John Fenn: Welcome to the *Folklife Today* podcast. I’m John Fenn, and I’m here with my colleague Stephen Winick.

Steve Winick: Happy Halloween!

John Fenn: Ha! He couldn’t wait!

Steve Winick: I’m terrible!

John Fenn: We’re both folklorists at the American Folklife Center here at the Library of Congress. I’m the head of Research and Programs, and Steve is the Center’s writer and editor, as well as the creator of the blog *Folklife Today*. And in case you didn’t catch it, this will be our second Halloween episode!

Steve Winick: Right! In honor of Halloween, we’re sharing scary stories from our archive here at the American Folklife Center.

John Fenn: And Halloween is a special time here at the Center, isn’t it?

Steve Winick: That’s right. We actually launched the blog *Folklife Today* at Halloween back in 2013, so this Halloween season marks the sixth anniversary of our blog, which you can find at blogs.loc.gov/folklife. And we launched the monthly *Folklife Today* podcast one year ago for Halloween, so this is both our anniversary, and our scary 13th episode! Since we started the blog, we’ve covered a pretty wide range of subjects and collections in over 600 individual posts. But we always do something special for Halloween, and it’s a tradition we’re extending to this podcast.

John Fenn: So why such a to-do for Halloween?

Steve Winick: Well, two reasons. One was just that it’s such a popular holiday, and such a rich folklore topic. But the other was that, for years, the most popular feature of the AFC website was an article written by the great folklorist Jack Santino, about Halloween, and we wanted to highlight that. So last year, we put pretty much full audio of that lecture on the blog, and an excerpt in episode one of the podcast. So once you finish listening here, go seek them out!
John Fenn: But now, we’re featuring scary stories which have been on the blog as well.

Steve Winick: right. We will start with Jackie Torrence. And in the middle we’ll have one by Mary Celestia Parler. And you’ll really want to stick around for the last one, which is by Connie Regan Blake. And John and I will be here to introduce the three tales. So our first story is a real classic, called “The Golden Arm”

John Fenn: Ooh, I love this one!

Steve Winick: Me too! I first saw this one in a book that came out in 1973 by a children’s author called Alvin Schwartz.

John Fenn: Oh, he’s known for those books called *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark*!

Steve Winick: Yes, that’s the guy, but this was before those books! I was just a kid when this book came out—it’s called *Tomfoolery*. And the exciting thing was that Alvin Schwartz did serious folklore research for his books, and he was friends with Kenny Goldstein, who later became my mentor at the University of Pennsylvania. He used to come to Penn and to Kenny’s house to do research! So I actually got to meet him the last time he came to visit at Penn, a year or two before he died. And that was after first reading his books when I was like five years old!

John Fenn: Very Cool. This is also a really well known story, because Mark Twain was fond of it, and Twain wrote a whole essay about how to tell a story using this one as an example. So Alvin Schwartz and Mark Twain--it’s doubly cool!

Steve Winick: No, it’s triply cool, because our version of this story is told by Jackie Torrence, who was a master storyteller who lived from 1944 to 2004, and spent most of her life in North Carolina. She was very much a spokesperson for the storytelling movement, appearing frequently on TV, and she wrote two books, *The Importance of Pot Liquor* and "Jackie Tales." She produced nine recordings on several labels, several of which won awards from the American Library Association.

John Fenn: You can read much more about her and see some pictures and a transcription on the blog, at blogs.loc.gov/folklife. For now, let’s hear Jackie Torrence’s performance at the National Storytelling Festival in
Jonesborough, Tennessee, in 1986. It is part of AFC’s International Storytelling Collection. And again, this is "The Golden Arm."

Jackie Torrence:

I would like to tell a story
A very old story that I heard from my grandfather.
He said that, many years ago, there lived a man and his wife.
They were an ordinary couple
and every night the man would seat himself before the fireplace and smoke his pipe and watch the smoke rings curl beneath the chimney.
Now his wife was really not an ordinary person at all.
For after she finished her chores about the house
she too would take her place before the fireplace.
But her left arm and hand were made of solid gold.
And she would polish and shine
and polish and shine
that golden arm.

One night she said to her husband as she polished that golden arm, she said “Do you...
Would you promise me that
if I should die before you
you will bury me with my golden arm?
Will you promise me that?”
And he said, “Huh?”
And she said, “promise me now
that you will bury me with my golden arm!”
And he said, “Oh, yes, yes, yes,
I will. Uh-huh.
Do not worry.”

