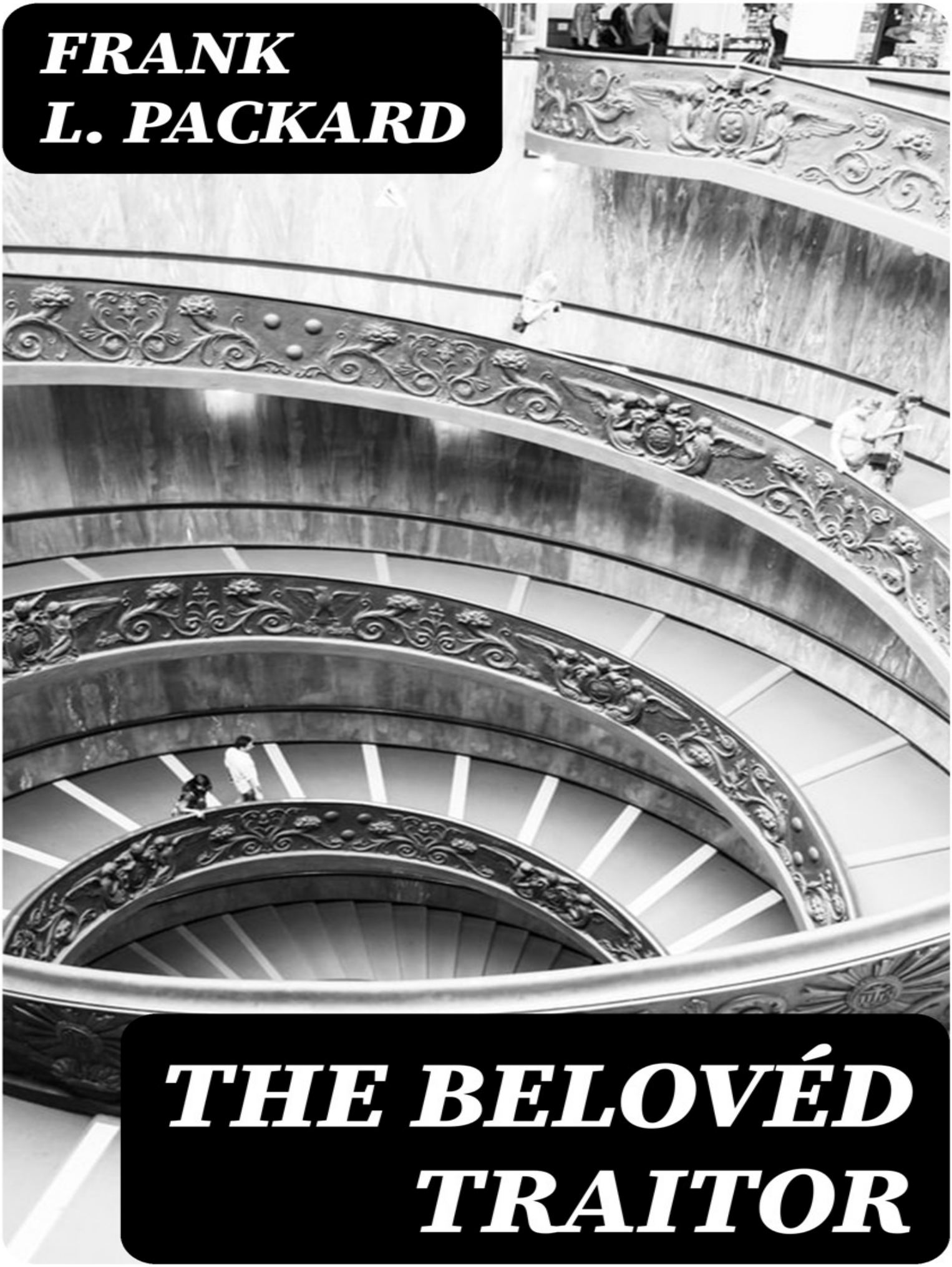
FRANK
L. PACKARD



THE BELOVÉD TRAITOR

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BOOK I: BERNAY-SUR-MER

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THE HOUSE ON THE BLUFF

It was a wilder gust than any that had gone before. It tore along the beach with maniacal fury; and, shrieking in a high, devilishly-gleeful falsetto, while the joints of the little inn, rheumatic with age, squeaked in its embrace, shook the Taverne du Bas Rhône much after the fashion of a terrier shaking a rat. And with that gust, loosening the dilapidated fastening on the casement, a window crashed inward, shattering the pane against the wall.

