

NEW CATHARS
OF MONTSEGUR



SAINT-LOUP

BERSERKER

BOOKS



NEW CATHARS FOR MONTSEGUR
Saint-Loup



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For Auda Hubert-Bonnal, when
she turns twenty.

IF NECESSARY, LANGUEDOC WILL BE
CATHAR AGAIN!.....

(Statement made to the press by André Castéra, winegrower from
Montredon, Aude, on the afternoon of 29 November 1967).

I

BLUE

LIGHT



Otto Rahn

The man emerged suddenly from the thickets of mulberry trees and masses of boxwood, fine oaks and beeches, which every spring bring greenery to the abandoned fortress. To the eyes of the eight young men who had just carried the postern gate, he appeared tall, thin and youthful-faced, with the clear eyes of a dream seller, his hair combed back under a helmet, yet at the same time old judging by his clothes: a crumpled scout shirt, hiking boots and *knickerbocker* shorts, which everywhere except England the fashion of 1937 was trying to get rid of.

The group of visitors stood motionless next to the truncated tower. What attitude should they adopt in the face of the apparent threat of a lone man walking slowly towards them, emerging from the depths of the ruin where almost no one had ventured in seven centuries? His features revealed no hostility. He seemed extremely upset, like a lover caught in the act or a hermit startled at the height of his asceticism.

The midday sun cast the shadow of the southern wall over the group. Comfortably settled in the hollows of the oak trees that the bushes prevented from growing, the blackbirds chirped. When he was a few steps away from the visitors, the veil of sleep that had separated him from the world of the living disappeared from his face. He smiled, extended his hand to the nearest boy and simply said:

"My name is Rahn.

"And I am Barbaïra."

"Otto Rahn!"

"Roger Barbaïra!"

The young man's pupils revealed a gaze unaccustomed to the southern sun; he seemed to be receiving the soft, dense light of a Scandinavian lake at some uncertain hour of the Winter Solstice. His brown hair made his Languedoc accent even more distinctive, which, despite everything, matched his average height, somewhat short legs and bony torso developed in strength.

"Are you German, Mr Otto Rahn?"

Ah! You guessed it? I have almost no accent. And you?
Are you German too? Belgian? Danish?

Roger Barbaïra shrugged.

"What do you think? I was born in Carcassonne. I live twelve kilometres away, near a village that bears my name... Well... I am the one who bears the name of the village.

Silence once again created a barrier between the group of young people and the solitary man. In the hollows where the village of Montsegur showed the slate roofs that the sun baked in reddish perspectives, a cuckoo marked the seconds with precise repetition.

Otto Rahn gestured towards the group standing still behind the young Barbaïra like a platoon of soldiers behind their leader, and asked:

- And your comrades?

- They are *ajistes* from here, from the region.

"Excuse me... *Ajistes*?! Imagine that, a French word I didn't know..."

Barbaïra smiled.

-It's not a French word, it's more like a barbarism!

Ajiste is the same as a youth hostel user.

-Ah, right!... Wandervögel? I know them well. It was a German teacher, Richard Schirman, who created the first youth hostels in Europe, back in 1907!

"We know that!" Roger Barbaïra replied curtly.



The young men settled on the rocks supporting the southern wall of the fortress, which gained momentum only to lose it immediately inside, on the chaotic, moss-covered horizontal surface. They took some meagre provisions out of their bags. Otto Rahn settled down beside them, drawn by a feeling of complicity. On the occasion of that encounter, then aged thirty-three, he joined the Wandervögel 'family'. He asked the others:

"So, are you *agists*?"

From the emphasis he placed on his words, it was clear that he had a perfect knowledge of the French language, but he stumbled upon an unfamiliar term and, like M. Jourdain, thought with a slight inferiority complex:

How can one be *an ajiste*?

"Yes," replied Jordi Couquet with his mouth full. We meet on Saturdays at a youth hostel here in the region. In winter it's in Carcassonne, at an AJ called *À l'Ombre de la Cité*... That's on rainy days! In spring we go to Mosset, to *Mas de la Coume*, to a *pau* called Kruger, a beautiful *pau*!

Otto Rahn was startled.

"A *pau*? What's a *pau*?"

-*Père aubergiste*. The guy who runs the youth hostel. He enforces discipline, helps young people and kicks out any lads who cause trouble in the girls' dormitory. You don't say *père aubergiste*, you say *pau*. It's quicker. Father Kruger is a very good *pau*... He's also against Hitler's exile, you know?....

Otto Rahn suppressed a gesture of annoyance and the young man continued:

"In summer, you can choose... The AJ in Saint-Pierre-la-Mer has a beach. The AJ *Jean Jaurès* in Quillan... has mountains. Like the one in Enveigt, near Bourg-Madame. But the AJ that everyone prefers is where we came from by bicycle this morning, the *Au-devant de la Vie*, between Foix and Roquefixade!

He remained silent. Otto Rahn watched with interest the girl in the group who was coming and going over the rocks. Tall, slender, nervous, she moved with restrained impetus, with the impatience of a thoroughbred horse interspersed with the fear of the jockey who keeps her expectant with successive turns before the starting signal. Otto Rahn seemed captivated by the movement of her beautiful, muscular legs, moulded into flawless femininity – thoroughbred legs that confirmed her attitude – but even more so by the melancholic smile that occasionally appeared on the lips of that blonde with dark, sparkling eyes that seemed to be lit up from within by a small hell. He was beginning to show the eighteen- or nineteen-year-old girl more interest than

than propriety dictated, when Jordi Couquet, amused and perceptive, answered the question the German did not dare to ask:

"That's Auda Isarn. She's a nursing student in Toulouse.

She's an excellent colleague, but sometimes a bit dull!

"And you? Apart from the AJ... what do you do? Ajiste... Eh! Eh! It's not a profession, is it?"

-Me? I work nearby, at a loom in Lavelanet. The one heading for the door is my boss's son, Gaston Reboul... This *yoke* seems strange to you, doesn't it? The proletarian and the daddy's boy... Capital and labour get along well, and we joke around at the AJ on Saturday afternoons!

'Spanish beds' ¹... Buckets full of water above the doors. Bunches of grapes inside the boots! I love playing pranks and I'm a socialist worth two!

-And your boss's son goes along with this game?

-Of course, he has *esprit auberge*! ²

Otto Rahn murmured dreamily:

"We have the same thing in Germany now.

And he alternately looked at the beautiful and disturbing Auda Isarn and Gaston Reboul, son of a 'capitalist' integrated into a classless society of the AJ. Of medium height, dark-skinned and thin, the young Reboul displayed a perhaps voluntary air of indifference, without which he would have difficulty feeling at ease in a world closer to that of the worker Jordi Couquet than to that of the heir to the Lavelanet Industrial Looms. He thought:

These *ajistes* (blimey! How can anyone be *an ajiste*?) are deluded, as their ideal is to align

the people with the elite and not bringing the elite down to the people! Jordi Couquet finished gnawing on a wrinkled apple, with a winter in the barn under his belt, and threw the core into the bushes in front of him. Otto Rahn scolded him

gently:

"You shouldn't have done that..."

¹ A joke consisting of placing the sheets folded in half so that the sleeper can only partially get into bed.

² French expression meaning roughly 'a fondness for hostels or a hostel spirit'.

-The young man raised his thick black eyebrows.

"Don't give me that! Why? An apple tree could grow there!

"Why? Out of respect for Montsegur, the most sacred of all the high places in Europe!

Restless, Comrade Couquet looked directly at the German. He felt like putting a finger to his temple, indicating his esteem for the mental health of his elderly interlocutor, but he contented himself with objecting:

"High place? Montsegur is barely 1,200 metres high. I've been to mountains over 3,000 metres high. So what? There were no restrictions on altitude for throwing bones!



The sun was still shining into the fortress above the western wall. Under this direct light, the wild vegetation revealed its true nature as undergrowth. Conversation dwindled with the first signs of heat. Otto Rahn seemed annoyed. The rhythmic movement of his foot resting on his heel marked the pace of his thoughts and revealed a slight irritation. He remained silent for a long time and finally resumed the conversation with a trivial remark.

"So you're all from this region?"

"All of us. Marius Chabrol, the little guy down there looking at us like a priest ready to hear a murder confession, is from Narbonne. He's a banker. Or rather, a bank clerk! Hey, hey! It's not the same thing. Be that as it may, he's an important guy... He's nineteen and secretary of the Communist Youth in his area! The one on the left is Raymond Ferrocas, he's going to enter the Teacher Training College. He was born in Béziers. The big guy with the machete-scarred face is Robert Robuffay, who works with his father in Menèrba. He has vineyards. The one with curly hair by the wall is Guyot Peyrat, from Toulouse. He's studying something at the Faculty of Arts in Montpellier. He's an eccentric. He speaks and writes in the regional dialect. They're all from here.

Guyot Peyrat had come closer and was now close enough to hear the last sentence referring to the langue d'Oc as a dialect. He shrugged his shoulders and said:

"They don't make *amôrri* ¹like you anymore, Jordi! You said more than a hundred times that the langue d'Oc is not a dialect!

"What do you want me to do to avoid being 'half-hearted', if that's all Greek to me?"

One by one, the boys gathered around the German. The girl walked along the rocks, keeping her distance in a 'pure-blooded' attitude. Otto Rahn turned to the boy he had first approached an hour earlier:

"Mr Barbaria, I wanted to ask you a question, an important question. What is the reason for coming with your comrades to Montsegur?"

Somewhat taken aback, Barbara took a moment to respond.

"Well... for us, *hikers*, it's just another place to go on an outing. At least, that's what I think. There's no reason why it shouldn't be! We set off early in the morning from the AJ on our bikes, pedalling and climbing. The paths are good for exercising our muscles. A beautiful view awaits us, and we admire it while we eat whatever we have with us. We've already been to Montsegur four or five times, as it offers the most beautiful view in the whole region and our base AJ is less than an hour away by bike..."

-Is that all?

-Yes, well, there's a castle, more or less small, which is very dilapidated. We know of others that are more interesting... Foix... Puivert... Puylaurens... Roquefixade... Queribus..."

The wind picked up. The oaks and beeches began to moan softly. Around the ruined fortress, the sound of a raging ocean could be heard. The thin black shadow cast by the southern wall highlighted its base. The sun warmed the cyclopean blocks, which were joined together without mortar and, thanks to the perfection of the cut,

¹ An expression that forms part of the dialectic of resentment used in Languedoc in 1968. It comes from Amaury and refers to the son of Simon de Monfort, who was not exactly renowned for his intelligence.

had withstood the required weight for seven centuries. The whiteness of the stones gave the fortress the virginal ardour of the great sailing ships of Cape Horn. Now, it seemed to rise on the wings of the wind, dive in a calculated and long impulse and head for the East at the mercy of the wind, rain and misery. The aerial detachment of the construction, the uncertainty of its balance, the illusion of the movement of a ship in rough seas can cause vertigo in the least prepared hearts.

"So," Otto Rahn insisted, "is Montsegur nothing more than a place for you to contemplate the landscape and a training ground for climbing?"

The young man tried to defend himself.

"No! We know it was the last refuge of the Albigensians¹ ... but that's ancient history and of little interest to us. The youth hostel we come from is called *Au-devant de la Vie!*

"I know, I know..." murmured the German in a melancholy tone. The flesh-and-blood homelands that, in their diversity, gave Capetian France an intense and unique character were replaced in your revolution of 1793 by a Jacobin homeland in the abstraction of the concepts of liberty and equality. How painful it is!

And he immediately added:

"Do you know that if Germany had the good fortune to possess a Montsegur, all Hitler's youth would go there on their knees?"

There was a moment of astonishment among the young people. It seemed as if a formidable weight had fallen on the great stone nave, shining with light, hindering the pitching and swaying movements caused by the north wind.

"Hitler Youth? Montsegur?" stammered Guyot Peyrat, the poet of the group. "Mr Rahn, I don't see what connection there could be between the two."

¹ A widespread error. In reality, after the capitulation of Montsegur, the Cathars of Languedoc took refuge in the castle of Queribus until 1255, and later in some fortified caves in Sabarthes.

The secretary of the Communist Youth of Narbonne interrupted:
-I get the impression that you are mocking us! There is not the slightest connection between Montsegur and that Hitler Youth of the sordid German dictatorship!

Otto Rahn blushed and replied angrily:

"I ask you not to insult Germany, my dear young man! I love my country. If Montsegur and Sabarthès are my second homeland, Germany remains my mother! I came to Montsegur with an immense love whose origin is unknown and which has nothing to do with current politics!



While Otto Rahn continued arguing with his friends, Robert Robuffay climbed the north wall; a sporting feat as dangerous as it was absurd, clearly intended to show off his climbing skills to Auda Isarn, who watched his progress with more anxiety than admiration.

Otto Rahn resumed the conversation.

"It frightens me to see how little interest the French born in Languedoc show in their own history! In the 12th century, your country had the most advanced civilisation and the highest cultural level in the West. Your feudal lords often turned to the Christian and military chivalry of the north. It was a way of seeking their aristocratic superiority. They discovered it in the Courts of Love, where troubadours devoted a certain cult to ladies who deserved it for their intelligence and beauty.

Now Robert Robuffay descended from the wall via one of the ruined staircases and approached the young woman, swaying his body slightly.

"Do you know what the German gentleman is saying, Auda? That you are the most beautiful and intelligent girl in all of Languedoc.

He fixed his wild brown eyes on her, trying to charm her with his ungrateful expression, and stretched his thin lips into a forced smile, but all he managed to squeeze out was brute, angry force.

"Did you hear that, Auda? The gentleman says we should open Courts of Love in the AJs of Languedoc.

As he approached to touch her, Barbaïra, who was watching the scene over Rahn's shoulder, frowned, clenched her fists and gestured for him to move forward. However, the young woman pushed the cheeky man away with a quick gesture and rebuked him to his face:

Idiot! Go somewhere else to spout nonsense! The spirit of *ajista* has nothing in common with Cortes de Amor.

Roger Barbaïra relaxed. Auda Isarn resumed his pacing, but with greater restlessness than the thoroughbred he had embodied moments before. Now his attitude was that of a wild animal disturbed by the world of instincts. Otto Rahn continued:

"Your country also had the Cathar cult, enemy of Roman Catholicism, and protected the Jews. When Pope Innocent III asked you to abandon heresy and expel the Jews, the country responded with songs! In 1209, he preached a Crusade against Languedoc. Defeated by Simon de Monfort, your lords were stripped of their fiefdoms and the peasants and villagers were subjected to the Capetian law of the north. Despite several uprisings, the Inquisition destroyed the Cathars and the French crushed your language and customs. Even today, Jacobin France continues to ensure that nothing of your past goes beyond mere folklore!

Now, folklore is the shame of an ethnic group that, despite being alive, does not dare to assert itself as sovereign! Did you know that?

"Yes," said Guyot Peyrat slowly, "I speak and write the langue d'Oc. But in the eyes of my comrades, you know... I represent that folklore that you so unjustly condemn!



Now the zenith sun burned the compressed vegetation inside the enclosure, distilling the aromas of the oaks and beeches and enhancing the scent of the forest that emerged from the southern depths. Blackbirds, cuckoos, finches and blackcaps broke one by one in the great silence of midday. Well settled in the life-giving heat of the stones

, the crickets surrendered, replacing the scale of the birdsong with a monotonous chant that gradually turned into a new silence.

Roger Barbaïra checked his watch and decided that the pause between heaven and earth had lasted long enough. He felt that his comrades, like himself, were eager to walk, run, shout, eat and drink. He said to the German:

"We're going down! We have to be at Foix station at half past five. Auda is going to Toulouse, Chabrol to Narbonne, Ferrocas to Béziers, Peyrat to Montpellier... Languedoc is big, Mr Rahn!

Just as they had done on their arrival, they passed through the postern gate one by one. Otto Rahn followed them at a run along the path, jumping from rock to rock. Out of breath, they stopped on a sloping meadow, the Prat dels Cremats.

"How about we all have lunch in Montsegur?" suggested the German.

Jordi Couquet smiled wistfully.

"You know, when we go *on* trips, we don't eat at restaurants. Besides, we don't have any money!"

Otto Rahn thought for a few seconds.

"Fine, it's on me for all eight of you! I'm by no means rich, but... what does it matter... I'm thirty-three years old!" And he added with youthful confidence:

"Besides, Mrs Couquet has to give me credit again!"

"That changes things!" observed Marius Chabrol, the young communist... "Ragged people of all countries, unite!"

They laughed heartily and continued their descent.



Marius Couquet's restaurant is located in a historic mansion whose façade bears the coat of arms of the Authie de Bellerose family, the oldest family in the country, not far from the church of Montsegur, built in 1685. Mrs Couquet offers guests varied menus on busy days, and simpler ones when there are only one or two travellers. Whatever the level, her capacity for

hospitality is unlimited. There is nothing ostentatious about the service or the cuisine, but it would be impossible to find more succulent ham than hers anywhere in the Languedoc, not to mention the Corbières wines with their taste of dry rock and the colours of the sun god.

When he saw Otto Rahn appear at the head of the procession, he let out a cry of surprise and exclaimed in French:

"Oh, Mr Rahn!.... Have you returned to us? We are delighted!

"Oh, certainly, Mr Couquet! It is a joy for me too!"

The German glanced around the room. Nothing had changed since his last stay. Perhaps it was a little blackened by smoke and older, but it was tidy and intelligently arranged. He murmured tenderly as he recalled the past:

"When I think that I lived in your house for three months... And the way you always treated me!... To see everything again! To leave everything behind!....

"You've just arrived and you're already thinking of leaving? That's not very nice of you!"

"In my rough and hard-working Germany, a month's holiday is an exceptional privilege, Mrs Couquet.

Otto Rahn lied discreetly. He was not on holiday, in fact, but on a mission.

-When did we last see each other?

-In 1931... Six years have passed! I wanted to return in 1934, when my book was published in French, but they wouldn't let me!

Otto Rahn's "they wouldn't let me" cast giant shadows across the German sky that would soon cover all of Europe. For the young *detectives*, however, the phrase meant nothing. They only retained the reference to the book. The man who had suddenly appeared before them that morning was a foreign writer, and shortly afterwards, the character took on new dimensions.

"He's a wise man," Ferrocas ventured.

"Perhaps a novelist," suggested Auda Isarn.

"Or a historian!"

"What he told us up there must be true," suggested Gaston Reboul. "When Germans study a foreign country, they do so thoroughly and end up knowing much more than the inhabitants of the region!

"That's true," confirmed Marius Chabrol.

Madame Couquet disappeared into the kitchen. She returned to the room a few minutes later and, pretending to have forgotten her French during that brief trip, asked Otto Rahn in the typical Montsegur accent, both rough and sing-song:

"Abèts dinnat?"

Realising that he still understood the dialect, Otto Rahn felt seven years younger.

"Did I have lunch, Mrs Couquet? No, actually, neither did my friends! That's why we came here.

"Nine in total? Fine! I won't let you starve, come on in!"

"You're giving me credit like other times, I'll pay! The innkeeper laughed.

"Like other times. Gladly! Even if it takes a long time, I know I won't lose anything with him.



The boys and the girl had sat down at the table. Otto Rahn presided over it and answered the question asked by four or five mouths at the same time:

"Yes, I published a book called *Crusade Against the Grail*. It was translated and published in Paris, but unfortunately they deleted many important notes referring to the Grail.

"Grail? What's that?" asked Jordi Couquet, speaking with his mouth full once again.

Otto Rahn smiled.

"Ah... ah... Are you interested in the Grail, Mr Couquet? But now that I notice, you have the same name as the owner of the restaurant!

The young man wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and replied.

"You see... in Montsegur, as in Lavelanet, on the other side of the mountain, where I was born, we are all cousins... which means there are a lot of them!"

And he smiled. Suddenly very serious, Otto Rahn seemed to be meditating. All that could be heard was a symphony of forks, the glugging of bottles and the sound of young jaws chewing. Finally, the German answered the question.

"According to a classic process of evolution, the Grail became a myth from a living reality. The Christians stole that myth from the pagans, just as they stole all their sacred places by building churches on the ruins of those temples..."

After a silence that allowed him to look at everyone one by one, he asked:

"Are there any Christians among you? I do not wish to offend anyone..."

A hearty laugh came from almost every throat. Gaston Reboul reminded the German:

"Did you know that we are members of the Secular Centre for Youth Hostels? That explains the question.

"Not necessarily!" objected Rahn.

"That's right, in fact!" agreed Raymond Ferrocas. "I was born in the Cévennes, into a *Camisard* family ¹, so I'm half Protestant... Enough not to mock when asked if I'm a Christian, as you do, comrades!"

"I'm a communist," recalled the young Chabrol.

"And the girl?" asked Otto Rahn, casting a gentle glance at Auda Isarn... "Isn't she eating?"

"I'm waiting for the salad." Jordi

Couquet burst out laughing.

"She's a vegetarian! Didn't I tell you, Mr Rahn, that Auda is very complicated?"

The young woman ignored the remark and replied directly to the German.

"I don't know if I'm a Christian, but if I am, it's not from a Catholic or Protestant point of view."

¹ Huguenot Protestants who fought against the armies of Louis XIV after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

Now reassured about the possible consequences of his words, Otto Rahn returned to the subject, raising his voice to be heard above the growing chatter in dialect.

Christians assimilated the myth of the Grail, as they did everything else, and turned it into the emerald cup that contained the blood of Christ collected by Joseph of Arimathea during the Passion. That cup was seen everywhere and nowhere! In Syria... in Rome, in the third century... in the Aragonese cave of San Juan de la Peña in 1399... later in Valencia, and of course in Montsegur, but Christians found nothing beyond the myth... And for obvious reasons! Just like my comrades...

Suddenly he fell silent. He was about to say: like my comrades from the sacred Hitlerian college, but then he thought about the effect it might have to utter such a phrase in front of such an assembly and skilfully added...

"Like my comrades, the specialists from Romania, I believe that the myth of the Grail is a reflection of a lost teaching, of a law of life suitable only for certain races.

"Race does not exist!" objected Marius Chabrol.

"Perhaps not for you!" replied Otto Rahn with a smile, "but for those who think that nature cares little and advances in an exclusively selective, racial sense, therefore... That teaching was written down, the law codified and, most likely, engraved in stone.

Rahn paused, gazed at those youthful faces slightly bent over the table, and then began again:

The Grail stone, evoked countless times by Wolfram von Eschenbach in his *Parzival*, where he tells of a "precious stone", and more explicitly designated by the Manichaeans of Persia by associating the word *gohr* – precious stone in ancient Persian – with the word *al*, sheet, that is, engraved precious stone, is possibly the only notion that does not belong to myth and is historically grounded!

"Interesting!" observed Robuffay, placing a huge piece of ham on his plate.

Meanwhile, the conversations of the local drinkers, who were listening intently to the German, gradually died down until they stopped altogether. Between two replies, all that could be heard was the whisper of flies swirling around the window panes and, outside, the Languedoc song of an oxherd walking along the village's only street to take his cows to the meadows stretching out at the entrance to the Lasset gorges.

"I have good reason to believe," Otto Rahn continued vigorously, "that your Cathars were in possession of the Grail-object and deciphered part of the law, but only part of it; if they had known it all, they would not have scattered themselves among the dead-end desert of Eastern thought and the Gospel of John—as Luther later did with the Old Testament—and they would have made Christianity disappear with the utmost ease instead of being destroyed by it!

Unlike most of the *agnostics*, who listened to him with polite curiosity, the local drinkers paid so much attention to the German writer's words that he ended up turning to them, recalling how Montsegur was and is sensitive to everything concerning the Cathar drama. He told them:

"When they left the fortress on 16 March 1244, the Perfects had not yet put the so-called 'treasure' in a safe place, which, for today's Europeans, spiritually corrupted by Jewish thought, can only be a pile of coins and strange stones and not a treasure according to the spirit and the flesh: a law of life concerned with the survival of the species, engraved on the plates of the Grail. It was moved the night before by Amiel Aicart, Poitevin, Hughes and a fourth man whose name has been lost. These Believers or Perfect Ones – their true dignity is unknown – descended by ropes along the north wall, the most vertiginous of *the pog*¹, and deposited the Grail in a safe place, most likely in a cave between Montsegur and Sabarthes. The secret disappeared with them. Thus, seven

¹ Name given in Occitania to mountain ranges with rounded peaks.

Centuries ago, the West lost the law that could, and still can, lead it back to the true path!



Otto Rahn turned back to the *ajistes* and said no more. The revelations he had just made about the nature of the Grail, which no member of the assembly dared to confirm or refute, were underscored by absolute silence. The men of Montsegur, who always think of the Cathars but never speak of them – as if the threat that the Crusaders of the north had brought upon the country still held all its force, or the torture by fire inflicted on the two hundred Perfects or Believers a few hundred metres from *Madame Couquet's* inn still crackled in their own flesh – resumed their interrupted conversations in low voices. The word *gargamèlho* often came to their lips.

"What does *gargamèlho* mean?" asked Robert Robuffay, continuing to chew the sixth slice of local ham.

"Greedy," replied philosophy student and poet Guyot Peyrat, looking at him with fierce irony.

"It's an expression from the Montsegur dialect," countered Otto Rahn. Everything here is special: the language, the pronunciation, the names, and even the special form of nobility. Given the association between the family name and the first name, the people here are always "from someone" or "from something": Nouel del Fidel... Marcou del Couli... Milou de Bast... and so many others!

Roger de Barbaïra barely touched his food. With a frown and a melancholy look, he spoke in a regretful voice:

"The Cathars... the Grail... the local nobility... All of this is truly extraordinary. When I think that in the space of two years we came to Montsegur five or six times without knowing for sure what we were doing, I have to admit that we are indeed miserable!

Otto Rahn replied with the utmost courtesy:

"The thing is, your curiosity is focused elsewhere. Apart from the sabbatical meetings at youth hostels and the Sunday outing, what else is going on?"

"We ski in winter and go on long hikes in summer; we cycle from the railway stations to the youth hostels," Barbaïra pointed out.

"And to the mountains," Ferrocas added. Comrade Robuffay is an excellent mountain guide.

Robuffay stood up slightly and confirmed his intentions to Auda Isarn, but without managing to make her raise her head.

"Right now, I can easily pass the *cinq-sup*¹. Apart from that... we explore caves. It's quite fun, it's like climbing upside down!

"We know Norbert Casteret," added Barbaïra, "the great man of French speleology. The advice he didn't give us allowed us to progress quickly.

Otto Rahn started and turned slightly pale. His eyes shone with a strange hope.

"What?" he replied. "You explore caves and you don't tell me anything?"

"You didn't ask us!"

Otto Rahn thought deeply but made up his mind quickly.

"I'd like to make a suggestion. Next week the Easter holidays begin, and some of you have at least eight to ten days off... How about we explore caves together?"

The boys looked at each other with amused surprise.

"You won't have any expenses except for food... I'll take care of the rest!" said the German.

"In that case, count me in!" announced Roger Ferrocas, the future teacher.

Marius Chabrol only had three days available, and Guyot Peyrat had to stay at home.

"I can bring Lou Ganet, a friend from Carcassonne," announced Roger Barbaïra. "He's only fourteen, but he's very strong, a real acrobat."

Then he turned to the writer:

¹ Degree on the scale of difficulty defined in climbing, ranging from one to six, with a higher and lower level between each landing. There is a second table for climbing called "artificial": a mode of progression that uses other points of support apart from the rocks.

"In any case, tell me, Mr Rahn... why this sudden passion for caves?"

The German smiled.

It's not a question of a sudden passion, Mr. *Ajiste* (he continued to think: how can one be *a-j-i-s-t-e* in this land that has the most beautiful language in the world?)... Apart from my friend Gadal, instructor at Ussat-les-Bains, I am perhaps one of the pioneers of speleology! In 1930 and 1931, when we lived near each other, we explored the most important caves in the region. Bouan, Niaux, Vic-de-Sos and Lombrives, among others. Guess what we were looking for? The Holy Grail, those tablets of the law saved from Montsegur that I mentioned earlier! We only found prehistoric material and some drawings and inscriptions that prove the presence of the Cathars.

Silence. Mrs Couquet cleared the plates from the table and served coffee in tall, narrow glasses.

"If we had poor results," the writer continued, "it could only be for two reasons. First, because there are thousands of caves in this region, and second, if we were looking far away for something that must be close to Montsegur. For two years I meditated on the historical certainties available to us in the manuscripts of the Jean de Doat Foundation, which I researched at the National Library in Paris... The four men led by Perfect Bertrand d'En Marti who took the treasure from the fortress were instructed to light a bonfire on the top of Bidorta if the mission was successful. The fire was lit and observed from Montsegur, but that does not prove that the bearers of the Grail had hidden it nearby. One man could have lit a bonfire while the others carried away the engraved stone slabs. To reconstruct the itinerary, I also started from historical data related to the existence of a sacred route of the Cathars.

Otto Rahn sipped his coffee slowly, took a pen out of his bag, tore a sheet from his notebook and drew a kind of master plan, which he passed around.

-See this path through the La Peyre gorge that connects Montsegur to Luzenac. It is the sacred route that links the fortress to the most important caves, inhabited since prehistoric times

prehistoric times. Just after the persecution began, the Cathars prepared two strong positions, one "open", the fortress rebuilt at their request by the owner, Lord Ramon, Lord of Perelha, at the top of *the pog* of Montsegur, and another "closed", in the caves of the Ariège valley. Until the Inquisition was firmly established in Languedoc, there were numerous comings and goings of Perfects and Believers along this route. The journey takes barely five hours on foot. When the persecution became fierce, traffic decreased, although it did not cease entirely, but tended towards a retreat from the "open" and more threatened position – Montsegur – to the "closed" and safer position – the caves. Despite the apparent logic of the matter, I made a slight mistake in looking for the Grail in those caves. Later, I realised that the Cathar leaders were not going to make the mistake of entrusting the treasure to *the fleas*¹ of Sabarthes, who were so well known and, consequently, so threatened. The Grail tablets were simply deposited in an unknown cave somewhere along the sacred route, before or after the La Peyre gorge! I can say that I returned to France precisely to try to discover it!

Roger Barbaïra, who had been watching the German with interest for a few minutes, said with a smile:

"I am of the opinion that your conception of the Grail may not be historically grounded, but in any case, it is a beautiful subject for speleologists.

"There are at least two caves in the La Peyre gorge that we know of, isn't that right, Robert?" said Ferrocas to Robuffay, the climber.

"Yes, one is on the slopes of Saint-Barthélemy peak, the other in a corridor on Soularac peak. But we're not thinking of marking them, let alone visiting them!

"There it is!" exclaimed the German. "I can't do anything on my own, but with a team as good as yours, I'll be able to succeed in my research!

"Look!" warned Marius Chabrol, waving his fist where he wore a wristwatch. "It's already past three o'clock! Foix is

¹ caves.

thirty-two kilometres away and we're on bicycles! If you intend to miss the train, I'm leaving now! If I don't show up for work on Monday, the capitalists won't pay me!

"Just a moment!" shouted Otto Rahn, getting up at the same time. "Can we meet here next Saturday? We'll sleep in the farms on the Lasset plain... Are there ropes, tents, lanterns?"

"Don't worry, Mr Rahn, we'll take care of that!"

Equipment, it's our business!

The *AJists* left the room amid a tumult of footsteps, rumours mixed with animal cries, political slogans and protests from Auda Isarn, closely besieged by the most eminent climber of the Languedoc *AJists*... Rahn sat back down and rubbed his right hand, bruised by the farewells that confirmed the "See you soon, brothers" of the vigorous *AJ members*, his new comrades, who were shrinking in size in the distance...



After the hard climb up to the Seguelà gorge, the young people headed downhill towards Montferrier. A cheerful wind accompanied them.

"This is what you call luck!" shouted Robuffay. Here we are, embarking on great underground expeditions in the style of Nobert Casteret.

"It's useless!" ¹ said Jordi Couquet.

They advanced haphazardly, like puppies, sometimes gliding with the precision of arrows, sometimes winding their way under the large plane trees ² that flank the road to Foix.

Ferrocas and Roger Barbaïra walked side by side. The future teacher looked uneasily at his temporary companion and said:

"I don't trust that German very much!"

"Why?"

¹ It's free!

² (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) Eurasian tree of the maple family.

"A guy who throws himself into things like that... Who pays without knowing anyone... Who imposes himself on the group...

-You depend on him!

-And what about that story about the cave? What could be behind all this?

-Nothing. He says what he's looking for!

Ferrocas shrugged his shoulders so hard that the bicycle tilted to one side.

-What a story! In the 20th century, people don't go around looking for the Holy Grail, for heaven's sake!

As time was pressing, they picked up the pace. They entered Foix station with the tumultuous impetus of youth. While Jordi Couquet registered the bicycles, Ferrocas insisted:

"Is this Otto Rahn a writer? What proof do we have of that? He could very well be a spy!

Barbaira shrugged.

"There's a French edition of the old book," he said. "Just buy it before next Sunday!"

"I hadn't thought of that!" admitted Ferrocas, blushing. But don't give up.

"What does the book say? It would be good to know!"

The discussion resumed on the train. The German's intrusion into the group's life – their private life multiplied by eight thanks to the esprit-auberge – was analysed from every angle. Finally, they voted for or against Otto Rahn's admission to the group. Five *members* voted in favour. As usual, Auda Isarn abstained. Guyot Peyrat and Ferrocas postponed their decision for the next eight days. They wanted to read *The Crusade Against the Grail* before making up their minds.

II

A week later, the *Ajists* climbed the path leading to the La Peyre gorge. And they sang:

*Ma blonde entendí-tu dans la ville
Siffler les fabriques et les trains? Allons
au-devant de la vie,
Let us welcome the morning!*

*Arise, my fair one, with kittens in the
wind, Arise, friends!
Our country is heading
towards the rising sun...*

The forest of beech, oak and fir trees engulfed them almost as soon as they left the farms on the last plain of Lasset, where they had spent the night lying on hay. Whitish trunks and black trunks. Compact foliage, red, black, green, filtering a slow light accentuated in the depths by the invisible sun. From time to time, a solitary ray pierced the black and green canopy with the precision of a spear. The forest was imbued with the sweet scent of mushrooms. Moss smelled of the underground. At their feet, Lasset set the pace of an ever-faster torrent as it moved away from Saint-Barthélemy, where it springs forth when hard snow at the summit feeds its wild force. The initial roar drowned out other noises and gradually became an echo of the tramontane wind, a breath of breeze, later the song of a bird, and finally silence.

Otto Rahn advanced at a slower pace than the young men. He had left a few minutes after them, but, sustained by his slow and steady walk as an expert mountaineer, he did not lose ground.

After half an hour, he emerged from the forest. The open space now replaced the walls of leaves that seemed to want to stick to his skin. Ahead, further on, the *young people* imagined themselves naked, sunbathing. Red sun. Blue meadows. Sky-coloured snow. The slight intoxication of the heights pigmented their skin and lit up a sudden joy in their eyes.

When Rahn caught up with them, they set off again as if eager to expend their youthful excess energy. The German writer stopped and turned around. He also hurried to discover the perspective crushed by the altitude he sensed

behind him, fearing the overwhelming emotion he was experiencing. Now the valley opened up in a progressive scissor movement and revealed the *pog* of Montsegur with a tiny white patch of the fortress imprinted on one side of the sky where the reflection of the pastures collided with the Mediterranean blue and suggested the depths of a glacial chasm. In a romantic impulse whose manifestations he could not control, and whenever his curiosity returned to the magnetic pole – Romania¹ – the Crusade against the Albigensians – the Cathar epic and the lost Grail – the German shouted inside himself:

*Montsalvatge, oh place of misery,
no one wants to console you*²

He wiped away a tear and returned to the path, which gradually became a trail through the expanse of grassland. Here and there, patches of snow continued to resist the fierce clarity of the sun on the northern side, melting at the base and dissolving into murmurs of living water. Rahn turned back every minute. Behind him, the *pog* moved steadily from north to south, vanishing into the hollows accentuated by the increasing altitude and seeming to struggle to maintain its dominance over the village revealed by the crimson drops on the rooftops, as if the men who had once chosen it to affirm their renunciation continued to dispute the laws of matter. The *pog* eventually disappeared, muffled by the foothills of the Lasset valley, also known as Val l'Incant, Valley of Enchantment, Enchanted Valley.

¹ A word generally used by linguists to refer to the group of countries whose inhabitants still speak Latin. However, these forms of Latin are very distant from their remote origin and very different from each other, and their different varieties became increasingly unintelligible to each other. To such an extent that they had to be given different names and became what we now know as Italian, French, Romanian, Spanish, Portuguese, Catalan... (Translator's note)

²Unless otherwise indicated, the quotations in this chapter refer to Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*.

Otto Rahn found his way again and quickened his pace. After fifteen minutes, he found the *ajists* sitting on the grass in the La Peyre gorge.

"So? Is it old yet?" Jordi Couquet asked him with a laugh.

"As old as the Grail! And even so, despite having the patience to wait seven centuries for me, I must hurry! Twenty-four hours or so, or fifteen minutes..."

Good humour all round. The boots are steaming. Jaws are working. Sun. A light breeze waits for the midday heat to rise before turning into wind and lashing the gorge, humiliating the Embeyre forest, roaring in the gorges of La Frau where the last Cathars took refuge. It is time for the seekers of the Grail to stop thinking about their quest. Jordi Couquet delicately placed blades of grass in Auda Isarn's neck, who protests. Today she is wearing men's trousers and the German writer, sensitive to the beauty of her legs displayed a week earlier, feels sad. Meanwhile, he admits that those clothes suit the dark-haired, black-eyed woman better than a skirt; that although she denies her sex, she has a beauty that is her own but impossible to define.

Robuffay struggles with a sausage fifteen centimetres long. He removes the skin with a spiral motion, and Otto Rahn notes with satisfaction that instead of throwing it in front of him, as in Montsegur, he wraps it in waxed paper and places it in his rucksack on the grass.

Blue grass. Blue sky. Blue snow still abundant in the main range of the Pyrenees, whose gorge stretches for fifty kilometres. The sun beats down on uncovered heads. Roger Barbaïra discreetly takes an old Languedoc beret out of his bag. It belonged to his father. The blue has faded and part of the fabric is greasy from being handled so much. Roger Barbaïra presses it with his fingers in the same place, pushes it up over his eyes and shapes the brim into a visor... just like his father used to do.

Ferrocas, who had not missed a single detail of the operation, said mockingly:

"What's that? Are you covering your head like the *culs-terreux* of the region?"

"And why shouldn't I cover my head like the *culs-terreux* to whom I belong?"

"You didn't need to bring your philosophy book with you!"

"With or without the book, I have both feet and hands in the vineyards, like my father."

"Shall we go?" asked Rahn.

The boys pick up their bags and take the path up the slope above the gorge. This time they leave no waxed paper or empty tins behind.



The tents were pitched near the first streams of the Soularac peak, not far from a depression where the snow maintained a good supply of frozen water. They lit a fire with the wood that Barbaïra, Couquet, Robuffay, the three strong men of the team, had stacked during the afternoon with the help of the newest member, Lou Ganet.

Ganet's father owned an agricultural machinery shop in Carcassonne, on Avenue Marcou, and he himself still wore the trousers he used to wear at Stanislas College, the "seminary" on Rue de Mairie. He was a poor student, unlike his sister Matilde, who was doing well. "The good parents" held him in such low esteem that they refused to let him join the Scouts. So *he* naturally accepted the compensation Barbaïra offered him.

He was a handsome, virile, robust, dark-skinned boy with wavy black hair, who at fourteen, in the midst of growing up, was already five foot nine. He appeared to be a dreamer, as closed off as he was maladjusted to his environment. No one knew of any other friend apart from Barbaïra, the only one who, apart from his father, mother, sister Matilde and brother Pierrot, knew of the existence in his room of a photograph of Mermoz hanging on the wall at the head of the bed, in the place where Jesus usually watches over the dreams of little creatures. He carried his twenty kilos of firewood without saying a word, and

no *labourer* could boast of ever having heard a whole sentence come out of his mouth.

The night was turning blue. Mount Saint-Barthélemy was losing the last threads of the golden mantle woven by the reflections of a sun that had long since disappeared behind the foothills of the main mountain range. The bonfire crackled. Otto Rahn held his hands out towards the fire, whose flames were lost in the night with the dancing, fleeting glow of will-o'-the-wisps. Roger Barbaïra, already well versed in the primitive caving techniques of his time, sat more quietly than usual, thinking that tomorrow a cave would yield the fabulous treasure of the Grail.

Barbaïra knew the legends of the Grail quite well. Before running the large wine estate his father owned at the entrance to Corbières, he had also rubbed shoulders with the "good fathers" of Carcassonne. More studious and better adapted than little Ganet, he had easily obtained two degrees. He was particularly interested in history. In the room he occupied in the 'castle' – in fact, a mansion, noble in design, it is true, but of modest proportions – he still kept his school books and reread them from time to time. The notion of the Grail that they gave him – the emerald cup carried between Montsegur and Valencia, or between Montsegur and Montserrat – left him indifferent, and given the youthful need to provoke an older and more knowledgeable man, he had not lied entirely when he told the German writer eight days earlier that the *agists* were not interested in the past. Everything began to change when he presented the Grail and the history of Languedoc in a new light.

He asked him:

"But, in the end, what would happen if we discovered the stone Grail you spoke of in Montsegur?"

Otto Rahn could not tell him the truth. It was impossible to answer this loyal boy, now so enthusiastic: those tablets would be taken in the utmost secrecy to the Third Reich! It was impossible to reveal to him the close relationship with Alfred Rosenberg, author of *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, who had just sent him to Montsegur, not

on holiday, but on a mission, or the relationship with the sacred college that lived in the shadow of Heinrich Himmler! However, without revealing the whole truth, he could answer him without deceiving him:

"If those plates are found, the texts must be translated. There is no doubt that our scholars today will encounter the same difficulties that prevented a fair and complete interpretation in the time of the Cathars.

"In your opinion, what kind of writing did the scholars have to deal with? Were the Egyptian hieroglyphics ever actually translated?"

-How can I know? Perhaps it is a pre-runic script. Wolfram von Eschenbach, who is believed to have been initiated into the Aryan mysteries, hints at this when he says:

*Guyot, the highly renowned master,
Trouva en écriture païenne enchevêtrée
La légende qui atteint la source première des légendes*¹.

Otto Rahn placed special emphasis on "coded pagan writing",
-Why runic or pre-runic script?

The German asserted with abruptly unleashed passion:

-Because it can only be an Aryan and pagan treasure! The Grail tablets ended up in Persia! How did they get there if not in the saddlebags of the Nordic conquerors? Where did the Shiites and Medes come from if not from the plains of the Danube and the Don? And where did the first occupants of those regions come from if not from the northern kingdom, from the civilisation of Thule?

Is the Grail perhaps the last message from the Hyperboreans before their disappearance?

Barbaïra thought carefully. As a man from the Languedoc region, his sense of balance rejected the

¹ Guyot, the renowned Master Found in encrypted pagan writing
The legend that goes to the primary source of legends.

theories of the writer, but he had an inner impulse that led him to accept them. He believed, unlike everyone else, in the depth of Germanic science and said to himself, if this man of great culture speaks with such certainty about the wanderings of the Grail, it is because he is basing his claims on discoveries that we are unaware of!

Nevertheless, he tried to defend himself against the German and against himself:

"These are all hypotheses, Mr Rahn. I would prefer a more... less romantic interpretation of history, shall we say! Nevertheless, let us admit it! In that case, what is the reason for the Persians, who are said to have possessed the Grail, to have embraced Manichean dualism long before the Cathars?"

"For the same reason! They didn't translate the tables correctly!"

There was silence. People were already sleeping in the tents. The wind picked up for a few seconds, whistling through the ropes that stretched the canvas, and then ceased for an indeterminate amount of time. On a peak revealed by a patch of sky darker than the rest of the firmament, the Shepherd's Star ¹lit a bonfire that an invisible shepherd stoked. Paralysed by the cold that froze the snow, the murmurs of the water ceased completely. From time to time, and increasingly spaced out as time flowed, a stone rolled in the gorges of the Soularac peak.

"And if the Grail were discovered and translated, what might happen?" asked Roger Barbaïra.

"If that were the case," replied the German writer in a low voice, "the destiny of the white man would take a completely different course.

"What do you mean?"

"It is difficult to say more. I do not believe you are sufficiently open to these problems to explain them in all their magnitude. Besides, I am no prophet! Just know that once the Grail is found and deciphered, Europe will cease to waver between the

¹ As the planet Venus is popularly known in some traditions. For the ancient Greeks, it was the star Capella, which was the shepherd who herded a flock of cows (the Milky Way).

Christianity and communism, and it will extinguish those two forms of leprosy that corrode her face and blind her!

Once again, there was silence.

"What if it isn't?" asked Barbaïra.

"The best of your troubadours, Peire Cardinal, has already answered that question:

*Prochains sont certes les temps
When the world will be turned upside
down, When the priest will go to the
tournament
And the woman will give the sermon ¹.*

Otto Rahn smiled, shook the young man's hand, and retired to his tent.



Divided into two teams, the *cavers* are now searching for the caves discovered last year. Robuffay remembers that they had three small openings, unlike the one at La Frau, which they explored themselves, and those at Bouan and Lombrives, which were explored by Rahn and Gadal.

"I walked twelve kilometres in Lombrives and didn't reach the last chimneys!" said the German to Barbaïra, who leads the Soularac team.

Sometimes he goes with him and other times with Robuffay, who is in charge of the Saint Barthélemy team. In fact, at the Laico Youth Hostel Centre, there are no bosses, only managers. This little dialectical lie amuses Otto Rahn greatly, since in the world of mountaineering, as in other aspects of life, it is the best, the strongest or the most "committed" of the boys who leads the pack.

¹ The times are coming for sure
Of a world turned upside down
The priest will go to the
discussions
And the woman
will give the sermon

The base of the Soularac peak sits directly on the grasslands. Nowhere does vegetation cover the crags. On the contrary, the eastern slope of Saint-Barthélemy, which hides the opening of the cave, is submerged in the thickets of the upper slopes of the Val de l'Incant. Robuffay tackles it with the strength of a woodcutter. He opposes the tangle of thorns, boxwoods and werneritas with his chiselled face, an expression of obstinacy, rough hands, sudden outbursts of violence and, from time to time, a rage that echoes throughout the mountain...

Barbaïra hopes to quickly discover the Soularac cave. When he returns to base camp on the first night, frightened and disillusioned, he says to Rahn:

"It's strange! I don't recognise anything! The paths and slopes have changed! The entrance was near an open chimney that I can't find now!"

Robuffay has just had a similarly negative result, but for more obvious reasons. Last year, he had crossed that area before the arrival of spring. The vegetation, now very tall, hides the paths, so it will take a lot of luck to discover an opening behind the black curtain of boxwood.

Second day of searching. New setbacks. When night falls, faces burnt by the sun and altitude lean towards the campfire. Hands scratched by thorns reach for food and plates. Auda Isarn, who runs the kitchen, has prepared a huge amount of rice stew, which the boys devour without the slightest hesitation. Half an hour later, they are snoring in their tents. Auda and the German writer are awake. The solitude of the two of them and the fire burning in the night invite them to continue their German-Languedoc love affair. He says to the young woman:

"Did you know that in Dodoma, where the most revered oak tree in Greece stood, the priestesses of Artemis were called doves? And that the dove was the sacred bird of the Cathars? On Good Friday, the day of *Minne*, that is, of supreme love, a dove would deposit a host in the Grail!"

He looked at Auda Isarn very sweetly, spoke in a moist voice and chose his words from the depths of his high culture. Through the red and black mist, the barrier of fire and the night that separated them, his hand caressed the young woman's after his search.

"In 1930, I discovered a Cathar dove engraved on the rock of a cave in Sabarthès. Eight days ago, I discovered another one, but this one is very much alive! May Auda Isarn, Cathar dove, also be able to place a host in the Grail tomorrow!

The girl shrugged her shoulders and replied in a tired voice:

"Please, Mr Rahn! Robuffay and Barbaïra are courting me, which I don't enjoy at all! I have the greatest sympathy for you, but I want to continue being just a comrade to everyone!

She disappeared into the shadows. Rahn heard her moving around inside the tent for some time. Moments later, she reappeared between the crimson and black and handed him an open book. It was Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* and Heinrich's *Legend of the Holy Grail*, which he had lent her. Auda Isarn had underlined a passage, which he read:

*Les chevaliers aussi qui, là-bas, le gardent
Doivent éter sans tache dans leur chasteté.
Quiconque veut appartenir au Graal
Must completely renounce feminine love ¹.*

Otto Rahn fell silent, deeply desolate. And he went to bed, taking with him as consolation the image of the smile that Auda Isarn had just offered him for the first time. It was a smile that a man could not associate with passion, sad, stripped of all hope.



¹ The knights who guard it must also be chaste and without blemish.
He who aspires to belong to the Grail
Must completely renounce female love.

The search resumed on the third day, but yielded no better results than on the previous days. Pursued by a hurricane that battered the summit of Soularac and rolled clouds of sulphur-coloured silk that slowly filled the rocky corridors, the two teams returned to camp half an hour apart. Night seemed to have fallen two hours earlier than usual. Lightning lit up the day, unfolding shrouds of vague luminosity, as quickly concealed as they were revealed by the dense clouds. With the first drops of rain, long and flat like communion wafers, Barbaïra entered Otto Rahn's tent.

"It's a local storm," said the German. "Someone threw a stone into the Druids' lake!"

Impressed, Barbaïra replied with great astonishment:

"A stone? This morning we threw stones into a lake as we passed by... to see who could throw them the furthest, but it was the lake that the locals call the Trout Lake.

The knights who guard it must also be chaste and without blemish.

He who aspires to belong to the Grail

Must completely renounce female love.

