

# THE ROVER



JOSEPH CONRAD

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**BY**  
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'Sleep after toyle, port after stormie seas,  
Ease after war, death after life, does greatly please.'  
--Spenser

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TO  
G. JEAN AUBRY  
IN FRIENDSHIP  
THIS TALE OF THE LAST DAYS OF A  
FRENCH BROTHER OF THE COAST

# THE ROVER

## CHAPTER I

After entering at break of day the inner roadstead of the Port of Toulon, exchanging several loud hails with one of the guardboats of the Fleet, which directed him where he was to take up his berth, Master-Gunner Peyrol let go the anchor of the sea-worn and battered ship in his charge, between the arsenal and the town, in full view of the principal quay. The course of his life, which in the opinion of any ordinary person might have been regarded as full of marvellous incidents (only he himself had never marvelled at them), had rendered him undemonstrative to such a degree that he did not even let out a sigh of relief at the rumble of the cable. And yet it ended a most anxious six months of knocking about at sea with valuable merchandise in a damaged hull, most of the time on short rations, always on the lookout for English cruisers, once or twice on the verge of shipwreck and more than once on the verge of capture. But as to that, old Peyrol had made up his mind from the first to blow up his valuable charge — unemotionally, for such was his character, formed under the sun of the Indian Seas in lawless contests with his kind for a little loot that vanished as soon as grasped, but mainly for bare life almost as precarious to hold through its ups and downs, and which now had lasted for fifty-eight years.

While his crew of half-starved scarecrows, hard as nails and ravenous as so many wolves for the delights of the shore, swarmed aloft to furl the sails nearly as thin and as patched as the grimy shirts on their backs, Peyrol took a

survey of the quay. Groups were forming along its whole stretch to gaze at the new arrival. Peyrol noted particularly a good many men in red caps and said to himself — “Here they are.” Amongst the crews of ships that had brought the tricolour into the seas of the East, there were hundreds professing sans-culotte principles; boastful and declamatory beggars he had thought them. But now he was beholding the shore breed. Those who had made the Revolution safe. The real thing. Peyrol, after taking a good long look, went below into his cabin to make himself ready to go ashore.

He shaved his big cheeks with a real English razor, looted years ago from an officer's cabin in an English East Indiaman captured by a ship he was serving in then. He put on a white shirt, a short blue jacket with metal buttons and a high roll-collar, a pair of white trousers which he fastened with a red bandana handkerchief by way of a belt. With a black, shiny low-crowned hat on his head he made a very creditable prize-master. He beckoned from the poop to a boatman and got himself rowed to the quay.

By that time the crowd had grown to a large size. Peyrol's eyes ranged over it with no great apparent interest, though it was a fact that he had never in all his man's life seen so many idle white people massed together to stare at a sailor. He had been a rover of the outer seas; he had grown into a stranger to his native country. During the few minutes it took the boatman to row him to the step, he felt like a navigator about to land on a newly discovered shore.

On putting his foot on it he was mobbed. The arrival of a prize made by a squadron of the Republic in distant seas was not an everyday occurrence in Toulon. The wildest rumours had been already set flying. Peyrol elbowed himself through the crowd somehow, but it continued to move after him. A voice cried out, “Where do you come from, citizen?” — “From the other side of the world,” Peyrol boomed out.

He did not get rid of his followers till the door of the Port Office. There he reported himself to the proper officials as master of a prize taken off the Cape by Citizen Renaud, Commander-in-Chief of the Republican Squadron in the Indian Seas. He had been ordered to make for Dunkerque but, said he, having been chased by the sacrés Anglais three times in a fortnight between Cape

Verde and Cape Spartel, he had made up his mind to run into the Mediterranean where, he had understood from a Danish brig he had met at sea, there were no English men-of-war just then. And here he was; and there were his ship's papers and his own papers and everything in order. He mentioned also that he was tired of rolling about the seas, and that he longed for a period of repose on shore. But till all the legal business was settled he remained in Toulon roaming about the streets at a deliberate gait, enjoying general consideration as Citizen Peyrol, and looking everybody coldly in the eye.

