

The Brigand and His Brother, the Hermit

Once upon a time, there was a farmer named Fanch Kerloho, who had paid his rent to his landlord. The landlord was gravely ill in his bed and could not give him a receipt, but he told him:

“I shall give you the receipt when I am well again. Go into the kitchen, make yourself dinner, and don’t worry about it.”

The farmer dined well in the *château* kitchen, then returned to his own house. When he returned, his wife asked him if he brought back a receipt in exchange for his money.

“I didn’t bring back a receipt,” he replied, “because the landlord is sick in his bed and he couldn’t make me one, but he promised to write it and to bring it to me himself, as soon as he is better.”

“You were wrong to give away your money without a receipt,” his wife replied, “because no one knows what could happen.”

And she appeared disgruntled and grumbled a bit.

A few days later, the landlord died. The farmer and his wife assisted in his burial and prayed to God for his soul, although he was always very harsh to them. The landlord’s son loved gambling and pleasure, and spent a lot of money. Because he needed money, he told all the farmers to bring it to him, promising a discount to anyone who paid in advance. Fanch Kerloho was invited to present himself there like the others. He went to the *château* and presented himself before his young master, when his turn had come.

“You have not paid your rent,” his new landlord said to him.

“Please excuse me, *monseigneur*. I paid it to your father, as was my habit, the same day as the St. Michael.”

“You are not marked in his notebook as having paid. Do you have a receipt?”

“No, I do not have a receipt, because your father was very sick in his bed when I went to pay, and he wasn’t able to write, but I assure you and even swear to you that I paid my rent, two hundred *écus*, in beautiful six-*livre* pieces.”

“That is all good and well, but, if you do not have a receipt, that is because you did not pay, and I need money.”

“I swear, before my God who died for us on the Cross, that I have paid and that I do not owe anything.”

“You are not a man who gives away his money without receiving a receipt, and, if that indeed happened, too bad for you, because I need you to bring me two hundred *écus* before eight days have passed; if not, I will have everything at your house sold. Go, and bring me the receipt or the money.”

The poor farmer returned to his house, devastated, and told his wife everything.

“I told you,” she cried. “We are ruined!”

And she screamed, cried, and made a terrible scene. The poor man let her be without saying a word, so that she could calm herself down.

The next morning, after having thought about his case, he went to find his confessor and told him everything. The priest listened attentively and then said to him:

“I do not know what advice to give you, but I have a brother who is a hermit who has lived for a long time in a forest, where he is doing penance for sins from his youth, and who receives visits from a good angel every day. Go find him after leaving here, and I am persuaded that he will find the means to end your misery.”

Fanch Kerloho went before the holy man and told him about his case.

“I shall ask my good angel,” the hermit said, “what you must do. If your former landlord is in Heaven or even in Purgatory, everything can be arranged, and it will be possible to obtain your receipt. But, if he is in Hell, alas! There will be no hope, and everything will be lost. Pass the night with me in my hermitage; I shall share with you what little I have, and, tomorrow morning at dawn, I shall receive a visit from my good angel as always, and I shall interrogate him about this affair.”

The farmer passed the night with the hermit, shared his frugal meal, which was composed of wild fruits and vegetables and water, then he slept on a bed of moss and dried herbs. The old man, he slept on the bare ground with a stone under his head, and murmured prayers throughout the whole night. The next morning at daybreak, Fanch saw him again kneeling at the door of his hermitage, facing the sunrise, with his eyes and his hands lifted towards the sun. Then he saw a beautiful, radiant angel descend to the old man’s side, talk with him for some time in a low voice, and then take once again to the sky. The hermit remained in prayer for some time, his eyes and his hands lifted towards the sky, as immobile as a stone statue, then he went to his guest.

“Well, Father Hermit?” he asked him.

“Alas! My son, your former master is in Hell, and my good angel cannot go there to search for your receipt.”

“Then I am lost!” Kerloho exclaimed.

