

Story for performance #927
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It took me some days to comprehend, indeed to digest the significance of Pascal's statement in which he made it clear that he accepted me into his nest of thieves. Just as my mood lifted Life, being what she is, changeable even fickle, gave Weather permission to lower her fluffy petticoat over our woods. For three days and nights it rained. It pissed down. Forest gave up her steaming vapours; her fallen leaves sighed as they eased their way into the carpet of compost that promised such future glory.

It seemed that even the rain could not dampen my mood. The nights had been cosy because the industrious Reynard, along with the brute strength of Enrique, had excavated a cave large enough to shelter the five of us. The Spaniard had propped and buttressed the hole with logs and the stoutest bones left from the wild boar carcass. The rib cage made a fine barred window through which I could watch Dawn as she crept on hands and knees through the undergrowth to feel her way slowly up the trunks of the trees.

As I lay wrapped in my coat, listening to the snuffles and night murmurings of my companions, I contemplated the direction my narrative should take. I know dear listener, that you have paused in anticipation with your coffee cup aloft. As much as I would beg your advice, my story may well be already written (as Jacques would say). Indeed I wondered what Jacques and his master might be doing at this time. With the wet weather I supposed them still to be curled in the soft beds of Marquessac. But I digress.

At that moment, I saw a familiar cloaked figure standing beneath the dripping leaves of the forest. Could it be? Indeed it was Diderot, back from Paris where he had re-installed Rousseau at his *escritoire* after his altercation with Rameau. I slipped out from my nest wrapping my dusty coat around my shoulders.

'Bon jour!' called Diderot, 'Do you still wish for my advice?'

'Indeed I do,' I replied, 'but first, how did you discover my whereabouts?'

'Ah! I returned to the inn at La Roque Gargac to find that you had already departed. The gossip there was abuzz with the news of bandits who had accosted the carriage of the English writer—what is his name? Smollett I believe. A description of the one who held the horses fitted you and it is well known that a band of thieves occupies this neck of the woods. After that, it was loud snoring that fine-tuned my search: but not from you of course. I believe that the necessary vigilance produced by the exigencies of your life has made you a light sleeper, n'est-ce pas?'

'That's so, but it is also true, with respect M'sieur Diderot, that you have placed me in this situation. For the moment, it is beyond me to know how to proceed. I crave your advice, which by its nature is an exchange of ideas, the fruits of which rest entirely with me, because if left to you they might find me

once again trapped in that terrible convent that at this very time holds close poor Sister Lucia of the Cross.'

Diderot cried, 'Never! Do you not know that I have compassion! Especially since you have so well tasted freedom and you have been such a fine navigator of your own course?'

(At this moment, my attentive listener, the urgency of this discourse has thrown you into the depths of my dilemma, but rest assured there is some way yet to fall).

Diderot went on, 'I take full responsibility for the original authorship of your situation, even for the fact that at a critical time, events took a turn, a twist that even I had not anticipated.'

'Yes,' I went on, 'to some degree I am the fruit of your deception. But when I leapt over that wall, escaping the clutches of that lascivious priest, I encountered the life and death situation of another character, the other face of any situation, the two horns of my dilemma.'

Diderot appeared to be puzzled. 'What can you possibly mean?'

'It is clear M'sieur, that if I had continued on the path that you had set for me, as a woman who had broken the law by escaping from a life sentence in a convent, that my eternal lot would have been as a washer woman, a drudge who in order to survive must undo the habits of genuflection and the making of the Holy Sign either of which could expose me to retribution brought on by these harsh times.

Diderot looked uneasy. 'Just the same, do you not take some responsibility?'

Anger rose in my breast and clawed her way into my voice and words. 'M'sieur! You astonish me! It seems that even you, *raconteur extraordinaire*, have found a blind spot for your own protection. I chose my path as a wandering scribe, dressed in the garb of an ordinary man, as the only means by which I could travel and survive with impunity. It has necessarily cast me into the company of thieves. Believe me, if I could escape these times, even this century...I have not surrendered myself to...'

Diderot waved his hand to stop me, but I pressed on. 'Do you, Denis Diderot, take any responsibility for a hoax of your own fabrication, that has gone astray?'

Before he could reply I said, 'Because I do, and believe me I will find a way to end this unholy marriage of circumstances into which I have entered with you!'

I had not known Diderot to be silent for so long. He donned the face of the Wise Counsellor and said, 'If I am able I would be happy to release you, even for sake of your own characters, for their own good. Are they not also trapped—in a web of your making?'

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