



La Chasse-Galerie (The Flying Canoe)

a voyageur's tale of the North Country

retold and set to music by Lynn Noel as Lisette Duval

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The Flying Canoe

La Chasse-Galerie

SCENE: A log cabin somewhere northwest of Lake Superior. Everyone is doing make-work. The PRIEST is reading in his Bible, mumbling in a monotone. Around him the VOYAGEURS are lounging by the fire, bored and lonely. PHILIPPE is doodling annoyingly on a whistle. François is the only one intent on his task, finishing his shaving in preparation to a visit with his femme du pays. The others are mending snowshoes or winter clothing, picking their teeth with a knife, playing cards, drinking from a stoneware bottle, etc. The scene stays like this for long enough to make the audience a little nervous, and also to set the social situation wordlessly. Thomas is particularly annoyed with Philippe for making the annoying sounds he makes.

Scene I: A cabin in le pays d'en haut (the North country)

instrumental and readings: The Huron Carol

PHILIPPE: [putting aside whistle, looking out into space]: This is going to be a long winter. [After a pause, he begins playing again]

THOMAS: It already is. [All laugh, a little grimly]

PHILIPPE: [sighing, oblivious] If only my Marie were here. Or I in Quebec. [All groan]

THOMAS: For God's sake, someone shut him up!

PRIEST: [patiently] Philippe, tonight the New Year begins. Think. It will be four months until the ice goes out, and then another two months in the canoe 'til Montreal, and another week until you see Trois Rivieres. This pining will drive you mad. You know I try to encourage patience and prayer, but... [he is at a loss for words]

THOMAS: For all our sakes, get a girl. Put your whistle to better use, eh? [all laugh]

PHILIPPE: You don't understand! I told Marie, I swore to her, I would be true to her.

THOMAS: Oh, have some sense. It's the new year, the time to change sweethearts. Besides, you're a voyageur now. There's no reason you can't still marry your Marie, but who would be foolish to spend half his life without the company of women?

PHILIPPE: You can talk all you want, but I won't betray her. [VOYAGEURS shake their head and give up, except for priest, who tries to think of something to say]

PRIEST: [at last] Patience and prayer. [shrugs and gives up. There is a pause, and PHILIPPE begins to doodle again]

TI-JEAN: [enters with a brace of stone-cold rabbits] Look my friends! A feast for the New Year! [All cheer, all but Thomas and Philippe turn in to examine the rabbits]

turns away and stares into fire

Mon Jo (Philippe)

*C'est aujourd'hui, jour de l'An
Gai lon la, mon jo malurette
C'est aujourd'hui, jour de l'An*

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*Il faut changer d'maîtresse
Il faut changer d'maîtresse, mon jo
Il faut changer d'maîtresse.*

*Échangera qui voudra...
Moi, je garde la mienne...*

*Et comme il serait doux...
De dormir avec elle...*

*C'est aujourd'hui, jour de l'An
Il faut changer maîtresse
Il faut changer maîtresse, mon jo
Je n' changerai pas d'maîtresse.*

TI-JEAN: For the love of God...For the sake of our sanity, go with Thomas tonight. His Isabel's sister is just your type...

PHILIPPE: Ah, go to the Devil, and let me be!

BLACKOUT ON CABIN, DIM LIGHT UP ON THE MAN IN BLACK

MAN IN BLACK: [laughs, deeply] It is well known that the gentleman in black has very good hearing. He can hear his name called, anywhere on earth. [shrugs] Truth be told, he hears it so much he has not enough time to pay attention. What he *notices* is his name called in the heat of desire. A young man who would give anything...well.... [laughs, exits]

Scene II: The farm in old Quebec

SCENE: A farmhouse kitchen, Trois Rivieres, Quebec. Girls are working by the fire, spinning, mending, and tending the cooking. They are primping for the New Year's dance, putting the house in order and fixing each other's hair and dress. LISETTE enters after a few seconds

LISETTE: Only an hour before sundown. Marie, is your dress ready?

MARIE: Oh, I suppose. If only Philippe could take me to the dance tonight!