"I know that, but those people are mistaken. It is the lake of the Druids! They told me all about it in 1931... Long before the birth of Jesus Christ, the local people were dying en masse, affected by an unknown disease... The Druids advised that everything made of gold be thrown into the lake to appease the hidden deities, lords of life and death. Once this was done, the Druids drew a magic circle around the *pond*. Once all the fish died, it could no longer be called the Lake of Trout! From green, the lake turned black. The people were healed, but since then, anyone who breaks the magic circle to take the submerged gold will die of the same disease that once ravaged the region. Stones thrown into the *evil pond* ¹awaken the Evil One and provoke his wrath. Then he unleashes a

¹ It can be translated as: 'Pond of Evil' (N.d.T.)

A storm as a warning!... Such is the local legend. Such is also the result of experience. Indeed, every time the people of Montsegur throw stones into the lake, a storm forms on the peak of Soularac, and only there! How curious, isn't it?...

The storm roars. The rain lashes against the tents, which the wind battered like soaked veils. It falls incessantly throughout the night and until midday. The water rushes impetuously through the mountain corridors. Locked in the base camp, the *ajistes* sleep, dream, play cards and battleship, tic-tac-toe and A sad day, but at the same time

beneficial. Physical strength is restored while morale slumbers like a fire covered with ashes.

The young people at the Laico Youth Hostel Centre have become accustomed to sweeping away and denying the supernatural nature of their concerns. But it continues to rain and the storm is expected to last a long time. Ash-coloured sky. Greyish pastures. Black and grey rocky areas. Rain. Hail. Lightning. The temperature has dropped fifteen degrees. The tent canvases stick to their shirts. It is impossible to light a fire. Auda Isarn opens tins of food. Otto Rahn delves once again into Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*.

*For this land is well guarded and
watched over by knights,
So that one cannot
Traverse the forest by trickery or artifice...¹*



Equipped from head to toe with a safety rope slung over his shoulder, Robert Robuffay gathers his team at dawn on the fifth day. His face contorted with anger, he shouts and brandishes the

¹ Because this land is awake and guarded by gentlemen
So that it cannot be
Cross the forest with deceit and trickery... (Translator's note)

ice axe he usually uses to clear a path through the undergrowth:

-Good God! I'm going to tear this damn bush apart until I find the devil's *flea*! Oh yes, I'm going to find it!

Sure enough, at three o'clock in the afternoon, he finds the entrance to the cave, realising from the landmarks that he had been very close to it from the first day! Given the poor performance of the calcium carbide torch, he advances about thirty metres inside and stops.

"What does it look like?" Otto Rahn asks eagerly.

"So far, I only see a gallery.

"Do you see any traces? Inscriptions?..."

"Nothing."

Good weather returned to the mountain. When the two teams, gathered in a single line and more heavily laden than ever, left base camp at dawn on the sixth day, the light returned and the ridges of Soularac and Saint-Barthélemy seemed to have been redesigned with almost cruel precision in the atmosphere purified by the recent rain. Rahn decided to abandon the search in Soularac and concentrate all his forces on the Saint-Barthélemy cave. After four days, whether the mission was completed or not and whatever the outcome, he had to return to Germany.

In 1937, caving equipment was reduced to a bare minimum. There were no steel cable ladders or winches for ascending and descending. Nor were there any long-lasting electric torches, telephones or radios to maintain contact between the men at the front and those on the surface. Robuffay, Barbaïra and Rahn, who were leading the way, had only three 20-metre rolls of rope, three calcium carbide lamps and a pocket torch. The other two carbide lamps were reserved for the boys on guard duty. At that moment, none of the explorers could imagine that the day would come when cavers would not venture into a cave without a protective helmet.

Otto Rahn, however, second only to Robuffay, feels protected by the esoteric poet who brought him to this wild region of the Pyrenees:

*Near him, Parzival learns Secret
news of the Grail
A une grotte l'hôte le conduisit...¹*

The gallery ahead slopes gently downwards. The ceiling is so low that the explorers have to walk slightly bent over. Every now and then, one of them bangs his head on the rocks above and lets out a curse! The limestone walls are completely dry.

"Under these conditions," says the German, "if the Cathars left any inscriptions, we should find them intact. Didn't you forget your camera, Barbaïra?"

"No."

"Or the magnesium?"

"No."

Although the dry ground does not give way under their feet, they proceed with caution. They stop from time to time to adjust the old lamps... stuck picks, leaking rubber seals...

By midday, they had walked a hundred metres beneath the mountain through a nondescript gallery without any inscriptions, cave drawings, stalactites or stalagmites. Barbaïra seems disappointed and says:

"All that effort to reach such an ordinary gallery! But Otto Rahn's enthusiasm remained undiminished.

"I'm sure we'll find some amazing things deeper down!"

It was late afternoon when they resumed their exploration, but just fifty metres ahead of where they had reached in the morning, they came to the end of the tunnel. At their feet was a deep pit. Robuffay unrolled the

¹ Near him, Parzival learns of
secret news about the Grail
The guest led him to a cave

twenty-metre rope and lowered a lamp into the depths. The lamp illuminated a platform, and beyond it, a sloping void whose angle would force them to proceed much more delicately than they had done until then.

-You can set up a *rappel* with two twenty-metre ropes, says Robuffay, but I need a stake to secure them, as there isn't a rock ledge here that's big enough and safe enough. Let's leave that for tomorrow!



They returned to camp and settled around the fire. Barbaïra said to the German:

"I've been thinking about what you told me the other night about the Grail. It's a new and very appealing interpretation indeed! The pagan Grail taken up by Christian Judaism—that fits in with a story whose deeper meaning I'm only now beginning to glimpse!

"Do you believe in it now?"

"I need to believe!"

Otto Rahn gazed at the young man whose face, bathed in the reflections of the fire, took on the coppery tone of an Indian countenance.

"In that case, Mr Barbaïra, I can also explain why you need the Grail, which, given your scepticism, I was unable to do the other night! Five thousand years ago, or perhaps more—a second in the history of living beings—a merciless struggle for world conquest began between the Jewish people and the Aryans! The Jews, a minority, advanced steadily along the path they had chosen once and for all, and never betrayed their original destiny because they possessed the Tablets of the Law! The Aryans lost theirs, that is, the Grail, the tablets engraved in "coded pagan script" that gave them the argument for their historical continuity... Hence the chaotic attitude, the contradictory actions, the hesitation in choosing between the law of spirit and matter, the impossibility of true affirmation!... By crushing the Jews, they blocked their path to world domination for a few centuries, but they did not do so with full knowledge of the facts. It was animal instinct,

simply the gregarious reaction of their enormous racial superiority. With the danger averted for a time, they returned to their old ways. While they lost their direction of consciousness, their Grail, the Jews saved theirs!

"You speak like a Hitlerian!" said Barbaïra, suddenly suspicious.

"And why not? I am convinced that my country possesses a formidable truth that must be revealed to the world!"

"All this deserves serious reflection," murmured the young man as he withdrew.

At the base camp, which on this night seems pinned to the ground by thousands of stars, no one sleeps deeply. Rahn's lamp burns brightly, Roger Barbaïra lies down with his back to the wood fire, which eventually burns out with small bursts of flame, then with red flashes of constellations, and finally with a mushroom cloud of smoke that rounds, dissolves and dissipates into mist.

A mineral silence adds to the weight of the evanescent mountain that Barbaïra contemplates above him. Suddenly, a human voice pierces the undisturbed silence, a cautious request.

"Auda..."

Roger Barbaïra raises himself up on one elbow. With newfound sharpness, he tries to pierce the night with his gaze. He has the impression that Auda Isarn's tent, set up somewhat apart from the others, is changing shape and that an unusual shadow is resting on it...

"Auda..."

"What do you want?"

"Open up!"

Roger Barbaïra jumps with his feet together and, in four or five bounds muffled by the grass, throws himself on Robuffay, who is kneeling in front of the young woman's tent trying to open the zip. Surprised, Robuffay falls backwards and receives punches to the face from Barbaïra, who is in a dominant position. Robuffay breaks free with a powerful blow to the kidneys and grabs him by the waist. The two fall, tightly entwined, and roll two or three times towards the ravine. They fight silently for a few minutes, moving further and further away from the

camp as the slope of the terrain propels them towards the La Peyre gorge. The echo of the blows grows fainter and fainter, fading away completely when the rivals separate and begin to rub their noses, swollen like cauliflowers, and wipe the blood from their mouths...



"You must have suffered enough in this damned scrubland, haven't you?" asks Rahn, glancing distractedly at the face of his mountain guide leader.

"Don't even mention it! There's nothing worse!"

On the morning of the seventh day, when the three men entered the cave followed by Reboul, Couquet and Ganet, who secured the return to the surface where Ferrocas was keeping watch, Robuffay was still as agitated as an ocean swept by a hurricane.

An hour later, upon hearing the roar of a man falling, neither Rahn nor Barbaïra could say whether the explorer in front had made a mistake due to his state of anger, fallen because of a *rope* that was too short, or whether the knot securing both ropes had come undone:

"Shit!"

Immediately afterwards, there was a muffled crash. Then silence. The saffron-coloured light of the calcium carbide lamps was not enough to mask the chalky whiteness of Rahn and Barbaïra's faces as they stared at each other with eyes filled with fear and bewilderment.

"He fell!" announces the German, open-mouthed.

After a moment of stupor, Barbaïra is overcome by an explosion of anger.

"Damn it all to hell! In three years of *dangerous* missions, there has never been an accident! There had to be one because of his... (he was going to say because of his fantasies, but he stopped himself) because of his ambitions!"

The words came out violently, but they were out of place in that necropolis atmosphere, where twenty metres below lay what was probably a still-warm corpse.

"We have to do something! We have to do something!" Otto Rahn repeated with the piercing intensity of a broken record.

"Of course! We must do something!" shouted Barbaïra as if he had hurled an insult at him.

He turns towards the entrance to the gallery and shouts:

"Ganet! Reboul! Couquet! Hey! Robuffay has fallen... Yes, fallen! Quick, pass me another rope! A rope!"

The plea rolls dangerously into the depths. A star pierces the gloomy depths and advances, sparkling. Another is born and dies, lights up again, grows and transforms into a red sun. Jordi Couquet comes to the front dressed in golden light and behind him Ganet dressed in shadow, which he leaves behind as he also enters the yellow-saffron circle that the lamps draw around the opening of the well.

Roger Barbaïra orders:

"Couquet, go up there, quickly! Ferrocas is looking for Auda, he must be in the camp. Tell him to come as quickly as possible with the first aid kit..."

Come on, old man! Ganet, go and get a rope from my bag by the entrance. Go on! And bring Couquet with you. We need five people for this!

The two boys disappear into the darkness and return ten minutes later.

"Ferrocas went to look for Auda!"

"Take the rope," says Lou Ganet.

Barbaïra examines it carefully and tests it.

"It's frayed, but it should hold!"

"Double it up!"

-Impossible. Robuffay needed forty metres for the *rappel*. It's just enough. Well, even worse! Come on, it's a risk we have to take. If you lower me slowly, there's no reason for it to break. Right now, I'm going to try to get to the platform.

"I'll descend," replies little Ganet, turning to him with a face that is both enthusiastic and pleading.

"No, I'll descend!"

"No, me! I'm stronger than you!"

"Shut up, boy!"

Barbaïra hesitates for a moment, thinks, and insists:

"I'm the one who's going to find that scoundrel, not you or anyone else! When I get down there, I'll retrieve the forty-metre rope, tie it to mine, and you pull. You climb up to Robuffay. Even with four of you pulling, it's going to be quite a struggle. Be careful that the rope slides over the earth and not the rocks. Then you pull me out of the hole too. Let's do it!"

After an hour of work punctuated by intense moments of excitement, tangled ropes, us making, unmaking and remaking, the inert body suspended in mid-air being pulled up and down, and tremendous efforts to hoist a dead weight of seventy-five kilos, Robuffay is hoisted to the edge of the pit.

"He's not breathing," Otto Rahn observes with anguish that carries a sense of guilt.

"Don't start arguing!" shouted Jordi Couquet. "Now we need to get Barbaïra out of there."

They pulled him out, then carried the victim along the gallery as carefully as possible. Robuffay's eyes were closed, his limbs limp, and his face covered in blood.

"He's dead!" said Rahn.

Then, with a tense expression and moist eyes, he muttered something to himself.

*In truth, your name is Parzival
Cela signifie à coup sûr pourfendu,
For great love carved deep furrows ¹.*



"Give him a sip of brandy between his teeth!" ordered Barbaïra.

¹ In truth, your name is Parsifal Which means split in half Because great love digs deep furrows.

One of the boys pried open his clenched jaws and poured enough brandy into his mouth to raise the dead, but Robuffay remained motionless.

"We have to give him artificial respiration," said Barbaïra, looking at Reboul. "Do you know how to do that?"

"No!"

"What about you, Couquet?"

"No."

No one knew how to perform mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. They stood there with their arms hanging limply and their hands empty, surrounding the sprawled body as if a new bolt of lightning from the Druids' Lake had just turned them into statues of ash.

"What about Auda? What's she doing taking so long?" cried Barbaïra, looking up at the mountainside. "Ferrocas went to fetch her over an hour ago!"

Auda Isarn did not arrive. The camp was very far from the cave. No path connected them, even though the terrain was not as obstacle-ridden as in the high mountains, which had some dead ends. Everyone's fear of another accident grew.

When the young woman appeared half an hour later, out of breath, frowning and empty-handed, Barbaïra breathed a sigh of relief.

"Didn't you bring the first aid kit?" asked the German.

Auda Isarn shrugged, walked over to the injured man and asked, "What happened?"

"Robuffay fell headfirst," Roger Barbaïra explained.

As the girl scrutinised his face, asking a silent question, he smiled and added:

"No one pushed him, believe me! He fell! And from a great height!"
Look at his blood!

-The wounds on his scalp prove nothing!

"What can be done?"

"All or nothing... It depends."

She constantly fixed him with a silent, strange gaze from her black eyes, lit up by an inner fire

that seemed to consume her. Barbaïra felt vaguely in control of the fate of the man lying there. And she saw on his face the marks of the blows she had dealt him during the night.

"What do you think, Auda?"

"I am a nurse. At the service of all who suffer... Without distinction!

"Without distinction? Hey!"

Auda Isarn knelt beside the unconscious man, lifted his neck with her hands and began a kind of very slow and continuous massage. At regular intervals she would interrupt it, searching with her thumbs for a specific spot on the skull behind the cerebellum and pressing lightly. Then she resumed the movement of her hands, more akin to a priestly anointing than a standard clinical procedure.

The operation took a long time. Barbaïra withdrew to the entrance of the cave and, with the help of Lou Ganet and Jordi Couquet, began to pack the scattered equipment into their rucksacks. Otto Rahn, crushed by the weight of responsibility, remained seated at a distance with his head on his knees and his arms hanging down. The others, exhausted from fatigue, lay on the grass and appeared to be asleep.

It must have been after three in the afternoon when Robuffay opened his eyes. He sat up almost immediately, looked at Auda Isarn with deep curiosity, ran his hand across his forehead and asked in a sleepy voice:

"What happened?"

Rahn jumped up. The boys ran to the wounded man. The German exclaimed nervously:

"Ah, my friend! Alive, alive! How wonderful! He fell into the well. His *rope* came loose somehow!

"Six metres!" confirmed Barbaïra. "I measured it! You were lucky, you rascal!"

To everyone's amazement, Robuffay stood up and tried to take a few steps. He didn't seem to be in pain, laughing nervously and repeating:

"How stupid! How stupid!"

Auda Isarn pulled the large visor-shaped beret that protected Barbaïra's forehead from his head, plunged it into a

pool of hard snow water and washed away the dried blood that gave the rescued man a tragic mask-like expression. Only the marks left by the night's battle remained.

"There," she said, forcing a smile, "now you're more presentable!

"Robuffay, my old friend!" cried Ferrocas, "you owe your nurse a great favour. We all stood by and did nothing, and without her you would have kicked the bucket!

The climbing leader grabbed the girl's hand, but at the very moment he did so, the pressure he exerted began to change in nature and ceased to express gratitude in favour of masculine desires. Auda Isarn pulled her hand away abruptly, as if she had just inadvertently touched a red-hot iron.

"We have to go back to camp," announced Jordi Couquet.

With that guy half wrecked, we'll need at least three hours!

And so Robuffay began the descent at a normal pace. He only asked to be relieved of the weight of the bag that the young Ganet, apart from his own, was now carrying enthusiastically, keeping secret, as was customary, the good Scouting deed¹ that his "good parents" had deprived him of. Otto Rahn walked alongside Barbaïra.

"It's extraordinary how Auda revived our mountain guide," he observed.

"She's a nursing student in Toulouse, and apart from that, she's studious and intelligent," the young man explained soberly.

The German was not satisfied.

"Ta! Ta! Ta!" he muttered. He didn't use normal methods.

There was something else going on here!

Barbaïra smiled as he thought, "This German is a keen observer!" He now felt bound to him by a certain complicity that had developed during the night when he explained the origins and mystery of the Grail. He replied:

"You trusted me that night when you told me certain things that are not in the books. Well, I am returning the favour.

¹ Scout action –boy scout– That is, a member belonging to the Scout Movement or Scouting.

but I ask you for the same discretion that you asked me to observe. It is as follows... Auda Isarn is the daughter of a famous healer from Toulouse, a man who made millions thanks to his gifts, but who lost them again due to the wickedness, mediocrity, and ferocity of his rivals, who used their positions of power to their advantage. He had serious setbacks with the Council of the Order of Physicians and was condemned.

Auda, as always somewhat exaggerated, developed an inferiority complex and even guilt from that condemnation! That is why she wanted to become a doctor to cover herself, but she lost the opportunity and has to settle for the title of nurse...

"I understand!" said Rahn.

-As she feels persecuted, she is very cautious. She almost never behaves as she did today. If I hadn't given her urgent orders, she would have let her comrade die. That's all there is to it. Naturally, I hope you'll keep this to yourself... I'm the only one of the AJs who knows about this particularity.

By virtue of his loyal character, but also because of the rapid development of events, Otto Rahn's discretion was guaranteed.

The search for the Grail had to be abandoned the next day. After the accident at Robuffay, the *AJ members* were not very enthusiastic about exploring the cave. The camp was dismantled, the team descended to Montsegur, got on their bicycles and took the road to Foix.

A few days later, Otto Rahn ¹left for Germany again and no one in Languedoc heard from him again.

III

The *Au-devant de la Vie* youth hostel stood between Foix and Roquefixade, in the wooded hills bordering the Scios valley, a few hundred metres from the road. The

¹ Until a few years ago, the position of the writer Otto Rahn as the "hope of the NSDAP" continued to be ignored by his many friends in Languedoc, who considered him a "liberal".

The access road followed the course of a stream that bounced over polished, moss-covered rocks. It crossed the old farmhouse where the hostel now stood, and the forest of oaks and beeches that gave way to black firs as the altitude increased. Higher up, the fir trees gave way to blue meadows interspersed with small woods. A glacial lake absorbed the colours of the sky. Further on, a rocky area crowned the spine of the small mountain. Beyond the stone tables covered with rhododendrons, the shepherds discovered the main mountain range of the Pyrenees and the snow softened by the first warmth of spring. When, in accordance with the seasons, the rams arrived at the village at around the blue hour, then mauve and finally black, their greasy smell entered the youth hostel with the balsamic scent of fir trees, the opium of the scrubland and the sweetened emanation of mushrooms and hawthorns...

The wind's aria in the sunken crags. The dull sound of the passing flocks marching through a halo of golden dust. Arpeggios of water on polished rocks. Cuckoo calls. Duet of nightingales. And on Saturday, amid the chords of the *Pastoral Symphony*, the squeaking of heavy boots in the mud on the road. Boys and girls climbed towards the *Au-devant de la Vie* youth hostel...



The bicycles were left in the old stable, where there was utter chaos... Rusty chains, piles of sprouting potatoes, chickens placed in a disused Peugeot *quadrilette*. To one side, under a sheet, were dismantled beds, wardrobes, bedside tables and kitchen tables, books tied in bundles. Robert Robuffay kicked an old bucket that was blocking his way and, without glancing at the sign explaining the presence of such a bazaar in that dormant sales room, leaned his bicycle against a worm-eaten mahogany chest of drawers. He knew the text of the motto!... "Brother

stranger passing through this hostel, I leave you everything that made my place a joy. I offer you these books, the companions of my solitude, to feed your dreams... Eat at my table, lie down on my bed, set off on distant journeys. As a bourgeois friend of myths, I could put covers on my sofas. Good and beautiful things were made for everyone's enjoyment. Use what belongs to me, I will repay you with friendship, but do so with caution, other people will come after you!

André des Cévennes".

The group crossed the open space between the old stable and the main building. Ferrocas washed his face at the tap of the reservoir decorated with an engraved plaque: "Turn off the tap, remember that the water is three hundred metres away". The boys and Auda Isarn, accompanied by another girl, entered the youth hostel.

"Hello, *everyone!*"

"Hello, comrades!"

Estève Caberol, *the hostel owner*, was about forty or forty-five years old. Short, stocky, with sparse grey hair, he was characterised by a peculiar tic: the movement he made with his head towards his right shoulder, which he seemed to use to throw back reflections marked by common sense and anything that might be considered constructive statements; but also by his extraordinarily clear eyes, true mirrors of dreams, incapable of reflecting anything but innate naivety and evangelical kindness.

"The debate with the Trotskyists continues! And it's going to be a long one!" grumbled Roger Barbaïra as he placed the bag on a bench.

The room was more than ten metres long and seemed to be completely occupied by a huge table. Remains of fir trees and boxwood roots burned in an open fire almost at ceiling level. Barbaïra walked around the room and along the walls without looking at the decor... Excerpts from the regulations of the Secular Youth Hostel Centre... A message from Léo Lagrange, Minister of Sports and Leisure... Two sentences from

Jean Giono with paintings by an unknown artist: "Join the crusade of poverty against the domination of wealth" and "After the war, only those who did not fight live"... The neighbouring poster was a call to arms by the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI) launched by the Barcelona headquarters to recruit volunteers in the fight against Franco, and it was a striking contrast. Two black flags tied together by *the innkeeper* framed the message written in Catalan.

There were doors at each end of the room. One of them led to a room where the *ajistes* were called upon to wash the dishes, a task always carried out communally. New engraved plaques invited us to think once again: "If you think about it, put the forks and spoons in the big cupboard. The five knives are part of the AJ's equipment... If you think about it, don't put any of them in the bag."

Barbaïra picked up the sack again and went up to the first floor with his comrades. Two bedrooms separated by a partition occupied the entire length of the building. The girls were on the east side, the boys on the west. On the walls, among some *au pochoir*¹ frescoes depicting stylised *AJ* life, there were slogans and catchphrases... "Singing the *Internationale* while whisking mayonnaise as if singing *Tout va très bien, madame la Marquise*, is not internationalism"...

The boys took off their boots, put on slippers and returned to the hall. As they descended the stairs, Barbaïra, Ferrocas, Chabrol, Robuffay, Peyrat, Couquet and Ganet heard fragments of the discussion between the *innkeeper* and the Trotskyists...

"All men are brothers..."

"The Spanish people fighting against fascism are asking for help..."

-The F.A.I. guys are scoundrels! Long live the P.O.U.M.!

-The appropriation of the means of production...

-I'm all for the collectivisation of girls and everything else...

¹ with template.

-I oppose bourgeois communism with Trotsky's great idea of permanent revolution!

Guyot Peyrat approached the fire and said:

-Let me sit down and put an end to these political discussions once and for all!

Roger Barbaïra put his hand on the *innkeeper's* shoulder and made him stand up, proclaiming:

"*Pau*, everyone knows that the gentleman is an old anarchist! Don't start again! Show me what you produced last month.



Estève Caberol had travelled extensively, but he never tied himself to any particular country or settled on any particular profession. He observed everything with indifference, but he lacked stability. Born in Sahorre, at the foot of Canigou, in French Catalonia, he left the country very early on and ended up settling in Languedoc, whose slang, customs and landscapes created an atmosphere of freedom around him in which his vocation as an artist and militant anarchist did not feel in the least constrained. The country that seven centuries earlier had protected Jews and heretics could only be benevolent towards libertarians. Compensated with a paltry sum – advanced by his partner Judith, an abandoned woman now at the disposal of young people – he lived for the country and youth, albeit rather poorly, with four-franc night *shifts*; and to obtain the money Judith refused him, he made clay pottery and oven-fired enamels.

He pushed open the door opposite the washing-up sink and led Barbaïra into the workshop. In one corner of the room, illuminated by the slanting light from the window, stood the potter's wheel. On one wall were shelves laden with the previous month's production.

Roger Barbaïra picked up a few pieces and looked at them, grimacing.

"*Pau*... all this... how vulgar. Why are you wasting your talent like this? Show us what you've got hidden away!"

Estève Caberol smiled, opened a cupboard and took out a kiln-fired enamel plate.

-The pottery is for sale... That's the thankless side of pottery making! Hey! Hey! But this is for me and not for labourers!

The work depicted a stylised shepherd's head in a modern style, but the glazes reflected the fires of Hell and the blues of Heaven, whose secret had disappeared with the great stained-glass illuminators of the 14th century.

-Magnificent, *Pau!* Why don't you try to find a formula that reconciles art and commerce? You could create some pieces alluding to the country's history and then produce them on a large scale!

"The country's history? What history?"

"Well, ours!"

"What kind of pieces?"

Roger Barbaïra thought for a moment, raised his head and suggested:

"Why not a beautiful Cathar dove?"

-I don't know what that is.

-I can give you the model that a German writer left me.

"I don't want to be indebted to the fascist *Krauts* ¹!"

-All right, all right, *Pau!*

-And it wouldn't work anyway. Nobody knows there are Cathar pigeons!

Suddenly Barbaïra hit his head and burst out laughing.

"I know, *Pau!* You could make the Grail!"

He wasn't thinking about the engraved plates made by the last pagan initiates, whose existence Otto Rahn had mentioned to him and which he had been searching for with renewed enthusiasm six months earlier in the cave of Saint-Barthélemy, but rather about the Christian Grail, invented to extinguish, along with everything else, the memory of the ancient pagan culture. Given the complicity that had developed between him and the German writer one night, he would never have revealed the secret of the stone Grail,

¹ Teutons, Germans.

but he felt that the Christian Grail was worthy of being commercialised for the benefit of popular superstition.

"The Grail?" said Estève Caberol slowly... "What is that?"

"The emerald cup that collected the blood of Christ!"

Don't you know the legend? Well, *pau*, it's part of religious folklore! It's official! If you made a beautiful enamelled cup in the kiln, even the local priests would help with the sales!

You could even try to get it listed on the stock exchange! The first one you cook will be presented as the true Holy Grail.

You can say you discovered it in a cave! Hmm! How about that?

And you'll easily find an American stupid enough to pay you a hundred thousand dollars for it! There you go, rich for the rest of your days! Hey, hey...

Estève Caberol made that familiar movement of his head towards his right shoulder with which he rejected constructive proposals and replied briskly:

"No! I will never encourage superstition!"

"You're wrong, *mate*! Anyway, think of anything related to the country's history!"

The anarchist put the enamel plaque back in the cupboard and said as he turned the key in the lock:

"I have to stop Judith from finding it! She was already trying to sell it, the stupid woman!"

Shortly afterwards, the two men returned to the room.



The fire was no longer burning. In the field of fir embers reduced to ashes, boxwood roots erected incandescent hills. The large room decorated in red and black echoed like a drum with the rumours of the night... and, high above, the autumn wind lashed against the mountain crags. Dogs howled death in the nearby village. The sleepy murmur of the stream, tired of running all summer long...

It had been a long time since the *ajistes* had finished their meal. Frugal. Pasta and eggs. Cheese. Fruit. Auda Isarn directed the washing up, aided by the dialectic of the Trotskyists and the

The champions of the permanent revolution went to bed. Estève Caberol closed his eyes. He seemed to be dreaming or sleeping while his partner knitted at a monotonous pace. In the sink, a poorly tightened tap timed the escape of precious water. Guyot Peyrat read. Robuffay carved a piece of wood with precise movements. Jordi Couquet was arranging the cogwheels of the clock he had just taken apart on the table. Roger Barbaïra yawned and asked:

"What shall we do tomorrow?"

No one answered. A dog barked and a glowing mass of boxwood collapsed, sparking.

"Really," said Barbaïra, "you're not exactly brimming with imagination!

"Shall we go up to Montsegur?" suggested

Ferrocas. The voices cried out in unison:

"Montsegur? Give it a rest! Always Montsegur..."

"The cave of La Frau?"

"We've already been there three times!"

"A walk through the Embeyre forest?"

"It's not summer anymore! It's not much fun!" Everyone yawns.

-If it rains tomorrow, I'm staying at the AJ to do crossword puzzles! announces Chabrol.

Autumn. Bare forests. Sad streams. Empty fields. The spirit of the *ajistes* wanders in landscapes where all life retreats while waiting for the snow to fall, which on frosty mornings makes the sound of saws and silk skis.

"So? Shall we lie down?" asks Barbaïra.

"We're miserable," Robuffay remarks. "We need someone like that German, Rahn. With him, we'd have some fun!"

"There would be no shortage of new ideas," agrees Chabrol. But no one ever saw him again. It's a shame!

An oppressive silence begins to descend. The *hikers* suddenly feel as old as the country where they explore valleys, mountains, ruins and even the gloomy reflections cast by the caves.

The innkeeper opens his eyes and listens. He yawns from time to time and says:

"You are like acorns. You make me sad! In fact, since there is not much to do in autumn, stay here. Since you have been talking for so long about organising an *ajiste* show for the spring, why not start preparing it now?"

The proposal awakens the assembly. Faces light up and eyes shine. Imaginations get to work.

"That's all very well," observes Ferrocas, "but since we started discussing the matter, we haven't decided what we're going to perform. Does any of you know any *ajiste* pieces?"

"No."

Pause.

"What if you wrote one, Peyrat?" suggests Estève Caberol.

"Yes, yes, thank you very much! As if it were a piece of cake for me!"

"What if we performed Lucrezia Borgia on stage in a castle in the region, outdoors, amid the ruins?"

-No, Lucrezia Borgia, no. And why not Hernani too, right now? I'm serious! Chabrol exclaims indignantly.

Barbaïra lets out a sigh.

"If Otto Rahn were here, he would suggest a historical play from our country!"

"Nonsense! I'm here for a modern play!"

"In that case, let's vote!" Robuffay interrupts. "Historical piece about Languedoc or modern piece?"

They vote by a show of hands and the historical piece wins by six votes to two.

"It has to be performed in the ruins of Montsegur," Barbaïra suggests.

No one objects to the proposal.

"There are no plays about Montsegur!" says the *innkeeper*... "Unless our poet and philosopher Peyrat has one in his drawer! Go on, stop being so modest! Everyone knows you've written loads of stuff!"

Guyot Peyrat blushes and says nothing.

"In that case, spill the beans," Robuffay adds persuasively...

I'm sure it's edible!

Surrounded by friendly faces, the young student cannot escape.

"Hmm," he says... I've never written a proper piece, but last year I entertained myself by writing something similar to a piece from the novel *Montsegur, the Cathars* of Lévis-Mirepoix. Whether historical or fictional, it's quite solid, but it was written in a somewhat affected manner.

"Thank goodness! That's just what we needed!"

"Lévis-Mirepoix?" exclaimed Barbaïra. "But wasn't he a descendant of Lévis, Simon de Montfort's lieutenant, who settled in the fiefdom of Mirepoix after expelling the thirty or forty nobles who were holding it and who therefore became *Faydits* ¹?"

Jordi Couquet whistled through his teeth.

"You know a lot! Where did you learn that?"

"I visited a few antique bookshops and know something about the history of the Crusades.

Then, turning to Guyot-Peyrat, he said:

"Pope Lévis-Mirepoix's novel could be interesting for an open-air show in Montsegur if you could adapt it properly. What's it like? You gave birth to that chicken and you're not saying anything?"

"Nobody asked me!"

"That's true too!"

With the atmosphere of the youth hostel radically changed, the night itself seemed to exist only to await the coming of the sun. Robuffay asked the young student:

"Did you bring that bone with you?"

"No, it's in Montpellier!"

"In that case, can you bring it on Saturday? I hope so!"

They went upstairs to lie down, and as the rain continued to fall patiently and relentlessly in the morning, they did not get up before noon.



¹ Victims of the famous "confiscation of property" that between 1210 and 1944 invariably accompanied the prosecution of the vanquished by the victors.

Travelling by train to Foix and then Montpellier, Béziers, Minerva and Toulouse represented an expense for everyone that was not justified given the time of year. So they met again in Carcassonne, the crossroads of their weekly journeys. Mrs Arcis-Caminade, who ran the *Al'Ombre de la Cité* youth hostel, welcomed them with her usual kindness, as well as Estève Caberol and his partner, who had been invited by the *ajistes*, who wanted to show their appreciation to the promoter of the new artistic activity.

Guyot Peyrat brought the piece with him. Delicate, flexible, athletic, dark-skinned with wavy hair, a smiling mouth and hazel eyes, Guyot did not correspond to the image that romanticism usually attributed to the poet, but Jordi Couquet, a skilled craftsman and keen observer, knew that he often spoke to himself.

"So, won't you read us that piece?" he asked in his terrible Ariège accent.

Seated at the table in front of his club mates and other boys and girls who had come to visit the city of towers surrounded by a cloud ready to unleash rain, Guyot Peyrat crossed his hands instead of opening the closed notebook in front of him and announced:

"No, I'll summarise it. To find out, study the pages! Here goes... The action begins in 1225, three years before the first revolt in Languedoc and the partial expulsion of the Crusaders who conquered it under the command of Simon de Montfort, who died in the siege of Toulouse...

Pons de Montaure, a nobleman from the county of Foix, more a troubadour satisfied with life than a committed warrior, enjoys his newfound freedom, throws parties and welcomes the Cathar heretics to his castle, but without adhering to heresy himself, a position generally adopted by most of the lords of Romania. He does not get away with it with his wife, Brunissende, who one night reveals the truth to him and leaves him, taking their daughter Jordane with her. Mad with grief and thirsty for revenge, Pons de Montaure abandons the cause of his immediate feudal lord, the Count of Toulouse, for that of the King of France, Louis VIII, who wants to reconquer Languedoc...

During the new war that would end in a second defeat for Occitania, Brunissende took her daughter to a convent before killing herself by *Endura*¹ of the Cathar religion. The mother superior and her assistants, secretly converted to heresy, turned the convent into a Cathar stronghold, and Jordane was educated in her mother's religion.

She is a staunch Cathar when she returns to the world in 1240 and reigns over the fiefdom of Montaure. Skilled at concealing her true allegiance, she maintains excellent relations with both the victors and the vanquished.

One day, the seneschal of Carcassonne, representative of the King of France, introduces her to his son, Gauthier des Ormes, who falls passionately in love with her, as does Raymond d'Alfaro, an officer of the Count of Toulouse, a truculent man always ready to serve the cause of independence. Jordane soon reciprocates Gauthier des Ormes' passion, but while she spends her days hunting with him and throwing parties in his honour, at night she secretly receives Raymond d'Alfaro and Bertrand Martin, a Cathar bishop who is preparing the third revolt of Occitania. The first act ends with the division of two equally noble and beautiful beings separated by two terrible imperatives: homeland and faith.

"In other words, two abominable lies!" exclaims Estève Caberol, throwing his head back over his right shoulder... As for love, we know how much it's worth, don't we, my mare? And he slaps his companion's thigh violently, and she gives him a venomous look.

Judith could not have been more than thirty years old. Small like her lover, thin, with black hair, heavy eyes and thin lips, she had a nose that was too wide, too long, which fell into a face that might have had some beauty without it, and fan-shaped ears that justified the jokes of the *ajistes* about *mau aux grandes feuilles*. Her unattractive appearance prevented her from achieving what she hoped for from them, and the opportunities she gave them never worked out.

¹ A type of suicide that the enemies of the Cathars portrayed as commonplace, when in fact it was used only in exceptional cases.

The eighteen-year-old boys did not like her. So she secretly harboured a fierce hatred for them, fuelled by her miserable success and the meagre profits she made from the hostel, which charged four francs per night.

"Perfect!" said Gaston Reboul.

"You've got talent, you!" said Chabrol. Guyot Peyrat smiled.

"Well, let's say that Lévis-Mirepoix made no mistakes! He simply adapted the fictionalised story, respecting the text as much as possible!"

Roger Barbaïra frowned.

'Right, comrades, I'd rather not talk about him any more. The signs say "based on the fictionalised story by Lévis-Mirepoix" and that's it. Enough!

"Next, Guyot!" demanded Robuffay.

"Hey, it's noon!" Jordi Couquet pointed out. "Shall we eat something now and continue the play later?"

"Agreed!" admitted the poet.



They ate lunch heartily while outside the windows a fine, melancholic rain veiled the city's skyline. After the table was cleared, the dishes washed by the boys and put away by the girls, Guyot Peyrat returned to his seat.

"Then let's move on to the second act. Torn between her carnal love for the French knight, her mystical love for the god of the Cathars, and her love for her Occitan homeland, Jordane de Montaure tries to overcome her inner contradictions and convert Gauthier des Ormes to heresy.

Without explanation, he leads a night ride to Montsegur, citadel and high place of the new religion. Here Gauthier is taken prisoner on parole in the keep. For twenty-four hours, he attends the service and listens to the sermons of the Perfects. Then Jordane takes him back to the castle of Montaure, and now he finds himself torn between his faith, his duty to his country, and his love for the beautiful Cathar woman, whose secret remains unknown

But the evidence is not strong enough to separate him from the King of France and the Roman Church.

So Jordane decides to prevent his departure and, both out of love and obedience to the order of the Cathar leaders, marries Gauthier. The men who symbolise the struggle for liberation hope that the betrothal ceremony will take the seneschal away from the stronghold of Carcassonne. Then, the Viscount of Trencavel, Lord *Faydit*, will take advantage of the situation to attack and recover his ancestors' possessions. It will be the signal for insurrection in Occitania.

The plan fails completely. When the prior of the monastery of Mirepoix confesses, the Dominican inquisitor Jean de Navarre discovers the double game played by the prisoners, Catholics by day and Cathars by night, and has in his hands the thread that will quickly lead him to Jordane de Montauze. Here we have the beautiful Cathar publicly unmasked, the marriage broken, the city of Carcassonne well defended against Trencavel by the seneschal. Thus fails the last revolt of Occitania against its occupiers. It is the end of the second act..

"Why don't we perform it in the city?" asks Reboul. "It's the ideal setting!"

"No," replied Guyot Peyrat. "We risk making a terrible impression in front of a thousand Parisian tourists who are used to seeing performances by real actors. It's better not to stray from our method: a show put on by *ajistes* for other *ajistes* and, ultimately, for the inhabitants of the neighbouring village. We can choose between four historic castles: Roquefixade, Puylaurens, Puivert and Montsegur.

-Puylaurens looks better than Montsegur.

-But access is very difficult.

-So, Montsegur?



A power failure left the youth hostel lit only by medieval candlelight just as the Occitan poet was about to begin his summary of the third act:

Jordane de Montaure takes refuge in Montsegur. Now he wants to receive the *Consolamentum*.

-What is the *Consolamentum*? asked Jordi Couquet.

-You'll find out when you study your part. Don't interrupt me, or I'll stop here...

Bertrand Martin refuses to prepare her for the supreme commitment of the Cathars because he wants to keep her in reserve for the last political attempt. He prepares with Raymond d'Alfaro an attack against a group of inquisitors travelling through the country. He believes that the undertaking led by his own lieutenant will compromise the Count of Toulouse and cause him to become belligerent against France. Watched by the knights of Gauthier des Ormes, who is in charge of intercepting them, Jordane and Raymond d'Alfaro set off for Avignonnet at the head of a small group. Raymond d'Alfaro is in love with Jordane and hopes to see his love crowned by the success of the expedition.

Gauthier des Ormes has little luck. Instead of surprising the Cathar knights, he is intercepted by them. He falls during the combat. Raymond d'Alfaro leaves him dying in Jordane's hands and walks away. Hela is reunited for the last time with her beloved, who is not dead but slightly wounded. A night of love under the stars, both magnificent and desperate. At dawn, Raymond d'Alfaro returns with the troops and presents Jordane with the head of the inquisitor Guillaume Arnaud... Comrades, the head does not appear in Lévis-Mirepoix, only a little blood on the lord's tunic, but I prefer to put the head on, it's better!

Burdened by centuries of violence, the mysterious light of the candles approves the initiative.

Raymond d'Alfaro was seeking a reward, but instead he finds a rival. Jordane explains the depth and antiquity of his love and retreats to Montsegur, unwilling to know about the singular combat that ensues between the two men. Raymond d'Alfaro falls dead and Gauthier des Ormes returns to his father and the troops in Carcassonne.

In March 1243, a small crusade set out for Montsegur with the aim of destroying the last bastion of

Cathar and national resistance ¹. Gauthier des Ormes himself, always torn between love and duty, which forced him to lose what was most precious to him in the world, led the most violent assaults. The famous siege ended on 16 March 1244, when Raymond de Péreilhe, the lord commanding the stronghold, and the Cathar bishop, Bertrand Martin, surrendered.

"Is that when the four knights take the Grail that our friend Otto Rahn sent us to find and that almost cost me my life?" asks Robuffay.

"Yes, but shut up and listen to the end. In the end, Gauthier des Ormes meets Jordane again, who takes him to an underground passage that will allow him to escape if he wants to. Gauthier follows her and flees with her, but stops shortly afterwards. Can the victor of Montsegur betray his victory? No, but there is a solution capable of reconciling the opposites... He will officially marry Jordane if she renounces her faith, since the Inquisition, good despite everything, spares the lives of those who renounce heresy. But Jordane is not willing to betray the Cathars, just as he is not willing to betray the King of France. She prefers to go to the stake lit in the Prat dels Cremats – a place you know well, at the base of *the pog* ² -. Horrified by such a prospect, the loving lord consummates a hopeless situation and pierces his lady's body with his sword. What do you think?

"Shakespearean!" exclaims Barbaïra as she flicks a dying candle into life.

"Magnificent!" said Couquet.

"Absolutely ridiculous!" interrupts Estève Caberol, throwing his head back over his right shoulder. "You'll have the whole country in stitches!"

¹ Contrary to popular belief, the siege of Montsegur was not the epilogue of the last resistance of Catharism. In 1325, the Inquisition was still discovering heretics in Pamiers.

² There is no evidence that the burning of the heretics and lords *Faydits* after the surrender of the fortress took place at the site known as Camp dels Cramats (or Cremats). The name of this place does not appear in any records. On the contrary, it can be assumed that the bonfire would have been lit further west of the Seguelà gorge (also erroneously called "du Tremblement").

"I'm convinced it wasn't!" protests Reboul. "It's perfectly acceptable, suitably romantic and innocent enough to enthuse simple folk!

"The *ajistes* are going to whistle!" suggests Marius Chabrol.

"I don't think so," replies Barbaïra. There is a stage... large curtains of ruined walls, in the shadows, under the stars... large lamps illuminating the scene... By the light of these candles, I began to lose my composure when Guyot described the scene in which Raymond d'Alfaro shows Jordane the severed head of the inquisitor... As a spectator born in this country, I would have applauded and shouted without hesitation: "Kill him! Long live the independence of Languedoc and freedom of conscience!"

"You seem short-sighted. You don't take these tricks seriously, do you? Or do you?" murmured Caberol. Barbaïra ran his hand over his damp forehead as if to shake off a dream...

"No, obviously, but it doesn't matter... The story grabs your attention. As emancipated *actors*, we can laugh at all that, but I think that as an actor I'm going to play it with conviction! It all depends, of course, on the role I'm given... We've already talked about that. Who's casting?

"Me!" said the *innkeeper* automatically. "I'm the oldest and I have the most experience!"



It was ten o'clock at night and the electric light was not working when the discussion about the distribution of roles broke out. Estève Caberol and Guyot Peyrat took charge as the *mère aubergiste* replaced the candles. The silhouettes of the boys appeared disproportionately large on the whitewashed walls. The dark light that rose from the depths of centuries of poverty and faith took away part of the reality from the living and placed it on the ghosts drawn on the walls of the room, whose limbs ended in underground shadows.

"Who will be Jordane de Montaure?" asked the young poet.

All eyes turned to Auda Isarn, whom the mystical light of the candles made even more immaterial and secretive.

"Auda can play Jordane de Montauze! Any objections?" asked Estève Caberol.

No objections.

"If Auda is Jordane de Montauze, who will play Gauthier des Ormes and Raymond d'Alfaro? I think it should be Robuffay and Barbaïra, no?"

A roar of laughter ripples through the assembly. Someone shouts:

-It's the best opportunity to fight seriously!

-Robuffay as Gauthier des Ormes! suggests *the innkeeper*.

"And I, Raymond d'Alfaro!" agrees Roger Barbaïra with a smile... "I just want to warn you that I'm going to alter the outcome of the play! I am the one who kills Gauthier des Ormes in single combat. And instead of putting my lady to the sword, I convert her, not to the Roman Catholic religion, let that be clear, but to that of the Holy Grail of the Aryans.

And he gives Auda Isarn a confident, luminous look, which she returns with clarity and confidence, but without matching his restrained passion.

"Good!" says *the innkeeper*. "Who wants to play the role of the Dominican brother Jean de Navarre? He is perhaps the most important character! You, Chabrol?"

The young communist frowns.

"That's all I needed! Can you imagine me dressed up as an inquisitor of the Catholic Church? It would be ridiculous!"

"In any case, you have to think about it, dear! You have the ideal physical appearance for that role. If only for the way you look at people and the kind of questions you ask everyone... It's well known that you're a leader of the Communist Party and, therefore, an inquisitor!"

Marius Chabrol blushes and protests.

"That's a strong statement, *Father* Caberol! As if it were possible to establish a relationship between the Communist Party and the Church!

"Of course it's possible! You are church people, hence your longevity!... God in Red Square... The

permanent procession... The millions of mujiks ¹ who pray to God... Communion with entry into the Party! And what is self-criticism if not confession, made even more vile by being public?... Minor excommunication for venial sin: exclusion from the Party, loss of employment and ration cards!... Excommunication *ad majorem*: immediate purgatory on earth, with Siberia! Or immediate paid hell: a bullet in the back of the head, no dear?... Hey you, you stay as inquisitor!

"Enough, comrades!" shouts *Mère Aubergiste* Arcis-Caminade. "We don't do politics in the AJ. I thought you came here to prepare a play, didn't you?"

"Who is playing the role of Cathar bishop Bertrand Martin?" asks Roger Barbaïra.

Raymond Ferrocas is chosen by acclamation.

-Considering his rather cold Protestant attitude, we couldn't have found anyone better! admits Estève Caberol...

And the others? Mr Pons de Montauze? Jordi Couquet?...

Let it be Couquet! A fine promotion for a labourer. And Guy de Lévis?

"Hoo! Hoo!" shouts the assembly.

-In his day, he was an execrable capitalist, exclaims Marius Chabrol. I therefore propose that Gaston Reboul represent that evil in another era!

Gaston Reboul takes on the role of Guy de Lévis.

-And Brunissende? Don't we need a mature woman?

"I propose my Judith!" shouts Estève Caberol. "Not only is she mature enough, but she's rotten, the old witch! And if she takes on the role of the Cathar Endura seriously, I'll be rid of her!"

Accustomed to her lover's rudeness, Judith accepts the game without protest.

"As for me, I will naturally appear in the role of the troubadour," says Guyot Peyrat. "I am the only one capable of reciting in the langue d'Oc.

"And what do I do?" asks Lou Ganet, raising his finger as if he were still sitting at the desk of the "good ones".

¹ Russian peasants.

parents" from Carcassonne... whom he had just left behind to start secondary school.

Estève Caberol looked at him as he adjusted his glasses.

"You? As a page! We always need a page."

The suggestion made everyone laugh, as Lou Ganet was better suited to holding down the defence position in Carcassonne Sports Association's first team than lifting the skirts of the damsels of the Pays d'Oc.



Studying for the papers took about six months, and life did not give them much time off. Auda Isarn was preparing for her nursing exams, Guyot Peyrat was trying to obtain a degree in philosophy, Ferrocas had just entered the teacher training college, Marius Chabrol was working overtime to balance the books of the Communist Youth, Robuffay was replacing his sick father in the heavy work of the family business, Gaston Reboul was starting to manage the factory's production department under his father's strict supervision, Couquet was attending night school, Barbaïra was working twelve hours a day to buy a motorbike, and at night he was consulting archives. In the end, none of them wanted to give up their weekly trips to the snowfields!

There is no more snow. The stream that runs along the AJ *Au-devant de la Vie* sings again in the open air. Cows graze in the blue meadows. The lake returns to the colours of the sky. The scrubland blooms. An irresistible joy dances in the new mountain views when, in May 1938, the group meets for the first rehearsal of "Montsegur – A play in three acts based on the poem by the Duke of Lévis-Mirepoix".

"With such good weather, it's silly to be cooped up indoors!" observes Ferrocas. "What if from now on we did our rehearsals on the natural stage?"

"That could avoid a lot of surprises," agrees Guyot Peyrat. Reciting outdoors or in a closed room can alter everything.

We have to raise our voices from the start. So, Montsegur?....

-It's very far away.

-Roquefixade?

They climb up to Roquefixade Castle, near the AJ, which takes them less than half an hour. They stop for a bite to eat. A rest. Then Guyot Peyrat opens the cardboard file containing the text of the play and the *staging* instructions ¹. And he calls out:

-Couquet, Lord of Montaire... Judith, Lady Brunissende of Montaire... Ferrocas, Cathar Bishop Bertrand Martin... Barbaïra, Raymond d'Alfaro... take your places. Act One, Scene One. Setting: the hall of Montaire Castle. Here, in this corner of the wall... Fire in the atrium... Large group of lords.

-And the fire?

-It will be lit on the day of the performance.

-And the group of lords?