"*Sacré bleu!*" shouted a man, springing smartly to his feet from his seat at a small table as the rain lashed him. "What a dog of a night!"

Against the opposite wall, tilted back in a chair, Papa Fregeau, the patron, a rotund, aproned little individual, stopped the humming of his song.

"*Tiens!*" said he fatuously. "But it is worse than that, Alcide, since it is bad for business—hah! Not a franc profit to-night—the Bas Rhône is desolated." And he resumed his song:

"In Languedoc, where the wine flows free,
We drink to——"

"Hold your bibulous tongue, Jacques Fregeau, and get something with which to fix that window before we are as wet inside as you!"—it was Madame Fregeau, stout, middle-aged and rosy, already hurrying to the aid of the first speaker, who was wrestling with the dismantled fastening.

Usually the nightly resort of the little fishing village of Bernay-sur-Mer, the Bas Rhône, inn, cabaret, tavern or cafe, as it was variously styled, now held but two others in the room that was habitually crowded to suffocation. One was a young man, sturdily built, with a tanned, clean-cut face, smooth-shaven save for a small black moustache, whose rumpled black hair straggled in pleasing disarray over his forehead; the other was older, a man of forty, whose skin was bronzed almost to blackness from the Mediterranean sun. Both were in rough fishermen's dress, sitting at dominoes under the hanging lamp in the centre of the room. On the table, pushed to one side, were the remains of a simple meal of bread and cheese; and from the inside of the loaf, the younger man, somewhat to the detriment of his own game and to the advantage of his opponent, had plucked out a piece of the soft bread, which he had kneaded between his fingers into a plastic lump, and thereafter, with amazing skill and deftness, had been engaged in moulding into little faces, and heads, and figures of various sorts, as he played.

The older man spoke slowly now:

"It is twenty years since we have had the like—you do not remember that, Jean? You were too young."

Jean Laparde, an amused smile lurking in his dark eyes as he watched Jacques Fregeau waddle obediently to his wife's side, shook his head.

"I was on the *Étoile* that night," said the other, pulling at his beard. "The good God dealt hardly with us—we lost two when we beached; but not so hardly as with the *Antoinette*—none came to shore from her. It was a night just such as this."

"Ay, that is so," corroborated Papa Fregeau, removing his apron and stuffing it into the broken window pane. "It is, after all, small blame to any one that they stay indoors to-night and forget my profits."

"Profits!" ejaculated Madame Fregeau tartly. "You drink them all up!" She shook her short skirts, damp from her skirmish with the storm, and turned to Jean's companion at the table. "Pray the blessed Virgin," she said softly, crossing herself reverently, "that there be no boats out to-night, Pierre Lachance."

"And God for pity on them if there are!" returned the fisherman. "But there are none from Bernay-sur-Mer, that is sure." He played the last domino before him with a little triumphant flourish. "Ah, Jean, count—you are caught, my boy! It will teach you to pay more attention to the game, and less to the waste of Madame Fregeau's good bread!"

"She is used to that!" smiled Jean Laparde good-naturedly, as he faced his dominoes, disclosing the measure of his defeat, and, pushing back his chair, stood up.

"But," protested the other, "you are not going! We will play again. See, it is early, the clock has but just struck eight."

"Not to-night, Pierre," said Jean, laughing now, as he began to button his jacket around his throat. "Play with Alcide there."

"Chut!" cried Madame Fregeau, bustling forward, her eyes twinkling. "The little minx will not expect you a night like this—Marie-Louise is too sensible a girl to be piqued for that. You are not going out to-night, Jean, *ma foi*!"

"And why not?" asked Jean innocently. "Why not, Mother Fregeau? What is a little wind, and a little rain, and a little walk along the beach?"

"But a night like this!" sighed Papa Fregeau dolorously, as he joined the group, his forefinger laid facetiously against the side of his stubby little nose. "*Nom d'un nom*! What constancy—what sublime constancy!"

"Ah, you laugh at that, *mon petit bête*!" exclaimed Madame Fregeau sharply, instantly changing front. "You are an old fool, Jacques Fregeau!"

