

ANIMAL TALES

A collection of folktales from the Francophone world, translated
from French into English by students at Salem State University



Dr. Elizabeth Blood, Professor of French, Editor

Translators:

Joey Brown, Gamael Chalvire, Brielle Laurent,
Dachaëlle Limose, Sam Perry, and Eunice Tabea

Salem State University
Salem, Massachusetts
January 2025

Table of Contents

I. The Legend of the Black Horse: A Folktale from Québec

II. That's My Cat: A Folktale from Martinique

III. Cockroach and Chicken: A Folktale from French Guyana

IV. Do You Want to Hear the Story of the Monkey and the Dog? A
Folktale from Guadeloupe

V. How the Wolf Was Outrun by Two Snails: A Folktale from France

VI. The Cunning Antelope: A Folktale from Africa

Copyright information:

All of the original French texts in this collection are in the public domain, and the vast majority come from oral tradition. Most of them can be found at <https://touslescontes.com>

The student translators retain the rights to their English translations.

Cover image: “’Twas was fine because ‘twas loud” by Karl Fröhlich, 1879
<https://www.oldbookillustrations.com/illustrations/example-catching/>

Other images in this collection:

- Legend of the Black Horse image: {{cite web | title=Horse's Profile | url=https://www.oldbookillustrations.com/illustrations/horse-profile/ | author=Howitt, Samuel | year=1811 | access-date=February 23, 2025 | publisher=Old Book Illustrations}}
- That’s My Cat image: {{cite web | title=Fly! Fly Away! | url=https://www.oldbookillustrations.com/illustrations/fly-away/ | author=Tegner, Hans | year=1900 | access-date=February 23, 2025 | publisher=Old Book Illustrations}}
- Cockroach and Chicken image: [[File:Hanen, kippen, kuikens en een wild zwijn, RP-P-OB-11.630.jpg|Hanen,_kippen,_kuikens_en_een_wild_zwijn,_RP-P-OB-11.630]]
- Story of Monkey and Dog image: {{cite web | title=White-Eared Titi | url=https://www.oldbookillustrations.com/illustrations/white-eared-titi/ | author=Werner, Jean Charles | year=1847 | access-date=February 23, 2025 | publisher=Old Book Illustrations}}
- How the Wolf Was Outrun image: {{cite web | title=The Wolf and the Mastiff | url=https://www.oldbookillustrations.com/illustrations/wolf-mastiff/ | author=Griset, Ernest | year=n.d. [1869?] | access-date=February 23, 2025 | publisher=Old Book Illustrations}}
- Cunning Antelope image: [[File:Alcelaphus buselaphus buselaphus.jpg|Alcelaphus_buselaphus_buselaphus]]

The Legend of the Black Horse



A Folktale from Québec

Translated by Joey Brown

There hasn't always been a church here in L'Islet, as you know; there was only a small log chapel. The parishioners used to go to Cap Saint-Ignace to celebrate Easter, to get married, to baptize their children, and to be buried.

One day, the news spread that the residents were going to get a priest. Great joy spread throughout the parish! But, my God, they had to get ready for the new priest! No church, no home for him. But Father Panet, the first pastor, was humility itself, without vanity, and what a good heart he had. Father Panet was a holy man, and a real saint, that one.

It had been decided to build the church, and Father Panet was wondering how to get the necessary stone hauled to the site. He was awake one night and thought: "Horses are so rare, and there was no down time in the season. Where could I find one?" It kept him up all night. Suddenly his name was spoken in the night. "Am I crazy?" he wondered.

The same voice called him a second time, a woman's voice, very softly: "François, François!"

He was scared, but said to himself, "I'm in a state of grace. So, I have nothing to fear." Straightening up, he answered: "In the name of God, what do you want from me?"

A beautiful lady appeared to him, bright and radiant: "I am Our Lady of Good Help," she said. "Have no fear and be confident! Tomorrow, when you wake up, you will find a horse in front of your door. You will use it to haul the stone for your church. The only precaution is that you should never unbridle it. Do not forget!"

The lady disappeared, and the good priest fell asleep in his chair. He woke up at the crack of dawn. It was May 1768. The sun was already shining in his room. The apparition came back to his memory, but he thought it was a dream. Kneeling down to say his prayers, the priest heard the trot of hooves

from a horse outside. Looking out the window, tied to the red spruce tree in front of his door, he saw a magnificent black horse whose coat gleamed in the sun. What a surprise! He passed his hand over his eyes. But the horse was still there. He stepped out onto the doorstep and put his hand on the horse's mane to make sure. The horse quivered from head to toe.