His reticence about his past was of that kind which starts a lot of mysterious stories about a man. No doubt the maritime authorities of Toulon had a less cloudy idea of Peyrol's past, though it need not necessarily have been more exact. In the various offices connected with the sea where his duties took him, the wretched scribes, and even some of the chiefs, looked very hard at him as he went in and out, dressed very neatly, and always with his cudgel, which he used to leave outside the door of private offices when called in for an interview with one or another of the "gold-laced lot." Having, however, cut off his queue and got in touch with some prominent patriots of the Jacobin type, Peyrol cared little for people's stares and whispers. The person that came nearest to trying his composure was a certain naval captain with a patch over one eye and a very threadbare uniform coat who was doing some administrative work at the Port Office. That officer, looking up from some papers, remarked brusquely, "As a matter of fact you have been the best part of your life skimming the seas, if the truth were known. You must have been a deserter from the Navy at one time, whatever you may call yourself now."

There was not a quiver on the large cheeks of the gunner Peyrol.

"If there was anything of the sort it was in the time of kings and aristocrats," he said steadily. "And now I have brought in a prize, and a service letter from Citizen Renaud, commanding in the Indian Seas. I can also give you the names of good republicans in this town who know my sentiments. Nobody can say I was ever anti-revolutionary in my life. I knocked about the Eastern seas for forty-five years — that's true. But let me observe that it was the seamen who stayed at home that let the English into the Port of Toulon." He

paused a moment and then added: "When one thinks of that, citizen Commandant, any little slips I and fellows of my kind may have made five thousand leagues from here and twenty years ago cannot have much importance in these times of equality and fraternity."

"As to fraternity," remarked the post-captain in the shabby coat, "the only one you are familiar with is the Brotherhood of the Coast, I should say."

"Everybody in the Indian Ocean except milksops and youngsters had to be," said the untroubled Citizen Peyrol. "And we practised republican principles long before a republic was thought of; for the Brothers of the Coast were all equal and elected their own chiefs."

"They were an abominable lot of lawless ruffians," remarked the officer venomously, leaning back in his chair. "You will not dare to deny that."

Citizen Peyrol refused to take up a defensive attitude. He merely mentioned in a neutral tone that he had delivered his trust to the Port Office all right, and as to his character he had a certificate of civism from his section. He was a patriot and entitled to his discharge. After being dismissed by a nod he took up his cudgel outside the door and walked out of the building with the calmness of rectitude. His large face of the Roman type betrayed nothing to the wretched quill-drivers, who whispered on his passage. As he went along the streets he looked as usual everybody in the eye; but that very same evening he vanished from Toulon. It wasn't that he was afraid of anything. His mind was as calm as the natural set of his florid face. Nobody could know what his forty years or more of sea-life had been, unless he told them himself. And of that he didn't mean to tell more than what he had told the inquisitive captain with the patch over one eye. But he didn't want any bother for certain other reasons; and more than anything else he didn't want to be sent perhaps to serve in the fleet now fitting out in Toulon. So at dusk he passed through the gate on the road to Fréjus in a high two-wheeled cart belonging to a well-known farmer whose habitation lay that way. His personal belongings were brought down and piled up on the tailboard of the cart by some ragamuffin patriots whom he engaged in the street for that purpose. The only indiscretion he committed was to pay them for their

trouble with a large handful of assignats. From such a prosperous seaman, however, this generosity was not so very compromising. He himself got into the cart over the wheel, with such slow and ponderous movements, that the friendly farmer felt called upon to remark: "Ah, we are not so young as we used to be — you and I." — "I have also an awkward wound," said Citizen Peyrol, sitting down heavily.

