

CANADIAN LEGENDS

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"GRANNY" Angele was doing the house work as usual, scrubbing the cooking pots and placing them under the three-decked iron stove. For fifteen years she had been in service, but we thought she was one of the family, the good old soul. Our mother was ill, that night, and we were restless.¹

"Sit down around the table, my children!" said Granny, her work done. "I'll tell you a story. But, mind you, be quiet like good children!"

She hung the dish in the open cupboard, and ran a moist cloth over the large family table around which we sat, all ears, our eyes spying her least motion. She slowly sat down in the rocking chair, at the end of the table. Pulling a snuff-box of jet out of her apron pocket, she snapped its top with two fingers. After she had screened the lower half of her face with a red handkerchief, twice she sniffed the powdered tobacco.

So the stage was set for Granny's story. What story? It might be *Finette*, *Cacholet*, *Les trois conseils du roi*, *Les paroles de fleurs*, *L'hiver des corneilles*, *La reine bougonne*, *Les deux magiciens*, *L'ours et le renard*, *Puce est morte* . . . All these are familiar folk tales, which children relish without question. It does not matter what they are told, whether it really happened or not. In *Finette* and other such stories, they bask in the silvery beams of true fantasy.

But, that night, Granny's mood took another turn. She began: "There's twenty-five years, this very day, that your grand-father died. I'll never forget! He had fallen from the roof of his barn, and the poor man could never get up from the ground. We must go and see the old man, for the news was bad. At sundown, we sat in the sleigh behind Fleet-Foot, and away we went to Rang-des-Belles-Amours. He was pleased to see us. They had brought Dr. Tache to see him. The doctor had charged two louis, and could not even name his disease. Yet it was an *estropiure*—a fracture: everybody knew it. Something inside grew up like a puff ball and began to gnaw his bones. They sent for Bélanger, the healer down the river. He found the thing, as soon as he walked in. For he was gifted with the lily (*fleur de lis*), being the seventh consecutive son of his mother. He gave the old man a good sweat, with infusions of dry herbs—turkey grass and cat-weeds; he would not let the folk know.

¹. A country doctor, at Lisbet on the South Shore of the St. Lawrence below Quebec, is speaking.

Your grand-father felt better. But one night he was much worse. Bélanger had to return in a hurry. Coming in, this time, he shook his head and declared: "May be he is done for, cause the moon is on the wave."

The old man sank very low, that night, and the neighbours all came in to see him and spend the evening with us: Denis, Brisson, Lil' Jacques, Marcello . . . No one had the heart, at first, to say anything. 'Twas painful! Marcello looked worse than the others. Not a word, and he mused, his head hanging. Denis called him into the kitchen and, after lighting his pipe, asked him whether it was true, what the folk said, that he had fought a werewolf. Surprised, Marcello turned to look at him and at the others that were walking in. He stood up, emptied the bowl of his pipe in the stove, put the pipe into his pocket, and said:

"Well, it's only too true."

"Then, tell us the story!"

He did.

And this story was of a werewolf which he had seen and had fought, in the sugar-bush, at Maringouins (Mosquito). "I was sitting up, one night, keeping up the fire and boiling down the sap . . . Suddenly I heard a gust of wind . . ."

The rest is a long hair-raising affair, which thrilled the children into remaining speechless for a long while after it was finished. And Granny Angele concluded:

"It's a strange thing, very strange! Why should the priests not believe in those things—the werewolves? They don't, and it's a pity! When I told the story of Marcello's werewolf to the parish priest, M. Delage, he smiled and said, 'Tut, Tut! Little fool that you are. The werewolf was naught but a *feu-follet*. And the *feu-follet* was the black cat following him.' As if tom cats and werewolves and *feu-follets* were one and the same thing."

In these remarks of Granny Angele and the parish priest we grasp the difference between a legend and a folk tale. The legend is considered truthful, whereas the folk tale is fiction.

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This distinction runs through the Canadian repertory of stories like a ruler. The large part of this huge repertory consists of folk tales; they have come down from the dim past, ready made and detached from actuality. They are meant for entertainment. Not so the smaller part, consisting of legends. The legends set forth strange events in the lives of the people them-

selves, at the edge of the supernatural world. They might be called superstitions. The source of the beliefs, the patterns they assume when transposed into real life, even the details of their folk manifestation, are mostly traditional and ancient. But the content and the circumstances are actual. Their participants usually are known by name; and the action has taken place at a fixed date and in a definite place.