The workmen arrived at five o'clock.

"My friends" said Father Panet, "I have borrowed a horse for you. It seems to be an uncommon beast. He will help you haul away the stone. Pay attention! He must not be unbridled, ever, you hear? Otherwise, he will escape you."

"What is your horse's name, Father?" After a moment's reflection, the priest answered: "His name is Charlot. I entrust him to you, my good Germain!"

"Don't worry about it, Father."

Charlot was harnessed to a small wagon with very low wheels, and the work began. Although the first load was quite large, Charlot trotted along as if he had only a feather behind him. The priest, seeing them arrive, shouted to them to put on a heavier load next time. The second was twice as heavy; the third, three times. It was nothing at all for Charlot. But the cart was not strong enough. The men made it twice as big, and they piled the stones in it high like a haystack. The wheels creaked. But Charlot seemed to be making fun of them; he barely touched the ground as he walked.

"My children, what a horse, this Charlot! Black as a coal, with four perfect strong legs, and strength of iron. And his tail, those perfect hindquarters!"

"But there is always something wrong, he could be bad-tempered and mean-spirited. We have to be careful. It doesn't matter since we aren't going to unbridle him."

Germain did not let the others approach his horse. But one day, he couldn't come. He was at a baptism. Charlot passed into the hands of Rigaud-à-Baptiste.

Rigaud was a hard worker, but stubborn and believed himself smarter than the others. So boastful! He acted as if he knew everything. His horses were strong, his cows produced fountains of milk, pure cream. His pigs were fattened to perfection, and his dog's behavior was finer than most people's. His hens laid two eggs every day on his rich farmland. His wife made the best pancakes. His daughter had refused all the guys from the area and was waiting for a lawyer from the city to come and marry her, but he never arrived. And what a cunning guy he was!

Today he had his chance. Charlot was his horse. You could hear him everywhere: "Woo, over here! My horse! Over there." Germain had warned him well: "Above all, don't unbridle him." But Rigaud had replied: "Don't worry, my good Germain! I know all about horses!" So Rigaud was jubilant while hauling stone.

It was August, and it was hot. Crossing the La Tortue river, he stopped the horse in the middle, and he drank twice from the palm of his hand. He whistled, but Charlot didn't want to touch the water.

“That’s odd!” he thought. “Maybe it's because of his bridle? What if I took it off of him? Who has ever seen a horse drinking with its bridle on! It takes a priest not to know horses!”

He ran his hand through his mane, coaxing him. Charlot shuddered while he unbuckled his bridle.

Poof! The horse bucked with fury. Rigaud was thrown fifteen feet high, landing in the riverbed. Getting back up, he saw the horse speeding like the wind along the Chemin du Roi.

Father Panet was just returning home at that moment from visiting the sick. He saw the escaped horse coming near the rock where the "monument" stands today and quickly recognized him. “It’s Charlot! But come on, what happened?” He made a big sign of the cross to try to stop him.

Charlot reared up, and, leaving the road, headed straight to the north, towards the rock which overhangs the river. The rock split open with a clap of thunder. Flames were licking the edge of the crack, several feet wide. And the devil—indeed it was him—rushed straight into hell, leaving behind a smell of sulfur.

Since that day, there has been a cave there in the rock is known as "the Devil's hole" or even “the gate of hell.” The hole in the rock looked like it was hit by a massive axe. Its black mouth, turned to the north, defies the winds which whistle endlessly on winter nights.

Charlot was not at all happy with the work that had been imposed on him. He despised hauling stone for the churches. It seems this was the tenth one. The people of Québec owe him for that! He took his revenge against the parishioners of L’Islet.

For years, one could not pass without an accident near the cavern of the rock, especially at night. Passing horses snorted in terror. Others stumbled and began to limp. Carriage buckles would fall break; or their wheels sank to the hub in a rut. You could sometimes hear howls there, or the rattling of moving chains. A wild beast, like a wolf, came out of the cave vomiting flames. Young people never dared to go past with their girlfriends on Sunday evenings. All that was the fault of handsome Rigaud, who had unbridled his black horse. How foolish he was! So much so that he could never look a black horse in the face again.

