

HOW FRANSEZ PAUTREMADE FOUND HIS FORTUNE

Once upon a time there lived a young man called Fransez Pautremad. He was as strong as an oak, as tall as a giant, and as brave as a lion. No one in Brittany could be found to match him. Unfortunately, he also had a mighty appetite, and his father could not afford to feed him. Soon he became very poor.

“My son,” said the old man one day, “When the bird grows wings, it leaves the nest. The world is full of many paths, go out and seek your fortune. If you are ever in difficulty, ask the advice of old people – they are wise and will be able to help you.”

Fransez took a stout, knotty stick and set out into the world. As he walked through the villages farmers called out to him, “You’re a strong young fellow. Come and work for us.”

“You will find my wages a little high,” said Fransez, “I’m looking for my fortune.”

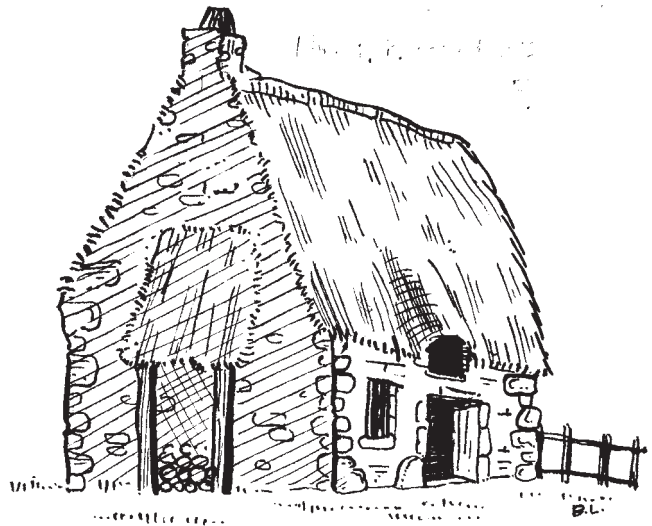
As he walked through the towns the King’s officers stopped and offered him a place in the army.

“Will I find my fortune?” asked Fransez.

“Men say soldiers sometimes find their fortune,” said the officer, “but we never have. Continue on your way.”

Fransez walked on and on; soon he began to think he would reach the end of the world, where the sun rests for the night. Still, his purse was as flat as when he set out from his father’s house.

“My father said follow the paths of the world



and you will find your fortune,” he thought to himself. “But I am as poor as I ever was. I will ask the advice of old people, for he said they are wise and will be able to help me.”

So Fransez began to look for the oldest person in the world. At last he reached a lonely spot, and saw a tiny hut. Its roof was very low, and it was covered with moss. From the inside came the whirr, whirr of a spinning wheel. An old lady was sitting spinning. Her skin was so lined, and her body so shrivelled that she must have been at least a hundred and fifty years old.

“Good day, Grandmother,” said Fransez. “You are the person I have been looking for, for my father told me to ask the advice of old people when I did not know what to do.”

The old lady put her finger to her lips. “Hush. Do not speak so loud, or you will awaken my grandmother.”

“Is your grandmother still alive?” cried Fransez. “She must be so old that she has lost count of her age.”

The grandmother had awoken and was trying to sit up. Her skin was like parchment, and her nose was so hooked that it almost met her chin. She had heard the traveller’s request and began to speak.

“So you are looking for your fortune, young man,” she said. “You will only find it on one condition; you must avoid men and defend the oppressed.”

As Fransez walked away he thought about this advice.

“Avoid men and defend the oppressed,” he thought. “How can I do that? I am no better off than I was.”

Still, his father had told him to follow the advice of old people, and he decided to take heed of the grandmother’s words. In the middle of a deep forest, far from mankind, he built a little hut. There he lived, surrounded by the birds and beasts, and he took care of weaker creatures and defended those that were in need.

One day he heard the cries of a bird. On drawing near he saw that it was about to eat a little bee, which had landed on a flower.