“Listen. Don’t despair, for maybe it is still not impossible to have your receipt. I have a brother who is a brigand and who has done every evil deed possible in this world, and who will certainly go to Hell, and soon, for he is already

old. Go find him in the forest where he lives with his band of scoundrels, or rather devils. Tell him about your case, and he will lead you to the road to Hell (for he knows it well) to reclaim your receipt; maybe he will even search for it himself. Whatever the result of your voyage, tell me what happened, upon your return.”

Fanch Kerloho thanked the hermit for his hospitality and his advice, and then he hit the road to search for the brigand. He managed to find him with much difficulty, tell him his reason for visiting, and speak to him of his brother the hermit, whom he had just left.

“Oh! My brother the hermit, the old imbecile!” the brigand exclaimed. “Has he no shame, a holy man like he is, who calls himself the friend of God and receives visits from his good angel each day, to ask a service from a brigand like me, covered in all possible crimes, and who is on the road to Hell, as he has said very often? But reassure yourself, my brave man, for I shall do for you what he cannot. Listen to me well, and do exactly as I say, and you may succeed in obtaining the receipt from your landlord, who is hardly any better than I, that he owes you from his life. Return to your house; take a bottle of holy water from the holy-water stoup at the church in your village. Then search for a woman breastfeeding her first child; ask her to fill a cruet¹ with milk from her breasts. Then have a saddler make you a leather whip with many knots and weighing eighteen pounds; have it blessed by your priest, then return to find me, and I will tell you what to do next.”

The farmer returned to his house. He easily procured the bottle of holy water, the milk of the young woman breastfeeding her first child, and the eighteen-pound leather whip, and he returned to the brigand’s house with all this. The brigand then called one of his servants, who was ugly and as black as a demon, and said to him while showing him Fanch Kerloho:

“Take this man to Hell for me.”

“Yes, master!” the servant replied.

“Listen again, before leaving,” said the brigand to the farmer, “and go everything exactly as I tell you to, point by point: This servant will lead you to Hell, and you must not fear him, because, as ugly and as black as he is, he will not do you any harm. There, you will find your former landlord sitting in a golden seat surrounded by fire and flames on all sides. Ask him for the receipt for the last rent that you paid, and that his son is asking for you to pay again. First, he will give you one that is no good. Refuse that one, and demand another. He will give you another, which will also be false. You will hear awful cries all around you, moaning, and the gnashing of teeth, coming from ponds of boiling oil and melted

¹ Cruet: “A small bottle or vial for liquids, etc.; now only applied to a small glass bottle with a stopper, to contain vinegar, oil, etc. for the table.” *Oxford English Dictionary*, s. v. “cruet,” accessed August 05, 2013, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/45174>. – Trans.

lead, where the souls of the damned are held. Hideous devils will maintain the fire underneath them. Do not allow yourself to be either moved or frightened, and spray these ponds with the woman's milk that you have in that cruet, and, when the devils try to oppose you, throw the holy water that you have in that bottle at them and hit them with that whip blessed by your rector. They will let out awful screams and scream for you to leave Hell. But continue to spray them with holy water and hit them with your whip, until you have a real receipt. When you take it, you can return from there, and no one will oppose you. However, before leaving, pay attention to an empty seat that you will see to the right of your former landlord, and you may ask him who is destined for it. Do exactly what I have just told you to, and you will succeed, but woe unto you if you stray at any point from my advice! You can leave now."

So, the brigand's black and hideous servant led Fanch Kerloho to the entrance of a cavern in the woods. There, he heard a whistle, and, immediately, two hideous devils arrived and asked:

"How may we be of service?"

"My master sends this man to you, so that you can lead him to your place, where he has business."

