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As evening draws in, Monsieur Reynard had not noticed the flurry of activity that had surrounded him. He would never know that he had been the cause. Although he had been awakened by his own snores, all he could hear at the moment was a baby crying in the distance, a child shouting, some faint voices, the sound of hammering on metal, then upon wood followed by some horns sounding in the woods atop the cliffs of Marquessac.

The voices he could hear were those of Jacques and his master as they strolled along the road leading their horses. They had passed Reynard while he slept, careful not to disturb him. Although they agreed that he was passably pleasant on most counts, his long monologues drove Jacques to distraction. His master had been known to topple from his horse as if drugged by boredom or as if sleep were his only defence against the monotonous onslaught of Reynard's raving. Jacques found that to give the speaker a whack with his cudgel was more effective. So they agreed to dismount and creep past quietly as possible.

For my part, I could not bear to bore you—my favourite listener—with one of Reynard's tirades even if it were cut short by Jacques. I do however have a decision to make. I feel that I should make myself known to Jacques and his master or at least to Reynard. It has been apparent from time to time, that each has noticed me, especially when I am in the company of Monsieur Diderot. He is quite familiar to them but I must appear rather mysterious as I reappear only upon occasion. Perhaps they think that I follow them. In a way I do. I try not to be seen and I speak as quietly as possible.

How must I appear to them? I am a slight figure of a man with olive skin tanned dark in the summer. I am clean-shaven yet with generous eyebrows. My face is rather narrow with dark eyes. My ears are small. My chin juts forward slightly over a somewhat long thin neck. My shoulders are pointed so that my clothes hang as if draped on a wooden board. My stride is long and deliberate, although I am inclined to glance about. This is a nervous mannerism that I have not been able to change. At a sudden noise my right hand moves involuntarily towards the hilt of my short sword. I am a solitary person who prefers to keep his own company and counsel. I prefer to read a good book than to strike up a conversation with another. I have my reasons. At the same time, I feel an urge to confide in someone. Should it be you, my attentive and educated listener? Or should it be Jacques who represents everyman, or his master, whose respect for Jacques knows no bounds? Or should it be Monsieur Reynard, the man of infinite resources and endless subject matter? I think not the latter, who, though his generosity is unlimited, his speech is unstoppable. Nor Jacques who might prefer good sense to my way of thinking, nor his master who although sure of his position is not sure of his mind.

You, dear listener, may not yet be ready. If this sounds arrogant please forgive me. For the moment I will continue to wander the countryside that is both my torment, my lot, as well as my privilege. How do I survive? An early, meagre education added to in my own time has proved the foundation for the wits upon which I live. I travel as a scribe with my plume, a small supply of paper, some fair vocabulary and the natural cunning of one who has survived events that have taken me to the brink of mental balance.

Enough from me. I am aware that Jacques and his master have cast their minds over the events of the past few days in which I must admit I have had some effect.

'Well Jacques, we have managed the passage past the Sabbatarian stump quite well. Such a wooden silence has scarce been heard before, apart from the snores like the sound of a woodcutter at a plank.'

The master giggled and spluttered a little at his attempt at a pun.

'There's no doubt Master, that we have survived to live another day in splendid solitude. But have you not noticed that strange figure of a person who appears from time to time on this journey.'

'I'm not sure to whom you refer Jacques. Where have you seen him?'

'The last sighting was back at the Inn in La Roque Gageac, before that on the banks of the Dordogne. A few days before he passed the haystack where we rested. Later I thought I saw him on the road near the farmhouse.'

'Ah yes, how observant you are Jacques. Did he not approach the Inn at nightfall in the company of Monsieur Diderot? Then he seemed to disappear and reappeared in a dark corner of the Inn where he sat sipping his wine and reading a book. I caught him glancing at me upon occasion. He would look away quickly and with a nervous air. I feel sure that he is not to be trusted.'

'Perhaps, Master, but let us first try to speak with him and then make up our minds, that is if he appears again. He may have taken the barge from La Roque Gageac. It may be that we will catch up with him downstream if either the fish or the bandits don't get to him first.'

'He looks strong enough to me Jacques. Those small wiry fellows are as tough as they come. He looks as if he is from good stock, if I am right then we have little to fear from his sword at least. I don't think that Monsieur Diderot would keep the company of a villain, although one could always be wrong I suppose. You are right. Let us wait and see.'

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