LISETTE: Don't be such a foolish girl, Marie. You know Armand has his eye on you. Twice he's asked to take you. Don't tell me you're going to stand him up. [Marie is silent] Too bad for you to fall in love with the youngest brother. You know what they say: the first gets the farm, the Army gets the second, the Church gets the third, and all the rest go to the Company or to the Devil, it's all the same. Why would you want a flea-bitten youngest son who isn't even with *la Compagnie*? You could be a farmer's wife, a *habitante*. Armand has a good five acres of bottom land, his horse is fat. [She shrugs] *He's fat*. I know, I know, he's a fat old man of thirty, and in a few short months your fine Philippe will come down the river weighted down with furs, and you'll be married by the bishop himself and live in a house carpeted with fur. [Marie smiles]. Hopeless. Completely hopeless.

MARIE: Philippe promised he'd be true to me, "Moi, je ne changerai pas d'maîtresse," he sings to me. I won't change my sweetheart; I'm not one

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of those boys that makes pretty love for a day or two, like a bird that flies away. I'll be like that too: when I love, I love with my whole heart, forever.
[sighs]

Quand-t-e j'aime

*Je ne suis pas d'ces jeunes amoureux
Qui font l'amour un jour ou deux (2x)
Quand-t-e j'aime, j'aime,
Quand-t-e j'aime, mon coeur aime,
J'aimerais cent fois le jour
O! cher amie, c'est pour toujours.*

*Je ne suis pas d'ces oiseaux de champs
Qui font l'amour en voltigeant (2x)
Quand-t-e j'aime...*

*Je ne suis pas d'ces capucins
Qui font l'amour sans aucun dessein (2x)
Quand-t-e j'aime...*

LISSETTE: Very pretty.

MARIE: You don't understand. I love Philippe, and...

LISSETTE: ...and he loves you. But there are many charming Métis ladies out on Lake Superior. He's probably got one in his arms tonight...

MARIE: Never! he's faithful, my Philippe is!

LISSETTE: Oh, certainly, certainly. Voyageurs are always fine men... to both their wives. [The thought distresses Marie greatly] Oh dear, I'm sorry. There, there. [Marie sniffles] This is going to be a long winter, I can see it now.

MARIE: I'm sorry, my sister.

LISSETTE: I know, I know. Now. If you won't accept Armand as your escort, will you at least come and dance. Do you good, get your blood flowing.

MARIE: Of course. [to audience] Oh, if only he were here. I can almost see him, trudging towards me through the snow...fadeout on QUEBEC as Marie turns to go back to her dress. lights up on CABIN

Scene III: La Chasse-Galerie (the wild ride)

instrumental: Mon Jo

Philippe is still off to the side, put out, throughout this scene.

THOMAS: That was a fine stew. What a way to begin the year! I should be away to the camp. Isabel awaits. [he begins to pull together his things]

TI-JEAN: Myself, I would choose the tavern over the girls. That's the real trouble with this place. No more high wine, and no good beer. But we make do, we make do! [raises a glass of home-brew]

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THOMAS: Well then, Ti-Jean, give us a tavern tune to fetch the Devil out!

TI-JEAN: Ha ha! Yes! [pulls out his own whistle]

pennywhistle: Réel du Diable Devil's Dream

PRIEST: And so it was that the blackness in Philippe's heart drew a deeper blackness toward him. For as he spoke, there appeared to him a shadowed figure of a Man in Black, who beckoned from the doorway. My heart sank, for none of his companions spared a glance from their jokes as he drew young Philippe toward him. And in the shadows they talked for a long time.

THE MAN IN BLACK & PHILIPPE mime actions as PRIEST speaks; MAN IN BLACK disappears mysteriously and PHILIPPE turns to VOYAGEURS

PHILIPPE: Ha HA! *compagnons!* rejoice! Come sing with me, for tonight we go to Quebec!

TI-JEAN: Dear God, the winter's gotten into the boy's brains. [they back away]

THOMAS: It will be five months or more before the ice is out, and then we can only begin the summer's journey!

PHILIPPE: No, no, my friends, listen to me! My friend in black has promised us a ride in the *Chasse-Galerie* -- the flying canoe! We can be in Quebec in a moment, in a breath, in a song! Come, sing for me to celebrate, for we will be in the taverns of Trois-Rivières tonight!

