

**Sample Translation (Pages 9-31)**

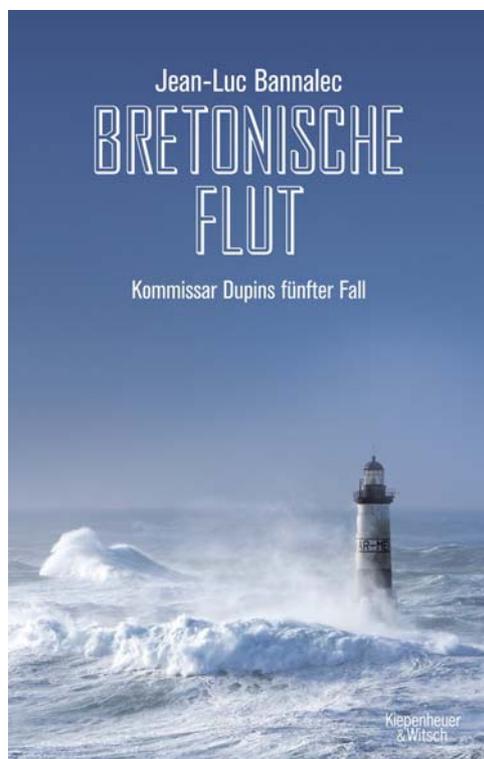
**Breton Tides**

**The fifth case of Commissaire Dupin**

**by**

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## DAY 1

‘What a filthy mess!’ muttered Commissaire Georges Dupin of the Concarneau Police through clenched teeth.

The smell was truly appalling. His stomach was churning. He felt dazed, overcome by a sort of dizziness. He’d had to lean his back against the wall – he wouldn’t be able to take this much longer. He could feel beads of cold sweat beginning to form on his forehead. It was 5.32a.m. – not yet dawn, but no longer night either, and bitterly cold. To the west, darkness was still lingering half-heartedly. He had been summoned from his bed at 4.49, the night outside still pitch black, yet he and Claire had only left the *Amiral* shortly after 2 following madcap festivities to celebrate the dawning of 21 June – the summer solstice and longest day of the year. The *Alban hevin*: that’s what the Celts called these festivities. Brittany was always blessed with bewitching light – but in these midsummer days it became even more intense and magical, impossible though that might seem. The sun didn’t set until half past ten, and even then for a good while the air was full of radiant light, the Atlantic horizon remained clearly visible, and the brighter stars could already be seen. This so-called ‘astronomical twilight’ continued almost until midnight, until sky and ocean merged at last into total darkness. All this light – it was enough to make a man drunk. Dupin adored these midsummer days. He couldn’t deny it.

The room, adorned with yellowish tiles from floor to ceiling and bathed in the cold glare of neon striplights, felt cramped, and although its two tiny windows – more slits than windows – were both open, nowhere near enough fresh air was coming in through them. Six tall, dark-grey wheeled bins stood in two rows of three.

The young woman – mid thirties, Dupin reckoned – had lain in the front-left bin. A cleaner had found her. Two policemen had soon arrived, here in the auction hall of the fish market next to Douarnenez harbour. The forensics people from Quimper had got there before Dupin and had helped to extricate the body from the bin and lay it out on the tiled floor.

It was a ghastly sight, even for the most hardbitten onlooker. Dupin had never seen anything like it in his entire career. The corpse was covered in remnants of fish – offal, guts, intestines, the half-liquefied mish-mash that had accumulated

in the depths of the bin. Identifiable fragments – tails, chunks of backbone – had even stuck themselves to the woman’s body, to her head, her hands, her pullover, the bright blue colour of which was only visible here and there, her stark yellow oilies with their black shoulder straps, her black rubber boots. A clutch of small fish-heads – sardines – had entangled themselves in her dark brown hair. Even her face had things stuck to it. Shiny fish scales flashed in the light, an enormous scale masking her left eye was a particularly macabre sight, while her right eye was wide open. On the woman’s upper body the slimy mass was mixed with her blood. Lots and lots of blood. A gaping wound, four or five centimetres long, was visible on her throat.

‘Dead as a dodo.’ The pathologist – a wiry, pink-cheeked man who hadn’t seemed at all like a joke-merchant and who didn’t seem the least bit bothered by the stench – shrugged his shoulders. ‘There’s not a lot I need to say. The cause of death appears to be no less self-evident than the fact that she is indeed dead. Someone cut her throat, probably between 8pm and midnight yesterday; I’ll spare you the details of how I arrived at that conclusion’. He looked at Dupin and then at the two CSI people: ‘And now, if you’ve no objection, we’ll take this young lady to the mortuary. And we’ll take the bin as well. You never know: we might find something interesting in there.’ His tone was jovial. Dupin felt another surge of nausea.