And so from farmer's cart to farmer's cart, getting lifts all along, jogging in a cloud of dust between stone walls and through little villages well known to him from his boyhood's days, in a landscape of stony hills, pale rocks, and dusty green of olive trees, Citizen Peyrol went on unmolested till he got down clumsily in the yard of an inn on the outskirts of the town of Hyères. The sun was setting to his right. Near a clump of dark pines with blood-red trunks in the sunset, Peyrol perceived a rutty track branching off in the direction of the sea.

At that spot Citizen Peyrol had made up his mind to leave the high road. Every feature of the country with the darkly wooded rises, the barren flat expanse of stones and sombre bushes to his left, appealed to him with a sort of strange familiarity, because they had remained unchanged since the days of his boyhood. The very cartwheel tracks scored deep into the stony ground had kept their physiognomy; and far away, like a blue thread, there was the sea of the Hyères roadstead with a lumpy indigo swelling still beyond — which was the island of Porquerolles, but he really did not know. The notion of a father was absent from his mentality. What he remembered of his parents was a tall, lean, brown woman in rags, who was his mother. But then they were working together at a farm which was on the mainland. He had fragmentary memories of her shaking down olives, picking stones out of a field, or handling a manure fork like a man, tireless and fierce, with wisps of greyish hair flying about her bony face; and of himself running barefooted in connection with a flock of turkeys, with hardly any clothes on his back. At night, by the farmer's favour, they were permitted to sleep in a sort of ruinous byre built of stones and with only half a roof on it, lying side by side on some old straw on the ground. And it was on a bundle of straw that his mother had tossed ill for two days and had died in the night. In the darkness, her silence, her cold face had given him an awful scare. He supposed they had buried her



but he didn't know, because he had rushed out terror-struck, and never stopped till he got as far as a little place by the sea called Almanarre, where he hid himself on board a tartane that was lying there with no one on board. He went into the hold because he was afraid of some dogs on shore. He found down there a heap of empty sacks, which made a luxurious couch, and being exhausted went to sleep like a stone. Some time during the night the crew came on board and the tartane sailed for Marseilles. That was another awful scare — being hauled out by the scruff of the neck on the deck and being asked who the devil he was and what he was doing there. Only from that one he could not run away. There was water all around him and the whole world, including the coast not very far away, wobbled in a most alarming manner. Three bearded men stood about him and he tried to explain to them that he had been working at Peyrol's. Peyrol was the farmer's name. The boy didn't know that he had one of his own. Moreover, he didn't know very well how to talk to people, and they must have misunderstood him. Thus the name of Peyrol stuck to him for life.

There the memories of his native country stopped, overlaid by other memories, with a multitude of impressions of endless oceans, of the Mozambique Channel, of Arabs and negroes, of Madagascar, of the coast of India, of islands and channels and reefs; of fights at sea, rows on shore, desperate slaughter and desperate thirst, of all sorts of ships one after another: merchant ships and frigates and privateers; of reckless men and enormous sprees. In the course of years he had learned to speak intelligibly and think connectedly and even to read and write after a fashion. The name of the farmer Peyrol, attached to his person on account of his inability to give a clear account of himself, acquired a sort of reputation, both openly, in the ports of the East and, secretly, amongst the Brothers of the Coast, that strange fraternity with something masonic and not a little piratical in its constitution. Round the Cape of Storms, which is also the Cape of Good Hope, the words Republic, Nation, Tyranny, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, and the cult of the Supreme Being came floating on board ships from home, new cries and new ideas which did not upset the slowly developed intelligence of the gunner Peyrol. They seemed the invention of landsmen, of whom the seaman Peyrol knew very little — nothing, so to speak. Now, after nearly fifty years of lawful and lawless sea-life, Citizen Peyrol, at the yard gate of the roadside

inn, looked at the late scene of his childhood. He looked at it without any animosity, but a little puzzled as to his bearings amongst the features of the land. "Yes, it must be somewhere in that direction," he thought vaguely. Decidedly he would go no further along the high road. . . . A few yards away the woman of the inn stood looking at him, impressed by the good clothes, the great shaven cheeks, the well-to-do air of that seaman; and suddenly Peyrol noticed her. With her anxious brown face, her grey locks, and her rustic appearance she might have been his mother, as he remembered her, only she wasn't in rags.