Chevaliers de la Table Ronde, verses 1-3

*Chevaliers de la table ronde, goûtons voir si le vin est bon.
repeat French or sing in English
Come ye knights of the Table Round and drink a glass of this sunny
wine.
Goûtons voir, oui oui oui, drink a glass, oui, oui oui
Goûtons voir, non non non, drink a glass, non non non
Goûtons voir si le vin est bon. drink a glass of this sunny wine.*

*S'il est bon, s'il est agréable, j'en boirai jusqu'à mon plaisir.
If the flavor be fine and mellow I will drink, drink and drink again.
J'en boirai... I will drink...*

*J'en boirai cinq ou six bouteilles, une femme sur mes genoux.
I will drink six or seven bottles, with a girl right upon my knee.
Une femme... with a girl...*

they break off as TI-JEAN pulls one of the VOYAGEURS down on his knee like a girl, and they tussle. PHILIPPE breaks away and calls them to order.

PHILIPPE: Now, my friends, quickly, for the night goes fast. Three things the Man in Black has said I must tell you about this canoe. First, we must sing to make the journey. You all know "*Canot d'écorce?*"

they nod

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PHILIPPE: Good. For this canoe, she will fly in the air as we paddle. But second, we must be very careful not to steer her too near to a church -- we must never hit a church steeple. And third, we must never swear upon the Church. For while the English, they swear upon the parts of the body, the body functions, so we make our blackest curses out of the Church and her parts.

TI-JEAN: Ah, *cathédrale* ! pronounced *kah-tay-drahl*

PHILIPPE: No, no, my friend, that is just what you must never say! For if you do, we are all lost! And one more thing -- we must return by midnight, or never again! Come, are you ready? to audience You must all help!

PRIEST: And so they climbed into the Devil's canoe, and took up their paddles. And they began to sing, and the canoe climbed higher and higher into the night sky.

Canot d'écorce

|: *Canot d'écorce qui vole, qui vole, Canot d'écorce qui va voler.* :|

THOMAS: Look! We are flying higher than the treetops!

|: *Canot d'écorce qui vole, qui vole, Canot d'écorce qui va voler.* :|

PHILIPPE: Look! We are flying with the geese! We are flying faster than the geese!

|: *Canot d'écorce qui vole, qui vole, Canot d'écorce qui va voler.* :|

PRIEST: Mon dieu! We are paddling up to the heavens!

|: *Canot d'écorce qui vole, qui vole, Canot d'écorce qui va voler.* :|

THOMAS: It's Lake Superior! And Huron!

|: *Canot d'écorce qui vole, qui vole, Canot d'écorce qui va voler.* :|

PHILIPPE: Look! the lights of Quebec!

TI-JEAN: I can see the taverns now!

Scene IV: The New Year's Dance

chorus enter calling and shouting

Why what is this? Look, it's Thomas! Ti-Jean, you are in the Northwest this long winter! What brings you here?

MARIE: Philippe! Philippe! [they run together and take hands] I was sure you would not be back until midsummer!

PHILIPPE: But here I am! And glad of it! [gives her a daring kiss] Come on, let's have a dance!

Si Mon Moine Voulait Danser

*Ah, si mon moine voulait danser
Ah, si mon moine voulait danser*

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*Un chapelet je lui donnerai
Un chapelet je lui donnerai.*

*Danse, mon moine, danse, Tu n'entends pas la danse
(Dan-seh, moñ mwañ, dan-seh, too nañ-tañ pah la dan-seh)
Tu n'entends pas mon moulin, lon la, tu n'entends pas mon moulin
marcher.
(too nañ-tañ pah moñ moo-lañ loñ la, too nañ-tañ pah mon moolañ
marshay.)*

*Ah, si mon moine voulait danser
Ah, si mon moine voulait danser
Un ceinturon je lui donnerai
Un ceinturon je lui donnerai.
REFRAIN*

*Ah, si mon moine voulait danser
Ah, si mon moine voulait danser
Un beau psautier je lui donnerai
Un beau psautier je lui donnerai.
REFRAIN*

*S'il n'avait fait vœux de pauvreté
S'il n'avait fait vœux de pauvreté
Bien d'autres choses je lui donnerai
Bien d'autres choses je lui donnerai.*

*TRANSLATION:
If my old top were a dancing man (2x)
A fine red sash I would give him then (2x)
(a robe so fine, a Bible bound)*

*If he'd not taken a monk's poor vows (2x)
Much finer things would I give him then! (2x)*

*REFRAIN Dance, my old top, dance now,
You do not hear the dance now
You do not hear my old mill run round (2x)*

THOMAS: Cousins, cousins! Do you remember the song I taught you when I came back from the wars?

