



Source: Steven Erlanger, 'Letter from the Middle East: Divisions and demons plague road to peace', *New York Times* in *International Herald Tribune* online, 14/10/05.  
Tags: animals, countryside, fire, fortune, literature  
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Jacques and his master passed me full pelt as they pressed their heaving, panting horse across the field in front of the fire. They were blind to everything except the billows of smoke that pushed them to great haste. For myself, travelling swift of foot, it was the heat of the flames that surprised my limbs to achieve a dazzling speed. I thought I was done for—soon to be toasted and roasted in my own juices. In my panic I was aware solely of my bursting heart and hot feet.

All at once and just in time, at the first singe of my hair bob, the wind changed direction and blew back into the wall of smoke. The flames were halted for a moment and in their confusion flung a solitary fireball out and over into a dry cornfield to my left. New flames exploded upwards but they raced off in a different direction. Jacques and his master were already out of sight and I thought I could hear the drumming of their horse's hooves away in the distance until I realised that it was the beating of my own recovering heart.

With a weak sensation in my limbs I sat down on a fallen tree and looked back over the smoking field. There was the black steaming knob of the haystack that had so recently been my refuge and shade for Jacques and his master. I reached into my fob pocket and took out my small tin of snuff. I pressed a generous pinch into my left nostril and snorted. A sweet sense of relief coursed through my body.

I dragged myself up from the log and turned towards the dusty road. There was little fear I thought, of coming across Jacques and his master who would be a league away by now. The memory of the lambasting the servant had given me earlier in the day was still strong enough, as were my bruises.

There was a new silence in the air as I stretched my legs forward, thankful for their strength. I enjoyed the crunching sound of my steps. Then in a wall of sound, the cicadas resumed their throbbing and I strode on.

At the crest of the next hill I halted when I heard voices that floated up from the valley below. Jacques and his master were in the throes of an argument. Yet again, I thought. I stepped aside from the roadway and slipped through a hole in the low stone wall that flanked the field. Under cover of the hedgerow I crept forward almost on my hands and knees. I was able to get quite close and peer through the veil of foliage. Jacques stood with his hands and chin on the end of his staff and his master stood holding the reins of his horse. The horse's flank was flecked with white foam and its coat darkened with perspiration as it stood with its head lowered and swept flies away with its tail. As it stood there cooling down, the two men were engaged in an increasingly hot debate.

'Come now Jacques, since it is almost nightfall I think we should try to reach the Inn at La Roque Gageac where we could take a swim. Or would you like to spend another

night under the stars?'

The topic assumed some importance for me because I knew that whichever path they chose, I would surely choose the other.

'Well Master, it has been a long day and this brave beast that so recently saved us both from the flames needs immediate rest and feed. If we take the left hand way there is a farmhouse and the farmer may well enjoy some payment for his fine food and a mattress. The horse will enjoy a cool dip in the Dordogne tomorrow morning.'

'You are right of course, Jacques. If the farmer refuses us we must take the consequences. But is it not the very farm with the biter—the hairy hound that went for the heels of my horse three years ago?'

'Yes, Master. However I heard that the dog was infected last year by the plague of St Vitus and didn't survive. It danced its way into the Dordogne and was drowned.'

'Well Jacques that is a relief although I would wish such a death for neither man nor beast. Let us put our disagreements aside and proceed forthwith to the farm. Once more you calm me. If by any chance that fool Reynard is there before us we must make sure that we do not engage him in conversation for any reason. I am not in the mood to have my ears dissolve on the side of my head with his relentless chatter.'

As I listened, something in this pompous gentleman's tone set an inner flame burning within me. My irritation was contained only because of the memory of Jacques' fighting skill with that heavy cudgel he now leant upon. I said to myself, if my name were not Reynard, then the plan that forms now in my head would come to nothing. I waited until they moved along the left hand way and then I ran across the road where I scrambled over the stone wall and fell through the hedgerow on the other side. It was getting dark and I knew that I could now cut across the fields and arrive well before them at the farmer's cottage.

The voice of Jacques was carried back to me by the wind, saying, 'Just the same, Master, do you remember the words that Monsieur Diderot put into my mouth sometime ago? "...and what does our Destiny...which sent the flames to almost consume us...hold in store for us now, I wonder?'"

The setting sun cast a rosy glow across the fields. The cicadas were settling down for the night and the plan was becoming clear in my mind as I set off at a steady canter towards the farm house where I could already see a plume of smoke from the kitchen hearth. I recited to myself, 'Reynard I am by name and Reynard I am by nature and something will come of this!'

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Nola Farman.