The subject covers extensive grounds; these are exposed in a collection of legends—90 numbers—which I have published in *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 33, No. 129 (1920), pages 173-258. In brief, they consist of buried treasures and their spirit or ghost keepers, dwarfs, fairies, haunted spots or houses, Chasse-Gallery or aerial visits or trips, *feux-follets*, werewolves (a particularly fertile theme), sorcery and charms, spells, sale of one's own soul to the devil (like Dr. Faustus), ghosts or the souls of the dead coming back to familiar abodes, foretelling the future and interpreting evil signs, etc.

Some of these legends are very brief, almost inarticulate; others are lengthy and replete with colourful details. Here the folk paint themselves as they are, with humour or in the grip of fear. Among the best in the Canadian repertory, some of which have been transposed into literature, we count: *The Handsome Dancer* or *Rose Latulipe*, *La poule noire* or a soul for sale at the cross roads, *The Witch Canoe* or *La Chasse-Gallery*, *The Black Horse* or the Devil helping to build a parish church, *The Buried Treasures of Portneuf County*, *Chateau Bigot*, *The Bel. of Caughnawaga*, *Père de la Brosse*, *The Great Serpent of Lorette*.

None of them because of its length can be quoted here in full. Brief extracts illustrating their style and development may serve instead.

In *The Handsome Dancer* or *Rose Latulipe*, José Moreau—a habitant, a righteous man who would not lapse from his curé's grace—gave a veillée in the old style, this once, because his eldest son had arrived from the States and his daughter Blanche was of age, soon to be married. A little supper, a bit of fun, with born revellers from ten miles around! Dédé, the great fiddler struck a tune, so lively that the chairs began to wobble, and living legs to itch. Too bad to let such good music go to waste! So on with the fiddle tune!

Now Dédé had the folk under his spell. Would they dance? Lean José Moreau gazed at Catherine, his fat wife, and wondered a moment. Why not? pleaded Catherine, forgetting the curé. This Why not? settled the question.

Tall Dédé now was in his element, wound up for twenty-four hours, tapping his heels and making the dust fly—had there been any dust on Catherine's floor. The dance was on in earnest—reels, casse-reels, spendies, salut-des-dames, cotillons . . .

What's that? Sleigh-bells outside, runners creaking on the frozen snow. Wo! And it stopped.

The clock rang eleven at night. Three knocks on the door.

"Come in!" answered José, the host. The door opened wide and a young man walked in—tall and straight like a spruce tree, with a proud head, curly hair and pointed beard, black as jet, and quite shiny. His dark eyes ran over the room, casting wild lights. His fur coat was of beaver, and his cap of the finest otter. His moccasins were of moose skin embroidered with beads and porcupine quills all the shades of the rainbow.

From the centre of the room he greeted the hosts with incredible grace, he tossed off his coat and his cap; his toupée rose like two small horns on his forehead. He insisted upon keeping his gloves on—black kid gloves. People thought that he wanted to show off. Never mind! He was a "swell." From that moment, for the girls, there was no other man on the floor. They all longed for a dance with him.

He knew how to do things! Blanche, the hosts' eldest daughter, was his first choice. When the handsome stranger asked her whether she would dance with him, she blushed and stood up, apparently hesitant. But that was only play. She began to dance with him, and every eye in the room was fixed on her. It was a bit embarrassing. The stranger, quite aware of it, passed his arm around her, drew her to him with a sure hand, and gazed down into her eyes just as if he already had won her.

Meanwhile Charlie the horseman went out with a friend to look at the stranger's horse. Sir, what a horse! Why, it looked like a person, almost able to speak, so intelligent! And mighty on its legs! A fine head, nostrils right open and quivering; eyes true lanterns in the dark. And the harness! Silver buckles all over, fine patent white leather, brand new! The carriage, polished like a mirror, full of buffalo robes with red felt!

