



Source: Geoff Elliott, 'Bush fires up to sell Iraq policy',
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Tags: [countryside](#), [animals](#), [plants](#), [religion](#)
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'Ah! There you are Jacques! Have you had your breakfast?
I see that you have not yet shaved.'

'Not yet master. The stubble of my beard is ten times
stronger than the bristles on a boar!'

Jacques reached across the bushes to take up his dry
shirt. He stretched it over his head and pushed his arms
through the sleeves, pulled on his breeches and sat
heavily on the grass bank to put on his boots.

'Where are we going today, master? Will we get beyond
Marqueyssac?'

'That is my intention Jacques. Marqueyssac is just a mile
or so along the river and I have some business to account
for with Monsieur de Cerval. I wish to see his new garden
made in the Italian style. I have heard that it is superb and
that his botanical research has been prodigious. After
that, we may have to take a boat or a barge down stream
at Beynac. Never mind that for the moment, I have a
surprise for you. My bed has been cold for some time. I
have been busy while you were swimming the horse. Stir
your stumps now.'

The master led Jacques across the road and into the
stables. The ostler was brushing the flanks of a sharp
looking black horse.

'Voila! Jacques! Your days of walking are over. You have
been a faithful servant and saved me from many a dark
day. Besides, we will need to make haste if we meet the
bandits who are reported to be nearby.'

Jacques held the horse's bridle with both hands and
looked it in the eye. He lifted its lips with his thumbs to
check its teeth. He ran a hand down its shoulder, felt its
leg and lifted its hoof to check underneath. Keeping a
hand on its coat he walked around its rump and along the
other side.

'He's a fine horse and sound, master. You have done well
and we will do well, just as it is written.'

Jacques kept the bright light of his joy in check while they
both smiled in satisfaction.

'Come now Jacques it's time to eat a hearty breakfast.'

The innkeeper had laid out a fine selection of confitures
and the baguettes were golden and crisp. The coffee
smelt strong and the aroma so rich that while I was
writing this, I was compelled to make myself a cup so that
I could sip it while I enjoyed watching Jacques and his
master hoe into their food. The innkeeper himself was
also so affected that he poured himself a large mug. A
spirit of generosity filled the air. The innkeeper's wife took
a steaming tankard out to the ostler. The Dordogne was
awash with the scent of coffee, so much so that a
bargeman several kilometres down stream lifted his nose
to the breeze and sighed. At first I thought that all I had
heard was the wind wafting through the willows as his
exhalation pushed its way up stream.

Jacques and his master felt the coffee course through

their veins. The sugar from the confiture followed fast
behind. As one, they pushed back their chairs and stood
up. The ostler led both of their horses, one strawberry
roan and the other black, to the front of the Inn.

By the time they had ridden a few metres along the road,
Jacques found his new horse to be more than a little
skittish. He was hard-pressed to keep its head pointed in
the right direction. I felt a little concerned because I did
not yet know how skilled Jacques was as a rider. He had
handled his master's horse well in the river so I should
not have worried.

'Well master, there's no doubt that this horse has spirit,
but I think he is a little short-sighted. He shies at the drop
of a hat and more. I will have to keep my wits about me.'

His master replied, 'In my opinion, Jacques, he has an
excess of energy. These Dordogne pastures are rich and
he's eaten well. I can't see his ribs. Take him for a short
sprint down the road and see if that settles him down.'

The master held his horse in check while Jacques leaned
forward and applied his heels to the black gelding's sides.
With a flick of its docked tail and an enormous fart, the
horse bounded forward straight into a gallop. Jacques was
a little shocked. He recovered his neck from its mild
whiplash and leaned forward into the stirrups. They
galloped away round a bend in the road.

The master could hear the drum of its hooves fading off
into the distance. The silence settled down onto and
around him. The cicadas had just begun their daily
orchestrations. He heard a cow tearing at the grass in the
meadow to his right and he was not sure that he liked to
be alone. His thoughts drifted and he considered how he
had come to depend on his servant, how he enjoyed the
man's common sense that was spiced by his intelligence
and wit. The big man sighed.

Just at that moment, in the seconds before he might have
begun to worry, to wonder if he should hasten himself
down the road to look for Jacques, he heard the black
horse returning still at the gallop. When they hove into
sight, he could see Jacques standing in the stirrups and
waving his hat. The horse's shoulders were flecked with
white foam.

'Master! Master!'

His sense of urgency was contagious and the master's
horse caught the spirit of it and began to dance in tight
circles.

'It's Reynard! He has turned Sabbatarian! He is standing
on a tree stump and accosting all who dare travel on the
Sabbath. He has renamed the Dordogne the Sabbath and
says that if we don't turn back it will dry up!'

He drew his horse up expertly and with a sly expression
enquired, 'Do I have your permission to give him a
flogging master?'

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