

The Dance of the Cats

One evening, three men from Andouillé who had threshed wheat the whole day were happily returning from the threshing floor with their flails on their shoulders. Having arrived at a crossroad, they saw cats sitting in a circle in a field that bordered the road. One of the threshers, both to frighten them away and as a means of pleasure, hit a gorse bush that garnished the embankment on the edge of the road with his flail. Immediately, he saw that he was surrounded by a multitude of cats: some climbed onto his shoulders, others suspended themselves from his arms or clawed at his clothes, and he heard them speak, calling him by his name, “Jean des Guillaards, then let’s dance! Jean des Guillaards, then let’s dance!”

And he was forced to dance, although he had hardly wanted to. His companions, at the sight of the cats, ran away without being followed: he, who saw that the cats were sorcerers, would very much have wanted to get rid of them, and, all while dancing, he thought of making the sign of the cross that would have made them flee, but several tom cats were suspended from his arms, and he could not move them.

He danced for a long time. At the end, he stopped, breathless, and as he caught his breath, he shouted, “We have already danced a long time, and I know not in whose honor I dance: dance a bit for the love of the Good Lord!”

He had hardly finished speaking these words when the cats disappeared, and he no longer saw a single one. But, he was weary as if he had been beaten, and not one bit of the soles of his shoes remained, although they were almost brand-new and well-fitted out with good hobnails.

Told by Angèle Quérinan, from Andouillé, 1878.
Paul Sébillot. *Contes populaires de la Haute-Bretagne*. Paris: G. Charpentier,
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Translated by Michelle Collins.