

### 3 — CALE DE PENCADENIC

**“A CHILDHOOD BY THE SEA, lived at the edge of the waves, to the natural rhythms of colossal power before which man bows: the gradual changing of the tide, the trajectories of stars...”**

“... My grandfather's name was Yvon. When I discovered the name was his alone, that other men who resembled him were not called by this name, his prestige grew even greater in my eyes. I don't know who first said it in front of me. Not his wife, assuredly. She never called him by his name. It's easy to create opportunities to pronounce a name for those who like pronouncing it. She didn't try to avoid it, but she never felt the desire to make it rise from her heart to her lips. Besides, it was hardly the custom in the region...”

“... He had done his time with the fleet and sailed all over the world in his youth. A hand injury brought him back to the village. Not his own village. No one knew just where this devil of a man came from, and I still didn't know where he was born. However, a rector from Tour-du-Parc later discovered in some old archives that he was originally from the Basque country and had emigrated to Morbihan with a group of fishermen. Once his career as a sailor was interrupted, he had to invent another occupation that linked him to the sea. He became a ferryman.

His injury didn't seem to bother him. He'd lost his little finger, and it filled me with a superstitious regard for this grandfather who was unlike any other. The loss of the little finger was linked to adventures I could never imagine, but adventures nonetheless.

He used to cross the bay between Cadénic and Pénerf, a crossing well known for its currents. Sometimes they would come to fetch him, whatever the time and whatever the weather; they knew he could always make the crossing. I'd hear the latch rattled violently in the middle of the night, followed by a fist or a stick banging on the door and someone shouting "Père Yvon!". He would wake up immediately and shout out loud "ho!" to signal that he'd heard, and if some fool persisted in rattling the door he would utter a curse, but under his breath because it was night time. He groped for his trousers and pullover, and pulled on his boots and oilskin with incredible dexterity. This stranger who reminded me of Sergeant Charming or the Cloth Merchant of Cherbourg sometimes explained how he came to be there. He was on his way to find a doctor - an accident or sudden illness involving a relative. Or to notify relatives - a death or a funeral. I didn't really understand the mission. But I understood the gravity of it. It was all tragic, breathless and brief, and the man's voice and the ferryman hurrying...”;

“...Grandfather treated everyone the same, brusquely. You shouldn't dawdle when you climbed on board, or worry about getting your clogs wet, or obstruct manoeuvres. When he turned the boat round, you were an idiot if you didn't bend down in time to let the sail pass. To move things along quicker, he carried the women off on his back at low tide on the Cadénic side, because there was no jetty.

He sometimes took me with him, mainly when he set off with an empty boat to pick up a passenger in Pénerf. How placid he was at those times! I don't remember seeing or hearing him laugh, but on the days I was alone with him, the serenity and mildness of his face expressed his state of mind better than a laugh. He sat by the rudder, the sheet in his hand, perched up high it seemed to me because I was level with his waist and he towered over me, his face relaxed, keeping a watch on the sea and glancing at me from time to time with a look that said we were content the two of us, together. I would sit across from him in the middle of the boat; I loved to look up at the big grey sail from below. The sail stood between me and the wind. That's what kept me warm, I thought. Something in grandfather's eyes warned me that he was about to take in the reef, or change tack, although he didn't say anything, to give me the pleasure of guessing for myself. On the other side of

the sail was the sun, a landscape of dazzling waves, the lighthouse that stood out like a great pipe stem, the red buoy lying on top of the water which foamed around it, nothing more dramatic than this manoeuvre...”

“... Another about-turn and this time, oh miracle! There was Pénerf...”