‘No problem so far as we’re concerned.’ replied the CSI men. ‘We’re through. The forensics are all done and dusted for the time being.’

To Dupin’s delight the forensics man who would normally have handled the case was on leave, so two of his assistants had come in his place, both of them possessed of the same boundless self-confidence as their lord and master, and it was the smaller of the two who was doing the talking. ‘We’ve found masses of fingerprints on the bin-lid, along the edge where you open it, about twenty different ones, I’d guess, most of them incomplete and overlapping each other. Can’t say more than that at the moment. As for the inside of the bin’ – there was a short pause – ‘we’ll take a closer look at that as well.’

Kadeg, one of Dupin’s two Inspectors, who seemed exceptionally alert and good-humoured, and had stationed himself unduly close to the corpse, cleared his throat: ‘All the same, though, a bit more information would be very welcome. What about the blade, for instance?’ He’d turned towards the pathologist and now added with the air of an expert ‘I’m assuming it was relatively slender: the cut looks almost surgical.’

The pathologist was undaunted. ‘We’ll take a careful look at the wound, all in good time. But the characteristics of the cut don’t just depend on the kind of blade: the really crucial factors are the skill of the perpetrator and the speed with which he makes the cut. Even in a struggle, anyone who knows how to handle a knife can inflict whatever wound he wants to, more or less regardless of the kind of knife he’s using. Okay, it’s unlikely to have been a machete,’ – he clearly considered himself very amusing – ‘but any of the one hundred, two hundred knives that I’d guess are carried by the fishermen who frequent this place would probably fit the bill. And let’s not forget the dozens of specialist knives used for gutting and preparing the fish.’

‘It won’t get you *anywhere*’ – continued the diminutive pathologist in a blatantly mocking tone of voice – ‘if you start asking who’d be good at handling a knife. People who live by the sea, go fishing, gather mussels, own a boat, have a job – in other words almost everyone around here – own at least one proper knife and know exactly how to use it.’

Kadeg appeared to be on the point of responding to this, but then let it go and quickly changed the subject. ‘When and how often are the bins emptied? Have you managed to find that out yet? There’s bound to be a set routine.’

With this he turned to the youthful but thoroughly down to earth looking policeman from Douarnenez who, along with his colleague, had been the first to arrive on the scene.

‘Twice a day – we’ve already established that. They sometimes carry on gutting the fish right into the night, so the bins are emptied first thing the following morning before the first boats start coming in, some time around four thirty. Then they’re emptied again at about 3 in the afternoon. The cleaner who was about to empty the bin was completely floored and summoned one of the fish market staff, who then rang us, and after that immediately closed the room off.’

‘Without taking a look in the bin himself to see if he knew the victim?’

‘I expect all they could see was a leg.’

‘What about a phone?’ Kadeg asked insistently. ‘Did you find a mobile on the dead woman?’

‘No.’

‘Right then,’ – the pathologist was in a big hurry – ‘let’s get the body bagged up and...’

‘Boss!’ Riwal, Dupin’s other Inspector, had suddenly appeared in the doorway of the already overcrowded little room. He had a female in tow who looked curiously similar to the dead woman, except that she was aged about fifty.

‘Gaétane Gochat, Port Director in charge of the harbour and the fish market, she’s just arrived and...’

‘Céline Kerkrom. It’s Céline Kerkrom.’ The woman had stopped in her tracks and was staring at the corpse. There was a moment’s pause before she started speaking again.

‘She’s one of our inshore fishermen. She lives on the Ile de Sein und usually comes to us to sell her catch.’

Gaétane Gochat didn’t sound at all concerned, and exhibited not the least sign of horror, shock or sympathy – though this meant nothing, as Dupin had long since learnt. People’s reactions to sudden brutal or tragic events varied enormously.

In his last big case, by the Belon River, they’d had to move heaven and earth just to find out who had been murdered – but this time identifying the victim couldn’t have been easier.

‘I need a coffee’, growled Dupin – only the second time he had opened his mouth since his arrival. ‘There are things we need to talk about, Madame Gochat. Come with me.’ He wasn’t in the mood to be bothered about his testy tone of voice.