"Hé! La mère," hailed Peyrol. "Have you got a man to lend a hand with my chest into the house?"

He looked so prosperous and so authoritative that she piped without hesitation in a thin voice, "Mais oui, citoyen. He will be here in a moment."

In the dusk the clump of pines across the road looked very black against the quiet clear sky; and Citizen Peyrol gazed at the scene of his young misery with the greatest possible placidity. Here he was after nearly fifty years, and to look at things it seemed like yesterday. He felt for all this neither love nor resentment. He felt a little funny as it were, and the funniest thing was the thought which crossed his mind that he could indulge his fancy (if he had a mind to it) to buy up all this land to the furthestmost field, away over there where the track lost itself sinking into the flats bordering the sea where the small rise at the end of the Giens peninsula had assumed the appearance of a black cloud.

"Tell me, my friend," he said in his magisterial way to the farmhand with a tousled head of hair who was awaiting his good pleasure, "doesn't this track lead to Almanarre?"

"Yes," said the labourer, and Peyrol nodded. The man continued, mouthing his words slowly as if unused to speech. "To Almanarre and further too, beyond the great pond right out to the end of the land, to Cape Esterel."

Peyrol was lending his big flat hairy ear. "If I had stayed in this country," he thought, "I would be talking like this fellow." And aloud he asked:

“Are there any houses there, at the end of the land?”

“Why, a hamlet, a hole, just a few houses round a church and a farm where at one time they would give you a glass of wine.”

## CHAPTER II

Citizen Peyrol stayed at the inn-yard gate till the night had swallowed up all those features of the land to which his eyes had clung as long as the last gleams of daylight. And even after the last gleams had gone he had remained for some time staring into the darkness in which all he could distinguish was the white road at his feet and the black heads of pines where the cart track dipped towards the coast. He did not go indoors till some carters who had been refreshing themselves had departed with their big two-wheeled carts piled up high with empty wine-casks, in the direction of Fréjus. The fact that they did not remain for the night pleased Peyrol. He ate his bit of supper alone, in silence, and with a gravity which intimidated the old woman who had aroused in him the memory of his mother. Having finished his pipe and obtained a bit of candle in a tin candle-stick, Citizen Peyrol went heavily upstairs to rejoin his luggage. The crazy staircase shook and groaned under his feet as though he had been carrying a burden. The first thing he did was to close the shutters most carefully as though he had been afraid of a breath of night air. Next he bolted the door of the room. Then sitting on the floor, with the candlestick standing before him between his widely straddled legs, he began to undress, flinging off his coat and dragging his shirt hastily over his head. The secret of his heavy movements was disclosed then in the fact that he had been wearing next his bare skin — like a pious penitent his hair-shirt — a sort of waistcoat made of two thicknesses of old sail-cloth and stitched all over in the manner of a quilt with tarred twine. Three horn buttons closed it in front. He undid them, and after he had slipped off the two shoulder-straps which prevented this strange garment from sagging down on his hips he started rolling it up. Notwithstanding all his care there were during this operation several faint chinks of some metal which could not have been lead.

His bare torso thrown backwards and sustained by his rigid big arms heavily tattooed on the white skin above the elbows, Peyrol drew a long breath into his broad chest with a pepper-and-salt pelt down the breastbone. And not only was the breast of Citizen Peyrol relieved to the fullest of its athletic capacity, but a change had also come over his large physiognomy on which the expression of severe stolidity had been simply the result of physical discomfort. It isn't a trifle to have to carry girt about your ribs and hung from your shoulders a mass of mixed foreign coins equal to sixty or seventy thousand francs in hard cash; while as to the paper money of the Republic, Peyrol had had already enough experience of it to estimate the equivalent in cartloads. A thousand of them. Perhaps two thousand. Enough in any case to justify his flight of fancy, while looking at the countryside in the light of the sunset, that what he had on him would buy all that soil from which he had sprung: houses, woods, vines, olives, vegetable gardens, rocks and salt lagoons — in fact, the whole landscape, including the animals in it. But Peyrol did not care for the land at all. He did not want to own any part of the solid earth for which he had no love. All he wanted from it was a quiet nook, an obscure corner out of men's sight where he could dig a hole unobserved.