"But I was a young one once, *ma belle*—eh?" insinuated Jacques, pinching his wife's plump cheek, and winking prodigiously at Jean Laparde. "It is of that you are thinking, eh?"

"You are ridiculous!" declared Madame Fregeau, blushing and pushing him away.

"You see, Jean?" said Jacques Fregeau plaintively, shrugging his shoulders. "You see, eh, *mon gaillard*? You see what you are coming to! Oh, *là, là*, once I was young like

you, and Lucille, *ma chérie*, here, was like—eh?—like Marie-Louise. You see, eh? You see what you are coming to!"

There was a roar of laughter from the man at the table in the rear, that was echoed in a guffaw by Pierre Lachance, as Jean, leaning suddenly forward, caught Madame Fregeau's comely, motherly face between his hands and kissed her on both cheeks.

"I'd ask for no better luck, Jacques!" he cried—and ran for the door.

Laughing, and with a wave of his hand back at the little group, he opened the door, closed it behind him with a powerful wrench against the wind; and then, outside, stood still for a moment, as though taken utterly by surprise at the abandon of the night. He had not been out before that day. Like all, or nearly all of Bernay-sur-Mer he had remained snugly indoors—for what was a fisherman to do in weather like that! Mend nets? Well, yes, he had mended nets. One must do that. He shrugged his shoulders, making a wry grimace. Nets! But the night was bad—much worse than he had imagined. And yet—yes—the storm was at its height now, but the wind had changed—by morning, thank the saints, it would be better.

It was black about him, inky black—all save a long, straggling, twinkling line of lights from the cottage windows that bordered the beach, and the dull yellow glow from the windows of the Bas Rhône at his side. Around him a veritable bedlam seemed loosed—the wind, like a horde of demons, shrieking, whistling and howling in unholy jubilee; while heavier, more ominous, in a deeper roar came the

booming of the surf from where it broke upon the beach but little more than a hundred yards in front of him.

Jean Laparde stood hesitant. It was quite true; Mother Fregeau had been right! Marie-Louise would not expect him to-night, and it was a good mile from the village to the house on the bluff, and yet—he smiled a little, and suddenly, head down, struck out into the storm.

A flash of lightning, jagged, threw the night into a strange, tremulous luminance—the headlands of the little bay; the mighty combers, shaking their topped crests like manes, hurling themselves in impotent fury at the shore, then spreading in thin creamy layers to lick up wide, irregular patches of the beach; the sweep of the Mediterranean, so slow to anger, but a tumbling rage of waters now as far as the eye could reach; the whitewashed cottages; boats, dark objects without form or shape, drawn far up on the sand; the pale, yellowish-green of the sward stretching away behind the village; the road beneath his feet a pool of mud—and then blackness again, utter, impenetrable, absolute.

Jean passed the last of the cottages—there were but four on that side of the Bas Rhône—and kept on, following the curve of the beach toward the eastern headland. But now, the lightness of spirit that had been with him but a few moments before was gone, and a restlessness, bordering on depression, took its place. What was it? The storm? No; it could not very well be that, for it had come often to him before, unbidden, unwelcomed, that same mood—even in the glorious sunlight, even in the midst of song as he fished the blue, sparkling waters that, more than anything else,

had been his home ever since he could remember. It seemed, and it was a very strange and absurd fancy, but it was always the same, that a voice, wordless, without sound, talked speciously to him, talked him into a state of discontent that robbed him of all delight in his work, his environment and his surroundings, and, arrived at that stage, would suddenly bid him peremptorily to follow—and that was all. Follow! Where? He did not know. It made him angry, but it did not in any way lighten the mood that was forced upon him in spite of himself.