One of the devils took the farmer onto his back and drove in with him running into the dark cavern. When he was tired, he handed his load over to his comrade who was following him, and they alternated thus, from time to time, and they went deeper and deeper under the earth, into the deepest shadows. After several hours of this subterranean voyage, Kerloho finally saw a small light in front of him, and, as he approached it, the light grew. He finished by arriving at an immense room full of fires and flames, and hideous devils, who maintained the fire under infinite cauldrons and seats of gold and silver, on which sat kings, princes, and lords of all kinds and of all countries. On one of these seats, he recognized his former landlord. Flames escaped from his mouth, from his eyes, from his ears, from everywhere, and Kerloho could not stop himself from trembling from horror and terror at that sight. Everywhere around him were moans and awful cries of pain. He also saw the cauldrons of which the brigand had spoken, and it seemed to him that thousands of frogs croaked in them. He threw some drops of the woman's milk that he had in his cruet into them, and the cries became joyous, from the doleful cries that they were. He believed that the poor souls that were in there were relieved, and he continued to spray them. But a troop of devils ran up to him, threatening him and pointing pitchforks of red-hot iron at him. He did not lose his focus, and, taking his bottle of holy water, he began to spray it at them, then to strike them with his large whip that was blessed by the rector. He devils screamed and they twisted under his whip and the holy water, and cried out to him:

"Go quickly! Go far away from here!"

“I will not go before I have received my receipt!”

“Ask your former landlord right there, and then go!”

And his former landlord held out a piece of paper for him, saying to him:

“Here is your receipt. Return home, quickly.”

He took the paper, examined it, and said:

“This is no good; I need another.”

And, again, he threw the woman’s milk into the cauldrons and the holy water onto the devils, and struck them as hard as he could with his large whip, and they jumped about and screamed, crying:

“Have mercy! Have mercy! We will give you a good receipt, then go, quickly.”

His former landlord gave him a second piece of paper, as predicted. But, after he had examined it, he said again:

“It’s not worth any more than the other!”

And he once again threw the holy water around him and wielded his large whip.

“Give him a good receipt, and he will leave!” cried the devils, who could no longer take it.

His former landlord gave him a third piece of paper, and, having examined it, Kerloho said:

“Splendid! This one is good.”

And he put it in his pocket. Then he asked his former landlord:

“Speak to me again before I go, of who is destined for the empty armchair that I see there at your right, and where it seems that the sitter will not be cold.”

“That seat is destined for the brigand who sent you here, and who must come to occupy it soon.”

His former landlord added:

“You are going to return to the earth and see my son. Tell him about everything you saw here, and tell him that there is plenty of time to change his life; otherwise, he will increase the number of unfortunate souls in this sad place. But, as he will certainly not believe you, here is a letter to give to him that contains my advice for him. You may go now; you shall be led safe and sound back to the entrance to the cavern.”

The same two devils who led him to him led him back to the place where they had picked him up, and he hurried back to the brigand, having on him the valid receipt, as well as the letter from his former landlord to the landlord’s son.

When the brigand saw him return, he hastened to ask him:

“Well! Do you have the receipt?”

“Yes, I obtained it with much difficulty, but I finally have it.”

And he presented it to the brigand. He examined it closely, then he returned it to Kerloho, saying:

“Good, it is the real one. But, tell me, did you notice the empty seat to the right of your former landlord’s, and did you ask whom it is destined for?”

“Yes, I noticed it, and he told me that you are waiting to occupy it.”

“I know,” – and he let out a sigh – “but go now and carry your former landlord’s son the receipt and the letter that you received from his father, then go find me here.”

And Fanch Kerloho went to the *château* of his young master and first presented him with the receipt, saying:

“*Monseigneur*, here is the receipt that I asked him for in Hell, where he is.”

“You lie impudently, and I will have you hanged!” said the landlord, furious.

“If you do not believe me, *monseigneur*, take a look at this letter, which your unhappy father gave me to give to you, and you will see that I am not lying.”

And he presented him with the letter from his father. He took it, opened it, and recognized his father’s handwriting with astonishment. But, when he read it, his astonishment doubled, and he was no longer as insolent. In that letter, he said that his farmer, Fanch Kerloho had indeed paid his rent, but that he could no write him a receipt, because of his illness. Then he advised him to change his life, to be charitable, gentle, and humane to the poor, to pray and to make penance, on pain of joining him in Hell, from whence he wrote.