Well, many years passed
and they lived together
and they were quite happy.
When one day the old woman died
and I suppose it was from carrying the weight of that golden arm.

And the night before they buried her
her husband thought to himself
“I can’t let them put that gold into the ground. Why if I had that gold from that golden arm I could buy myself a brand new house I could buy myself a brand new suit of clothes I could buy myself a wagon and ten white horses.”

[Chuckling]

So he went to the place and he cut off the golden arm. And the next day his wife was buried without her golden arm. But that night he stood in front of the fireplace holding the golden arm and thinking to himself,

[Chuckling]
I’ve got the gold from the golden arm I shall buy myself a brand new house [cackling with glee] I shall buy myself a brand new suit of clothes [cackling with glee] I shall buy myself a wagon and twenty white horses. [cackling with glee]

And just as he admired the golden arm he just happened to look up through the window and the sky that had been so bright with stars was now very dark. And the wind started to blow about the house. And the noise of the wind you could barely hear a thing but over the sound of the wind he heard:

“Who-o-o-o’s... go-o-o-o-o-t... m-y-y-y-y-y... go-o-o-o-olden arm?”

“Oh,” he said, “Who is that? “Somebody wants my golden arm! I must hide.” He looked all about the house and there was only one place. it was a closet. And he started toward the closet
But before he opened the closet door
he looked through the window.

And the sky was darker and darker.
And the wind blew harder and harder.
And the voice was just outside the front door.
“Whe-e-e-e-e-ere’s...
m-y-y-y-y-y...
go-o-o-o-olden arm?”

“Oh,” he said,
“It’s coming in the house!”

So he stepped into the closet
And he slammed the door
And he turned the key
“Oh.” he said,
“I’m safe.
I’m safe.”

But inside the closet
it was dark
dark
dark.

And all about the house
the wind blew harder
and harder
and harder

And all at once the door
the locked closet door
started to open
[creaking sound].

And the candles had burned low, and out.
And the fire had gone out in the fireplace.
And the wind no longer blew outside.
It was quiet.

But there was that voice
standing in front of the closet door
“Whe-e-e-e-ere’s…
m-y-y-y-y-y…
going-0-0-0-olden arm?”

“Who-o-o-o..YOU’VE GOT MY GOLDEN ARM!”

And the ghost of his wife grabbed that golden arm
ran down through the hallway
leaped through the window
and nobody’s ever seen that ghost or the golden arm again.

Steve Winick: That was the brilliant Jackie Torrence of North Carolina with
"The Golden Arm" on the Folklife Today podcast.

John Fenn: And of course, when you tell this story around the campfire,
you can actually grab someone before you shout “You’ve Got it!” Folklorists
call that kind of story a “Jump Tale” because it makes people literally jump!

Steve Winick: Yeah, it's kind of mean, but kids have done it for ages!

John Fenn: So our next story is from Mary Celestia Parler. And you
transcribed this story and compared several versions on the blog, didn’t
you, Steve?

Steve Winick: Yes...several different versions by the same storyteller. And
Mary Celestia Parler was a really interesting figure in folklore. We just did a
symposium at AFC about women folklore collectors, and she’s probably the
most important collector ever in Arkansas. She was a professor at the
University of Arkansas for many years, and generated tons of collections,
some of which are here at AFC.

John Fenn: So is this a story about Arkansas?

Steve Winick: No, like many academics, she didn’t end up working where
she grew up. Mary Celestia Parler was from South Carolina. And she was
white, but she learned this story from her babysitter when she was a girl,
and the babysitter was African American.

John Fenn: Yeah, I find it interesting that the story is one that’s been
connected by folklorists to both African and European antecedents, and
probably is an example of cultural creolization.
Steve Winick: Yeah, and Parler recorded this for linguist Miles Hanley in 1934, so it is an old and slightly crackly recording. But there's a transcription of it, both at loc.gov/podcasts on the *Folklife Today* page, and on the blog at blogs.loc.gov/folklife. So you can read along if you have to, but I think it’s pretty clear.

John Fenn: One last thing: what’s the title?

Steve Winick: Ha, well, years later Parler revealed that her title for this story was “The Forty Mile Jumper” which refers to the magical vehicle the witch has which lets her jump 40 miles—it could be a broom but it’s never actually described. But she never told Miles Hanley that, so he wrote down "Story of Witch Who Kept Hotel." And so, here at *Folklife Today*, we’ll say: let’s all sit back and listen to Mary Celestia Parler tell “The Witch Who Kept a Hotel.”

