

# The Watching of Lôn, The Miscreant

By A. Le Braz

When Lôn (called the Miscreant), died, his wife asked the neighbours to come and take part in the night-watch over his body.

"I am really afraid," she said, "to keep watch alone beside this miscreant. I am afraid that now he is dead he may serve me a worse turn than all the bad ones he has done me while alive!"

This was on a Saturday evening. And though it was late the wife of Lôn went into the village.

She thought to herself: "I am sure to find two or three scamps of the same sort as Lôn at the Inn, who will be willing to watch beside him. It will be quite enough to bring them, if I promise them cider and strong wine to their heart's content!" She was right in her reckoning. In the Inn at her end of the village there were a number of toppers making a great noise and playing cards.

The wife of Lôn crossed the threshold and said: "Are there here four strong men able to do me a service?"

"Yes, within reason," answered one of the men.

"It is to watch beside my husband who has just died. I can promise cider and strong wine in plenty."

"Well, boys," said the man who had answered, addressing his companions, "as you know, the Innkeeper has threatened to turn us out at nine o'clock, let us go with this woman, we can go on with our game at her house, and the drink will cost us nothing."

"Let us go," cried the others.

The wife of Lôn returned home escorted by four half tipsy fellows, brawling loudly all the way.

"Here we are," said she, pushing open the door; "I must beg of you to be a little quieter out of respect for death."

The dead man was stretched upon the kitchen table, covered with a tablecloth, which was the best piece of linen in the house, the face alone was uncovered.

"Ah! after all it's Lôn, called 'the Miscreant!'"

"Yes," replied the widow, "he died this afternoon."

She went to a cupboard and took out wine and glasses, which she laid on the bench.

"Drink as much as you will," she said, "I am going to bed."

"Yes, yes. You can leave Lou in our charge, we won't let him escape!"

The woman having gone away, the men established themselves round a little table, placed near the corpse, upon which a candle was burning, and a piece of box-wood (blessed on Palm Sunday) lay beside a dish of Holy Water.

I have not told you the men's names. They were Vraz, Bitouz, and the two brothers Troadek from Kerelgiun. All were careless, determined men, not likely to be daunted by the presence of a corpse.

Vraz took a pack of cards out of his pocket, which he always kept there. "Cut," said he to William Troadek. Thus the game began.

For about an hour they played, drank, cursed, and swore.

When they came, the men were but half drunk, they were so completely now, except the youngest of the brothers Troadek. He had a little more right feeling than the rest. "Come, come, boys," he said, "after all we are not doing as we ought. Have you no fear that we may have cause to repent this behaviour by a dead man's side? We have not even said a "*De Profundis*" for the repose of his soul

"Oh! oh!" laughed Bitouz, "for the soul of Lôn, the Miscreant! If he had a soul, it would rather play and drink with us than hear us say "*De Profundis*!"

"By the Powers, yes!" cried Vraz, "Lôn was a regular vagabond. I am sure that dead though he be, if we proposed a game to him he would accept."

"Don't say such things, Vraz."

"We shall see!"

Suited to the action to the word he shuffled the cards, and as it was his turn to deal, instead of four players, he counted five.

"Old Lôn," he cried, "there's a set for you!"

Then a terrible thing happened.

The dead man, whose hands were joined across his chest, gradually slipped his left arm to the table on which they were playing, put his hand upon the cards which fell to his share, lifted them above his face, as though to look at them, then put one down, whilst a fearful voice thundered out, "Spades are trumps! Spades are trumps! Spades are trumps!"

The four young dare-devils, petrified with fear, rushed to the door. And Yraz, in spite of his bragging, was not the last to make off. They all fled from the house, out into the dark night, not knowing or caring whither, and they wandered about the fields till dawn, like wild creatures. When at daybreak they got each to his home, they were all as pale as death. Vraz died during the week. The others escaped after having suffered for nearly a year from a strange fever, which was only cured by drinking water from the well of St Gouéry.<sup>1</sup>

*(Related by Jeanne Marie Cone, Penvénau, 1886.)*

---

<sup>1</sup> The water from the well of St Gouéry is believed to be efficacious in cases of fever and obstinate headache.