-They are the inhabitants of Montsegur, diantre! They will be happy!... Scene one... Lady Brunissende and the Lord of Montaire are seated with Jordane between them. We need to find a little girl to play Auda Isarn as a child... Gentlemen, friends... Raymond d'Alfaro and the Cathar bishop, always dressed as a weaver. The troubadour Peire Cardinal is kneeling in front of the maiden and reciting. That's me. Here goes:

*Peire Cardinal – Let yourself be buried, my lady,
And let no word proclaim you again! You were
mocked, you lost your honour
You are as weak as a dead man,
They gagged you and clericalised
you. The king denied your
inheritance
Your whole kingdom is hallucination and plagiarism
That is why they suppressed you!*

Guyot Peyrat stands tall.

¹ Staging.

-Now you, Couquet. Leave the throne and respond to Peire Cardinal's poem, which is, after all, a provocation against the Occitan lords, your peers... divided, kind and happy despite living in defeat! When you reach the lady of Montaure, kneel down. Come on!

*Pons de Montaure – I do not sing
To men of arms in heavy helmets Nor to the
clamorous crossbows.
I sing of my lady's beauty
And the nightingale of our forests
And the lakes of our mountains,
The eyes of my lady and the eyes of the sky,
The golden bread of our countrymen.
Minne is my homeland,
My borders run through my lady's heart,
Those of our countrymen, through the heart of reason...*

Bertrand Martin - You are mistaken, sir! The sun lies, only the rain and the cold squeeze the truth out of the world!

-Very well! Now, the assembly withdraws with the lord of Montaure. Brunissende and Jordane remain alone with a servant... To your places for scene two. Ferrocas, Bertrand Martin, you enter the scene and the lady of Montaure embraces your knees:

Brunissende – Ah, good Christian, when will you grant me the joy of the Consolamentum?

Bertrand Martin – The Consolamentum, my daughter, is a spiritual death in which our austerity must serve as a tomb for the senses. When you are married, you cannot be admitted among the chosen ones; you will remain at the entrance! There is no salvation in marriage.

Brunissende – I obey you, good Christian. While I wait, give me God's blessing and yours. I ask the Lord to defend my soul from a bad death and lead me to a good end...

-Stop! Ferrocas, you are the Perfect One!

-Solemn and undaunted, as those Cathar ancestors of the Protestants should have been! comments the *père aubergiste* with a laugh.

-The heat is missing from the *mau*! ¹

-Are you asking my Judith to renounce physical love? How can you expect her to agree?

-Let her make an effort!

-Come on, Judith, my queen, make an effort!

-Get ready for scene three!... Bertrand Martin exits. Brunissende and little Jordane are left alone for a few minutes, until Pons de Montaure enters with a torch in his hand, which he then places in a ring on the wall.

Pons de Montaure - Did you send for me, madam?

Brunissende – Upon my soul, I wanted to spare you the cruelty of this conversation, but there is no time, sir! You sang so much about the beauties of spring and the tenderness of love that I could not bring myself to show you the world as I see it.

Pons de Montaure - The world? Could it be that seeing through your beloved eyes would make it seem less kind and beautiful to me?

Brunissende – My poor knight, you speak the language that Satan put into men's mouths to help you deceive yourselves! Satan, angel of pride, displayed the charms of nature and diverted souls from the celestial ether! It is he who continues to bewitch them with lust! From Satan came to the Church of Rome the inspiration of marriage, which is a sin without shame, whose purpose is to multiply prisons and cause souls to fall!

Pons de Montaure – Brunissende, you misunderstood the Perfect Ones' speeches. They could not have urged you to torment a man who never wished evil upon anyone and who likes to see people laughing around him. Have you forgotten the meaning of father, mother and daughter?

Brunissende – Lies! You are nothing to me now, and this child is my remorse. She deserves respect only because I offered her the horror of bringing her into the world!

¹ *Mère aubergiste*

Pons de Montaure - Is it Satan who gives me this suffering, then, or those men in whose name you speak and whom I consider so pure?

Brunissende - You suffer because you are ignorant!

Pons de Montaure – What I know, what I see, what I feel, is that I love you, Brunissende. Is it possible that, having written so many songs for you, you thought they were not sincere?

Brunissende, I beg you, look deep into your heart and if I am dear to you in any way, if through some thread of memory, compassion, or friendship, you still feel connected to me, swear to me that you will not tear it away!

Brunissende – After looking deep into my heart, I swear that there is absolutely nothing that binds me to this earth!

-Stop! Brunissende, get off Jordane's neck. You, Couquet, you are going half mad! You draw the sword and shout: Revenge!... You walk towards the keep, pass through the window in the tower of Montsegur and disappear. You climb the ladder we are going to place there and continue shouting:

Revenge!... Revenge!... At the top of the keep, you shout once more: Revenge!... At night, it will have a formidable effect!... Good. Pons de Montaure leaves and enters the service of the King of France. Brunissende, retired among the Cathars, prepares to receive the Consolamentum after practising the Endura. Important. Both are key actions in the Cathar ritual... Extras: elderly women of Montsegur dressed in black. Brunissende is lying on a pallet... Ferrocas, the Cathar bishop, enters...

Bertrand Martin – Brunissende, is it true that you are ready and sufficiently close to the moment of union that you desire between your soul and the spirit?

Brunissende – I am prepared.

Bertrand Martin (turning to the group of women dressed in black) – Faithful ones, I hold up this woman as an example to you. She spurned the corrupting triumphs of beauty and decided to consummate the annihilation of her material substance. Six weeks ago, she renounced all food. She drinks only a little water, just enough to remain lucid until the very end... She wanted to enter Endura in order to prepare herself to receive the

Consolamentum and, immediately afterwards, to leave this world of perdition! She has reached the magnificent moment when she discovers that she no longer has enough strength to continue living, and, at the same time, that she still has some left to complete her journey towards the Holy Spirit in full consciousness... Meditate on this example! The Consolamentum is simultaneously a baptism, ordination and last sacrament.

Purify those who return "clothed"!

But do not expect the merits of this saint to apply to you! This woman dies for herself, not for you! Just as the angel Jesus, adopted by God to save mankind, did not rescue you, but only enlightened you with his example, so this woman does not exempt you from any effort. She invites you to seek, if not bodily death, at least death by the spirit and deprivation. Woman, the moment you make these faithful understand how much you despise your body, your words will have as much value as mine.

Brunissende (in a muffled voice) - Let them leave it in the rubbish!

Bertrand Martin – It is good that you have spoken these words, for you must remember that you were beautiful, perfumed, sweet-kissing, adorned with all the graces of nature.

Brunissende – May worms gnaw at the eyes that poets sang about.

Bertrand Martin (turning to the women) - Listen and think the same!

The chorus of women – Man of God, comfort her as soon as possible. If she leaves like this, her soul may wander for thousands of years in the bodies of animals.

Bertrand Martin – Brunissende, your physical strength is leaving you, only your spiritual strength sustains you! I believe you are near the end...

Brunissende – Sir, pray to God for me!

O coro de mulheres - May God be implored!

Bertrand Martin – Brunissende, do you wish to receive the comforting spirit, not the one who sits beside God the Father, for that is the principal spirit whom you will have the joy of contemplating in his radiant beauty, but the one who must lead you to the sublime Trinity, the spirit who separated from your soul when it fell into a body?

Brunissende (in a very weak voice) – Comfort me!

Bertrand Martin – You must renounce the faith of the Church of Rome.

Brunissende – I renounce it.

Bertrand Martin - Do you renounce the cross that the priest made on you with chrism at your baptism?

Brunissende – I renounce it.

Bertrand Martin – I ask God's forgiveness for all the sins I have committed.

The women's choir – May God forgive you!

Bertrand Martin (laying his hands on the dying woman's body) – Pater et filius et spiritus sanctus parcant vobis omnia peccata vostra... *Brunissende*, I remind you that the state of marriage is a state of sin and that it is not enough to abandon your husband. Right now, you must banish him from your thoughts.

Brunissende (in an agonising voice) – I have already banished him.

Bertrand Martin (placing the Gospel of St John on *Brunissende's* head) – Pater sancte, suscipe ancillam tuam...

"Perfect!" shouted Guyot Peyrat. End of scene three. Judith, your part ends here.

"You're no longer needed, you can go and paint the Mona Lisa somewhere else!" says the *innkeeper*.

"Great, Ferrocas. It's a story worth telling, you spent your life comforting Cathars! Now we'll take a break and continue to put ourselves in the shoes of characters who have aged twenty years..."



The afternoon was drawing to a close when, after laborious rehearsals of the lines repeated in the morning, the final scenes of the first act were staged. Around them, the castle of Roquefixade stood with the stumps of its ruins. It was one of the oldest in Languedoc. In 1200, Raymond de Péreilhe, the future leader of the defence of Montsegur, lived there with his two brothers, Maurice and Pierre-Jourdan.

Night fell over the landscape stretching from Montcalm Peak to the peaks crowning the invisible Foix. The setting sun hung curtains of golden brocade over the walls that formed the backdrop. Almost immaterial clouds heralded a windy day ahead. Smells from wells, emanations from the abyss with the scent of moss and damp rock rose from the escarpment that the wall extended without interruption and fell into the shadow of twilight trapdoors.

"It's time to get going!" ordered *the innkeeper*. "It will be dark in fifteen minutes!"

"We'd better light a fire," suggested Lou Ganet.

"Prepare the fourth scene! The hall of Montauze Castle... The corner of the wall will serve for the whole piece, besides... We are in 1240... Jordane has recently left the convent where he received a clandestine education from the Cathars. He deals diplomatically with victors and vanquished... On stage: Jordane, Guy de Lévis, Gauthier der Ormes, Raymond d'Alfaro... You, Auda, sit in the place your father occupied twenty years ago... You kindly welcome the seneschal's son...

Come on!... Go!

Gauthier des Ormes – Lady of this feast, would you like to hear a song?

Jordane de Montauze – If it pleases my lord.

Guy de Lévis – Begin then, nephew, and try to make the French language sound sweet to Provençal ears.

Gauthier des Ormes – *At the rock of*

Anglars I or no clear fountain

Tsano d'Oimé

I bau quéré soun aigo

Lou fil del rey

One day I met Tsano of

Oimé!

So much has been

taken away, Bel

tsibalhé!

The moon has tricked me! ¹

"Stop!" cries Guyot Peyrat... "Not like that! You sound like a Flemish cow speaking Occitan, Robuffay! You'll make all the old people in the region laugh!

"It's not my fault!" replies the boy irritably... "If my father had taught me the language of the country, I wouldn't look like *an amôrri* now!"

Barbaïra laughs at his bewildered rival, who continues:

"Peyrat, I've been asking you for lessons for a long time... grammar, vocabulary of the langue d'Oc. Now's a good time, isn't it?"

Delighted, Guyot Peyrat makes a mental note to meet with the climbing *instructor*, but objects:

"Until we start working in earnest, pay attention to how the poem should be recited.

Peyrat recites it and the scene resumes.

Guy de Lévis (offended by the concession Gauthier des Ormes has just made to the defeated Crusaders) - What's this all about? Are you speaking Provençal now?

Gauthier des Ormes – When the northern tongue rose to my lips, I thought I would fall like a stone of ice at the feet of the lady who honours this feast, and I sought words in Provençal as warm and sweet as the incense of a tribute to the lady of the sun!

"Robuffay! Audá!" shouts the *innkeeper*. "You look like two fools! You forget that this is the moment when sudden passion awakens... Come on! Feel it! Look at each other intensely... eyes locked! And you too, Raymond d'Alfaro!

Clench your fists and give her your most terrifying look!

"But am I going to smash his face in?" replies Roger Barbaïra, marking his opponent with an insolent nod of his head.



¹ On the rock of Anglars/ There is a crystal clear spring/ Jeanne d'Aime goes in search of water/ One day, the king's son finds her/ Jeanne d'Aime, get up quickly/ Handsome knight, the moon deceived me!

It is now the middle of the night. The fire lit by Lou Ganet projects the silhouettes of the actors onto the medieval walls and illuminates their faces. An ocean of mist covers the valley at the foot of Roquefixade and the castle begins to sway and spin slightly in the immaterial undulation. The peak of Montcalm fluctuates along deserts of dust that the setting sun drags behind it. The first stars stud the velvety blue canopy of the sky above the head of Auda Isarn, Lady of Montaure, Queen of the Occitan Courts of Love.

"Change of scene!" shouts the director. Auda remains alone on stage for a moment, and then Bertrand de Martin immediately enters, followed by two Perfectos, two extras. Let's continue!

Jordane de Montaure - Holy men, give me the kiss of peace!

"Attention!" Peyrat shouts to the Cathar bishop... "You must not touch a woman, not even with your fingertips! That is the rule. Give the Gospel of John to your coadjutor to kiss, then kiss it yourself and give it to Jordane to receive the kiss of peace.

Jordane de Montaure – Holy men, I did as you asked! I agreed to return to the world. I indulged in softness and perfumes without despising them as I should have. I ask forgiveness from God and from everyone.

Bertrand Martin – You are only fulfilling your mission better, my daughter.

Jordane de Montaure – Since I must be seen in this way, you will finally give me the power to gird myself with the sacred cord of the Perfect Ones so that my loss may be certain. Was that not what I was brought up for?

Bertrand Martin – Lady de Montaure, in view of the events that prevented the immediate realisation of these projects, you can render us services that you could not give us after being consoled. You wear the disguise that persecution imposes on us. Use the charms that Satan gave you to better confuse. Did you notice the impression they made on Gauthier, he who is praised for his audacity and military skill?

Jordane de Montaure – Yes, holy man, I noticed it.

Bertrand Martin – And does he know the art of softening as well as that of wounding?

Jordane de Montaure – Oh my God, I think so.

Bertrand Martin – So he tried to please you. And do you like him?

Jordane de Montaure – I suspect so, holy man!

Bertrand Martin – It must be so. I have laid out a perfumed thread for you, so that at our signal, you need only withdraw your arm. The Midi has not resigned itself; it stirs in the shadows, and our brothers sanctify that turmoil. Carcassonne is under surveillance. It was there that Montfort wounded us, and it is there that we will go to wound Montfort's successors! If Carcassonne falls into the hands of the liberators, the fire will spread from Carcassonne to Montsegur and consume the enemy. Our southern princes wander around their former estates and avoid practising heresy. It matters little! They were expelled with heresy, and with heresy, for that is what Rome calls our gospel, they shall return. Provence is like one of our believers, waiting to be consoled. We will clothe her! And you, wait, for like her, you will be clothed on the day of victory! Let us pray!

"End of scene four," says Guyot Peyrat. "And now, the fifth and final scene of the first act. It is the great monologue of Madame de Montaure... Auda de Montaure, you are left alone on stage and you must hold your ground as firmly as possible.

It's difficult, but don't stand there with your arms hanging down like you're at an awards ceremony at the Toulouse high school! Come on!...

Jordane de Montaure - Why did I accept the teachings of the Cathars, why did I devote myself entirely to their cause, if I remain so sensitive to the wonderful stirrings of life? No doubt because I would not know how to lull myself into quiet contentment. It is excess that attracts me!...

Auda Isarn, Lady of Montaure, gradually cheers up and begins to pace slowly back and forth between the two curtains of the wall that cast their giant shadows. She rediscovers the restless yet restrained gait of the thoroughbred held back by the knight before departure. The fire stirs up flames that dance like Cambodian dancers, their slender hands

tortured themselves helplessly in the choice between love and renunciation. Motionless, captivated, seated in a semicircle around the fire, the *ajistes* watched her with growing unease. Auda continued in an increasingly excited tone...

Jordane de Montauve – I like to lean over the abyss, the abyss of pleasure and the abyss of death, and I would throw myself from the top of a mountain to fall on roses! I am the daughter of an absolute contradiction: my father and my mother. And yet, it is in the Midi, in Provence, that I will go to conquer for both of them! The Midi of the troubadours and the Midi of the Cathars! Provence gives joy and Provence gives melancholy, how could you make common cause?

Auda Isarn so skilfully conveyed *Jordane de Montauve's* anguish, and, through her, that of the ravaged country, that she projected it onto every moment experienced by the *ajistes*... who, with the complicity of the walls, the magic of the fire, and the confidential circle of the dark night around them, were losing their senses. Hearts were sinking into the past of that country, ignored just a year earlier! Guyot Peyrat discreetly wiped away a tear. Estève Caberol scratched his tight throat. Barbaïra's blood pulsed strongly at the edges of his temples.

Auda Isarn now seemed to be entering a trance, and her anguished voice opened wounds in the night...

Jordane de Montauve – There are those who lose courage or grow weary, blinded by crude comfort. The "clothed" call them "Sad with thirst," which is the true way out. There are the refined who, after recognising the vanity of ordinary pleasures, give themselves over to the vertigo of desolation. Others wallow in materialism because they are told that the Consolamentum will liberate them one day. And I, what am I but passion and desolation?

End of scene. Auda Isarn falls abruptly silent and stands still, rigid, her nails dug into her palms, her mouth open. No one applauds, no one speaks. Roger Barbaïra goes to free her from the character she had become and grabs her by the arms, feeling a long tremor run through her muscles and a little foam of saliva at the corners of her lips, which the reflection of the fire transforms into a drop of blood.



She now descends to the bottom of the valley. Barbaïra walks alongside Auda Isarn, far behind the group, but without touching her, as required by Cathar rules. He says to her:

"Auda, you acted like a talented actress. As well as Sarah Bernhardt!"

Auda shook her head as if rejecting the compliment, but the darkness of the night hid her gesture. Barbaïra guessed this and insisted:

"Really, were you acting? Or were you squeezing out something that exists within you and that until now was indefinable?"

You showed the other side of Auda Isarn!

"Maybe it's true, I don't know!" she replied in a muffled voice.

Auda continued tempering while advanced parsimoniously towards the AJ *Au-devant de la Vie*. With a touch of humour following the minutes of enthusiasm, Roger Barbaïra says to Auda:

"It pains me to hear you talk about Robuffay like Jordane. I feel uneasy and wonder if, through her, you won't come to love him one day!"

"Don't be silly!"

Some time passed. All together again, they crossed the village. From the farmyards rose a muffled murmur, punctuated by the bleating of lambs.

"I'm not passionate about anyone," continued Auda Isarn, "but I have great affection for you. You know that, Robuffay, don't you? And why him? All the boys in the *ajiste* club courted me. All except Ferrocas.

"I'm sure he did! Ferrocas is a true Cathar!"

Once again, they heard the silence of the night, broken only by their footsteps. The lights of the youth hostel appeared on the slope of the valley. Auda continued:

"I feel that you were called to do great things, Roger. Why are you wasting your time with a girl like me? Remember what Otto Rahn's books say:

*He who wishes to belong to the Grail
Must completely renounce female love...*

Ah, he will be happy to know that we are determined to resurrect the past of this country he loves so much! I will never forget the lesson he taught us when we threw empty tin cans into the ruins of Montsegur. Never, Auda! Now, in addition to learning to respect them, we are going to bring them back to life!

Thanks to him!

Auda Isarn shuddered:

"Shut up, Roger, or some misfortune may befall us! You don't joke about terrible things like that!"

"Misfortune? What misfortune?"

Auda rediscovered the stark voice that had so disconcerted her comrades in the ruins of Roquefixade.

"Ah! I haven't seen anything yet, but it will happen! Yes, it will! The ruins of war... the torture... new bonfires!"

Roger Barbaïra shrugged and insisted:

"If Otto Rahn were among us, he would not fail to encourage us to perform the play! I wonder what has become of him..."

IV

Through his father, Roger Barbaïra was given the motorbike he had been dreaming of. It was an English *Norton*, a very fast machine for its time. Its power, quality and price set it apart from other machines of the same type, just as a palfrey differs from a draught horse. Clad in leather armour, helmet firmly secured, the large silver tank with black piping clamped between his knees, Barbaïra set off for Toulouse with the determination of a barbarian who had just found a means of expression in keeping with his times and his true nature... This was at a time when young people his age were killing themselves because they didn't know that a *Norton* was too fast. Racing motorcycles, like thoroughbreds, must be taught to obey their rider! He says to Auda:

"I named it Matraz... The arrow! More specifically, a crossbow bolt in the Occitan language. See how beautiful it is!"

He caresses the silver breastplate with an almost sensual love.

"I have to go to Carcassonne, but we'll be at the AJ in less than two hours! No more trains! No more bicycles!"

He went to find Auda Isarn to repeat the second act of *Montsegur* on the stage of Puivert Castle, near the N117 road between Bélesta and Quillan. It is the last Saturday of September 1938. In Toulouse, as in all French cities, there is a heavy sense of anxiety arising from the international political situation.

"The news is not good," says Auda Isarn... Several comrades at the hospital have received marching orders and will be leaving in three days!

"For now, we're not involved in the mess! Come on, get in and hold on tight!"

They drive towards Carcassonne. Barbaïra takes the bends with the same passion that a good skier feels for steep slopes, leaning until he sees the horizon at a forty-five-degree angle. At the limit of the incline, always initiated but never completed, his only point of support is the air compressed by the effect of speed. The road exists only to be memorised. At the top of the climbs, the wind seems to want to devour the machine, which shifts into fourth gear... It is not the steady movement of a car or the flight of an aeroplane, it is a smooth, undulating glide along the asphalt, with all the weight of ingenuity and luggage suspended on the wings of the wind...

Headwind. Athletic tension in the arms, hands firmly gripping the animal's neck. Crosswind. Careful when tacking against the wind to maintain the course of life. Tailwind. Speed increases and Barbaïra becomes as light as a feather. Her eyes take in images of meadows, the thread of water in the Canal du Midi, trees, houses and adversaries – cars, carts, cyclists, pedestrians – which speed reveals to her in fleeting perspective, seen as quickly as they disappear. The air smells of wood fire, petrol,

castor oil, warm asphalt, horse manure and fallen leaves, but no one sensation has time to dominate the others... The taste of speed, of showing one's face... An insect hitting one's face has almost the same effect as a rifle bullet. The motorcyclist, like a warrior, rediscovers the taste of epic times. As in war, it is the final battle with ancestral fear. Born of industrial civilisation, the motorbike makes the ultimate concession to those who seek to live dangerously.

With burning cheeks and shining eyes, Roger Barbaïra stops at the entrance to Carcassonne to refuel *Matraz*.

"It's wonderful, isn't it, Auda? At over a hundred kilometres an hour, I feel like the master of the world! Don't you feel like me, wanting to insult all those pedestrians and cyclists crawling along in mediocrity as you pass them?"

Auda Isarn doesn't answer. She happens to glance at the plate that in 1938 would have indicated the name of the vehicle's owner. She reads it, utterly stunned:

"Roger Barbaïra
Count Faydit de Miramont
Domain of Le Pech, Aude".

She places her finger on the brass plate and looks up with a silent question. The young man blushes, but nothing else is noticeable on his face, which is reddened by the wind from the ride.

"We're going to pass through Miramont," he says... "It's not far. I'll explain why later."



Instead of taking the Fanjeaux road at the entrance to Carcassonne, drive through the town and continue towards Béziers. In the village of Barbaïra, take a secondary road and climb the mountain, which, once wooded, has given way to brambles in a place already occupied by the chaos of crags, each one resembling a dismantled fortress. Stop at *Matraz* by the side of the road.

Now, we continue on foot. It's about fifteen minutes. You'll see...

Fir trees. Beech trees. Oak trees. Large clusters of thistles. Boxwood hedges. Bramble thickets. Blackbirds sing. One by one, always in front of the couple who violate the austere solitude, the cuckoos sound their warnings. Neither the vegetation nor the birds can dispel the sadness that hangs over the landscape. This piece of land seems to be touched by a curse. A very ancient curse that has lost none of its power, to the point of discouraging those who are tempted by the opinion expressed in the guidebooks. But no one takes that path, no one visits the place.

On a bare hill, just beyond the forest, stand the ruins of a castle. The walls, made of heavy cyclopean blocks placed one on top of the other, as in Montsegur, line three sides. The fourth side shows nothing more than a pile of stones overgrown with brambles. The truncated keep opens onto a low-ceilinged room covered by a portion of a vault. No other witness to the past of this stronghold remains...

"The castle of Miramont," says Roger. Some still call it Alaric's castle. Some historians maintain that the mortal remains of the Visigoth king were exhumed here after the battle of Vouillé and that Alaric was buried on this hill with other treasures, women and elephants, but before 1063, nothing certain is known about the castle. It appears in a document signed by the Count of Carcassonne, Roger III, and Roger I, Count of Foix.

Auda Isarn gazes with bulging, flashing eyes at the gloomy pile of stones.

"I just don't understand the connection between you and Miramont Castle!

"Wait a minute! You know I've been poring over the family archives, the parish records of Barbaïra and the library of Carcassonne for over a year.

"Yes."

"Well, I found documents signed 'Raymond Barbaïra, Count *Faydit* of Miramont'.

-Why *Faydit*?

-Etymologically, *Faydit* means 'he who lacks faith'. *Faydit* is the reprobate, the heretic who justifies the Albigensian Crusade – officially, at least! – and who, after it, is outlawed and stripped of his possessions by the victors. Some Occitan lords, such as the *Faydit* family of Terssac, for example, bore this patronymic name long before the Crusade of 1209. My great-great-grandfather still had it. I think the Barbaïras lost everything in 1793. My father doesn't see that as a great evil.

He says that all that ancient history is not worth a good year without mildew ¹ and that the age of the vines is more important than that of the family!

-So, are you Lord of Miramont?

-We were. In 1149, it was part of the possessions of the Abbey of Lagrasse. The Barbaïra family, a Visigoth family, received it as a gift between 1149 and 1200. On what grounds, it is not clear. According to the historian Guy des Vaux de Cernay, in 1210, around Easter time, Miramont was besieged by Simon de Monfort and surrendered after eleven days.

The young man cheered up slightly.

"If I had been there, I would have sent Simon de Montfort packing. I would not have surrendered the town, and the Barbaïras would not have been *Faydits* for seven centuries! That is how we lost Miramont, my dear Auda.

"But did they manage to save the land?

"Yes, of course, we became winegrowers!"

He smiled and said in a cheerful tone:

"One day I will reclaim the castle. While I wait, I will take up the title and give it all the meaning it deserves. Nobility, Auda, is not a matter of archives, but of behaviour. From now on, I will be of Miramont, even in the most insignificant things!

He laughed. He didn't seem affected by the gloomy nature of the place... The black stone castle... Black fir trees in the background... The misty view of the Black Mountain to the north. It was impossible to imagine a place more completely devoid of life.

¹ A disease that affects certain plants.

Roger Barbaïra must have picked up on part of that message because he added:

-There's no need to wait to get going again!

"We have to hurry," suggested Auda Isarn. "Even on a motorbike, we're going to be late!"

They ran down the path. Back on the road, Roger took the young woman's hand and said, half seriously, half smiling:

"When you're Countess of Miramont..."

Auda withdrew her hand as quickly as if she had been burned by contact with male skin. Nothing irritated Barbaïra more. She buttoned up her leather armour with a sharp movement, pulled her helmet onto her head with a punch and threw *Matraz* dangerously down the road.



When they arrived at the youth hostel, Estève Chabrol's companion had just killed a rabbit. The ceremony took a long time. First, she hung the live animal by its hind legs from a bar in the barn. Then, with surprising dexterity, she gouged out one of its eyes with a twisting motion of her knife and watched with interest as the animal convulsed and bled to death. From time to time, she collected a few drops with her hands and rubbed them together. Her face reflected the kind of ecstasy typical of Etruscan statues chiselled with voluptuousness and death.

"Abominable vampire!" muttered Barbaïra, pushing Auda forward... "I'd like to know what the AJ management is waiting for to kick her out on the street!"

She introduced *Matraz* to her comrades, who were ready to leave. She was surrounded, admired, caressed on the neck and chest. When, thanks to the engraved brass plaque, the owner's name became known throughout the titles, an angel passed by. Roger waited for that moment with some anxiety. Given the political climate that reigned in the AJ community, he threw his titles, fallen in the dust, as a provocation and expected to be morally rejected in the

outer darkness. That was not the case. Guyot Peyrat seemed very pleased to discover through him a true Occitan lord, and Raymond Ferrocas, descendant of the *Camisards*, immediately felt solidarity with the *Faydit* Roger Barbaïra. Realising that until then he had been slumbering without knowing what a count was, Jordi Couquet discovered the benefits of democracy. Robuffay's hostility, rekindled after Auda appeared riding on the back of his rival's motorbike, drew its strength not from the past, but from the present. Only Marius Chabrol sanctioned the revelation in terms of class struggle, but without malice. He simply said:

'I have a feeling that the count is going to reveal himself with this ingenuity!

It is *Matraz* who distances herself, creating a kind of hierarchy in an environment that was completely unfamiliar to her before she appeared. She took them according to the century, not according to history... It was that simple, because the thirty kilometres separating *Au-devant de la Vie* from Puivert Castle took her twenty minutes, compared to more than an hour for the cyclists.



The imposing castle of Puivert occupies the edge of a plateau on the right bank of the Blau, in the area known as Camp Ferré. Very little remains of the ancient Occitan fortress where the beautiful Adelaide of Boissezon and Esclarmonde of Foix presided over the Courts of Love of their time, at the head of the high and mighty lords of Toulouse, Roussillon, Sardinia and Aragon.

It was one of the four favourite lieutenants of Simon de Montfort, a knight who came from the Yvelines as a conqueror, Thomas de Bruyère, who ordered the construction of the stronghold, whose ruins occupy the largest perimeter of any castle known in the West. It is flanked by six towers. The walls enclose a massive, towering, indestructible keep, more authentic than the older defences of Carcassonne, because it has never been restored.

"There's plenty of room for thousands of spectators!" observes the *père aubergiste*.

"What would be the point of that?" objects Guyot Peyrat. "Do you intend to invite the whole of Languedoc?"

"No, but Puivert is immediately usable, whereas Montsegur requires four or five Sundays of work to clean up the interior.

"That may be, but at Montsegur we are at home!" replies Roger Barbaïra, "whereas here we are in an enemy castle!"

He then adds, in a more scathing tone:

"Of course, it's the best setting for staging a play by Lévis-Mirepoix.

Estève Caberol shook his head.

"We'll rehearse here once. Later, we'll decide between Montsegur and Puivert.

Guyot Peyrat opens his director's folder.

"Take your places for the second act, comrades. The scene depicts the interior of Montsegur Castle. It really is the ideal setting. The crowd is on stage, the actors and spectators are mixed together, but the audience can participate fully. And who knows if there won't be a real communion between the historic site, the play, the actors and the local inhabitants? A true resurrection of the Occitan community? Right, let's go!... Jordane de Montauze surprises the amorous Gauthier des Ormes and takes him to Montsegur with the intention of converting him to the Cathar faith... and leaves him among the crowd of Perfects and Believers who had gathered to hear the word of Bertrand Martin. Raymond d'Alfaro watches the enemy with the deepest hostility...

Barbaïra proposes:

"I think it is time to put together a suitable *mise-en-scène*. Let us consider the faithful Cathar spectators. It is to them that our preacher Ferrocas is addressing himself! I, Raymond d'Alfaro, remain among the crowd. Jordane de Montauze and the suitor, too. I insult Robuffay over the heads of the spectators. I take to the inhabitants of

Montsegur as witnesses to the scandalous presence of a *franchiman*¹ among them! Who knows how they will react?

The rehearsal begins. The Cathar preacher stands near the keep...

Bertrand Martin – Faithful listeners, the concerns imposed on us by the defence of our faith against the sectarians of Rome cannot make us forget the main objective of aspiring to infinite heights. For this very reason, there is no need to be wary of revealing your mysteries, all of you and just as you are, without imitating the method of Simon Magus, Basilides, Marcellinus and other Gnostic ancestors who reserved the secret for a small number of initiated sages. Jesus, a living parable, spoke in parables, but he spoke to everyone!

It does not matter if some understand little and others understand much; the former can reach the ineffable abyss more quickly if they know how to annihilate themselves. I quote a countryman from our mountains. Perfect among the Perfect, who, disdainful to kill himself, managed to deny the useless flesh in life and remain for years sitting on a bench at the door of his house in stony immobility.

Raymond d'Alfaro (lost in the crowd and pointing to Gauthier des Ormes) - Who is that traitor who has insinuated himself among us? Believers and Perfect Ones, unless he converts to our religion, is it not preferable to put him to the sword?

The crowd - Let him convert!

Jordane de Montauve - That man came up to Montsegur to hear the word of the Perfects. Leave him alone! God will show him the way to truth and lead him to the ineffable, like that countryman our holy man is telling us about!

Bertrand Martin – He truly reached the limits of the ineffable and, later, entered into its bosom, indeed! The All and the Nothing are but a single principle under two aspects that must be confused. Such is perfection, but in the Nothing there is a tendency to become anything... Because of that tendency to

¹ It could be equated with the pejorative term 'franchise'.

service of the denying god, one series of existences begets another, which, becoming increasingly precise, progressively depart from perfection! Thus, the created spirits, the Aeons, are staggered in a series of successive degradations. From the moment existence is affirmed, imbalance is born, followed by the desire that begets matter. Among the Aeons, two of them, Satan and Jehovah – the evil god of the Old Testament – restless and jealous of the perfection from which they had been separated, wanted to possess it again and become all-powerful through desire. If they could not attain the All, which is precisely the absence of desire, they attained a high degree of power by binding spirits in matter...

"Stop! Stop!" cries Guyot Peyrat... "Ferrocas, it's a perfect Perfect!" An inspired voice, a fiery gaze in communication with the Hereafter, a sovereign gesture. All right, but I wonder if this text will have any impact on the audience. It is a masterful discourse on third-year philosophy, but it is far beyond the understanding of a villager from Montsegur!

"So much the worse!" interjects Estève Caberol, "let him finish his speech. It's important! The doctrine of the Cathars must be explained! When it comes to ignorance, there can be no half measures!"

Bertrand Martin – So they declared war on the true God, or rather, on the firstborn son of God, the Spirit, the first emanation of the absolute God, the only one through which that God is intelligible. The absolute God is above him, totally immobile, even without thought, since thought is already movement! It is the Spirit that comes from him that thinks! Then, out of compassion for the lower Aeons gradually chained in matter by the rebellious Aeons, the Spirit sent them three higher Aeons who were with him in heaven: Jesus, Mary, and Saint John the Evangelist, who never took on substance. They had the appearance of human bodies, but they were not born of the flesh and will not die. They took on this appearance so that they could be perceived by men, imprisoned souls, and to teach them abstinence and chastity, through which the material world reaches the spiritual world. Thus,

desire will retreat upon its own footsteps, inanimate matter will tend towards dissolution, spirits will rise towards the Spirit, and the Whole will reach its point of perfection, which is Nothingness!

"Hey, there!" shouts Estève Caberol, making a gesture as if to tear out the few hairs he has left... "You're right, Peyrat, things aren't like that! All those Aeons wandering around in zeppelins between good and evil!

"Without ever reaching the end!" confirms Jordi Couquet.

Roger Barbaïra's eyes sought out Auda's, which seemed to be fixed on the red flames of forgotten bonfires, and he whispered to her:

-I disagree with the Cathars. What about you?

-Perhaps.

-The beauty of the world and the grandeur of the struggle for life satisfy me... provided that both retain a part of their femininity!

Then, turning to *the innkeeper*:

-You're right, *pau*, what surpasses them is not valid, and apart from that, it won't raise the awareness of the villagers of Montsegur, who are magnificent pagans!

Estève Caberol calls out to the director:

-Come on, come forward! Compensate us with a good, voluptuous dinner! Let Robuffay upset the lady of Montauze!

-Scene two... Gauthier des Ormes finds Jordane in a room in the keep of Montsegur... It is night... The Cathars have gone down to the village or taken shelter in the huts surrounding the fortress. Let's go!

Gauthier des Ormes – After hearing abominable things and witnessing that unholy conversation, I am afraid of myself when I think that if I had to make this journey again, even knowing the purpose, I would do it again to hear the oracle that will come from your lips!

Jordane de Montauze – The oracle has been spoken, I will only help you to understand. Have you reflected on what Bertrand Martin said about marriage?

Gauthier des Ormes – No, I thought about your heart submerged in the night! You, Jordane, heretic, condemned to not love the beauty of free and sweet days! I feel suffocated! What will become of me?

Jordane de Montaure – You came here and knew how to please me, but, according to Cathar tradition, the more time passes, the less I dream of being your wife.

Gauthier des Ormes – Ah! Jordane!

"Stop!" cries Barbaïra. "Robuffay, dear, you are as good at acting out this scene as I am at threading needles! That passage can only be interpreted by me and Auda. Get out, leave!"

She advances with clenched fists and a resolute gaze towards the keep that serves as the stage. Robuffay, who eight days earlier would not have given an inch, looks at his rival from a new angle. He sees him advancing towards him in a terrifying manner, riding *Matraz*, clad in leather armour, his palfrey adorned in silver and black, his head covered with the helmet of the lords *Faydits* of Miramont. And he gives way. The scene resumes, still according to Lévis-Mirepoix's text...

Roger Barbaïra, Count Faydit de Miramont - Ah, my beloved!

Auda Isarn – A strange project took shape in my mind and in my heart. It was a being torn apart by suffering, but capable of loving madly! I became excited. I felt you coming towards me and said: I will go further, ever further, he will follow me, I must lead him to initiation. Will it shatter my beliefs? At least, know it and you will understand. The impression on him was very strong... then, perhaps he will experience, like me, the bitter and attractive vertigo of doomed passion, which is granted a moment to cry out before being suffocated!

"End of the scene!" shouts Guyot Peyrat... *Gauthier des Ormes* impetuously embraces Jordane with the wind howling in the hollows of the keep.

"Don't squeeze so hard, you cretin!" murmurs Robuffay.

A belated and superfluous recommendation. With a gentle but resolute gesture, Auda had just pushed Barbaïra away from her.

night was falling. The wind sang in the spiral staircase of the keep at Puivert. Above the murmur that was fading into the calm imposed by the end of the day, the clock in a village began to strike, one note after another, each one sad. The boys shuddered.

"The alarm bell!" murmured Gaston Reboul... "War must have been declared!"

They paid closer attention. It was just the call to prayer sounding from the depths of the valley.

"It's time to descend!" ordered the *père aubergiste*.



A few dead leaves were already rustling under their feet as they entered the inn. The motto seemed to be halfway there: *Au-devant de la Vie*.

"To the front lines of war, that's for sure!" murmured Chabrol.

Due to the late hour, they contented themselves with a frugal meal. Mashed potatoes and fruit. They ate with their lips alone, but listened to the radio news with all their ears. As the pessimistic news was confirmed, they felt a knot in their stomachs and their limbs slip into a kind of pit formed by a peace in the process of decay. Scattered across the huge table were newspapers with thick headlines: "Daladier confronts Hitler's *Diktat*... Mobilisation of the British fleet... French generals in London... Security measures in Paris against bombing. One sandbag per building!... Gamelin speaks of the splendid morale of the French army..."

"Are you in good spirits?" Jordi Couquet asks the boy next to him.

"No, I don't."

"What about you, Robuffay? What would you do if there were a war?"

"I remain faithful to the spirit of the hostel. We came to the AJ to create a fraternal world among young people from all countries. I will not betray it. If necessary, I will defend it with my life!"

When the radio voices that seemed to come from beyond the grave fell silent, they went to to pay attention to the rumours

nocturnes, as if war were coming out of the night and knocking on the door of the youth hostel. But only the wind sliding down from the mountain top mourned the summer that was fleeing with peace.

"It's all very nice," Gaston Reboul objected with a shake of his head, "but if tomorrow the police present you with a mobilisation order, how would you go about defending the *anarchist* ideal?"

"I wouldn't go. I'd rather flee to Spain."

"And I would do as Robuffay did!" Marius Chabrol interrupted... The AJ are with the USSR. For peace! Against the imperialist war that once again attempts to resolve the internal contradictions of capitalist society! Not a man, not a penny for the war!

Reboul lets out a sigh. For a long time he remains absorbed in contemplating the toe of one of his boots and finally says:

"You're lucky! If I were free to choose like you, I would also be the man of 'refusal to obey' like our friend Giono. But what would the people of Lavelanet say when they saw the boss's son between two policemen, accused of insubordination or desertion in wartime? I belong to the factory!"

"Me too," confirmed Jordi Couquet. "After the war, there will be no work for deserters!"

Marius Chabrol laughed sarcastically and pointed his finger at the colourful plaque hanging on the wall of the room: "After the war, only those who did not fight in the war will live." Everyone fell silent. The radio was full of pessimistic news. Estève Caberol smoked nervously. His partner knitted with particular fervour. Ferrocas watched the movement of the wool with a vague sense of anxiety. Peace was as fragile as that red thread, which could break at any moment. Or Judith could go and fetch a pair of scissors from the sewing box and cut it for no reason at all. If that happened, everything would fall apart... The hopes for a more just and fraternal life for young people of all countries, regardless of religion, class or race... The ideal *of* a community of boys and girls without hatred. The history of Languedoc would become

to the past because the radio would immediately start playing the *Marseillaise*! He said slowly:

"I choose to refuse obedience. For the reasons I recently explained in Puivert. This war was organised by Jehovah, the evil god of the Old Testament. War is the triumph of matter. To wage war is to enter the service of the accursed Aeons who turned the world to Evil. Good resides in immobility, in refusal to obey. Are you of the same opinion, Barbaïra?"

As he listened to the news and the discussions of his comrades, the young man seemed to maintain the aggressive attitude he had adopted when he threw *Matraz* at over a hundred kilometres per hour. He replied:

"My dear Ferrocas, that's not the problem. I don't give a penny for your Cathar philosophy, but I would adopt the same attitude as you, albeit for other reasons. The war in France is not my war, because France is not my country! I may one day fight for Barbaïra or Carcassonne, but not for a homeland that has other ideological contours. France is not the land of my fathers!"

"And the language? Isn't that also a homeland?" objected Gaston Reboul.

"A homeland that the *French* forced down our throats at spearpoint, comrades! We must also renounce that homeland!"

The autumn wind howled around the youth hostel. The song of the stream sounded like a lament. The air that the boys and girls breathed tasted like ashes. Lou Ganet, the youngest member of the team, in no way threatened by mobilisation, felt a lump forming in his throat. He wanted to cry. Like the wind. He thought of the mother he adored and the girls he met in the afternoons at the looms in the city of Carcassonne.

Guyot Peyrat resumed the conversation:

"You're fantastic, Barbaïra. I'll follow you everywhere as an Occitan patriot! Who set you on this path? Otto Rahn, perhaps...?"

Roger Barbaïra stood up and spoke as if he were in public.

"Comrades, I didn't invent anything! No one conceives what they want it to be, everything is written in history! In September 1938, did you choose to refuse obedience in the face of an imperialist and capitalist war that you dare not name? Long before you, other Languedoc patriots took the same stance! Remember Marcelin Albert... Two hundred and eighty-five thousand demonstrators in the streets of Montpellier in 1907!... Against poverty, against French and capitalist oppression from the north!

"Marcelin Albert was on the government's payroll!" shouted the *innkeeper*.

"That's what they say!" scoffed Roger Barbaïra... The truth is that, having arrived in Paris at the invitation of the French to negotiate, poor Marcelin Albert didn't have a penny to return to Montpellier after the negotiations failed! He was paid by the government, yes... but to buy his train ticket!

The inn guests burst out laughing. The boys and girls hung on the lips of this young man who stood up against imperialist war, seeming to cling to him with the same fervour as a crowd discovering a leader who will save them from their troubles!

"Marcelin Albert's adventure is just a detail. The important thing, comrades, was to see the 107th Infantry Regiment of the XVII Corps lowering their guns so as not to fire on their Languedoc brothers! The revolt of the Agde regiment was the modern revolt of the Viscount of Trencavel, comrades!

"Long live Trencavel!" shouts Guyot Peyrat.

"Hear the rest! In 1917, the regiments of the Midi left the battlefield and refused to die in a war that was not theirs! The war that is now being imposed on us is not our war either! As far as I am concerned, I will not wait to lower my gun, as our brave ancestors did, I refuse outright to take up a French rifle!

"Bravo!" shouted Marius Chabrol.

Almost all the *anarchists* present, including those who had come individually to the hostel and were not members of the club

of the most assiduous members, took part in the anti-war protest. Various cries dominated the murmur of the discussions... Daladier to the wall!... Soviets everywhere!... Hitler to hell... Barbaïra to power!... *Canes* on the front line!

"Well, I'll fight that war!" announced Estève Caberol when the calm allowed him to be heard... "We must avenge our comrades in Barcelona! It is impossible to guarantee a future of freedom for Europe without crushing fascism in Spain, Germany and Italy!"

"Down with the scabs!" shouts Chabrol.

Jordi Couquet gives Barbaïra, who has just returned to his seat on the bench, a friendly nudge in the back and says confidentially:

"Just as he would cut off Hitler's moustache, Caberol doesn't mess around with his friend Judith! He's fed up with mental work. It's the way to start a fresh and cheerful war!"

Judith raised her head. She had certainly heard her name being called. She put down her balls of wool and muttered:

"The Teutons? We must kill many... Kill them all! Kill! Kill!"

V

"It was here that we saw Otto Rahn for the first time!" murmured Roger Barbaïra.

He had just passed through the southern gate of Montsegur with the users' club and set foot inside the fortress. In summer, the "volunteer teams" cut the brambles and pruned the trees in preparation for the performance planned for the last Sunday of September 1939.

"Do you remember how Rahn scared us when he suddenly appeared in the middle of the brambles?" asked Ferrocas.

"What impressed me most was that vacant look and the way he walked, he looked like a ghost wandering through his own dream!" murmured Guyot Peyrat.

"Above all, I remember the commotion caused by the empty tin cans we left lying around everywhere!" said Jordi Couquet.

Do you remember how difficult it was for you to assimilate the word '*ajiste*', Peyrat?

They laugh and place their rucksacks on the bare rocks. Their foreheads are covered in sweat. The scent of brambles hangs in the thick air. Above the reddish mists veiling the sky, the sun sets a seal of red wax whose pasty contours gradually fade.

"It's too hot for 3 September!" observes Robert Robuffay. He was wearing the usual climbing gear – tight-fitting trousers, a Bonneval jacket – and, like Barbaïra, a helmet to protect him from falling rocks on the mountain. It was his stage costume. In fact, they decided to present *Montsegur* in a modern context to the villagers, projecting the heroes of the play onto figures of men of their time. Thus, Gaston Reboul would play Guy de Lévis as a "combat leader" and wear his father's own coat. Thanks to Jordi Couquet's work, the Cathar bishop Raymond Ferrocas would go as Bertrand Martin in his clandestine digressions, disguised as a weaver. Marius Chabrol, the inquisitor, would adopt the black leather clothing of the Chekists, fitted at the hips by a belt with a pistol holster... empty, of course. Auda Isarn would appear from the beginning dressed in *shorts* and a conventional low-cut dress, the period of Jordane triumphant in her femininity, and then, at the time of the Cathar renunciation, wrapped in the black wool dress of the women of Montsegur. Robuffay and Barbaïra, rival lords, would wear their usual combat attire: the Bonneval of the mountain knight and the leather armour of the road knight...

"It's the ideal clothing for a scorching 3rd of September!" observed the *innkeeper* ironically when he saw the two boys covered in sweat.

Roger Barbaïra neither saw nor heard. His eyes were fixed ahead, in the direction of the boxwood and bramble bushes that covered the foot

of the eastern wall, along the line where the German had appeared two years earlier. Nothing moved in the thick air. There was no birdsong or the sound of a fox or rabbit fleeing through the tall grass. Even a ghost would hesitate to show itself in heat as dense as yellow fever! Barbaïra said slowly in a melancholy tone:

-And yet, it was thanks to him that it all began...

"Yes," confirmed Reboul, "he was the guide we needed to give more meaning and interest to our *trips*!"

-Without him, perhaps no one would have had the idea of staging *Montsegur*! murmured Guyot Peyrat.

"He was a great guy," admitted Jordi Couquet, "even when he was hunting for waxed paper!"

Furthermore:

-If he left, it was for a reason!... Well, that doesn't stop us from having a bite to eat!

They settled down on the rocks. Somewhat apart from the group, Auda Isarn resumed his comings and goings with restrained momentum and the impatience of a thoroughbred horse, which so impressed Otto Rahn. The sun broke through the sheets of mist surrounding the fortress. The walls lost all their relief under this weak light, reminiscent of candles unable to penetrate the deep shadows of cathedrals. Beyond the postern gates, nothing transpired from the panorama of peaks and depths of the valleys to which they were accustomed. Montsegur, generally so open to the invocations of the world, withdrew into a funereal selfishness, as if suspended from its past.

"It looks like a night of the dead!" said Chabrol. "Speak, say anything, or I'll start to sleep."

With a sudden decision, Roger Barbaïra jumped to his feet and shouted:

"If Otto Rahn came here now, what would he think of a bunch of slackers incapable of climbing Montsegur on their knees like the Hitler Youth?"

Jordi Couquet stood up with a sigh:

"I don't like the Hitlerites!"

"Me neither!" added Chabrol.

"We're not performing *Montsegur* for them, but for ourselves!" interrupted *the innkeeper*.

Reboul had just laboriously emptied a tin of sardines and raised his arm like a slingshot to throw it forward, but he paused for a few seconds, his arm lost its rigidity and dropped. He wrapped the tin in paper and put it in his bag.



One by one, without haste, they walked to the keep that served as the stage.

"Stop!" shouted the stage manager. The first scene of the third act opens with a view of the forest. On the other side of the castle, therefore, between the hedges and the trees.

"What about the audience?" asked Reboul.

"It doesn't matter, they're part of the play. Instead of looking at the keep, they look the other way... We are now on 24 May 1242, in a forest between Avignonnet and Montsegur... Jordane de Montaure and Gauthier des Ormes are waiting for Raymond d'Alfaro, who has just killed the inquisitors Guillaume Arnaud, Étienne de Narbone and Raymond l'Écrivain... Jordane leaves the arms of his beloved, hidden in the hut made of branches.

"Are you sure they won't sleep together?" asks *the innkeeper*, laughing.

"Well... the text of Lévis-Mirepoix is not explicit on that point. The question will always remain: will they sleep together, or will they not...

But I decide that they will sleep! Otherwise, the people of Montsegur would not understand anything! Raymond d'Alfaro then appears... Come on, Barbaïra...