Mary Celestia Parler:
It seems that once upon a time there was an old witch
Who kept a hotel
Out in the country somewhere.
And everybody marveled at the fact
That although a number of people stopped at that hotel
And went in to spend the night,
Nobody ever left again.

One night two men were traveling along the road.
Night caught them just as they were passing this hotel,
About which they knew nothing.

So they stopped in the hotel
And asked if they could spend the night.
And the old witch was very pleasant and told them,
Yes, she’d be very glad to have them spend the night
And furthermore she’d let them sleep with her two daughters.

So the two men went to bed with the two daughters
And they for some reason became suspicious of the old witch.
And when they noticed that the two daughters slept with peculiar long nightcaps on,
They decided that perhaps it would be a good idea
After the daughters went to bed
To change the nightcaps from the....
I mean after the daughters went to SLEEP
To put the nightcaps on their own heads,
Which they did.

And they stayed awake and noticed that
When the old witch came in in the dark
With a long gleaming butcher knife in her hand,
She felt around in the dark,
And she felt around in the dark,
Till she felt the nightcaps.
And then she felt the ones that didn’t have nightcaps on,
And SLIT the throats of her own two daughters.

After she went out of the room
These two men hot-footed it away.
And they went rushing away
And made quite a good distance before first day.

When the old witch woke up and went in
To see about these two men that she’d killed
And hide them in the cellar
There were her two daughters with their throats cut.
When she saw that she was so mad, she just
Was so mad she could DIE.

So she ran out in the yard
And she got her forty-mile jumper
And she got on her forty-mile jumper
And she jumped and she jumped until she caught up with the men.

And one of them ran and climbed a tree.
And the other man
Rushed off to call the dogs that they had
For some reason in the vicinity.

The old witch got a ax and she went at the tree and she’d say
She’d chop the tree and say
“Willy willy willy come down.”
And the man up the tree’d say
“Willy willy willy come up.”
She’d chop the tree:
“Willy willy willy come down.”
The chips’ d fall.
The man up the tree’ d say
“Willy willy willy come up.”
The chips’ d fly back up.

All this time the other man was calling
“Bah-manecker Rody Kai-anger
Bah- manecker Rody Kai-anger.”

And the old witch going
“Willy willy willy come down.”
And the man up the tree going
“Willy willy willy come up.”

Pretty soon the old dogs were coming
“Aa-oow Aa-oow
Aa-oow Aa-oow.”

And the old witch
When she saw the dogs coming
She tried to get on her forty-mile jumper
But the dogs got there first
And they got her
And they caught her
And caught her by the throat
And KILLED her.

And the two men got on the forty-mile jumper
And they jumped and jumped and jumped
Till they went back to the hotel and found all the Bones
Of all the people
That had been murdered in that inn
And down in the cellar,
A GREAT PILE of TREASURE.

Steve Winick: Again, it’s our second Halloween show here on the *Folklife Today* Podcast, and episode 13 as well.

John Fenn: Maybe we should have skipped the number 13 and gone straight to 14, like in old-fashioned elevators.

Steve Winick: Too late! We're doomed! And we have one more scary story for you, from the great Connie Regan Blake.

John Fenn: Connie Regan Blake is a fantastic storyteller who contributed her own collection to the American Folklife Center Archive, and who is also a big part of the International Storytelling Collection here at the Center. And so last year, we arranged for Connie and her longtime storytelling partner and cousin, Barbara Freeman, to give a performance in our Homegrown concert series.

Steve Winick: It was special for me because back in the 1980s, I used to do radio at WKCR FM in New York. And we had Connie and Barbara’s albums. They were called the FolkTellers. And I was a Halloween fanatic even then, and I used to do a Halloween marathon of Celtic Music and scary stories, so I played those records on the air! And Connie and Barbara hadn’t worked together in many years when they came to visit us here at the American Folklife Center, so it was a real treat to work with them. And I actually asked Connie for special permission to use one of her stories on the blog and the podcast to promote her performance here, and this is that story.

John Fenn: So we should say that Connie Regan Blake and Barbara Freeman’s performance as well as oral history interviews with each of them are over at the blog, at blogs.loc.gov/folklife.

Steve Winick: And the story we’re going to hear is a classic English story called "Mr. Fox." We'll warn you that it does have some gruesome images and ideas in it.