That would have to be done pretty soon, he thought. One could not live for an indefinite number of days with a treasure strapped round one's chest. Meantime, an utter stranger in his native country the landing on which was perhaps the biggest adventure in his adventurous life, he threw his jacket over the rolled-up waistcoat and laid his head down on it after extinguishing the candle. The night was warm. The floor of the room happened to be of planks, not of tiles. He was no stranger to that sort of couch. With his cudgel laid ready at his hand Peyrol slept soundly till the noises and the voices about the house and on the road woke him up shortly after sunrise. He threw open the shutter, welcoming the morning light and the morning breeze in the full enjoyment of idleness which, to a seaman of his kind, is inseparable from the fact of being on shore. There was nothing to trouble his thoughts; and though his physiognomy was far from being vacant, it did not wear the aspect of profound meditation.

It had been by the merest accident that he had discovered during the passage, in a secret recess within one of the lockers of his prize, two bags of mixed

coins: gold mohurs, Dutch ducats, Spanish pieces, English guineas. After making that discovery he had suffered from no doubts whatever. Loot big or little was a natural fact of his freebooter's life. And now when by the force of things he had become a master-gunner of the Navy he was not going to give up his find to confounded landsmen, mere sharks, hungry quill-drivers, who would put it in their own pockets. As to imparting the intelligence to his crew (all bad characters), he was much too wise to do anything of the kind. They would not have been above cutting his throat. An old fighting sea-dog, a Brother of the Coast, had more right to such plunder than anybody on earth. So at odd times, while at sea, he had busied himself within the privacy of his cabin in constructing the ingenious canvas waistcoat in which he could take his treasure ashore secretly. It was bulky, but his garments were of an ample cut, and no wretched customs-guard would dare to lay hands on a successful prize-master going to the Port Admiral's offices to make his report. The scheme had worked perfectly. He found, however, that this secret garment, which was worth precisely its weight in gold, tried his endurance more than he had expected. It wearied his body and even depressed his spirits somewhat. It made him less active and also less communicative. It reminded him all the time that he must not get into trouble of any sort — keep clear of rows, of intimacies, of promiscuous jollities. This was one of the reasons why he had been anxious to get away from the town. Once, however, his head was laid on his treasure he could sleep the sleep of the just.

Nevertheless in the morning he shrank from putting it on again. With a mixture of sailor's carelessness and of old-standing belief in his own luck he simply stuffed the precious waistcoat up the flue of the empty fireplace. Then he dressed and had his breakfast. An hour later, mounted on a hired mule, he started down the track as calmly as though setting out to explore the mysteries of a desert island.

His aim was the end of the peninsula which, advancing like a colossal jetty into the sea, divides the picturesque roadstead of Hyères from the headlands and curves of the coast forming the approaches of the Port of Toulon. The path along which the sure-footed mule took him (for Peyrol, once he had put its head the right way, made no attempt at steering) descended rapidly to a plain of and aspect, with the white gleams of the Salins in the distance,