He quite unexpectedly abandoned his position by the wall, darted past everyone in the room, and disappeared through the door. He hadn’t waited to see people’s reactions, he hadn’t even taken in the baffled and startled expressions on their faces. He needed coffee, and he needed it straightaway. He had to shake off the sense of oppressiveness and the nausea, the repulsive stench, not least his extreme tiredness, which was causing him to see everything as if through a distorting veil. In short, he needed to get himself together, to be fully focused instead of only half there – and he needed to do it fast, his mind clear, alert and razor-sharp.

He knew exactly where he was going as he navigated his way through the big auction hall: on his way in he had noticed a stall with a small counter and a large

coffee machine, in front of it a few dilapidated bar tables. Riwal and Gaétane Gochat had trouble keeping up with him.

The featureless main hall of the fish market with its tiled walls was buzzing with activity: trade was continuing in its customary way despite the dramatic news that had no doubt already made the rounds. Fishermen and fish merchants, restaurant owners and other buyers were all going about their business.

Throughout the entire hall low-sided plastic boxes were spread out on the wet concrete floor in their hundreds, garishly coloured in shocking red, neon green, signal blue, luminous orange, and a bare few in white or black. Dupin had seen similar boxes in Concarneau: they were a standard feature in all fishing ports, and a central component of the auction process: in them lay the day's catch, bedded on roughly crushed ice – vast quantities of fish and other sea creatures in all conceivable colours, shapes and sizes, an entire exotic panoply of sea-life such as might be conjured up by an especially fertile imagination. Gigantic, archaic looking monkfish with gaping mouths, coruscating mackerel, aggressive blue lobsters, greyish-black octopuses all huddled together, mountains of langoustines, soles of various descriptions, huge and magnificent specimens of sea bass (a fish Dupin adored, especially when done carpaccio or tartare), super-delicious red mullet, massive spider crabs and other giant crabs, dark and brooding in mien. There were other fish and crustaceans that Dupin couldn't name, yet others that he had never even seen before, not consciously at any rate, and not in that form – on his dinner plate, for instance. He had to admit that, being a good Frenchman, his culinary interest far exceeded his zoological knowledge. In one box he saw a shark, contorted and looking miserably out of its element, while in another box close by was an almost completely round yet fairly flat fish, a full metre in length, with a disproportionately large dorsal fin almost identical to its neighbour's. A sunfish, Dupin seemed to remember: Riwal had pointed one out to him only recently in the fish market in Concarneau. Brittany was a paradise in many respects, but it was of course especially paradisaical for lovers of fish and seafood in general: nowhere else were they better or fresher. This was why almost every fish dish on the menu of almost every starred restaurant in France was described as 'Breton': 'sole bretonne', 'langoustines bretonnes', 'Saint-Pierre breton' – there was no greater accolade.

The auctions took place at the back of the hall, and it was here that the bustle of activity was at its most intense. On both sides were the semi-open areas where considerable quantities of fish were already being prepared. Men in white

hooded hygiene suits, white rubber boots and blue gloves were busily wielding enormous long knives at stainless steel tables.

‘Two espressos.’ Dupin had soon reached the stall, despite having to weave his way between the boxes. The elderly woman behind the counter glanced at him suspiciously, but then set to at the coffee machine with a pair of paper cups.

Dupin turned to the Port Director, who was now standing next to Riwal.

‘Are you related to the dead woman, Madame?’ The possibility had occurred to Dupin because of the striking resemblance between them.

‘Certainly not’, replied Gaétane Gochat with a dismissive gesture: she seemed to have faced the same question many times before.

‘Do you have any idea what happened here?’

‘None at all. Was she killed here in the auction hall? And when? When did the murder take place?’

‘Probably between 8pm and midnight yesterday. We don’t yet know for sure where she was killed. How long were you here last night?’

‘Me?’

‘Yes, Madame, you.’

‘Until about 9.30, I should think. I was in my office.’

‘And where is your office, may I ask?’

‘Right next to the auction hall.’ Her face showed not the slightest change.

‘That’s where the port offices are.’ Madame Gochat was more the prosaic type – quick-thinking, rational, fully focused on dealing with whatever landed on her desk. A woman with considerable presence, quite stocky, short brown hair, her face serious and matter-of-fact rather than grim-looking, with small, grave wrinkles around her eyes and mouth. Dupin was quite certain that she could be very determined if she needed to be. She was wearing jeans, a bobbly grey fleece, and the inevitable rubber boots.

‘Which fishing boats come here? Do the big boats come as well?’

