



Source: Ed O'Loughlin, 'Olmert, Abbas talks may be off before they begin', *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 16/09/06.

Tags: countryside, animals, language

Writer/s: Nola Farman

© 2008 Barbara Campbell and the writer/s

'Not talking! Not talking!' roared the master as his horse wheeled about exchanging one hoof for the other. 'What do you mean by saying "Monsieur Reynard is not talking"? The silence will be deafening, the leaves will be still for fear of rustling, the Dordogne will run backwards so as not to sound its rapids and all the birds will topple from the trees! Must I talk in his place to keep our world in motion?'

Jacques smiled to himself. I stood looking up at the big man as he cast a shadow across my face. The sun blazed behind him.

The master relaxed into a huge smile and said, 'This calls for a celebration! But tell me, what is the cause of this soon to be famous stilling of that wily fellow's tongue?'

You must be aware by now, dear listener, that I had introduced myself to this pair of wanderers. They saw me approach with great interest. I was for them a mysterious fellow who walked towards them from around a corner in the road. I had been sitting on the banks of the Dordogne thinking about whether to reveal my identity. I must say to you, that it is not my real identity but one that must suffice for the moment. I am not sure how they would receive me otherwise and I feel that my life depends upon my guarding this secret for the time being. I already have some quirks of behaviour that could give me away. For example, try as I will I cannot stop myself from genuflecting when I pass a church or one of those roadside effigies. I could see one a little further up the road towards Marqueyssac. But enough of me! I can see that I have locked two tales within this narrative.

I had encountered Reynard a little further back on the road as he was waking up from his sleep with his back resting on the stump of a tree. His nervousness at seeing me was evident by a slight twitching of his mouth and the way in which he sprang to his feet with his hand on his short sword. (Some people still carried these steels, which were rather like long daggers. If a man could afford it they could be purchased from travelling sword sellers from Toledo. Many acquired them by theft. But I digress). My own right hand involuntarily gestured for my own bright sword. My hand clasped the hilt as I waited to see what he would do. In any case, as the narrator of this tale, I could change the plot at any time but as I stood there I felt I should leave it up to Reynard to make a move, to reveal what sort of character he really was, after all. I was relieved when he exhaled deeply, slowly, then dropped his hand to his side.

'Bonjour Monsieur Reynard', I said as gruffly as I could. In a cordial way I extended my hand. He looked at me askance with the cast in his eye accentuated, then grasped my palm. I was a little surprised at the gentleness

of his touch. Every now and then he would look straight into my eyes just for a moment before he glanced away. I expected him to begin his verbal flow but strange as it may seem, he was silent. He cast his eyes to the ground and kicked at an embedded rock with his toe. His boots, I noted to my surprise, were as large and almost as cumbersome as those of a postilion. Did he expect a horse to step on him? How did he manage to be so fleet of foot? Perhaps he tied them by their laces and flung them over his shoulder when the circumstances were there for him to run. But yet again I digress. Please forgive, me my most attentive of listeners.

In any case he didn't answer me. At each question that concerned his wellbeing he shuffled his feet and turned his gaze to the treetops. I could see that I would have to fill in the gaps for myself. How could I with so little information? Something must have happened to effect such a change in his mood that was at most times affable and quick in response to people and situations.

'Come, come, Monsieur Reynard, pray tell me if there is anything I can do to cheer you or cast light on your day?'

He looked into my eyes in a quick and penetrating way. For a moment I thought he would speak, but no, it remained for me to struggle on with what had become a monologue. I assured him that he must look upon me with favour for I bore no malice. I went on to say that I understood the nature of secrets and I would press him no further. His sombre expression remained but he seemed relieved as I turned away and strode off down the road towards Marqueyssac.

As best as I could I recounted this to Jacques and his master. They sat on their horses each of which shook the flies from its face and rested its offside back hoof. 'Well, for the blessed god of Silence' sake!' said the master as he brushed a fly from his own brow and stood in the stirrups to stretch his legs. The saddle leather creaked. 'What do you think of this state of affairs Jacques?'

'Well master, do you think I should go back and give him a quick short cuff to bring him to his senses or should we leave him be and count our blessings?'

The master shook his head from side to side. He repeated over and over as if to himself, 'Not talking, eh? Not talking? Well I'll be...'

I was surprised to see that the master had a look of concern on his face. It seems that he had a quiet regard for Reynard after all.

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