COUSINES: Napoleon with his five hundred soldiers?

THOMAS: Yes, yes! (all sing)

Napoléon avait cinq cents soldats

*Napoléon avait cinq cents soldats
Napoléon avait cinq cents soldats
Napoléon avait cinq cents soldats
Marchant à même pas.*

TI-JEAN: Your canoe has led us a merry dance, Philippe! Myself, I've got a fine partner [holds up a bottle] and she's singing to me with a sweet voice! [during the next song, CHORUS acts out the verses with him as TI-JEAN swaggers, mugs and generally shows off. For the "four drunks" verse,

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THOMAS can choose four large men out of the audience to help him hoist TI-JEAN and carry him to a bench to “bury him” with a flag and a tombstone.]

Chevaliers de la Table Ronde, verses 4-6

Si je meurs, je veux qu'en m'enterre dans une cave ou il y a du bon vin.

*When I die, then let me be buried in a vault full of vintage wine.
Dans une cave...In a vault...*

*Les deux pieds contre la muraille, et la tête sous le robinet
My two feet up against the side wall and the tap right above my head.
Et la tête... and the tap...*

*Et les quatres plus grands ivrognes vont porter les quat' coins du drap.
Let the four biggest drunks around here carry me to my resting place.
Vont porter... Carry me...*

*Sur ma tombe, je veux qu'on inscrive, Ici gît le roi des buveurs.
On my grave, let them carve this saying, Here he lies, King of all the Drunks.
Ici gît... Here he lies...*

*La morale de cette histoire, c'est de boire avant de mourir.
And the moral of this fine story is, We must drink, drink before we die.
C'est de boire... We must drink...*

[everyone is laughing; bell tolls midnight and all FREEZE except voyageurs]

PHILIPPE: Quickly, quickly! Into the canoe! All of you! Hurry!

|: *Canot d'écorce qui vole, qui vole, Canot d'écorce qui va voler.* :|

|: *Canot d'écorce qui vole, qui vole, Canot d'écorce qui va voler.* :|

|: *Canot d'écorce qui vole, qui vole, Canot d'écorce qui va voler.* :|

TI-JEAN: [groans and sways in his seat; he has had far too much to drink]

PHILIPPE: Give me that! [snatches TI-JEAN's paddle from him]

THOMAS: [slurred but still conscious] You greenhorn! Mangeur de lard! Pork-eaters can't make gouvernail for three winters! [tries for the paddle, but PHILIPPE has it firmly; he knows he is the only “designated driver”] Look out! At Mackinac -- the church steeple!

TI-JEAN: *Ah! Cathédrale!*

PHILIPPE: Ah, non! We are lost!

LIGHT CHASE

SCENEIV: Back in the Cabin

optional for PRIEST or a NARRATOR/EPILOGUIST: “The canoe was bouleversé -- rolled over until they tumbled out like dried peas out of a shell, and down, down, over and over in the spinning darkness until they landed with a bump! before the fire.”

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TI-JEAN: Oh, my head! What hit me?

THOMAS: I think I have drunk too much of that high wine, and I am dizzy as if I had been flying through the air!

MAN IN BLACK APPEARS IN THE DOORWAY

PHILIPPE: Look! Do you see him?

MAN IN BLACK: You are safe this time, but next time you belong to me! [laughs evilly and vanishes]

PRIEST: And so you see Philippe, you must not rush the cycle of the seasons, for the Man in Black is strongest at the New Year. Spring will come, the rivers will melt, and you will see your Marie in good time.

PHILIPPE: Oh, yes, Father, I see it now.