Charlie and his pal never had ever seen his like. He must be from the States—a race horse, a real champion, a Dan Patch. He must have come down the river at high speed; he was white with rime. They went in and asked the stranger to let them unharness his horse and give him oats in the stable. But no, it was not worth the trouble! Just throw a buffalo robe over

him. He, the stranger, had come in only for "a couple of steps."

And the dance went on, more exciting every moment, until Catherine had a presentiment. She stood up, the child in her arms, and reached out for the vial of holy water at the head of the bed, dropped her fingers into it and, back in the doorway with a trembling hand, she sprinkled water in the direction of the dancers.

The Devil—for it was he!—leaped with a yell to the ceiling. The house tossed and rocked. Then he made for the door, but stopped short, at the sight of a black temperance cross with a blessed fir twig over it. Mad with rage, he turned sideways and jumped clean through the stone wall, there to vanish with a clanging of chains and a frightful stench left behind. Sparks from the hoofs of his black steed marked a trail in the air.

In *The Witch-Canoe* or *Chasse-Gallery* and *The Black Horse* legends, the Devil again is the hero or rather the villain in the piece. Seldom does he get a square deal at the hands of the shrewd habitants, and that serves him right. The main theme is studded with episodes and sketches of real life, often humorous, as if to make the narrative more convincing.

For instance, in *The Witch-Canoe* ride, ninety years ago, Jack Boyd, the foreman in a Gatineau lumber camp, picks his men for a drive home in the birch bark canoe; this, as soon as his men have jumped over the pork barrel into the New Year.

"Now, my boy!" says Boyd to a young man who has still to win his spurs with the devil. "You musn't speak the name of God while you're here in the canoe. You musn't touch the crosses on the church spires as we go by."

As soon as the eight men have stepped into the canoe awaiting them on the fresh snow in a moon-lit clearing, Boyd shouts: "Ready?" The men with one voice answer: "Ready!"

"Satan, we promise you our souls, if in the next six hours we pronounce the name of God. *Acabris, acabras!* Bring us to Lavaltrie and back before the sun is up. *Acabram!* Show the stuff you're made of! *Acabris, acabras, acabram!*"

The canoe began to shake like a leaf in the wind. Old Nick was on the job, there could be no mistake! Off we went like an arrow over the tree tops, hundreds of feet in the air. It took my breath away. Below, everything was dark, and we could barely see the Gatineau River. Above, the dark blue was bright with little pin holes. Light as feathers, we paddled on our way to Montreal.

Acabris, acabram! Boyd would often repeat, like a witch,

and every time the canoe shivered and plunged ahead as if over a waterfall.

The broad ribbon that shone darkly under us was the ice on the Ottawa River. It broadened out into a wide sheet—Lake-of-Two-Mountains. *Madame, nous filons!* like the wind.

Tin spires tipped with iron crosses began to glitter in the moonlight, every few minutes—those of the parish churches down the river.

“Keep your heads cool!” Baptiste commanded, at the stern.

Lights shone ahead of us, in a cluster.

“Le Champ de Mars!” chuckled Jack Boyd, shaking the icicles off his frozen beard. “We’ll skim Montreal and frighten the gay dogs who are still out carousing in lower town at this hour of the night. Jos, how’s your whistle? And lend us a hand with your song *Envoyons d’avant!*—Forward, boys!”

This is only the beginning of a night-long celebration that was to take them to Lavaltrie, then, before daybreak, over Montreal again to the lumbercamp.

The devil, in *The Witch-Canoe*, had carried on his broad shoulders a Satanic crew. In the legend of *The Black Horse*, he figures as a powerful beast daunted by the Blessed Virgin for the service of the church—a rôle which has been awarded to him in various parishes of the St. Lawrence. Here are a few extracts replete with local colour and habitant wit.

At first there was no church at Lislet—a French-Canadian village, down the St. Lawrence, on the south shore,—only a small wooden chapel. My grandparents had to go to Cap-Saint-Ignace for their Easter duties, to get married and to have their children baptized. The only parish priest lived there, an ambulant missionary, tramping about with his little bag. In those days, it was not as easy as one might think to travel about, on account of the bad roads—the mud, the swollen creeks, and the snow banks.

