

Malevolent Maine

Episode 2: Le Chatouilleur

Malevolent Maine is a horror podcast, and may contain material not suitable for all audiences. Listener discretion is advised.

The odd.

The strange.

The unexplained.

Ghosts. Cryptids. UFOs. Demonic possessions. Some call it the supernatural or the paranormal. Some claim there are forces outside our understanding working just beyond our ability to perceive them. Many denounce these as superstition and the product of an overactive imagination.

But what if they are real? What if, hiding just beneath the surface of this ordinary, mundane world is something else, something that can't be defined by logic and reasoning, something... malevolent.

We investigate the paranormal, the eerie, and the abnormal in the great state of Maine. Lots of people have a story they can't tell because it is too wild, too illogical, or just too unbelievable.

Well... we believe you.

This is Malevolent Maine.

Intro

Welcome back, MMers! We come to you today with a story out of Belfast. Have you ever heard the tale of "Le Chatouilleur"? It's a story that's circulated around Belfast for decades, but recently has gained some serious traction.

Maurice Plumes was born in 1913 and even from a young age was a bit odd. He stared at things for too long, often going hours without moving or speaking. For the first four years of his life his parents thought he was suffering from an intellectual disability. That turned out not to be the case, at least the 1920s standards, but perhaps there was something to his parents' initial suspicions that something was *off* about their son.

In grade school Maurice would often get in trouble for tickling other students. In the middle of class he would reach forward and lightly brush his fingers across some unsuspecting student's neck, causing a gasp or a shiver. Other times he would dig his fingers into their ribs or the small of their back, making them jump and howl. Teachers reprimanded Maurice and told him to keep his hands to himself, but his tickling got so bad he was once sent home from school.

He eventually grew up and got a job in the Fanghorn Textile Mill, specializing in making quilts. Even then, he was still known for his tickling. He'd often sneak up behind a distracted co-worker and tickle the back of his knee or reach around and dig deep into the belly. He soon found that the feathers from the quilts made excellent tickling tools, and would always keep one or two in his pocket to tickle the ear of some caught-off-guard worker. It was mostly harmless, and those close to Maurice just assumed he was an eccentric guy.

We reached out to his granddaughter, Amelia Plumes, to see what she had to say about the story.

[AMELIA:] "Pepere Maurice, well, he was always so nice to us. He would give us, me and my three siblings, a dollar apiece and send us down to the corner store to buy whatever we wanted. As kids we would sleep over their house a lot. Pepere and Memere had the most comfortable down blankets and pillows - I think he got them from when he worked in the factory. But You always had to be careful around Pepere Maurice though. If he caught you walking by, not paying attention he'd reach out and tickle you real quick. It was good fun when we were little, but it got more annoying as we grew up. Sometimes, in the middle of the night, I would wake up because something was tickling my feet, and there would be Pepere Maurice standing at the end of my bed with one of his big, white feathers, and a huge smile on his face. I know that sounds creepy, but it wasn't. I mean, it was just Pepere, you know? Grandfathers like to play silly games with their grandkids. Right?"

As he got older, Pepere Maurice (as the community came to call him) would walk around the neighborhood, one feather tucked in his shirt pocket. As he walked the street, he'd peek in to his neighbors out on their lawns. If he saw anyone without their shoes on, he'd lean in and whisper. "Oooh, watch those tootsies and footsies or le chatouilleur will get them." Some kids played along, others were scared.

Ben Williams, who grew up three houses down from Pepere Maurice remembers those warnings clearly.

[BEN:] "He was old, by then. This would have been 1990 or 91, so he had to be like almost eighty, right? He'd just come down the street. He walked like everyday, I remember that. He'd walk by and if you were out on the sidewalk or your lawn and he saw you didn't have shoes, he'd whisper that tootsies and footsies thing. He always had this smile, you know? At first it was like, oh he's just a kind old man - Pepere Maurice, right? But after a while you noticed that it didn't look right. I don't know how to describe it, but it was like he wasn't really smiling, just wearing like a Halloween mask of a smile. Do you know what I

mean? I started wearing shoes all the time in the 90s. Outside, inside, it didn't matter. I was convinced Le Chatouilleur would get me. I didn't even know what that was until I took French in high school. I thought it was some kind of monster."

