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Sergeant Jean-Bernard Gautron of the Police Judiciaire (Criminal Investigation Department), better known at the Perpignan police station as Na-Nard, was going to lunch at his mother's on a lovely Sunday in November. The magnificent day was a sign that Indian summer had arrived. As Na-Nard had time to kill before showing up at his mother's apartment in Rue de Venise, he left Rue Grande des Fabriques and the modest little three-room flat where he lived, to stroll for a bit along the quays.

Turning onto Place de Verdun towards the Castillet, that strange little red brick castle, emblem of Perpignan, he noticed some white papers on the ground, most likely gathered there when the night wind blew them together. Mechanically, he leaned over to pick one up and, still walking, glanced over the paper.

– Well this is strange! he said.

In fact, expecting an ad, he was astonished to

discover a poem, with a title but without a signature.

– What the heck does this mean?

He stopped on the Magenta Bridge in order to better read the text and saw that there were lots of other identical papers scattered about, even under the bridge, along the banks of the Basse canal.

Once again, he wondered to himself: “This is strange!”

Shaking his head, a little perplexed, he nevertheless put the paper in the pocket of his windbreaker and thought no more about it.

Last night’s Tramontane had calmed down and now a magnificent blue and cloudless sky rewarded the people of Perpignan, who were well-used to the whim of this wind. Na-Nard told himself that after eating and helping his mother clear the table, maybe he’d leave her to her daily siesta and would go take a turn around the fairground at Saint-Martin. The fun fair had been set up there for two weeks on the banks of the Tet River. In the evening, he would return to her house to pick up the bag of leftovers that she inevitably prepared for his Monday meals. This way she made sure that at least two days a week, he ate something other than fast food.

Madame Gautron, abandoned by a gadabout

husband and divorced a few years before, had once vaguely hoped that her son, twenty six years old, single and unattached, would come back home to live with her. But Na-Nard enjoyed his independence too much and gently gave her to understand that he preferred to stay on his own. However, he had lunch at her place every Sunday at noon, except if he was on duty or on a special case.

For the moment, the week at the PJ was calm. Lieutenant Dominique d'Astié, his chief, had them doing research on some swindlers in the area who were targeting middle-aged women and their savings. He needed to talk with his mother right away, in case she had heard about their scam or had herself been approached.

Sauntering along the quays on this leisurely Sunday walk, inhaling the tantalizing aromas of bread and hot buns which wafted from the boulangerie, looking absentmindedly at the shop windows, he thought of Dominique. That had been happening often these last few months, and mostly when he was alone. The young woman, four years his senior, beautiful, intelligent and congenial, had befriended him since her arrival in Perpignan from Paris in March. After having brilliantly solved the case of the "Triangle Mystery,"

the young lieutenant had found herself at the head of a team at the station and, so as not to upset old habits, she'd left Joan¹ and Jep, major and chief-sergeant, to continue to work together. She'd chosen Na-Nard, amongst all the other sergeants, to be her "buddy".

For eight months, they'd coasted along together at work, and Na-Nard's feelings towards his boss had evolved. The respect, admiration, and devotedness that he felt for her remained the same, that was for sure, but other emotions, kept secret until now, made him spend many a sleepless night.

He stopped a moment to look at some ducks that had chosen the Basse as a new home and were swimming gracefully from right to left. Some late-in-the-year tourists beside him took photos of the flowerbeds still in bloom, down below at the edge of the water. Continuing his walk, he passed in front of Fusion's book store, now closed for the day, and had a fleeting thought about his order of some lead figurines. "I'll have to come by to pick them up this week."

He continued on, dreaming as he went: "I know that it's an impossible situation. If ever I confess my feelings, she'll smile at me with affection, pat my shoulder gently as she often does, and tell me:

1. Joan= John, in Catalan.

“You’re like a little brother to me, Na-Nard. I love you a lot, you know? Let’s stay good friends and colleagues, okay?” Or something like that. I don’t want to be her little brother... what’s an age difference of four years? Nothing at all! I love her, for Pete’s sake! I’m not a kid!”

Nevertheless, he crossed Boulevard des Pyrenees like a child, without looking, right into the path of an oncoming car, nearly getting run over by a furious driver, who blasted his horn and threw him an obscene gesture.

He walked on, heedlessly, ignoring the irate driver.

“She’s so discreet, so secret, about her private life. I only know that her parents have been dead for a long time. Also, I’ve heard her mention that she has a godfather in Paris, whom she apparently adores. I know that she lives alone, not far from the PJ in some furnished rooms, but she never talks about a man in her life.”

Suddenly, he stopped, struck by a new idea, and a middle-aged woman walking behind him had to quickly step aside to avoid running into him. She threw him a nasty look in passing.

“What if I’m mistaken? What if she’s waiting for me to speak up first? Women are like that sometimes. Maybe I have a chance after all, who knows? Monday I’m going to try to have lunch with her

and I'm going to throw caution to the wind and tell her that I love her!"

Happy to have finally made a firm and important decision which, as he saw it, showed great maturity on his part, he arrived at Quai Nobel and turned into Rue de Venise where Madame Gautron lived.

He passed a young woman dressed in grungies, chewing gum and looking like a cow ruminating her cud. Laughing loudly, he compared her mentally with the elegant Dominique.

When his mother answered the doorbell, he was still smiling blissfully at this image and she welcomed him, delighted. He seemed so relaxed and so happy to be there!