THE END

Translated into English by Joey Brown

Salem State University, 2023

That's My Cat

A Folktale from Martinique



Everyone knows that cats are mysterious animals, especially black cats.

In a beautiful villa located near the city, my nephew had a beautiful black cat named Zombi. This cat was "very big, very fat, very furry," like the one in the fable, but was far from being "a saintly cat" and was instead the biggest thief of all the cats in all the fables!

Every day, the peace of the house was disturbed by the angry cook, chasing down the offending Zombi, who of course never let himself be caught.

At all times of day, the cooks of the neighboring villas, armed with brooms, would burst into my nephew's house shouting at the top of their lungs: "Get out of here, cat! It's stealing the meat"...

But the broomsticks aimed at Zombi would break a painting glass, overturn a trinket, sometimes even wander off onto the heads of innocent bystanders, while Zombi remained uncatchable and unassailable.

Eventually, my nephew resolved to get rid of his cat, and one day, when a friend from the countryside was raving about the beauty of Zombi, Zombi was given to him. Properly packed up in a bag, the cat was put in the friend's car and headed off to Rivière-Pilote.

The neighborhood around the villa breathed a sigh of relief. The cooks put on their aprons without fear. Imagine, a cat that even stole food from the fire!

Three days later, surprise!

Zombi was stretching out in the sun in front of his first owner's kitchen. My nephew was happy, the cooks less so. The trip had not improved the outlaw, and the misdeeds began again. The cat was once again banished. This time, Zombi was deposited onboard a schooner bound for Trinité.

"He won't come back this time, he'll end up in the water," said a cook, openly rejoicing.

Three days later, shock!

Zombi was purring on the most beautiful cushion in the living room, "That cat is a sorcerer!"

People were scared.

The thefts resumed on the spot, and with them, broomsticks were wielded indiscriminately throughout the house!

"Sorcerer or not," the gardener, a strong-minded man, said one day. "Give me Zombi, and I swear he won't come back." Regretfully, the faithful but too thieving Zombi was abandoned to him, and that evening, they feasted on a meal "with rabbit sauce."

Three days later, terror!

In my nephew's room, Zombi, blacker than ever, Zombi in flesh and blood, easily recognizable by different particular features, Zombi himself, perched on a wardrobe out of reach of all, was glaring his phosphorescent eyes at his persecutors... The whole house saw him. After a while, he disappeared without anyone seeing how. It was ten o'clock at night.

To tell the truth, he has not reappeared since, except in the "good old stories" of the family and... on peaceful days like today.

MEOW

English Translation by Gamael Chalvire

Salem State University, 2023

Cockroach and Chicken

A Folktale from French Guyana



Once upon a time, there was a cockroach who married a chicken.

One day, Chicken said to Cockroach: "We have our fence, but we need to go work on it. Tomorrow, we will wake up early to leave." Cockroach agreed.

When Chicken was ready, she called Cockroach. Cockroach got out of bed with a bandage wrapped around his head.

He told Chicken, "My love, leave me at the hut today. I am sick." Chicken went out to the fence all alone. As soon as she left, Cockroach put his drum outside, and started to sing :

*"Tibidi badi badi
Bamban,
The drum goes to the nearby village.
Bring some bottles of champagne, eh !
The drum goes to the nearby village.
Tibidi badi badi
Bamban,
The drum goes to the nearby village."*

All of the cockroaches from the village arrived, and they all started to dance.

As soon as Cockroach heard the hour strike four, he packed up his drum, sent everyone away, and went to bed. He tied a bandage around his head.

Chicken arrived. She asked Cockroach how he was feeling. Cockroach said that he was suffering

a lot.

The next day, Chicken walked over to the doorway. She said to Cockroach: “Won’t you come with me?” Cockroach replied that he was too sick.

Every day, Cockroach made the same excuse. As soon as Chicken left the hut, he jumped up and yelled “Woohoo !” He beat his drums, he danced, and he sang :

*“Tibidi badi badi
Bamban ” etc. etc.*

Chicken said: “This is too much! I think that Cockroach is lying to me.”

The next day, instead of leaving for the fence, she hid behind the hut. Cockroach thought that she had left for the fence, so he took out his drums and began to sing :

*“Tibidi badi badi
Bamban ” etc. etc.*

All of Cockroach's friends arrived. Just when his dancing was warming up, Chicken jumped out from behind the hut. She said “Aha! Liar!...This is how you act when you are sick?... Rascal! You will not make fun of me again!”

