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## Castle Oron

# The Legend of the Green Dame



Back then, one could die from love... For a change, I will tell you a story where there are no bad guys. At least, I think so, but... who knows?

We must acknowledge that we do not like peaceful love stories very much. Lovers remaining faithful until death make disillusioned people smile, who cannot be happy through their own doing.

When the Baron of Oron and his beloved wife felt that they were to leave this world on the wings of the black angel of plague, they entrusted their wee Péronnette to the old butler and his sister, a spinster whom locals called an unclaimed treasure of love. This old couple, retired in the castle, had served the Baron from his youth. So, the little girl was looked after by one who had never known love, who had never given birth, but who still found the gestures and the skills, which all mothers around the world invent since the dawn of ages, such as to smother with kisses this little bundle of tenderness and innocence. Thus in their old age they knew the joy of holding a child in their arms. Years went by as the river that flows in the nearby ravine. The little one grew up, as grew her wisdom, her poise and her grace. Now she is beautiful as a spring dawn, sweet as briar honey and pink as apple tree blossom. She is revered, people look at her walk by in her dress, green with silver linings. Mothers tell each other: "Here is our Green Dame passing by. The colour of her dress harmonizes so well with that of her eyes."

When she was of age, the officers of the Suzerain came to endow her with the Barony and the Castle. She lived happy days with the ones she called father and mother, learning about responsibility and kindness, waiting virtuously, as it should be, for the coming of a beloved. Will he come, will he not?

Sometimes she daydreams. This first love for a stranger, this rich May flame which will enlighten these green eyes. He will be handsome, he will be strong. When he takes her in his arms, he will almost hurt her. Is there anything sweeter than sharing one's days with one's beloved?

This is what young maidens dream about.

The soul to be loved appears on a windy day, coming from who knows where. Politely, he begs for hospitality. Gaudibert is handsome by nature, wise by nature, and poor by nature. As a second son, while the elder has inherited everything, he must make his own fortune. Of course he could have enlisted in the armies of foreign princes. As he is of noble extraction, he would have been given a command. However, he does not like war. He'd rather leave him with a hurdy-gurdy across his back, adventure in his head, poetry and love in his heart. He sings incognito on village squares, he tells stories and fables, legends of ancient kings, all that is learnt by word of mouth. He charms young and old, his voice carries, superbly at mass and vespers, so well that deacons and choir boys shut up to listen. On the church's court, as a follower of the Juggler of Notre-Dame, he performs tricks that transport the boors to the marvellous world of the impossible. He was allowed to enter, and when he saw the mistress of the realm, he had this tell-tale shiver.

Love, sung so often for others, did the deed for him. He thought to himself: "This is the one and none other." Péronnette with the green eyes saw Gaudibert and thought: "This is the one and none other."

Love does not dilly-dally. The handsome rover disclosed his noble origin to the old parents and confessed his poverty. He has hesitations about loving a rich maiden when he has nothing but himself to his name. Péronnette herself believes that love knows no price and that Gaudibert is worth more than any riches. Money is not a problem for those who are in love. After the bishop uncle called for the benediction and the protection of He who invented love upon the newlyweds, the latter experienced an unforgettable honeymoon. The old butler and his sister share in the joy of their children, happy with the knowledge that the one they cherish will not be alone when they leave this world.

Happiness does not last on this Earth. Fate, ever so jealous, and Destiny, her accomplice, do not like to see humans happy and make short-lived bliss even shorter.

One morning, as Péronette is still sleeping, Gaudibert rides out to the forests and marshes of La Glâne. An early rising peasant saw him riding near the Pierraz bridge, and being met by a mysterious stranger on a black horse. They both disappeared behind the willows that line the small river.

Then... nothing. The day goes by, night falls and no one comes back to the castle.

Forebodings dark as black butterflies shoot through Péronette's heart, eaten away by worries. Without telling anyone, the young woman saddles her horse. Only dressed in her green dress, she leaves to look for the soul she cherishes more than anything in the world, through a night which the moon makes a dark, bluish day. She dives into mystery and... her ride alone returns to the castle.

What happened? Where did she roam? Did she fall, did her pretty head hit a low hanging limb? Did she call, did she mouth or shout the name of her beloved?

Tired from searching so long, from crying so much, dropping with fatigue, with a sob of despair she fell asleep forever, amongst the meadow-sweets and the buttercups.

I told you that one could die out of love. The marshes and the bushes of the Glâne keep their secrets and mysteries dearly. Neither the body of her beloved nor hers were ever found. It fell to the old man and his sister to wait in vain for those they considered as their children, who were swallowed by the void.

In his wisdom, despite his deep sorrow, the old man murmured: "Sir God reunites always those who love each other, wherever they are."

Since then, those who can read between the lines, who can imagine between ideas, who can see beyond what the eye perceives, those who can hear a shadow pass by, those espy, through a fine, dreamy haze, the one that is called the Green Dame ever since.

She walks from room to room, without making any more noise than a rising day. On the tippy-toes of her pretty feet, she passes by. She smiles when looking at a visiting friar who snores, with his mouth open, in the Prior's bedroom. Unwittingly, she makes a floor slat creek when she goes to the deserted kitchen, which still smells of grease and cold ashes. She is not hungry. You know very well that roving souls feed on the dreams of live people. If you pay real attention, you can see the linen on the distaff. You think you may have seen the spinning-wheel turn, or a curtain quiver in front of the window. In the library, all the sudden a page from an open book turns over by itself and you think you heard two notes from the harp in the music room.

On windy evenings, she takes shelter in the turret, from where she thinks still she will see the one she is waiting for appear. On clear nights, she goes, airy and light, among the birches, the alders and the dog-rose bushes, ruffling the leaves and the willow-herbs in the wet forests. To the lonely soul desperately looking for tenderness, she lets herself be spied in her green dress and her untied blond hair. She will appear in a ray of moonshine, immaterial and silvery. Then she will go back to the Castle and the imagination of those who see with the heart, where no one can dislodge her from, even the disbelievers.

Some say that she shakes latches and door handles.

To those who believe this, much good may it do!... I, for one, know that this is not true. She is much too well-behaved to wake those who are dreaming.