Raymond d'Alfaro - Justice has been done, madam! None of them escaped! The world will hear about us!

Jordane de Montaure - Did you manage to surprise them easily? Didn't they put up much resistance?

Raymond d'Alfaro - The commotion woke them from their sleep and they were already up when we found them. Be that as it may, those wretches are well and truly dead! When they heard from us

the fate that awaited them, they knelt down to sing the Te Deum! But... aren't you going to say anything, my lady? Do you think it's natural that a knight more suited to war than murder should have taken part in this slaughter, and that you see no merit in a gesture that will awaken an entire sleepy nation?

Jordane de Montaure (with courteous affection) – Dear Raymond d'Alfaro, women are very passionate in their threats, but somewhat more timid in their execution. Do not be offended!

Raymond d'Alfaro – You are an ardent champion of our cause, it is true, but I am its most devoted champion!

Having long harboured my two passions in one, Jordane and vengeance, and after almost two whole years spent in Montsegur adoring you without that adoration displeasing you, I deserved more than your silent haughtiness!

Jordane de Montaure – And what do you deserve, pray tell?

Raymond d'Alfaro – Until the very last moment, you did not want to leave those who were going to commit the liberating crime, and tonight you offered me the splendour of your eyes, you bet your beauty on a glance!

Jordane de Montaure – That is not true!

Raymond d'Alfaro – Madam, you must not allow your gaze to speak louder than your mouth.

Jordane de Montaure – You are trying to claim a favour that is nothing more than an expression of your audacity!

Raymond d'Alfaro – And what does that matter after all you wanted? I may be mistaken, but your past justifies my surprise. She who, to defend a cause, consented to seduce an enemy like Gauthier des Ormes, would not know in her pride how to consider and grant the good servant the price he paid, perhaps too hastily, to the renegade!

Jordane de Montaure (angry) – You will discover that you are mistaken, Sir ¹: I do not pay, I give!

-Bravo! shouts the *innkeeper*... This Auda, pardon me, this Jordane is truly shameless!

¹ This is archaic French. *Messire* comes from *sire*. Etymologically, it means 'my lord' (Translator's note).

-Silence! shouted the director... Jordane, go and fetch Gauthier des Ormes from the cabin and bring him to the stage. Raymond d'Alfaro, who thought he was dead, is taken aback. Jordane points to the Frenchman:

Jordane de Montaure – Someone who fought tirelessly against our people two years ago is not a traitor! Traitor?! He was no more on our side than I was on his! There are no debts between us. He is my weakness and I am his! We cannot be together. Perhaps your anger is holy, d'Alfaro, in pushing me into this challenge... because, alone, I would not have the strength to leave this encounter overnight. You will find me in Montsegur!

Raymond d'Alfaro – Before that, madam, we must settle this matter!

Jordane de Montaure – No, Messire, I do not want to witness the combat! First, I demand both of you give me your word as gentlemen that you will not resort to violence before I disappear from the forest.

I won't even look back, I'm not a bet! Whatever the outcome of the fight, my destiny will remain isolated in the heights where I will try to forget human passions...

"So, are we fighting or what?" asks Roger Barbaïra with some impatience.

"With what? We don't have swords, axes or piles of weapons... According to Lévis-Mirepoix, we should use one of these three instruments!" says Robert Robuffay.

"You didn't understand my *mise-en-scène*!" laments Guyot Peyrat. "It's a modern *mise-en-scène* based on a transposition. Between two athletes, one specialising in mountain sports and the other in motorcycling, how can a difference be honourably resolved if not through a boxing match?"

"Let's go for the gloves then," agrees Robuffay.

Both boys shed the upper part of their leather armour and Bonneval's jacket and begin the fight bare-chested. The red sun burns their skin through the haze of fire. Sweat accentuates their muscles. The sharp sound of fists disturbs the funeral silence of the fortress. Barbaïra and Robuffay begin to gently mark each other, dancing on their legs and multiplying feints, hooks and symbolic *uppercuts*. Then the game becomes more serious. The two

champions take a liking to the fight, accelerating their movements and increasing the force of their blows. With increasingly furrowed brows and clenched jaws, they are about to settle a dispute that goes beyond the realm of fiction and quickly turns into pure passion. Fists strike sharply, leaving blue marks on bare skin. Suddenly, blood begins to flow.

"Hey, stop! Hey, stop!" shouts Estève Caberol... "Are you crazy or something? Stop that right now! Are you going to fight for real over a slut?"

"Stop!" shouts the director. "If you're going to go at it like that in rehearsal, someone's going to get killed on performance day. Besides, where is the spirit of the age? Not to mention that in the 20th century, men don't fight to the death over a woman!"

"We'll see about that!" muttered Barbaïra.

"I'll put those idiots in their place!" declared Robuffay.

It was necessary to separate them and call them to order, each in opposite corners of the fortress.



"We are now at the besieged Montsegur," explains the director, opening his notebook after an hour's break. For six months, the army under the command of the archbishops of Narbonne and Albi, the seneschal of Carcassonne, Guy de Lévis and, of course, Gauthier des Ormes, has been attacking the fortress. They have made no progress. Well supplied with provisions, the Cathars will not succumb to hunger. Discouragement reigns among the French. On the other hand, in the fortified temple of the Cathars, mystical enthusiasm reaches its peak. War ravages the foot of Montsegur, but in the face of it, they plunge into the serenity of renunciation of the world. Come in, Ferrocas!

Bertrand Martin - Hosannah! Blessed be the trial that God sends us, for we will emerge from it purer!

Jordane de Montaure - My father, have mercy on me!

Bertrand Martin - I read your thoughts, my daughter. You wonder if "he" is among them? Well, he is, but I offer you once again that consolation of the Holy Spirit that you deem yourself unworthy of receiving. It will tear out that remnant of passion that you carry

within you, and you will help me in my apostolate. Once you are converted, a sacred authority will be added to the prestige you already enjoy thanks to your mother. Brunissende, the saint!

Jordane de Montaure – Console me, my father, I implore you, but ask nothing of me in return. Only in death can I be consoled!

"Auda!" asks the director, "do you have a dagger to present to Bertrand Martin as a token of your funeral resolution?"

-No.

"Give him a hunting knife," suggests Robuffay.

"Let us continue!" says Guyot Peyrat... Auda shows the dagger to the Cathar bishop. The bishop refuses to carry out the plan and replies:

Bertrand Martin – Jordane, when your mother decided to leave her family and the world, it was not to flee from a trial, but to aspire ever higher and set an example... We preach renunciation, not cowardice! At the present time, our duty is to stay alive, to fight so that our doctrine is not wiped off the face of the earth... If you died like that, you would be remembered as the one who fled when the enemy approached! Besides, if it hurt you, it would not kill what needs to be killed... First you must die in spirit!



The purple mist that surrounded the fortress melted into the sides of the cliff and coagulated at the bottom of the valleys. The sky reappeared, but laden with green and yellow clouds, as if filled with sulphur. The walls also took on these colours, while golden hues adorned the leaves of the oak trees. It was still hot. Sweat glistened on the bare torsos of Robuffay and Barbaïra, marked with the imprints of the punches they had thrown. The tumultuous symphony of scents wafting from the bushes contributed to the tension in the air, which maintained the electrical potential of the stormy weather. Auda Isarn played her role with a special power of suggestion, but Guyot Peyrat sensed in this the onset of a nervous breakdown.

"Let's rehearse the last scene now," he said. The Crusaders' assault through a steep corridor ended up...

"False!" shouted Barbaïra. The Crusaders did not storm through a corridor. Only a small group managed to set foot in the Trébuchet passage after a night-time climb led by Basque mercenaries.

- It was then that Gauthier des Ormes attacked the barbican...

"False! None of the documents dealing with the siege of Montsegur mention that name. That knight must have existed only in the imagination of Lévis-Mirepoix!

-But aren't we performing a play based on one of his novels? A novel is a novel!...

- Agreed, but in that case, can we alter the epilogue at will? Yes or no?

- Change some details, yes, but not the general meaning of the events that belong to history!

- Contrary to what Comrade Chabrol claims when he recites the Marxist catechism, there is only one driving force in history: man. Man makes, unmakes and remakes history! So, I am going to remake the history of Montsegur and annul the capitulation!

The boys slowly gathered around him, some out of curiosity, others driven by a need for answers, and still others out of anger. Auda Isarn resumed his solitary comings and goings, but at a faster pace than usual, as if the thoroughbred within him had just broken into a gallop.

"Do you want to change the ending of the piece?" asked Estève Caberol. "In keeping with the spirit of *ajismo*, which respects individual freedom more than anything else, you have that right, but I would point out that if we vote for the change, Peyrat will have to write another text, the others will have to learn it and rehearse it, and that will postpone the performance indefinitely!

"It doesn't matter! We're twenty years old and history hasn't set any deadlines for us! Peyrat, what do you say?

- I stand by my text. I worked hard on it. What do you propose?

- I propose we have a drink! suggested Lou Ganet. I'll go and get some beers. They sat in circles on the rocks and drank beer, which was unfortunately as warm as the walls of Montsegur.



While they were arguing and drinking, a cathedral of black clouds had built up over the peak of Soularac, its neighbour in the sky, like a Christian building superimposed on a pagan temple. Only Montsegur escaped the rule. Rome never dared to plant the cross there. The storm broke suddenly and lightning bolts in the shape of runic signs began to stab the horizon.

"Someone threw a stone into the Druids' lake," murmured Roger Barbaïra, who had not forgotten Otto Rahn's explanations about the unusual nature of these storms, which were always limited in space. Indeed, despite the tar spewed by the clouds and the yellow light sailing in the green depths of the sick sky, the atmosphere remained calm everywhere; the valley floors and the village of Montsegur were invisible beneath the blanket of scarlet mist that muffled them.

"Well? Are you going to present your conclusion or not?" asked the *innkeeper*.

Roger Barbaïra stood up and his comrades followed suit, wiping away the sweat. The slightest movement made them perspire as if they were in a tropical country.

- My conclusion is no more extravagant than Lévis-Mirepoix's... In truth, comrades, fiction for fiction's sake, I prefer my version to his! That ending cannot be portrayed, it's impossible! It's silly, corny, good for making Maria's children cry! Here is what I propose... Three months before 16 March 1244, a knight from the North enters the fortress through one of the passages connecting it to the outside. The knight's name is perhaps Alain Barbaïra de Miramont, and he was a descendant of famous Visigothic chiefs, who were at the same time frowned upon at the court of Alaric – converted, as you know, to Christianity – because of their knowledge of

pagan tradition. He brought to Montsegur the key that would allow the "encrypted pagan writing" engraved on the stone tablets of the Grail, then in the custody of the Perfects, to be deciphered... From that moment on, everything changed! The defenders of Montsegur realised that Roman Christianity and Cathar Christianity were just two variants of the same error regarding the conception of man and the world and, instead of keeping the Grail hidden, they revealed its nature to men steeped in superstition... There was no surrender. The Perfect Ones opened the gates of Montsegur, descended upon the Crusaders, enlightened us and liberated the Occitan homeland with the help of the oppressors, now their friends. They marched on Rome and liberated it too from imposture, simony and Christian lust. They restore the unity of the West based on primordial truths, restore the health of the peoples and the prosperity of their homelands... And, of course, Alain Barbaïra de Miramont marries Jordane de Montaure! What do you think of this optimistic ending, comrades?

- Too late to perform! Auda Isarn suddenly shouts in a tone that startles the assembly... Listen!

They paid attention to the invocations of space. The storm roared on the peak of Soularac.

- All I hear is the rumble of thunder, says *the innkeeper*.
- Me too, confirms Chabrol.
- Listen! Listen! insists Auda.

There was a potential for anguish in her tone of voice that seemed completely unjustified in a setting so familiar to her and the other *ajistes*, apart from the electric tension in the atmosphere and the yellow light around them that transformed the stones of Montsegur into cursed blocks of gold.

Auda Isarn ran towards the southern postern gate, closely followed by Roger Barbaïra who, having once heard that desperate cry escape her lips, expected the worst. The other boys, *the innkeeper* and his companion joined them.

- Listen! repeated Jordane de Montaure, dressed in the black fustian skirt that Auda Isarn had asked the women of Montsegur for at the time of his renunciation.

Once again, they listened to the faint noises coming from the village shrouded in a scarlet mist.

"The bells are ringing the alarm!" cried Gaston Reboul.

Their faces paled and took on the livid hue of the sky.

"No, it's the call to prayer!" Lou Ganet said in a trembling voice, but to calm his comrades.

"Don't be silly! Have you ever heard the bells ring for prayer at three o'clock in the afternoon?" said Guyot Peyrat.

They counted the tolls of the invisible bell ringing in the abyss below them, the pauses, and then the rapid tolls again, one after another.

-It's the alarm bell, yes! confirms the *innkeeper*.

Framed against the sky of that incomprehensibly important postern gate for a defensive fortification, Auda Isarn stands on the stone threshold. Her arms are slightly raised and now she extends them towards the valley in the direction of Camp dels Cremats. Her face grows paler and paler, and her eyes seem to take in the flashes of lightning from the storm raging on the peak of Soularac. And she says in a voice that seems completely drained of emotion:

"I see... I see..."

Roger Barbaïra brings his mouth close to Auda's ear and asks softly:

"What do you see, Auda, my dear? Tell me... What are you seeing?"

The girl did not answer for a long time, then announced in a weak voice:

"I see soldiers marching to Montsegur... I see swords... shining swords!... Horses!... Horses!... Tents... The army..."

Now her eyes were closed, her hands resting in the air, her arms frozen.

Barbaïra insisted, almost in a whisper...

"Tell me what you see, dear Auda... don't be afraid..."

No one behind her whispered a word, all the anguished faces leaning over the abyss. Auda Isarn remained silent for several minutes, and that silence became

tension more unbearable than the atmosphere of high electrical potential. Suddenly she announced in a grandiloquent tone:

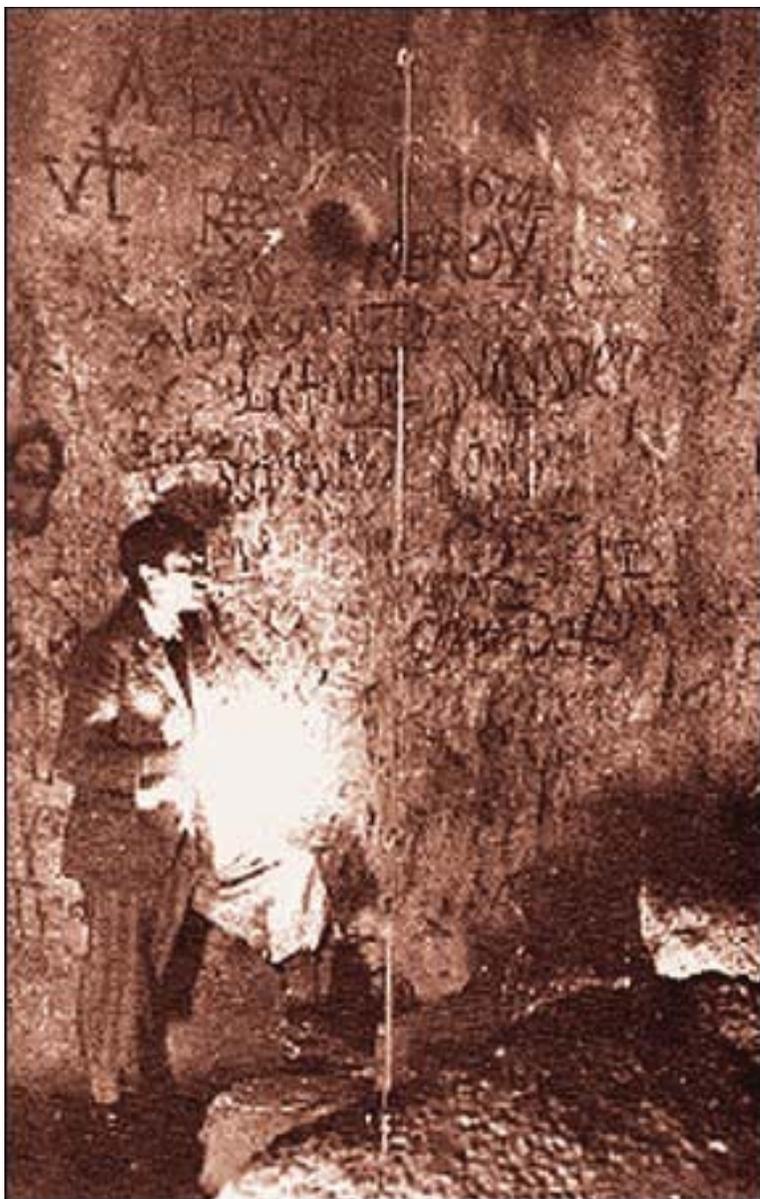
"I see new inquisitors coming towards us!... I see death hovering over Robuffay's head!... I see death upon Caberol... Everything burning down there in the valley... I see the death of Lou Ganet... The torture and death of Ferrocas... Ah!... The inquisitors!... Torture! Bonfires! I see bonfires burning..."

Auda Isarn let out a scream of terror and fell backwards with her eyes closed, her cheeks greenish, stiff as a board. Roger Barbaïra only had time to stretch out his arms to catch her.

Three hours earlier, World War II had begun.

II

RED LIGHT



Otto Rahn

When Guyot Peyrat arrives at the youth hostel three years later, he suddenly feels old. As he walks through the village, he hears only women's voices. The few men whom the icy wind drives home have white hair. The stables and corrals exude a stale breath that the animal life no longer warms.

The bell does not ring for prayer because there is only one priest for five parishes. The wind moans in the bare beech and walnut trees. Mauve clouds rush hurriedly at the height of the peaks. Guyot Peyrat curses the autumn wind that hinders his bicycle and seems to want to deny him access to the high regions of Ariège ¹.

He puts his foot down and climbs back up the stony path. The insipid smell of mushrooms from the damp forest. The roar of the wind in the rocks of the scrub above prevents him from hearing the song of the stream as it leaps from channel to channel, carrying large swathes of cold light in its course. Night will fall shortly. The beautiful farmhouse that serves as a youth hostel seems abandoned. The sign "Au-devant de la Vie" has disappeared and the entrances are in complete disarray. However, Estève Caberol did not abandon his post, once he had agreed to take in the old club. Since the beginning of the war, this is the first time that its members have managed to free themselves from their daily obligations at the same time.

Guyot Peyrat leaned his bicycle against the wall of the old stable and headed for the farmhouse door. The wind seems to be calling him aside and giving him warnings he does not understand. The black trees also shake their branches and multiply their gestures of dissuasion. As soon as the young man knocks on the door, an invisible weight falls on his shoulders. Two arms grab him around the waist and push him against the door, which gives way. From the hot breath blowing on his neck, emanating the smell of garlic and onions, comes an order:

"Come in, man, there's room!"

¹ Midi-Pyrénées region.

Rather than being ushered in, Guyot Peyrat is thrown into the large room he knows so well. Illuminated by the hearth fire, an unknown man, bearded and frowning, points a sawed-off shotgun at him. Stunned by the unusual welcome, he tries to cling to any image from the past. And that image comes with Judith. Leaning over the fire, she sings in a hoarse voice:

*Les corbeaux posés sur la neige
Sont coiffés de casques gris,
Casques gris, Casques gris...*

*The doriphores infect us
In green uniforms, grey helmets, Grey
helmets. Grey helmets... ¹*

He raises his head and shouts to the two men who welcomed the *hostage* in such a new style:

-Pablo! Hernandez! Our friends have arrived!

The hunting rifle lowers. The man who grabbed Peyrat bursts out laughing and extends his hand:

Excuse me, mate!

"I forgot to warn you," said Judith. "They're good guard dogs. Sit down."

She pointed to a bench, gave the boy a cold look and added:

"Estève won't be long! Neither will his mates, I suppose."

Peyrat notices the change in tone and thinks: new times call for a new dialectic. An angel passes by. The wood fire brightens the golden gloom. In the mountains, the wind fine-tunes its symphony for a clan of wolves. One of the Spaniards is polishing his shotgun.

¹ The crows perched on the snow are combed with grey helmets, Grey helmets, Grey helmets...

The doriphoros infect us
In green uniforms, grey helmets,
Grey helmets. Grey helmets...

Guyot Peyrat feels a tremor as he shakes off the weight of the wind and the man still clinging to his shoulders. He mentally translates into the langue d'Oc the lament that Judith takes up again, leaning over the fire, her icy eyes lost in the bloody universe of the flames.

*The barbarians suffocate us
Under the weight of grey
helmets, Grey helmets. Grey
helmets... ¹*

Time passes. A feeling of frustration weighs on the poet. He returned to the youth hostel to rediscover a past that, with the passage of time, seemed so sweet to him, and now... From time to time, Judith looks at him and strips him bare with a cold gaze. He immediately remembers the sharp way she rejected his advances and thinks that now she is alone with him and the two Spaniards, she is in a position of strength to settle scores. Horrified, he asks:

"Can I go to the road to wait for my comrades?"

"What a question!" murmurs Judith. "You are a free person, Mr Peyrat."

He leaves and thinks: it's true, I'm free for now, but for how long? And who will come to take that freedom away from me? The Germans? The French? The Spanish?



Guyot Peyrat goes down to the road. A quarter of an hour later, a pair of headlights begins to decipher the mysteries of the night. It is Gaston Reboul. He had gone with Jordi Couquet in a gas-powered van discreetly taken from the factory to wait for his comrades at the Foix railway station. Lou Ganet, Raymond Ferrocas, Marius Chabrol and Robuffay got out and surrounded him. He said to him:

¹ The barbarians are suffocating us
Under the weight of the grey
helmets, Grey helmets. Grey
helmets...

-Caberol hasn't arrived yet, and imagine, I've just fallen into the middle of *the maquis*! ¹

Then he counts the *ajistes* and asks:

-And Barbaïra?

-He must be coming on his motorbike with that boring woman, Couquet informs us.

They walk up the path in single file. The two Spaniards welcome them warmly and Judith lights the carbide lamp. The young people look at each other with a certain strangeness, a little like strangers meeting for the first time. In fact, the bond that united them had been broken with the death of the youth hostels on 3 September 1939. Other bonds were formed, but of a different nature.

Marius Chabrol, who moments earlier had been watching one of the Spaniards sitting at the table, walked over to him and asked:

"Isn't your name Pablo las Heras?"

"How do you know that?"

"Hey! ... The Vernet camp ... Gurs ... I'm Marius Chabrol!"

"Blimey!"

The two men embraced. Persecuted since the beginning of the war as a "permanent member" of a communist party outlawed by Édouard Daladier's government after the signing of the German-Soviet pact, Marius Chabrol found himself behind the barbed wire fences of the Vernet concentration camp in December 1939. Along with hundreds of French suspects and thousands of Spaniards whom Franco's victory had just driven back beyond the Pyrenees, he endured mistreatment until early 1941, the scars of which he still bore. He began whispering to his former comrades:

"When I think that the *collaborators* ² have the audacity to accuse the USSR of sending people to starve to death in Siberia! And the Republic, then! But we know those concentration camps! When it comes to gratuitous cruelty, we can't take lessons from anyone! Isn't that right, Pablo?"

"That's right, man!"

¹ Saboteurs from the scattered and defeated Spanish Republican army.

² Abbreviation for collaborators.

They sat down at the table and took the provisions out of their bags. In the familiar surroundings of the youth hostel, they were less sensitive to the poor food than they had been at home... They had lunch and dinner so many times in Spartan fashion, sitting around that table – as unusually long as ever, only more fragile and dirty – that chewing their meagre fare now made them more optimistic.

"And you, Ferrocas? What did you do during the *drôle de guerre*?¹

-I was in prison! For refusing to obey orders!

The descendant of the *Camisards* leaned over his plate, his face tormented, elongated and sad, made even more tormented, elongated and sad by the months of imprisonment that had given him a special pallor.

"I woke up," he said... Instead of being discreet, I wrote a letter to the commander-in-chief of the military region introducing myself as a conscientious objector and explaining my reasons.

"And then?" asked Jordi Couquet, who always spoke with his mouth full.

"After that? It didn't work out! Two policemen. Toulouse. Military court.

"And what did you say to the judges?"

"I bet he gave them the sermon of Perfect Bertrand Martin that he performed in *Montsegur*," Gaston Reboul suggested... Jehovah, the evil god of the Old Testament, unleashed this war against the Spirit for the benefit of matter... despite the higher Aeons Jesus, Mary and Saint John the Evangelist!

"More or less," admitted Ferrocas. They sentenced me to five years in prison. Hélène Laguerre and Giono's friends sent me oranges, and Déat managed to get me out of the hole in 1941. I have no regrets; prison is an irreplaceable experience.

"You should have done as I did," said Robert Robuffay. I became a woodcutter, hid in the Iratí forest, and my father spread the rumour that I had disappeared on an expedition to

¹ *Grotesque or esperpéntica war* might be the most appropriate translation in Spanish.

caving. I came back to the surface after the armistice and told a series of lies that no one noticed! What about you, Peyrat?

-Me? I benefited from a student deferment. They didn't ask me anything! Some of my classmates went, others stayed...

What a joke! I stayed.

"Me too," said Reboul... I stayed at the factory as a specially affected worker ¹. A general burst of laughter shook the old *workers*, and Chabrol took the opportunity to offer a political-philosophical reflection on the specially affected worker:

"Of course! War is also waged by one class against another class!"

"No. Jordi Couquet remained as a special employee for the same reasons as me. Technical reasons."

"Don't make me laugh!"

They heard the sound of an engine on the road.

"Attention," Chabrol shouted, "the Count of Miramont and the Countess are about to arrive!"

And it grew louder when Barbaïra and Auda Isarn appeared, glistening with sweat and their faces flushed:

-We were talking about the organisation of war, Barbaïra, one class against another... From what I can see, the occupation statute confirms it. Some walk on their legs, others receive petrol supplements! Does that privilege perhaps come from the Visigoth kings, your glorious ancestors, no, Count?

"No, my friend! It's a mixture of benzene and alcohol. The benzene was discreetly obtained from the gasworks in Carcassonne, as for the alcohol... I don't think it's forbidden to distil wine... We're hungry and thirsty, may we sit down?"

They settled down among their comrades. Everyone was rediscovering the *tense* atmosphere of the now distant time when they were preparing the performance of *Monstsegur*, a three-act play based on the novel by Lévis-Mirepoix.

¹ "Affecté spécial" in the original text. Status reserved for men with professions essential to the economic life of the country in the event of mobilisation.

"And *Montsegur*?" asked Guyot Peyrat. Despite the circumstances, did we or did we not set a definitive date for the premiere of the play?

General laughter.

"And are you asking the Krauts for permission to perform in a restricted area?" Chabrol sneered... We were just talking about our memories of the *drôle de guerre*, Barbaïra. What about you? What happened to you?

"Nothing. I was thinking of travelling around the world with the conscientious objectors, but I ended up staying in my room. I stayed to look after my father's vineyards. No one asked me to do anything. Later, I realised that I was a refractory of my own kind!

"What a joke! And they say they're going to Berlin with flowers in their rifles!"

The door turned on its hinges in a peculiar way, with the caution that could inspire an almost professional mistrust. Estève Caberol appeared. He was wearing old hunting clothes and carrying a submachine gun in his hands. It was difficult to say with certainty whether he had become an outlaw or was presenting himself as a member of an organisation. The kindness in his eyes, however, belied the weight of the weapon. Jordi Couquet, who was well aware of his servility as a dog trampled on by his owner, did not take him seriously.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, pointing his finger at the weapon... "Don't play with that, *mate*! Do you know it can go off by itself?"

"Great warrior, tell us about your exploits!" said Chabrol mockingly.

O *père aubergiste* entered the pottery workshop, hid the weapon at the back of a cupboard under some old blankets, and returned to the table smiling.

"My exploits? All right, let's talk then. Ah, wait, first I'll make you laugh with my distinction!

He opened his briefcase and took out a crumpled, yellowed sheet of paper.

-I heard what the distinction says: "Estève Caberol, mobilised for the entire duration of the war. Corporal. Gifted with a high sense of duty, always ready to put himself on the line in the most difficult circumstances. He demonstrated the highest military virtues in the fulfilment of the missions entrusted to him. He successfully led

the combat train entrusted to him by his superiors from Sedan to Narbonne. This distinction confers upon him the War Cross with Palms..." There you have it! They were preoccupied with the *drôle de guerre* and paid no attention to me, but the situation is about to change. Now, it's all about killing the Krauts and the *collaborators*!

Leaning over the fire and indifferent to the warm atmosphere of camaraderie that was slowly returning, Judith continued to hum the plaintive melody:

*Boches morts, Boches morts.
Ne reste plus sur la neige Que
moisson de casques gris,
Grey helmets. Grey helmets...*¹



Sunday morning, bright with sunshine. The woods look like Rococo altars gilded with leaves and supported by a colonnade of black trunks. The stream absorbs large swathes of blue sky in the calm plane of the channels and rubs them together after each waterfall. The wind carries the faint scent of recent decay. The stone bench along the front of the youth hostel is warm, then hot. The boys occupy it and the Spaniards take out a bottle of contraband aniseed liqueur. Sitting next to Barbaïra, Auda Isarn is serious as usual, a little sad and reserved at the same time, open to camaraderie. Jordi Couquet leans towards the boss's son and says quietly:

"I have friends in Carcassonne who have seen them together many times since the war began. What do you think, is it because of Roger... or because of the motorbike that she is interested in him?"

¹ *Dead Germans. Dead Germans. Nothing remains on the snow but the harvest of grey helmets, Grey helmets. Grey helmets...*

"I don't know.

-Do you think she's sleeping with him?

-I'm sure she isn't! The man who will take her hasn't been born yet!

Eager for sunshine, the *ajistes* remain silent for a long time, then Guyot Peyrat asks the usual question:

-What shall we do? Shall we go up to Montsegur again?

"Always Montsegur! Don't come up with tricks like that!" Couquet interrupts.

The poet beats a retreat.

"I'm not talking about what we can do today! I was thinking about the great projects of the past that we could perhaps take up again!"

Judith sat down on the bench, as far away as possible from *the innkeeper*. Armed with a sharp knife, she waited for lizards to venture onto the stone, drawn by the sun's rays.

"I believe," said Raymond Ferrocas, whose warm voice took on the accent of Protestant shepherds who draw their strength from human fanaticism, "I believe that, as former *ajists*, the problem that arises now is how to defend freedom.

"Bravo!" shouted Estève Caberol.

Barbaïra shrugged.

"The freedom of an anarchist like him has nothing to do with what the Languedocians are demanding, comrades. We need five years to discover our country. Now, it's a question of how much time we have to spend on liberation and how to achieve it. Do you agree?"

The silence of the small assembly signified agreement in principle, but with one small difference.

"Did you hear the Marshal's speech to the Savoyards?" asked Ferrocas.

Estève Caberol laughed out loud.

"The old man talks a lot but says nothing!"

"That's not true! That's not true!" shouted Ferrocas. In his speech to the Savoyards, he said the following: "The province of tomorrow must be organised in such a way that it can be self-sufficient. It must be larger and more open than it was in the past and produce all

the resources essential to its population ¹ ... Eh? Nothing more to add, comrades. Occitan freedom now passes through Vichy.

We must follow the Marshal!

Marius Chabrol tapped his forehead with an eloquent gesture but said nothing.

"Be that as it may," Ferrocas continued, "that question only concerns Peyrat and me. We have been active in the S.O.L. and we are going to join the Militia that is already being formed. And you?"

A long silence followed, filled with feelings of indignation and uncertainty. Suddenly, the *mother innkeeper's* icy voice rang out:

"On the fourth chime... It's later than you think, my dears! ... Crack!

And she stabbed the knife with precision into the lizard perched on the hot stone, which had been spying on them for some time, its reflections diminishing with the advancing season. Then she leaned over the two pieces convulsing in the death throes and verified melancholically:

"How strange... it's not bleeding!"

Marius Chabrol gave him a dark look. Then, turning to Ferrocas, he said:

"Petain is an old traitor. I don't understand how you can be so foolish as to be convinced by his promises. Promises he will never keep!"

"Didn't he make a commitment to the Savoyards?"

-Perhaps, but he immediately compromised himself before the capitalists and imperialists who pull the strings of the government! Don't you think?

-No!

-In that case, I'll prove you wrong!

He got up and went to the dormitory. The sun caressed their faces and gilded the aniseed that took on the scent of the hillside scrub, tired of blowing fumes all summer long. The *mère aubergiste* continued to spy on the lizards. The two bare-chested Spaniards tried to

¹ Speech to the Savoyards, 22 September 1941.

increase the tan on their shoulders. Young Lou Ganet looked at the glass in his hands.

"And you, young man?" asked Estève Caberol... "What are you planning to do?"

Why don't you join the *maquis*? It's more for your age than mine, and yet here I am!

Lou Ganet smiled. He was now eighteen and had just graduated from high school with honours. Mediocre while attending the "bons parents" of Stanislas School, a brilliant student at the lycée on Rue de Verdun in an atmosphere of freedom that revealed him to himself, he was extremely reserved and only opened up in confidences to two cousins, Yvonnette, from Carcasota, and Claire, from Villefranche-de-Lauraguais. The city only knew him for his love affairs. All the girls dreamed of this blond, virile young man, now fully grown, who walked through life according to the style imposed by his father, a rough, hard-working man who constantly repeated to him: 'Walk straight! Stand up straight! Do as I say!'

"I joined the *Compagnons de France* with the idea of serving, but I resigned," he said.

"Why?" asked Barbaïra.

-Because I found out that the bosses are being paid. For me, it's a given that a boss should serve without asking for anything in return. Now, I'm at the *Chantiers de Jeunesse* with my friend Trougnon. We clean forests in La Bastide-Esparbeirenque. But the *Chantiers de Jeunesse* aren't worth a penny either. The bosses are corrupt!

-Then come to the *maquis*! says Caberol.

-I'm too new to have political opinions. And I don't do anything without asking my father and mother for their opinion. And even less so anything that might upset them!

"So, Lou... Don't you have any ideas of your own?"

"I only know one thing: I will not commit any treason against my country!"

Roger Barbaïra smiled.

"And what is your country?"

Lou Ganet thought for a long time, smiled back and said:

"Carcassonne!"

"Bravo!" cried Count *Faydit* de Miramont as he shook his hand.

"On the fourth chime..." Judith warned... Crack!

The two halves of a severed lizard began to writhe convulsively on the burning stone.



Marius Chabrol was taking a long time to come down from the bedroom where he had gone to search through his luggage for evidence of Pétain's betrayal. The *innkeeper* turned to Gaston Reboul.

"And you? *Maquis* or S.O.L.?"

"My father decided long ago. He joined the *maquis*, Jordi joined the S.O.L. and then the Militia if Vichy comes to form it as announced.

"You're fools!" said Estève Caberol. "Soulless capitalists!"

Reboul lowered his head and replied in a slightly contrite tone:

"Personally, I am for the freedom of Languedoc and, ultimately, for freedom itself. But what can you do... the factory is in charge, and the factory has no political options! Or rather, it has all of them! Whatever the outcome of the war, it has to play on all sides in order to continue!

"Very well!" says Chabrol, returning from the dormitory. He opens the leather folder and addresses Raymond Ferrocas... So you were saying that in his speech to the Savoyards, Pétain is playing the regional freedoms card?

"Exactly!"

"Perhaps, but..." And he took a stack of papers out of a used dossier.

-In the telegram of 4 May 1941 addressed to Lucien Romier, a copy of which we have in the Party, "It is essential to establish regions that bring together a certain number of departments. This will result in a more direct and effective exercise of government authority..." Do you understand? Government authority... Paris, therefore! On 20 November 1938, before the war, and therefore with complete

freedom of spirit, he had already expressed a more intimate thought in Metz: "Organise a truly national education so that the soul of young French people – note that he does not say young Languedocians, but young French people – is formed within the framework of the nation without losing sight of our history, our love for our land and our empire..." Finally, if you want to hear a formal denial of the promises made to the Savoyards and, by extension, to the Languedocians, read the declaration of 7 August 1941: "Since France has existed, no regime and no government has agreed to question the principle of national unity. Henry IV, Richelieu, and the National Convention ruthlessly crushed all manoeuvres that sought to divide the homeland against itself." There you have it... It goes without saying: I, Pétain, will crush Languedoc if Languedoc revolts! Like Simon de Monfort or Blanche de Castela! Or Clemenceau! Pétain is an old traitor! He must be brought down. We must help the USSR win this war because, as soon as we come to power, we will give France a constitution that provides for the linguistic and cultural autonomy of the federated peoples! The freedom of Occitania depends on the freedom of Moscow, comrades!

"Down with the Soviets!" shouted Ferrocas.



The discussion was slowly taking on the tone of an election rally, but it also heralded a civil war in the making. A skilled politician, Marius Chabrol sensed this and captured the "esprit auberge" in the air.

"My friend," he said to Ferrocas, "if you want to let yourself be recruited by the Vichy regime, that's your problem! Take responsibility for your actions, and I'll take responsibility for mine! I spoke with the *pau* last night, and we're going to organise a *maquis* in Montsegur, starting with this AJ, which is already serving as a post office. We need to create a resistance around Montsegur, just like in the 13th century. Ruthless! Pure and simple! And I'm telling you, it's open to everyone from now on..."

"I'm in!" Robuffay declares decisively. To win our regional freedoms, we need weapons, and only the *maquis* can get them.

"On the fourth ring... crack!" announced Judith, and cut the third lizard.

The sun jumped through the now almost empty bottle of aniseed liqueur. Half drunk, Pablo de las Heras went to fetch the *père aubergiste's* machine gun, placed it on Robuffay's knees, patted him on the back and chattered:

"Man... *je fé fais... gentleman!*

"You brute!" shouted Estève Caberol, "go put that away immediately. If the Krauts come down the road..."

He added with a laugh:

"It's true that no one saw you there, but it could have happened!

"And it will happen!" growled

Chabrol. And then:

"I extend my hand to you, Robuffay. I expected nothing less from you!"

"Neither did I," muttered Barbaïra... When it comes to acting like an idiot, he's always at the forefront. You're right to denounce old Pétain, Chabrol. He's an expert in the art of betraying everyone, Germans included. But you were wrong to place the Constitution of the USSR under the banner of regional freedoms. There is linguistic and cultural autonomy in the USSR, it's true, but it is controlled by a centralising dictatorship. As far as I'm concerned, I demand total political freedom for Languedoc. Neither Moscow nor Paris! I don't bow to Moscow or Vichy, but to Germany!

An oppressive silence followed the end of the sentence. All that could be heard was the chaotic buzzing of flies invigorated by the sun, ready to explore the bottle of aniseed liqueur, the sound of waterfalls and the singing of a village woman entering the village behind her oxen. Estève Caberol finally broke the silence and said slowly, with some emphasis:

"Barbaïra, you're not in a youth hostel, but a *maquis* hideout. I could shoot you right now. If I don't, it's because I'm taking into account a past that binds us..."

"On the fourth ring... crack!" announced Judith. Barbaïra smiled and raised his head.

"Does the spirit of the AJ still allow people to explain themselves?"

"What do you expect from Germany?" asked Chabrol, deeply surprised.

"The same thing you expect from the USSR, no more and no less: the destruction of France, but by other means and for other purposes!

And he exploded with anger as he looked at the closed and sceptical faces of his comrades:

-You have hexagonal and Jacobin patriotism running through your veins! In 1938 and 1939, you were even more radical! History has handed you the end that justifies the means on a silver platter, and you find it more than perfect! You are nothing but a bunch of cowards!

He paused, then continued in a more serious tone:

"In 1939, France threw a stone into the Druids' lake, and the storm came crashing down on its head! It was well done!

Highly moral! That country was weighed in the balance of history and found wanting! It no longer exists! And now I see you, you poor cretins, ready to rebuild it by other means... You, Ferrocas, joining Pétain's S.O.L., and you, Robuffay, joining a *maquis* encouraged by international capitalism! I ask, on the contrary, whether Germany might not be our natural ally!

"No!" shouted Chabrol. "The Boche Wehrmacht is Simon de Monfort's army, which came to Languedoc to pillage, rape, destroy its culture and stifle its remaining freedoms! It is the crusade of the Nazi papacy!"

"Don't be an idiot! That army freed us from Christianity and has just restored the old pagan freedoms!"

The tone of the discussion was rising dangerously. Everyone was ready to bring it to a dramatic conclusion, but the Spaniards were following the developments with some effort.

"On the fourth chime... crack!" announced Judith.

Barbaïra felt the danger growing around him, not because of Chabrol, to whom he was bound by many old memories, but because of the presence of the Spanish anarchists, hardened by their long experience in the Spanish Civil War and unapologetic about the means they chose. But he raised his head and observed:

"Listen, Chabrol, you and I hate France with the same heart, partly for the same reasons, partly for different reasons. France has just succumbed to the blows of an army that for us represents an army of liberation.

What more do you want?

"If I were so sure of that, it would be different, but I don't believe in Hitler's sincerity. What he wants, quite simply, is to dominate Europe through classic means such as war and prisons, a piece of bread in one hand and a stick in the other!

Nothing proves it! What we can be sure of is that if he wins the war, he will blow the hexagon to smithereens, and that is what matters for now. Then we will easily obtain from the Germans a series of freedoms that France denies us!

-Why and how?

-Because if the French are well organised to maintain seven centuries of oppression, the Germans will only be after spending a long time. That's what I think. I intend to distinguish myself as a bad Frenchman, and to that end, I will use all possible means.

He fell silent, sighed, and added:

"Unfortunately, I lack the means. After rejecting the S.O.L. and the *maquis*, I find only emptiness! As a man of honour, what can I do to effectively help Germany?

"Always Count *Faydit* de Miramont?" Chabrol sneered.

"Exactly, without adding or taking away anything!"

Judith raised her head and announced, vibrating with pleasure:

-I cut seven!



Auda Isarn and Roger Barbaïra arrived in Carcassonne at the end of the day. Autumn was less advanced on the plain than in the highlands of Ariège, giving its course a harsh and melancholic flavour. As on the eve of the Crusade, Languedoc slumbered peacefully in all its glory. In a rapid succession of images, the tawny hills rise and the gullies of reddish euphorbia, parched by the drought, descend... Grape harvests at the

door... Flight of red partridges in the junipers. Rain of golden leaves falling from tired fig trees. The air they breathe, with the rare scents of thyme and lavender subtly combined, has a nourishing flavour for the soul.

Barbaïra says to his companion:

"I don't have enough fuel to take you to Toulouse.

You'll have to take the ten o'clock train.

After serving as an ambulance nurse during the 1940 campaign, Auda Isarn worked in a hospital in the pink city. She suggested:

"Shall we take a walk around the city while we wait?" They leave *Matraz*, "the crossbow bolt", at the entrance to

Aude, and continue on foot across the high plains of the ramparts. This is where lovers usually go to dream. Equally upset at passing a married couple who abruptly remind them of the meaning of such walks, Barbaïra wary of running into people he knows, Auda Isarn thinking she might be mistaken for her comrade's lover, they quicken their pace as if to dispel any misunderstanding.

They pass by the Visigothic tower, the Round and Square towers of the bishop, Cahuzac, Grand Canissou and Mipadre. The grass on the plains, in full mutation, changes from daytime green to twilight blue, similar to that of the mountain in the distance, yet softer, like a bird's wing suspended between the sky and the plain...

They walked around the city at a brisk pace... They were sweating when they returned to their starting point, the count's palace, a mass that was both solid and light, over which night was already falling. Auda Isarn stopped suddenly and pointed to one of the towers.

"Wasn't it there," she asked, "that Simon de Montfort had Raymond Roger Trencavel arrested after the city's surrender?"

"Yes, it was. He died in an underground dungeon after three months of agony, on 10 November 1209. Historians do not entirely agree on how he died... Poison, say some; dysentery, say others. It's a murky business!"

Tired, they sat down on a slab on the rampart walk. Barbaïra had her head bowed towards the ground and seemed to be reflecting in silence. She shuddered when she felt Auda Isarn grab her arm and squeeze it tightly. It was not her custom to seek this kind of contact.

"Roger," he said in that hoarse voice that always made him feel uneasy, "one day you'll end up imprisoned in a tower in Carcassonne if you keep getting involved in all this!"

And then:

I heard some people in the AJ... The guerrillas of the *maquis*... and those of the Militia. Wretched people! They all put themselves at the service of evil!

Completely absorbed in the pleasure of feeling the squeeze of the hand on his arm, Roger Barbaïra paid no attention to his words, but Auda insisted in an anguished and urgent voice...

"Roger, we should listen to our friend Giono when he says that the smart thing to do is to stay away from evil! Let's be a little smart, you and me!"

Barbaïra looked at the hand of light resting on the black leather of his motorcyclist's suit. In the almost pitch-black night, it had the evanescent appearance of the long, slender hands that the Italian Renaissance attributes to aristocrats of holiness. He cautiously tilted his face towards her, took his own voice as testimony and murmured:

"Auda, my dear, if you really don't want me to be thrown into Trecanvel prison one day, it's because you feel trapped by your old *partner*, isn't it?"

She smiled—but the night prevented her smile from being seen—and said:

"Have you only just realised?"

Her head resting on her hand, her lips suspended inches from the luminous messenger, not daring to reveal her deep desire to kiss her, Barbaïra did not move... She said in a muffled voice:

"But aren't you already bound to me as the Countess of Miramont, isn't that true?"

A couple embraced passed in front of them without seeing them. Contrasting with the fire of suddenly inflamed blood, Barbaïra shuddered. He tilted his face towards her hand and

pressed his lips to it. Auda Isarn withdrew her hand, but slowly, with a melancholy movement, not with the force of the reflex that until then had opposed this type of initiative.

"I don't want to be tempted by lust," she said softly, "especially in marriage..."

She fell silent for a few minutes. Barbaïra remained in the position she had been in when her companion's hand withdrew.

"I want to share my life with you, Roger," she said, "even without marriage, but not out of lust. I would be very happy if we could build a kind of pantheon for two souls saved from matter!"

Surprised by words he was hearing for the first time, Barbaïra raised his head.

"Marriage," she continued, "marriage as you understand it, is a shameless sin, it is the official spirit of descent into the bosom of matter. What I wanted was to find in it liberation for a more luminous and pure path..."

Barbaïra shuddered again. The towers of the count's castle took on a fearsome presence. Simon de Montfort's men-at-arms moved in the shadows, ready to organise the siege of the city. He thought he could see behind the castle's stained-glass windows the brave Trencavel and the beautiful Cathar ladies sheltering under his protection, looking at him with anguish and speaking to him.

"I hoped," said Auda, "to bring you a truth that is not found in the hostels of youth and to convince you to live together, far from all kinds of desire.

"You never spoke to me of marriage as you do now, Auda! I do not agree! For me, marriage is the very foundation of life! I want to marry you to ensure my eternity in the children you will bear me, because it is the only eternity that is not susceptible to mystification!

The girl wrung her hands and groaned.

"Ah! You want children to turn them into warriors and send them on guilty adventures like the ones we are living now, thus perpetuating evil!"

Barbaïra shrugged his shoulders.

"The warrior's condition is the noblest of all! If my ancestors had shown more solid warrior virtues, today I would be Count of Miramont and Languedoc would be free!

Auda groaned again.

"Oh... Poor Roger, you speak the language that the devil put in men's mouths to help them deceive themselves!

She placed her hand on his arm again and brought her mouth close to his face. Overcome with dizziness, Barbaïra felt a furious desire to embrace her, to dominate her before possessing her. Auda whispered in his ear, almost mouth to mouth:

"My dear Roger, I trust you enough to ask you to swear that you will not enlist in this war!

Around them, war raged furiously at the foot of the walls of Carcassonne. Simon de Monfort had just launched his assault on the borough to the strains of *Veni Sancte Spiritus*. The poorly defended borough fell despite the heroism of Viscount Trencavel, but the citadel repelled the assault. The foul smell of decomposing bodies and the pestilential miasma of the great marshes surrounded the city on the Aude side... Sappers at work, blunderbusses in action. The dull thuds of stone projectiles. The excited cries of the attackers. The challenges and insults of the besieged. As their wings brushed together in perfect synchrony, the cicadas on that 8th of August emitted a noise like overheated steam...

Simon de Monfort's men entered the citadel at the end of the day and withdrew again, leaving behind a weak garrison that Trencavel hastened to liquidate the following night to reconquer the position. In the field where the white linen of the tents and the silk of the banners stretched out like beds of purple and blue flowers, the great men of the north watched over the operations. From the high plains where Trencavel directed the defence, Roger Barbaïra, Count of Miramont, occasionally saw the Count of Saint-Pol, Henry IV of Nevers and Eudes of Burgundy around the papal legate...

Behind the Frankish barons now emerged the great Germanic men Von Rundstedt, Von Reichenau, Von Bock,

surrounded by their captains Rommel, Guderain, and Sepp Dietrich, set in motion after seven centuries of servitude...

Roger Barbaïra said to Auda:

"Do not be wary. I will not enter the war until Germany takes a position on the independence of our country. But I do not swear, for I am willing to ally myself with the devil to conquer Carcassonne and Miramont.

They were cold. The couples were disappearing into the mauve, then black, shadows. Auda Isarn withdrew the hand she wanted to give as a token of her ineffable love.

"Come on," said Roger. "Let's have dinner at home. You have time. My father will be happy to meet you. After talking about you for so many years without introducing you, he must think I'm in love with the ghost of Esclarmonde!"

They left their seats on the rampart walk, now colder than a gravestone. Barbaïra buttoned up her leather armour and put her helmet on her head.

II

In May 1943, the Montsegur *maquis* had not yet achieved the position Marius Chabrol wanted to give it. There was a fighting spirit, but weapons and objectives were lacking. After the snow melted, the former *innkeeper* and his group settled in the cave of La Frau ⁽¹⁾, whose first occupants were already under the command of Commander René, a former cavalry officer in the French army.