“Kuit! Kuit!” sang the bird, “M’hou tèbrou, kommér! M’hou tèbrou!” (I will eat you little gossip! I will eat you!)

With a blow of his stick, he felled the bird to the ground. Immediately he was surrounded by hundreds of bees. They did not sting him, but performed a graceful dance about his head.

“You have saved our Queen,” they buzzed. “How can we repay you?”

“The pleasure of having helped you is enough,” said Fransez.

“All the same, we are in your debt,” said the bees. “If you are ever in need, we will help you.”

The next day Fransez was walking through the forest when he heard the neighs of a terrified horse. The poor animal was being attacked by wolves, and could not protect itself.

“Another chance to defend the weak,” said Fransez. With a few blows of his stick he felled two or three wolves, and the remainder fled into the forest.

“Thank you, young man,” said the steed. “You have saved my life. I am the King’s horse, and I will repay this service.”

On his way home Fransez saw a sparrowhawk swoop down on a swallow that had landed to drink from a spring. In a moment he had killed the attacker and set the swallow free.

“Thank you,” said the bird, “You have rescued the Queen of the swallows. If you are ever in need, I and my subjects will fly to your aid.”

The surprises were not at an end. As the swallow flew away, Fransez heard the mewling of a cat. The poor creature was trying to defend her little ones from a large hound. Fransez slew the ferocious animal, and the cat began to purr with gratitude.

“You have saved us,” she said. “Know that I am Queen of the cats, and some day I will repay you.”

Seeing that animals were no different from men, Fransez left the forest and continued his travels. He walked and walked but he still could not find his fortune and he began to grow weary. He longed to return home, but he was afraid of what his father would say.

“When I was in the forest I helped many poor creatures,” he said to himself. “Maybe they can help me now.” Raising his voice, he called, “Queen of the swallows, where are you? Come to my aid.”

Almost immediately the bird appeared.

“How can I help you, master?” asked the swallow.

“I want to know how to find my fortune,” said Fransez.

The Queen of the swallows summoned all her



people, and Fransez asked them the same question.

“I do not know,” said the first swallow.

“Nor I,” said the second.

“I do,” said the third. “It lies in the castle of the Caragine¹, but no one can enter there. The castle is surrounded by three walls. Behind the first wall are thousands of rats, who will eat anyone who passes through. Behind the second are furious lions and behind the third is the Caragine. In the castle itself there is a prisoner. She is the King’s daughter, and she is the most beautiful creature in the world.”

Fransez did not stay to hear more. He walked over hills and rivers for many months until he reached the castle of the Caragine. It was as tall as the clouds, and it would have taken twenty men to open the door. This did not discourage Fransez.

He set his mighty shoulder against the door and burst it open. No sooner had he done so, but lo! fifty or a hundred rats leapt down and began to bite his face and neck.

“Queen of the cats, come to my aid,” he cried.

In the blink of an eye cats swarmed over the surrounding landscape and began to pour into the castle. Soon all the rats had been devoured.

“Queen of the bees, come to my aid,” called Fransez. As he said these words, he set his shoulder against the second door and burst it open. The lions rushed to meet him, but already a black cloud of bees was pouring through the door. They stung the lions and in the confusion the terrible beasts slew one another.

The Caragine had heard the dreadful noise, and came running to help his servants. Fransez did not hesitate; with a blow of his stick he felled the giant to the ground and rushed into the castle.

He was greeted with joy by the poor prisoner. The little swallow had spoken the truth for she was indeed the King’s daughter, and she was the most beautiful person in the world.

Fransez called the King’s horse to him, and told him to carry the good news to his master. When the King heard that his daughter was free, he was filled with joy, and vowed to give his whole kingdom to her saviour.

Soon the marriage of Fransez Pautremad and the King’s daughter was celebrated, and they lived happily in the Caragine’s castle for many years.

Told by M. l’abbé Le Moing, curate at Cléguer