

Grosse Pointe Historical Society

www.gphistorical.org



Le Lutin - A Legend of the Goblin Horseman

c.1746

By Jef Fisk

Narrator

Thirty years before the English colonies in North America delivered the Declaration of Independence to King George of England, there was a thriving community in Grosse Pointe. One local gentleman, Jacques L'Esperance, found his way to Grosse Pointe society through by way of his inheritance. He was known as Jaco. Upon the death of his father, Jaco found himself sole owner of a fine farm in Grosse Pointe. The soil was rich, and seemed to be full of promise. And Jaco was not lazy, but somehow his farming efforts did not meet with the same success of his neighbors. Perhaps his heart was not in it. However, he did have a way with horses. It was said that he could charm a wild horse into a saddle without so much as a carrot. He followed his equine gift to become one of the most celebrated horse breeders in what was known at the time as "The West".

It was during a race in the winter of 1746 on the ice along the shores of Lake St. Clair and Grand Marais, or great marsh, that Jaco gained his greatest triumph. Jaco was seated high on his horse and sleigh, well protected from the blasts of winter by his Indian-blanket coat with its deep black stripe. His hood was drawn tightly over his head, a wide red sash circling his waist, his hands covered with mole-skin gloves. Even though he was nearly covered in his winter protection, his voice was heard loud above the others as he urged his little Canadian pony on: "Avance donc Caribou! avance Lambreur!" With lightning speed he flew, and before the sound of his voice had died away only a tiny speck on the ice marked the horse and its

driver. Arriving at the Hotel of the Grand Marais, in his excitement he made bold claims about the speed and skill of his favorite horse L'éclair:

Jaco

There were cracks in the ice twenty feet wide and L'Eclair cleared them at a leap! She is, without a doubt the best pony that ever lived.

Narrator

After the race, Jaco could be seen every day riding L'Eclair along the lake shore. L'Eclair is the French word for Lightning and she carried herself as if she was aware of the admiration she created.

One night, Jaco went with the many of the other locals to a party at the home of Antoine Griffard. The host's magic violin playing could make the most unwilling feet dance the night away. And Jaco was no exception. He jigged and waltzed into the wee hours of the new day. At dawn, Jaco went to the stable to bridle L'Eclair, for he was finally exhausted and had a long drive back to his estate. When he entered the stable, he was horrified to find his prize pony all covered with foam, her mane all tangled with burrs. Jaco was outraged that anyone should have played such a trick! But not wanting to make a disturbance, Jaco held his tongue. However, he did decide that, when he came to Griffard's again, he would bring a less valuable horse.

But the next morning, and the next, he found his beloved L'Eclair again covered with foam, tired and wearied as if she had been ridden hard all night. He put a lock on his barn door, spread ashes about the entrance to discover the footsteps of the nocturnal intruder. Yet to his great amazement he found L'Eclair in the same heartbreaking state, the lock intact and no footprints on the ashes.

Jaco, much confused, went to talk with one of his good friends, Pierre, who listened carefully to his story, and at its conclusion, gazing around cautiously as if afraid of being overheard.

Pierre

"C'est Le Lutin qui la soigné", it is the goblin who takes her. This "Le Lutin" is a terrible monster that has haunted Grosse Pointe for many years. If, for some reason Le Lutin takes a dislike to you, he will torment you by riding your finest horses to exhaustion every night.

Jaco

I don't believe it! There is no monster. Someone is trying to get back at me for something... perhaps they are jealous because I won the race so handily.

Monster.... Baahh! I have heard of "La bete a Cornes," or horned beast. And some call it Le Lutin, as you have. But these are ghost stories that my mother told me as a child. There are no monsters!!

Pierre

Oh, my friend. Do not discard this explanation so quickly. What if it is true? Please brand your horses with a cross, or put a good-luck charm around their necks. What have you to lose? And if it IS Le Lutin, these small actions will protect you.

Narrator

Jaco, not believing any of this, returned home sad and discouraged. He had not heard what he wanted, and was determined to find out for himself who this enemy was.

A few nights later, by the light of the full moon, Jaco sat himself at his window where he could have a good view of his barn without being seen. Armed with his musket, he waited for his enemy. Not a sound disturbed the night air except the pulsing low murmuring of the waves against the beach, the rare lone cry of the fox, or the occasional splash of some restless bullfrog leaping to a more comfortable spot. All nature seemed to slumber. Suddenly a sound like the troubled neighing of a horse fell on his nearly sleeping ear. Keeping his eyes on the barn doors, he saw them slide silently open. Appearing briefly in the opening, his favorite L'Eclair, trembling like a leaf, flew out into the moonlit night air. On her back was a fearful vision. Jaco was no coward, but he felt his courage oozing out at his knees, as a cold chill chased down his back, and great beads of sweat materialized on his forehead. The monster resembled a baboon, with a horned head, a skin of bristling black hair, brilliantly glowing, restless eyes, and a devilish sneer on its face. It clutched L'Eclair's mane with one hand, and in the other he waved a thornbush stick with which he thrashed the pony.

Jaco recognized in an instant that his musket was powerless against such an enemy. Remembering the old method used to kill a demon, he seized the holy water font, one of which hung at the head of every good Christian's bed, and threw it down upon the monster as he passed beneath his window. A blood-curdling demon-like shriek filled the air, the horse snorted, reared, raced to the water's edge and plunged into the chilly waters of the lake. Jaco rushed to the lake in pursuit. When he arrived at the beach, only the circling water marked the spot where the frightened animal and its fiendish rider had disappeared.

Jaco, distraught, fired his musket to wake his neighbors, who rushed to the scene to find out what was the matter. Jaco told them his adventure. His disheveled

appearance, the absence of the horse, the broken fragments of the holy water font, and the thornbush stick dropped by the goblin, confirmed his tale.

Thereafter, like a sensible man, Jaco marked all his horses with a cross, fearing the return of Le Lutin. And until the automobile came to Grosse Pointe, its inhabitants retained this custom.

And if a Grosse Pointer went to the barn in the early morning and find his favorite horse reeking with sweat and foam, with its mane all tangled as if by the claws of a hideous beast, he would shake his head hopelessly and say, "It is Le Lutin come again."