

# *The Death of the Fairies*

Formerly, in the days of our good mothers the fairies, the sea caves of Poulifée, of Jâs, of Crémus, and of Château-Serin served as their hideaways.

The most beautiful and the greatest of all these caves of Plévenon is that of Poulifée, and there is yet to be a person able to reach its end. Those who have visited it say that one can see the perfectly furnished rooms, with seats and tables of stone, stairs, chests of drawers, and even chapels that are very well adorned.

At the time when the fairies made their home there, they often went out to have a walk on land, and many a time the fishermen saw them dancing round in the moonlight on the moors of Fréhel.

The good fairies of Poulifée took pleasure in doing services for the locals. The women and the girls knew their obliging mood. Also, when they went to pasture their sheep on the moors of the Cape, they descended the cliff paths and left at the entrance to the sea cave their distaff, loaded with oakum, their spindle, and a piece of bread, then they went away, and, in the evening, when they came to get their distaff, it was all spun and the yarn was more regular and more beautiful than that of the best spinners in the country. But they did not find the bread, because the ladies of the cave had taken it as their salary.

Often the good fairies dried linens of all kinds in the sun on the moor of Fréhel sheets, shirts, towels finer than the best canvases of Quintin: those who managed to go without blinking up to the place where the mist of the fairies had spread had permission to pick up everything they could carry. But as soon as one had blinked, he saw nothing more: all the beautiful white linens disappeared with the swiftness of an enchantment.

There were certain families that they favored: they made them presents and gladly consented to be the godmothers of their children. They took care of their godchildren and the families could come and visit when they needed advice.

A woman from Plévenon who had a sum of money disappear from her home came to the cave of Poulifée to ask her godmother who had stolen from her. The fairy showed to her goddaughter, whose name was Jeannette, a mirror, and said to her, "Look, my child, there's the thief."

Jeannette cast her eyes on the mirror and she saw her husband, who was at the inn, drinking and diverting himself with several of his friends. The poor woman was completely overcome with emotion, and, as she could not believe that her husband was guilty, she said, "I clearly see my husband; but, godmother, that does not prove that he stole my money: he often drinks and entertains himself, even when he hasn't a penny in his pocket."

The fairy showed Jeannette a second mirror in which she distinctly saw the figure of her husband, who was surrounded by the gold and silver which had been stolen.

She began to weep bitterly, but the good fairy consoled her goddaughter, and revealed a secret to her that made her husband the best and most steady of all men.

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At the time, there was a dispute between the fairies of Poulifée and those of Château-Serin who, until then, had been on good terms. They looked no further than to harm each other, and the inhabitants of Plévenon were suffering; because they were sometimes friendly with the good fairies of Poulifée, those of Château Serin were jealous, and they easily found occasion to express their discontent.

A man from Plévenon who was well liked by the fairies of the cave of Poulifée, came to ask one of them to serve as godmother to a child who would soon be born; she readily accepted and named the baby Jean, a big and beautiful boy.

His godmother gave him many gifts, and as he already naturally had a good disposition, growing up, he became the model of children in the country, and everyone spoke of him with praise.

One of the fairies of Château-Serin, who was the rival and enemy of the godmother of Jean, became jealous of the young boy and the gifts that had been made for him, and she resolved to slay him when he reached the age of eighteen years.

But the good fairy of Poulifée who watched over Jean like her own son had knowledge of those wicked projects, and to protect him from the wrath of her enemy, she dug from the cliff of Fréhel into the sea cave of Crémus, where she locked him up while looking out for all the traps that the other fairy could hand him. Jean remained in the cave until he reached the age of twenty years. From that time, the fairy of Château-Serin no longer had the power to hurt him.

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Jean's godmother communicated to him the knowledge of the fairies, and he became almost as knowledgeable and as skillful as they. But she always hid from him a secret that he wanted to know: he did not know why fairies did not die.

One day when he was walking along the edge of the sea, he saw a fairy sleeping on a rock, and her mouth slightly opened by her slumber was full of little worms. That greatly stunned him, and, when he returned to the sea cave, he told his godmother what he had seen. She said to him that, if fairies did not die for the

same reason that they had worms in their mouth: because, never having been baptized, they never had their lips salted. It is because of this, she added, that worms can colonize there: a bit of salt placed on the lips would make the worms die, and the good fairies would be mortal just as humans are.

Teaching Jean the final secret that remained for him to learn, his godmother advised him never to reveal it to anyone, and to keep himself from serving himself with the power that he had:

“If you make a single fairy die,” she said, “all fairies will become mortal and die, me as well as the others.”

Jean made these beautiful promises to his godmother, but, every time that he left the sea cave to go on a walk, he took care to bring with him a bit of salt.

Some days after he went hunting, and, pursuing game, he came near Château-Serin. He entered the woods and saw the fairy who had persecuted him sleeping on the grass, at the foot of a fir tree, her mouth open and full of little worms. Jean reminded himself of all the cruelty of the fairy who wanted to kill him, and his anger prevented him from thinking of his godmother’s plea.

“The hour for vengeance has sounded,” he said, and, taking the little packet of salt that he always carried with him, he emptied it entirely into the fairy’s mouth.

She woke up as though she had been burnt with a red-hot iron, and she fled, letting out screams of pain that made the cliffs tremble.

Since that day, all of the fairies have disappeared from the country, and no one knows what became of Jean, their godson.

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At the bottom of the sea cave of Poulifée, there is still a rooster that only sings at night. Next to him is a dwarf sitting on a tripod between a fire of live coals and a huge rock that closes the entrance to a cavern where a treasure that he guards is stowed away.

Several people assure that they have seen the little man come out of the ground at night, next to a bridge a short distance from the church of Plévenon, and that he distributed to strange women large amounts of gold pieces.

That is, they say, Jean, the godson of the good fairy of Poulifée who had revealed to him the secret for killing fairies, and it is he who, after their death, inherited the vast riches that they amassed at the bottom of the sea caves.

Told in 1880 by Joseph Chrétien, from Plévenon, notary clerk, age 16.  
Paul Sébillot. *Contes populaires de la Haute-Bretagne: Contes des paysans et des pêcheurs*. Paris: G. Charpentier, 1881.

Translated by Elianna Lisan and Michelle Collins.