bounded by bluish hills of no great elevation. Soon all traces of human habitations disappeared from before his roaming eyes. This part of his native country was more foreign to him than the shores of the Mozambique Channel, the coral strands of India, the forests of Madagascar. Before long he found himself on the neck of the Giens peninsula, impregnated with salt and containing a blue lagoon, particularly blue, darker and even more still than the expanses of the sea to the right and left of it from which it was separated by narrow strips of land not a hundred yards wide in places. The track ran indistinct, presenting no wheel-ruts, and with patches of efflorescent salt as white as snow between the tufts of wiry grass and the particularly dead-looking bushes. The whole neck of land was so low that it seemed to have no more thickness than a sheet of paper laid on the sea. Citizen Peyrol saw on the level of his eye, as if from a mere raft, sails of various craft, some white and some brown, while before him his native island of Porquerolles rose dull and solid beyond a wide strip of water. The mule, which knew rather better than Citizen Peyrol where it was going to, took him presently amongst the gentle rises at the end of the peninsula. The slopes were covered with scanty grass; crooked boundary walls of dry stones ran across the fields, and above them, here and there, peeped a low roof of red tiles shaded by the heads of delicate acacias. At a turn of the ravine appeared a village with its few houses, mostly with their blind walls to the path, and, at first, no living soul in sight. Three tall platanes, very ragged as to their bark and very poor as to foliage, stood in a group in an open space; and Citizen Peyrol was cheered by the sight of a dog sleeping in the shade. The mule swerved with great determination towards a massive stone trough under the village fountain. Peyrol, looking round from the saddle while the mule drank, could see no signs of an inn. Then, examining the ground nearer to him, he perceived a ragged man sitting on a stone. He had a broad leathern belt and his legs were bare to the knee. He was contemplating the stranger on the mule with stony surprise. His dark nut-brown face contrasted strongly with his grey shock of hair. At a sign from Peyrol he showed no reluctance and approached him readily without changing the stony character of his stare.

The thought that if he had remained at home he would have probably looked like that man crossed unbidden the mind of Peyrol. With that gravity from which he seldom departed he inquired if there were any inhabitants besides

himself in the village. Then, to Peyrol's surprise, that destitute idler smiled pleasantly and said that the people were out looking after their bits of land.

There was enough of the peasant-born in Peyrol, still, to remark that he had seen no man, woman, or child, or four-footed beast for hours, and that he would hardly have thought that there was any land worth looking after anywhere around. But the other insisted. Well, they were working on it all the same, at least those that had any.

At the sound of the voices the dog got up with a strange air of being all backbone, and, approaching in dismal fidelity, stood with his nose close to his master's calves.

“And you,” said Peyrol, “you have no land then?”

The man took his time to answer. “I have a boat.”

Peyrol became interested when the man explained that his boat was on the salt pond, the large, deserted and opaque sheet of water lying dead between the two great bays of the living sea. Peyrol wondered aloud why any one should want a boat on it.

“There is fish there,” said the man.

“And is the boat all your worldly goods?” asked Peyrol.

The flies buzzed, the mule hung its head, moving its ears and flapping its thin tail languidly.

“I have a sort of hut down by the lagoon and a net or two,” the man confessed, as it were. Peyrol, looking down, completed the list by saying: “And this dog.”

The man again took his time to say:

“He is company.”

Peyrol sat as serious as a judge. “You haven't much to make a living of,” he



delivered himself at last. "However! . . . Is there no inn, café, or some place where one could put up for a day? I have heard up inland that there was some such place."

"I will show it to you," said the man, who then went back to where he had been sitting and picked up a large empty basket before he led the way. His dog followed with his head and tail low, and then came Peyrol dangling his heels against the sides of the intelligent mule, which seemed to know beforehand all that was going to happen. At the corner where the houses ended there stood an old wooden cross stuck into a square block of stone. The lonely boatman of the Lagoon of Pesquiers pointed in the direction of a branching path where the rises terminating the peninsula sank into a shallow pass. There were leaning pines on the skyline, and in the pass itself dull silvery green patches of olive orchards below a long yellow wall backed by dark cypresses, and the red roofs of buildings which seemed to belong to a farm.

"Will they lodge me there?" asked Peyrol.

"I don't know. They will have plenty of room, that's certain. There are no travellers here. But as for a place of refreshment, it used to be that. You have only got to walk in. If he isn't there, the mistress is sure to be there to serve you. She belongs to the place. She was born on it. We know all about her."

"What sort of woman is she?" asked Citizen Peyrol, who was very favourably impressed by the aspect of the place.

"Well, you are going there. You shall soon see. She is young."