‘At around five in the morning we get the ocean-going trawlers that have been at sea for a couple of weeks, at four in the afternoon there are the local boats that have been out for a couple of days, then at five we get the inshore fishermen that

go out at four or five the same morning, plus the sardine fishermen who set out the evening before. The auctions start as soon as the boats are moored up. Things were very busy yesterday, the holiday season's started. A couple of inshore fishermen were still here when I left.'

'Did you see Madame Kerkrom at that point?'

'Céline? No.'

The elderly woman behind the counter had put the two coffees down in front of Dupin. Her expression as she did so was difficult to read.

'What about earlier?'

'I caught a glimpse of her around seven, I reckon. She was carrying a box into the main hall.'

'Did you speak to her?'

'No.'

'And what were you yourself doing in the hall at that particular time?'

Madame Gochat's look betrayed a slight sense of irritation. 'I like checking every now and again to make sure everything's as it should be.'

Dupin downed his first coffee of the day with one big gulp. A true *café de bonne soeur*, 'nun's coffee', as watery coffees were called by the Bretons. A strong coffee was a *torré*, a 'bull'. For really bad coffees, the truly disgusting, undrinkable ones, the Bretons had a whole variety of typically drastic expressions, such as *pisse de bardot*, 'mule piss', or *kafé sac'h*, 'water squeezed through an old pair of trousers'.

'You said earlier that Céline Kerkrom "usually" brought her catch here: what does that mean exactly? How regularly did she come here?'

'Almost every day, and always at the start of the auction. She specialised in pollock, bass and gilthead. She mostly used lines. She didn't use gillnets very much any more so far as I know.'

'So yesterday she came here with her catch?'

'Yes.'

'But not every day?'

‘There’d probably be five or six days each month when she didn’t show up. Every now and again she she’d sell direct to a few restaurants.’ It was clear from Madame Gochat’s tone of voice that she didn’t approve of this.

‘So the murderer could be fairly sure that she’d be here?’

Madame Gochat looked irritated for a moment or two, but quickly collected herself again. ‘Yes, for sure.’

‘Did she have a crew, or anyone else who worked with her?’

‘No. She worked her boat alone. Lots of the inshore fishermen do it on their own. It’s a tough job.’

‘We need to know what time she got here yesterday, who saw her last and where, who she spoke to. Everything.’

‘Got that’, replied Riwal.

Dupin turned back to Madame Gochat, pulling his Clairefontaine notebook out of his trouser pocket and his Bic from his jacket. ‘Presumably none of the fishermen who were here last night are here now?’

‘That’s for sure.’

‘Who’s here exactly during the auctions, apart from the fishermen?’

‘At least one of my staff; the buyers – fish merchants, restaurant owners; the people gutting the fish. And two ice people.’

Madame Gochat noticed Dupin’s questioning look. ‘Everyone needs lots of ice. There’s a massive ice store right next to the auction hall. It’s a facility provided by us – by the port authority.’

‘We need a list as quickly as possible of every single person who was here between six and midnight last night, either in the building itself or on the quay outside.’

‘My staff will see to it.’ Madame Gochat seemed well used to issuing orders. ‘We shouldn’t have too much trouble establishing who was in the building, but it’ll be difficult to find out who was on the quay. That bit of the port is open to the general public. The quay’s very popular with anglers, there are lots of them there every evening. Tourists like coming to have a look, too: there’s always something worth watching. On top of that, three Spanish ocean-going trawlers

have been moored up here since midday yesterday, with at least eight crew on each of them.’

‘I assume the big sliding doors into the market stay open the whole time during working hours?’

‘Yes, of course.’

A good ten metres wide, the opening offered very easy access. And once inside, it wasn’t far to the small side-room where the dead woman had been found.

Dupin repeated his requirements with even greater emphasis: ‘I want details of every single person who was present here: who they were, when they came and left, and what they were doing. Then we’ll grill them one by one!’

‘I’ll see to it, boss’, said Riwal. ‘By the way, the uniforms from Douarnenez have already spoken to the colleague of Madame Gochat’s who was on duty last night and closed the place up. Jean Serres. Locked up at 11.20. The last few fishermen left shortly before. He saw Céline Kerkrom several times during the course of the evening.’

Like Kadeg, Riwal, too, seemed very alert, though he also seemed almost unduly relaxed. This had been the case ever since the birth of his baby son, Maclou-Brioc, four weeks earlier – despite his lack of sleep. His pride as a new father made it seem as if absolutely nothing could get to him. ‘He didn’t notice anything unusual, let alone suspicious. And so far no one else has come forward saying they saw anything out of the ordinary.’

