



Source: Ian Fisher, 'In West Bank, Hamas is silent but never ignored', *New York Times online*, 28/06/07.

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To my surprise, instead of waiting for my reply Pascal stretched his limbs, his feet almost in the fire. He held the palms of both hands towards me and shook his head in mid-yawn.

'Wait, my friend. It is late. We must sleep now. There'll be time. There'll be time in the morning. You can tell me your story over a slab of cold pork. Find yourself a place by the fire. It will be a cold night.'

Hervé and Reynard were already ensconced on the opposite side of the fire. They talked quietly and rapidly in dialect. Every now and then they guffawed with laughter each slapping the other roughly about the chest, shoulders and head. They wrestled and rolled in the dust, kicking their heels in the air, acting out some past shared adventure. I realised that Reynard had come home. He had found the place for his incessant chatter—somewhere to share the fruits of his wit and cunning. After a while they curled up together like puppies.

Enrique had been sitting on a log not far from Pascal. He listened to us, occasionally sniffing the air as he stared off into the darkness of the evening. It was his job to attend to the remains of the roast boar. He trussed it neatly in some rope, threw the loose end over a tree branch, and then hauled the swaying carcass high into the air out of the reach of bears and other beasts of the night. After tying off the rope he disappeared into the woods to reappear with some stout logs to keep the fire alive until morning. As he hefted them onto the coals, the sparks showered up. They went up and up faster and faster until caught in a great updraft that carried them beyond the canopy into the deep ultramarine of the night sky. In their brightness they competed with stars of the Milky Way and won. Such was my excitement as I realised that after my years of wandering alone, I could rest for a short while at least, in the company of these men. I spread my great coat on the ground and rolled myself in it with my back to the soaking warmth of the fire.

Reynard was already snoring loudly. Pascal strolled around the fire and gave him a hefty kick and threatened to pour wine into his ears. Enrique had spread his coat on the ground. He and Pascal rolled onto it and curled up together with satisfied grunts and muffled growls like two great bears settling in for hibernation.

Almost immediately soft wheezing surrounded me, along with snorts and prolonged whistles as the four men fell into deep guilt-free slumber. It was like the sound of a distant woodwind orchestra tuning up. My mind wandered. Morpheus will be busy scattering dreams tonight I thought. For my part, I could not sleep. The rich fare of red wine and pork kept my entrails in a state of excitement. The words Pascal uttered—'Tell me, and what of you scribe?'—kept my brain in an agitated state.

I was a scribe, yes, but I had not always been so

employed. I had kept my identity a secret for more than a decade. Nobody could be trusted. My own family would turn on me. I hoped they were no longer searching for me if indeed they ever had. My hope that Diderot would come to my rescue had long faded. To tell the truth dear listener, I could scarcely tell if I was a figment of Diderot's imagination or my own. I had abandoned his Jacques and Jacques's master (although they were doing well wining and dining at Marqueyssac) and at least I had left them in good hands. What of myself? In whose hands had I placed myself? The construction of this predicament was certainly not Diderot's doing.

To my surprise I had found that I trusted these men—a motley bunch of thieves. In my experience, the men and women of the so-called worthy classes—the principled and moral classes with their priests, their mothers superior, their town fathers, their good housewives, their respectable citizens, were more treacherous than the swirling waters of the Dordogne in flood, more dangerous than the wild bear I could hear snuffing at the base of the tree where the cooked pork was hanging. These bandits were, like myself outcasts, outsiders. Unlike myself, they were at peace with their circumstances. They had each other.

But if I trusted these bandits, should I tell them everything? How much did they already know? How much had they guessed? Deep down I think I had already surmised that they would accept me, my past deeds, my difference, with ease. My mind wandered to Sister Lucia. I wondered how she was faring in the cold walls and corridors of the monastery. I knew I must be close to sleep, because each night at this time, for the last ten years my thoughts strayed to embrace her, even though I knew there was no chance of some sort of reunion. And so I drifted into a profound sleep.

It was scarcely daylight when Enrique was lowering the pork. Pascal was scraping the bristles on his chin with a razor sharp blade. My mind was stirring towards the idea of coffee because the rolling pot on the fire was sending its aromatic tendrils deep into my nostrils to cast a lazy U-turn at the back of my throat, to spread across the rough plane of my tongue upon which each nascent bud lifted in anticipation. My reverie was mercilessly short-lived. Hervé and Reynard who had been scouting about the countryside burst into the clearing. Their excitement was contagious.

In a hoarse whisper Hervé said, 'There's a coach and four at the inn! It carries an Englishman!'

Enrique dropped the pork. Pascal paused but continued shaving as if he hadn't heard. 'Make ready, boys!'

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