"And the husband?" asked Peyrol, who, looking down into the other's steady upward stare, detected a flicker in the brown, slightly faded eyes. "Why are you staring at me like this? I haven't got a black skin, have I?"

The other smiled, showing in the thick pepper-and-salt growth on his face as sound a set of teeth as Citizen Peyrol himself. There was in his bearing something embarrassed, but not unfriendly, and, he uttered a phrase from which Peyrol discovered that the man before him, the lonely, hirsute,

sunburnt and barelegged human being at his stirrup, nourished patriotic suspicions as to his character. And this seemed to him outrageous. He wanted to know in a severe voice whether he looked like a confounded landsman of any kind. He swore also without, however, losing any of the dignity of expression inherent in his type of features and in the very modelling of his flesh.

“For an aristocrat you don't look like one, but neither do you look like a farmer or a pedlar or a patriot. You don't look like anything that has been seen here for years and years and years. You look like one, I dare hardly say what. You might be a priest.”

Astonishment kept Peyrol perfectly quiet on his mule. “Do I dream?” he asked himself mentally. “You aren't mad?” he asked aloud. “Do you know what you are talking about? Aren't you ashamed of yourself?”

“All the same,” persisted the other innocently, “it is much less than ten years ago since I saw one of them of the sort they call bishops, who had a face exactly like yours.”

Instinctively Peyrol passed his hand over his face. What could there be in it? Peyrol could not remember ever having seen a bishop in his life. The fellow stuck to his point, for he puckered his brow and murmured:

“Others too. . . . I remember perfectly. . . . It isn't so many years ago. Some of them skulk amongst the villages yet, for all the chasing they got from the patriots.”

The sun blazed on the boulders and stones and bushes in the perfect stillness of the air. The mule, disregarding with republican austerity the neighbourhood of a stable within less than a hundred and twenty yards, dropped its head, and even its ears, and dozed as if in the middle of a desert. The dog, apparently changed into stone at his master's heels, seemed to be dozing too with his nose near the ground. Peyrol had fallen into a deep meditation, and the boatman of the lagoon awaited the solution of his doubts without eagerness and with something like a grin within his thick beard. Peyrol's face cleared. He had solved the problem, but there was a shade of

vexation in his tone.

“Well, it can't be helped,” he said. “I learned to shave from the English. I suppose that's what's the matter.”

At the name of the English the boatman pricked up his ears.

“One can't tell where they are all gone to,” he murmured. “Only three years ago they swarmed about this coast in their big ships. You saw nothing but them, and they were fighting all round Toulon on land. Then in a week or two, crac! — nobody! Cleared out devil knows where. But perhaps you would know.”

“Oh, yes,” said Peyrol, “I know all about the English, don't you worry your head.”

“I am not troubling my head. It is for you to think about what's best to say when you speak with him up there. I mean the master of the farm.”

“He can't be a better patriot than I am, for all my shaven face,” said Peyrol. “That would only seem strange to a savage like you.”

With an unexpected sigh the man sat down at the foot of the cross, and, immediately, his dog went off a little way and curled himself up amongst the tufts of grass.

“We are all savages here,” said the forlorn fisherman from the lagoon. “But the master up there is a real patriot from the town. If you were ever to go to Toulon and ask people about him they would tell you. He first became busy purveying the guillotine when they were purifying the town from all aristocrats. That was even before the English came in. After the English got driven out there was more of that work than the guillotine could do. They had to kill traitors in the streets, in cellars, in their beds. The corpses of men and women were lying in heaps along the quays. There were a good many of his sort that got the name of drinkers of blood. Well, he was one of the best of them. I am only just telling you.”

Peyrol nodded. "That will do me all right," he said. And before he could pick up the reins and hit it with his heels the mule, as though it had just waited for his words, started off along the path.