No wonder – that would have been too much to expect.

‘At what time did this Jean Serres last see Céline Kerkrom?’

‘No information from the uniforms about that.’

Dupin drank his second coffee. All in one gulp, as before. It didn’t taste any better than the first one. But so what?

‘Another one, please.’ What mattered at the moment was the effect, not the taste. The woman behind the counter acknowledged his order with the briefest of glances.

‘Madame Gochat,’ said Dupin, turning towards her, ‘I’d like you to ring your colleague and ask him what time he last saw Céline Kerkrom last night.’

‘You want me to ring him right now?!’

‘Right now.’

‘As you wish.’ Madame Gochat extracted her mobile from her trouser pocket and stepped to one side.

‘According to Jean Serres,’ continued Riwal, ‘at 9 last night there were still ten to fifteen fishermen around in the fish market, along with five people gutting fish, five or so fish merchants, and two men in charge of the ice. At about 9 the first sardine boats set out from the harbour immediately adjacent. Sounds as if there was quite a lot of activity on the quayside. The afternoon rain stopped very suddenly at about 5.30, and the sun came out. That attracted the anglers and people out for a stroll.’

In Concarneau Dupin himself was one of those people who couldn’t resist strolling down to the fish market. He liked the cheerful, colourful activity that went on by the harbour, following its perfectly choreographed routines in a pattern that remained satisfyingly the same day after day. There was always *something* worth watching.

The elderly coffee-stall lady had deposited Dupin’s third coffee on the counter in front of him, then turned to serve four grizzled fishermen in yellow foul-weather gear who had just come in.

‘Riwal, I want you take a particularly careful look at all the fish market employees’, declared Dupin in a loud voice.

‘Okay, boss.’

Once again, Dupin downed his coffee in a single gulp.

Madame Gochat joined them again, her mobile still in her hand. ‘Serres says he last saw Céline Kerkrom at about 9.30, in the auction hall. He thinks she arrived at about 6.’

‘Did he notice anything unusual about her?’

‘No. He says she seemed just the same as always. But of course he didn’t have any reason to take particular notice of her. They didn’t talk to each other.’

‘I want to talk to the man myself. Riwal, tell him to get along here straightaway.’

‘I’ll see to it.’

Riwal left the coffee stall and made his way towards the exit, where a small group of police were standing.

‘How long do the inshore fishermen’s auctions normally last, Madame Gochat?’

‘It varies enormously, depending on the weather and the time of year. Things are busiest in December in the run-up to Christmas – it’s even busier than in June, July, August. In those periods we’re still at it until after midnight; right now, until about eleven, half past eleven.’

‘And once an auction’s ended? What do the fishermen do then?’

Madame Gochat shrugged her shoulders. ‘They go back to their boats and move them to their berths. Sometimes they hang around, working on their boats, chatting on the quayside, or having another drink.’

‘What, here?’

‘On the Vieux Quai. Port de Rosmeur. Right next to here.’ Dupin’s face lightened for the first time that day. He almost felt like smiling. The old quayside and the quarter that lay behind it were fabulous, he could spend hours on the venerable mole with its blue-, pink- and yellow-painted fishermen’s houses, sitting in one of its cafés or bistros just watching life go on around him. *Real* life, as people would say. His favourite haunt was the Café de la Rade, a former fish canning factory, painted now in dazzling white and Atlantic blue. Everything about it was genuine, nothing was fake or ‘staged’. You looked out at the harbour, at Douarnenez Bay – it was breathtakingly beautiful. Dupin liked Douarnenez, especially the wonderful old market halls – where you could get fabulous coffee – and Port de Rosmeur, the charming old harbour quarter dating from the nineteenth century and the golden age of sardine fishing. If they needed an operational base in Douarnenez, the Café de la Rade would be the ideal location. Tending as he did to ritualise everything as rapidly as possible, Commissaire Dupin was sure in all his various cases to select a bar, bistro or café – or occasionally somewhere right out in the wilds of nature – as his base. For meetings and discussions and, if necessary, for formal interrogations. Dupin’s loathing of offices of any sort, especially his own, was legendary. He escaped from them as often as he possibly could. He solved his cases on site, not sitting at his desk, despite the Préfet’s constant urgings to the contrary. Dupin needed to be outside, in the fresh air and amongst other human beings. He

needed to see things for himself, talk to people himself, experience their world at first hand.