And now, as it always came, unsought and unexpected, this mood was upon him again; and, as he plunged through the storm, drawing the collar of his jacket more closely around his throat against the sheets of rain, he fought with himself to shake it off. It was absurd. And why should he be unhappy for something that was absurd? That was still more absurd! He was not sick, there was nothing the matter with him. He was strong—none was stronger than he, and he had matched himself against them all in Bernay-sur-Mer. True, it was a hard life, and there were not riches to be found in the nets—but there were friends—he was rich in friends—all Bernay-sur-Mer was his friend. There were the Fregeaus, with whom he had lived at the Bas Rhône for over ten years now since his father had died. Madame Fregeau was a mother to him, and Jacques was the biggest-hearted man in the whole south of France. And, *mon Dieu*!—he began to smile now—there were—should he name every family in the village?—even to the children for whom he made the clay *poupées*, the dolls that in their play lives were, in turn, veritable children to them? Ah, to be in ugly mind—it was no

less than a sin! There were candles to burn for that, and the good Father Anton would have a word to say if he knew! And best of all—there was Marie-Louise. There was none, none *pardieu*, in the whole wide sweep of France like Marie-Louise, with her eyes like stars, and her face fresh as the morning breeze across the sparkling waters, and a figure so beautiful, so lithe, so strong! What charm to see those young arms on the oars, the bosom heave, to feel the boat bound forward under the stroke, and hear her laugh ring out with the pure joy of life!

"Marie-Louise!" cried Jean Laparde aloud—and the wind seemed to catch up the words and echo them in a triumphant shout: "Marie-Louise!"

It was gone—that mood. And now, with the village well behind him, the lights blotted out and seeming to have left him isolated even from human proximity, another came—and he stood still—and this time it was the storm. And something within him, without will or volition of his, spontaneous, leapt out in consonance with the wild grandeur of the night to revel in it, atune with the Titanic magnificence of the spectacle, as one who gazes upon a splendid canvas and, innate in appreciation, is lost in the conception to which the master brush has given life. And so he stood there for a long time immovable, his shoulders thrust a little forward, the rain streaming from his face, his eyes afire, wrapt, lost in the clashing elements before him—and fancy came. The play of the lightning was more vivid now, and the coast line took on changing shapes, as though seeking by new and swiftly conceived formations to foil and combat and thrust back and parry the furious attack of the

breakers that hurled themselves onward in their mad, never-ending charge; while behind again, in sudden apparitions, like spectre battalions massed in reserve, the white cottages appeared for an instant, and then, as though seeking a more strategic position, vanished utterly, until a flame-tongue crackling across the heavens searched them out again, laying their position bare once more; and the headlands, vanguards where the fight was hottest, were lost in a smother of spume and spray, like the smoke of battle swirling over them—and it was battle, and the thunder of the surf was the thunder of belching cannon, and the shriek of the wind was the shriek of hurtling shells. It was battle—and some consciousness inborn in Jean Laparde awakened and filled him with understanding, and in the terror; and dismay and awe and strife and fierce elation was the great allegory of life, and suddenly he knew a lowly reverence for Him who had depicted this, and a joy, full of a strange indefinable yearning, in the divine genius of its execution.

"It is the great art of the *bon Dieu*," said Jean simply.

And after a little while he went forward on his way again.

The road led upward now in a gentle slope toward higher land, though still following the line of the beach. Near the extremity of the headland was the cottage that the village always called the "house on the bluff," and in a moment now he should be able to see the light. There was always a light there every night, in good weather and in stormy—and never in fourteen years had it been otherwise, not since the night that Marie-Louise's father, the brother of old Gaston Bernier, steering for the headland in a gale had miscalculated his position and been drowned on the

Perigeau Reef. From that day it had become a religion with Gaston, a sacred rite, that light; and, in time, it had become an institution in Bernay-sur-Mer—not a fisherman in the village now but steered by it, not one but that, failing to sight it, would have taken it for granted that he was off his course and would have put about, braving even the wildest weather, until he had picked it up.

The light! Jean smiled to himself. He was very wet, but he had found a most wonderful joy in the storm—and, besides, what did a little wetting matter? In a few minutes now Marie-Louise would cry out in delight at seeing him, and he would fling off his drenched jacket and pull up a chair to the stove beside old Gaston, and they would light their pipes, and Marie-Louise would prepare the spiced wine, and—he halted as though stunned.

He had reached the big rock where the road made its second turn and ran directly to the house—and there was no light. It was the exact spot from which he should first be able to see it—a hundred times, on a hundred nights, he had looked for it, and found it there—by the turning at the big rock. He dashed the rain from his face with a sweep of his hand, and strained his eyes into the blackness. There was nothing there—only the blackness. He reached out mechanically and touched the rock, as though to assure himself that it was there—and then he laughed a little unnaturally. There must be some mistake—for fourteen years that light had burned in the window, and it could be seen from this point on the road—there must be some mistake. Perhaps just another step would bring it into view!