Located at an altitude of 1,800 metres at the foot of a cliff on the ridge separating the Lasset and Basqui valleys, the cave was notable for the size of its opening, whose arch had the profile and dimensions of a cathedral portico. A very open place – visible from the village of Montsegur – and at the same time closed off – no one could approach without being discovered – La Frau was the outpost of

¹ In the Occitan language: Fraou (terror).

observation and defence of *the maquis*. Eight hundred metres below, numerous farms on the Lasset plain offered the men relatively comfortable resting places... Between these two bases, which were not connected by any road, the great medieval forest of Montsegur, owned by the Duke of Lévis-Mirepoix, provided an ideal recreational area.

"It's an excellent place for a *maquis* determined to defend itself and, consequently, resigned to its loss!" Marius Chabrol said to Commander René after a few days of coming and going in the field.

"What?"

Between Commander René, an officer in the secret army, and the young communist charged by the Party with creating a free-shooter state in the early *maquis* of Ariège, all agreements proved impossible from the outset.

"What can be sabotaged in this region? The fortress of Montsegur?" asked Chabrol.

"We'll see about that later!" replied the officer. "For now, it's important to train men and gather weapons worthy of the name!"

Night was falling. Raymond de Péreilhe's castle stood out sombrely against the peaks and ridges that bordered the snow-covered northern slopes. Blue snow. Black snow. Slabs of black snow still slid down the pastures. Given the steep drop below the cave entrance, they formed a slope that a single automatic weapon could easily sweep across its entire length.

As for automatic weapons, they had only Caberol's submachine gun and an old FM with three magazines. The old *innkeeper* said to the Russian Gregory Pilatos, an escaped prisoner from Germany, who showed him his empty hands:

"Calm down, Popof! Tomorrow I'll go to the forest and make you a slingshot!"

Gregory laughed. He didn't understand French very well, but he was an excellent woodcutter.

"In the meantime, build a blunderbuss to attack Montsegur! There's no shortage of wood!"

One shivered with cold behind the stone wall erected at the mouth of the cave to protect the interior from formidable

drafts. It was impossible to light a fire. Even the glowing tip of a cigarette could be seen from Montsegur, which, however, rarely and always unexpectedly, received visits from German patrols.

The former *heretics* felt miserable and protected at the same time in that position resurrected from prehistory. Not without some reluctance, they had contact with those who joined the Montsegur *maquis* for various reasons, none of them seeking to make either position a base from which to reconquer Languedoc for France.



Sun. Burning grass. A gentle breeze. The snow patches melt, the marmots whistle. The roar of waterfalls and the murmur of streams orchestrate the song of the forest tenors: bee-eaters, blackcaps, greenfinches, cuckoos. The air tastes of dry stone, resin and honey. Freed from the night, the Thabe massif is transformed into a solar temple. The mountain, like the men of *the maquis*, is twenty years old.

Sprawled on the grass with bare chests, dirty toes sticking out of torn socks, the *maquisards* sweat, sleep, dream and argue. Gaston Reboul unfolds a Michelin map on the grass and traces the winding line of the valleys and the border with his finger. His voice still thick with sleep, he says to Robuffay:

"When the Krauts are defeated, the Montsegur *maquis* will probably spread to the Spanish border. It will form an isosceles triangle with its apex at Puigcerda, its two sides traced by the high valleys of the Ariège, and its base resting on the N117 road from Foix to Quillan. Obviously, we cannot count on the cities at first, but we will have the mountainous region, which is easy to defend.

-And who will smuggle in the tonnes of ammunition that are needed?

Chabrol thinks the Reds will retake power in Spain after the war ends. If that happens, supplies won't be a problem.

-And transport?

-Through Bourg-Madame, if we can control national roads 20 and 116... If that's not possible, parachute drops in the Carlitte massif.

He falls silent and dreams, leaning over the map.

-What about propaganda to win over the populations that would remain under French control?

-Radio Andorra, of course, and then the shortwave stations recovered during the war by the Montsegur *maquis*.

Estève Caberol appears at the entrance to the cave and walks towards him, brushing the bits of straw off his shirt with his hand.

"It's almost certain," he says, "that you're still talking nonsense about the great Occitan *maquis*. Is that true or not?"

"We're trying to get organised."

Caberol reacts with the familiar movement of his head thrown sharply back over his right shoulder and replies:

"Exactly! That's what I call stupidity! You're not organising anything! Organisation is reprehensible in itself; genius lies in improvisation. Besides, can you imagine preparing the conversion of an anti-fascist *maquis* into an anti-French *maquis* several years in advance? Bah... you're so simple-minded!"

Robuffay shrugged his shoulders.

"Think what you like! In any case, anarchists have no place in our *maquis*! It won't be the black flag that flies in the Pyrenees, but that of free Languedoc!"

Estève Caberol winked and nodded towards the opening of the cave.

"And have you already told the commander about your plans?"

"You're a fool! He could have killed us on the spot!"

Estève Caberol sat down next to them, tucked into a succulent piece of ham and said with his mouth full:

"Your *maquis* is going to need Spaniards. It's all very well to think about liberating Languedoc, but first and foremost,

necessary to think about liberating the human person. Therefore, it is advisable to be on the side of the F.A.I.

"I want the F.A.I. to be ruined!" says Robuffay. The Languedoc will be liberated by the peasants as soon as they take up arms and conquer the mountains. The world today is corrupt, but the peasants are not. You'll see! When we raise the flag of a free Languedoc in the Pyrenees, thousands of peasants will raise it too in the Cévennes and the mountains of Auvergne.

Estève Caberol scoffs.

"Revolution through mountaineering!

"Exactly! Men of courage, attracted by the plains, descend from the highlands and lose themselves! They are like rivers, but we reverse the current!"

"You're right," confirms Reboul. "Bringing the peasant back to the land of a liberated Languedoc is like stabilising the side of a mountain that threatens to collapse with a plantation of resinous trees.

"Beautiful image, beautiful image!" replies Caberol, attacking the second piece of ham.

He burps, rubs his stomach and declares:

"Damn, it's been more than ten years since I've eaten as well as I have in this *maquis*!

Then he disappears into the vast, discreet foliage of the forest. Reboul and Robuffay continue to design their great *maquis* in the form of a dream.

"Do you think we can get a hundred thousand people to sign up?"

With Spain freed from Franco, of course we can!

"What if the French attack?"

"With what? France is defeated and for a long time will not have an army ready to fight!

-What about the G.M.R.? What about the police? Robuffay bursts out laughing.

-The mercenaries will take to their heels at the first clash with peasants determined to live free or die!

Reboul scratches his head.

-Yes... but... are they really determined?

-That's the question! The truth is that, at this moment, the Montsegur maquis doesn't even have twenty men willing to kill Germans!

-And how is it possible to convince those brave people that after killing the Krauts, it is necessary to kill the French?

Suddenly awakened from his reverie, Robuffay loses himself in contemplation of the landscape stretching out before him. Seen from this angle, the fortress of Montsegur looks like a dismantled ship whose superstructure has been destroyed by a hurricane. Abandoned to the wind and the currents of the ocean of mountains that push it towards a mysterious destination after the storm that wrecked it seven centuries earlier, it floats on the *pog* like a dismasted ship with its deck wide open above the holds. Reboul guesses his comrade's thoughts, raises his head and says slowly:

"The great *maquis* of Montsegur can only be the starting point for a crusade from the Midi against the north!

He sighs and adds:

"Unfortunately, history proves that the north always ended up bringing it to the Midi. In fact, on a global scale, it was the northern hemisphere that created today's civilisation; the southern hemisphere never gave anything to the world, not a single sage, a great captain, a valuable artist, a single invention, a new idea, however small, for a philosophy or a religion!

Robuffay brushed aside the pessimism with a curt gesture and laughed.

"Perhaps that's a reason to hope, old chap! The Midi remains untouched!"



The discussion continues a few days later in the presence of Marius Chabrol. It is raining. Masses of viscous clouds seep down the sides of the mountain. Further down, thick clouds brush the tops of the fir trees and tear into flakes of vapour, like sheep's wool passing by brambles. In such a moisture-saturated environment, the walls of the cave are dripping.

The *maquisards* shiver with cold and talk of descending to the Lasset plain, where the farms offer beds of dry hay. Commander René comments:

"We must learn to suffer. First and foremost, we are here to atone for France's defeat."

The Russian Gregory Pilatos does not understand this language. Neither do the former *ajistes*.

"We are here to rebuild a position of strength that will guarantee the victory of Languedoc through the victory of the Allies," says Chabrol. Above all, it is a question of building up large weapons depots.

"To offer them on a silver platter to the nationalists of the secret army?" mocks Estève Caberol.

Reboul gestures for them to lower their voices, as the echoes in the cave make conversations unpredictable.

"No," whispers the former secretary of the Communist Youth. The Montsegur *maquis* is being armed as it should be, but most of the material is being kept for later revolutionary actions.

He speaks calmly. He feels he is fulfilling his dual allegiance, serving both his small Languedoc homeland and the greater homeland of socialism. Won't the victory of the USSR give Occitania minority status? The creation of secret weapons caches is part of the instructions received a few days earlier from a Soviet agent operating in Montferrier. He continues:

"We must get weapons wherever we can find them!

"Are you going to mount an operation against the Kommandantur in Toulouse... or Carcassonne?"

Marius Chabrol shrugged his shoulders.

Let's talk a little, but let's talk well. In this damp cold, talking too much makes your lips crack. A poor *maquis* like ours has to get its supplies from rich *maquis*, that is, follow the line of least resistance in history.

He unfolds a map. The *maquis* closest to Montsegur is currently organised in the forest of Picaussel, above Puivert, not far from the Quatre-Chemins crossroads. It was born out of a

triple ambition and chance. Volonta, school director in Quillan, Moury, primary school teacher, and Milou, innkeeper in Puivert, were lamenting their weakness to each other when, one night, a plane in distress dropped a cargo of weapons that was not intended for them on the Rodon plain. With the help of young people from the village, Milou found it and put some of the weapons in a safe place.

"We need those weapons!" declared Chabrol. So we left the Montsegur *maquis* for a few weeks and joined the Picaussel *maquis*.

"It's despicable to do that to resistance fighters who are also our compatriots!" said Reboul.

"History is not made by feelings, it follows its course like a great river.

"In that case, when are we going to discuss it?" asks Robuffay.

"Tomorrow. I'll talk to the commander myself. We'll take our personal weapons so that the guys in Picaussel don't get suspicious when they see us empty-handed, that is, two pistols, a short-barrelled shotgun and the *pau's* submachine gun. For that five or six-hour journey, all we need is a good snack. The hardest part is getting to the La Frau gorges by cutting across the mountain. Once we've done that, there are roads and forest tracks... For now, there's no danger of running into the Krauts. As for the police... Sergeant Toutblanc got twenty-five days in prison for not discovering the *containers* that fell on the Rodon plain. He went looking for Milou, and Milou said, "I've got them!" The sergeant didn't insist and got twenty-five days!

"Open season on machine guns!" exclaims the former *innkeeper*, rubbing his hands together.

He loves the anarchic nature of the little wars between the *maquis*.

"It's a shame that idiot Barbaïra isn't here with us," he says. "He would have loved the new genre of '*ajiste sortie*'!"

But... since he didn't want to get involved in this war, too bad for him!



Roger Barbaïra lived with his father on the Le Pech estate. He only vaguely remembered his mother, who had died in 1932. Both men were slaves to their work and devoted to different tasks: the son climbing onto the gas-powered tractor, the head of the family going from group to group to stir up the enthusiasm of the farm workers. The two men saw little of each other during the day.

The evening meal brought them together in the large dining room, where the shadowy corners made the red sheen of the relentlessly waxed wild cherry wood disappear. A kind-hearted maid who had been with the family for thirty years brought in the steaming soup and lingered near the two men, commenting in a kind of local dialect on the events of the day or offering advice with the authority she had gained from her voluntary servitude and her status as a landowner. In fact, she had inherited a small farm adjacent to the estate and cultivated it. It never occurred to the Barbaïras to drink any brandy other than that from their still, which she offered every year.

Roger and his father spoke little, almost always about the property that they both strove to make prosperous and which grew every year. The father, tired, went to bed early. The son retired to the living room, which had been converted into a library, where he read, took notes and sorted files until around midnight. They had few visitors. Almost always, they were winegrowers from the region, more or less like themselves. So, when the doorbell rang at the end of the afternoon that day, they were startled...



Roger Barbaïra arrived at Le Pech after lighting, as he did every year, a bonfire of Saint John in the ruins of Miramont. He was just thinking that someone might be watching him from far away, perhaps from the Black Mountain itself, and find this bonfire of Saint John unusual in a country where the tradition had been lost, when the doorbell rang...

"Julia, go see who's calling at this hour!" shouted her father.

Given the enormous distance between the house and the entrance gate, linked by a plane tree-lined path with the strength of a cathedral nave in the middle of the vineyards, which restored the shade and mystery, the kind-hearted maid only returned a few minutes later.

-It's the Germans, sir!

The father shuddered, but reacted as the head of a family and a business in a country occupied by the enemy in June 1943. He turned to Roger:

"What have you been doing for the Germans that they've come looking for you?"

Surprised, Roger Barbaïra raised his eyebrows and shook his head, his brown hair cut short.

"Me? Nothing! I lit a bonfire in Miramont, but I don't think that's forbidden!"

His father's defensive reflex quickly calmed his son.

"Stay here," he said, "I'll talk to them."

He got up and began to walk through the canopy of trees where the shadows were battling with the last rays of daylight. He saw a car parked in front of the gate and a man in a black uniform preparing to pull the bell cord. He stopped when he saw the owner of the property approaching.

"Is this where Mr. Roger Barbaïra lives?" he asked in a curiously sing-song French, each word seeming to have little wings, but grammatically perfect.

"Yes," replied the father, "but..."

"Can I see him?"

"He's not at home... well, he..."

The German smiled at the defensive reaction and said:

"He is at home, yes, and he can see me. No harm will come to him!" Roger's father opened the gate and ushered the visitor in.

I'll call him.

But young Barbaïra was already striding forward. As they passed each other, his father muttered:

"Don't talk too much! Speak little! With the Krauts, you never know!"



Roger was now alone with the stranger. Wrapped in a uniform blacker than night, the double lightning bolt of the silver runes shining on the collar of his tunic, there was nothing remarkable about him except for a face with soft curves, a beautiful girl's face exuding carnal innocence but drawing extraordinary strength from a truly unbearable fiery gaze reminiscent of Auda Isarn's. The contrast caused a disturbing sensation in the observer, but it was so disarming at the same time that it induced sympathy and a feeling of intense curiosity. Barbaïra thought: Here is a man I have already met somewhere and who did not leave me indifferent! But... where and when?

The German introduced himself politely and without any affectation:

"Obersturmführer Klingsor."

"Would you like to come into the library?" suggested Barbaïra with equal courtesy.

"Thank you, I'd rather walk under these magnificent plane trees, it's nice here.

And then:

"I come on behalf of Dr Otto Rahn."

Barbaïra was startled.

"Otto Rahn! What has become of him? When is he returning to France?"

"Dr Otto Rahn committed suicide in the mountains a few months before the war," murmured the visitor in a neutral voice.

Barbaïra lowered his head and tears stung his eyes upon learning of the disappearance of the man who had played such an important role in his life, the significance of which he now suddenly realised. He knew he owed him his rebirth as a man of the Languedoc region and the revelation of its historical culture. He asked for details about his death. The German shook his head to avoid the question and said:

"Like him, I belong to Alfred Rosenberg's Ministry. In the papers he left behind"—and he took a sheet of paper from his tunic pocket—"we found a note giving us the addresses of two trustworthy Frenchmen who may be able to help us... Mr.

and Robert Robuffay. I already went to Minerve but couldn't find him. Where do you currently live?

Barbaïra was about to say, 'In the *maquis*!', but he held back his answer just in time and improvised:

"I think he left France in 1939."

"What a shame!"

They walked slowly to the steps of the mansion, turned around and walked back down to the gate. The night of San Juan suspended large patches of dim light with traces of golden dust over the two men's walk. Strong aromas rose from the earth and the cicadas scratched the silence with a kind of fury. The unusual remains of a fire, which Barbaïra had lit hours earlier in the ruins of Miramont, cast red reflections on the mountain. He thought – because, in the presence of a German, a sense of responsibility implicitly arose in him – I am at fault... according to the clauses of 'Passive Defence', it is forbidden!

The SS officer's black uniform now blended into the night, the silver runes casting a couple of rays each time the two men entered or left an area of more or less dense shadow.

"Mr Barbaïra," asked the SS officer, "does Dr Rahn's recommendation seem sufficient to us to obtain your cooperation? Rahn sufficient for you to give us your cooperation? The young man gave a slight start and frowned.

"What cooperation? I am not *a collaborator* in the sense that the politicians in Paris and Vichy use the term. No way! Germany interests me, but only insofar as it allows me to reconquer Languedoc!

He gestured towards the vineyards that grew next to the village and stretched out in all directions through the night. Then he added:

"Be that as it may, I will do nothing that could be held against the family that has maintained this land for seven centuries!"

The German leaned towards the young man with interest, but did not notice the look that must have accompanied such a profession of faith. He replied:

-Mr Barbaïra, it's just a matter of facilitating the work of a team of speleologists... We expect two things from you:

as a guide to lead us to the still unexplored caves in the Tabé region and as a guarantor of the secrecy of the operations.

Barbaïra scratched his head, thought for a moment, and replied:

-As a guide, no problem, but as for secrecy, I'm not so sure...

"Then let me explain. My minister does not want the research to arouse people's curiosity, and in the event of failure, he does not intend to deceive anyone. Considering that, despite the war, this research is of interest to the entire white race, he does not want the Germans to appear to be superior. My team of scientists and I will be disguised as militiamen, protected from outside curiosity by real militiamen under your command. The camps set up in the mountains and the men assigned to control the *maquis* officially report to the French Ministry of the Interior. Obviously, we are not interested in the *maquis*. Unless they attack us, we will have no contact with them, but it is my wish to avoid any incidents.

Barbaïra scratched his head again and frowned.

"In that case, do I have to enlist in the Militia?"

"It is essential. You will be appointed head of *Centaine*¹ by superior decision and will choose reliable men.

"Hmm... I don't like the sound of that. I'm not exactly a supporter of Vichy, quite the contrary!"

"I understand your position, but the importance of the work we are about to undertake transcends any European patriotism!"

Do you give me your word?"

Barbaïra scratched his head again and frowned.

-Are you asking me to join the Militia? The Militia is a Vichy organisation! I'll think about it!

-Time is passing, Mr Barbaïra, and history is setting deadlines for us! When can you give me an answer?"

-Tomorrow!

He accompanied the visitor to the military *Volkswagen*, which soon disappeared into the night.

¹ Centuria



"So?" asked the father... "Who was the German?"

A little dazed by the prospect of the adventure that was looming, to which he now had to respond with a yes or no, Barbaïra stared at the bowl of cold soup with eyes like pools of oil that seemed to fix him with devilish curiosity. He replied in a dreamy voice:

"A man I met a long time ago, I don't know how... A certain Obersturmführer Klingsor."

"What a strange name for an officer!" grumbled his father. "At least he won't cause you any trouble?"

Roger smiled.

"In a way, I think so! He wants me to join the Militia!"

"Are you mad or something?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Don't be ridiculous! What about your job?"

"I like working on this land that I wanted to be nobler, vaster and richer, but we are in an era that proposes we do things 'for God's sake', as the Christians say!

Is it possible to escape that?

-I don't know. You must know how to play on the value of what they offer you and, apart from that, you are old enough to decide for yourself, according to your conscience and your interests... but think about the grape harvest!

-I'll think about it anyway!

Meanwhile, he had lost his appetite. He pushed his plate away and went outside to enjoy the cool evening air. He walked beneath the banana trees for a long time. He looked at the problem from every angle and tried to judge the Militia on its own merits, thinking that it could not contain all the good that some praised it for, nor all the evil that others attributed to it. He felt torn, indecisive, like the people around him. Then he thought that enlisting in the Militia under those conditions and according to the imperatives that overwhelmed it did not in any way imply adherence to a programme that

he considered tainted with *Francoist* and Jacobin nationalism. He returned home, went into his room and lay down to sleep.

At breakfast, he felt his father's gaze on him.

"So?" asked the owner of the estate... "Are you going to enlist with the Pétainists?"

Barbaira looked up at him with a face marked by deference that did not hide his resolve and said:

"I apologise, Father, but even if the devil himself forbade me, I could not do otherwise.

He holed up in the library to study the maps of the Tabè massif and looked for his pre-war notes where he had recorded the caves.



There was great agitation in the cave of La Frau. On 9 July 1943, little Soeuillard, whose parents live in Montsegur and who serves as a liaison officer, came up with a warning for Commander René. A major attack was being prepared against him. A company of G.M.R. had just arrived in Foix to head for the dissident zone and could set off at any moment. René wrote a note to Marius Chabrol asking for reinforcements, especially weapons, from the Picaussel *maquis*. Soeuillard disappeared into the night but did not arrive in Puivert until the next day, too late to save the secret army *maquis*.

Chabrol, Robuffay, Reboul and Estève Caberol are still in the Picaussel *maquis*. With his usual patience, the young communist waits for the right moment to seize the weapons dropped by parachute. He is clever, but the *innkeeper* Milou has all the strings of the clandestine organisation in his hands and is not far behind. He knows that in its current state of development, the main activity of the Ariège *maquis* consists of some supplying themselves with weapons at the expense of others. And he takes precautions. The stock of weapons, which is widely scattered across farms as far as the Sault region, will be difficult to locate.

Night falls on the cave of La Frau, darker than the skirts of the women of Montsegur. The tense situation reveals the men as they truly are. Possessed by an almost mystical fervour, some of them opt for desperate resistance.

"Very well!" says Commander Renè. "We are here so that France may be reborn from our sacrifice."

The others point out that most of the personnel do not even have a pistol, that the *FM* has only three magazines and the shotguns only a few cartridges.

"You can leave!" says the commander.

More furtive than shadows, some of the men enter the forest of the Duke of Lévis-Mirepoix. Some take refuge in the talc mine behind the La Peyre gorge, others go to Montferrier, where the maquis have hiding places, and the rest head for the old youth hostel between Foix and Roquefixade, thus reinforcing the Spanish team that has been occupying it for over a year with Judith.



The next morning, daylight is slow to arrive. A bank of clouds resting on the mountain distils an unhealthy clarity. The terraced pastureland stretching from the cave to the edge of the forest is not visible in its entirety. Commander Renè is optimistic again. What troops would dare to launch an attack in these conditions of visibility, which, alongside the natural obstacles, protect the cave?

Around ten o'clock in the morning, the fog becomes less dense and suddenly reveals a number of black silhouettes standing at the foot of the grassland. Having dismounted from their trucks at dawn, the G.M.R. have just crossed the forest and taken up positions for an assault that could turn into a disaster if a machine gun were able to fire more than three bursts. Commander Renè's does not.

The fog creeps through the grass. The birds fall silent. The sun, dimly outlined behind the clouds, offers a red slap in the face to those

those who are about to die. The black silhouettes of the G.M.R. blend in with the fir trees and do not move. Commander René orders:

"No one fires without my order!"

Some time passes. The mountain dwellers of the region, hidden in the forest, notice a great deal of activity among the Praetorians between the cave and the Seguelà gorge where the trucks are stationed. Finally, a silhouette moves in the grassland, standing out in the silver grass dotted with water droplets, and begins to climb up to the plateau. It is Lieutenant Massa. He advances as if to negotiate, alone and unarmed.

Commander René fires a shot from his rifle. Just one shot. It is a downward trajectory and visibility is poor. Lieutenant Massa falls dead and his body rolls through the grass to the edge of the forest.

Once again, immobility and silence. In the cave, no one thinks about eating. In the early afternoon, when the fog lifts, those under siege do not see a single G.M.R. Commander René speculates on the moderately combative spirit of the regime's praetorians and thinks that after his warning shot, as effective as it was unexpected, the G.M.R. abandoned the game.

The dawn of 21 July casts a grey face on the peaks and contemplates the *maquisards* marked by forty-eight hours of vigil, deprivation and anguish. The spectacle they see at the entrance to the cave robs them of all hope. This time, the G.M.R. company attacks with overwhelming force. Several machine guns bear down on them. Commander René thinks: if the enemy does not retreat, any resistance is impossible.

A loudspeaker roars in the cold dawn:

"Either you surrender, or we will drop explosives on the promontory!"

Commander René surrenders with the Soviet Gregory Pilatof, René Corbin de Lavelanet, Jacques Arnaud de Mirepoix, Parando de Toulouse and Broucksaud, the S.T.O.¹ refractory.

¹ Compulsory labour service in Germany. We are missing the name of the seventh man. It was claimed that Lieutenant Massa was killed by a G.M.R. and that the bullet that hit him followed a trajectory from below

Thus came to an end the first Montsegur *maquis*, where the Languedoc nationalists had retreated in time. Marius Chabrol received the news in the cabin he occupied with the former *ajistes* in the Picaussel forest. He told them:

"Be warned from the outset. A static *maquis* is a liquidated *maquis*!" Estève Caberol slammed his fist on the table and roared.

"We must put an end to caves of this kind once and for all. When we return to Montsegur with the Spaniards, the Krauts will lose their will to laugh!

And he toasted the liberation of the human person.

III

Once past the village of Comus, the caravan entered the La Frau gorges and the conversations suddenly ceased. The road, which narrowed increasingly after the Aix-les-Thermes-Quillan national highway, offered a single lane and prevented vehicles from overtaking or turning around. The succession of rocky walls in front of promontories rising several hundred metres high formed zigzag shelters that limited visibility to a stone's throw. They showed terrifying crevices, the result of primitive geological chaos and erosion. Multiple cavities cast patches of shadow on the pale limestone plains. Fir trees struck by lightning lay scattered across the rough walls, and blocks of rock that had fallen from above lay across the road. The horror of the passage justified its name – Gorge of Fear – and even surpassed it when the pile of boulders, the accumulation of rickety and livid trees, the supremacy of shadow over light, and the depths of an almost always invisible sky took on grandiose intensities.

above. However, a shot fired from a distance, as was the case, and following a trajectory from top to bottom, would produce the same effects. Since Commander René was later killed in the Perpignan region, it is impossible to be certain about this episode, so we refer to it with the utmost reserve.

eloquent. He then demanded a more decisive name to expel the traveller, a term that would need to be added to the romantic repertoire of fear!

Responsible for the safety of the convoy, the chief militiaman of *Centaine*, Roger Barbaïra, travelled standing up with his torso outside the open roof of the large *Peugeot* leading the way. The Militia had removed the four doors of the vehicle to allow the occupants freedom of movement in case of attack. Barbaïra said to Jordi Couquet:

"If I were in the maquis, I would have your skin without firing a shot. All I would have to do is push some rocks off the cliffs... Just like in the Middle Ages!"

He scrutinised them intently as the black eye of the machine guns watched over the limited views offered by the bends in the road.

They reached a somewhat more open space without further difficulty, halfway through the gorges, where the route laid out by the Bridges and Roads Administration ended. To their left, a rural road gained momentum to climb a steep slope.

"That way!" shouted Barbaïra when the five vehicles in the convoy gathered under the protection of the guards scattered around them.

Then, turning to Obersturmführer Klingsor, he said:

"We've passed the most dangerous part! Now you'll see how impressive the contrast is between these gorges and the high valley of Basqui!"

The vehicles tackled the climb. The two low *Citroën* "traction" vehicles smoothed out the rutted road a little. In a few minutes they reached the centre of the forest cirque where all the roads converge, in the heart of a ruined farmstead called *Métairie du Père Blanc*.

Standing in the campaign *Volkswagen*, Obersturmführer Klingsor silently and slowly studied the scene spread out before him. While the escort men unloaded the camping and exploration equipment, he asked Barbaïra to come closer:

"Until now, I assumed that the most beautiful forests in Europe were located on the northern slopes of the Carpathians, but now I no longer hold that opinion!"

They took possession of the domain that the Levis had received as a gift from Simon de Montfort. Seven centuries of sensible use had greatly increased the quantity, height, volume, and majesty of the trees. Mostly populated by beech trees, the forests covered the entire mountain up to the level of the La Peyre gorge to the west and, even higher, the entire northern slope, extending their foliage up to an altitude of 1,800 metres without giving way to the resinous trees that generally occupy such heights. Slightly less dense than the Basqui forest, the Embeyre forest exudes more varied essences up to the watershed line that separates the Basqui valley from the Lasset valley. On the other side of the long thorns, it serves as protection for the cave of La Frau, and from there, it descends again to Montsegur.

With the beautiful face of a girl blushing with emotion, Obersturmführer Klingsor says softly:

"Here is medieval France as I imagined it when I finished my *Abitur* ¹ ... A sister of Germania covered with impenetrable forests..."



Impenetrable forests. Giant beech trees. A solitude that sends a chill down your spine...

"Do you know how many voters there were in this valley at the end of the 19th century?" asked Barbaïra... "Well, no fewer than 150! Incredible, isn't it?"

Apart from the walls of *Métairie de Père Blanc*, there was not a trace of human life around. Boxwoods, brambles and hawthorns had devoured the ruins of the farms. Nothing moved in the wooded cirque. No footprints in the grass, no smoke, no calls... A world that was both hostile and

¹ German equivalent of the French baccalaureate.

benevolent, from which man, drawn to the easy life of the plains, had tiptoed away...

In front of him, the upper part of the valley was shaped like a semicircle divided by the stream descending from the peak of Soularac. As old and as tall as the oldest Alpine fir trees, but delicately scattered over a diameter four or five times greater, the beech trees lined up at the edge of the forest in military formation stood guard at the borders of the meadow where the tents were pitched. Beyond that black border lay a thick mystery, an ancient and millennial secret reserve. From the exceptional landscape emerged a force impossible to describe in precise terms, made up of millions of silent, irresistible, and peaceful elevations, now freed from any notion of time. A single element of life was perceptible in the prehistoric landscape: the jumping stream that slid impetuously, tearing its silver tunic at the tip of the rocks, blowing into the cavities of the banks, chanting the language of the glacial potholes, reciting romantic verses on the bed of soft sand...

Night falls. The leaves, gilded by the first cold spells of September, take flight like migratory birds, the wind blows moderately from the La Peyre gorge, and the stream alternately offers and refuses its confidences to the men of the countryside.

"How curious!" murmured Barbaïra. "For a moment there, I thought I heard human voices!"

The Obersturmführer pays attention. Mauve flashes, probably caused by twilight reflections, soften the brightness of his gaze.

"They really are human voices," he said slowly, "but not fairy conversations as one might think. They sound like songs... Listen!"

They lean over the stream that squanders long tails of cold light. They hear lamentations, stifled notes or endlessly woven... Long violin cries... Duets... The immaterial voices of adolescents at the time of mutation... Melodious bass solos... Choirs of villagers and knights... The Obersturmführer says slowly:

of basses... Choirs of villagers and knights... The Obersturmführer says slowly:

"It was here that Richard Wagner and Beethoven stole the secret of telluric music from nature. I hear alternating themes from the *Pastoral* Symphony and the Grail... Listen! Listen!... Mi-Fa-La-La..."

Barbäira shudders and looks intently at her companion. The darkness tempers the brightness of her eyes and extinguishes the uneasiness they provoke during the day.

"Listen!" insisted the German in a strangled voice... There is no doubt about it, it is the leitmotif of Wagner's *Parsifal's* Grail... Mi-Fa-La-La-La... when Gurnemanz says to Parsifal: "My son, space here is born of time"... They are on their way to the village of the Grail, behind this forest... because Mountsalvatsche can only be behind the forest that surrounds us... Montsegur!

The Embeyre forest and the night now formed a single mass in which vague outlines could still be made out. The two men got up and began to walk slowly towards the camp, which was clearly laid out in the meadow still visible. Further away, a group of militiamen led by *Dizaine* chief Raymond Ferrocas was returning to the tents after arranging the ruins of the estate in a defensive position.

The Obersturmführer put his arm around Barbäira's neck. Initially surprised, the young man suppressed a gesture of repulsion when he remembered his comrade's girlish face, which seemed to give the gesture an ambiguous meaning, and contented himself with recalling with a certain irony:

"This is also the moment when Gurnemanz says to Parsifal: 'If you are pure, expect drink and food from the Grail...' Well, it's late and I'm hungry!

-And Parsifal asks: what is the Grail?

"I know! The stone tablets engraved in 'pagan code' that we are looking for with our dear Otto Rahn!"

The German leans towards him, looks him straight in the eye and says quietly:

"What we will have to find if my dear Barbäira were the 'young, mad and pure' one we hope for..."



They arrived at the tent, which the fading light outlined as an almost immaterial substance. They sat down at the folding table in front of the classic German army dinner, spartan in every way – black bread, margarine, tap water – in the company of Ferrocas, the speleologist Springer, the palaeontologist Darmesdorf, the Romanist professor Klotz and the prehistorian Pfeiffer.

"I know where I saw you and met you for the first time," said Barbaïra, handing the jug of water to the SS officer. "Didn't you perform in *The Flying Dutchman* and *Parsifal* in 1938?"

"Yes, yes!" replied the SS officer with a smile. And I was even good in the role of the magician... Calling myself Klingsor, it's natural, isn't it?"

He fell silent and turned his attention to the secret movements of the night. All that could be heard was the light footsteps of the militiaman on guard, coming and going on the grass, and the chant of the stream, which was diminishing between dusk and dawn due to the melting snow. The speleologist asked:

"Are there still bears in the region?"

"The people of Comus say there's one in the Basqui forest," replied Ferrocas. "A huge solitary bear, strange in a country that hasn't seen them since the beginning of the century. It is thought that it got lost during a journey, or, what is also possible, that it chose this region to die.

"What a pity!" sighed the Obersturmführer. "I liked the idea of the Grail being defended by a clan of those animals they called savages. They would come to kiss Parsifal's hands, recognising in him the young, mad and pure man that the century awaits!"

The prehistorian shook his head.

"If we don't run the risk of encountering bears and even small aurochs, Obersturmführer, I believe that, on the other hand, there are many dangerous maquis in the region!"

"Aurochs?" said the SS officer. "Hmm, I like that name! Barbaïra, in the reports I sent to Toulouse, I designated our base with the code name: Aurochs-Platz!"

Then, turning to his compatriots, he said in German:

-Fortunately, gentlemen, we have not forgotten the taste of aurochs skin, unlike the decadent French!

He paused for a few seconds and continued in a heavy tone of veiled threats:

"The SS are there to bring to order those in Germany who might be tempted to forget that taste!"

They went to bed early. The investigations were to begin at dawn the next day in the cave that had been fully explored in 1937 under the direction of Otto Rahn.



Barbaïra finds himself once again on the bare flanks of the Soularac and Saint-Barthélemy peaks, gnawed away by a green and grey leprosy. The speleologist Springer has the experience and equipment to conduct the investigations without hesitation. The pit that almost cost Robuffay his life is of no interest, ending in a pile of earth thirty metres below. The Soularac cave, complex and deep, requires three days of risky attempts. No Cathar or prehistoric material is discovered.

Barbaïra moves the teams' activities to the Causou peak area, at an altitude of nearly two thousand metres. He remains faithful to Rahn's premonitions and does not stray from the sacred path of the Cathars, the Montsegur-La Peyre gorge-Luzenac axis.

Eight hundred metres of elevation now separate the base camp from the theatre of operations. Springer and the deep teams go there every three days to resupply and rest. In the meantime, they camp in caves. As planned, Barbaïra's militiamen ensure the security and secrecy of the investigations. The Basqui valley has only two exits: the La Peyre gorge to the west and the La Frau gorges to the east. Patrols guard the entrances to the forbidden valley. Aurochs-Platz is protected by the fortified Blanc farmhouse, equipped with two machine guns and operational firing positions.

Such precautions seem ridiculous. The peace that has come from the depths of time envelops the valley, dressed in black and golden forests, in a bed of blue and green grass. The inhabitants of the region do not venture into the La Frau gorges, now fraught with indeterminate dangers. The Montsegur *maquis* disappeared from the La Frau cave in July and the Picaussel maquis shows little activity, but there are uncontrolled bands roaming the Ariège Pyrenees. The Pétainist forces of the order are increasingly leaning towards the Resistance. The cave of La Frau is only three hours away by easy footpath and the forest of Picaussel five hours away. The warriors of Klingsor and Barbaïra occupy a dominant position but, at the same time, one that is potentially dominated. They dominate a valley that is off-limits from the inside and which may, from one day to the next, also become off-limits from the outside.

Supplying Aurochs-Platz is a considerable problem. Jordi Couquet does it three times a week and takes on the risks of the operation alone, smiling, with his southern charm constantly on his lips and calm confidence in his eyes. He has to enter the gorges of La Frau and reach Quillan via deserted roads. He leaves Aurochs-Platz at dusk and returns around one in the morning. The darkness and the speed of the journey, he says, guarantee greater safety than the support that an armed escort vehicle could provide in broad daylight.

"You're wrong to take the *Citroën!*" Barbaïra tells him. "It's a tin can! If you're attacked, you won't get out alive!"

A superfluous observation. Both *Volkswagens* are reserved for German personnel. The doorless *Peugeot*, considered an emergency vehicle, must be available day and night. Jordi Couquet shrugs his shoulders.

"I like to take risks. Whatever will be, will be!"
It's good training for the day when we launch the national resistance!

Barbaïra puts his index finger to his lips, nods towards the militiamen lying in the grass not far from them and says quietly:

"Attention! Those people over there are supporters of a national resistance that is not like ours! One day, we may find them in the crosshairs of our machine guns!"

"What a mess!" murmurs Couquet... "The *maquis* want our skins as militiamen, and we, also militiamen, want the skins of other militiamen! What a mess!"

"It's normal, Jordi! We have nothing to do with a clash between great nations that use the militia and the *maquis* as supplementary troops! We are here to find in the Grail the key to our independence lost in 1209. The Germans – I mean the SS, which is not the same thing! – are our natural allies in this endeavour. That's why I agreed to defend Aurochs-Platz.

They stand up so they can talk more freely, without having to whisper. Thin clouds veil the autumn sky. The forests are bathed in pink gold. Guyot Peyrat asks:

"What if the Grail is not found?"

Barbaïra does not answer.

"As far as I'm concerned, I'm sure Pétain will keep his promises to restore regional freedoms," says Ferrocas.

Jordi Couquet expresses his scepticism with a wink.

"If not, we'll set up a large liberation *maquis* and take the place of those who oppose us! A pure and simple *maquis*! In my opinion, it should be an isosceles triangle with its apex at Puigcerdà, the two sides representing the Aude and Ariège valleys, and the base on the Foix-Quillan road.

"And the weapons?"

-Those of the Militia, which we will seize at the last moment!

-And the ammunition?

-They come from Republican Spain, via Puigcerdà.

-And the propaganda?

-Radio Andorra, of course, and the shortwave stations we capture from the French army and the forces of law and order!

It would be impossible to design a more precise *maquis* in the form of a dream. It is time to pass on the patrols and prepare the

supply work. Raymond Ferrocas and Guyot Peyrat check the appearance and armament of the five militiamen under their command, with whom they are going to head one to the La Peyre pass and the other to the La Frau gorges, the two exits from the forbidden valley.

Jordi Couquet checks the Citroën's engine and tyres, the submachine gun and grenades, then lies down to sleep on the grass while he waits for the signal to set off on his adventure.



As the autumn days pass, the relationship between Obersturmführer Klingsor and Roger Barbaïra grows closer. When the others rest, they keep watch in the tent at Aurochs-Platz. Night envelops the German's confidences and provides a backdrop for the mystery he draws from the forests, guardians of a prehistory that continues without ageing.

At first with reservations, then more freely, he exposes the Frenchman to certain deeper issues of his country's politics. Barbaïra listens and finally says:

"When we first met, you told me that Otto Rahn had committed suicide in the mountains, but I think you hid part of the truth from me.

"That's right!" admits Klingsor. "At that time, I didn't know him well. Now he is one of us, and so I must tell him the truth. In March 1939, Otto Rahn voluntarily entered the Endura of the Cathars, whose epic he discovered here!

"That's not possible!" exclaimed the Count of Miramont... "Was he then one of those new Cathars that Occitania hides so carefully, as if the Inquisition were still oppressing them in 1943?"

"Not exactly! After representing one of the hopes of the Black Order destined to give birth to the race of supermen from the Third Reich, he became a heretic!

Roger Barbaïra's face reflected surprise and concern.

"I still don't quite understand," he murmured.

"It's very simple. Your friend published *Crusade Against the Grail* in 1932. He was living in Fribourg at the time, in poverty, hoping to return to Sabarthès.

"And he wasn't here for a few weeks?"

-Later. In 1933, Himmler discovered the book and asked the author to come to Berlin. He had told the Führer: Otto Rahn is one of the hopes of our revolution... More specifically: "a tree to be nurtured". He immediately enrolled him in the SS special schools, then appointed him Obersturmführer and, shortly afterwards, he was incorporated into his staff and delegated to Alfred Rosenberg. Until 1937, Rahn seemed to have what he had been promised. He published another work, *Lucifer's Court in Europe*, which the Reichsführer sent to the Party's top leaders, thus giving it gospel status... Suddenly, everything changed. Otto Rahn realised that Germany was preparing for war... He spoke about it to Himmler, who admitted it, pointing out, however, that all the great nations were preparing to crush National Socialism, which represented a mortal threat to the Jewish diaspora, comparable to that which Tito had brought to bear on Jerusalem. The only difference is that Germany is preparing for war faster and better than its enemies! Otto Rahn, who does not accept this policy, speaks to Rosenberg and tries to convert him to his own conception of National Socialist policy...

"What was that conception?" Barbaïra asks eagerly.

"More or less this: the mission of the NSDAP exists according to the Spirit and not according to Matter. It is necessary to enlighten white men about their true nature and, therefore, to discover and read the Grail. Germany must be a community of Perfect Ones, not warriors... Parsifal against Siegfried! Perhaps it is necessary to raise the ardour of nations to bring to life the truth that it carries, but at least let it have clean hands. The Hitlerian nation must climb Montsegur on its knees... Otto Rahn harshly criticises the Führer's plan. For him, Hitler allowed himself to be seduced by a Napoleonic adventure. The conquest of the East –

land, and therefore matter—represents, according to Rahn, the choice of the evil god over the good god...

Barbaïra interrupted him.

"And what did Rosenberg think?"

"No one can say for sure, but I don't think that point of view would have shocked him that much.

"What happened next?"

Otto Rahn took the controversy to higher authorities within the National Socialist Party. Himmler excommunicated him and cast him into outer darkness!

"Poor Otto Rahn!"

-He wanted to end his life, which he considered useless, in Ussat and Ormolac, alongside his friend Gadal, and he headed for France, but without money or a passport, he didn't get further than Freiburg. The man whom the Mayer publishers took in for the last time on 8 March 1939 was a desperate man.

-And then?

-Well, I think the time had come for Otto Rahn to decide on mystical suicide. In the manner of the Cathars. With his exemplary death, he opposed the misguided National Socialism that had launched him on the quest for the Grail before 1933 and which he now renounced. I think you were wrong, Comrade Barbaïra, since the quest for the Grail did not cease despite the war.

He smiled...

"And we are here to bear witness to that, are we not?"

"And then...?"

He climbed Montsegur on his knees. At the end of March, approximately, he disappeared during a period of snowstorms on the mountain overlooking Kufstein. Forest rangers found him at the top, sitting on a rock, his head resting on his bent arm, his face calm. He seemed to be sleeping... ¹

¹ The death of Otto Rahn, vaguely known to his Languedoc friends, has been shrouded in mystery until now. We were alerted by a note in the book *Le Trésor Cathare* (Presses de la Cité), written by Gérard de Sède, which states: "As for Otto Rahn, he was beheaded by the Nazis." Very sceptical, knowing that the nationalists...

He fell silent. After a few minutes, Barbaïra looked up and said:
"I will never forget Otto Rahn. If Germany wins the war, I hope they will allow me to bury him in the *pog* of Montsegur. What you have just revealed to me is fascinating. So, National Socialism has new Cathars, just as the Church had the old ones? Only... I think that both are wrong to reject matter!

The Obersturmführer smiled and agreed:

"That is precisely why Rahn was excommunicated. He opposed our own myths of liberation with the Christian poison contained in Catharism! However, I wonder if..."

He leaned over the table and fell silent. The prehistoric night hovered around the poorly lit tent.

"What were you going to say?" asked Barbaïra.

Contrary to what is said, the socialists did not have a habit of beheading intellectuals. We began an investigation that took us quite far and constitutes a very important source for this narrative. There were three versions of his death:

- a) Beheaded by the Nazis;
- b) Shot by a border guard while trying to cross into Austria, according to his friend Gadal from Ussat-les-Bains;
- c) Disappeared in a labour camp.

The first version is manifestly crude and primitive, the second is absurd... How could Otto Rahn have been shot while crossing a border that in 1939... did not exist between Germany and Austria? As for disappearing in a labour camp, there is not a single example of labour camps before the start of World War II.

Although reluctantly, the Federal Republic helped us in our search for the truth. To talk about Otto Rahn's death was to reveal the high position he held in the Allgemeine SS and, therefore, to open a chapter of history that today's Germany wishes to hide with a tenacity as determined as it is childish. It was through the confidential documents left by Minister Rosenberg and one of his surviving collaborators that we were able to reconstruct Rahn's "passion". His former editors also helped us with the utmost goodwill, for which we are warmly grateful. Rahn killed himself by ingesting a dose of cyanide at the top of the Kufstein mountain for political-mystical reasons explained by the Obersturmführer in charge of investigations in France between 1943 and 1944, and also for personal reasons that are not relevant to mention here as they are unrelated to the present account.

The Obersturmführer raised his head.

"Could it be too late? The Aryan man is sick..."

"How so?"

The German smiled melancholically.

"Aren't you surprised by the atrocious nature of the wars of extermination between peoples of the same race? Germany-England! Germans against Saxons! Germans from Germany against Germans from France! And, a little bit everywhere, Celts against Celts! 1914-1918, a monstrous and stupid slaughter... And now... The slaughter of the European racial elite has been going on continuously since 1914! Do you think that's normal?... And what about the "great fears" that caused hysteria in 1940 among a people as courageous as the French? These are clinical signs of an ailment of our ancient races, too ancient!

"There is no French people, Comrade Klingsor!" objected Barbaïra, "but a mosaic of races that were once great and still cling to 'small homelands' that are trying to liberate themselves!"

Klingsor raised his head and mechanically crushed the piece of black bread he was dragging across the table...

"My dear comrade!" he said, "it is a miracle that you remain a pure-blooded Visigoth! You fight to restore the rule of the aristocracy to which you belong, but your efforts are perhaps futile!"

Barbaïra raised his eyebrow.

"What? Are you trying to intimidate me? You, an SS officer? Klingsor sat up straight in his seat.

"The SS are men of prey, heirs to your counts of Foix who beheaded monks and pillaged convents, and they did so wisely. They tried to halt the process of decay through draconian means that aroused the hatred of the universe, which is only fair, since the universe is now dominated by those contaminated races whose disappearance we desire! Those races defend only emptiness! But it is too late, we cannot succeed!

-How do you know?

"There are men behind the Reichsführer who read the past and the future and who know! I cannot tell you more."

"In that case, I wonder what we are doing here!" murmured Barbaïra bitterly.

"We are searching for the Grail that can save everything!"

Silence fell over the tent, and the sound of the torrent was now part of it. The Basqui sang more tenderly, with more restraint than during his stay at Aurochs-Platz, because autumn, well advanced in the high mountains, was stingily measuring its water flow. The Obersturmführer strained his ears, discovered the song beneath the silence, and said:

"He too has gone from Siegfried to Parsifal! The accents of noble warrior strength have been replaced by those of pity!"

He stood up, put on his cap with the Totenkopf, put on his camouflage parka because the cold was intensifying, and said:

"Come on, Barbaïra... Since we can't hear Siegfried, let's listen to Parsifal!"

They went outside and walked across the frost-covered grassland. They stopped at the edge of the stream.

"Listen! ' ' said ' ' the German ' '...' ' 'Höchsten ' 'Heiles ' 'Wunder!'..."

*Erlösung dem Erlöser!*¹ The hour of the redeeming Grail! Precisely the ending we do not want. Richard Wagner, like us, Barbaïra, discovered the great truth, but he did not manage to master it... Once morality, sacristy bric-à-brac and Holy Saturday phantasmagoria have been set aside, what is *Parsifal* if not an invocation to the cult of blood? King Amfortas suffers from an incurable illness, an eternal wound, that is, a corruption of the blood that has no cure. Parsifal, the most biologically pure ignorant hero, must choose between the voluptuousness of Klingsor's garden, symbolising corrupt civilisation, and the austere service of the knights who guard the primordial blood, the mystical source of all life! For us, it is our Lady! We have all been more or less affected by the plague of blood stained with racial contamination!

¹ Holy and pure miracle!... Redemption of the Redeemer!

-Klingsor perhaps bears a heavy share of responsibility. While Parsifal discovered the path of higher charity, did he not seek to conquer the Grail through violence? Should Klingsor and the SS not bow their heads?

-No, no! SS Klingsor believes, on the contrary, that the piety through which initiation is attained is only a virtue for those who are corrupt and contaminated with impure blood. The SS can do nothing by itself. The disease must be allowed to die. Help it to die, even by virtue of a higher charity! No, no! Barbaïra, the eternal life granted by the Grail is reserved only for men of pure blood, for noble men! And science walks hand in hand with us in recognising that there is no eternity other than biological eternity!

Barbaïra grabbed the German's arm, squeezed it tightly and asked:

"Is the meaning of the Grail what we seek, is it not?
The law of life that ensures eternity according to race?

"Precisely, comrade! It is our last effort. If we were to succumb, not because our truths are unclear, but because of a balance of power that works against us, it is because before the fall we did not find or decipher those tablets of the law that would have proven us right against all the devils in the world!

And then:

-The world is not ready for a freely felt and consented general purification; it needs a drastic law... Well... What shall we do tomorrow, Barbaïra?