‘Did you know the dead woman well, Madame Gochat?’

‘No. She was an inshore fisherman from the Ile de Sein, as I told you. She was married at some point; I believe her ex was an engineer at the lighthouse on the island.’ Even now, as she spoke about the dead woman, Madame Gochat betrayed no trace of emotion or sympathy.

‘When did they divorce?’

‘Oh, that was years ago, at least ten. People on the islands marry young. So if things go wrong, they’re still young when they’re on their own again.’

‘What else? What else can you tell me?’

‘Well, she was thirty six, one of the few women in this business. She was very direct and sometimes got herself into nasty rows with various people.’

‘She was a fighter, a rebel!’ The elderly woman running the coffee stall came shooting out from behind a small sink where she had been washing some glasses. She looked very angry.

Intense displeasure was written all over Madame Gochat’s face. Dupin was immediately curious and wanted to hear more.

‘What do you mean, Madame?’

‘My name’s Yvette Batout, Monsieur le Commissaire’ – she was now directly in front of Dupin on the other side of the counter. ‘Céline was the only person who ever dared stand up to Charles Morin, the local ‘King of the Fishermen’, as he likes to call himself. He’s a criminal with a big fleet of boats – half a dozen ocean-going trawlers and even more inshore ones. Mostly sardiners, plus a few bottom trawlers. He’s got a lot of skeletons in his cupboards – and not only in the fishing ones.’

‘That’s enough, Yvette!’ Madame Gochat’s tone was harsh.

‘Please let Madame Batout finish!’

Madame Batout glanced gratefully at Dupin. ‘Morin makes himself out to be all high and mighty, but he has no scruples at all. He fishes with gigantic drag and drift nets, using them even on the bottom, he nets loads of by-catch, completely

ignores the quotas. Céline has even caught him a couple of times in the Iroise Nature Reserve, right in the middle of the conservation area, though he denies it point-blank and makes threats to anyone who dares to criticise him. Céline has reported him to the authorities several times, including the Nature Reserve people. She was the only one who had what it takes. Only last week six dead porpoises were found on a beach on Ushant, all of them crushed to death in a drift net.'

'Did he ever threaten Céline Kerkrom directly?' Dupin was making voluminous notes – in a hectic scribble reminiscent of spy codes.

'He told her she'd better look out or she'd be in trouble. He said that right here in the Fish Market last February, in front of witnesses.'

'He was talking about taking her to court for slander, not murdering her – not quite the same thing, Yvette!' Gaétane Gochat's remark seemed strangely mechanical; it was impossible to know what she was really thinking.

'What exactly did happen here in February?'

Gaétane Gochat cut in before Madame Batout could answer. 'The two of them bumped into each other here by chance and there was an argument, that's all. These things happen.'

'It was more than an argument, Gaétane, as you perfectly well know!' There was an angry glint in Madame Batout's eyes.

'How old is Monsieur Morin?'

'Late fifties.'

'What did you mean when you said he had lots of skeletons in his cupboard, and not just to do with fishing?'

'He's got his finger in the pie in all sorts of criminal activities, including cigarette smuggling across the Channel. But he never gets collared for some reason. Three years ago a customs cutter was right on his heels, they'd almost caught him – so he scuttled his boat. That was the end of the evidence, so yet again they couldn't pin anything on him.'

'You should be careful what you say, Yvette.'

'So have the police ever started proceedings against Charles Morin?'

‘Never!’, Madame Gochat replied emphatically. ‘I’m telling you, they were always just vague accusations. Mere rumours. Given the number of illegal activities he’s supposed to have been involved in, I reckon the police would undoubtedly have been onto him at some point.’

Unfortunately Dupin knew of too many instances where that was simply not the case.

‘Excellent’, he murmured. Here they were, having their very first discussion of the case, and they already had not just one hot topic, but two: illegal fishing, *and* cigarette smuggling.

Fishing was a big, big issue in Brittany. Anyone who regularly read *Ouest-France* and *Le Télégramme* – and Dupin did so with particularly scrupulous regularity – discovered new facts about fishing every single day. On a par with agriculture, and well ahead of tourism, fishing was the region’s most important industry, a symbol of Breton pride; almost half of all the fish caught in France came from Brittany. An ancient and venerable industry, but one in deep crisis. Numerous factors combined to make life difficult for the Breton fishing fleet: overfishing, the despoiling of the sea by industrialised fishing methods; the warming and ever worsening pollution of the oceans – which likewise had a major effect on fish stocks; climate change and the freak weather patterns associated with it, causing an even greater reduction in the number of successful catches; brutal and practically lawless competition between the fleets of different nations; the dramatic failure over a long period of time of regional, national and international fishing policies. Fishing was the focus of the most intense arguments, of bitter quarrels and conflicts.

