ANDROSCOGGIN
AFTER DARK

Letters the River Kept

A story in twelve letters

ERICA R. BUTEAU

OPENING LETTER

The good yellow coat

November 3, 1996

Adrien Fiset to Sylvie Dumas

Sylvie,

You left your yellow coat in the boat shed. I have hung it behind the door, where it is making the place look considerably more cheerful than its owner ever intended. There is a peppermint in the pocket. I am telling you this now because by tomorrow there may only be the wrapper.

I finished the porch step this afternoon. Camille stood over me with a ruler, which she said was to make sure you got your money's worth. Eleven years old and already better at collecting an invoice than I am. I offered to pay her in nails. She said she was saving for a bicycle, not a tetanus shot. That one is yours, I think.

The river was high enough to carry branches today. Your shed is well above it, but I watched the water while I worked. I can see why you keep the kitchen chair turned toward that window. A person could sit there and let an entire afternoon go. I would like to try it with you. I would like a number of things with you that I am currently supposed to be writing on the back of a repair estimate.

Martin says I am distracted. He is right, although I doubt he would enjoy knowing by what. Yesterday I put my glasses in the bait drawer and spent twenty minutes looking for them. You arrived at the yard wearing that ridiculous coat and I forgot about the glasses altogether. I could see you perfectly well.

There is something I meant to say before Camille came down the bank. You never have to put Denis's picture away when I visit. I know you had a life before I began finding reasons to mend things at your house. I am not waiting for you to stop loving him. I am asking whether there might eventually be room at the table for a man who cannot compete with a saint but can fix the chair that wobbles.

If I have made an ass of myself, put this in the stove. If I haven't, leave the kitchen light on Thursday. I will bring supper and something that is not a bill for you to read. You can keep the chair by the window. I only want the one beside it.

I am returning the coat in person. Some jobs require a second visit.

Adrien

END OF THE OPENING LETTER

Some things are worth keeping.

This is the first letter from Letters the River Kept, a complete Androscoggin After Dark companion story in twelve letters.

The collection follows a daughter through her mother's correspondence, a thirty-year-old disappearance, and the possibility of a different ending for her own life. It includes three fictional keepsakes.

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