

The Joy of My Life

by

Rene' Domingue

## Author's Purpose

This story was written to give Louisiana children a reflection of their culture. Louisiana, Cajun culture is beautiful and unique. Cajun heritage is something children should know and be proud of. There is a lack of children's literature that reflects authentic Cajun culture and this story was created to help fill that gap. Reading level is for children in Kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, but of course anyone can enjoy! The story is a romantic folktale, based on the legends of the Feu-Follet in the Louisiana swamps.



This story is dedicated to the magical type of love that brings you into your own  
‘Happily Ever After’. I pray it finds you one day.

He's the love of my life, but recently he's changed. It all started the afternoon our puppies, Evangeline and Gabriel, got out. The puppies ran into the bayou and Samuel followed to find them, eventually coming home with them the next morning. He said he didn't remember much of the night, guessing he must've fallen asleep against a tree or in an abandoned pirogue.

Every night since, he laid next to me in bed, but it felt like the only soul in the room was me. My goofy, loving husband no longer stayed up talking with me until we fell asleep. As soon as the sun set, he was in bed seemingly fast asleep. It took awhile to figure out, but finally I realized his soul was gone, taken in the night by the trickster thieves of the bayou. If I ever wanted my love to be with me in the moonlight again, I was going to have to get it back.

I knew the Feu-Follets never let a soul go free, but they also loved proving how clever they were. If they were in a good mood, they would ask you to wager your soul in a rigged game of bourrée. If they were in a bad mood you wouldn't be able to say a word before they made you one of them.

The only way to get a soul back was to outwit them, so I hatched a plan.

On the night Samuel and I wed, we drank a bottle of wine, the next day decorated it, and it had sat in the center of our dining room table ever since.

I stayed awake one night until I saw his soul leave, then I took the bottle and an old deck of cards and dashed out of the house chasing the glowing orb of the soul I loved most.

I followed it down the bayou, over the cypress knees, past the floating pirogues lost in the storms. Eventually I saw a dancing, party of light up ahead. The Feu-Follets were in good spirits, which put the odds of survival in my favor.

I spoke before I was noticed.

"I demand a round of bourrée! The terms: if I win, I take my husband's soul home with me and we live in peace, never to be bothered by you again. If I lose, you will keep my husband's soul and gain mine as well for the rest of time."

The glowing orbs froze, and I imagine if they had faces, all would have been turned towards me. A single orb floated towards me, transforming as it came closer. When we were face-to-face the orb had turned into a handsome, but impish, looking man. He spoke in a deep baritone voice that gave me the frissons.

"It seems that love is not only blind, but also foolish. I take your wager, on the condition that if you lose, forever means forever. Neither of you will ever return to your mortal bodies, your souls will float free of flesh for eternity. Do you accept?"

I steeled my nerve, looked him in the eyes and responded

"I accept. I have brought cards, now are we going to play or not?"

The Feu-Follet man laughed and had the knees of a cypress tree bend into a table and chairs. We both sat and the rest of the orbs circled around him. One orb stayed above my shoulder and it comforted me to think it was Samuel supporting me.

I dealt 5 cards each, flipped the trump suit (spades), and the game began. The man went first throwing down an 8 of hearts and I responded with a 2 of spades. He did not seem troubled by my winning the first trick or the second, and the game continued. He won the third and fourth tricks, so tensions were high on the fifth and final trick. The man calmly placed the king of spades on the table and I stared at the card, putting my hands in my lap. He began laughing.

“Wonderful try my dear, but I believe you have something that now belongs to me. Time to pay the price for foolish love.”

I looked him in the eyes, put my hands back on the table and grinned as I placed my card: the ace of spades. Teeth gritting in rage, the man stood and spoke.

“How lucky, but unfortunately you did not think far enough ahead. The nature of the Feu-Follet is for humans to follow us, we do not follow you. Nor are you able to handle a Feu-Follet without becoming one. So, unfortunately your husband’s soul can not go home with you after all.”

I simply responded by picking up Samuel and I’s wedding night bottle and uncorking it. The orb that had been by my shoulder quickly flew into the bottle and settled floating in the middle. I re-corked the bottle and turned my back on the man to begin my trek back through the swamps. The entire time walking home I saw blue orbs creating pathways in every direction, the Feu-Follet obviously upset with being outwitted.

Finally, I reached home, walked into the door, and sat next to my husband’s body on the bed. I carefully uncorked the bottle and watched as the orb floated out and into my husband’s chest. Samuel slowly opened his eyes and sat up. He kissed me and asked.

“How did you manage that? How did you know you would win?”

I pulled the deck of cards out of my pocket and handed it to him, my Great-Uncle Jacky’s lucky cards. I hugged him and said

“Jacky was the best bourrée player in the family. And I knew I needed all the luck I could get, so I was just praying these would help.”

## Vocabulary

**Abandoned** – Left or forgotten.

**Baritone** – a deep voice or sound.

**Bourrée** – a card game in which the goal is to win the most “tricks” (aka rounds) by playing a high number or suit card.

**Eternity** – for all time, without end.

**Feu-Follet** – the Cajun folktale creatures that are floating blue orbs who confuse travelers into getting lost in the bayou.

**Frissons** – the Cajun-French word for the chills or goosebumps, when the hair on your arms stands up.

**Impish** – having fairy-like facial features.

**Mortal** – a life that is able to end.

**Outwit** – to trick or be more clever than.

**Pirogue** – a Cajun boat, similar to a canoe.

**Rigged** – set up so that one person will always win.

**Steeled** – to stick to your decision.

**Survival** – to come away from something unharmed.

**Trek** – a journey, usually walking or hiking.

**Trickster** – someone who tricks others.

**Wager** – a bet or gamble.

## References

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## About the Author



Rene' Domingue is an elementary education major at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Rene's love storytelling, especially through books and movies! Some of her favorite things to do are to read and sew. Rene' hopes to become a 1st grade reading teacher.