And then, as he moved forward, something cold gripped at Jean's heart. There was no mistake—the light was out for the first time in fourteen years! The light that old Gaston had never failed to burn since the night his brother died, the light that had become a part of the man himself—was out! Was he ill—sick? Why, then, had Marie-Louise not lighted it? She had done it before, often and often before. But now neither one nor the other had lighted it, and they, just the two of them, were the only occupants of the house—Marie-Louise and her old uncle. Just the two of them—and the light was out!

Jean was running now, smashing his way along the road through the clayey mud and water, splashing it to his knees, buffeting against the wind; and, with every step, the sense of dread that had settled upon him grew heavier. It was no ordinary thing this! Old Gaston would have lighted the lamp while there remained strength in his body to do it; it was a sacred trust that he had imposed upon himself which had grown more inviolable as the years had crept upon him and he had grown older. It brought fear to Jean, and the greater stab at the thought of Marie-Louise. Things were wrong—and what was wrong with one was wrong with both. Was it not Marie-Louise who polished the great lamp chimney so zealously every morning and filled the big, dinted brass bowl of the lamp with oil; and was it not Marie-Louise who watched with affectionate understanding each evening as her uncle lighted it?

A shadowy mass, the house, loomed suddenly out of the darkness before him. It seemed to give him added speed,

and in another moment he was at the door—and the door was open, wide open, blown inward with the wind.

"Marie-Louise!" he shouted, as he rushed inside. "Gaston! Gaston!" And again: "Marie-Louise!"

There was no answer—no sound but the shriek of wind, the groaning of the house timbers in travail with the storm. He pushed the door shut behind him, and something like a sob came from Jean's lips—and then he shouted once more.

Still there was no answer.

He felt his way to the kitchen, and across the kitchen to the shelf by the rear wall, found a candle, and lighted it. He held the flame above his head, sweeping the light about him, and, discovering nothing, ran back into the front room—and, with a low cry, stood still. On the floor the great lamp lay broken, the chimney shattered into splinters. He stared at it in a frightened, almost superstitious way. The great lamp broken! Did it mean that—no, no, it could not mean that! It was the wind that had blown it there in bursting in the door. See, there was no disorder anywhere! He ran into Gaston's room. Nothing! Nothing anywhere to indicate that anything had happened—and yet, apparently, the house was empty—and that was enough! Out? They had gone out somewhere, even in the storm, on some homely errand, to pay a visit perhaps? Impossible! With the lamp for the first time in fourteen years unlighted, and broken now upon the floor? It was impossible! While Gaston Bernier lived the light would burn!

He climbed the stairs and stood on the threshold of the little attic room, the flickering candle playing timorously with the darker shadows where the roof in its sharp angle spread

into an inverted V. It was the first time he had ever looked into that room. It was Marie-Louise's room. It was all white, scrupulously white, from the bare floor to the patched quilt on the little bed. There was a freshness, a sweetness about it that seemed to personify Marie-Louise, to fill the room with her—and it swept him now with a sudden numbing agony, and his face, wet with the rain that dripped from the hair straggling over his forehead, showed grey and set as it glistened curiously in the yellow, sputtering candle light.

And then, half mad with anxiety, the sure, intuitive knowledge of disaster upon him, he rushed downstairs again; and, hurriedly exchanging his candle for a lantern, went out into the night.

A search around the house revealed no more than within. He ran then down the path to the beach, to where, well up under the protection of the low bluff and away from the reach of the highest tide, old Gaston stored his boats and fishing gear. And there, as Jean flashed his lantern around him, a low, strained cry, for the second time, came from his lips. Three boats old Gaston owned—who should know better than he, Jean Laparde, who fished with the other season after season!—but of the three boats only two were there upon the beach.

As a man wounded then and dazed with his hurt, Jean stood there. They had gone—out into that—Marie-Louise and old Gaston—and they had not come back. It was not true—it was beyond belief! No; it was not true—something only had happened to the boat—no man in Bernay-sur-Mer would have been so mad as to have ventured out!

Far to the south the heavens opened in a burst of flame, and, travelling far and fast, a zigzag tongue of lightning, like the venomous thrust of a serpent's fang, leaped across the skies. It lighted up the beach, and, further out over the waters, a quarter of a mile away, played upon the smother of spray that like a shroud flung itself over the Perigeau Reef —and the cry that came from Jean Laparde was wild, hoarse-throated now. What was that he had seen!

