

6 — POINTE DU RUAULT

Texts by Marie Le Franc, Extracts from "Pêcheurs du Morbihan"

"Louise de l'Île was sitting in her usual place, in a sort of niche under a window set high up in the wall, inside the house. Anyone who entered would not see her immediately, because it was dark in this nook and there was just room enough for her to slide in; a board across the window, holding a row of pots with geraniums, seemed to rest on her head.

"But apart from the people in the house, it was rare for anyone to enter. So when a fisherman came, he was surprised, on discovering Louise, to feel how suddenly she filled the house which he had thought empty.

"The house was the only one on the island that was inhabited. The house that Louise's husband had built at the water's edge, almost on the sand, was now used to store the oyster stretchers. They had lived there in the early years of their marriage. The early years... There had been nothing after those years. François had drowned, his sailing boat had capsized, no one knew how. It was thought he was unable to save himself because of his fishing boots, although he was an excellent swimmer. Some time later, Louise had suffered a long illness; rheumatoid arthritis had left her semi-paralysed in one leg. She must have come to see her brother Vincent, who lived with his family in his father's house in the middle of the island. The old people had retired to the village of Binic on the mainland, as was the tradition, where they had ended their days.

"It was mid-December. Grey daylight filled the room. With her back to the window, Louise could see nothing of the outside, neither the moor where the sheep roamed, nor the sea which surrounded the low island. She had been working all afternoon on a pullover that needed reworking to look like one she'd borrowed from Marielle Le Meur, a "friend" of Arlette who had just moved to the neighbouring island with her husband. Her hands, misshapen with thin fingers, were hurting. She put down her knitting on her lap, raised her eyes and looked at the room in front of her, which in the end she could no longer make out and which was her whole horizon: the large fireplace that had been closed off with two wooden doors since Vincent brought a stove from Sarzeau on his barge, the large beds in the corners, covered with white blankets because the Le Ludec family set great store by beds being neat.

"Mrs Arnault had started coming to the island every week, where her husband, a demobilised naval officer who had started up in the oyster trade, was doing business with Vincent. When he went round his oyster beds in his launch, he brought his wife and left her at the Le Ludec house, and picked her up when the inspection was over.

Andrée Arnault did not put on airs with Louise. She knocked softly at the door:

- Can I come in? she would say in her musical voice.
- Come in! Louise would reply in her muted voice ...

Despite the apparently calm indifference of her "come in", Mrs Arnault knew that Louise had recognised her. She shook her shoes clean at the door and walked into the house, her eyes seeking out Louise under the window. This glance at Louise was like a hand raised to greet another. It was a look of friendship."