John Fenn: so without any more talk from us, here is Connie Regan Blake with "Mr. Fox."

Connie Regan Blake:
Now the way I heard it, it was a wild, isolated land way out on the moors. One day a stranger came to town,
said his name was Mr. Fox.
Some people called him Reynardine.
He was a tall good looking man with bushy red hair and a mustache
and as was the custom of the day,
he used to go around and court the young women in the afternoon.
There would always be a chaperone there, usually a parent.
Now there was one woman who really took his fancy.
Mary was her name.
She was an orphan child,
but she had four brothers.
So whenever Mr. Fox came to court,
which was about once a month in the beginning,
one of the brothers would always be there
and they would sit and have tea and
talk.
Well, Mary was very interested in Mr. Fox.
He had been to strange lands and he knew strange languages
and before long he was coming there once a week,
usually on Tuesday.
And after a bit Mr. Fox said: “You know, Mary,
I've been coming around to visit you and you've never been out to my
place.”
And Mary said: “Well, Mr. Fox,
I don’t believe I know where you live.”
And Mr. Fox said:
“Well, I do keep myself to myself, but it's no secret.
I have a house in the woods north of town.”
“Ah, Mr. Fox, that's what it is.
People around here don't go into those woods north of town.
Why, I've never been any distance at all in them.”
And Mr. Fox said: “Well, Mary,
they're perfectly safe woods
and I'll come around sometime and take you out there.”
Well, he never did get around to it and Mary was just as glad.
She wasn't too sure about going into those woods.
And it came to be a spring afternoon.
A glorious day: the sun was shining, the air so fresh
and Mary was out picking some wildflowers. She was kind of daydreaming and wandering and picking mostly bluebells. They grow in clumps, so she’d pick a few and then walk Until without knowing it She had gotten into the woods north of town Now she wasn't really lost, she just had to head back South to get home, but she had clearly gone a lot deeper than she had planned. She looked around, she noticed a clearing off to the side and she thought she could go over, get her bearings with the sun and perhaps find a path heading South. So she walked over towards the clearing and she saw at the far end of that clearing a house: old, Tudor, you know, with the big beams set in it. And she thought “That must be Mr. Fox’s house. Well he did invite me to tea, I’m sure he’d know the best way home.” So she walked over towards the house, she went up three big granite steps and it was a heavy open door with an iron knocker. She clanged it and it rang hollow inside. No one answered. She was kind of intrigued by now and she went down the steps around to the side of the house and she looked in one of the windows but all she could see was the wooden hallway. And she thought: “I'm sure Mr. Fox wouldn't mind if I just went in and looked around a bit.” So she came back around, went up those steps and something caught her eye and she looked up and she saw that there were words carved in the lintel above the door.
And the words said: “Be bold, be bold.”
She thought: “That's an odd welcome.”
But she tried that door and it was open.
She went inside and found herself in that hallway.
There were several doors leading off to the side.
But what really caught her eye was a grand staircase
leading up to a long gallery that was filled with windows.
And it was the kind of staircase that made you want to walk up it
pretending you're very rich and very grand
That you have on long dress or a waistcoat.
Well, that's just what Mary did.
She walked up pretending she was very elegant.
She got to the top of the stairs and still in that daydreaming mood.
Sun was coming in the windows.
And she looked at the far end of that hall and she saw a door and she
thought:
“That must be Mr. Fox's bedroom.”
So she walked down towards the door.
When she got close,
she saw that there were words carved in the lintel above that door,
and the words said,
“Be bold, be bold, but not too bold.”
Hmm. She opened that door.
It was his bedroom but kind of ordinary inside.
It was very large and a bit dark.
The curtains were drawn.
There was a big four poster bed in one corner next to it.
There was a wooden stand with a fine porcelain bowl and pitcher.
But what really caught her eye was another door and she thought:
“That must be Mr. Fox's closet.
Oh, he's such a fine dresser.
I'd love to see some of his clothes.”
So she walked over towards that door and when she got close,
she saw that there were more words carved in the lintel above the door.
And the words said:
“Be bold, be bold, but not too bold.
Lest that your heart's blood should run cold.”
She opened that door,
and it was pitch black inside and it took a while for eyes to adjust to that darkness.
And once they did, she saw what appeared to be three vats.
She went to the first and it was filled with a dark liquid
