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The air was particularly clear and crisp as each of us waited in our assigned positions for the coach of four to draw near. I was in a ditch with my eyes at the level of the road. Enrique lay a little further along, breathing heavily, his eyes rolling in anticipation. Reynard and Hervé were in the tree branches that swept overhead in a green arch which would have sent me into a delirium of pleasure on another day free of the all-consuming terror that beset me this day. Pascal was a bow-shot along the road ahead, at the bend.

As the coach lumbered along I could see the two servants atop, driving the horses. The postilion clung to the rear with his heavy boots anchored on a step. He whistled for the dogs to take their place each side of him. The air was so clear I could make out the conversation between the passengers—a man and a woman. (I swear to you dear listener, their words were so familiar that I realised I had come across them somewhere before. Perhaps, you too will recognise them!)

'You do go on so, Tobias. I found the waters of Bath to be so refreshing after all!'

'My dear Ann, I have done with the waters...On the first morning, the first object that saluted my eye, was a child full of scrofulous ulcers, carried in the arms of one of the guides, under the very noses of the bathers. I was so shocked at the sight that I retired immediately with indignation and disgust. Suppose the matters of those ulcers, floating on the water, comes in contact with my skin, when the pores are all open, I would ask you what must be the consequence? Good Heaven, the very thought makes my blood run cold! We know not what...'

At that moment the coach hit a large hole in the road. All the contents including the passengers, the servants and the postilion, shot into the air and down again in a cloud of dust.

'King's evil!' shouted Tobias. 'Blessed be God for all things!' cried Ann. I dare not repeat the servants' expletives and the postilion had not yet noticed his dogs as they tore savagely at two large pieces of roast pork that had appeared on the road some ways behind the carriage.

Simultaneously, with style and precision, like a choreographed dance, Pascal appeared, musket in hand, on the road ahead; Hervé and Reynard dropped onto the top of the carriage; Enrique rose like a spectre from the cloud of dust that ballooned from the great hole in the road. My job was to hold the horses as they reared and frothed at the goings-on and shrieks that issued from the depths of the carriage. I dangled, I somersaulted, I swung in the air as these magnificent beasts, scarified and with eyes flashing, tossed their heads. So concentrated was my attention on my assigned task, my survival without broken bones, that I did not notice that in an instant, Reynard

and Hervé had thrown all the baggage from the top of the coach into the ditch where I had heretofore been hiding. Enrique kept the attention of the servants as he clasped the postilion by the neck, which it seemed he might snap like a chicken and toss the carcass to the dogs. These beasts were still smothering their slabs of pork with snuffling and slathering growls. Pascal stood at the open door of the coach, his foot nonchalantly planted on the step, the barrel of his musket making small circles in the air as he engaged the attention of Tobias and his wife. Neither of them appeared to notice their belongings being dragged into the depths of the woods.

All at once, Pascal uttered a loud cry and slammed shut the door of the carriage. This was my cue to drop the harnesses and run into the woods. Pascal slapped the rump of the nearest horse and sent a deafening musket blast into the air. The horses plunged into a gallop; the carriage rattled its way along the road. Enrique slapped the backside of the postilion who tried to run after the disappearing carriage but in his great boots he fell flat on his face. His head had travelled forward at a greater speed; he scrambled to his feet, which had now left his boots behind, and in a renewed pursuit disappeared around the bend in the road.

Meanwhile the dogs were licking their chops and sniffing the dampened dust of the road where once there had been meat. Enrique gave a whistle and the great spotted carriage dogs turned, dutifully following him into the woods.

As thin and wiry as they were, Hervé and Reynard had manhandled the travellers' luggage deep into the clearing which I could now almost call my home. They stood back when Pascal approached.

'Well done, boys! And you too Scribe! Open the chests Enrique!'

The giant Spaniard kicked each of the locks, which sprang open. It was clear he had no interest in their contents as he turned towards a large wine barrel among the spoils. He turned it on end and sat watching the others. Reynard had pulled a fine taffeta dress with its ballooning skirts over his bony shoulders. He danced around the smouldering fire snapping his fingers over his head in a mock Gypsy dance. The squint in his darting black eyes seemed much exaggerated. Hervé cried out in excitement as he held aloft a sack of coffee beans. Pascal silently sifted through the fineries in another trunk. Then he raised high a string of pearls that glistened in the morning sun. He seemed to be mesmerised as he twirled them in the air and let them fall around his dark and sinewy arm. With a flick and a sly grin he tossed them to me.

'These are for you Scribe.'

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