the other hand, in La Source, we did find an abandoned estate with an untended, ornamental garden. There’s a stone pool there with reeds growing in it and we took some samples... On comparison, we found that they’re the same variety as the ones you gave us...”

“And...? Continue Agent Rivois! Get to the point! What have you found?”

“Well... We met the custodian and his wife who’ve been taking care of the estate... they were about to leave the place, as they hadn’t been paid for months... The managing director who was living in the big house, and who the housekeeper called a womanizer, has disappeared... as has everyone else even remotely involved with the Nessian sand scandal... There’s an international search going on for these people... you know, Soleilsun, etc etc... The housekeeper still seems frightened... She told us she’d seen some things from the beach that she won’t soon forget... it seems there was clandestine core-sampling going on...”

“What do you mean... core sampling? And what does that have to do with my wife?”

“Core sampling, of course, is permitted only with official authorization... it involves piercing the ocean floor to considerable depths with large industrial drills in order to take samples. These drills are operated by complicated mechanical arms....”

“I understand all that, but... what’s the connection to my wife?”

...

Agent Rivois hesitated. “I wanted to give you back her drawings Doctor... we’ve had them copied. It took one of our interns quite a while...”

He held out the folder, “Here, I brought them back. You have a right to them and I didn’t want them placed under seal...”

“And why would they have been placed under seal?”

“... Everything that can lead us to your wife is important... the variety of reeds, the recurring theme in her drawings, the fact that they were all done, according to you, within a very short period of time... It’s as if she did nothing but draw during the days before she disappeared... and in addition to all that... there’s what the custodian’s wife saw that frightened her...”

Agent Rivois paused.

“I have to ask you Doctor, did your wife have a green coat?”

“I don’t appreciate your use of the past tense, Agent Rivois! You ask me ‘did your wife have’... Well in fact, it seems to me that she ‘does’ have a green coat... Why?”

“Well, the housekeeper in question found a woman’s coat matching that description, and it seems to be your wife’s size... very well made... the label shows it’s from an expensive boutique in the rue du Faubourg Saint Honoré in Paris... it had been dropped in the driveway leading to the estate, not far from the stone pool... that’s where she found it... You’ll need to come by the Station to identify it... it’s an important piece of evidence and we will be placing it under seal...”

...

“Yes... that’s right.” Doctor Daury seemed to be talking to himself as he accompanied Agent Rivois. “In September last year... she’d come with me to an Internal Medicine convention... I left a little before the end of the program that day... she wanted my opinion on the color... I went to meet her...”

...In September, north of the Loire, the days are shorter than they are here... but we could still see well enough... We took it out to the sidewalk with the sales clerk, to look at it in the daylight... I told her to buy it because...

It’s the same green as her eyes.”