TI-JEAN: *Non, non, mon père !* That is not the moral! The moral is, we must DRINK before we die!

reprise last verse of Chevaliers and improvise dance

Epilogue: The Voyageur

(by William Henry Drummond)

*Dere's somet'ing stirrin' ma blood tonight
On dis night of de young New Year
W'en de light is warm, and de fire is bright
And de bouteille is close at 'and
Out on de rivièrè de nort' wind blow
Down in de valley is pile de snow
But what do wwe care, so long we know
We're safe on de log cabane.*

*Drink to de 'ealt' of your wife an' girl
Another one for your frien'
Den give me a chance, for in all de worl'
I've not many frien' to spare
I was born w'ere de mountain scrape de sky
And bone of my fadder an moder lie
So we'll fill de glass, and we'll raise it high
An' we'll drink to de voyageur!*

*Ask him de nort' wind, w'hat 'e see
Of de voyageur long ago
An' he'll say to you what 'e say to me
So lissen 'is story well
I see de track of his botte sauvage
On many a hill and long portage
far, far away from 'is own village
An' de soun' of de parish bell*

*De women an' children runnin' out
Of de wigwam of de Cree
De little papoose, dey laugh and shout
When de soun' of 'is voice dey 'ear
De oldes' warrior of de Sioux
Kill hissself dancin' de whole night t'rough
An' de Blackfoot girl remembers too
De old time voyageur.*

*De light of his camp on de snow I see
An' I lissen 'is "En roulant"
[CHORUS sings one chorus of "En
roulant ma boule" sotto voce]
Out where de reindeer travel free
Ringin' out strong an' clear
Often the grey wolf sit before
De light is come from 'is open door
An' de caribou follow along de shore
De song of de voyageur.*

*If 'e only keep going, dat red ceinture
I see 'im along de Pole!
One mornin' e's startin' along de tour
For blowin' de worl' around
But wherever 'e sail, an' wherever 'e ride
De trail is long, and de trail is wide*

*An' city and town on every side
Can tell of 'is camping ground.*

*So dat's de raison I drink tonight
To de man of de Grand Nor'west
For 'is 'eart was young and 'is eart was light
So long as 'e's livin' dere
I'm proud of de same blood in my veins
I'm a son of de Nort' wind once again
So we'll fill 'er up 'til de bottle's drain
And we'll drink -- to de VOYAGEUR!*

*PAUSE for applause, then LIGHTS UP for a
final ALL SING with audience*

Reprise of C'est l'aviron (whole cast and audience)

*A la santé de son père et sa mère (2x)
(Ah la sañtay de soñ paii et sah mair)
A la santé de ses soeurs et ses frères
REFRAIN
(Ah la sañtay de sasay sir ay ses frair)*

*A la santé de ses soeurs et ses frères (2x)
A la santé de celui qui son coeur aime
REFRAIN
(Ah la sañtay de sellwee key soñ ker
ehm-uh)*

**ALL raise hands in salute and SHOUT:
Santé! [BLACKOUT]**

Props List for the Devil's Canoe

This tale can be told with no props at all, or staged more elaborately. Here's what we used for a 10-person version at Heritage Hill State Park in Wisconsin in 1989, and again at Parish Players in 1996.

- *candle and candlestick*
- *priest's robe a choir robe is great*
- *old-looking or leather-bound book priest can conceal his script in here*
- *wine bottle*
- *tin cups three, or enough for all cast*
- *long bench for Ti-Jean to "die" on during drinking song*
- *small firkin or barrel*
- *reversible sign saying WINE CELLAR/HERE LIES THE KING OF THE DRINKERS*
- *ours was shaped like a tombstone & reversed upside down as a tavern sign*
- *fleur-de-lis flag or any equivalent -- a bath towel works fine*
- *"a fine red sash" for priest in Si Mon Moine*
- *"robe so fine" -- we used a red priest's cape, you can improvise*
- *the big book again, or another one*
- *bell, pot, or something to ring midnight on can also use guitar*
- *black cloak and/or hat for The Man in Black*
- *improvised 18th century French-Canadian clothing: knee breeches, long socks, and open-necked shirts with caps & sashes for men; long skirts, bodices and white open-necked chemises or blouses with daycaps for women*
- **** canoe: our most important prop! We had made for us a ten-foot "canoe" painted on white muslin, and appliquéd onto a denim drop with a sleeve at top for insertion of a 1" x 1"x10' wooden rod ours was in two sections screwed together. The voyageurs stand behind it and hold it at their waists to give the illusion that they are "flying" in the magical canoe.*