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Finally Pascal, with his knowing eyes, looked away. It gave me time to gather my scattered thoughts that had been drawn from me by my anxious imagination. That the man standing before me had brought Sister Lucia, so close to my heart, into my life, was almost too much to comprehend. As one of life's many coincidences, it was most odd.

I know, dear listener, that I have not yet explained myself fully. You have some sense of the workings of my mind but you know so little about my past; therefore my identity, apart from my being an itinerant scribe, must be somewhat obscure. Please, be patient for a while longer and trust me that I am trying to find the words to tell you more; for I have become trusting of you; I have a sense of your integrity proved simply yet strongly by the duration of your attention over these many long evenings.

Meanwhile, Pascal had indicated with a simple nod of his head in the direction of the fire and the spit with its gleaming burden of roast boar, that we should carve and eat. Each man had his own knife. Enrique as the victorious hunter was given first choice of the cut. To my surprise he impaled an ear then slashed it off with my short sword, which he had gruffly borrowed. The ear was crisp and Enrique crunched it in two strong jaws. The sound caused me to look up. I expected a branch to fall from one of the trees.

Pascal as the leader took a generous serve from the haunches of the beast. At this, the fullness of the aroma flooded forth. If a scent could have volume, then the air was filled to capacity. How far it reached I cannot be sure. I can only tell you that the birds stopped singing. As Jacques and his master reached the top of the cliffs of the hanging gardens of Marqueyssac, they pulled up their mounts and stood high in the stirrups to sniff the air, their stomachs rumbling with anticipation. I can only hope that the *chef de cuisine* had something delectable for their dinner.

Hervé preferred a succulent slab of the belly. Pascal motioned me to serve myself next. To me this indicated that I had been raised in the ranks by one place. Last of all Reynard, with surprising strength for one so lean and wiry, hacked off an entire foreleg. It was roasting hot so that he was forced to toss it about in the air before his hungry fingers could grasp it. He then sat on a log and tore at it with the juices running the entire length of his body. The sounds he made were like those of a hungry beast. I wondered when he had last eaten. I myself had eaten well the previous evening at the inn at La Roque Gargac.

I sat on the log, suffused by gastronomic pleasure. After my body had relaxed with warmth and comfort Pascal himself filled my mug with blood red wine squeezed from his wineskin. As he passed it to me his eyes locked mine

in a knowing way. In that moment I knew I should take the initiative. I did not yet know this man whose intelligence and cunning I could only guess. Overall, my instincts had taught me to have a keen respect for him, but Caution was at this time my best friend. So even as I thought he might not deign to answer me, I searched in my mind for a question. I could only hope that the combined beneficence of roast pork and wine would gently unlock his tongue.

'Monsieur,' I began, 'I find it hard to find the words to thank you for this meal, the fine coffee and superb wine.'

Pascal shrugged his shoulders, growled something and I thought I saw a trace of a smile break away from the corner of his mouth, curl around and disappear down his ear hole. Forgive me dear listener, for you might recognize those lines from another story written in a different time and on a different continent, it is because I find myself to be somewhat incontinent after a few swallows of my host's wine.

'Monsieur,' I began again, 'do you have no news at all of the plight of Sister Lucia?'

I must say I was astonished at the directness of my question and my audacity. I felt as if I was engaged in a game of chess.

He glared at me as if to probe the depths of my soul. 'Monsieur Scribe, I have not always been a wanderer, a roaming bandit, a thief and a robber, although I have pride in these circumstances and the loyalty of my companions. When I met Sister Lucia, things were different.'

Pascal went on to tell me that he was the eldest son of a peasant family. He was about to be drafted into the army of a local castle but he caught wind of it and escaped. His first encounter in the world at large was with the robbers who beat him in the alleys of St Emilion. They were the unknowing initiators of his friendship with Enrique who took him on a brief visit to his home in La Mancha. Here Pascal fell in love with Enrique's sister, Mercedes. After a short liaison she fell pregnant. Pascal was in no position to marry her. He was a fugitive in France just as her brother was pursued by authorities in Spain and she herself now an outcast. The only course, Pascal believed, was to place her in a convent in France (where his own aunt was the Mother Superior). Here, he considered, Mercedes would be looked after. He fully intended when his circumstances had improved to return to reclaim her and his child.

At the end of this, Pascal returned the enquiry, 'Tell me, and what of yourself, scribe?'

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