Ah, my children, I would rather not think of it! Such hardships at times! You don’t know what it is to take the land with the timber standing. You have to clear it off, pull out the stumps and the rocks, and plough it deep.

Naturally there were not many people as yet, only a few houses, log cabins, far between. The Chiasson and the Cendrès lived here; the Cloutiers there, at the foot of the hill. Cloutier’s wife was supposed to have brought in half a bushel of French “piastres” when she married—hum! think of it, many hundred louis! Where the village now stands, there were the houses of

Seigneur Casgrain, and of Bélanger, one of the biggest habitants of the parish; then, at Three-Salmons, those of Caron and Boucher. That's all! Now there is a whole village of Carons—52 fire places in 49 houses. Not so then. No Pretty-Love-Row (*Rang des Belles-Amours*) in those days. Just the sugar bush!

M. Panet, the parish priest, was sitting up, one night. He had decided to erect a church of stone, but he did not know how to have the stone carted, the stone needed for the walls. Horses were so few, and he knew of no dead season in farm work. He was losing sleep over it.

All of a sudden, at night, his name was called. "What is that?" he wondered. A second call, the same voice, a woman's voice, very soft, "François, François!" It frightened him. "But," he thought, "my conscience is clear. I have nothing to fear." He answered, "In the name of God, what do you want of me?"

He saw a beautiful lady all in white. "Have no fear, François," she said, "I am the Lady of Good Help—Notre-Dame du Bon Secours—. Be confident, and go to sleep! When you wake up in the morning, you will find a horse tied to a spruce in front of the house. It will be useful in your work, and will draw heavy loads of stone. It is powerful. But its bridle must never be taken off." The white lady vanished as she had come, and the good man fell asleep in his chair.

Kneeling down for his morning prayer, at dawn, the curé heard a horse pawing the ground outside. He looked and saw it tied to the spruce, a splendid horse whose black hair glittered in the light.

What a horse, my children, that Charlo! Black as jet, not a white hair, four good legs, and the limbs like iron. His head was proud, his eyes were fiery, and the flowing mane on a neck bent like a wheel! And the tail, my friends! He was a fine horse, but ill-tempered and wicked at the mouth. The men had been warned, "Keep clear of his mouth!" It did not really matter, since the bridle never was taken off. The curé from time to time would ask,—for he was always there, except when in the confessional or calling on the sick,—"Well, my Germain, how do you like your Charlo?" "Number one, M. le curé!"

Germain never let anybody approach his black horse. But one day he could not come. A new child, his own, had to be baptized. So Charlo passed to the hands of Rigaud-son-of-Baptist. Rigaud was a good fellow and a worker, but obstinate and full of conceit. Nobody like him—the cock of the walk!

He knew everything. Nothing compared with whatever he owned. The only thing his horse lacked was speech; his cow was like a spring for milk, and the milk was all cream; his pigs grew fat basking in the sun; his dog was more intelligent than most people; his hens laid twice a day; and his farm was so fertile that it needed only being held in check; and what a horse-man he himself was! He understood horses as if he were half one himself. Before this day, he had cast an envious eye upon Charlo, and criticized Germain for his way of handling him.

To make friends with the black horse, when crossing Turtle Creek, Rigaud passed his hand in Charlo's mane. The horse groaned. "Here, here!" said Rigaud coaxingly, "Wait a minute!" And he pulled off the bridle. Pou-i-i--eh! Charlo slipped out of the harness, and he was gone, gone, like lightning across the fields. Rigaud, blown fifteen feet in the air, fell into Turtle Creek. When he stood up again, much shaken, he saw the black horse disappear along the King's highway.

In *The Buried Treasure* of Les Ecureuils, Portneuf, Denis was ploughing his field, when a kettle burst open on one side, under his feet. He hid it after he had filled his pockets, and straight away went off to Quebec. There he bought a silk dress for his wife. The next day, the silk changed to cotton.

That's not all; he bought a gray horse, but the horse at once turned into a black one, black as pitch—or darker still. It was possessed of the Evil One. A goblin every night braided its mane, he would never leave it alone. He pulled its ears until they were long and pointed as a donkey's; he worked at its teeth until they were gold, and shod its hoofs with silver. Someone advised Denis to take the horse to the county fair at Cap-Santé (Cape Health). It was a horse like no other. Every time it laughed, its teeth glittered in the sun.

