

The magpie and the pillory

In the small village of Vellereille-le-Sec, life passed by pleasantly with the seasons.

The merry month of May had returned ; the hawthorn trees were in full bloom and in the castle everyone was busy with the daily chores.

Every week Mary had to take care of the laundry.

But the linen sheets she had to soak and wring out in the icy cold water at the washhouse were very heavy.

After washing them, she had to leave them to bleach twice on the meadow and eventually she ironed them with the flat irons that were put to heat on the kitchen stove.

But once she had completed her work, Mary proudly carried the bedlinen exuding the sweet smell of spring to her mistress's closet.

That evening Mary was tired : she had been ironing the whole day but she was so glad to see the nicely stacked and neatly folded bed linen under a small bouquet of lavender.

Suddenly screams filled the air : "Stop thief! Stop thief! My jewellery! Somebody has stolen my jewellery!"

The Baroness was out of her mind and running all around, screaming in a panic.

Monsieur le Baron walked up the stairs to the room in alarm. He began searching everywhere, under the table, in the drawers, under the bed, in the smallest corners, but this did not help : the jewels were missing!

The following morning Mary was summoned in front of her masters in the great hall.

Monsieur le Baron spoke : "Mary, you know that Madame's jewellery are missing.

Yesterday you were the only person to enter the room where they were kept. You stole the jewels! Tell us where you are hiding them! "

Mary broke down into tears. She could only keep saying again and again : "I have not stolen anything!"

She kept repeating it hundreds of times, not knowing how to answer the Baron's questions.

In the end he ordered : "Put her in the stocks!"

The poor girl was tied to the pole of shame on the small village square.

And the next day everybody in the village came by to see Mary, the maidservant from the castle, who had committed a theft.

She remained in the stocks for eight days but she never confessed.

Some time later, the Baron's gamekeeper noticed the strange behaviour of a magpie that was flying from the castle to a tree top.

He watched as the bird was flying towards an old oak tree.

He noticed the bird's nest, fired a shot and disintegrated the nest that was hanging flimsily from the top of the tree to a mass of twigs and small sticks and was stunned to see the Baroness's jewels fall to the ground !

The thievish magpie flew away chattering in anger at the treasure that had just been taken away from her.

Later the same day, the upset villagers gathered on the market place.

Everybody was talking loudly and wildly and waving as they spoke. One of the farmers tied a rope round the pillory and all the villagers began pulling and chanting : " Come on lads! Come on! Let it fall down!"

They pulled so hard that the pillory eventually came crashing down.

Since then, on the small square of the village of Vellereille-le-Sec, buried in the grass, lie the few remaining stones of what was once the pillory.