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The pilgrim, who was a large fellow, had risen from his stool and now roughly thrust it aside. It teetered on one leg and then in slow motion fell to the floor with a loud clatter. I was frozen momentarily to the spot. I could see that he meant me considerable harm. He gripped the knot of his girdle book and pushed his chin forward and hissed. I thought to myself, 'In the name of mercy, where is Diderot now when I need him?' I didn't like the way this was going and I had a terrible feeling of a lack of control, not only of the turn of events but of other more personal and unspeakable effects. By the time I could move again he had ceased his terrible hissing and crossed the room with his girdle book swinging. I am a small person and not a man of action. Words are my weapons but would they fail me now? Diderot, Oh Diderot! I said out loud.

The man stopped for a moment with a puzzled expression and I said in as firm a voice as I could raise,

'I counsel you desist from this purpose! Leave off, man!'

He hissed his terrible hiss and swung the book with a loud whack onto the table. The book flew open and a page came loose. With a howl that sounded like a wounded animal he picked it up in both hands and read from it in a loud voice,

'And it shall be, that in the morning, as soon as the sun is up, thou shalt rise early, and set upon the city; and, behold, when he and the people that is with him come out against thee, then thou mayest do to them as thou shalt find occasion.'

He lifted his eyes to mine and with a fearful lowering of his eye brows swung the book again, this time in circles above his head as he charged at me. I darted behind the wooden counter of the bar and ducked down. Thwack! This time the Bible (his girdle book) split and spilled several pages. It seemed to be the only thing that would stop him and I gained some strength in the knowledge that he was his own worst enemy. Once again he read from a fallen page,

'And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever!'

This time he raised his eyes to mine in complete astonishment. His expression changed to one that supported one large question. I didn't wait to find out what it was and with a crouching run I sped from behind the bar. I was halfway to the door when I was caught between two events—the doorway in front of me was blocked by the Innkeeper and behind me once again the Bible flew. It hit a low beam in the ceiling and pages wafted down onto my head and shoulders like leaves fallen from an albino maple tree. One fell into my hand. I grasped it and spun towards my attacker and read in a voice emboldened by the presence of the honest frame of the innkeeper behind me.

'And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophesy of this book: for the time is at hand.'

The pilgrim lowered both his hands, the remains of the girdle book and its suede leather strap and knot fell to the floor, he lowered his stubbled chin, he lowered his eyes and a dribble of saliva hung from his lower lip. The Innkeeper and I stared mesmerised as the drip swung like Foucault's pendulum in the Musée des Arts et Metiers, then fell onto the floor.

'What in the name of Starvation has been happening here?' asked the Innkeeper.

Before I could reply, two more pilgrims came up to the door of the inn.

'Bonsoir! Bonsoir, Messieurs!' the first man said with the friendly body language to match.

'Ah! There you are Eugenius! Where have you been, man? What has he been up to this time? Has he been any trouble? Ah there's no doubt that he is his mother's son. Or should I say the son of the Heavens for it is the light of the moon that sets him off! Although he's not the brightest star in the sky he does possess a certain wisdom that we do like to keep covered with a bushel. He escaped from us this afternoon. We knew he was heading for La Roque Gageac and indeed here he is. Tomorrow we will accompany him on his way and hope that all is forgiven. May the rest of the evening bring you peace.'

The innkeeper cleared his throat and look meaningfully towards the broken furniture. The third pilgrim raised a small but fulsome pouch in his hand and assured the host that all care would be taken.

At last all seemed peaceful except for the thumping of my poor heart. Meanwhile the innkeeper, who had just returned from the stables that had earlier in the evening been beset by some strange disturbance, said, Put all of this behind us and come to the stables. Something miraculous has happened.

I could see that the three pilgrim's had a weakness for miracles and we all dutifully followed the innkeeper. In the stable a single lamp burned from its hanging place on a wooden beam. Jacques and his master were seated in the hay. The other people had crowded in before me and I was forced to go to my hands and knees and look between their legs. I could see the rounded form of a large grey animal and see the occasional twitch of its tail. I could see that Jacques had rested his staff against the back wall of the stable and that he had rolled up his shirt-sleeves the cloth of which was speckled with blood. He wiped his brow with a bloodied arm and smiled broadly up to the ring of spectators and said,

'So it was written up there and so it has come to pass!'

With those words I must say it is my professed desire that in the morning, Diderot assist me with the plot as he had promised.

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