She ripped off all of his bandages. His friends began to run away in all directions: “Ahhh! ahhh!...” But before he had time to say: “My love!”...Chicken killed them all. She ate all of them.

This is why you hear the common saying: “A cockroach is never right in front of a chicken.”

Translated into English by Brielle Laurent

Salem State University, 2023

Do You Want to Hear the Story of the Monkey and the Dog?

A Folktale from Guadeloupe



Gentlemen, *Cric!* And the crowd answers *Crac!*¹ Too bad for the ones who fall in the mud and do not know how to wash themselves.

Gentlemen, *Cric!*

Do you know why the monkey is afraid of the dog?

No... Well! I'm going to tell you the story.

Mr. Dog and Mr. Monkey, on a Saturday after pay day, went to the village to go grocery shopping. They arrived late, there was not much left and together, they acquired a sausage.

Mr. Dog took the sausage to carry it. The pair went up the coast singing. Mr. Dog said in a low voice: "I am carrying our sausage; I am carrying my sausage!"

Mr. Monkey noticed and said to him: "What did you just say, mate?"

Dog replied: "I'm carrying our sausage." However, from time to time, he was saying: "I'm carrying my sausage."

Monkey got angry but did not say a word; he was keeping an eye on his pal.

While they were walking on the paved highway, devoid of trees, he let the dog carry the sausage. The dog is skilled on the long roads, as you know.

¹ When a group of Guadeloupeans gathers around a storyteller, the storyteller begins by asking his audience if they want to hear him. He says something like: "*Tim, Tim?*" And the audience answers "*Bois sec!*" (Dry wood), meaning "Go ahead, we are listening to you!" Another such formula is: "*Cric!*" to which the audience responds, "*Crac!*"

But when he found himself surrounded by trees, he said: "Mate, you must be tired, let me help you."

And imagine that: Dog handed it over to him.

Monkey began to say: "I am carrying our sausage, I am carrying my sausage, I am carrying my sausage."

And he started walking faster and faster, my friends, when he saw the trees.

Mr. Dog heard perfectly well what Monkey said, but Mr. Monkey kept moving faster, while Mr. Dog was getting out of breath.

When he saw Monkey was getting too far from him, he began to shout: "What are you saying, mate?"... Monkey replied: "I'm carrying my sausage." Dog leaped, but you can bet that Monkey had climbed high up a tree.

Dog, furious, demanded his share of sausage from Monkey: "I will give it to you, wait."

Meanwhile, Monkey ate the sausage and threw the casing to the Dog.

Gentlemen, *Cric!*

This story is true and if you think I'm lying, look at a dog when he sits on his rear end, he looks in the air thinking that Monkey will come down one day so he can take back his share of sausage.

English translation by Dachaëlle Limose

Salem State University, 2023

How the Wolf Was Outrun by Two Snails

A Folktale from France



One day, the Wolf met the Snail, who was hurrying, with difficulty, to get to a hedge.

“Step aside, you straggler!” he shouted at him. “I walk further in a quarter of an hour than you do in a year.”

“Oh! oh!” replied the Snail. “We’ll see about that. Listen, let’s race tomorrow, with the morning dew, and I agree that you can eat me if I don’t arrive before you!”

“I accept, but take care to lengthen the tentacles on your head; they can never be too long to reach the goal soon enough.”

“We shall see, we shall see; don’t sing victory yet.”

The Wolf stepped over his miserable opponent with a pitying laugh and ran off. Once he had disappeared from view, the Snail went to tell one of his brothers about the challenge he had made.

“You’ve gone too far,” he said. “How can you beat a wolf? You? Who can hardly drag your shell from one end of the field to the other in one day?”

“No doubt, but I counted on your assistance. You know how unintelligent the wolf is, so we’ll do this: you’ll stand at one end of the field, I’ll stand at the other, and...”

“Good! Good! He won’t notice that there are two of us. I understand.”

“So get going quickly. You have to be at your post tomorrow morning, and crossing the field is not a small task.”

“I’ll be there, I won’t stop all night.”

With these words, the traveler popped up from his shell and, having established it well on his back, left with a speed of four meters per hour.