In less than five minutes Peyrol was dismounting in front of a low, long addition to a tall farmhouse with very few windows, and flanked by walls of stones enclosing not only the yard but apparently a field or two also. A gateway stood open to the left, but Peyrol dismounted at the door, through which he entered a bare room, with rough whitewashed walls and a few wooden chairs and tables, which might have been a rustic café. He tapped with his knuckles on the table. A young woman with a fichu round her neck and a striped white and red skirt, with black hair and a red mouth, appeared in an inner doorway.

"Bonjour, citoyenne," said Peyrol. She was so startled by the unusual aspect of this stranger that she answered him only by a murmured "bonjour," but in a moment she came forward and waited expectantly. The perfect oval of her face, the colour of her smooth cheeks, and the whiteness of her throat forced from the Citizen Peyrol a slight hiss through his clenched teeth.

"I am thirsty, of course," he said, "but what I really want is to know whether I can stay here."

The sound of a mule's hoofs outside caused Peyrol to start, but the woman arrested him.

"She is only going to the shed. She knows the way. As to what you said, the master will be here directly. Nobody ever comes here. And how long would you want to stay?"

The old rover of the seas looked at her searchingly.

"To tell you the truth, citoyenne, it may be in a manner of speaking for ever."

She smiled in a bright flash of teeth, without gaiety or any change in her restless eyes that roamed about the empty room as though Peyrol had come in attended by a mob of Shades.

“It's like me,” she said. “I lived as a child here.”

“You are but little more than that now,” said Peyrol, examining her with a feeling that was no longer surprise or curiosity, but seemed to be lodged in his very breast.

“Are you a patriot?” she asked, still surveying the invisible company in the room.

Peyrol, who had thought that he had “done with all that damned nonsense,” felt angry and also at a loss for an answer.

“I am a Frenchman,” he said bluntly.

“Arlette!” called out an aged woman's voice through the open inner door.

“What do you want?” she answered readily.

“There's a saddled mule come into the yard.”

“All right. The man is here.” Her eyes, which had steadied, began to wander again all round and about the motionless Peyrol. She moved a step nearer to him and asked in a low confidential tone: “Have you ever carried a woman's head on a pike?”

Peyrol, who had seen fights, massacres on land and Sea, towns taken by assault by savage warriors, who had killed men in attack and defence, found himself at first bereft of speech by this simple question, and next moved to speak bitterly.

“No. I have heard men boast of having done so. They were mostly braggarts with craven hearts. But what is all this to you?”

She was not listening to him, the edge of her white even teeth pressing her lower lip, her eyes never at rest. Peyrol remembered suddenly the sans-culotte — the blood-drinker. Her husband. Was it possible? . . . Well, perhaps it was possible. He could not tell. He felt his utter incompetence. As to

catching her glance, you might just as well have tried to catch a wild sea-bird with your hands. And altogether she was like a sea-bird — not to be grasped. But Peyrol knew how to be patient, with that patience that is so often a form of courage. He was known for it. It had served him well in dangerous situations. Once it had positively saved his life. Nothing but patience. He could well wait now. He waited. And suddenly as if tamed by his patience this strange creature dropped her eyelids, advanced quite close to him and began to finger the lapel of his coat—something that a child might have done. Peyrol all but gasped with surprise, but he remained perfectly still. He was disposed to hold his breath. He was touched by a soft indefinite emotion, and as her eyelids remained lowered till her black lashes seemed to lie like a shadow on her pale cheek, there was no need for him to force a smile. After the first moment he was not even surprised. It was merely the sudden movement, not the nature of the act itself, that had startled him.

“Yes. You may stay. I think we shall be friends. I'll tell you about the Revolution.”

At these words Peyrol, the man of violent deeds, felt something like a chill breath at the back of his head.

“What's the good of that?” he said.

“It must be,” she said and backed away from him swiftly, and without raising her eyes turned round and was gone in a moment, so lightly that one would have thought her feet had not touched the ground. Peyrol, staring at the open kitchen door, saw after a moment an elderly woman's head, with brown thin cheeks and tied up in a coloured handkerchief, peeping at him fearfully.

“A bottle of wine, please,” he shouted at it.