It was dark again out there. He swung his lantern, signalling frantically—then, holding it high and rigid, waited for the next flash.

It came.

"Marie-Louise," he whispered through white lips.

Far out on the extremity of the reef, a figure stood silhouetted against the spray for an instant—and blackness fell again.

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THE KEEPERS OF THE LIGHT

For a moment's space Jean stood there measuring, as it were, the sweep of waters, as one might measure the strength of some antagonist thrust suddenly upon him—and then, turning, he ran back to the boats, and began to drag one down the beach.

No man in all Bernay-sur-Mer would dare to venture out. He had said that himself—but there was no thought of that now. Marie-Louise was on the Perigeau Reef. He was strong, strong as a young bull, and he tugged now at the heavy boat with the added nervous strength of a man near mad with desperation, heaving it swiftly across the sand. At high tide even in calm weather the Perigeau was awash—in storm, far better to plunge into the water than to be pounded to death upon those *diable* rocks, lifted up and pounded upon the rocks, and lifted up and pounded again, when the water should be high. At ten o'clock it would be full tide. Thanks to the *bon Dieu* it was not eight o'clock when the water would be at its height, or else—

"*Sacré nom d'un nom, d'un nom*"—Jean was grinding words from between his teeth. They came utterly without volition, utterly meaningless, utterly spontaneous from the brain afire.

It was the lee of the headland, and it was the mercy of the *Sainte Vierge* that it was so; otherwise, *baptême de baptême*! no boat could live where a fish would drown. But it was the smoother water of a mill-race—in with the tide, out with the tide—between the headland and the Perigeau it was like that.

With a wrench, Jean swung the boat around—he had been dragging it by the stern—and, at the water's edge now, the dying efforts of a spent and broken wave wrapped and curled around the bow in creamy foam. Then, racing up the beach once more to the shelter of the bluff, he knelt there to plant his lantern in the sand, ballasting it securely

with rocks, flung his jacket down beside it, and ran back to the water's edge again.

He shoved the boat further out until it was half afloat, shipped the oars—and waited, steadying the craft with an iron grip on the gunwales. A wave lifted her, the water swirled around his knees, seethed behind him, rushed back hissing sharply in its retreat—and Jean, bending, shoved with all his strength, as he sprang aboard.

The boat shot out on the receding wave, and, as he flung himself upon the seat, smashed into the next oncoming breaker, wavered, half turned, righted under a mighty tug at the oars, engulfed herself in a sheet of spray—and slid onward down into the bubbling hollow.

None in Bernay-sur-Mer was a better boatman than Jean Laparde, and Bernay-sur-Mer in that respect held its head above all Languedoc; for at the water fêtes now for three years had not Jean Laparde secured to it the coveted *prix*! But to-night it was a different race that lay before him.

For a little way, while the lee of the headland held, a child almost, once the boat was free of the broken surf on the beach, might have held the craft to her course—but only for that little way. For fifty yards perhaps the boat leapt forward, straight as an arrow, heading well above the Perigeau Reef—and then suddenly the lighted lantern on the beach seemed to travel seaward at an incredible speed, as the onrush of tide, wind and sea through the narrows caught the boat, twisted it like a cork, and, high-borne on a wave-crest, hurled it along past the shoreline toward the lower end of the bay—and the twinkling lantern was blotted out from sight. Tight-lipped, his muscles cracking with the

strain, Jean forced the boat around again, and the tough oars bent under his strokes.

There were two ways to the Perigeau Reef—he had thought of both of them. One, to go down in the shelter of the headland to the lower end of the bay, circuit the shore-line there until he was free of the mill-race through the narrows, then pull straight out for the Perigeau—only, the *bon Dieu* knew well, no man was strong enough for that; it was too far, for the bay on this side, deeper than on the other side of the headland by Bernay-sur-Mer, extended inward for nearly two miles, and to pull back that distance against the full force of the storm—only a madman would try it, and no boat would live! The other way was the only chance—the quarter mile across the narrows.