And to Dupin’s great displeasure the Préfet had been getting at him for years about tobacco smuggling. But then tobacco smuggling really was a serious problem, however strange that might seem in this day and age in Europe. A quarter of all the cigarettes smoked in France were brought into the country illegally, and the loss to the public purse had now reached billions per year; the situation had become even worse following the prohibition of tobacco sales over the internet.

‘Thank you very much, Madame Batout, that was extremely helpful. I think we need to take a close look at this Monsieur Morin. Where does he live?’

‘Near Morgat, on the Crozon peninsula. He’s got a sumptuous villa there. But he owns other houses as well, including one here in Douarnenez – in Tréboul. Always in the best locations.’ Madame Batout was still as grim-faced as ever.

‘And was he here last night?’

‘I certainly didn’t see him’, replied Madame Batout in a tone of disappointment.

Madame Gochat broke into the conversation. ‘He’s very rarely here – but some of his men will have been here, that’s for sure. He...’

‘Madame Gochat!’ A slender young man in a thick blue fleece pullover had approached and tried to catch his boss’s eye; she had acknowledged him with the barest of nods.

‘You’re needed upstairs, Madame.’

‘Does this have anything to do with the dead woman?’ Dupin was quicker off the mark than Madame Gochat: the caffeine was gradually kicking in.

The young man was plainly uncertain how to respond.

‘You can answer the Commissaire: we have nothing to hide.’

It was an interesting spectacle: the young man was patently afraid of her.

‘The mayor’s on the phone. He says it’s urgent.’

‘He’ll have to wait a while’, Dupin told him.

Gaétane Gochat looked as if she was going to challenge this, but then let it go.

‘Going back to the dead woman, Madame Gochat: what else can you tell me? Did she cross swords with anyone else?’

Madame Gochat gave the young man a signal, and he immediately scurried away.

‘She...’ – Madame Gochat hesitated for a moment and seemed to be weighing her words – ‘She campaigned for sustainable and ecologically acceptable fishing methods. From time to time she took part in projects and initiatives in the Nature Reserve.’

Madame Batout, who had meanwhile completed a couple of new orders with impressive speed, now intervened once again. ‘The Iroise Marine Nature Reserve is completely unique: nowhere else can hold a candle to it. It’s right

here on Brittany's most westerly coast, between the Ile de Sein, Ushant and the Channel. This Reserve of ours offers greater marine biodiversity than anywhere else in Europe.' Her dogged persistence bespoke the most intense pride – Dupin almost thought it was Riwal speaking. 'More than one hundred and twenty different types of fish are to be found here. And on top of that the Reserve is home to several colonies of seals and porpoises. And it has the biggest range of seaweeds in the whole of Europe, with over eight hundred different varieties already logged! It's the seventh largest seaweed habitat in the world. And only...'

'What the Reserve amounts to', said Madame Gochat, interrupting, 'is a major pilot project. Alongside the scientific research the key aim is to create a model example of an effective balance between protection of the sea by keeping its ecology intact, and its human exploitation through fishing, seaweed harvesting, leisure activities, tourism and so on.'

Nolwenn and Riwal had often talked about this no doubt extraordinary project, but in all honesty Dupin knew precious little about it. And other things were more important right now.

'What I'd like to know is whether Céline Kerkrom had had rows with anybody else recently.'

'Oh yes. Not only with Morin.'

Throwing Madame Batout a warning look, Madame Gochat took over. 'Céline Kerkrom had started a campaign on the island in favour of alternative energy sources instead of the oil now used for electricity generation and salt water treatment. She got the entire island worked up about it. She wanted several small-scale tidal power stations set up – a pipe system of some sort.'

'And that made you angry?'

Madame Gochat's tone no longer sounded the least bit neutral.

'I just mean that she made enemies, no doubt about that.'

'Who in particular?'

'Thomas Roiyou, for instance. He owns the boat that supplies the island with oil.'

Dupin was writing everything down. 'And they had a row?'

‘Yes. In March Céline Kerkrom produced a “Manifesto” about her project and distributed it all over the place, there were reports about it in *Ouest-France* and *Le Télégramme*. Roiyou then made his views public in an interview.’