The Count of Miramont contemplated the shadow of the SS, which the flashes of the torrent protected from the sovereign night. More than observing, he guessed his discouragement. And he roared:

"What? Klingsor is giving up? Has he lost faith in magical powers? Is he no longer seeking to attract the mad and pure to the enchanted castle?

He hummed... "Behold the moment. My magical tower awaits the simple one, the creature I see singing in the distance!" As he sang out of tune, he made the Obersturmführer laugh, who said to him:

"No, Barbaïra, my mad and pure comrade, I will wait as long as necessary, but now it is time to sleep!"

He grabbed his arm, regained his commanding voice and announced:

"Tomorrow we will begin our investigations in quadrant 17. At this point, there is no point in waiting to get down to work!"

Each man entered his tent, turned off his torch, and let the night surrender to the ride of the aurochs.



In the early hours of 1 November, snow appeared on the peaks. The ridges of Soularac and Saint-Barthélemy now looked like daughters of the Virgin suspended from the black sky, drawn with the naive beauty of a Japanese print. The sun did not show itself and the cloud cover descended lower and lower. The peaks disappeared. The snow neutralised the exploration area around Cassou. Reaching the opening of the caves was now impossible, but the investigations continued...

A week later, the aurochs of the region descended to base camp, driven away by the snow. Aurochs-Platz awoke in a great white silence. Giant beech trees surrounded it like candle bearers. The black torrent that slid between the blue or pink banks, depending on the time of day, raised barely a whisper to celebrate the mass for the dead. The ruins of the estate evoked forgotten Russian campaigns. The Obersturmführer spoke in terms of fairy tales.

"This is how I imagine the last camp of the men of the Thule civilisation," said Barbaïra as he pointed to the tents half-crushed under the weight of the snow... The last group of nomads bearing primordial blood renounce their northern existence... They break camp and descend to the land of the sun, where racial contamination stalks them... From them are born the great civilisations of India, Egypt, Greece and Rome... They marry women of

coarse blood in the biblical lands. The gods then become demigods and, later, the Germans and French of today... Poor Germans, poor Frenchmen!... The heroes grew weary long ago, Barbaïra... Well... What shall we do?

-I think the research must continue!

They sent for twelve pairs of skis from Foiz. After stopping the *Citroën* "traction" next to the estate, Jordi Couquet said to him:

"I almost got stuck in the gorges. Another snowfall and it will be impossible to get through!

The eight days of good weather that followed gave them a reprieve. They now came and went in a palace of blue, green and pink diamonds in long processions of skiers, leaving behind the noise of saws and silk created by the contact of the boards with the frozen snow. They climbed slowly up to the exploration area and returned to Aurochs-Platz in almost immaterial glides reminiscent of the flight of black rooks.

Black sky. Black snow. The piercing cold heralds a new storm.

"We have to give up," says Klingsor. "We'll continue the research in the spring."

The scientists give the order to nail down the boxes in which they had collected a beautiful collection of minerals, but the palaeontologist Darmesdorf is frankly disappointed:

"And to think we didn't find a single interesting fossil!

"I'm beginning to believe," says Klotz, "that it was our predecessor Otto Rahn who designed that Cathar dove on the walls of the caves that intrigues us so much!

"Maybe we'll have better luck in 1944," says the Obersturmführer... We have to say goodbye, I wanted to get to Toulouse before nightfall!

Night fell an hour earlier than the previous evening. The men bustled around the heavily laden vehicles and the old ajistes tied down the luggage. Barbaïra returned to the Le Pech estate, as he had promised his father, where he would remain throughout the winter; Jordi Couquet returned to the Carcassonne Militia, Guyot Peyrat to the Toulouse Militia and Ferrocas to the Béziers Militia. The Count of Miramont

approaches the weaver who serves in the Lavelanet factory through the Militia, just as the boss's son serves through the *maquis*, and asks:

"So, Jordi? Can I count on you in the spring?"

"Of course! With you, the Militia is much more fun!"

It's a bit like the AJ!

"What do you mean?"

"Well... I can't explain it very well... Anyway, here too, people do anything for an ideal... Your story about the Grail doesn't really convince me, but I think it's for the good of mankind! Isn't it?"

"Yes, Jordi, you're right!" replied Barbaïra with a friendly slap on the back.

They gather around the doorless *Peugeot*, which promises them a polar excursion, and quickly inspect their weapons, whose steel sticks slightly to their fingers.

"And you, Ferrocas, are you coming too?"

"I'm an orderly. When I get the order to come, I come. If they send me somewhere, I go somewhere. I always obey and don't argue."

-And you, Peyrat?

-I will always be with you, exploring caves or preparing for Occitania's independence. To me, you are the Lord of Miramont, Roger. As I said before, I belong to your fiefdom!

They slapped each other heartily on the back to comfort each other and, at the same time, to affirm their bonds of friendship. Then they got into the *Peugeot* and took the lead of the caravan that rolled along a track that the deep snow had pushed to the limits of the forbidden. It carried men who were also renouncing the boreal condition.

IV

On 1 March 1944, Estève Caberol took possession of the La Frau cave again, as he had promised. Gaston Reboul, Marius Chabrol and Robert Robuffay brought with them

some weapons stolen from the Picaussel *maquis* and twenty Spaniards from the 30th Guerrilla Brigade.

The stone wall intended to provide cover from air attacks remained intact, and the sloping pasture was covered with ten centimetres of snow. Various debris bore witness to the disaster of the previous year.

"What a beautiful house!" exclaimed the guerrilla leader, contemplating the walls of the cave.

Alberto—whose real name was Gutiérrez—came from the Vernet camp, as did Marius Chabrol and Pablo las Heras, the latter settled in the old youth hostel with a contingent of Catalan anarchists that grew every day.

The following night, a troop of thirty well-armed men led by El Madriles – whose real name was Pedro Abascal – also from the 30th Guerrilla Brigade, arrived at the *former hostel*. The Montsegur *maquis* was thus quickly becoming operational.

"Forward, men! Forward!" shouted El Madriles, who seemed to embody the resistance in the open air.

New *maquis*, new atmosphere... There were no traces of the mystical heroism of Commander René, who sought France's redemption in sacrificial resistance, but rather rough men capable of living for a week on three onions, experienced in all the movements of the civil war and turned fierce after their stay in French concentration camps. Light but effective weaponry: submachine guns, Spanish-made pistols, German grenades, anti-personnel mines, dynamite cartridges, kilometres of detonating cord. And also knives and throwing daggers that Alberto, El Madriles, and his men wielded with terrifying precision!

Marius Chabrol soon felt at ease among his new companions, but the former *père aubergiste*, Robuffay and Reboul, retreated into themselves and lost the dominant positions they had held until then in the Ariège resistance. Neither Commander Alberto nor El Madriles were willing to share command of a *maquis* in which their

men constituted the main force, but they accepted Chabrol as a political advisor.

Their conception of resistance was perfectly in line with his, that is, with that of the Communist Party... No major commitments on the offensive, no heroic resistance on the defensive, attacks on limited targets launched ten against one and retreat to remote bases... Constant movement, a whirlwind of night-time sabotage, theft at the enemy's expense. Taking prisoners and obtaining information through torture. Investigating information within the following twenty-four hours. No witnesses for the prosecution. Anyone who talks dies immediately. A team takes him to the forest *for a walk*... The task of gathering firewood. The body disappears into an abandoned well, into any chasm in the mountain.

None of the current *maquisards* of Montsegur would know how to immerse themselves in contemplation of Ramon de Péreille's fortress as in the good old days of the commander or captain ¹René... No succulent ham for Estève Caberol, only dry, hard bread, garlic, onions, broad beans and kidney beans... Groups of guerrillas leave the cave day or night and return disguised as villagers or woodcutters, street vendors or militiamen, depending on the origin of the stolen clothes. Three days after settling in, they had already sabotaged a large section of telephone lines between Foix and Quillan, destroyed two German trucks and "requisitioned" a petrol station. The petrol cans are hidden in the old *Au-devant de la Vie* youth hostel. Meanwhile, the informers were taken for a *walk*.

The leaders' council meets in the cave every evening. There, the major and minor objectives are reviewed.

"I know of a masterstroke we can carry out nearby," Marius Chabrol announces to the two Spaniards who are attending.

"What is it?" asks Alberto Gutiérrez.

¹ With very few exceptions, the *Maquis* commanders had no official status, so we indicate their positions or ranks without any guarantee of accuracy.

"A large Militia camp that has just been set up in the Basqui Valley. Three hours' march away!"

"Very good! Very good! Let's go!" advises El Madriles with typical Castilian enthusiasm.

Chabrol smiles.

"Hey! Calm down, mate!... Twenty guards francs... Heavy weaponry! It's not as easy as frying eggs!"

Late into the night, they discuss the most effective and least costly way to reduce the enemy's field. Finally, they agree on the need to obtain first-hand information before anything else.



Days before the arrival of *the* former *innkeeper* and the Spaniards at the La Frau cave, Obersturmführer Klingsor, the team of scientists and the militiamen had reoccupied the Basqui valley. Spring snow still covered part of the pastures and the stream roared dully around midday under its shell of ice. Under such conditions, discovering the entrance to new caves was extremely difficult. Barbaïra did not hesitate, he put on his skis and set out to explore the mountain in the place he had abandoned months earlier while Ferrocas improved the defensive positions of the Blanc estate.

Around the middle of the second half of March, Barbaïra received a report from the 2nd Section of the Militia in Toulouse. It reported the establishment of another *maquis* in the Montsegur region. It confirmed the S.D. ¹report that Klingsor was studying in his tent. With one difference: while the former was a real cry of alarm, speaking of "hundreds of guerrillas", the latter referred to a "militarily insignificant" force.

¹ Military intelligence service accompanying the German army on campaign. It was this service that carried out almost all the missions and which popular ignorance attributed to the Gestapo, which, with rare exceptions, never operated in France.

"Either way, it's a thorny problem!" says Klingsor. "I wouldn't want to get involved in French affairs for anything in the world. What do you think might happen, Barbaïra?"

"If those people don't come here to cause trouble, I won't lift a finger, but if they show up at Aurochs-Platz, I'll have them shot without hesitation after the three regulatory warnings.

"Barbaïra! You crazy, pure Visigoth! I expected nothing else from you! However, be vigilant and moderate at the same time.

My team and I are in a rather precarious position!

Under the protection of the French Militia!... Our work in 1943 went unnoticed, and in 1944 I would like to act discreetly as well! Those are my instructions. And then, mind you, I am expecting a visit from a high-ranking official of the German Reich any day now! What would happen if the *maquis* attacked at that very moment?

Roger Barbaïra raised his eyebrows, asking for more details. Klingsor fell silent, leaning over the SD report, but his gaze drifted vaguely beyond, into the distance of the snow-capped mountains. Barbaïra pressed his curiosity further and asked:

"Who is this high-ranking official? Hitler?"

The German put his arm around the Count of Miramont's shoulders and murmured in a sincerely distressed tone:

-Dear Barbaïra!... I'm sorry... but I can't say... *Streng verboten!* Because of my SS oath, you know?

Besides, you're not an SS *knight*... at least, not yet! There's a *non possumus* here.

"I understand," replied Barbaïra, raising his head.

He did not insist further, but sought out the Obersturmführer's hand and shook it vigorously, looking him straight in the eye.



While the Montsegur maquis launched their great spring offensive and Obersturmführer Klingsor set off once again in search of the engraved stone slabs supposedly hidden in a cave somewhere along the sacred route

of the Cathars, three men sat around a table arguing in a *villa* in Aix-les-Thermes. Bitter wartime coffee steamed in their cups. Family portraits seemed to gaze ironically at the silhouette of a grand piano, denying it any value as a decorative element in that typically bourgeois living room.

"We must go to Montsegur on 16 March!" said engineer H...

The engineer, who had never published a single line on the subject, was one of the leaders of Languedoc research. His vast erudition covered in particular the Albigensian Crusade and the Cathar heresy.

"Gentlemen, we must commemorate the 700th anniversary of the fall of Montsegur! Are the Germans there?"

And afterwards? Languedoc knew many occupiers, but even so, it did not forget its dead!

Montsegur is in a restricted area, Professor Sarlat reminded us. How can we get there?

"How many of us are there? Seven? Eight? I can get two vehicles from my department.

"And the authorities?"

"Can't Mandemant give the regional commander-in-chief a call in Toulouse?"

-I'll give it a try.

Mandemant, editor of the *Toulouse* newspaper *La Dépêche*, was known for his violent temper, fierce spirit and knowledge of Languedoc history. He lived in Ussat-les-Bains at the time when Otto Rahn divided his time between discussions with his friend Gadal, exploring the caves of Sabarthes, and managing the family guesthouse that he had opened in a *villa* now occupied by the EDF in order to make ends meet.

As he devoted more attention to the memory of the Cathars than to the management of the business, it did not take him long to go bankrupt as a hotelier! In fact, that romantic was incapable of selling a broom! Mandemant detested Rahn. In the articles he wrote, he accused him of drawing the Cathar doves himself on the walls of the caves, which he later offered up to the curiosity of scientists.

The next morning, Mademant reported to the German general in charge of border security.

"Ach," said the general... "Go to Montsegur with your friends? Well, no!"

He let these reasons sink in for a few minutes and then suddenly blurted out:

"No and no! *Verboten!* Montsegur *verboten!* Montsegur belongs to the Great Reich, my dear sir, at least in principle! It is in Montsegur that the Bayreuth troupe will present Wagner's Tetralogy after the war! You may be allowed to attend, but only as a spectator! And you will have to pay for your seat! Ach! Our historical rights to Montsegur are as firm as our admiration for the epic of Romania and the Cathars!

Consider that everything has been said and don't stick your nose in!

Petrified with surprise and boiling with anger, Mademant reported his failure a few days later.

"It doesn't matter!" concluded Engineer H... shrugging his shoulders. "What do we risk by going there? Me, a reprimand from the administration for using vehicles outside of working hours, and all of us, two days in prison for some local *Feld-Kommandant*? The importance of the 700th anniversary requires us to take that risk. The hardest part is finding fuel, but I'll take care of that!"

On the night of 15 to 16 March, two cars with their lights off took the road to Montsegur.



Aurochs-Platz. Midday. Blue sky. Blue snow. New flowers on the edges of the snow, which is visibly retreating upwards. The Basqui torrent takes up the motif of the Grail and supports the chorus of knights... "Joy for those who know how to love and believe"... Through the clamour of the brass, the esoteric invocation of the flutes, the mystical arpeggios of the harps, a new song is born from the orchestra reconstituted by the torrent that beats against the rock and swirls in the caves on the banks. It rises behind the La Peyre gorge, passes the

pass, falls from the sky, thunders in the forest cirque... A white aeroplane flies low over the valley.

"Here comes our visitor!" announces Obersturmführer Klingsor. And he turns to the German staff tents:

"*Achtung! Achtung!*"

The day before, he had asked Barbaïra if the militiamen wanted to present arms to the envoy of the Great Reich.

"What militiamen?" wondered Barbaïra. "I only see the armed men of Lord Ramón de Péreilhe searching for an object lost days ago by the Perfects of Montsegur..."

This is 1244, a time when the Great Reich and France did not exist as great nations!

The Obersturmführer considered that everything had been said. They decided by mutual agreement that the Germans would present arms and that the guards would disappear to establish a security ring around the camp. The plane was now flying over the cirque on the axis of the small runway that had been prepared and marked out days earlier.

"It's a *Fieseler Storch!*" announced the Obersturmführer.

The silhouettes of the pilot and passenger were clearly visible, but the aircraft did not lose altitude and the engine maintained cruising speed.

"How strange!" remarked Klingsor... "Can't they see the signal panels? Steiner! Fire smoke flares!"

But the pilot seemed to ignore the columns of smoke, and the plane continued on the same course, turning ninety degrees north over the La Frau gorges and disappearing.



The plane entered the Lasset valley. As it completed its turn, it almost grazed the wall where the cave occupied by the new Montsegur *maquis* was located. Total surprise among the guerrillas. About twenty men are scattered across the sloping grassland. Some are sleeping, others are cleaning their weapons.

"Watch out!" shouted Commander Alberto Gutierrez.

"Hide! It's a German plane!" yelled Estève Caberol.

Some of *the maquisards*, abruptly awakened, roll down the slope. Others rush into the cave in search of weapons. Others even spit in the direction of the aircraft and hurl obscene insults learned in the red-light districts of Barcelona.

"Attention!" shouts Robuffay... "It's going to turn... It's getting ready to make another pass... This time it's going to strafe us, that's for sure!"

Hide!

Imperturbable as usual, his inquisitorial eyes almost hidden behind his eyelids, which he raises to maximise his vision. Marius Chabrol closely follows the aircraft's manoeuvres, turns to his comrades and says:

-Bunch of idiots! Can't you see it's a *Fieseler*, a reconnaissance taxi, and it's not carrying any weapons? If you're scared of flies now, the least I can do is enlist in the Militia!

The *maquisards* realise their mistake. El Madriles stops a man at the entrance to the cave who is wielding a machine gun to target the enemy plane and shouts:

"Damn it! Do you want to call the Gestapo? Marius Chabrol agrees.

"Of course! When you say reconnaissance plane, you mean information plane! After the information comes the commotion... After the commotion, it's the mass grave or the Gestapo! Our only chance is that the observer will mistake us for woodcutters taking a break from work... and that idiot was going to give us away! It's unbelievable!

A great uneasiness now weighs on the maquis.



After describing an arc to the west, the aircraft is now flying towards Montsegur. Engineer H... and his friends have been in the fortress since dawn. They will watch the sunrise and pray, shivering with cold, for the repose of the two hundred Cathar Perfects, knights and men-at-arms burned in the fields near the Seguelà gorge on 16 March 1244, exactly seven centuries ago. In the manner of a funeral mass, Professor Sarlat read aloud passages from the

statements collected by the inquisitors and some excerpts from the Doat legation. Afterwards, they climbed to the top of the eastern wall to contemplate the landscape surrendered to the great battle of flowers against snow. Around noon, they began to take provisions out of their bags for lunch, when suddenly...

"A plane!" shouted Engineer H...

"German or French?" asked Professor Sarlat.

"How naive!" cries Mandemant... As if there could be French aeroplanes flying around here today! Do you still believe what Nungesser and Coli say?

He puts his hands up to shield his eyes and shouts:

"Damn it! It's because of us! Everyone down!" They climb down the wall as quickly as the dilapidated ladder allows.

. Between two jumps, the journalist from *La Dépêche de Toulouse* murmurs:

"It was that general that sent here the mastiffs! I was suspicious that we would come anyway... Unless... I really don't think it's going to bomb!

The plane is now flying directly overhead. Despite identifying it as a reconnaissance aircraft, the seven men crouch down and wait for the moment predicted by the wise men of Druid times: something will fall from the sky onto their heads! Nothing happens, however. The *Fieseler* is flying at an altitude that prevents it from detecting human presence and has no bombs on board. It flies away towards the east. The pilgrims of Montsegur raise their heads.

"Attention!" announces Engineer H... "It's going to turn... It's coming towards us... They must have seen us!"

Suddenly, smoke begins to pour out of the device.

"It's on fire!" Capeyron shouts... "He's been hit! The *maquis* must have hit him!"

Mandemant bursts out laughing.

"Not at all, Mr Capeyron, he just activated a smoke generator! Like the planes used by advertising companies! Haven't you ever seen that? Those planes that write the name Machin-Chose in the sky?

And then:

"It's still very strange! I'd like to know which brand of sauerkraut this one works for!"

The aircraft has just begun a wide turn around Montsegur, with the fortress at its centre. After closing the smoke ring at an altitude of about a thousand metres above the *pog*, it cuts off the emission and dives northwards, a white dot almost invisible in the deep blue of the spring sky. Then it leaves a trail of smoke behind it again, descends along the north-south axis and stops transmitting just as it cuts the circle. It repeats the manoeuvre from west to east, leaving a second trail that cuts the previous one at a ninety-degree angle.

"Hey... it's a Celtic cross!" murmurs engineer H... in amazement.

The plane dissolves into the sun. The noise of the engine fades away in successive waves in the direction of Toulouse. All that remains in the sky is the cross of cosmic dimensions, which the wind takes hold of and extinguishes.

"It really is a Celtic cross!" confirms Mademant. There is no doubt about the intention and execution. There could be no better example!

"It's just another way of giving meaning to the smoke from the bonfires of Montsegur on this anniversary day!" murmurs the engineer with an emotion that his desire to be objective cannot quite conceal.

And he throws his hat. Mandemant throws his cap. The professor throws his beret. It is 16 March 1944. ¹



¹ M.H... – a senior official in the Ariège department and a unanimously respected figure – as well as other surviving witnesses, are categorical: the plane clearly drew a Celtic cross in the sky above Montsegur. Based on our investigations, we can confirm the following: it was indeed Alfred Rosenberg, organiser of the Grail investigations, who was a passenger on board the *Fieseler-Storch* on 16 March 1944. The RAF bombing of the nitrogen factories in Toulouse that day prevented the minister's plane from Germany from landing. So it turned around and continued on to the Montsegur area. The *Fieseler-Storch* took off from a makeshift runway with another passenger about whom we know nothing.

At the end of the afternoon, Obersturmführer Klingsor summoned Barbaïra and said to him:

"I'm sending my assistant officer to Toulouse to find out what's going on. Can anyone take him?"

"Jordi Couquet is available. He's the most experienced driver on the team."

"He must leave as soon as possible. I'm worried... A *Fieseler* arriving on schedule with a passenger and not landing... Something smells fishy to me! This is an important person, extremely important!"

Barbaïra returns to the militia camp.

"Do we have to go now?" objects Jordi Couquet... "All right, but I'll have to cross the La Frau gorge in broad daylight! I don't like the idea, but anyway... duty is duty!"

The Untersturmführer gets into the *Citroën* "traction" and they set off. Barbaïra watches the vehicle roll and sway along the track, scarred by the melting snow.

Pink snow. Blue snow. Black snow. Night falls on the procession of aurochs. Klingsor retires to his tent and rereads texts by the Greek philosophers. Barbaïra reads Daniel-Rops' *Le Communisme et les Chrétiens* in his tent.

A quiet night. Aurochs-Platz awakens in the midst of a dense fog. Enlarged and distorted by the prismatic effect of the sun through the vapours, the men on duty begin to move, extrapolated into ancient ghosts from seven centuries ago.

"What time did Steiner say he would arrive?" asks the Count of Miramont.

"He promised to arrive in the late afternoon. I am eager to hear news of the case. The radio is reporting a bombing in Toulouse. We have to wait, but Steiner should arrive before nightfall. He's like clockwork!"

The day passes normally. The investigations at altitude continue quietly. The patrol from the La Peyre gorge arrives and reports: "Nothing to report." The patrol from the La Frau gorges appears at dusk... Nothing to report! But Steiner does not return. At midnight he still hasn't arrived, and at three in the morning there is no sign of him. Klingsor

had closed his Plato and Barbaïra his Daniel-Rops. They are in the tent before sunrise.

"I am worried about Steiner!" says the Obersturmführer.

"I am uneasy about Couquet!" says the Count of Miramont.

They review all the possibilities.

"Problems with the car, perhaps!" suggests the German.

"Or they lost time because of your dreadful administration!" suggests the Frenchman.

Klingsor tries to smile but fails.

"What if they were ambushed by the *maquis*?" he says slowly.

Barbaïra shudders.

"Damn! Jordi was certainly quite uneasy. Crossing the gorges of La Frau during the day with the *maquis* two or three hours away... that's tempting fate, isn't it?"

They said no more. They would soon find out! The expedition they mounted at daybreak would confirm their fears. The *Peugeot* patrol car rolled along, followed by two armed *Volkswagens*. Barbaïra and Klingsor saw nothing unusual until they reached the entrance to the Basqui valley, a spot regularly visited by patrols, but a kilometre further on, they discovered the "traction" vehicle overturned and on fire. The blackened and reddened bodywork shows no signs of bullets.

"They shot the tyres and forced them to stop!" suggests Raymond Ferrocas. There is no blood on the seats or signs of a struggle in the surrounding area.

"The terrorists took them!" says Peyrat.

Barbaïra's face is livid. So is the Obersturmführer's.

"They may have escaped and hidden in the mountains or in the house of a villager in Comus!" ventures the Count of Miramont.

"Unlikely!" replies Klingsor. "They're in the hands of the *maquis*."

"Let's go to Comus!"

"Impossible, I'm not authorised... I can't have any contact with the local inhabitants."

-So, we search the gorges!

Until midday, they explore the gorges with their weapons in hand, but without conviction... They don't find a single trace... Not a lost object or a clue... Just the emptiness of the cliffs scarred by erosion, the fir trees swaying in the high-altitude wind, and the slow flight and melancholic cries of magpies in the narrow strip of visible sky...

They do not linger uselessly in this sinister place where a few determined *maquisards* could wipe out the rescue expedition without giving it time to make a move to defend itself. But... it has been twenty-four hours since the *maquisards* set off with the prisoners.



Life resumes at Aurochs-Platz, but in a mournful tone. No one eats, no one resumes exploring the caves. The German scientists' faces are marble. The militiamen frown with anger. Klingsor says to Barbaïra:

"I am responsible for Steiner's disappearance! I will never be able to justify myself to my superiors.

"And I to the new recruits, at least as far as what they owe to Jordi Couquet... I shouldn't have let him leave before nightfall!

"You don't apologise in the SS, Barbaïra, otherwise I would have to apologise to her for ordering such a premature departure!

It would be useless!

Time passes. At one point, Klingsor asks:

"Do you think they're going to kill them?"

"It all depends on which *maquis* they fall into. If it's the secret army, there's nothing to fear, but if they had the misfortune of falling into the hands of the Spanish guerrillas..."

Night falls. Tormented by remorse and anguish, Klingsor seeks out Barbaïra and says to her:

"Steiner's disappearance is going to cause a stir in Berlin!

"On the other hand, Jordi's disappearance won't cause much of a stir in Lavelanet. He was just a boy... A factory worker doesn't count for much in the conscience of France, Klingsor! And then... after all... he was just a stupid militiaman! And everything's sorted! Who's going to know that it was the boss's factory he was defending in the Militia? For me, it was very different. Jordi Couquet... A wonderful guy, with a heart this big...

Barbaïra spread his arms wide to embrace a space that encompassed the entire mountain, the snow, the forests, and the peaks reaching up to conquer the sky. He discreetly wiped away a tear that had formed in his eyelids, clenched his fists, and stood up straight.

He spoke of Jordi in the past tense, but deep down it's nonsense! There's no proof he's dead. I'm going to put the two *Dizaines* on a war footing and tomorrow I'll attack the Montsegur *maquis*.

His eyes were shining. His lips were trembling. Muscles bulged under the sleeves of his blue tunic. A wild joy now swept away the moments of pessimism he had experienced. He stood up and hurried out of the tent to give orders when...

"I forbid any such initiative!" ordered Klingsor in an icy voice.

"And by what right, if I may ask?"

"You swore an oath to follow my plan, Barbaïra! In the best interests of this mission, did we not agree to ignore the *maquis* unless they attacked us?"

"But we've just been attacked!"

"Yes and no... We were not attacked directly, nor in such a way that the investigations would suffer as a result. Couquet and Steiner were not indispensable... We will easily find an assistant and a motorcyclist!"

"That's true..." admitted Barbaïra, lowering his head.

They remained silent for a long time. Finally, the Obersturmführer stood up and said:

"Come on, my dear madman and pure one! Let's hear the advice of our magical torrent!"

They slowly crossed the meadow, now more richly flowered than an ancient Isfahan tapestry. They stopped at the edge. Klingsor embraced the Count of Miramont's neck, forced him to bend over the babbling torrent and listen carefully...

"Listen! Listen to what the powers of the Grail are saying! 'The holy source of strength to the pilgrim... An august work is being prepared for him... He will fulfil the holy mission... Everything in him has been purified of the dross of the long journey... For us, let him be washed here...'"

"Washed of what?" asked Barbaïra... "Of the blood of Jordi, whom I could not save?"

-No, washed of human weaknesses, comrade Count of Miramont!

They remained motionless for a long time, waiting for the torrent to reach the end of *Parsifal* and drain away in a single note, endlessly woven into the immaculate purity of the snow...



Determined to give his life to defend the secret of the Grail and knowing that a man always speaks under the effect of certain tortures, Untersturmführer Steiner agreed to the rules of the Order. As the guerrillas dragged him along the dangerous route that could have allowed him to escape over the top of the gorges, he made an irresistible decision when he reached the top of the precipice and dragged the man who was guarding him with him to prevent any attempt at escape. The two bodies crashed fifty metres below.

Jordi Couquet and the escort guarding him walked all night. Fate ruled against him in the meeting between the column commander and his deputy. One wanted to go to the cave, the other to the farmhouse that had served as a youth hostel before the war. The deputy's opinion prevailed.

Couquet thus passed less than five hundred metres from the cave where his former comrades, the *Ajistes*, were sheltering. They could have helped him, and certainly would have done so if they had known of his desperate situation. But the *Ajistes* knew nothing of each other, except

those who were in the Militia and those who were in the *maquis*, each fighting in their own way for the independence of Languedoc.

The guerrillas skirted Montsegur, flanked the Seguelà pass, crossed the sleeping town of Montferrier, passed through Roquefixade via a complicated maze of footpaths, and arrived at the youth hostel. Tireless walkers, the Spaniards advanced with apparent ease. Dejected by the unfortunate event and weakened by his awareness of the situation, Couquet slowed the march. Every time he showed signs of weakness, the guerrillas breathed new energy into him with the butts of their rifles.

Dawn was breaking when they reached the *maquis's* refuge. Jordi Couquet recognised the surroundings. The access road climbed alongside a rushing stream that cascaded over polished, moss-covered rocks, the forest of oak and beech trees giving way to black firs as the altitude increased. Higher up, the tender, bluish meadow covered with reeds, the wastelands that would soon give off wild scents with the arrival of the first heat. Above, the stone tables covered with rhododendrons. The birds greeted the dawn. A great despondency filled the void that had become increasingly pronounced since his capture.

He was led into the large room at gunpoint. The man guarding him moved away and joined other *maquisards* sitting around the fire. Jordi recognised the unusually large table, now covered in grease... The dirty and torn signs of the *Ajiste* movement... The F.A.I.'s call to arms in support of the Spanish Republic... Jean Giono's surviving appeals, whose lucidity was underlined by the new context... "After the war, only those who did not wage war will live"...

The guerrillas eat, drink and argue in Spanish and Catalan. Shouts that burst out or die away like isolated or rapid gunshots. Obscene laughter. The moans of a wounded man lying on a bench in a dark corner. A strong smell of red wine dominates the stench of garlic and onion.

Driven by the instinct for self-preservation, Jordi Couquet considers his remaining escape options. He can clearly hear

the footsteps of the sentries posted outside. Two others guard the door inside. The off-duty *maquisards* keep their loaded weapons within reach. They are all equipped with throwing knives and Toledo daggers whose blades flash blue in the dawn light.

Jordi Couquet tries to think of something other than the impossible escape. Meanwhile, the guerrillas seem to lose interest in him. For a long time, he sits on the floor in a corner, leaning against the wall to relieve his back and kidneys from the pain of the blows.

Finally, a Spaniard appears from Estève Caberol's old office, whom Jordi recognises as Pablo las Heras.

"Come here!" he says.

Pablo las Heras now spoke a little more French and had enjoyed prosperity since becoming one of the lovers of the former *mère aubergiste*. He pushed Couquet towards the workshop, closed the door behind him and left.

Judith stood near the bed that took up a large part of the room, which had been converted into a bedroom. She gave the boy a cold stare, still chanting the war cry:

*Boches morts. Boches morts.
Ne reste plus sur la beige Que
moisson de casques gris.
Casques gris. Casques gris...*

And when she finished, she said:

"You collaborated with the Krauts, you scoundrel. You're going to pay the price in blood."

He called Pablo las Heras.

"Come here, my rabbit... *come, my rabbit...* we're going to take care of you!" said the Spaniard.

He forced him to take off all his clothes, made him sit on the edge of a bench and took a seat in a chair opposite him while the guerrilla Águila and another man whose eyes justified his nom de guerre – El Loco – flanked him, leaning indolently on the tabletop.

"Now..." said Pablo las Heras... "now, little bunny..."

With the weight of the joy he expected to extract from the interrogation, he forgot the little French he knew. Águila, who spoke it well, stepped forward.

"Well... Now you're going to tell us what you're doing in the fascist militia, you idiot!

"I'm under my boss's orders."

Águila burst out laughing and shouted:

"*Very well!*... In the service of the capitalists?... So you have no class consciousness?

"*What does the little rabbit do for a living? With the milicos¹ in the Basqui ravine?*" asked Las Heras.

Águila translated with a smile.

"What are you doing with the militiamen in the Basqui valley?"

"I drive cars."

-And the others?

"I don't know."

"*Very good!*"

Las Heras looked at El Loco and gave him a prearranged signal. Jordi Couquet received a formidable pair of slaps that left his ears ringing and the base of his neck feeling like it had been broken. They gave him time to recover and then:

-So? Why are all these militiamen in a place where there's nothing to do? Are they against us?

-No.

"Then what?"

-I don't know.

-*Bunny*, you were warned... We don't have time to waste on you. Either you talk, or you're done for!

-I don't know.

Again, the agreed signal. El Loco opened a bag, took out a pair of pliers, grabbed the prisoner's hand and, with frightening dexterity, pulled out a fingernail... Jordi Couquet let out a roar and cringed over his injured hand.

¹ r militiamen.

"You're misbehaving, *bunny*," said Eagle... "Talk before your comrade takes care of your left hand like he did with your right! ... Well?"

"I don't know."

El Loco tore off two nails, one at a time, and Jordi Couquet fainted. They revived him with heavy blows from wet cloths. The guerrillas around him seemed uninterested in the interrogation. Some were checking their weapons. Others were eating quickly. One of them was treating his injured feet. Another, his legs bare, was mending his trousers. A tall, thin, ragged man was stroking a tame marmot. From outside came the sound of sentries' footsteps. As the heat increased, the strong smell of petrol became more pronounced. It came from the old quarters of the *ajistes*, where they had stored several dozen drums "requisitioned" during past expeditions. The combination of the fumes and the wood fire created a volcanic atmosphere that awakened the adventurous and nihilistic mood of the Spanish and Catalan *maquisards*, most of whom were anarchists.

"So, you don't know?" asked Águila.

"Yes," murmured Couquet, stifling his sobs, "they're looking for the Grail.

"What?"

"The Grail."

The three *maquisards* looked at each other in utter surprise. It was clear that they had never heard of the Grail. El Loco tore off the last fingernail on his right hand to force the prisoner to confess... Wasn't the Grail the code name for a secret weapon kept by the Militia in the caves of the mountain?

Couquet groaned and clenched his bloody hand.

-No... no... it's not... I think it's... a cup... a precious thing containing the blood of Christ...

Pablo las Heras smiled mockingly and shouted:

"*Man! Is that how priests are? Ha, ha! They're going to give you a ride!*"

Águila confirmed:

"You're in a fine mess, *rabbit*, coming here to talk about parents' business! *Do you know that we roast some of them down below, behind the mountains?* Serving the capitalists and the parents, you're finished! There's nothing I can do for you. The boss doesn't forgive those things!"

They knocked him down onto the table after sweeping the dirty dishes covering it with their palms. Eagle leaned over the naked man, who was shaking with a sudden fever.

"Now, *bunny*... you're going to spill everything about your mates, the weapons... the plans... everything you know!

"I don't know anything," moaned Couquet.

"*Very well!*"

They grabbed their knives, snapped the automatic blades open with a sharp click, and began to slowly stab him along his legs, arms, face, anywhere the steel could sink in without immediately killing him. In a few minutes, his body was red with blood. Couquet told them everything he knew, which wasn't much. Águila asked the questions, Pablo las Heras wrote the whispered answers on a sheet of sturdy paper. The smell of fresh blood and faeces mingled with the smell of petrol, red wine, garlic and onion, which the guerrillas chewed with a piece of stale bread. At one point, someone called from the old pottery workshop:

"Pablo!"

Pablo las Heras left his work and went to meet the former *mère aubergiste*.

"He's not bleeding enough!" said Judith.

Then, in an ecstatic tone, she added:

"It needs to bleed a lot... a lot..."

Pablo las Heras went back into the room and closed the door behind him, while Judith kept watch, her eye glued to the gap between the loose boards.

Jordi Couquet stopped moaning. He had fainted, and tears were slowly drying on his face.

Then they cut his neck and wrists, and blood spurted out until it covered the long table with a

sumptuous red towel. Without regaining consciousness, he died at nine in the morning. While they waited for the end of the day, which would allow them to transport the body to the mountain and throw it into the well that usually received the bodies of the victims, two *maquisards* lifted him by his legs and armpits and carried him to the old furniture barn that a romantic *ajiste* had once bequeathed to Estève Caberol and which now lay broken by the fury of successive occupants. They placed Jordi Couquet under the panel that evoked the donor's intentions: "Unknown brother passing through this hostel, I leave you everything that made up the joy of my home. I offer you these books, companions of my solitude, to feed your dreams... Eat at my table, lie down on my bed, set off on long journeys. As a bourgeois friend of myths, I could put covers on my sofas. Good and beautiful things were made for the joy of all. Use what belongs to me, I will repay you with friendship, but do so with circumspection, other people will come after you!

André des Cévennes".



In the first half of April, the Montsegur *maquis* was very active. The guerrillas multiplied ambushes and destruction in the Corbières and around Pamiers. They operated in small groups and launched sure strikes after meticulous intelligence work. Instead of attacking the militia camp in the Basqui valley by force, they test its outer defences with raids and attempt to paralyse its supplies to force it to abandon the site.

Thus, in the early hours of the Sunday following Jordi Couquet's death, the patrol led by Guyot Peyrat, responsible for guarding the vicinity of the La Peyre gorge, came under fire from an invisible enemy hidden at the edge of the Embeyre forest. One militiaman was killed and Peyrat was hit in the arm by a submachine gun bullet. It was a complete surprise. The episode lasted ten seconds, after which

the birds began to sing again. The pink snow of dawn turned blue. There was no trace of the *maquisards*. They had returned to the talc mine that had sheltered them during the night thanks to the complicity of some of the mining staff.

"Do you consider this an attack or a courtesy visit?" Barbaïra asks Klingsor, leaning over Fabrègue's body, which has just been brought down from the mountain.

-An attack! admits the German.

"That releases us from our commitments!"

The two men walk away while the militiamen place the body in a box.

"My dear Barbaïra, you cannot attack the Montsegur *maquis* for one very simple reason... The main force established in the cave of La Frau requires the deployment of our mountain hunters, not a small troop of militiamen whose military experience, I regret to say, is negligible. The SD reports now speak of a 'very dangerous' *maquis* comparable to the Soviet *partisan* troops ¹! I don't want you to commit suicide with the boys!

Be patient and wait for the German army to deal with our neighbours, which should not take long!

Roger Barbaïra gives in once again and reinforces security measures. Instead of sending one vehicle three times a week to transport supplies, he mobilises two, including a heavily armed *Peugeot*, and makes only one trip. He no longer leaves only at night and on fixed days, but day and night, regardless of the day of the week...

The day after the ambush that just cost Fabrègue his life, he sets off for Quillan in broad daylight. The aim is to cross the La Frau gorges by surprise, bearing in mind the almost certain presence of the enemy, determined to block the two exits from the valley.

Nothing happens on the flat part of the track. The surviving *Citroën* "traction" reaches the top of the steep ramp that descends to the road and the *Peugeot* follows it fifty metres behind.

¹ Terrorists and saboteurs operating behind German army lines (Portuguese translator's note)

metres behind. Suddenly, a burst of gunfire shatters the silence. Ambushers in the bushes covering the lower slopes on both sides of the track aim at the car in front but miss... Tyres screech. Doors slam... The three militiamen inside jump out of the metal box, which this time failed to do its job... Barbaïra arrives like a hurricane in the *Peugeot* equipped with a German machine gun that is already devouring golden cartridge belts and thinks: "The *maquis* were expecting a patrol, not a convoy... Their device doesn't work against armed vehicles... This time we have a chance."

"Climb up! Climb up!" shouts Barbaïra... "Get the guys up there!" The militiamen climb the slopes, almost out of breath, and empty their weapon magazines at anything that moves or seems to move... The machine gun fires over their heads and cuts branches from the trees. The smell of gunpowder now mingles with the scent of resin, which seems to purify the air on this radiant spring morning. The firepower fills the gorges of La Frau with thunder. It is the insane din of a great battle, disproportionate to the number of troops present, but no one falls, neither on the side of the militia nor on the side of *the maquis*. The silhouettes of the guerrillas appear and disappear among the boxwood mounds, and as they gain height, among the trunks of the

first trees of the forest.

"Higher! Higher!" shouts Barbaïra... "If you let them climb, we'll achieve nothing!"

Ferrocas sees him running alongside him with the enormous Colt that the Militia had given him, shouting too:

"Quick! Quick! Surround those fools!"

Surprised by the unexpected reaction of a convoy and the firepower of the militiamen, the maquisards scramble away as best they can, each of them climbing, almost out of breath. They must reach the shelter of the great forest before they are caught, otherwise... Outnumbered and, it seems, less well armed than their adversaries, they lack the usual vigour of Spanish guerrillas.

"Let's catch them!" shouts Barbaïra.

But the first *maquisards* are already disappearing into the shadow of the cathedral of tall beech trees. Barbaïra and Ferrocas climb with the impetus of insatiable animals and suddenly find themselves ten metres away from two men whom the most advanced militiamen are repelling as they pass by. Ferrocas stops, rests his large-calibre *Colt* on his bent forearm, aims slowly to calm his racing heartbeat and fires... Barbaïra sees the silhouette thrown several metres backwards by the force of the impact, arms flailing like the blades of a windmill.

"You got him!" he shouts enthusiastically... "The other one! Don't let that pig get away! Take him alive!"

The militiamen surrounding him quickly fall on him. They cover him with a flurry of punches and throw him to the ground. The firing suddenly stops. The bulk of the *maquisards* disappear into the forest. An unbearable silence fills the ears of the militiamen who now control the area, with no casualties, the body of a dead enemy and a prisoner.

"Put him in the car!" orders Barbaïra.

The men, deafened by the rattling of automatic weapons and their own screams, can only hear the pounding in their temples. The blissful scent of fir and boxwood slowly masks the smell of gunpowder... Gradually, the world of sounds becomes perceptible... First, the birds... Then, the crickets announcing a hot day... Finally, the voice of *Centaine's* leader:

"Put him in the car!"

They lift the man up by kicking him in the back and shins. He still seems to be out of breath, his head uncovered, his clothes in tatters and his hands empty. He must have lost his submachine gun during his dash for the shelter that fate denied him. He is strong, broad-shouldered and incredibly bearded. Barbaïra looks at him curiously, as if he were a being who had just descended from the sky to take part in the aurochs festival, then his eyes widen and he lets out a cry:

"Shit! It's Robuffay!"

The echo replies:

"Shit! Barbaïra!"

Stunned, the *Centaine* chief drops the submachine gun. He bends down to pick it up, grabs it by the barrel, burns himself, and shouts "Shit!" again. Then he faces the prisoner and says in a sepulchral voice:

"All this because of a stupid game, truly a game for idiots!"

A feeling of discouragement extinguishes the remnants of his fighting fury. He clenches his fists until his nails dig into his flesh, bringing him soothing pain. He thinks intensely for a few seconds and devises a plan that seems appropriate for the situation. He says to Ferrocas, who is standing next to him with the revolver in his hand:

"I want to personally decide the fate of this prisoner. I suppose you recognised him!

"Yes, I did," Ferrocas confirms in a sombre voice.

"I won't do anything without your opinion and Peyrat's opinion. Then, turning to the militiamen:

"Two men on the machine gun... Two men on guard in a dominant position... The others, search the area. There are weapons to recover, perhaps some terrorists hiding, wounded or dead. Arrival at Aurochs-Platz at noon. *Dizaine* Ferrocas takes command and I take the prisoner.

He presses the barrel of the submachine gun into Robuffay's kidneys and pushes him towards the *Citroën*, which was hit by several bullets during the skirmish. He gets behind the wheel with the prisoner beside him. He starts the engine, begins to drive slowly in first gear and asks Robuffay:

"What about Jordi?"

"What about Jordi?" murmurs Robuffay in a low voice.

-You know very well, Jordi Couquet, the AJ's mate!

-I never saw him again. I knew he was serving in the Militia, like you, Peyrat and Ferrocas, but I never found him again. Nor did I find Chabrol, Reboul and Caberol.

-Oh? Are they also in the Montsegur *maquis*?

What a situation! Well, one of our cars was ambushed recently. Jordi and a German disappeared.

-I heard about that. A German who committed suicide and a *milico* killed in the old AJ.

Barbaïra nodded in agreement.

"I wasn't responsible for that," murmured Robuffay.

Barbaïra drove slower and slower as he approached Aurochs-Platz. The valley was less than three kilometres away, and he had little time left to solve the problem he had created for himself.

"I'm not responsible!" Robuffay repeated.

"I believe you, otherwise I'd have finished you off already!"

He was silent for a few seconds and then continued:

-You are going to do the following... You take my machine gun – in case you decide to play this game, I warn you now that it is empty – you hit me on the head with the butt – not too hard, of course – you jump out the door, I fall down the slope and pass out... But before that, swear on the heads of the martyrs of Montsegur that instead of returning to the cave of La Frau, you will go to Spain within the next twenty-four hours and that no one will see you in the region until the end of the war... Do you agree?

"No!" Robuffay replied angrily. "What you want is to eliminate me for good and steal the girl I love more than you!"

"In that case, move everything! As far as I'm concerned, I'm disappearing! Auda Isarn herself will decide your fate!"

He shifted into second gear, then third, and continued at normal speed towards Aurochs-Platz.



When Barbaïra presented his report at the end of the afternoon, the Obersturmführer commented:

"Bravo, comrade! Your militiamen reacted like lions! The final tally is two enemies neutralised, one killed by machine gun fire and another prisoner, four submachine guns and several pistols seized. I am not going to apologise for the mistake I made the other day when talking about the military virtues of the

militiamen—in the SS, apologies are not asked for—I will only say this: no unit of the German army would behave with more courage and determination in such an action. But... what's going on?

After a victory of this importance, you don't look satisfied!

Barbaira looked sombrely into the German's eyes and said quietly:

"The man we captured is one of our former comrades..."

"Oh, really? What an unpleasant situation! In any case, I think that no matter how strong and long-standing the bonds of comradeship may be, they are broken by certain attitudes. If, as I believe, you have a high regard for our mission, nothing can bind you to a man who enlisted in a crusade against the Grail!

"Exactly! According to all logic, he should be on my side, he!

-I don't understand!...

The Count of Miramont sighed.

-It's called Robuffay... In 1937, he was leading the

exploration of the Saint-Barthélemy cave on behalf of our friend Otto Rahn. Something went wrong and he nearly lost his life!

Klingsor was startled. He asked slowly:

"Is that what I was looking for in Minerva before I found you?"

"That's right. One of the two trusted Frenchmen recommended by Otto Rahn!

"Why didn't you tell me before? I would have looked for him, found him and convinced him to follow us!

"I'm not so sure about that, comrade Klingsor. Between 1939 and 1943, the cards changed hands several times. When you asked me point-blank about him, I thought I shouldn't tell you the whole truth!

"That seems fair.

Silence fell. Aurochs-Platz was back to normal, but the attentive footsteps of the militiamen bustling around the tents, the fragments of French songs that added smiles and jokes to the romantic echoes of the stream, testified to the joy that the men who had endured

the ordeal they had endured and were now mastering. Barbaïra envied such simplicity and decided to address the essential question.

"What happens if we hand Robuffay over to the SD?"

"Captured with weapons in hand and without the uniform of a country at war, as established by the Hague Convention on War signed simultaneously by France and Germany, he will undoubtedly be shot.

Barbaïra sighs. Klingsor scrapes a crushed flower stain off his clothes with his fingernail. Militia clothing that is part of his political disguise but which he rarely wears, preferring camouflage and the Order's death's head cap. Thus, on the night of the battle, he pays discreet homage to his protective gear.

His brow furrowed with worry and his gaze sombre, Barbaïra meditates. Klingsor respects this silence, guessing its meaning, and finally asks:

-What can I do for you, my dear madman? The Count of Miramont plucks up his courage and makes up his mind...

-Comrade Klingsor, outside of service, I never asked you for anything.

-That's true!

-Then, I will use up whatever credit I may have... I ask that you let me dispose of Robuffay's fate as I see fit.

The Obersturmführer does not respond immediately. With a frown and a stormy look in his eyes, he falls into deep thought... Barbaïra does not take her eyes off him and thinks: He's not going to fall for that! Ah, but Klingsor, make up your mind...

-What you are asking me, Barbaïra, is administratively inconceivable in times of war.

"I know that, but I renew the request on behalf of our friend Otto Rahn who, if he were alive, would remind you that Robuffay risked his life in search of the engraved stone tablets..."

"That's reasonable," murmured the German.

He let out a deep sigh, raised his head and, now with a clear conscience, using French words that seemed to have wings, said:

"When you see fit, let Robuffay escape. If he violated German... and French law of war, it was in the name of the higher law of the Aryans, forgetting that this man tried to stab his brothers in arms during an action undertaken precisely for their salvation... I want to believe that he did not know what he was doing! However, let it be clearly understood, Barbaïra, you assume full responsibility! If anything goes wrong, you will answer with your head in a military court in Toulouse?"

-I completely agree! However, that authorisation implies another: going to Toulouse and bringing back a militiaman to replace our motorcyclist Jordi Couquet and, at the same time, a woman.

Klingsor exclaims:

There we have Kundry entering the scene!

He puts his arm around the neck of the pure madman and says:

*Les maux don't tu gémis, Ces
deuils éteins-les
Au baume qu'amour vient t'offrir...*¹

-Kundry is currently *verboten*. Barbaïra blushes a little and replies.

-It's not what you think. I can't decide anything about Robuffay without her opinion.

-Bring her, then, even if it's against the rules! I hope she doesn't make anyone here forget the taste of aurochs skin!