Denis climbed on his horse on the appointed day and went to exhibition grounds, proud as Jack-the-giant-killer when he was on his way to rescue the princess.

But the horse, instead of walking the bridge on the Jacques-Cartier, swam across the river, so fast that Denis had no time to get frightened. In the water, the horse once more was gray; but, on the other bank, again it was shining black. It was duly registered with its identification marks—black, golden teeth, silver shoes, and donkey's ears. The judges were looking around for it in the afternoon, its pedigree in hand. No such horse anywhere, that they could see! It had turned back to gray, without gold or silver, not even the pointed ears.

The gray horse disappeared at night, even though the stable was locked up and nobody could get out. A witch-doctor must have been the guilty one, the people surmised; he could do all sorts of tricks with his thumb—heal wounds or cause trouble. Denis, crestfallen, had to go back home afoot, and he would not speak to his wife of his wretched luck. He went back to his kettle, early the next day. But the kettle was no longer there.

Haunted Houses have always been a favourite topic in a long list beckoning entranced listeners by the fireside. And the evil spell on a house often began with an historic event. Bigot, the infamous Intendant of New France, who contributed to the fall of Quebec to the British, is the target of several legends like that of Chateau Bigot, of Beauport on the Beaupré Coast near Quebec.

“That’s all the fault of Bigot,” a story-teller would say. “Yes, the fault of Bigot, if the ghosts of Lorette girls never leave the ruins of that Château to this day. Poor girls! Such an end they met with, outside of religion, without comfort or consolation! They were so pretty with their dark eyes, black glossy hair, and tan complexion. Real beauties, fresh from the woods. They were like morning dew, with their milk-white teeth. And the noblemen were fond of them, in their revelries. They lured them away from their parents, into their mansions. Bigot more than the others. And they did away with them, somehow. Their bones are there, buried in the ruins. Their ghosts still hold nightly vigils over them; they suffer no other around, and they hate men! I don’t know how those priests who have bought the place for a summer home will get along with them. They had better make friends with their unseen hostesses, and leave the ruins alone. I pity them if they expect to sleep at night. You can hear nothing there but Indian songs and the stamping of moccasined feet in wild dances. At other times, all you hear is sighs and lamentations. Some Lorette folk who have been there tell me that the only language spoken is Huron. This, because of Bigot.

But yet, that’s nothing compared with the charivaris at Godbout. The Hurons are far less vindictive than the Montagnais of the far north—men of the woods as these are. Hundreds of years after their death, they are still as terrible as on the first day. Frightful dances and war-whoops at night! The whole night long. And the dancers seemed laden with chains. They dragged the chains after them, shook them, whipped

around and beat the ground with them in sheer frenzy. The noise was deafening. And the yells were like those of wild beasts, thirsty for human blood. We stood all that, when we were young, but it would kill me now, were I to spend a single night there.

The haunted houses of Les Chenaux were still worse, I hear, though I have never been there—neither would I care to go! If I told you all that happens, your hat wouldn't sit on your head. Chenaux used to be a village. People, when they must, simply rush through it, not a few of them, in the daytime—never at night. Nobody would dare stop; *hm!* might be fatal.

At night, Chenaux can be seen from the Grand Baie, across—five miles away. That's near enough! For it is inhabited, not by ordinary, plain people. There's nobody there in the daytime, not a living soul. Even the cattle stay away. But at night, it is dreadful, fantastic. It's all fire and smoke, like the open gates of hell—*les cheminées de l'enfer!* All kinds of devils, large and small, caper about and do all sorts of indecorous things when they are not ghastly! Some are red, some blue, others yellow. Green ones? No, Madam! the Irish hadn't yet come to this country! How large is that population, no one knows. The census officer has fallen down on his job there, or rather before he went. Else the population of Canada would be a good deal larger, if not much better. There are enough regular devils without them. Ah, les Chenaux! What a din at night, a *vacarme* that can be heard miles away, from the Baie! The fools that boasted they would go there at night, and did, never came back; and this makes but little difference.