

“The Naming Contest”
by: John Francois

For Jacques Hébert, it was a matter of personal honor that he outdo and outwit his sly and aggravating neighbor, August Boudreau. Over the years, August had refined the art of knowing just which chain to yank or button to press to one-up Jacques. In the past, the competition between the two men had ranged from who could grow the best sweet corn, or the largest watermelon, even down to who’s sow could deliver the largest litter. And August had somehow always gotten the better of Jacques. So today, the latest competition, in Jacques’s mind, anyway, would manifest itself at the baptismal fountain, where his and Émilie’s new baby girl would be baptized along with August and Olida’s fifth child, a baby boy.

Early that morning, Jacques hitched Nonc Dud, his little brown mule, to his buggy and hurrying Émilie into the buggy, drove as fast as he could to arrive at St. Joseph’s church to get there before August did. When they arrived, however, August and Olida were already there.

Here it must be said that the two women, good friends despite their husbands’ competitive natures, thought it might be nice to have a double baptism ceremony where they could act as godparents for each other’s baby. Surely this would be something nice that they could share together. What competition could there be here?

Émilie had a name picked out for her baby, their long awaited first child, but Jacques didn’t care for the name. As for Olida, she had no idea what her baby boy would be called, because it was her husband who named the babies if they were boys. So far, she’d had no part in naming any of the four children they had.

So when Father Andrépont came walking up from the sacristy in his baptismal vestments, he asked who would be first.

“It should be us, Père,” said August. “We was here first.”

“No, no,” said Jacques. “Little girls should go first.”

“Père,” said Émilie, “Jacques and me, we haven’t even agreed on a name for our baby yet.”

“Yes, we have,” said Jacques. “Her name will be Carême.”

“Carême?” echoed August, a gleam suddenly lurking in his eye. “Carême?”

“Pere,” said Émilie, “please tell my husband that Carême isn’t a name to call a baby.” The priest scratched his white-haired head. “Carême...do you mean like the Lenten period between Mardi Gras and Easter?”

“Exactly,” said Jacques. “Our chère petite was born in Lent, so it is a wonderful name for her. Listen how it rolls off the tongue. Car-r-r-rême,” he said, relishing the sound it made.

“I want to call her Cunitte,” said Émilie, “after my poor, dead mother, Cunitte Comeaux.” “I

see,” said the priest, nodding his head. “Of course, she must also have a saint’s name.” “We’ll call her Carême Celestine, then,” interjected Jacques, because Celestine, that was the name of my mama and everyone said how she was a saint.”

“They said that because she had to put up with you,” said Émilie. “Père, isn’t Cunitte already a saint name?”

The priest scratched his head again. “I’m not sure. I’d have to look it up.”

At this point, August lifted his little son up above his head and said, “Père, I present to you Dagobert Pantaleon Savignon Henri Louis Boudreau, name after the five kings of France,” and gave Jacques a triumphant look. Of course, August had no idea if any of the names were of French kings or not, but one of the names did come from the label of an empty wine bottle he’d found on the side of the road.

Jacques studied his neighbor for a moment, bit his lip as he considered his next move. Then he snapped his finger. “Émilie, we must give some more names to our little Carême. Queen names.”

“Fine. Marie, then,” said Émilie. “Marie is a saint name for sure and she’s also a queen, the Queen of Heaven.”

“And not only that,” said Jacques, “but little Carême should have as many names as the little Boudreau. Père, I want to add the name Fidèle, after my aunt on my mama’s side. Our sweet little girl will be called Carême Cunitte Marie Fidèle, oh, and Célestine.”

“Five names, too?” said the priest.

August raised his hand. “Père, I think I want to add the name of Clébert to my son. Clébert was my uncle and he had only had one foot, but he could still out-dance everybody on Saturday night at that club in Church Point.”

“The little Boudreau will have six names, then?” said Jacques with a frown.

“Yes. Dagobert Pantaleon Savignon Henri Louis Clébert Boudreau. What do you think of that?” he said, arching a brow at his neighbor.

“I don’t think there will be enough space,” said the priest, “on the Baptismal Certificate for me to write all those names, even if I write as small as I can.”

“Just think, Jacques,” said August, “if your little girl is lucky enough to marry my little boy, the *Church Point News* will announce that Dagobert Pantaleon Savignon Henri Louis Clébert Boudreau will be marrying Cunitte Carême Marie Célestine Fidèle Hébert.”

“You already got her names in the wrong order,” said Jacques. “Besides, the marriage announcement must always give the name of the girl first...and the name of the papa and mama

of the girl first, too. Not that we would even agree to let her marry your little Boudreau,” he added.

“It will take a whole newspaper page to print all them names,” said Olida, shifting her baby to her other arm, as though all the names her husband had hung on their little son were weighing him down.

“That’s all right,” said Jacques. “I’ll write the announcement since August don’t even know how to write good.”

“Ha! I finish the third grade, Jacques. And you, were you even able to find the door of the school house?”

“I pass the fourth grade, August, thank you.”

“I propose that you each drop a name,” said the priest, tugging at his tightening collar.

“I’m willing to take off Clébert if Jacques will remove one of his names,” said August. “That way, things will be equal.”

“Oh, it’s easy for you to remove a silly name like Clébert,” said Jacques, “but which one of my names can I take off?”

“Well,” said August, “let me tell you that Carême sounds a whole lot sillier than Clébert.

“Why don’t you call her Mardi Gras, instead?”

“Hmmm,” said Jacques, “I kind of like that name, too, but Père wants us to cut down.” At that moment, the little Boudreau let out a howl, and the little Hébert began wailing as well.

“Now look at what your little Boudreau started,” said Jacques.

“They have too many names, that’s the problem,” said Émilie.

“Yes,” said the suffering priest, “and we’ve run out of time. I’ll baptize the little girl first. Madame Olida, as her godmother, you hold her. And August, as godfather, place your hand on the baby.”

The victory of being first as his, Jacques smirked at August and said, “And don’t press too hard on her little belly.”

When the priest finished baptizing the little Hébert girl with her five names, and not without problems getting them in the right order, he turned to Émilie who was holding little Boudreau and indicated that Jacques place his hand on the boy. Jacques put his left hand on the boy, and lifted his right hand as though he were swearing on a Bible.

“Père Andrépont, just baptize him Louis Clébert,” said August. “He will have just two names. “I change my mind about them other names. Little Clébert will have too hard a time trying to learn how to spell all them king names.”

At that very moment little Louis Clébert Boudreau stopped crying, and little Carême Cunitte Fidèle Célestine Marie Hébert burped and soiled her diaper.

“Poo-yai,” August said, wrinkling his nose. “Jacques, your little Carême just made ca-ca.”