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Tags: [animals](#), [countryside](#), [literature](#)

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I woke to a peaceful morning at La Roque Gageac. I could hear the innkeeper at work in the kitchen. The three pilgrims had left at daybreak after paying for the damage to the furniture caused by their brother Eugenius the night before. All was peaceful in the stable where the donkey had given birth to triplets! Jacques had risen to the occasion and assisted the birth.

The soft morning light on the Dordogne was as clear as a mirror. I crossed the road to go for a walk along the banks. A few ripples swept out from behind the bushes to the left. It was Jacques, crouched on the grassy edge as he washed his bloodied shirt. He kneaded it on a rock like so much dough and then rinsed the stain away into the river. His master's horse munched nearby at the rich green grass. Its eyes were half closed as it occasionally, with a quiver of its skin and a flick of its tail, sent a fly on its way. I imagined Jacques' master to still be asleep in his room at the Inn.

I stopped some distance from Jacques and watched. The scene was beautiful in its way, but I had no idea about what to do next. Where was Diderot? He had promised to give me some ideas for how this narrative could progress. I had after all borrowed (with his approval) his characters. But I had lost my way. I was new to this business. All I could do for the moment was to wait. Diderot was still asleep perhaps although I doubted that. The man was too energetic, too connected, too wired up, as we would come to say in an electronic age.

After a while I was very hungry. Jacques had spread his wet clothes on the bushes. He had ridden the horse into the river. They swam together both man and beast snorting sprays of water as they went. The sound carried crisp and clear in the still air. I turned back to the Inn. Better my stomach to gnaw at a good tartine with that delicious confiture made from wild berries than to have anxiety destroy my stomach lining.

I sat at a table and waited for the innkeeper. He brought my food and a fine draft of cool water. I was lost in the pleasure of eating when my host brought me a letter.

Monsieur Diderot left this for you.

I seized upon it and broke the seal.

*'Mon Cher Narrateur,*

*'It is out of a sense of duty towards you, my friend, and towards myself that I am writing this letter.*

*'Je suis très très désolé* to have departed post-haste without speaking with you. As you know I have embarked upon an enormous project that has all but consumed my life—the *Encyclopédie*. I had to leave forthwith because I received an urgent message from Mme d'Epinay who

writes that my friend and colleague Rousseau is deeply upset. She has informed me that my presence is required in Paris to expedite his consolation.

I have commissioned from Rousseau a large contribution that encompasses the influence of the Italian composers on Opéra within Europe. It has come to pass that over dinner at chez Rameau a great argument has occurred. Rameau has been outraged by Rousseau's ideas. The latter has withdrawn to the countryside and will only be persuaded to return to his work on the project by my presence.

'My friend, overburdened as you must be with the weight of responsibility towards your story, here is your chance to discharge it in part and obtain some relief. If you are happy with the direction, you should go with it. If you are unhappy, you should go more readily still. If it annoys you, throw it into the fire and let us think no more of it than if it had never been written. But do ask yourself, my friend, will you find such another opportunity in life to demonstrate your passion for the printed word? I cannot think how better to advise you.

'I send you greetings, I send you love, I embrace you.

'Yours in haste and with deep regret, Denis Diderot'.

Can you imagine the effect that this letter had upon me? I was left with more questions than answers. First of all, the letter had a familiar ring to it. Some years ago I had come across some letters that had been exchanged between Rousseau and Diderot. Could it be that somehow the words had been re-arranged in this letter? Was Diderot after all not my sincere advisor? Did he in fact object to my game?

I took the letter to the bank of the river. I sat on a grassy slope and reread the sentences several times. Each time I hoped to find some clue that could bring me relief. I needed some thought to guide me. As I lay back in the grass, I stared at the sky with its tracery of clouds and felt the breeze on my cheek. I could hear Jacques and his horse splashing their way up and out of the water. I imagined how the horse's hooves sank fetlock deep into the soft brown sand. My brain buzzed in tune with the flying insects and the cicadas. I had no idea what to do. My eyes closed and I felt the warmth of the sun soak through my clothes and deep into my skin. I waited.

A loud voice split the atmosphere. My eyes flew open without seeing. It was the Master.

'Jacques! Jacques! Where in the name of Deception are you!'

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