

A Ladder of Swords

Ecréhos, and the fisherman was seized. He, poor man, swore that he kept the light burning to guide his brother fishermen to and fro between Boulay Bay and the Ecréhos. The captain of the frigate tried severities; but the fisherman stuck to his tale, and the light burned on as before—a lantern stuck upon a pole. One day, with a telescope, Buonapois had seen the exact position of the staff supporting the light and had mapped out his course accordingly. He would head straight for the beacon and pass between the Marmotier and the Maître Île, where is a narrow channel for a boat drawing only a few feet of water. Unless he made this he must run south and skirt the Écrivière Rock and bank, where the streams setting over the sandy ridges make a confusing, perilous sea to mariners in bad weather. Or he must sail north between the Ecréhos and the Dirouilles, in the channel called Étoc, a tortuous and dangerous passage save in good weather, and then safe only to the mariner who knows the floor of that strait like his own hand. De la Forêt was wholly in the hands of