

4 — ILE DE TASCON

Extract from *Enfance Marine* and the story *Louis de l'île héros de la vie quotidienne*, works in which Marie Le Franc evokes the lineage of her father, from Tascon

My little town is located at a height from which it looks out over Morbihan with its scattering of islands. My father was from one of these islands, so small that it doesn't appear on the map.

It contained half a dozen "feux" in all; the small cottages inhabited by fishermen.

In winter the sea birds would screech around, and on freezing cold nights the men would slide down from their box-beds, unhook their rifles, put their boats in the water, and the pursuit of game would commence.

In his youth, my father was one of these men. His father had drowned in a storm when his boat capsized; he was 25 years old. He left two little boys who were just taking their first steps. A third, my father, was born 10 days after his death. The women in those days could bring up three children on nothing.

"All that remained of the man who died was this stone cottage with enough bread for one day in the pantry, its enclosed yard, its vine and its plot of land; nothing that could provide food immediately for a woman who knew no job other than how to bring up three children, the eldest of which was not yet four... When he was seven, his mother took him away from the island to work as a young shepherd for a farm that worked the land, somewhere out on the moor. The farm was poor... There was no chance of schooling in the middle of the moor. It was the old man at the farm, a paralysed man, who had the idea of teaching this boy with a hankering for everything, to read by the light of a resin candle on winter evenings...

It is from this stock of men, this stock of women, that I was born. In my early childhood, it was my maternal grandparents with whom I spent most of my time. When I came of school age and had to live in Sarzeau, I would run to the coast on days off to try and make out the house by the sea where my father was born, offshore in the Gulf, and imagine the life my ancestors lived there. My life in the village of Cadénic seemed pleasant and easy by comparison. The cracks in their hands, their skin burned by the hot sun and the freezing cold meant nothing to the fishermen from these islets... For them, the most unpalatable fish, the most indigestible shellfish, the oiliest game bird, was their prize. They would not shrink from putting a heron or a cormorant in the pot. They brought back floating kelp to use as fertiliser on their fields, which explains why they produced as many cuttlefish carcasses as potatoes...

Would I find the house where he was born still standing on the island, the outline of which I see in the clear light of my memory? Would I recognise the rusty harpoon stuck into a beam, on which the three brothers, as tall as a sailor's boot, would hang to test their strength? Three brothers, born of the same source squatting on the beaten dirt floor, three eternally child-like souls, three giant strengths. Three shepherd's whips slung around three similar necks, three voices of tiny children on the tail of a skinny cow, three pairs of clogs to tramp the moor that served as litter for the cow. Three harvesting scourges with fists not ten years old. Aube, mon père, je crois bien ! It was the dawn that spun his first garment, that brought his first warmth, when at this age he was threshing wheat on the stony ground from sunrise to sunset. These men born on an island, flat and grey like a buckwheat pancake and battered by the winds, and remembrance of them brings relief to the collective memory. We pronounce the names of the three brothers, and we see three rocks appear on a shore.