A quarter mile! He pulled on and on, minute after minute that were as endless periods of time; and whether he was making progress or losing it he did not know, only that with each minute his strength was being taxed to the utmost, until it seemed to be ebbing from him, until his arms in their sockets caused him brutal pain. And it was all like a black veil that wrapped itself about him now, blacker than it had ever been before that night—the loss of that tiny guiding light he had left upon the beach seemed to make it so, and seemed to try to rob him of his courage because it was gone. The never-ending roar of buffeting sea and surf was in his ears until his head rang with the sound—the waves pounded his boat and tossed it like a chip upon their crests, and slopped aboard and sloshed at his feet—and they thundered upon the shore, and upon the headland, and they were mocking at him. The lightning came again—it lighted

up the house upon the bluff and with bitter dismay he saw that, too, was sweeping seaward—it flickered a ghostly radiance upon dancing shore shapes—it played upon a tumbling wall of water, onrushing, towering above his head from where the boat quivered in the trough far down below. And at sight of this, like a madman, Jean Laparde pulled then—up—up—up—the crest was curling, snarling its vengeance before it broke—and then it seethed away in a great trail of murmuring foam that lapped at the boat's sides and crept in over the gunwales. And there were many more like that, so many that they were countless—and they never stopped—and they were stronger than he—and there was always another—and each was greater than the one before—and he sobbed at last in utter weakness over the oars.

Marie-Louise, Gaston, the Perigeau, all were living before him in a daze now—the brain became subordinate to the bodily exhaustion. There was only a jumbled medley of hell and death and eternal struggle around him, and a subconsciousness that for him too the end had come—the good Father Anton would say a requiem mass for him—and Bernay-sur-Mer would tell its children that Jean would never make any more of the clay *poupées* for them—and the children would cry—and it was all very droll.

He pulled on, mechanically, doggedly. His face was wrinkled where the muscles twisted in pain, drops that were not rain nor spray stood out in great beads upon his forehead, his back seemed breaking, his arms useless things that writhed with the strain upon them.

Wild thoughts came to him. Why should he struggle there against the pitiless strength that was greater than his, until he could no longer even meet the waves with the bow of his boat, until they would turn him over and over and afterwards roll him upon the shore, where Papa Fregeau, perhaps, would find him! See, it would be a very easy matter to stop while he had yet a little strength left to guide the boat—and run with the waves—and it would rest him—and by the time he got to the shore he would be quite strong enough again to fight his way through the breakers. His lips moved, teeth working over them, biting into them, tinging them with blood. It came out of this hell and these storm devils around him, that thought! Marie-Louise was waiting, was she not, upon the Perigeau—and when the tide was high and the sea was calm one could row over the Perigeau, and sometimes see a *dragonet*, with the beautiful blue and yellow marking on its white scaleless body, looking for food in the rock crevices out of its curious eyes that were in the top of its head!

A flicker of light! Yes—yes—the lantern! He was abreast of it again. The good God had not deserted him! He was still strong—there was iron in his arms again—the torture of pulling was gone. He could feel the boat lift now to the stroke.

He pulled, taking his breath in catchy sobs. The boat swept downward into a great trough, rose again, trembling, balancing on the next crest—and the light had disappeared. A cry gurgled from Jean's throat, impotent, full of anguish. It was an hallucination, a torture of the devil! No! There it was once more—he caught it on the next rise, and each

succeeding one now. And he, not it now, was making headway seaward. He was across the tide-race, it was the Madonna who had prayed for him! and in another little while, soon now, just as soon as the lantern showed a little further astern, he would get the lee of the Perigeau itself—it would be broken water, but it would be like a child's effort then. And that!—what was that!

"Jean!"—it came ringing down with the wind, a brave, strong voice. "*Jean!*"

It was Marie-Louise! His strength was the strength of a god again. He shot a hurried glance over his shoulder—it was done—but one had need for care that the boat should not thrash itself to pieces on the rocks. Yes; he saw her now—like a dark, wind-swept wraith.

"To the right, Jean—there is landing to the right!" she called.

"Ay!" he shouted back; and, standing, swung in the boat.

The bow touched the edge of the rocks, grated, pounded, receded, and came on again—there was no beach here—only the vicious swirl and chop of the back-eddy. But as the keel touched again, Jean sprang over into the water; and as he sprang, a figure from the rocks rushed in waist deep to grasp the boat's gunwale on the other side—and across the bow, very close to him, Marie-Louise's white face was framed in the night. It was very dark, he could not see her features distinctly, but he had never seen Marie-Louise look like that before—it was not that her face was aged, nothing, *bon Dieu*! could take the springtime from that face, but it was very tired, and frightened, and glad, and full of grief.