He squeezed Barbaïra's two hands and entered the tent.



¹ The evils that afflict you
Those mournings extinguish
In the balm that love offers you...

Barbaïra passed through the La Frau gorges without incident. In his opinion, the *maquis* would not set up another ambush so soon after the lesson they had just received. He crossed them again the next day in a violent storm. Lightning lit up the mountainside, struck fir trees fell into the abyss, and the wind roared across the ridges. Black sky. Green rocks. Shrouds of fire. The limestone blocks that had fallen from the top of the cliffs looked like gravestones. Barbaïra navigated between the ancient and recent mausoleums with his usual precision. Sitting beside him, Auda Isarn watched the unleashing of the elemental forces without any emotion altering her facial features. Lou Ganet shouted to be heard above the apocalyptic roar that surrounded them.

Rejected by the thefts and other disturbances discovered within the *Chantiers de Jeunesse*, he left and went to work at the O.N.I.A., the gunpowder factory in Toulouse. Enrolled at the same time in the Faculty of Law, he continued his studies as much as his work schedule allowed. He had also just enlisted in the Militia.

"Why?" cried Barbaïra.

"To protect my parents. With all these attacks on militiamen, they need me. Can't you let him come to the camp when possible? I tremble when I lose contact with him!"

"We'll think about that later!"

They arrived at Aurochs-Platz under a grey rain that flooded the great medieval forest, but without incident. Auda Isarn stayed to learn all about the Robuffay case after the Count of Miramont took her to the tent reserved for the prisoner. He left her with him and said:

"You have one hour to resolve your problem!"

Then, to the militiaman standing guard outside, wrapped in a tent cloth:

"No one enters or leaves until I return!"

He arrived at the ruins of the Blanc estate, now transformed into a guard post thanks to the stones, beams and tiles that had been recovered

He summoned Ferrocas and Peyrat, the latter with his arm in a sling, to the same place and said to them:

"I have authorisation from the Obersturmführer to resolve the Robuffay issue as I see fit... We are militiamen and he is *a maquisard*, but we are all former *ajistes*. I want to respect as far as possible the spirit that was once common to us all, so I am asking for your advice before deciding anything.

Raymond Ferrocas gave him a sombre look, his forehead still marked by anger, and hissed through clenched lips:

"From what you tell me about him, I no longer know him. Hand him over to the Germans!"

"What would happen in that case?" asked Peyrat.

"He'll be shot!"

"He's a scoundrel, but we can't let him end up like that! Isn't there another solution?"

"I can get him into Spain, but that's what Auda is deciding right now.

"What if we took him with us to the caves? He's a good speleologist!" suggested Peyrat.

"In that case, I'm giving up everything!" murmured Ferrocas. What has been separated must not be reunited. It is written in the Bible.

Barbaïra raised his head.

"In any case, the Obersturmführer would not accept that solution!"

"Then what?"

"We have to wait. Auda is deciding between me and him, as he himself requested!"

The storm raged. Lightning crowned Aurochs-Platz with fire. The tent cloths flapped in the wind with the viscous malleability of fins. The rain swept across the horizon and sounded like drums on the broken tiles of the post. The smell of the sea stuck in their throats.

"If Auda refuses to choose between one or the other, what will you decide?" asked Ferrocas.

Roger Barbaïra was sitting on the sentries' rustic bench. He put his head in his hands, his nails digging into his short brown hair. He replied in a hoarse voice:

"Ah, it's terrible, old man! I should have let things slide without taking responsibility... Come on, give me an idea, suggest anything!"

Raymond Ferrocas shrugged.

"It all seems too clear and biblically simple to me. Robuffay gambled and lost. What would happen if the *maquis* got their hands on us? They'd send us to the forest and no one would see anything wrong with that! We're at war, Barbaïra! War knows only one law: an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth!"

Barbaïra sighed and turned to Peyrat.

"And you, old man, what do you think?"

"I think we can prevent them from killing Robuffay! He's a Languedoc independence activist, and you know very well that there aren't many of us!"

Overwhelmed, the Count of Miramont hid his eyes in his hands.



An hour had passed when she returned to the prisoner's tent. Sitting on a militiaman's bench, her back whipped by the wet fabric, Auda Isarn was shivering with cold. Barbaïra attempted a smile and said to her:

"It's a frankly uncomfortable position for even the most Cathar of Toulouse women!"

Auda Isarn replied impassively:

"Luxury does not suit those who preach the independence of the country and the renunciation of evil."

Robuffay remained facing her and pretended not to recognise the man who had just entered.

"Auda," he insisted, "did I or did I not have the right to assume that you loved me for myself and not for the cause I served?"

Auda shrugged her shoulders.

"I did nothing to confirm your assumption!"

Anger stirred once more in that violent and uncompromising man.

"That's not true!" he shouted. "Your eyes! The promises in your eyes!"

"I am not responsible for the look in my eyes when my soul puts nothing special into them."

Barbaïra gazed into those eyes and felt herself melt gently. They were truly extraordinary eyes, seemingly endowed with special powers in the name of the little hell that burned within them. They united in a double flash all the perfections scattered around her: her soft, matte face polished with the delicacy of Far Eastern ivory, her slender and harmonious body, her legs that spoke for themselves, now hidden but well known to all the ancient *ajists*, her aristocratic hands painted by Leonardo da Vinci. In the presence of such a woman, any real man felt the need to rape and pray. The Count of Miramont understood Robuffay's anguish well and asked through his own anguish: in the end, it was not him she chose!

The green light filtered through the tarpaulins gave the prisoner's face a deathly pallor.

"I have the right to assume," he said forcefully, "that the saint who protects our struggle for independence will choose the strongest and most sincere of her fighters!"

Auda Isarn shrugged her shoulders again.

"As always, my poor Robuffay, you mix the sacred and the profane! Long ago, I freely chose between God, who made heaven, not earth, and men, whom I can only choose under duress and coercion!"

"That's the case today, Auda! If you love me even a little, I'll go with you to Spain and I'll be safe, otherwise..."

He turned to Barbaïra as if recognising him only then and added:

"Otherwise, this scoundrel will have the Krauts kill me!"

Auda Isarn shuddered as if awakened to the harsh reality of the moment. Her gaze lost some of its intensity and gained a certain sweetness. Everything seemed to calm down in her. She murmured:

"It is true that the Spirit has mercy on rebellious angels... My poor Robuffay, I will go with you to Spain, but I

warn you that you will have neither bed nor marriage from me. I'll leave you alone, just be sure of that!

"To meet this scoundrel again, of course!"

As a smile spread across her face, Auda turned to Barbaïra and announced in a melting voice, without letting the sparkle in her eyes fade:

"I must tell you honestly, Robuffay, that if I ever sleep with a man, it will be with him. But I will not marry, he knows that! I do not want to wall myself up in a prison of flesh. But it matters little because, in any case, I was not made for happiness in this world..."

Robuffay cringed like a soldier hit by a bullet in the stomach and stammered:

"She's mad... Completely mad..."

Despite this, silence remained between them. The rain was now falling less heavily on the roof of the tent. The storm was moving away and the lightning only illuminated the ground in the form of large red flags. A noise of footsteps and voices preceded the arrival of the team in charge of handing over the posts. The militiaman who was guarding the tent gave instructions and moved away. The song of the torrent took over Aurochs-Platz in successive waves. The day was coming to an end. From green to yellow, the light falling on them turned blue and then mauve. Twilight smelled of wet earth. At the end of a long moment, Barbaïra asked quietly:

"So? What have you decided? Are you going to Spain with her?"

"No!" cried Robuffay in a tone of someone emerging from a long nightmare. "Never! I don't want pity, Auda! Since you have nothing more to offer, it's decided!"

Auda Isarn rose slowly, sadly, smoothed her hair, which had been tousled by the flapping of the tent canvas, and said in an impersonal tone that made her seem somewhat detached from life:

"Once you have chosen evil, there is nothing I can do for you. War is a man's business."

Then, in a louder voice:

"And I am not a gamble!"

She stormed out of the shop. Barbaïra followed her without looking back.



He allowed himself twenty-four hours of additional reflection and set off for the mountain. He walked all day from the search area to the summit of Saint-Barthélemy. Then he descended to the cave explored in 1937 and 1943, and finally, wrapped in old memories, he rested for a long time by the opening. It was there that he had first given the order to save Robuffay, and Auda Isarn had obeyed.

When he returned to Aurochs-Platz in the evening, exhausted but calm, he felt morally strong and resolute. After the evening report, he said to the Obersturmführer:

"Comrade Klingsor, you can send a message to the SD, but the gentlemen will have to take the trouble to come and fetch the prisoner... None of my militiamen are available!

"I understand," murmured the German, lowering his head.

Barbaïra opened a folder and took out a stack of papers. He placed them on the table and numbered them under the SS officer's gaze.

"Here are my master plans of the Tabe massif, on which I have marked the openings of the caves currently known. There are certainly others that can be discovered without my presence.

It's a matter of intuition and luck!

The SS officer was startled:

"What? Are you leaving us, Barbaïra? The Count of Miramont smiled.

"With your permission. I don't think you will refuse me that permission. I am going to enlist in the combat SS ¹.

¹ That is, in the Waffen-SS, a group of military formations that should not be confused with the Allgemeine SS or with the special repression units. After long including them in the same indictment alongside all branches of the SS, and despite the fact that they were not prosecuted in the conclusions of the Nuremberg trials, the victorious powers of World War II changed their decision and dissociated the Waffen-SS from the political units prosecuted for "war crimes".

Klingsor closed his eyes and remained rigid as a statue for several minutes. Then the blood returned to his face and a smile lit up his lips. He fixed the man in front of him with a benevolent gaze animated by small flashes of irony and hummed: *Höchsten Heiles Wunder!... Erlösung dem Erlöser...*

And he translated his thoughts:

Is this then the hour of the redeeming Grail, Barbaïra, my dear madman and pure one?

"In a way, yes... The Count of Miramont, head of the Militia Centuria, cannot hand over a fighter for Languedoc independence to German military security, even knowing him to be guilty of treason against the higher ranks of the Grail... A true SS officer would not have stumbled upon this problem of conscience, which will not arise again from now on!

"I understand," murmured the Obersturmführer again, lowering his head.

Aurochs-Platz sleeps. The spring night blows an intoxicating breath of warm flowers, wet grass and the dead perfumes of prehistoric forest humus into the tents. At the height of its power, the torrent enlivens the choruses of ancient tragedies that have fallen into oblivion. The night ^{birds} respond little by little, offering their clairvoyance to the militiamen charged with guarding the forbidden valley.

"I am no saint," added Barbaïra, "but I can sleep peacefully because it was the woman I love, a prisoner of her own deep nature, who led my comrade to condemn himself... If I leave you, comrade, it is for a powerful reason. I claim a place of command in the homeland of my ancestors. History has never given a kingdom to those who were content

In federal Germany, former Waffen-SS combatants tend to be considered on an equal footing with former Wehrmacht soldiers. And it could not be otherwise, considering that after the assassination attempt of 20 July 1944, Hitler transferred the best units of the regular army to the SS without the soldiers or officers being able to raise any objections to this transfer.

¹ Owls, barn owls, bats (Translator's note)

with making demands!... He only grants favours to ambitious men. I'm not going to try to prove myself wrong after I've convinced myself, am I?

-Of course not!

-To be the Simon de Montfort of my era, there is no better school than the combat SS! It is an opportunity to enter a system that represents both the religion of the race, in which I believe, and a temporary conquering special force.

Under these conditions, how can I hesitate?

"I don't disapprove in any way," murmured Klingsor, I'm just going to miss you!

He smiled and added:

"Roger Barbaïra, Count *Faydit* de Miramont, Obersturmführer of the Waffen-SS, here is a title laden with lightning and storms that possesses the magical power to redeem ancient defeats with modern victories!

Barbaïra agreed with a nod.

"That is indeed how I interpret the notion of redemption that you throw at me like a reproach. My kingdom is of this world, comrade Klingsor!

"Mine too!"

They fell silent and leaned over Tabe's master plans. For over an hour, Klingsor asked for detailed explanations about the location of the entrance to each of the caves discovered by the *ajists*, access routes and existing landmarks. He took notes and raised his head from time to time to look at Barbaïra with the light of warm friendship in his eyes, which were occasionally clouded by a veil of sadness. As time passed, he became less interested in the work and eventually closed the files.

"Dear Barbaïra, given the balance of forces on the Eastern Front, do you know what your chances of survival are if you join the Waffen-SS? One in five, at best!

"Are risk and sacrifice of life not the only redemption to which an ambitious man can aspire?

"Of course they are.

-Dead or victorious, can an SS officer receive absolution from history?

-I have no doubt about that. Unfortunately, there is one possibility you have not yet considered: returning alive but defeated! You will be thrown to the mob because you will represent the ideal heretic for Christian Democrats and Russian Marxists, the Cathar of an era that, like all others, needs bonfires! He will be burned in a square in Carcassonne or in the Seguelà gorge... and the history of the Counts of Miramont will end as it began!

Barbaïra frowned and did not reply. He began to draw castles on the paper in front of him, then tanks, blunderbusses and Merovingian swords. Barbaïra may have sung out of tune, but he was a very good artist. After a while, he raised his head, looked Klingsor firmly in the eye and asked:

"And you?"

"Me what?"

"Alive and defeated, what would you do?" The SS officer raised his head.

"My problem is somewhat different from yours, Barbaïra. If Germany loses the war without us finding the stone tablets of the Grail..."

- He opened the collar of his shirt, took out a gold chain and produced a small tube made of the same metal, which he secured with his fingers and showed us:

"Inside here is a vial of cyanide that will solve all problems in less than a minute."

He put it back inside his shirt and suggested:

"I can get one for you."

"I appreciate it, but I have faith in my lucky star.

Even if I had to climb the pyre at Montsegur, I know that a miracle would save me body and soul!

The Obersturmführer stood up.

"I admire and envy you, Barbaïra. You don't carry the anxiety that both nourishes and constrains German men in their eternal becoming! Do you renounce France? But she gave you a comfortable historical situation, that somewhat insolent security

that we do not have! It should be France and not Germany that engraves *Got mit uns* on the soldiers' belts ¹.

"God does not love the poor!" said Barbaïra, putting his arm around his comrade's.

"Let us hear the oracle of our magical stream," suggested Klingsor as he left the tent... "It will tell us whether he will return victorious or defeated from the Eastern Front!"

"And about the lost or rediscovered Grail?" added the Count of Miramont as they both plunged into the night.



The night tinges the sky over Toulouse with pastel pink. The river, now low on water, carries the scent of perfume along its banks. The dusty plane trees wait for a liberating breeze that never comes. The city suffocates. The private residences of the former *capitouls* defend for their own benefit the remnants of coolness that are part of the structural privileges that no regime can abolish. The militiamen on Bayard Street leave their offices and go home, occasionally glancing back to see who is following them. Patrols of German cyclists with *Mausers* on their backs and helmets perched on the greying hair of territorials called up for active service pass through Matabiau station, resignedly pushing their machines. The wooden soles of a girl fleeing some imprudent encounter beat the pavement along the dead façades. An unidentified aeroplane wanders in the depths of the sky.

In a black market restaurant hidden from view by thick tapestries, Roger Barbaïra offers a young nurse a modest feast of war and farewell. Auda Isarn is livelier than usual. With wine from

¹ German army belt buckle (excluding Waffen-SS). Its literal translation would be 'God with us', although a more accurate translation, reflecting its true meaning, would be 'God in us' (Translator's note).

Carbières and *cassoulet*¹, it would be no surprise. The Count of Miramont advises with a smile:

'A little more cassoulet... and a little of this wine... Neither of them talks about the war, they only remember the time in the shelters... Do you remember this?... Do you remember that?... The caves... The bike rides... *Au-devant de la Vie*... Judith... By the way, what ever happened to that witch who cut lizards in half?... Estève Caberol, the king of the fleshy ones... The skiing trips on primitive ash boards...

A police patrol passes by... "Inhabitants of Toulouse... go home... it's time to turn in..." The original fear takes its steps, lurking at every crossroads but letting lovers pass.

Roger Barbaïra and Auda Isarn walk slowly along the river. It's a damp night. They don't fight against the misunderstanding in the upper reaches of the city of Carcassonne as they did before, when they walked briskly to put distance between themselves and the lovers... They walk at the same pace as the other couples. Roger puts his arm around Auda's waist, and she doesn't resist, leaning more and more on his shoulder. He asks:

"So? Are you leaving for Paris tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow, yes."

"Have you ever set foot in an SS office?"

"No, never."

Auda Isarn lives in a furnished room in an old house on the Tounis quay. She takes a key out of her bag and opens the door; then she takes her companion's hand to guide him through the absolute darkness that contrasts sharply with the silvery night on the riverbank.

The harsh light of the electricity dazzles them as they enter the room. It is a high-ceilinged room with two square windows overlooking the pier. Barbaïra discovers for the first time the elegant order that moderation can preserve from frivolity... A bed, a wardrobe, a dressing table and a sofa covered with cushions the colour of dry leaves. Books in

¹ Bean stew with duck, lamb, pork, etc., typical of Provence (Portuguese translator's note).

a shelf... a Bible with a bookmark in the Gospel of St John. He asks his companion:

"What a magnificent Bible! Where did you buy it?"

It was truly a rare, antique and dignified edition, bound in leather and decorated with monograms.

"It belonged to my mother.

-From what I can see, you read the Gospel of St. John a lot?

-Yes, many times.

-Interesting. There you will find everything a man should not respect or believe...

She shakes her head.

"No. It contains the whole truth. One day I'll teach you how to read it properly!"

She speaks without much conviction because she knows his feelings well. Barbaïra closes the Bible and sinks into an armchair. Auda makes him a cup of coffee on the electric stove. As he drinks it, she gazes at him with her magnificent black eyes. Barbaïra fidgets, defending himself against the waves of heat that make his face flush.

"So, are you sure you're going?" murmurs Auda in a tone of deep melancholy.

"I'm going."

They remain motionless, facing each other, their hands folded on their knees.

"And when are you coming back to Toulouse?"

-I don't know. Maybe I won't come back. Auda Isarn raises her head.

-I know... you're going to suffer a lot. It's fair, because you chose evil, but you'll come back and we'll meet again... Where? When? I don't know yet, maybe I'll be able to tell you tomorrow.



Barbaïra lit a cigarette, stood up and began to pace around the room. Auda followed him with her eyes and seemed to be thinking. After a few moments, she said in that voice that always impressed men's hearts:

"Oh, my poor Roger, how easily I can read you! Despite your usual optimism, you are leaving with the idea that you may die. If you believed in the Spirit, which is the first emanation of the true God, you would not leave without asking for the Consolamentum from those who can still grant it to you..."

She stopped abruptly, as if she had reached the threshold of a forbidden frontier, then smiled and continued in a low voice:

"I can give you the consolation that befits your lack of faith, but which you deserve for your constancy. I don't think you will refuse it..."

She stood up at that very moment, unbuttoned her dress, which slid down her legs until it fell like a corolla around her ankles, threw off her bra and knickers with the utmost naturalness, and appeared naked like a bronze idol caressed by the light of the oil lamp on the bedside table. More wary of the initiative than of the revelation of an admirable body he knew almost entirely, Barbaïra let out a deep groan like an animal possessed by desire. He put his hands on her hips, lifted her up, threw her on the bed and lay on top of her. He cried out hoarsely when the supreme moment contracted his kidneys.

Auda remained lucid and repeated softly:

"Roger... Roger... What will my neighbours say?"

When he opened his eyes again an hour later, he found the young woman's eyes staring at him, but he did not discover the special spark he was looking for.

He caressed her again at length, modelling her form with the hands of a sculptor passionate about his model, seeking the most suitable style for her transfiguration. He possessed her again, but this time with the violence of a man of prey. As he felt the pleasure increase, he watched his companion's eyes, waiting for the announcement of the sublime moment that was slow to reveal itself and did not reveal itself. Auda did not spare any tenderness, caressing his lover's chest and kidneys with his long Botticellian hands, but she did not share in the delirium of the revealed god.

A third embrace at dawn confirmed the existence of a desert stretching between them that grew continuously

as Barbaïra tried to cross it. He thought: I failed!... And it will continue like this until I make her let out that cry of women reconciled with what nature wants them to be! But I will not give up. And he said aloud:

"Auda, my dear, I will make you enjoy yourself, or I will not call myself Barbaïra!"

It was too late or too early to try a new experience. The train to Paris was leaving in two hours. The great June sun, already fierce, broke through the window shutters. A golden light illuminated the room. Auda slept naked in the rumpled bed. Barbaïra leaned over her and gazed at her. He felt his heart beat faster and his senses were aroused once again. He made an effort to calm himself, aided by an observation.

Auda's sleep was no ordinary sleep. It was as unusual as her gaze. She slept in pursuit of a second path, her body agitated, tremors shaking her soft flesh, so sweet to the touch of his hands... From her trembling lips escaped from time to time sounds that were incoherent to an ear uninitiated in that language and, at other times, words, clear phrases, which seemed to be articulated according to the point of view of Sirius.

Barbaïra remained bent over his lover for a long time, trying to uncover a secret whose existence he sensed. Then he felt a chill... Auda Isarn said:

"... Lou Ganet and Ferrocas are going to die at the stake in Carcassonne... The heretic who has returned from the dead is going to Montsegur... He will set up camp beyond the Trébuchet pass... in the boxwood area, where the stone balls are... The Perfect Ones are going to help him believe in the Spirit and join them..."

Roger Barbaïra stood up, put on his clothes without touching Auda Isarn's body, as if a sacred terror held him back, and headed for the door. He paused for a second in the doorway, his eyes filled with tears, blew a kiss in the direction of his disturbing lover, and disappeared after closing the door behind him.

In early July 1944, François Soeuillard conveyed important news to the Montsegur *maquis*. Upon leaving the council of chiefs, Marius Chabrol told his comrades:

"The Gestapo has just shot Robuffay!"

After a few seconds of stunned silence, Gaston Reboul murmured with tears in his eyes:

"Miserable wretches! They killed an innocent man who was fighting for a country that only wanted freedom!"

The former *innkeeper* gave him a sombre look and remembered that...

"A man thinks he is fighting for his country and dies for industrialists! You know that, don't you?"

Reboul lowered his head and wiped away his tears. Everyone fell silent. The cerulean blue sky weighed heavily on their shoulders. The forest exuded warm resin. The birds sang the glory of summer in a light tone and the Lasset torrent in a grave tone. The last remnants of snow gave the peaks of Soularac and Saint Barthélemy the appearance of faces whose make-up was crumbling away, revealing only devastation. The world surrounding the *maquisards* reveals itself to be both old and rich in youthful energy, but Robuffay's death dampens the joy that the former *ajistes* could draw from the triumphant summer and a victory they are already beginning to savour.

"He will be avenged!" Marius Chabrol assures them, "but while we wait, we have to pack our bags. Soeuillard brings bad news. The Boches are going to attack with shock troops!"

True to their tactics, the guerrillas and communists refuse to fight. El Madriles and Alberto Gutiérrez divide the *maquis* into small groups. Some take refuge in the La Lauze gorge, others in the talc mine behind the La Peyre gorge, and the anarchists settled in the former *Au-devant de la Vie* youth hostel join the *Picaussel* *maquis*.

The operation is successful, but only just. On 9 July, a strong German column composed of intervention troops and mountain hunters leaves Foix heading east. Shortly afterwards, it splits up. One part progresses along the Roquifixade road, the other via Saint-Paul-de-Jarrat, Freychenet and Montferrier. The first column approaches the youth hostel and finds it empty. Pressed for time and desperate for transport, the Germans are unable to carry away the enormous spoils they discover and content themselves with setting fire to the farmhouse and its outbuildings. Fuelled by the thousands of litres of petrol stored in the bedroom and the old stable, the fire completely destroys the building, to the point where it is impossible to identify it after the war.

The second column arrived in Montferrier, which had been abandoned by its inhabitants, who had fled to the mountains to support the Montsegur *maquis* and escape the expected reprisals. The Germans even found a wedding banquet prepared in a large marquee! They took the place of the happy couple and feasted until late afternoon, missing their last chance to attack the cave of La Frau, whose evacuation had not yet been completed.

When they appeared in the Seguelà gorge on the morning of 10 July, the inhabitants of Montsegur were barricaded in their houses. Little Soeuillard, the *maquis* liaison officer, descended from La Frau to the village to reach his parents' house and was spotted in a field on the other side of the Lasset. He lost his cool and ostentatiously attempted to flee instead of assuming the role of a farmer bent over his field. The mountain hunters saw him and naturally opened fire. Hit in the back, Soeuillard fell dead next to the sloping rock formation where he was going to hide ¹.

The hunters then climb up the Lasset gorges. One section enters the forest to attack the cave and finds it empty of occupants. The other enters the hay barns scattered along the stream and sets them on fire one after the other. The

¹ In 1967, we had to literally clear the ground to reach that spot. Soeuillard's parents left Montsegur before the war, and the plaque commemorating their son's sacrifice is completely hidden by vegetation.

Flames crackle and dance in the cool morning air, sending columns of golden sparks into the sky. Smoke rolls between the banks of the stream. The mountain echoes with guttural commands and bursts of fire which, apart from the unfortunate Soeuillard, only strike down ghosts created by the play of light in the tangle of black fir trees. The wind blows emanations of gunpowder, hay and burnt wood. The birds do not sing. The animals are hidden in their shelters. The sun disappears.

Estève Caberol too. He had left the cave the day before, before nightfall... Last of all! Was it to mark his opposition to the tactics of his Spanish friends, to the constant flight that reminded him of the enlistment of May 1940 and deprived him of the fight of his life? And also because of his deep-seated nature, which led him to go against all orders dictated from outside? No one knows, and no one will ever know.

From the investigation carried out later by Marius Chabrol, it appears that the former *innkeeper* left La Frau before the Germans arrived. Tired, perhaps, driven by a fundamental desire for opposition and playing with his destiny at a decisive moment, he spent the night lying in the hay of one of the farms scattered across the Lasset plateau. Surprised by the arrival of the Germans, even if he had woken up early, he did not manage to escape in time. Most likely, the fire woke him from his dream in which the 'human person' triumphed, and the combustion of the haystacks immediately suffocated him without causing him too much suffering.

Neither the inhabitants of Montsegur nor the former *members of the maquis*, who arrived weeks later, were able to locate his remains in the seven or eight farmhouses that had been burned and obstructed by piles of beams, broken tiles and ashes. Thus, as Auda Isarn had announced on 3 September 1939, Estève Caberol ended up in the flames near Montsegur.



Obersturmführer Klingsor's convoy had special protection to get from Carcassonne to Germany. However, lacking

However, lacking equipment and fuel, the Third Reich's armoured army provided him with two machine-gun vehicles and a platoon of combat motorcyclists. He travelled only at night. A section of the SD, well informed about the movements of *the maquis*, facilitated his journey.

Upon arriving in Carcassonne, Klingor gathered the militiamen who had ensured his protection for two seasons and said to them:

"Those who wish to do so may come with me to Germany. You will be considered members of the Wehrmacht and, if necessary, naturalised as Germans."

An uneasy and unbearable silence greeted his proposal. He then called each of the men aside and said to Ferrocas:

"France is going to have a major nervous breakdown after the departure of our troops! Terrible things are going to happen!"

"I don't think so," replied Ferrocas. "France is a Christian country and, at the same time, faithful to Roman law... Parents ¹, justices of the peace and notaries must regulate political disputes properly!"

Klingsor raised his arms to the sky.

"How naive, Ferrocas! Your country experienced four years of hunger and fear, which is enough to reveal the volcanic forces of primitive man! Thousands of years of Christian preaching will count for less than nothing when 'the beast that rises from the abyss' is revealed in every man... German discipline will exorcise it for a few more days, but that's the end. The Wehrmacht is retreating. All those who extended a hand to them, however small, will be massacred!

And he continued to defend them warmly:

"I hold you in high esteem, Ferrocas, as well as your comrades. I want to save everyone, but it is impossible if you do not stay by my side until the end!

"Bah!" muttered Ferrocas, "I know my homeland, Languedoc, well. It has many hiding places and friendly houses. My *Camisard* ancestors resisted perfectly with the support of the Cévennes region.

¹ Fathers in the sense of spiritual fathers, fathers of the homeland, etc.

The city of Carcassonne gradually cut its towers into the early morning sky. Parked on the Narbonne road opposite the prison, the convoy prepared to resume its journey eastwards. Some drivers checked their engines. The machine gunners in the armoured vehicles checked the cartridge belts tucked into the butts of their rifles. Motorcyclists sheltered in large green raincoats dozed half-lying on their machines. The German sentry posted in front of the prison by the good offices of the Kommandatur, legs apart, rifle slung over his left shoulder, seemed to have turned into a pillar of salt. The pale sky was surreptitiously taking on the pink colour of peach trees. In the distance, in the lower part of the town, a dog howled. Klingsor insisted:

"Ferrocas, do you expect to come and take the still warm place of the *maquisards*? It's a dream! Our enemies – who are also yours, whatever you do now – are going to set in motion the most gigantic police apparatus the world has ever known. You will be as fiercely persecuted as the Cathars after the fall of Montsegur and Quéribus. The police dogs will drag you out of your caves as they did in the days of the Inquisition. Because it is an Inquisition that will pursue to the depths of your conscience the sin of collaboration with Germany, that is, adherence to the new religion of the race that Germany opposes to Judaism, Christian or otherwise. I say and I repeat: you cannot escape the inquisitors! Everyone saw what happened in Italy after the evacuation of Rome!

He fell silent. Guyot Peyrat and Lou Ganet had slowly approached. They now formed a group whose silhouettes became more bluish or greyish as the day grew brighter. The Obersturmführer leaned towards Lou Ganet.

"I was telling Ferrocas," Klingsor continued, "that they're walking into the lion's den!

"Exactly," replied the young man, "in case of danger, I want to be close to my father! He is more threatened than I am. There will be two of us, so we will be better able to withstand the onslaught!

"And you, Peyrat? Why don't you come with me to Germany?
As a writer in the langue d'Oc, your future is guaranteed

in any case among us! Do you know how far we have got with our studies on Romania? ... And the great esteem we have for the Occitan past? Whether we win or lose the war, the Reich will give you a place that you will never have here!

"I'll think about it!" replied Guyot Peyrat with a smile... For now, I can only give you a stupid answer, that of Danton: You don't carry your homeland – and even less so a small homeland – on the soles of your boots!

He looked at his own boots, laughed heartily and added:

-Especially when they're worn out like mine! I'm going to ask the Militia for a new pair of boots.

Klingsor shook his head with a melancholy gesture.

"You'll find excellent footwear in the torture chambers they're preparing for you, my dear Peyrat!

He checked his wristwatch and announced:

"It's time! Let's walk a little further, as I have to shelter the caravan during the day. Dive-bombing attacks are becoming increasingly dangerous."

The Obersturmführer's face was visibly darkened by shadows. He looked at Ferrocas, grabbed him by the arm in the name of the particular esteem he seemed to hold for him, and pushed him aside.

"One last argument in favour of your withdrawal to Germany... Only the faithful of the 'last square' of our resistance are called upon to survive, which is the resistance of the superior races to the global subversion that threatens them. Destiny will choose between us and the 'grey world' announced by your brilliant Count de Gobineau. I must tell the whole truth. The conventional war we have been waging for five years is lost, of course. We will quickly move from a state of revolutionary war to the use of secret weapons. Do you know what we mean when we talk today about secret weapons and that success depends only on the time we have left to discover how to use them?"

They came and went along the caravan, which stood like a green and grey snake. Klingsor returned to the city of Carcassonne with his beautiful girl's face marked by fatigue and worry. Dilated by the prismatic effect of the morning mist

, the rising sun stood on the horizon like a blood-red host, brightening their rosy cheeks and revealing the sky-blue of their pupils. Ferrocas discovered in them the small, disturbing flame of bad days and said:

"I am sensitive to your arguments, Obersturmführer. The grandeur of your struggle is not lost on me, but you must bear in mind that I am a man of faith. I offered my faith to Marshal Pétain on the day he promised to restore, throughout France, from Savoy to Brittany, passing through the Basque Country and Occitania, the historical personality of our flesh-and-blood homelands... I remain at the disposal of Marshal Pétain, Obersturmführer Klingsor!

The German bowed.

"I still have one question... Do you feel capable, even under prolonged torture, of not revealing anything about what we are looking for in Sabarthés? Of all the militiamen, only you know the essentials...

"Even if all the devils in the world tortured me, I would not say a word!"

"Very well!" said the German in a grave voice. "One must have the highest opinion of your character to believe in the value of such a commitment. But I believe, despite the unpredictable effects of torture and the weakness of the flesh that can belie the strength of the soul!

He extended his arm towards the assistant who commanded the armoured vehicles, standing upright on the turret with headphones on his ears, who never took his eyes off him. Ferrocas raised his head, intrigued by the SS officer's attitude, and noticed that the machine guns were following with barely perceptible movements the comings and goings of the militiamen who were circulating on the road and arguing or nibbling on Wehrmacht combat rations. He felt a chill, and Klingsor gave him a smile as sharp as the edge of a sword.

"I can tell you now, Comrade Ferrocas... According to the instructions I received, I had to enlist in the SS all those who knew too much about our investigations... When in doubt, I was not to leave anyone behind... That being the case..."

"That being the case...?"

"Now, I had to kill right here those who want or cannot follow the caravan and who know! That is, a certain Ferrocas!

They walked in silence for a few moments, and Ferrocas finally said:

"I understand perfectly."

The Obersturmführer relaxed and risked a smile.

When the leaders of the Albigensian Crusade asked the papal legate, Arnaud-Amaury, whether or not they should slaughter the inhabitants of Béziers who had taken refuge in the city's churches, he replied: "Kill them all. God will recognise his own!" Historically, this may be false, but it is... psychologically true! The religion of the race is an enlightening religion based on scientific assumptions! It is not God, but we, SS priors, who choose who should live and who should die, and therefore I have the right to correct the exaggeration of the instructions given by a certain Germanism that has already caused us so much harm! So, instead of forcing or executing Ferrocas, I decided to leave him with a mission on earth, knowing that his Lutheran rigour had already made him one of us! That's all!

He extended his hand to the militiaman, who shook it firmly. The armoured vehicles' machine guns returned to their resting position. The Obersturmführer checked his wristwatch again, took a whistle out of his bag and put it to his lips. With their usual discipline, the German personnel in the convoy took up positions on the road. The motorcycles began to spit out small flames and bursts of blue gas.

Klingsor gathered the militiamen around him again and said:

"French comrades, we are going to part ways... I leave you with sorrow because you have shown that your honour, like ours, is called loyalty! I propose that we sing together an old song of the Scottish knights that the Freemasons transformed into a Boy Scout chorus and that you all know..."

And he sang:

It's not goodbye...

It's just see you later, brothers,

The German sentry in front of the prison seemed to lose his regulation rigidity when he heard the Obersturmführer of the black SS singing along with the "degenerate" Frenchmen.

We will see each other again, brothers...

And when he finally smiled after Klingsor took to his heels, Ferrocas realised that that smile was shaking Germany to its foundations and that more than one page of history had been turned!



On 14 August, Lou Ganet was in Montpellier as a "guard of honour" for the Militia. And he thought: "Except for honour, all is lost!" The exodus had begun. The Militia of the south-west could no longer hold the positions set by the government's security forces. Lou Ganet went home, hugged his mother, and set off with a caravan to the east, but he did not get beyond Montpellier, where the Militia split between the Rhône valley and Persignan. He turned back and returned to Carcassonne in the company of his father and Raymonf Ferrocas, Jacques Pannier and Petitpé. On the night of 20 August or the following night, they were all arrested.

Due to a lack of authority and experience, Guyot Peyrat is unable to get the nearly 1,000 armed militiamen gathered in Persignan to form a shock troop and open a passage to the Spanish border. He reminds them that the Count of Toulouse voluntarily allied himself with the King of Aragon in the 12th century to fight the French and liberate Occitania... Why not Franco now?

Except that the local militiamen do not feel like Languedoc nationalists but rather Pétainist Frenchmen, and one of them

slaps him! Peyrat sets off alone and unarmed in search of a better opportunity, but is captured by a *maquis* near Cerbère.

They take him by truck to the department headquarters. The population of Persignan, excited, takes to the streets. French flags and red flags. Red sun. Red wine. Some cry, others laugh. Faces of ecstasy and faces of hysteria. The truck drives around the city. Red tomatoes! The prisoners taste the juice of the tomatoes thrown by the mob that howls for death and shoots in the sun. Submachine guns multiply the "king's shot" in the sun, for the Germans left long ago and an old humanism implanted in those parts with the first Greek colonies forbids shooting prisoners who are bound to the triumph of an anonymous Caesar.

A terrible anguish oppresses Guyot Peyrat. He feels lost and inwardly regrets his naivety. What can he do in that militia group? Why didn't he follow Obersturmführer Klingsor?

The truck transporting him finally stops in front of the citadel. The *tricoteuses* on duty ¹wield their needles with sombre patriotic fury. The improvised guards – mostly young men – make the prisoners get out, line them up facing the wall, stand behind them and rattle their rifle butts. Agitated by a feeling of boundless despair, Peyrat thinks: they won't even let me write one last poem, like André Chenier... For charity's sake, give me an hour, in the name of the poetry of the langue d'Oc!... Permission granted. The guards do not shoot, they laugh heartily. Always the old humanism of the first Greek cities...

They put us in a cellar, one of the citadel's "lion pits". A faint twilight allows them to find their way around, but not to read or write. Guyot Peyrat hesitates between 150 straw mattresses, most of which are occupied. He collapses onto a free cot and falls asleep, leaving the writing of his message to future liberated Languedoc generations for later.

¹ Allusion to the women who went expressly to the Place de la Concorde to watch the guillotine executions and knitted while they waited for the executions (Portuguese translator's note).

He wakes up after an indeterminate amount of time, torn from his sleep by brutal voices. Two men standing near the stairs call out... Perillos!... Gléon!... Roquelongue!... The poet asks his nearest neighbour, whose face he cannot make out:

-What are they going to do to them?

-It's ten o'clock at night... They're going to be tortured... It's already started, listen!...

-I can't hear anything.

-That lorry engine running in the yard... It's so you can't hear the screams. The session usually lasts until midnight or two in the morning, depending...

A cold sweat ran down the young man's back. The neighbour asked:

-Who are you?

-My name is Peyrat.

-I am Father Niort, parish priest of Tautavel.



Every afternoon, the regulated hour of torture strikes. The guards at the end of the staircase call out the names of the new Cathars who are to be sacrificed to the evil God. The truck's engine starts, roars, and then falls silent. Some men arrive at the "lion's den" staggering and moaning. Others, silent, are carried on stretchers by the jailers. Others do not return.

Over the city that once played at liberation and threw grand parties for itself, that shot down the red sun and drank red wine in gulps, there now hangs a feeling of unease, a bad mood among brave people plundered by liars, knowing, first vaguely, then more precisely each day, what is happening in the citadel.

One night, they call for Abbot Niort. They bring him back at dawn, dying. Presented to the firing squad in the

courtyard of the city court, he is tied to the stretcher in an upright position and twelve bullets finish him off¹.

Terrified and at the same time resolved in his great design, Guyot Peyrat leaves the cot in the corner where death lurks and takes refuge near the staircase. He trembles in the flesh, but does not yield in spirit. When he has to die by torture like Abbot Niort and so many others, he will leave something behind so that Languedoc may one day be resurrected through its troubadours. The faint light comes from the staircase, he writes on a piece of wrapping paper. The poem is entitled *The New Cathars*.



A week of anguish passes, then the night-time calls cease abruptly. Five or ten detainees are taken out each night and invited to take their meagre belongings with them. Guyot Peyrat is part of a large group that the jailers push towards the truck.

The city regains a familiar face. The fair is a success. Life begins again without the Germans, but it is as difficult materially as it was during the occupation. As predicted, the following days sing, but out of tune.

The detainees are escorted by regular police under the command of an unbearable and bad-tempered inspector. The truck stops at a police station. A motley crowd gathers in the rooms and offices. Officers come and go in the corridors. Civilians too. The difference between an inspector and a civilian is not very obvious. No one asks anyone anything. Names are called out amid the old southern anarchy finally rediscovered... This one will appear before the court of justice in Carcassonne, that one... before the civil court in Narbonne... Those who are called walk back and forth, waiting for the

¹ The "burners" of Carcassonne prison were later discovered, arrested, brought before the military court in Bordeaux, sentenced to long prison terms and immediately pardoned. By virtue of the obligations imposed by the action judged, we cannot reveal their true civil status and maintain the pseudonyms they themselves chose.

Transfer. People come and go. Guyot Peyrat also comes and goes to stretch his legs... Coming and going, he quickly finds himself in front of an open, unguarded door. He passes through naturally, enters a corridor and reaches the courtyard of the building and, from there, a narrow street where women are bargaining. He mingles with the crowd, walks as if he were out for a stroll, wanders around to overcome the temptation to flee, and gradually moves away through the city.

At dusk, he steals a bicycle and heads for the road. Instead of heading for the Spanish border, which is still heavily guarded, he heads west through a region free of *maquis* and militiamen, whose respective sagas have come to an end, and plunges into the Corbières.



The Germans had left Carcassonne on 19 August. The next day, the arrests began. By the 23rd, more than two hundred and fifty people are crammed into the prison. On one of the verges of the Narbonne road, opposite the town, it extends into a modest but solid wall that runs at right angles along a street named after the *félibre*¹ Auguste Fourès. In the surrounding area, there are small houses and vegetable gardens. In relation to the city's castle, which can be seen from the cells on the first floor and where Raymond-Roger Trencavel, who could not believe in the perfidy of men, was detained until his death, the city appears desperately petty-bourgeois and "third republican".

A vulgar portico protects it from the curiosity of free people. Behind the portico, there are two machine guns set up in battery, but no one can say whether they are operational. The jailers at this point are "road guards". They claim to be part of the resistance and say they are under the orders of Sergeant-Assistant S.! On 22 August, a group of bandits arrives who have been operating in the Limoux region for three months disguised as F.T.P.

¹ Poet of the Occitan language.

Gaby: shiny hair, straight nose, well-defined mouth, dull and disturbing gaze. He is said to be a natural child. Félicien: wavy hair shaved at the sides, low, blunt forehead, deep-set eyes, sharp lips, matador's head. Hans: Polish, born in Aisne, toothless and taciturn. Pedro and Cyprien complete the "Gaby gang" that has just left horrible memories in Limoux.

The F.T.P. settle in. Instead of the ground floor with an office on either side of the entrance hall and a *lobby* with a visiting room, covered walkways and a staircase leading to the cells on the first floor, they prefer the basement... At the foot of the connecting staircase is a corridor where the kitchens and cooks' cells are located. At the end are the cells of those condemned to death. On the right are the women's cells, then the showers and washrooms and the guards' dining room. The whole place does not look particularly frightening. It is a provincial prison that the Germans left in a state of rigorous cleanliness after their withdrawal.

Gaby begins by ordering a large table to be placed in the cellar corridor, commissioning several barrels of red wine, a large quantity of alcohol and food supplies, all paid for with the 'taxes' imposed on the prisoners' families.

The new prison life begins. At 10 p.m., a great feast takes place in the cellar. Gaby drinks cognac straight from the bottle. Félicien, a boastful braggart, multiplies sadistic thanks to the guests, personalities from Carcassonne who, having lost their sense of shame, dare not miss the event, members of the Liberation Committee, friends and prostitutes. The wine flows freely, the roast chickens smoke on the grill. The cooks-detainees are feverishly busy. Around midnight, Hans, the toothless, cold and taciturn man, loosens his belt and says:

"Now, to work!"

His first visit is reserved for the Count of Lorgeril.

Days earlier, the guards had warned him:

"A fine specimen of an aristocrat! They didn't kill off the aristocrats in 1793, but now they won't get away!"

Until three or four in the morning, horrible howls that were anything but human echoed through the Carcassonne prison.

At night, after the banquet, everyone enjoyed their own entertainment. Gaby discovered a somewhat weak-minded prisoner, a village wedding entertainer, and used him as a jester to distract the small group:

"Come on, you fool!" she shouts, "sing or *Marechal nous voilà!*"

And he sings. And he performs tricks. The guests laugh. The loose women undress a little. At midnight, the serious work begins again.

After "operating" several times on the Count of Lorgeril, who no longer speaks and whose body, broken by blows and covered with burns, is nothing more than a wound, Félicien perfects the torture known as "the flag". He forces Lorgeril to lie down in an empty bathtub, pours a small amount of methylated spirits over him and sets him on fire. A moderate dose! The patient must not die immediately, but be slowly roasted like a chicken. The count struggles and screams, but survives. He is taken back to his cell and the whole process is repeated the next day.

The days pass and the imagination of the medieval "burners" at Carcassonne prison discovers a little more each day about the fine traditions of the secular arm to which the Inquisition handed over heretics.

It is Raymond Ferrocas who coincidentally inaugurates a new form of torture. The former F.T.P. members discovered an old bookbinding press in one of the prison administration offices and adapted it with a board with nails to secure and pierce feet. Then they increase the pressure of the worm gear and crush them.

Ferrocas lets out a beastly roar when the nails pierce the soles of his feet, but he composes himself and says:

-I don't know anything!

Félicien flashes a mocking smile.

"I don't care whether you knew or not, you scoundrel! We're here to punish you, that's all!"

He was sent to the cell without resorting to the second degree of torture.



During the day, Gaby, Félicien, Hans and other henchmen organise guided tours of the prison for friends and acquaintances and lead us along corridors whose walls are painted with long trails of blood. They smile as they show us the cell doors decorated with inscriptions: *Milico... Collabo... Boche... Pétainista... Aristo...* Sometimes, they enter one cell or another at random to put on a show of lenient repression, kicking and punching.

The real interrogations take place in the afternoon. They are led to the offices on the ground floor by police inspectors who are unaware, or choose to be unaware, of what happens at night in the prison. They do not disdain walking through the 'tobacco passage', but without overstepping certain limits. They are introduced to Raymond Ferrocas, who drags his wounded feet. They ask him:

"What were you doing with the Germans in the Basqui Valley?"

"I don't know anything!"

Ferrocas had decided once and for all that he would only answer questions with that phrase.

The inspector slaps him with all his strength.

"And now?"

"I don't know anything!"

"But we know that the Germans were conducting investigations in the Cassou massif and in the La Peyre gorge! What do they expect to find in the caves? Treasure?"

"I don't know anything!"

"Are they hiding secret weapons?"

"I don't know anything!"

Helped by a colleague, the inspector kicks him in the shins and punches him in the face.

"I don't know anything," mutters Ferrocas, spitting out broken teeth. They take him to his cell.

"What do you mean you don't know anything?" murmurs Félicien the following night as he lays him down in the bathtub. "It doesn't matter whether you know anything or not, I'm sure you'll remember your mother's name when this starts to burn!"

The flaming alcohol makes little blue flames dance around his naked body. His flesh shrinks and blackens, and the air smells of burnt chicken. Ferrocas howls in pain. When the flames die down, he mutters under his breath:

"Bunch of scoundrels! The god of vengeance will deal with you!"

They take him away and bring Cazademont. Of all the detainees, only Cazademont will survive the torture of the burning bath, after a hospitalisation that will last from 6 September 1944 to July 1945.

Lou Ganet does not survive. The henchmen discover him in a 'collaborationist' cell and say:

"Oh, hello, and this one?"

They interrogate him for several minutes. His father, who shares a cell next door with Gilbert, hears him leave, understands what is happening and shouts:

"Stay strong, my son!"

They take him to the "Big School" – that's what the executioners call the cellar, to distinguish it from the ground floor where the "Nursery School" is located, so called because of the benign nature of the interrogations that take place there. The "Big School" smells of fresh blood, cognac and *cassoulet* from the evening banquet that has just ended.

Gaby tells him:

-Do you still maintain that you never attacked the *maquis*?

-Never.

-Perhaps that's true, but... what if you were given orders to attack them?

-I wouldn't hesitate for a second!

They strip him naked and put him in the incendiary bath with a large dose of alcohol. Lou Ganet howls in pain and thrashes about like a man possessed.

-Bandits! Murderers! I'm a militiaman, I spit in your faces! You'll pay for this!

And he spits acid saliva laden with bile in their faces. They stand him up. Three men beat him with sticks. Then they swap the sticks for bayonets and stab him all over his body. Lou Ganet avoids fainting and tries to remain as composed as possible. It is then that the executioners

pour sulphuric acid into his open wounds. Lou Ganet stops screaming when his strength leaves him and begins to murmur very softly, like an animal in agony... You will pay for this... Infamous... Criminals... Evil... Long live the Militia...

Félicien applies second-degree torture. Bones break. His crushed ankles are nothing more than a red mass, but Lou Ganet remains conscious. Words from the past emerge from his weak consciousness, the only thing left of his reality... Stay strong... Walk straight... Do as I say... From time to time, he forms vague words through the gurgling sounds that come from his bloodless lips and black face... Murderers... Militia... Pay... Scoundrels... Lou Ganet remains strong.

The torturers' fury reaches its peak in front of this boy who refuses to submit. They grab their batons again and beat him with all their might. Lou Ganet falls into the coal bunker in the kitchen. Gaby and Hans kick him, not to remove the coal dust that fills his countless wounds, but when they leave him in the cell, he is still not dead.

He will have eighteen more hours of agony before he dies. A friend of his, a member of the Resistance – a true member of the Resistance – tries to save him. In fact, he enters that prison as if he were entering a mill. All he needs is a bracelet and a submachine gun. The Resistance fighter goes to the city in search of a doctor and brings him, green with fear, to the bedside of the dying man. The doctor takes a vague look at the tortured body, mumbles a few unintelligible words and disappears. During the night of 31 August to 1 September, Lou Ganet dies in the arms of his enemy from the day before.



Upon learning of his death, Ferrocas murmurs:

"God will never forgive you!"

