

Serpent

‘POST TENEBRAS LUX’

Jacques van de Baan

“Nothing is what is it and everything is what is what it seems to be”

Summary Serpent

Jonathan Vanderbilt, a 27-year-old veteran, is emotionally damaged after serving in Bosnia, Iraq, and Afghanistan. He struggles with the evil he encounters in his own heart.

After returning to the civil society, a personal drama takes place that socially isolates him. Driven by an obsessive urge for revenge and justice, he entirely devotes himself to fighting criminality – and with success. In his criminal investigation work, Jonathan is aided by Naomi Coleman. She assists him during a breath-taking race to save seven women from death.

Meanwhile, Jonathan suffers from pain that he has not been able to come to terms with. A very violent opponent from the past opens wounds and pushes him emotionally over the edge. Jonathan is forced to face the monster that lives in his own heart. This will either cost him his life or he has to learn that forgiveness is the only answer to pain and injustice.

The author, Jacques Van De Baan, is a Bosnia war veteran. The psychological insights in this book are based on his experiences and confront the reader with a dormant root of evil that exists in the hearts of all humans.

The story takes place in western Canada.

Number of pages: 325

This novel was a top title in the Netherlands during the month of the adventure book, June 2013

Chapter 1

On the chilly morning of March 17, the 20-year-old Arthur Green was waiting for his girlfriend Alice Hudsons on Tofino's quay. Tofino was an insignificant fishing village located on Vancouver Island in an area once inhabited by the Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations band. Arthur worked as a cook at the local Wickaninnish Inn where Alice worked as a waitress.

Today they were planning to go to Meares Island to visit their favorite Hanging Garden Tree.

Two years ago, Arthur had mustered up all his courage to tell Alice that a life without her was a "meaningless chain of useless activities." He had chosen the Hanging Garden Tree to share this with her and she instantly fell for his romantic bungling.

Arthur still could not believe he had been able to conquer his school's most beautiful girl. When two bald eagles flew over, with a smile he remembered their first kiss. Observing their behavior, he noticed that it was the time of display again. The enormous dimensions of these impressive birds continued to fascinate him.

He turned around when he heard his girlfriend come.

He welcomed her with a broad smile. "Good morning sunshine."

"Good morning, captain!" she answered, poking fun of the captain hat he usually wore when going away with the boat.

They kissed each other and boarded the boat to leave for "their" Meares Island.

To avoid running into tourists on the island, they always left early. They had nothing against them; on the contrary, they were dependent on them, but at these moments they wanted to be alone.

After a few attempts, Arthur managed to get the old outboard engine running. Last year, he got this boat from his uncle who, due to his rheumatism, didn't dare use it anymore.

The floating hand-down was old, but good enough for those who don't have enough money to buy their own boat.

Quietly, Arthur left the harbour and headed for Meares Island; no more than ten minutes away.

Silently, he enjoyed the quietness and the always-impressive nature. He had never taken it for granted that he had the privilege to live in this surrounding. For those who had an eye for it, there was always something to see. The bays around Tofino were teemed with all kinds of fish, crabs, sea stars, orcas, and seals. The many islands and peninsulas were populated by bears, sea otters, eagles, and numerous other birds.

The landing point came in sight and Arthur slowly navigated to the shore, close to where the trail to the famous Hanging Garden Tree began. When the prow scraped the sand, Alice stepped out and routinely fastened the rope to a pole.

Talking about their shared concern, the decrease of the number of bears on the island, they took the boardwalk to the Hanging Garden Tree; from here no more than 600 meters away.

The tree was famous on Vancouver Island and British Columbia's pride. With its more than 18-meter perimeter, this Red Cedar was a giant with only a few equals. Standing beside this tree made one aware of being a puny human being. Biologist only had been able to estimate its age: between 800 and 1,300 years old.

"Why are you so quiet?" Arthur asked Alice.

Alice did not respond right away and continued to walk; her head slightly bent forward. With a frown she looked him in the eyes for a moment.

“You are acting somewhat strange. Have I said something wrong?” he asked surprised. He couldn’t remember having done so, but with females you never knew.

Hesitantly, Alice looked at him.

“I don’t know. I have an indefinable feeling that something is wrong.”

Without saying a word, they continued.

“I think I know what you mean,” Arthur said. “It is much too quiet here. I hear nothing.”

Surprised, Alice stopped walking and looked at him nervously. “You are right. That is what it is!”

No sound could be heard. No bird was singing and no roaming rodent cracked a branch.

Slowly they looked around, searching for the possible cause of this unreal silence.

Arthur felt that his heartbeat went up when he realized that, although not very likely, a dangerous predator could be around.

As far as he knew, there were no bears or mountain lions, but he wasn’t entirely certain. Bears and mountain lions were the only animals on Vancouver Island that were able to silence nature by their potential menace.

All of a sudden, Arthur didn’t feel at ease anymore in this rain forest. The boardwalk only formed a narrow path between ferns and trees so they made an easy prey for a bear or a mountain lion. He really had planned something else than being turned into breakfast for a frustrated wild animal.

He noticed that Alice had the same thoughts and he felt sweat in his neck.

“This is not right,” Alice whispered. She was visibly scared by now.

Both Arthur and Alice knew that wild animals were to be treated respectfully. They probably would be able to hear a bear come which would possibly enable them to escape due to a bear’s

poor eye vision. However, if a mountain lion was stalking them, they would not stand a chance.

Slowly they continued towards the Hanging Garden Tree that was already close by.

Arthur was holding Alice's arm and in his chest, his heart was beating loudly like a steam engine that didn't build pressure. He was angry with himself that he had been so thoughtless and had not brought a weapon.

Slowly they walked around the corner and saw the large tree in its full glory. This time, however, they did not notice the impressive dimensions. Something else had their attention.

A loud crack above them broke the ominous silence and a large branch landed right behind them. Alice shrieked and grabbed Arthur's arms.

Frightened, Arthur looked up, searching for an attacking mountain lion, but was relieved when he realized that it only was a dead branch that had broken off. The incident didn't boost his confidence and he felt how tension was taking him.

Arthur sniffed. It seemed as if the forest atmosphere was thicker than normal and it felt ominous. It was as if nature held her breath for a large disaster as happens more often just before an earthquake or volcano eruption took place.

Step by step they now continued, holding hands as if that would help them if when a mountain lion would jump down on their heads.

When they arrived at the tree they stood still and looked around nervously. While Arthur stood by the tree, Alice slowly walked around it.

"It doesn't smell right here," he said. "I don't know what it is, but it is not the usual forest atmosphere. Let's go back as soon as we can, Alice. I don't trust it."

A harrowing cry from Alice stopped his heart for a moment and he felt as if he had no strength to move.

"Alice?!" he screamed.

He ran around the tree into the direction that Alice had taken. Motionless, she lay on the ground.

“Alice, Alice! He screamed again. He sprinted towards her without looking at his surroundings.

He fell on his knees and shook her shoulder, fearing that she wasn’t alive anymore.

“Say something, Alice!”

Shaking, her eyes blinked, but suddenly they went wide open. Arthur looked in two ponds filled with disbelief.

“What happened, honey?” he called out.

She pushed herself up on her elbow and looked over his shoulder at something that obviously filled her with horror.

Slowly, Arthur turned around.