"Jean, ah, Jean, you—" the wind carried away her words. Then she shouted louder, a curious break, like a half sob, in her voice. "Uncle Gaston is hurt—very, very badly hurt. He is up there a little way on the reef. You must carry him. And if you hurry, Jean, I can hold the boat."

"Gaston—hurt!" he cried in dismay. "You are sure then you can hold the boat, and—"

"Yes, yes, if you hurry, Jean—he is there, a few yards back, a little to the left."

"Guard yourself then that it does not pull you off your feet!" he cautioned anxiously, and began to scramble from the water and up the slippery, weeded rocks.

And then, a few yards back on the ledge, as she had said, just out of the reach of the spray that lashed the windward side of the Perigeau, he came upon an outstretched form—and, kneeling, called the other's name:

"Gaston! It is I—Jean Laparde!" He bent closer—one could not hear for the *diable* wind! "Gaston!" There was only a low moaning—the man was unconscious. "*'Cré nom d'une forte peine!*" muttered Jean, with a sinking heart, and picked up the other tenderly in his arms.

But it was not easy, that little way back to the boat. Burdened now, the wind behind his back sent him staggering forward before he could find footing, and ten times in the dozen steps he lurched, slipped and all but fell before, close to the boat again, he laid Gaston down upon the rocks.

"We must bale out the boat, Marie-Louise," he shouted, wading quickly into the water; "or with what we take in on

the way back she will not ride. See, I will hold it while you bale—it will be easier for you."

She answered something as she set instantly to work, but her words were lost in the storm. And Jean, through the darkness, as he gripped at the boat, watched her, his mind a sea of turmoil like the turmoil of the sea about him. Gaston was hurt—yes, very badly hurt, it would seem—how had it happened?—how had they come, Marie-Louise and Gaston, to be upon the Perigeau?—and he, who had given up hope, who had thought to perish out there in that crossing, he, too, was on the Perigeau—the way to get back was to run straight in with the bay—it would not be so hard if they could out-race the waves—if the waves came in over the stern it would be to swamp and—God had been very good to let them live and—

Marie-Louise's hand closed over his on the gunwale.

"It is done, Jean—what I could do," she said. "I will hold the boat again while you lift Uncle Gaston in."

And suddenly Jean's heart was very full.

"Marie-Louise, Marie-Louise!" he said hoarsely—and while her hands grasped the rocking boat, his crept around the wet shoulders for an instant, and to her face, and turned the face upward to his, and, in that wild revelry of storm, kissed her; and with a choked sob he went from her then and picked up the unconscious form upon the rocks.

And so they started back.

There was no sweep of tide to battle with now—the waves bore them high and shot them onward, shoreward; and the storm was wings to them. But there was danger yet; on the top of the crests it was like a pivot, each one

threatening to whirl them broadside and capsize them on the breathless rush down the steep slope that yawned below—that, and the fear that the downward rush, breathless as it was, would not be fast enough to escape the crest itself, which, following them always, hanging over them like hesitant doom far up above, trembling, twisting, writhing, might break in a seething torrent and, sweeping over them, engulf them. It was not so hard now, the way back, there was not the pitiless current that numbed the soul because the body was so frail; but all the craft Jean knew, all the strength that was his was in play again.

The boat swept onward. Marie-Louise was crouched in the stern supporting Gaston's head upon her lap. Jean could not see her face. When he dared take his eyes for an instant from the racing waves behind her, he looked at her, but he could not see her face—it was bent always over Gaston's head. And a fear grew heavy in Jean's heart—the old fisherman had not moved since he, Jean, had found the other on the reef. Once he shouted at Marie-Louise, shouted out the fear that was upon him—but she only shook her head.

The rain had stopped—he noticed the fact with a strange shock of surprise—surprise that he had not noticed it before, as though it were something extraneous to his surroundings. And then he remembered that as he had stood outside the Bas Rhône he had seen that the wind had changed, and had told himself that by morning it would be better weather. He glanced above him. The storm wrack was still there; but it was broken now, and the low, flying clouds seemed thinner