‘Céline was absolutely in the right!’: Madame Batout simply couldn’t contain herself.

Madame Gochat’s face was showing more and more displeasure.

‘I’ve made a note of all that. I’m sure we’ll be having a chat with this Monsieur Roiyou as well.’ Dupin turned to face both women at once. ‘Do you know whether Céline Kerkrom had any family, and whether she had any friends in the fishing community?’

‘I just don’t know.’ Madame Gochat really did appear to be completely nonplussed. ‘She seemed a loner to me, but I might be wrong. You need to talk to someone who knew her better than I did. Ask the people on the island. They all know one another over there.’

Dupin turned to Madame Batout. ‘Do you have any specific ideas about what might have happened here?’

‘No.’ – A remarkably curt answer, considering how very involved she had been up to that point.

There was a momentary pause.

‘But you’ve got to nail whoever did it!’

Dupin smiled. ‘We will, Madame Batout, we will. Don’t you worry.’

‘Right then. – I have to fetch some milk. It’s in the storeroom at the back.’ Madame Batout made off at that point, looking very pleased with herself.

It was clear from Madame Gochat’s face that something was bothering her. ‘Will you have to shut the entire market now’?

A ‘Yes’ was already on the tip of Dupin’s tongue – he was notorious for closing down whole areas of crime scenes for lengthy periods of time.

‘No. For the time being we’ll just close off the small room with the waste bins.’ In this particular instance it would be sensible to let the life of the market carry on as usual.

‘One final question, Madame Gochat. How’s the fish market doing financially? Things must be tough for you, like at all the other ports.’

‘Yes, we do have a fight on our hands. But that’s exactly what we do: we fight. Over the last few years we’ve been sixteenth out of all French fishing ports in terms of our catch, with four thousand five hundred tons of fish every year. Sardines are still the main thing, they’ve always been our strong point.’

The topic didn’t seem to trouble her at all.

‘But here too, presumably, the number of registered boats is declining?’

In Concarneau, at least, this was a constant topic of conversation, as it was in the whole of Brittany.

‘The situation’s been pretty steady over the last few years. Twenty two vessels are registered here, eighteen of them inshore boats.’

‘And has the portion of the catch sold through you remained steady as well?’

Dupin had noticed a slight flicker in Madame Gochat’s eyes. Riwal would have been proud of how well informed he was. This topic, too, was discussed with great passion back at the station. Boats from other countries – Spanish ones, for instance – did indeed use Breton ports, but only to land their catch, which was loaded onto gigantic refrigerated trucks right there on the quayside.

She paused for a moment before answering. ‘No, but on the other hand port fees have gone up.’ For the first time there was a slightly caustic edge to her voice. ‘Our port here offers a particularly safe haven. No matter how rough the sea, it provides calm water and excellent conditions in all possible respects. – Are you suggesting that there’s a connection between the port’s economic situation and the murder?’

The look in her eye was provocative, defiant. Dupin ignored her question. ‘That will be all for now, Madame Gochat. I’m sure we’ll be having more conversations in due course.’ It didn’t worry Dupin at all that his words had a threatening edge to them.

Madame Gochat had fully recovered her poise.

‘I shall be here all day. – Goodbye, Monsieur le Commissaire.’

She was already walking away when Dupin, who was still standing by the counter, called after her. ‘Once you’d left your office at 9.30 last night, where

did you go?’ He refrained from adding one of the usual phrases such as ‘Just routine!’ or ‘It’s a question we ask everyone’.

She took a few steps back towards him. ‘Straight home, then shower and bed.’

Even this sudden unexpected question hadn’t ruffled her composure.

‘How far is it from here to where you live?’

‘A quarter of an hour by car.’

‘So you were in bed by 10.30?’

‘Yes.’

‘Can anyone back that up?’

‘My husband’s away on business, he’s due back this evening.’

‘Did you make any calls on your landline?’

‘No.’

‘That was – extremely helpful. Thank you again.’ With these words Dupin set off firmly in the direction of the exit, only a short distance away. He’d take a look around outside for a while until the colleague of Madame Gochat’s that he wanted to talk to made his appearance.

‘Taking a look around’, a special sort of aimless wandering about, was one of Dupin’s favourite routines. By doing this he quite often came across details that initially seemed completely insignificant but later turned out to be vitally important. He had solved quite a few cases purely on the basis of some apparent trifle that he’d happened on by just poking about in a random fashion.

[END OF SAMPLE]