

The Story of Grandmother (French Folktale)

Collected by folklorist Achille Millien, ca. 1870

Translated from the French by Austin E. Fife

There was once a woman who had some bread, and she said to her daughter: "You are going to carry a hot loaf¹ and a bottle of milk to your grandmother.

The little girl departed. At the crossroads she met the *bzou*² who said to her:

"Where are you going?"

"I'm taking a hot loaf and a bottle of milk to my grandmother."

"What road are you taking," said the *bzou*, "the Needles Road or the Pins Road?"

"The Needles Road," said the little girl.

"Well, I shall take the Pins Road."

The little girl enjoyed herself picking up needles. Meanwhile the *bzou* arrived at her grandmother's, killed her, put some of her flesh in the pantry and a bottle of her blood on the shelf. The little girl arrived and knocked at the door.

"Push the door," said the *bzou*, "it's closed with a wet straw."

"Hello Grandmother; I'm bringing you a hot loaf and a bottle of milk."

"Put them in the pantry. You eat the meat that's in it and drink a bottle of wine on the shelf."

As she ate there was a little cat that said: "A slut is she who eats the flesh and drinks the blood of her grandmother!"

"Undress, my child," said the *bzou*, "and come and sleep beside me."

"Where should I put my apron?"

"Throw it in the fire, my child; you don't need it anymore."

"Where should I put my bodice?"³

"Throw it in the fire, my child; you don't need it anymore."



illustration by Antoine Clouzier (1697)

¹ *Époingne*. *Épigne*, a small loaf of bread, usually made for children, which has slashes on it made with a knife prior to cooking.

² [Achille Millien, note in manuscript]: I asked the storyteller: "What is a *bzou*?" He replied: "It's like the *brou*, or *garou* [werewolf; the modern French form is *loup-garou*]; but in this story I have never heard anything said except *bzou*."

³ an upper garment that has removable sleeves or no sleeves, often low-cut, worn in Europe from the 16th century to the 18th century

"Where should I put my dress?"
"Throw it in the fire, my child; you don't need it anymore."
"Where should I put my skirt?"
"Throw it in the fire, my child; you don't need it anymore."
"Where should I put my hose?"
"Throw it in the fire, my child; you don't need it anymore."
"Oh, Grandmother, how hairy you are!"
"It's to keep me warmer, my child"
"Oh, Grandmother, those long nails you have!"
"It's to scratch me better, my child."
"Oh, Grandmother, those big shoulders that you have!"
"All the better to carry kindling from the woods, my child."
"Oh, Grandmother, those big ears that you have!"
"All the better to hear you with, my child."
"Oh, Grandmother, that big mouth you have!"
"All the better to eat you with, my child!"
"Oh, Grandmother, I need to go outside to relieve myself."
"Do it in the bed, my child."
"No, Grandmother, I want to go outside."
"All right, but don't stay long."

The *bzou* tied a woolen thread to her foot and let her go out, and when the girl was outside she tied the end of the string to a big plum tree in the yard. The *bzou* got impatient and said:

"Are you making cables?"⁴

When he became aware that no one answered him, he jumped out of bed and saw that the little girl had escaped. He followed her, but he arrived at her house just at the moment she was safely inside.

⁴ i.e., "Are you defecating?" [In other words, the *bzou* wants to know why the girl is taking so long to return.]