

The Decapitated Head

By A. Le Braz

One night that Barba Louarn of Paimpol had been sitting up spinning to a very late hour, she fell asleep over her task from fatigue. She was very nearly seventy years of age, poor old woman. Her distaff had escaped from her hands, and had fallen noisily upon the spinning-wheel Barba awaked with a start. She was not a little surprised to find the room illumined by a white light. In the middle of the room was a round table upon which Barba was accustomed to lay the skeins of flax which she had spun. And lo! upon the heap of skeins she beheld a head, a head newly cut off, and from which blood was dripping.

This head she recognised as that of her son, a sailor on board a ship of war.

The eyes were wide open, and gazed upon her with unutterable anguish.

"Matic! Matic!" she cried, clasping her hands; "what in God's name has happened?"

No sooner had the old woman thus spoken than the head began to roll, and went nine times round the table. Then it appeared once more on the top of the heap of skeins. "Farewell, mother!" said a voice.

Barba Louarn found herself again in darkness. Her neighbours found her the following day on the floor in a dead faint,

Some time afterwards it was ascertained that on that same night, and at that same hour, her son, Yvon Louarn, the second officer on board the "*Redoubtable*," had had his head separated from his body by an accident, and as it was in heavy weather, the head had rolled about the deck for some time before it could be seized and retained.

(Related by Marie Jeanne Le Pay, Paimpol.)