



Once upon a time there lived near Guiscriff an old couple called Isidore and Mariannik. They had a little farm, called Loj ar Bleiz, and Isidore grew hemp and apples and buckwheat. Mariannik spun the hemp and made it into shirts, and they drank the sweetest cider and ate the crispest pancakes. They would have been quite content if they had only had some children.

They had made many pilgrimages to sacred places, and prayed to all the saints in heaven but it was as if they stopped their ears and said: "N 'entend ket, n 'entend ket" (I do not understand).

That year, after they had made their usual pilgrimage, Isidore said that he would not go again. He was growing old, and the journey was becoming difficult. Henceforward he would stay at Loj ar Bleiz.

Now, the old couple had a field that lay beside the open heath of Kernoalet.

It was here that Isidore grew his hemp, and a finer crop had never been seen. He went to look at it every day, for he knew that fierce winds could come blowing across the heath, and he was afraid the plants might be flattened.

One day Isidore was standing by his field when a great storm arose. In the blink of an eye it tore up the ripening hemp, and Isidore had to run and seek shelter.

He entered a sunken path and walked on until he came to a thicket. Through the trees he saw a charcoal burner's hut, which he had never seen before.

"I am in luck," he thought. "I can take shelter there from the storm."

He went over to the hut and opened the door. Inside was an old woman, wearing a round bonnet. She was stirring a cauldron of oat gruel, over a fire of heather and bracken. When she saw the old man she became very frightened.

“Unhappy man,” she cried. “Why have you come here? Do you not know that this is the home of the Caragine? He hates all mortal men, and may even kill you.”

“For the love of God,” said old Isidore, falling to his knees. “Save me from the Caragine.”

“I will do what I can,” said the old woman. “Never let it be said that Zabel Goz (old Isabel), the Caragine’s serving-woman, helps her master in his evil ways.”

So saying, the old woman hid Isidore beneath a pile of faggots.

In a little while the Caragine himself came to seek shelter from the storm. He was very tall, and the trees bent as he passed by. He stopped on the threshold and sniffed the air.

“A mortal man has been here, Zabel,” he said. “In fact, he may be here still, for I think I can smell him.”

“Oh no, dear master,” said Zabel Goz. “It is the oat gruel; think no more of it. You are tired and wet. Come in and warm yourself by the fire. Eat some of this delicious gruel, and drink this foaming cider.”

The giant sat down and began to drink jug after jug of cider. At last he became drowsy and rested his head on the table. Before long he was asleep, and Zabel went to bed and also fell asleep.

Isidore crept out of his hiding place and tiptoed across the room to the door. He hurried out and soon came to the road to Loj ar Bleiz. The storm was over and the night was calm. The moon shone in the sky, and was reflected in the waters of the Doe Pool. As Isidore drew nearer, he saw a white shape coming towards him.

“Who can this be?” he thought, and began to tremble. “Perhaps it is Ankou (*Death*) himself.”



The white shape came closer and he saw that it was a beautiful maiden. Her golden hair floated out behind her, and she was dressed in a linen gown that reached to her feet.

“Do not be afraid Isidore ar Bragou Bras*”, she said. “I mean you no harm. I am the fairy of the Doe Pool and I have known you for many years. I know the danger you have been in, and I can tell you that you were within an inch of losing your life. Good men like you should not have to suffer at the hands of wicked people, and I will give you a present to make up for your fright. Take this white cloth and spread it over the table at Loj ar Bleiz. Each time you open it out it will be covered with the choicest food. Go, you are always kind to the poor; now you will be able to feed them all. Invite them and invite your friends. They will become your children, and there will be many happy days at Loj ar Bleiz.

“Good fairy,” said Isidore, “how can I thank you?”

“It is very easy,” said the fairy. “Follow my advice and every day invite the poor and needy to your table. With this cloth I give you a second gift. Take this stick; it has magical powers. It will protect you from anything. When you wish to use it, say “gret ho micher!” (*do your work*) and when you wish to stop it say ‘ouazé, ma goalik!’ (*stop, my stick*). Now farewell, Isidore ar Bragou Bras. Be kind to the poor, beware of false friends, and be content.”

Isidore hurried home and found Mariannik anxiously watching out for him. He told her all that had happened, and showed her the white cloth.

“Now,” he said, “let us see what the fairy has given us.”

He spread the cloth on the table and there appeared before their wondering eyes the most delicious food and drink they had ever seen.

“It seems selfish to keep all this to ourselves,” said Isidore. “Let us invite our friends Francès the miller, and his wife Katel Goz, to take supper with us tomorrow.”

The next day Francès and Katel arrived, full of excitement about the meal. They were surprised to find Isidore smoking his pipe, and Mariannik spinning at her wheel.

“Am I mistaken,” asked Francès, “or did you invite us to supper tonight?”

“I did indeed,” said Isidore. “Here is the cloth, and we shall be served immediately.”

As if by magic, the dishes appeared, loaded with cakes, fruit, victuals, and delicious wines. Francès and Katel rubbed their eyes, and thought they were in a dream.

“What has happened to you my friend?” asked the miller. “Did you meet with a fairy on the road?”

“Maybe, maybe not,” said Isidore, who remembered the fairy’s advice not to trust false friends. “Whatever the case, this cloth and that stick in the corner are certainly mine.”

They began to eat and drink and old Isidore grew very talkative. He forgot the fairy’s words and told the miller all about how he had been given the tablecloth.

“Oh no, my cloth does not come from Rennes or Quimper, it is a gift of the fairies,” he said. “I shall not tell my secret to anyone, not even Francès.”

He and the two old women fell asleep, and only Francès the miller remained awake. He arose, hid the magical tablecloth in his breeches and left a cloth from the closet in its place. He returned home, delighted to have got the wonderful cloth for himself.

When Isidore and Mariannik awoke they saw what had happened.



“Do not cry, Mariannik,” said Isidore. “Francès has left us the stick and we will use that to punish them.”

A few days later Francès and Katel received another invitation to supper at Loj ar Bleiz. This time there was only plain fare, and Mariannik and Isidore were silent and thoughtful. The miller and his wife were ashamed, and wanted to return the stolen cloth, but their pride prevented them.

Before they returned home Isidore gave Francès the magic stick.

“Here, take this,” he said. “It is growing dark, and this stick will protect you.”

In his head he thought: “In a quarter of an hour ‘gret ho micher’.”

When Francès and Katel were half way home the stick flew up into the air and began to rain down blows like hailstones in March.

“Let us hurry back to Isidore,” cried the miller. “We must apologise for what we have done!”

The stick chased them all the way to Loj ar Bleiz, and they fell on their knees before Isidore and Mariannik.

“Forgive us, friends, forgive us,” they cried, and the stick dropped to the ground.

“Ouazé, ma goalik,” said Isidore. The friends embraced and kissed each other and they decided to hold a celebration, and to invite all the people round about.

From that time forth, Isidore and Mariannik lived happily, and were loved by everyone. No one in Guisriff ever went hungry, and amongst the poor folk they were known as Father and Mother.

Told by a nun at Kermaria