

# *The Devil Transformed into a Girl*

If the Good Lord and the saints once walked through the Breton countryside, the Devil did not deprive himself of it either, as we shall see shortly.

In an era when the guild system existed, all workers made a tour around France. They were proud, these artisans with their large, beribboned canes, traveling these crisscrossing routes, and calling to each other thus when they encountered each other:

“*Tope!*<sup>1</sup> Countryman, what vocation?”

“Carpenter. And you, countryman?”

“Stonemason.”

Depending on whether they were or were not of the same type of craft, they drank from the same gourd, or, indeed, said to each other while looking each other up and down:

“Give me a wide berth!”

Often, they fought and bloodied the grass on the path.

The guild members, in their old age, liked to speak of their travels like soldiers of their old battles.

We remember having known, in another time, a former currier who, at winter *veillées*<sup>2</sup>, took pleasure from narrating his adventures and those of his comrades. It is to him that we owe the tale of the Devil changed into a girl.

One morning, two members of the carpenter’s guild left Rennes to head for Nantes, where they hoped to find work. They arrived at Bain in the afternoon. After having taken a meal in the inn of Marg’rite Courtillon<sup>3</sup>, on the Rue de la Rouëre, they went to rest at the edge of the beautiful pond that ornamented the small town. As they were tired, they lay down under linden trees, where they were not slow to fall asleep.

When the two travelers awoke, the stars began to shine in the sky. They bathed at the end of their rest and continued their route.

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<sup>1</sup> This appears to be a sort of greeting. – Trans.

<sup>2</sup> *Veillée*: “In French-speaking rural areas, a traditional evening social gathering of a family or community, often with singing, dancing, etc.” *Oxford English Dictionary*, s. v. “veillée,” accessed August 05, 2013, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/243266>. – Trans.

<sup>3</sup> An innkeeper in the town of Bain who is mentioned in the introduction to the original story collector’s book as the source for a number of the book’s stories; see Adolphe Orain, *Contes du Pays Gallo* (Honoré Champion, 1904), vii-viii. – Trans.

The rest that they took was too short, without a doubt, for they plodded along, their feet fighting the stones, and conversation was languishing.

Climbing the coast of Pommeniac, one of the travelers said to his comrade:

“We need a lively young woman to wake us up some.”

“Alas!” replied the other. “Pretty girls don’t take these roads at this hour.”

He had barely spoken these words when they heard treading at their side, and they perceived, without knowing where she came from, a woman who looked young to them, and who asked them for permission to travel with them.

Though they were very strong, solid men, they experienced a sentiment of great fear, so sudden was the appearance of the stranger, so strange was her presence in that deserted place.

Under the pretext that they were in a hurry, they lengthened their steps, hoping to rid themselves of that woman, but no matter how fast they went, she walked just as quickly as they.

When they reached the village of La Bréharais, they saw light inside a cabaret, and the least brave of the two travelers declared that he was thirsty, and that he would go inside to refresh himself. His comrade followed him, and the stranger did so as well.

All three penetrated into the inn and took seats at a table where they were served a bottle of white wine.

One of the guild members noticed, in the faint light of the candle, that the female traveler had at the end of her fingers claws that pierced through her gloves and feet that resembled those of a young hen rather than those of a woman. He told his discovery to his comrade, who got up from the table as though to light his pipe in the foyer, but, informing the innkeeper, he beckoned him to get out, and told him what they had done and what they had just seen.

The master of the house, a former soldier who feared nothing, also said:

“Be calm, I’m taking care of everything. Just invite me to drink with you.”

When all four were at the table, the innkeeper took his glass and, instead of lifting it to his lips, he threw its contents at the face of the female traveler.

A noise similar to an explosion sounded, all the dishes in the house were shattered. The windowpanes fell into pieces, but the Devil – for it was he – had disappeared.

The two workers continued their voyage, without being able to guess how the innkeeper there was able to rid them of their companion on the route.

Told by José Martin, currier in Bain-de-Bretagne, age 58.  
Adolphe Orain. *Contes du Pays Gallo*. Honoré Champion, 1904.  
Translated by Michelle Collins.