Le Chatouilleur. The Tickler.

Diane Lachance was Maurice's neighbor for thirty-five years.

[DIANE:] "They were nice people, Cindy and Maurice. At least, I thought so. I woke up one night and Maurice was in my room. I lived by myself ever since my Robert passed. He was standing there at the foot of my bed and he had this long white thing in his hand. It was a feather and he was running it up and down the soles of my feet. It was dark, and all I could see was that big smile. It stretched too far, like a clown. I didn't scream, but I sat up in bed and said, 'Maurice what are you doing here?' I think I was more confused than scared. He took a step backwards, blending in with the shadows so all I could see was that weird grin and the big feather. I heard him whisper, 'Tootsies and footsies,' real low. Then he was gone. The next morning I thought it must have been a dream because when I left the house to go to work, there was Maurice, watering the flowers. He waved and said good morning just like nothing had happened."

Le Chatouilleur made several more midnight appearances over the years. Several children reported boogey men and monsters in their rooms, with big teeth and long white fingers who tried to grab their legs. Parents just assumed it was typical kid stuff. Said one man we talked to, who had small children back in the early 2000s, "I wish we had known, you know? We just thought it was normal boogeyman stuff. I used to be afraid of a monster under my bed, I assumed it was just that, you know? Looking back, knowing what I know now, yeah I would have done things differently."

Maurice Plumes died in 2011, two years shy of his 100th birthday. He is buried in the local cemetery. His grave reads, "Beloved Husband, Father, Pepere."

But the story of Le Chatouilleur doesn't end there. In 2015 a young woman renting her first apartment in the neighborhood awoke to a man standing at the foot of her bed. "The blankets were off," the woman, who wished not be identified told us. "I wasn't wearing... I mean, I was sleeping, so I had on a tank top and sleep shorts. It was hot, so I must have kicked all the blankets off. He was standing there, this big, huge smile on his face - like, I think they describe it in books as wolfish. He had this feather in his hand and he was tickling my feet. I don't know how long he was standing there before I woke up, but he was whispering, 'Tootsies and footsies. Tootsies and footsies.' Over and over again."

The woman screamed and jumped out of bed. She called the police but there was no sign of the man anywhere in her apartment, no sign anyone but the woman had been in the house at all. They did find one single white feather beneath her bed, but there was no indication that this had been brought in by an assailant.

Over the years reports of La Chatouilleur popped up from time to time. They were always unexplained, always accompanied by a single white feather left behind. They were written off as nightmares, but the long-time locals knew.

[BEN:] "Pepere Maurice...I mean, I was all grown up and moved away by then, but I heard stories. My mom told me about some of them. I knew right away what it was. I mean, I'm not saying he ever tickled me, but I knew kids, right? I knew Pepere Maurice did that stuff. We all did. And no one did anything."

Has Pepere Maurice come back from the dead to haunt the feet of unsuspecting individuals? Is this just the collective paranoia of generations of people who grew up remembering the man they called Le Catouilleur? And if it is the spirit of Maurice Plumes, back from beyond the veil, why has he come back? Just to send that tingle up the spines or the soles of the feet of the living? Or is there a more sinister purpose to his tickling?

[AMELIA:] "My grandfather was a good man. He liked to tickle. It was fun and games, you know? My husband loves to play hide and seek with our kids. Some people like to sing songs or do puppet shows or whatever. Pepere Maurice was a tickler. He would never hurt anyone. He was just a tickler."

If you're in the Belfast area, watch your "footsies and tootsies" and keep your shoes on.

Stay safe out there, Maine.