and with her fingers she touched that dark liquid
and then she brought it to her mouth and she tasted it
and it tasted of human blood.
And the second vat,
it was filled with bones,
what appeared to be human bones,
and the third with hair...
long, silken hair and skin.
She was really frightened.
She came out of that closet, shut the door.
She looked around, made certain that she had touched nothing
or left any sign that she had been there.
She went out of the bedroom and closed that door.
She was hurrying down the landing.
When she heard something.
She looked outside and she saw Mr. Fox.
He was striding across that clearing and he was pulling a young woman by the hair
and that woman, she was struggling and screaming and Mary thought,
“T’ve got to hide somewhere!”
And she went running down the staircase.
She went to the side and she crouched down and as soon as she had done that,
Mr. Fox, he flung open that front door and came walking across that hallway.
He started up those stairs and that woman, she was still struggling.
So she reached out and she grabbed hold of that bannister and that Mr. Fox,
that Reynardine,
he drew out his sword and hacked off her hand at the wrist.
He went right on up the staircase, down the hallway and into his room
and all was quiet.
Well, that hand had fallen into Mary's lap.
She picked it up in her apron and she ran out of that house
and she ran home, south as fast as she could.
That was on a Sunday
and on Tuesday Mr. Fox came to court.
Mary made sure all four of her brothers were there.
They were sitting and having a bit of tea and Mr. Fox said,
“Oh Mary, you’re not very talkative,
is anything the matter?”
And Mary said: “Well, Mr. Fox,
I've been having a bad dream and I've not been getting much sleep.
And Mr. Fox said, “Well, Mary, you know,
I've traveled many miles and I've read many dreams.
Perhaps if you'll tell me yours,
I'll be able to help you.”
And Mary said: “Well, Mr. Fox,
I dreamed I was out picking wildflowers.
When I came to an old house,
I dreamed I went up the steps and something caught my eye and
I saw some words carved in the lintel above the door
and the words said: ‘Be bold, be bold.’
And I dreamed I walked into that house and up a staircase
and came to another door with more words carved above it.
And these words said:
‘Be bold, be bold, but not too bold.’
I opened that door.
And it was a bedroom.
And I noticed another door with more words carved above it.
And these words said:
‘Be bold, be bold, but not too bold.
Lest that your heart's blood should run cold.”
And Mr. Fox said,
“But surely it was not so,
and it is not so.”
And Mary said:
“But that is the way it was in my dream, Mr. Fox.
And I dreamed up open that third door and I saw three vats. The first it was filled with blood, the second with bones and the third with hair.”
And Mr. Fox said: “But surely it was not so, and it is not so.”
And Mary said, “But that is the way it was in my dream, Mr. Fox. And I dreamed I came out of that closet, shut the door, went out of the bedroom, and I was hurrying down the landing when I saw you, Mr. Fox, come striding across that clearing outside and you were pulling a young woman by the hair and I saw you come through that front door and start up the staircase. And that woman, she was struggling so she reached out and grabbed hold of that banister and you, Mr. Fox, you drew out your sword and you hacked off her hand at the wrist. You went right on up the staircase, down the hallway and into your room.”
And by this time Mr. Fox was on his feet and he said: “But surely it was not so, and it is not so and God forbid that it should be so!”
And Mary very quietly took the hand from under her apron. She put it right on Mr. Fox's plate and she looked him in the eye and said, “But Mr. Fox, it was so, and it is so, and here's the very hand to show.”
And the four brothers, they took him out back and they killed him.
And I shan't tell you how
Lest that your heart's blood should run cold.

Steve Winick: That was the hair-raising story of "Mr. Fox," as only Connie Regan Blake could tell it. We hope you’ve gotten thrills and chills from our second annual Halloween episode!

John Fenn: and we should thank a few people: Jon Gold, our engineer, and Mike Turpin and Jay Kinloch of the Music Division for help with the studio, and of course to our storytellers, the late Jackie Torrence and Mary Celestia Parler, and of course Connie Regan Blake.

Steve Winick: Also to Jennifer Cutting for pursuing permission to use the Jackie Torrence performance; Thea Austen for producing the Connie Regan Blake and Barbara Freeman show and Todd Harvey and Valda Morris for working with Connie; and Carl Lindahl for background on the Mary Celestia Parler story.

John Fenn: Finally, we offer thanks to our colleagues throughout the Library of Congress who help us deploy this podcast once we make it. And thanks to you, Steve!

Steve Winick: And to you, John! And thanks to all our listeners. Until next time, find us at blogs.loc.gov/folklife.