The letter terrified him; he distributed all his property to the poor, and devoted himself to prayer and to penance, to redeem himself after the inhumanity and the disorder of his past days.

As for Fanch Kerloho, after having reassured his wife, telling her of the good news, he returned to the forest to see the brigand, as he had promised. The brigand said to him:

“I have dismissed my comrades, for the hour of penance and atonement has come. Since you have been able to go to Hell and then return, perhaps it is also not impossible for me to be saved. Help me in this terrible ordeal, and help me to not lose the heart for it. Listen to me, and do what I shall tell you to do, point by point. First, you will break all of my limbs with a stick, then you will tear my fingernails and toenails out with a farrier²’s pliers, one by one, then you will tear out my eyes...”

“My God! You’re telling me to do that!” Kerloho exclaimed, seized by horror.

² Farrier: “One who shoes horses; a shoeing-smith.” *Oxford English Dictionary*, s. v. “farrier,” accessed August 05, 2013, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/68299>. – Trans.

“I beg of you, do what I ask, and do not fail to do it...Have you forgotten the empty seat that you saw in Hell, to the right of your former landlord?...After having broken my limbs, as well as pulling out my fingernails and toenails, you will burn me on this pyre that I have constructed myself for that purpose. When all of me is consumed, you will find in the ashes a charred bone. Take that bone; place it on that small coffin there that I have also prepared, and dispose of the coffin on the wall of the nearest churchyard, and leave me there while you assist in a mass for me. During that mass, a fight between a white dove and a black crow will occur on the coffin holding the bone. The white dove will try as hard as it can to make the coffin fall into the cemetery and the crow will labor to reject it from the opposite side, in order to push it out of the cemetery. If the dove wins, I will be saved; but, if it is defeated, alas! I shall go to Hell to occupy the seat that you know of, and it will be useless to pray for me. Do you have the courage to do what I ask of you?”

“I shall do my best,” replied Kerloho, horrified.

“Good. Let me say a little prayer, then perform your duties, without delay.”

The brigand sprawled out, facing the earth, his arms in a cross, prayed for some time, then lifted himself up and said:

“And now, my brother, get to work with courage.”

So, Fanch Kerloho took a large stick prepared for this purpose and began by breaking the brigand’s limbs; then he pulled out his eyes and his nails...More than once, he felt faint-hearted, but the martyr, who supported it all with an unheard-of courage, said to him then:

“Courage, my brother, and remember the seat that you saw in Hell!”

And he went back to work. To make a long story short, when the pyre where he threw the mutilated and bloodied body consumed it entirely, he shifted around his ashes to find a bone, as he had said to him, closed it up inside a small coffin and disposed of it on the cemetery wall, then he entered the church to assist in the mass where he was honored by the rector of the parish. When the mass was over, he left the church, worrying and in a hurry to see whether the white dove or the black crow was the winner. Thank God! It was the white dove, for the little coffin was now inside the cemetery. He thanked God and immediately went to see the brigand’s brother, the hermit of the forest, to tell him the good news. Contrary to what he expected, the old man experienced astonishment more than joy, and he even said:

“How can it be! My brother, the brigand, is saved? He who has committed every crime possible! Oh! Then I am sure to be saved as well; I even regret having done such unnecessary harm to myself, since one can be saved so easily, and I will not be so foolish as to remain in these woods for another hour!”

He had not finished speaking, when an enormous boom came from the sky, and lightning struck him dead!

Alas! His soul did not go to Heaven with that of his brother the brigand, for, while the brigand died in penance, humility, and sincere remorse, the hermit glorified himself to the point of doubting God's justice.

As for the landlord's son, when he learned of the fates of the two brothers, the brigand and the hermit, he retired into solitude to pray and to perform penance, and he died as did the saints.

Told by Barbe Tassel in Plouaret, November 1873.

François-Marie Luzel. *Légendes chrétiennes de la Basse-Bretagne* t.1. Paris:

Maisonneuve, 1881.

Translated by Michelle Collins.