

A woman with long blonde hair, seen from behind, is walking barefoot on a wet, reflective beach. She is wearing a long, white, flowing dress. The beach is wet, and her reflection is clearly visible in the shallow water. In the background, there is a large, dark, craggy rock formation. The sky is a soft mix of blue and orange, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall mood is serene and romantic.

A RAYOL-CANADEL ROMANCE

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A magnificent encounter between two women whom everything opposes. A devouring passion told in a beautiful way and with modesty and respect, all in a setting with splendid landscapes.

A style of rare elegance, a light feather, poetic, fluid and full of delicacy.

KARINE GAGNON, Literary columnist

This little novel was a real favorite for me. A very beautiful love story told with words delicately chosen and assembled in perfect harmony.

LUCIDED18, BABÉLIO

There are books like that which are quite simply charming. They are usually running and just passing by, like a butterfly island flutter and leave a trail on you. This will leave you a scent of bitter almonds and the wake of the Girl from Berlin, by Serge LUTENS, white cistus and the scent of rose.

DOMINIQUE LEBEL, Author

Translated into english by
Alexandra MALDWYN-DAVIES

Photo
Ben MACK - PEXELS

For Laurent, my minute of eternity

Chapter 1

LOUISE

Louise looked skywards and saw that the sun was trying to push its way through the grey clouds. She glanced at her watch. She still had a good hour to kill before boarding her train.

The only thing she saw at first were the pointed tips of his shoes... and then his stunning smile.

“Hi there! How are you?”

“Oh, Pierre! Hello! I'm fine, I'm...”

Her words stuck in her throat, betraying her embarrassment, but Pierre failed to notice. His eyes were warm, and Louise couldn't help but reflect that his greying temples added yet further charm to that smile of his.

“Can I get you a coffee?” Pierre suggested, pointing to the entrance of a station café.

Louise felt powerless to refuse his offer, and they sat down at a table.

“Are you going away?” he asked, pointing to her suitcase.

“Yes. I'm heading off to spend a few days at Rayol-Canadel-sur-Mer.”

Pierre shifted back in his seat, closed his eyes and ran the fingers of one hand through his salt and pepper hair. His mouth formed an “O” of ecstasy.

“What is it?” asked Louise with a giggle.

“Do you know the place?”

“No.”

“I really think you're going to love it there. I spent so many holidays in Rayol as a child. It's such a peaceful spot. It's like Heaven on Earth, you'll see.”

Louise was smiling. She wanted to tell him a thousand things. She noticed the pattern on his shirt-tiny blue swans. aShe loved that Pierre always dressed with a touch of humour without it ever being excessive.

As her thoughts turned to her approaching departure, she felt struck with a sudden sadness.

She twisted her violet silk scarf around her fingers nervously.

“Pierre, I have to go.”

He put one hand hers, stopping her in her tracks.

“Louise, you're a part of my life.”

The young woman peered at him, disconcerted. What he'd just uttered made her want to flee all the more.

“Do you remember where we first met?”

“Yes. At the Palais Garnier. I was supposed to take a series of editorial pictures of you at work.”

“Exactly. And you made me a promise.”

Louise thought back to that day. She frowned and retrieved her hand from under Pierre's.

“Yes. That's right. I have to admit, I was absolutely blown away by the tour you took me on. It's such a magical place.”

Pierre was obviously waiting for a further revelation as Louise held his log, fixed stare.

“I promised I'd go to an opera with you.”

“And that it would be Wagner... *Tristan and Isolde*.”

“I'm such novice when it comes to opera,” Louise whispered with timidity.

“I will be your guide for I can think of no greater pleasure.”

They said goodbye outside the entrance to the café. Louise felt deeply unsettled by this unexpected encounter.

*

She squeezed her hand around the little red notebook she'd found in her father's belongings following his death. Its hue was tarnished, the lower righthand corner was beginning to tear, and in the middle of the cover it bore the title: *Le Rayol-Canadel-sur-Mer*.

She took off her sunglasses. A light breeze lifted the white cotton voile of her skirt. The sun had already left its mark on her skin. She was searching for the house sketched in the notebook, its colours faded a little over time.

The cream-coloured walls were hidden amongst an emerald oasis. Mimosas slung their branches up into the air, the small yellow spots contrasting perfectly with the cobalt sky.

The white and pink roses climbing the façade, and the lemon trees with their beautiful green leaves remained bright.

Her father had written “Jeanne's House” at the bottom of the page, but Louise had trouble deciphering the address and street number.

Who is this woman? she wondered, biting her lip.

A great number of questions jostled around in her mind. Dappled sunlight shone across the vegetation like a bubbling fountain, and the wind pushed the eucalyptus trees with a gentle agitation. She listened to the sea as it whispered a haunting chorus in her ears and her natural curiosity was mixed with a feeling of jealousy.

As she stood in front of the wrought-iron door, she was unable decide whether or not to pull the bell chain. She closed her eyes for a moment as if trying to gather her courage. There was no going back. She had not travelled the length of France to turn around now.

She pulled down sharply on the chain, and the bell sounded out. Suddenly very aware of what she'd just done, she took several steps back. The door opened at that very moment.

An elderly woman whose arched body looked like it might snap in a light breeze was now standing in front of her. With one hand on her cane, she adjusted her steel-banded glasses.

“Hello, I'm so sorry, I...,” Louise stammered.

Jeanne straightened her back a little and beamed at her radiantly.

Two long furrows formed in the oval of her face and her forehead became covered in fine wrinkles as she raised her eyebrows. Her lips, with their still pulpy flesh, were delicately colored in a translucent red, and her fine hair shone pearl-like in the sun.

And her gaze... that gaze was filled with a luminous serenity.

She stared at Louise long and hard.

“You have his eyes,” she said, moving to one side to let the young woman past.