The next day, at sunrise, the Wolf arrived. Without giving him time to breathe, the Snail called out to him:

“Come on then, dog, faster! Are you afraid? Here, see this furrow. Let’s go there! Victory to the one who crosses it the fastest. Let’s go, to the goal! To the goal!”

The Wolf, excited by the cries of the Snail, started to run without noticing that he remained quietly in his place. He went belly down, making clouds of dust, out of breath, panting. He could already see the end of the furrow and was about to reach it, when suddenly a Snail raised its two tentacles in front of him, waved them in victory and shouted:

"Hello!"

The Wolf gasped "Oh!" in astonishment, with a sideways jump; then he remained bewildered, convinced that he was seeing the same snail who was at the starting line.

“Do you admit defeat?”

“Defeated in a race by a Snail... never! Let's do it again.”

“Let's do it again. One... two... three, let's go!”

And the Wolf launched himself into the race, losing his breath. This time he was flying, it would have been hard for a bird to keep up with him. Nearly at the finish, he turned his head to see where his competitor was. Seeing nothing, he thought he had won, when, an inch away from his head, the cry rang out again:

"Hello!"

Without saying a word, he turned around and set off again... without any success, alas! At the end of the furrow, he found the triumphant snail.

The race continued for a long time in this way. But a moment came when the ninny fell down, exhausted, out of strength. The poor beast almost died.

Translated into English by Samuel Perry

Salem State University, 2023

The Cunning Antelope

A Folktale from Africa



Not all antelopes are stupid. With a little luck, they can even fool their sworn enemies, as did an antelope from the South African steppes.

The antelope in question, above all, liked to graze on fresh, untrampled grass, away from her herd. This was dangerous, as a solitary antelope is easy prey for a wild animal, but our antelope relied on her intelligence and good luck. Until now, she had always done well, so she became arrogant.

One day, while grazing alone on the steppe, the antelope saw a cheetah coming straight at her. She was very afraid, because the cheetah is the fastest animal in Africa, indeed in the whole world, and no one can escape it. Once again, the antelope was lucky. The shepherds armed with spears were just leading a herd of buffalo to water. The antelope leapt like an arrow into the middle of the herd, causing panic among the buffalo. Without paying attention to the antelope, the shepherds pounced on the cheetah and drove it away with their spears.

As the antelope ran away, she heard the cheetah shout again:

“I will never forgive you for what you just did! One has nothing to lose by waiting, we will meet again one day!”

The Antelope laughed:

“Be glad you got away safely!”

And how arrogant she was, she did not learn her lesson. She continued to graze away from her herd, where the grass was fresh and untrampled, not thinking about the cheetah for a long time.

The cheetah, on the other hand, was serious about his revenge. One day, he jumped in front of the antelope from the top of the only tree growing in the meadow. “This time you will not escape me!” he roared.

“Indeed, this time I am done!” The antelope panicked. But since her cocky luck never failed her, she didn't even have to run.

Just like the cheetah, a huge python was lurking in the tree. He, too, was watching the antelope, but when he saw the turn of events, he quickly slid down the trunk, wrapped himself around the cheetah's neck and squeezed it so tightly that he broke its neck. Then he swallowed it whole, without even chewing.

The antelope breathed a sigh of relief:

“Good thing the cheetah didn't eat me. I would now be in the huge belly of that horrible python.”

Just as she was about to bolt, a huge serpent eagle appeared. The viscous raptor ran up on its long legs, shaking its tail, and threw itself at the python. The cheetah's tail was still sticking out of the reptile's mouth when it received the first blow in the head. After a hard fight, the serpent eagle shattered the python's head with its beak. The bird considered its prey for a moment, then swallowed it, with the cheetah in its belly.

The antelope watched the scene, eyes wide.

“I'm curious to know who will eat the serpent eagle,” she wondered.

No one came to eat it. When he finished eating, the serpent eagle walked slowly towards the lonely tree, then flew up and landed on a branch. The raptor tucked his head between his shoulders and stayed that way for a long, long time, without moving.

“Well, that's how life is!” the antelope said to herself and ran off. Do you think she learned her lesson? She continued to graze away from her herd, where the grass was fresh, crisp and not trampled, all the while congratulating herself for being so clever and so lucky, knowing that the cheetah is in the belly of the python and the python is in the belly of the serpent eagle.

English Translation by Eunice Tabea

Salem State University, 2023