The atmosphere in the prison reaches the height of tragic anguish. No one can sleep. Ozouf, the young interpreter who was tortured three times, has just committed suicide. He throws himself from the second-floor balcony to escape further sessions of

. When the executioners go to fetch Lou Ganet's father, they find a man whose hair has turned white overnight, pierced by his son's screams. And they say to him:

"Your son is gone, now it's your turn!"

They take him down to the "Grand School". Hans, the taciturn one, crushes both his feet in the press, but as the tortured man does not dare to defy them to the end like his son, they take him back to his cell.

Third interrogation of Raymond Ferrocas by the inspectors of the "Nursery School". He had just been through the fire bath. He has no eyelashes or eyebrows, barely a few strands of singed hair remain, and he cannot use his hands, which are covered with monstrous blisters that are already oozing.

"So, the Krauts?" asks the inspector. "We heard you collaborated with an SS criminal. What were you doing down there?"

"I don't know anything."

The inspector punches him in the nose. Blood gushes out.

-So? Either you talk, or you'll be shot! This is your last chance!

"I don't know anything," stammers Ferrocas, blowing red blisters between his lips.

"You don't know anything? Are you an idiot? It wasn't worth the risk! Or maybe you're just tough! But I've made tougher guys than you talk before!

Locked away in his Calvinist and *Cévenol* determination to remain silent, Raymond Ferrocas was taken to his cell ¹.



The military court began its proceedings on 1 September.

¹ The inhabitants of Tautavel (Eastern Pyrenees) still talk about an unusual event that took place in 1945. For a year, according to them, the day after the death of their parish priest in Persignan, the church bell rang for several minutes without any mechanical or human intervention.

From then on, the rabble would be able to witness executions every day. The firing squads began operating at the Réomieu firing range and then at the Lapperrine barracks riding arena. Hundreds of people permanently occupied the Avenue des Tilos, where they could follow the operations better than at the cinema. The men fell amid halos of dust and golden light. The hills of Carcassès were once again covered with the yellow skin of the lioness. Golden vineyards. Red euphorbias. Red sun. Red wine...

A special Narbonne-Carcassonne coach provides daily service for tourist executions, bringing in thirty or forty people in addition to the regulars. The southern way of doing things introduces a certain gentleness into the rough kermesse... People come and go from the avenue to the riding arena and even enter the sand itself to examine the bodies of the executed. When the condemned men shout insults at the firing squad and die proudly, the crowd applauds. They mock the unfortunate ones who do not fall with the first volley. This is the case of Jacques Pannier, nineteen years old, who survives. A voice rises from the crowd:

"Shoot him in the balls!"

After three volleys, an inept sergeant-major finishes off the teenager. A popular triumph for the Promés, father and son. They fall holding hands as if they had agreed on their end in prison.

The air smells of dust, gunpowder and splatter. The women wear their Sunday best and the younger boys their first communion suits. The men drink jugs of beer and smoke cigars. The F.T.P. walk around solemnly, ostentatiously displaying submachine guns happily emptied in the last fireworks display. The ambitious take the opportunity to make election speeches. A child asks his mother:

-Mum, does it hurt a lot when it goes 'boom'?

'Yes, dear, very much,' replies the woman, who does not know that twelve bullets fired together cause less pain than a pinprick.

"And will they make me go 'boom' too when I grow up?"

"If you were a soldier, of course!"

She thinks: We won't see this again! We must take advantage of it!

Despite God being under repair in the diocese of Carcassonne, the women cross themselves every time a condemned man falls. The city has just discovered the power of hunger and primal fear and is reviving the past beyond the era that conferred its first dignity, that of *the murus strictus* and *murus strictissimus* of the Inquisition. The "Gaby gang" adopted the superlative *murus strictissimus* and transcended the ferocity of the Old Testament with grandiose impetus.

Before leaving the prison to be shot, Vassas Jr. asked for a glass of water. Gaby went down to the cellar.

"Give me a glass of vinegar!" he asked the cook, D.

Vassas Jr. was forced to drink the glass of vinegar and was still vomiting when they tied him to the post.



Raymond Ferrocas cannot see the execution post because he is almost blind. As he staggers because of his mutilated feet, the mob insults him, thinking he lacks courage. Nor does he see the woman who enters the Réomieu firing range during a break between two executions, or if he does, he does not recognise her. It is Judith, the former *mère aubergiste*, who, with grave, sensual fervour, prepares to soak the canvas in the blood of the young Pannier, who was shot minutes earlier. The F.T.P. chase her away as if she were a fly.

When they tie him to the post, Raymond Ferrocas continues to repeat the phrase that accompanied him throughout his stay in prison and hours of torture... I don't know anything... I don't know anything... And he is surprised that the men around him, whose blurred silhouettes he can barely make out, do not ask him any more questions. He now feels very sure of himself. Anaesthetised by excessive suffering, he long ago passed the dangerous stage of torture, which still allows him to 'empty himself'. He is at peace with his *Camisard* conscience, with the Christianity he takes so seriously, which pursues even the most intimate of evil thoughts and condemns

eternity for breaking his word. He has gained peace in the kingdom of God and dies in peace.

He does not see the firing squad in front of him, he only hears the manoeuvring of the rifle butts. He shouts:

"Long live free Occitania!"

He does not die immediately after the volley. The sergeant-major shoots him in the ear and says as he stands up:

"Normally they die for Pétain, but not this one!"

Then, turning to a soldier from the firing squad approaching the post:

-Do you know what Occitania is?

-No, Sergeant-Assistant. Is it some kind of political party?

The assistant raises his head, looks at the body that is about to be transported and murmurs:

-Another *amôrri*!...



The villagers took Guyot Peyrat for *an amôrri* when they saw him rolling his bicycle tyres, making a huge racket with the scrap metal and jumping comically on the uneven road. That was precisely what saved him! Throughout rural Europe, from Kharkov to Landerneau, village fools continue to be sacred monsters who deserve respect.

The tyres on the bicycle stolen in Persignan were probably pre-war and came to an end after Estagel. He had no money to replace them and, moreover, they were still not available in shops.

At night, Guyot Peyrat dug up potatoes, ate them raw and slept on haystacks. Riding on the tyre rims caused him a real nervous breakdown, so he threw the bicycle into the Agly before reaching Rennes-les-Bains. At night, he crossed Limoux on foot and continued walking westwards. He did not know where to go, only one certainty drove him forward: to flee at all costs from Languedoc, which had just offered him a spectacle of terror and proposed that he play a role for which he felt no vocation whatsoever.

Completely exhausted, he took refuge in the church of Mirepoix, where twilight was already weaving a protective shadow. He knelt down, making gestures of intense faith, more to please an old pious woman sitting on a nearby bench than out of any certainty that God could improve a truly detestable situation...

Without a bicycle, he couldn't go very far. Stealing another one was too risky, and he didn't have a penny to take a train... He would never escape from this Languedoc hell. As soon as he left the church, any policeman could ask for his papers and send him back to the torture chambers from which he had miraculously escaped.

Guyot Peyrat had a good knowledge of history, literature and philosophy. He knew that the Jacobin Republic had set a seven-year period for the remission of sins. This provision was not part of any law or decree, but was established by custom in the 19th and 20th centuries... In order to survive until he received absolution, he needed to disappear for seven years. Where and how?



He began to pray with his lips rather than from the bottom of his heart. Night was slowly falling around him. The old woman dressed in black got up and left, multiplying genuflections and the sign of the cross. A man came to the side of the portico with the obvious intention of closing the church. Suddenly, a large white spot appeared behind the altar, circled it, descended the central aisle of the nave and headed for the exit. Overcome by an inspiration that he would later consider brilliant, Guyot Peyrat stood up and blocked his way, saying in a grave and somewhat imperious voice, accentuated by a kind of harshness resulting from the fatigue and terror he had experienced in recent days:

"Right of asylum!"

The monk startled, leaned towards him and put a hand behind his ear.

"Forgive me, my friend... I hear poorly!"

The monk was perplexed. It was perfectly clear that no one had invoked the right of asylum since he had entered the Order. He knew that this recourse existed because he was not entirely ignorant of the history of the Church, but what did this medieval custom have to do with the modern context of a France in the throes of liberating euphoria?

He seemed both intrigued and annoyed. Guyot Peyrat felt that his opportunity was not as firmly guaranteed as he had initially thought, when that inspiration had come to him during his prayers.

"Why are you asking for asylum?" murmured the monk.

Peyrat reflected for a second and thought: if I tell him the truth, he'll throw me out on the street. He preferred to play along...

"Father, can you hear my confession?"

"Well... you see... I'm a Dominican, I'm not the minister of this parish..."

He fell silent. His face seemed relaxed, but perhaps that was a reflection of the twilight, whose deeper shadows softened his features. Sensing some trickery, he said almost brutally:

"No formalities... There's no one else in this church. You can speak freely..."

Peyrat decided he had to take the plunge without wasting any more time. The church was about to close, the monk was going to return to his community and leave him on the road. In the middle of two police officers!

"I am a militiaman on the run!" he announced in a firm voice.

The monk shuddered, opened his white cowl wide and closed it again over his chest. He began to walk faster, descended to the portico and climbed back up to the altar. Guyot Peyrat clung to him like a shipwrecked man to a lifebuoy. He asked astutely:

"Father, can you give absolution to a militiaman on the run?"

The monk opened his cowl again and held it up towards the vault for a few seconds in a gesture of sublime astonishment.

"Without a doubt... without a doubt... But you are not a common sinner, you are a common criminal!"

"And what do you advise me to do in that case?"

The monk closed his cowl again, a gesture that made a bright ray of light pass before Peyrat's eyes, at the same time as he smelled the pleasant scent of fine wool, evoking flocks of sheep marching towards the free pastures of the Pyrenean mountains.

I advise you, said the monk, to surrender yourself to the justice of your country.

"Thanks!" replied the fleeing militiaman curtly. "I'd never get out of there again! No one returns to hell of their own free will!"

"But you can count on God's justice!"

"Thank you again, but I don't want to die on a fixed date!"

Father, you have an excuse for speaking to me this way because you are unaware of what happens in the prisons of the Liberation!

"I am unaware, indeed. Our kingdom is not of this world..."

With his intelligence sharpened by the tragedy of the situation, Peyrat took refuge in positions whose solidity he knew from his knowledge of history... The church was about to close its doors. He had only a few minutes left to ensure his salvation.

"In short," he said to the monk, "you are more severe than Domingo de Guzmán, the founder of your Order, who said: 'When blessings are not enough, the truncheon is enough'!... Do you refuse me your blessing and present me with the truncheon before even hearing me out?"

The monk was startled and asked:

"Do you know the history of Languedoc? Guyot Peyrat smiled.

"Poorly as a graduate, but quite well as a writer in the langue d'Oc! Let's see... I am a militiaman only by chance, for reasons I don't have time to explain now... but I return to Domingo de Guzmán. When he travelled through our country around 1206, he preached to heretics, asked them for their reasons and opposed them with his own. He agreed to debate with Guilabert de Castres and other Perfects in Montpellier, Montreal, Fanjeaux... He imposed certain penances on those who returned to the bosom of the Church, but he did not put their lives at risk! It was not Domingo, but Arnaud-Amaury who, much later, handed heretics over to the secular arm... You, a son of Domingo, want me to go to the stake of liberation without being heard? I cannot believe it!

The monk stopped suddenly, and Guyot Peyrat thought: That's it! I've cornered him against the wall!

It was the middle of the night. The church now took on the dimensions of a medieval forest, each column an oak tree, each vault diving into a black sky. The flame of the royal presence shone on the altar with the force of a star. The white habit seemed to herald the return of the angels to the bosom of men, and Peyrat resolutely slipped under the large wings that opened and closed from time to time. The sacristan advanced, announcing timidly:

"Father, we're going to close..."

"Just a moment, please! Or rather, close up, my friend, we'll leave through the sacristy."

He leaned towards Peyrat. Tall and hard of hearing as he was, he could not see or hear well.

"My dear fellow," he said, "do you write in the langue d'Oc? Magnificent!

And do you speak Occitan? Peyrat frowned, not expecting such a question. The linguistic issue was not one of his immediate concerns, and yet he replied in the historic language he spoke beautifully:

"It is in Occitan that I claim the right of asylum, Father!

The monk replied also in Occitan:

"And I grant it as a man of God and a native of Languedoc from Lavaur!"

Guyot Peyrat shuddered violently. The game was won! He thought that after having almost lost, his small homeland was now saving him through a curious detour. The monk added:

"As a militiaman, you sank lower than a common criminal. You gave yourself over to a very serious worldly heresy and denied a certain social morality. If Innocent III were to return to this world, you can be sure he would be less lenient than I am!

It will take a long time and a lot of effort to redeem yourself!

The monk was now speaking the old language of the country, and Guyot Peyrat no longer felt any reluctance to reply cheerfully:

"I haven't forgotten, Father, I have seven years ahead of me to renounce that kind of heresy!"

"Come on," said the monk. "I'll get you a suitable habit. As the community gardener, you will initially have the opening to God's heaven and the singing of the birds, a lot of hard work too, and a simple diet to get you back on the right track..."

He stopped at the narrow, low entrance to the sacristy, pushed the heavy oak door open with his shoulder, and said:

This is the narrow gate spoken of in the Gospels, which you must pass through, my young friend! Follow me!

Guyot Peyrat followed in the footsteps of the large white wings that hid and protected him from the night closing in behind them.



The night was brightening towards the sea. More than seeing, the vagabond guessed at the faint and vague trail he left behind him. The Corbières, dressed in the gold of autumn, seemed well nourished by the sun. The euphorbias and red fig trees anticipated the climb.

The night accompanied the man but did not protect him. As he passed through the villages, the stimulating aroma of new wine excited his sense of smell. His mouth watered and his stomach growled with hunger.

Red partridges took flight as he passed, bringing silence, the last refuge before daybreak, and the cicadas, tired of chirping for so long during the long hot days, resumed their discreet trance at the end of the season.

The man quickened his pace. He wore a camouflage uniform and a German army jacket, a uniform that had become commonplace with the last prisoners of war and workers who, like him, were returning in the autumn of 1945 to their welcoming or destroyed homes. He limped on one leg, but covered distances with surprising speed. The greyish light now revealed the large scar that adorned the left side of his face from his ear to the corner of his

, the marks imprinted on his greyish face, his brown hair cut close to the scalp.

Restless, Roger Barbaïra wondered if he would reach Durban Castle before the village huddled in the shadow of the walls awoke. He took no special precautions until he reached Narbonne, but once he arrived in the area where he knew almost all the roads and villages that could also recognise him, he decided to walk only at night and stop during the day at the ruins of the great Romanesque castles on the old border between the county of Narbonne and Roussillon, separated from each other by short stages of thirty kilometres. Since no one ventured into those places in that pre-historic period of tourism, he ran no risk of being discovered.

When he arrived in Durban, some of the village gates were already open. He slept most of the day under the vaulted ceiling of the old cistern made of stones joined with pink mortar, which had served as a prison in the 15th century.

He ate little to economise on provisions, which were now uncertain. Naturally endowed with a solid power of sleep that had saved him during the battles of the Carpathians, Pomerania and Berlin, and as a clandestine wounded man in the hospitals of Prague and Vienna, he sought and obtained from rest the reconstitution of a vital force that owed almost nothing to the stomach.



He set off again after nightfall, crossed the village and, fifteen kilometres further on, took possession of the ruins of Aguilar Castle before sunrise. He slept until almost midday and got up, somewhat feverish, to visit the estate. He explored the polygonal keep flanked by a round tower, a primitive construction erected by Ramon III, which in its more modest size and location was reminiscent of the fortress of Peyrepertuse. He visited the six towers and the wall that St. Louis had ordered to be built to defend the southern border of a Languedoc finally united with the French crown.

The comings and goings from one place to another put him in a bad mood. Living as an illegal immigrant for over a year in a country whose language he spoke poorly, he had developed the habit of giving himself long speeches to occupy his solitude. He began by cursing the dilapidated state of the castle and calling out the Directorate of Historic Monuments, the conservation department and the villagers of Tuchan who stole carved stones from Aguilar to reinforce their houses or build new ones. At five o'clock in the afternoon, he went back in time and addressed Olivier de Termes, son of Ramon III, who was walled up in Carcassonne. He said to him:

-Sir, you are a traitor! By handing over this castle to the King of France in 1241, just after the disaster of Trencavel, you irrevocably insulted the memory of your father!... What?...

I hear you wrong!... Are you saying you are not guilty? Unquestionable, sir, unquestionable!... When you surrendered the fief to St. Louis, you had it recorded in the minutes that you acted without 'caution or coercion'... which means that you distrust the judgement of posterity! And you handed over your Cathars! I care little for your Cathars, but I cannot forgive the abandonment of our direct rights over the lands of Occitania. You knelt at the king's feet for a pittance of twenty thousand pounds to pay your debts... Treason! Treason!... If instead of partying you had worked and fought, you would have no debts! After that, did you go three times to the so-called Holy Land?

Treason!... You are a coward! I spit in your face!

He spat on the ruins and kicked some bushes growing between two carved stones. A viper flashed in front of him and disappeared. A harsh, icy wind rose, heralding the north wind that would begin to blow at dawn the next day and continue for three, six or nine days.



Late at night, he set off again to complete the short but rough stage that took him to Quéribus. After passing Cucugnan, he was engulfed by the dry storm that battered the mountain ridges. When he reached the last outcrop of the ruins, the north wind

He grabbed him around the middle and threw him over the rocks. He stood up cursing and climbed back up, bracing himself every time he sensed a gust approaching, leaning heavily with all his weight and throwing himself back in front of the void that swallowed him when the wind blew with the suddenness of an assault and the mass of wind laden with whirlwinds passed around him with the force of a torrent.

Around him, tortured boxwoods swayed. The stillness that returned between two gusts seemed as crazy as the previous gesticulation. Like the silence that followed the explosions of wind...

Barbaïra fell several times, face down and on his back, was hit in the face by a stone, cursed again and continued. Queribus defended itself, refusing to be conquered. He had to conquer it, and he loved the way he perceived the situation... It had been a long time since he had lost a battle! He fought against the wind, against the altitude and against the hail of stones raining down from the barbican... He threw himself to the ground and got up as if he were in Waffen-SS school... *Heinlegen... Auf!* and progressed with successive jumps. He crossed the barbican by crawling over the stones, risked his life on a ruined staircase that bordered on an abyss, and finally entered the castle of Quéribus.

He continued along a large building with windows open to the south. He advanced close to the stone blocks of the second wall, some of which were more than a metre long. He touched them as he passed, as if to appropriate their invincibility, confirmed by time, which he needed to carry out his conquest against the armies of the tramontane.

He entered the keep and a great peace descended upon him, at first more unbearable than the rumours of Cape Horn that persisted outside, but then the sweetest and most eager of meditations. He explored the keep and, after performing acrobatic feats on a dangerously dilapidated staircase, reached the roof, but could only stay there for a few seconds in the wind before risking a flight into the abyss. He returned to the vaulted room on the floor below.

The dawn was breaking, whitish. Roger Barbaïra felt a void created by the devitalising effect of the hurricane. He felt a slight fever which, however, created around him the characters demanded by solitude. He perceived moving shadows animated by the wind, coloured by the first rays of daylight. The sky changed from black to grey and then to pink. It is that delicate and frightening moment when night is no longer night and day is not yet day, when anything is possible, when everything is permitted...

Roger Barbaïra sat down on the carved stone bench in a niche in the wall, in line with the eastern window. Very upright, very dignified, with his hands on his knees, a crown of brown hair on his head enriched by fine pearls of light, the emeralds of the last reflections of the green night that was receding. He said:

-Chabertus de Barbaïrano, my cousin and lord of Quéribus, you appear before the 'People's Court' because you surrendered without a fight a stronghold mourned by the Perfects and Believers whose names are: Pierre Paraire, Cathar deacon of Fenouillède - Guilhem de Raymond de Narbonne - Bugarach - Borde de Barbaïra and Doumeng... Statement of the facts: Chabertus de Barbaïrano, lord of Quéribus, took part in Raymond Trencavel's offensive in 1240 to reconquer the Languedoc homeland... During the campaign, you were accompanied by the knight Aymeric de Montlaur and took possession of the castle of Montlaur on the southern flank of the Mountain of Alaric... You still held it in your possession after surviving Raymond VII's revolt... Aymeric then surrendered the castle to St Louis in exchange for the freedom of his mother, Auda de Montlaur, who had been imprisoned for heresy in Carcassonne!

"That's right, my cousin!" replied Chabertus de Barbaïrano.

"Do not interrupt! The court verifies that you withdrew to your castle at Quéribus with the intention of defending it from the usurpers. You were then the last truly free Occitan lord! On 5 May 1255, Pierre d'Auteuil, a Picard knight and seneschal of Carcassonne, laid siege to Quéribus, which he described as a nest of "heretics and thieves". On 8 May 1255, he sent a letter via Guillaume

de Broue to the bishops gathered in council in Béziers. He called on the Church for support in destroying you, which shows that he was unable to do so by his own means! The bishops replied that they were not prepared to follow him in this matter and that the Church could not take a position without the order of the papal legate or the archbishop of Narbonne. This proves that the offensive against you was inspired by purely political motives! What happened to make you surrender Quéribus so suddenly?

Messire, Olivier de Termes promised to negotiate the independence of my fiefdom and led me into a trap. I could do nothing but submit!

-We know this Olivier de Termes, and the "People's Court" already condemned him yesterday in the court of justice at Aguilar. You can expect anything from the perfidy of that traitor, anything except the action you reproach him for today! In fact, Olivier de Termes was detained in Malta on his return from the Crusade in May 1255, and only arrived in Languedoc in the autumn of that year!

-If it weren't Olivier de Termes, it would be any one of his men. Perhaps his right-hand man, Guillame Aban? Be that as it may, I signed the capitulation with a dagger at my throat.

-It matters little, cousin! You handed over the Cathars, who interest me as much as my first submachine gun, but you also handed over the *Faydits* who trusted you and who were, after all, the brains and brawn capable of saving our country from servitude! Instead of living with your fellow outlaws in the Pyrenean forests, like wolves, as you reconciled with S.Luis and with the Church.

You certainly retired to the court of the King of Aragon, but in October 1275 you were in the company of Pierre Roger de Mirepoix – may the Jews keep his soul! – as a witness to the marriage of James, Infante of Aragon and future King of Majorca, to Esclarmunda, sister of Roger Bernard IV, Count of Foix! Is that true?

-It is true, cousin!

From Perpignan, you could see the silhouette of Quéribus on the horizon of the Corbières! Was your conscience clear when you

contemplating the last fortified work in Occitania surrendered by you to the enemy?

-I don't remember, cousin. I was old, my eyesight was poor and I couldn't make it out!

-The "People's Court" condemns your insolence! Remember that no lord, no general, no soldier defending a just and popular cause has the right to capitulate anywhere, whatever the reason!

Chabertus de Barbaïrano began to feel uneasy. He changed his tone and addressed the tribunal in the person of his cousin:

"Come on, lad, it's funny that an SS *Faydit*, whose troops surrendered everywhere to the Asian barbarians and allowed them to settle two hundred kilometres from Reno, should now come and remind me and reproach me for surrendering a castle when all was already lost for us Occitans!

"The 'People's Court' condemns your rude language and repudiates such a statement. The SS did not surrender anywhere, neither on the battlefield nor on the ideological front!"

To sign Germany's surrender on 8 May 1945, it was necessary to find a German admiral who represented nothing more than a group of indolent cowards, since all the heroes were dead. The SS defended the ground inch by inch, and only after the physical liquidation of its defenders did the enemy occupy it. The Western demons defeated Germany but not the SS, whose destiny is no more German than Occitan. The war continues, and it is unlikely that the SS will ever surrender!

Chabertus de Barbaïrano, my cousin, you are accused of surrendering the last stronghold of Occitania, a place so important that its surrender automatically led to the surrender of Puivert and the invincible Puylaurens, castles where the "People's Court" will move in the coming nights. You are accused of cowardice, a mentality foreign to our people, for which we can only deplore your frivolity. You are also accused of treason for having called upon the French lords Pierre des Voisins and Philippe de Montfort as guarantors of the act that dishonoured you.

Consequently, after deliberation, the "People's Court" condemns you to an end as ignominious as your life was ignominious. You will be hanged by the neck on a butcher's hook in Saint-Paul-de-Fenouiller until you are dead...

Roger Barbaïra awoke. It was already daylight and the north wind was still blowing fiercely. The cannon thundered, and the blasts from the cosmic artillery shook the walls.



As he passed through the postern gate of Puylaurens, an eagle's nest balanced on the precipice, the garrison presented arms. He greeted the heretics who had taken refuge in the fortress: Pierre Jacob, *Bérenger* Maleret, Pierre Brunet, *Bérengère* and Marquise de Dorna, Pierre Jean de Limoux, and Raymond de Viviers. He said to Rubens de Alafäis, commander of the stronghold:

"I knight you of the Iron Cross for your victorious resistance."

"Thank you!" replied the captain, "but I ask for nothing! Neither Simon de Montfort nor the kings of France will dare to attack Puilaurens because our walls are impregnable.

"You are mistaken, Captain. Victory in a great cause does not depend on the walls that protect the borders, but on the nobility of blood of the defenders!"

He set off again the next day and, due to the length of the stage, arrived in Puivert well after dawn. He took refuge in the almost unrecognisable ruins of the original castle behind the Gothic wall that once linked the towers called "Verde" and "Tesorería". He found no one there except Adelaide, wife of Viscount Roger Trencavel, who in 1178 organised the first Courts of Love in Puivert. She wept for the end of the happy days of Occitania and wandered in the desert of black stones in search of the lutes and flutes of the troubadours. Barbaïra said to her:

"You have reason to weep, madam! While you were singing, the men of the north were arming themselves and preparing for our ruin!

On the edge of the great forest of Sainte-Colombe, between the gorges of Babourade and Del Teil, he met the head of the house of Puivert, Lord *Faydit*, who lived in the mountains. He said to him:

"For your part in the death of the inquisitors in Avignonnet and for your uncompromising resistance, I knight you with the Iron Cross!"

The slight fever that seized Barbaïra transported him to another state.

He resumed his march westward, like Guyot Peyrat a year earlier, but instead of leaving Languedoc, he pressed onward into the heart of Occitania.

Dawn was breaking as he passed through Fontestorbes. Moonlight still dominated the landscape. He heard a brief chirp from a bird that was not repeated... as if the animal felt guilty for anticipating the legal time set for birdsong. The wind tried to make him forget the excesses of the tramontane and rolled discreetly around the trees. Behind the outlaw's shoulders, the first red streaks of the rising sun were quietly taking shape. Illuminated by rays still invisible on the land of men, the silvery pyramids of clouds appeared like projections of mountains turned towards the vertical plane and in a different substance. All life was suspended, awaiting the revelations brought by the new day.

Overcoming his fatigue and dragging his leg, which was hampered by a poorly healed wound, Roger Barbaïra continued along the road. The curtain of mountains gradually stood out in the background of the close-up shot and offered, with a special reticence, other views of slopes and peaks. As they came into view, the outlaw slowed his pace. He finally stopped and said in a hoarse voice, as if the tears welling up in his eyes were also choking his throat:

"Montsegur!"

The multi-faceted *pog* appeared framed exactly between two mountains fanning out, resembling the Matterhorn as seen from Gornegrat. Observed from the visible eastern face, it lived up to its romantic title of "inaccessible peak," while from other angles

angles, it appeared to be nothing more than a large rock. In the still timid light, with its edges blurred by fine mist and the distance keeping the boundary between the sky and the mountains uncertain, the *pog* depended at that moment on a scale of values other than the plastic or geometric. Barbaïra did not perceive it, but he seemed to hear through himself the cry of the earth as it tried in vain to become lighter than the sky. A cry of despair, not of hope. And he thought that it was not the handful of exceptional men who gave the *pog* that will of esoteric imponderability with their sacrifice, but that this imponderability already existed before their arrival.

Barbaïra shuddered. He now realised that a will external to his military adventure had been driving him towards Montsegur for many months and that he was now nearing the end of the road.



When he came within sight of Serrelongue at the bottom of the Caroulet Gorges, the outlaw took the path he knew well and walked along the rocky mass. Soon the steep slope began to level off. He reached the Roc de la Tour passage at the foot of the wooded northern slope and entered its shelters. The trees gradually became less dense and were soon replaced by boxwoods. Meanwhile, the lights of Villeneuve d'Olmes, Lavelanet, and Laroque d'Olmes faded into the distance on the plain below.

He now climbs terrain that is easy for a mountaineer of his age, accompanied by large convoys of holiday clouds that follow plagues and celestial valleys of splendours unknown to men, at the mercy of the wind.

Barbaïra feels increasingly free. It takes him some time to locate the blocks of stone abandoned by Hugues des Arcis's "artillerymen" in 1244, but he eventually finds them and unfolds the tent canvas in the densest area of box trees, where it is practically invisible. Disturbed in her meditation, the short leaves drop sparkling dewdrops like diamonds born in the crucible of the night onto her.



After a week, Roger Barbaïra was on excellent terms with the defenders of the fortress, the *Faydits* and the heretics sheltering there. Raymond de Périlhe, commander-in-chief of the garrison, told him:

"At the beginning of the first siege, we had enough provisions for nearly two years. Today, when the square is barely blocked by Vincent Auriol's seneschal, there is nothing to eat!

"Being an outlaw is harder in the 20th century than it was in our time!

"I doubt it!"

"You lack the terms of comparison to judge, Messire! *Faydit* as Count of Miramont and later as Obersturmführer of the Waffen-SS, I know better than you the process that leads to the degradation of the human person!

"What are you going to do, son?" asks Perfect Bertrand Martin, the last spiritual leader of Montsegur, anxiously.

"I am not your son. I am resupplying myself with the means available on board. Today, as yesterday, the blockade of the fortress is not total!

Night begins to fall on the Lasset plain cultivated by the villagers. He steals potatoes, picks the last fruits of autumn and thinks of winter...

"How will you survive the cold days, gentle knight?" asks Jordana de Montaure, who regularly visits him at dawn, ever more moving in her beauty but untouchable in the symbolic black wool dress with which she was "clad" and which detracts from human passions.

-Eating snow, noble lady!

-But snow does not nourish the body, noble Sire!

-Then I will starve to death, but I will not surrender!

-We will give you the Consolamentum, and with the help of the Spirit, you will enter with us into the Ineffable.

"I want nothing to do with the Ineffable, and the Spirit I worship is that of resistance!

While Roger Barbaïra continues to dream, dawn casts veils of white frost over the mountain. The fever caused by his poorly healed thigh wound

poorly healed wound in his thigh feeds him more and more, sustaining him better than the potatoes he has to eat raw because it is impossible to light a fire that would immediately reveal his presence in the *pog*. Without a blanket, he freezes in the tiny tent. He waits impatiently for the sun, and it is thus, through his flesh, that he discovers the material origin of solar cults.

Jordane de Montaure, daughter of Saint Catherina, appears punctually at daybreak. As is to be expected, she has the lightness of a shadow and makes no noise as she glides between the giant box trees. She reveals her presence through the drops of dew that she makes rain down on the roof of the tent as she parts the vegetation that protects her.



Upon waking one morning, Roger Barbaïra discovers that Jordane de Montaure is no longer so discreet. Dry branches crunch under her footsteps and she rolls stones in the direction of the Trébuchet passage. For seconds – or minutes – she wanders with her subconscious caught on the border between the 13th and 20th centuries. Then she takes a leap. It is not a ghost that strikes near the shop. Barbaïra had already seen several visitors climb up, people from the village of Montsegur, fellow believers from Montsegur, a high place of the Cathars, and he easily avoided them, but the presence of a human being on the *pog* at dawn takes on a threatening character.

He rummages in his bag, takes out his assistant officer's pistol, a P38 that he keeps and treats with scrupulous care, loads a bullet into the chamber, puts three magazines in his pocket, slips out of the tent and climbs towards the Trébuchet pass.

He armed himself reflexively, but remained undecided as to what course of action to take... Could it be some idiot villager who happened to be in Montsegur without any particular reason, just as he might have been at the top of Saint-Barthélemy? Or perhaps it was a group of police officers sent out in pursuit of him... In that case, he would have to recognise them, avoid contact, and retreat to one of the safe hiding places he knew. If he were surrounded and had no

chance of escape, he would open fire. With thirty-two rounds, he has enough to make them pay an exorbitant price for their lives!

He moves forward with more curiosity than suspicion and shudders when he hears his name carried on the wings of the cold, sparkling morning:

"Roger!... Roger!... Roger!..."

He emerges from the boxwood and sees a girl in black trousers – as black as the wool skirt of the Perfecta whose visit he was expecting – calling to him with her hands cupped around her mouth. At her feet, a bulky rucksack rests on the stones.

Recognising Auda Isarn, he drops his gun, which makes a muffled sound as it disappears into the moss. He hesitates for a second and then rushes towards her like a madman.

"You scared me, Roger, stop!"

Barbaïra squeezes her so tightly that the blood rushes to her face and the air leaves her lungs. She staggers like a soldier shot in the stomach, looking for the best place to fall... Then she steps back, gains some space and looks at Auda Isarn, who, perhaps enriched by the meditations of her long wait or simply evolving towards motherhood, is more beautiful than ever, more pathetic and less disturbing than before. Barbaïra is shipwrecked once again in those eyes that drown him. He cannot get a single word out of his throat, except for the one that tears from his guts with the roughness of an animal:

"Auda!"

He hesitates again, sees a grey veil pass before his eyes, growing until it becomes an enormous white veil that seems to sweep away the horizon of deprivation, physical and moral suffering, hypertrophied will, and the loneliness that generates the ghosts with which he has lived for so long. He feels himself sinking into an ocean of ice and loses consciousness.

When he regains consciousness – very quickly thanks to the mysterious power of the hands resting on him – he perceives the face of his lover inscribed in the disc of the sun already high in the sky. He makes an effort to reach her lips and falls back onto the bed of moss. Only now is he aware of the state of extreme weakness he has reached and wonders how he can stay so long in a

The entire universe united against the *Faydit* SS without outside help. He risks a smile that highlights the red, numb scar that runs across his face from his ear to his mouth.

"You're hurt, my poor Roger!" murmurs Auda, "but I'll heal you. I can even make that vile blow disappear!"

She smiles and adds:

"If the effectiveness of the means at my disposal depends on the force with which I use them on you, perhaps I will soon be able to say to you, like the first of the angels: 'Get up and walk!'

"It's mainly my thigh that's troubling me," says Barbaïra slowly.

"My face doesn't worry me... A piece of shrapnel in Sanok tore my helmet from top to bottom on the left side and hit my face. I was lucky, but my thigh is another matter. The wound won't close.

There must still be iron inside."

Auda looks at him with an interest that seems new. He is her lover, but he is mainly, perhaps, a wounded man...

"Since the war ended, I've come here twice a month to wait for you. What happened that I didn't find you before?"

"Ah, I just arrived, so to speak! From Vienna to Montsegur... without a train ticket... How did you know I was coming straight to the *pog*?"

"What a question!" murmured Auda, shrugging her shoulders slightly.

Barbaïra pulls down his trousers. Auda puts a bandage on the wound on his thigh and he follows her movements with the trust of a sick child. Thanks to her, he has been eating for a week now, and for the first time, something other than raw potatoes and rotten plums. His memory, which had retreated into the great myths of the past, now shows an intense curiosity about the present moment. As if wanting to free himself from a tormenting anxiety, he asks abruptly:

"What have they done with my father?"

"He spent six months in prison in your place. They sentenced him to ten years of national indignity for the crime of paternity... The truth is, with the normal rates of the new justice system, he didn't pay too high a price for having fathered an SS officer!"

"And Le Pech?"

"He's under embargo, waiting for your situation to be regularised. They appointed a provisional administrator who, through signals, gets on well with your father.

-Thank goodness! And... me?

-Sentenced to death in absentia, obviously! Barbaïra laughs.

-Bunch of scoundrels!

-Don't laugh. Terrible things happened in Carcassonne and elsewhere.

Barbaïra falls into a kind of prostration, then revives and asks the girl lying beside him, who is squeezing his hand with maternal tenderness:

"Have you heard from Ferrocas?"

"He was shot in Carcassonne!"

Barbaïra shuddered.

"Pigs!" she muttered hoarsely... "And Lou Ganet?"

"He also died in prison."

Another shock. Auda doesn't dare to specify what hellish circle little Ganet had been plunged into and thinks: everyone in Carcassonne knows what happened and she has to tell him how it was.

This is not the time to traumatise him!

"And the *pau*? Did you hear from him?"

"It's on record that the Germans burned him, but I don't know exactly under what circumstances."

"Shameless!" Barbaïra muttered again. "And Reboul?"

-Legion of Honour. Resistance Medal. He runs the factory in Lavelanet and has replaced his elderly father.

"And Marius Chabrol?"

"He was on the verge of establishing a people's republic in Toulouse. The newspapers have stopped talking about it, but he's the one who runs the show in the Languedoc liberation committees.

"So much the better for him!" sighed the Count of Miramont. "He's a man of faith!"

He pulled Auda into his arms and sought her lips, and she surrendered without resistance but also without much enthusiasm. Barbaïra tried to take the initiative further, but Auda kept him at a distance with the firm gentleness she usually reserved for patients in the hospital ward.

"No, Roger, not now. A seriously injured convalescent who has just walked I don't know how many kilometres has to stay calm! You narrowly escaped septicaemia and the battle is not yet won! I have to take you with me to Toulouse and hospitalise you.

"So the *flics*¹ can catch me on the way out? No! I'd rather stay here until the end of time!"

Auda Isarn got up and began pacing back and forth, which had once seduced Otto Rahn, the first (knocking down, knocking over, lowering, falling) in favour of the new quest for the Grail. Always refined, more nervous than ever, she continued to maintain the reflexes of a thoroughbred that cannot be let off the leash. Her black eyes sparkled and, as she shook her mane, she once again unknowingly shattered the heart of the Count of Miramont. She said to him:

"I must be in Toulouse tonight!

"Stay with me, Auda," he begged.

"I can't, I have to work. The supplies I bring are from the black market and are more expensive, but I make extra deliveries so that you don't go without. I'll come here every Saturday."

"No... twice a week, Auda!"

"Impossible, the people of Montsegur know me. They've always thought we were a bunch of madmen, and they're not surprised to see me coming up with a big rucksack, but..."

Finish emptying it in the shop and refill it with herbs and branches to restore its original volume.

If I went through Montsegur with an empty rucksack, it would arouse suspicion, and the same would happen if I came in the middle of the week!

You could go up via Roc de la Tour... You never meet anyone on the northern route!

She shook her head.

"The mountain has the eyes of Lucifer. Nothing escapes him!"

She lay down again next to her fleeting lover, whose thoughts were now turning to the world of *his* comrades, almost all of whom had disappeared. She took his hand and announced:

¹ Policemen.

"I will pray for your healing and your freedom, Roger, and for the *bons hommes* ¹ of Toulouse to pray for the health of your soul.

He shook his head and replied:

"We do not have the same gods, Auda, and at present, mine cannot intercede on my behalf, but I accept your prayer because I love you.

They lay there until nightfall, hand in hand, like children lost in the immensity of *the pog*.



With a fidelity that was clearly conjugal and at the cost of a long and arduous march from the Caroulet gorges, Auda Isarn climbed the *pog* every Saturday, sometimes via the normal route from Montsegur, sometimes via Roc de la Tour. The first days of November remained sunny, but the nights were cold. Having recovered from his convalescence, Barbaïra faces them without great difficulty thanks to the Canadian tent and sleeping bag that absorbed his lover's entire savings in one fell swoop. Barbaïra asks him:

"Do you remember the rehearsals for *Montségur*, a three-act play based on the novel by Lévis-Mirepoix, by Guyot Peyrat, that we did here? By the way... What ever happened to our poet?"

-I haven't the faintest idea. It disappeared. Yes, I remember the rehearsals... Mainly, I remember the final scene you wanted to change! I died at the hands of Gauthier des Ormes as Cátara and at the same time as a lover forced by fate!

-I didn't like that melodramatic and false ending.

-You suggested that a knight from the North entered the fortress three months before the fateful date of 16 March 1244...

-Called Alain Barbaïra, Count *Faydit* de Miramont.

¹ The expression *bons hommes* or *bonhommes* was often used in reference to the Cathars, and mainly to the Perfects.

-A descendant of Visigothic chiefs renowned for their knowledge of pagan tradition and frowned upon at the court of Alaric, who had converted to Christianity!

-The key that allowed the "encrypted pagan writing" engraved on the stone tablets kept by the Perfects to be deciphered was brought to Montsegur. Despite having multiplied the passwords and tried to read them, they achieved nothing but the miserable Cathar heresy!

-Everything would change.

The Perfect Ones would understand that Roman Christianity and Cathar Christianity are both forms of delirium typical of the sick peoples of the Middle East, endorsed by dreamers of boundless credulity!

It is very cold. Fierce stars stud the black sky in unfathomable depths. The atmosphere is as dry as if the firmament were a bell jar in which a vacuum had been created. Not even a breath of air crosses the ruined fortress. Auda Isarn and Barbaïra stand close together at the corner of the western wall they occupied on 3 September 1939 and recreate the scene they did not have time to act out. Barbaïra comments:

"Freed from superstition, the Cathars would once again be the men they were before they fell into delusional metaphysics.

"An elite group of knights.

-A superior race.

-In love with an ideal.

-Capable of consenting to the highest sacrifices.

-In everything that surpasses them and that they want to surpass!

-In the Eternal Return.

-The Perfect remain perfect.

-But since then returned to earth and not to heaven.

-Entrusted with the mission of sublimating matter rather than destroying it.

-They no longer hide the Grail; on the contrary, they will reveal its true nature.

-To men still steeped in superstition.

-There will be no surrender at Montsegur.

-They descend upon the Crusaders

- They enlighten us.
- Together they liberate the Occitan homeland.
- They march on Rome.
- They pursue falsehood.
- Simony.
- Lust.
- They restore the unity of the West around forgotten primordial truths.
- The splendour of the earth.
- Love for life.
- The resurrection of carnal homelands.

They fall silent, closely entwined. Against the cold. Against the night. Against loneliness. Against fate. Immersed in Auda Isarn's eyes, which open onto twin abysses from which a light stronger than that of the stars rises, Roger Barbaïra discovers the golden particles that the moonlight seems to want to leave in them. His heart beats strongly. He says:

"And Barbaïra, Count of Miramont, marries Jordane de Montaire!"

Auda pulls away and walks slowly towards the southern postern gate. She lies face down on the lights of Montsegur, gathered almost vertically beneath her eyes on a narrow, elongated plane resembling a generously signposted runway. That side of the mountain is, however, an ocean of shadows from which the peaks of Tabe emerge like large black icebergs. Barbaïra joins her. They do not speak, they only watch the moon rise, casting a lifeless light on the walls. Then Auda Isarn murmurs:

"It was 3 September 1939 and we hadn't performed the play.

"Yes, we did, Auda! We performed it!" shouts the Count of Miramont, his voice raised... The curtain now rises on the final act, which corresponds neither to the Lévis-Mirepoix version nor to Roger Barbaïra's 1939 version! It is destiny that will write it, but the broad outlines of the action are already known.

- Gauthier des Ormes is not marrying Jordane de Montaire!
- We don't know.

-Is he going to kill her, perhaps, as in the Lévis-Mirepoix version?

-That's unlikely, for two reasons... *First*: Gauthier des Ormes is a man of honour who cannot kill Jordane without killing himself afterwards. *Second*: the guardians of the Grail are now too few in number to risk their lives. At most (at the very latest), the knight hopes to divert Jordane from the Cathar faith and, sooner or later, convert her to the religion of life!

-So, is the Grail rediscovered?

-The Grail is found and lost again.

-Did the current Cathars manage to read the encrypted pagan script?

-No more than the ancient Cathars.

-So, do they make him leave Montsegur on the last night, before the surrender of the fortress?

-They take it out on 2 May 1945 from the besieged fortress called Germany.

-Are the names of the Perfect Ones who hid him somewhere along the sacred route known?

-The names of the SS who took him to heaven and hid him in a glacier in Tyrol are known.

-And the names of those who watch over him?

-They do not know each other, but they observe the same star every night. And so it will be with their children and their children's children until the seventh generation.

-Can we then rehearse again but change the ending of the play?

-Yes, we can rehearse again. I'll call the actors... Jordane de Montaure?

-Present!

-Sir Gauthier des Ormes, present!... Inquisitor Jean de Navarre?

¹

-Delegate of the French Communist Party alongside the Languedoc liberation committees!

-Cathar Bishop Bertrand Martin?

¹ r Juan de Navarra.

- Handed over by the Inquisition to the secular arm of Carcassonne!
- Mr Pons de Montaure?
- Tortured by Spanish anarchists in Roquefixade!
- Sir Guy de Lévis?
- He is in his fiefdom of Lavelanet!
- Brunissende de Montaure?
- Missing!
- Troubadour Guyot Peyrat?
- Missing!
- Page Lou Ganet?
- Handed over by the Inquisition to the secular arm of Carcassonne!
- Director Estève Caberol?
- Burned at Montsegur by German troops!

They fall silent. The moon casts an otherworldly light on the scene. The walls of the fortress seem to be built of timeless stone that can easily be pierced with a finger. No sound rises from the open valleys all around. Not a breath of wind. Not a bird stirring on a tree branch. Not even a fox darting through the tall grass. At the end of a long moment, Barbaïra says in a hushed voice:

"In short, the play taken from Lévis-Mirepoix's novel has to be performed without actors? Because apart from you and me..."

And after shrugging her shoulders:

"Bah, to remake the world, all you need is a man and a woman!"

They walk slowly to the Trébuchet passage and pass between the box trees that hide the shop below. Auda Isarn leaves her companion a batch of provisions and picks up her rucksack full of branches.

"I have to go," he murmurs. The comrades who brought him by car will soon arrive at Montsegur.

"Ah... Do you have other comrades?"

Auda raises her eyebrows in surprise at the question.

"Of course!" she replies. "Life goes on, and my ties to this world are not so strong that they prevent me from replacing the

missing comrades with others!... I'm leaving... Be kind and embrace me...

"Wait a moment!" says Barbaïra.

She turns her back slightly with a sombre look and a furrowed brow and seems to reflect. Then...

"A little while ago, when we were taking roll call, we forgot someone, Auda... Someone we both know well..."

"That's right! We forgot Robert Robuffay!"

Barbaïra slightly corrects his previous position and replies:

"Handed over by Auda Isarn to the German military justice system and shot with my blessing!"

Auda shrugs her shoulders and, as she puts her rucksack on her back, replies in a sombre voice and with a certain fury:

"I can only give men the small part of myself that is devoted to the salvation of my soul! I have no right to forget the teachings of the Perfect Ones or to commit suicide with you for love! So much the worse for those who demand too much of me!"

Auda turned her back and began to descend the slope. Barbaïra watched with tearful eyes as the silhouette, illuminated by the timeless light of the moon, struggled to remain visible against the diaphanous backdrop of the eastern wall before being obscured by the gate. She wiped her eyes and murmured:

"Estève Caberol called her a cowhide, but, regardless of any comparison, he was right!"

She entered the tent and searched for a long time for sleep that would not come.



The Indian summer granted the *Faydit* a respite before surrendering to the storms. The essences of the evergreen foliage continued to maintain the reflection of the dead season around Montsegur and on the *pog* itself. Apart from Auda Isarn, who resupplied the outlaw, no one else visited the fortress. Faithful to her commitments, she abandoned her marble body to her lover at night, firm and sweet flesh untouched by sexual emotion. She never rushed, and as she

caressing her, Barbaïra wondered whether it would be the Midi of the Troubadours or the Midi of the Cathars that would ultimately triumph in her.

When she saw her arrive at the end of the week with her simultaneously restless and resolute animalistic attitude, her face animated by a passion that was not reserved for her, she thought: she expects from me the only thing I cannot give her, that Consolamentum that the clandestine heretics of Toulouse promised her in childhood, as she confessed to me one day!

However, she would go to see him, open her arms to him, and embrace him with kisses, but without entering into him. In an increasingly urgent tone, she would ask him a question, always the same one:

"So... what are you going to do, my poor Roger?"

Barbaïra smiled.

"It matters little. I will not capitulate!"

"But why Montsegur? You're a pagan and you detest the Cathars..."

"The Cathars of Montsegur? They couldn't have been very numerous on 16 March 1244... Not even half as many as Hugues des Arcis and the inquisitors had burned after the surrender! In reality, apart from the Church, always jealous of eliminating competition, I don't think anyone was interested in them! On the contrary, the *Faydits* who took refuge under the protection of Raymond de Péreille were of great interest to Blanche of Castile! Those who were singled out and whom I now defend were my equals, Languedoc lords plundered by simoniacs, crushed by lies and violence!"

He spoke with ardour, enriched by the vital force that Auda Isarn had just saved. He added:

"I fight for..."

"Pure childishness!" murmured Auda. "The war is over!"

Barbaïra shrugged.

"No, the war isn't over. I'm still fighting to prevent the Crusade against the Albigensians from falling under the yoke of historical prescription. When I leave Montsegur – if I ever really leave it – nothing will be the same as before. I absolutely reject the verdicts of history!"

Auda Isarn rested her head on his chest and turned her eyes towards the sky, imbued with a weary light, tinged with pastel pink. She said:

"In any case, you had to leave Montsegur. Go to Spain, I'm coming with you!"

"No conditions?"

"I will continue to be your lover... Why do you hesitate when you have what Robuffay did not have?"

"I don't want to go to Spain."

Then, in a sombre voice:

"I've been retreating since 1944... For me, enough is enough!"
I failed in all my attempts... I didn't discover the engraved stone tablets... Joining the SS didn't allow me to reconquer Miramont... I know you'll never truly love me. I have no land, I don't have a penny, not even an identity!...

She looked at him with sombre admiration and said, somewhat excitedly:

"You're forgetting one thing, Roger. In a way, you became a 'clothed' heretic. From the point of view of Matter, you have the same dimension as the Perfect Ones!"

Barbaira laughed.

" r that, as heretic, no could have one better!...
Baptised Christian and returned to original paganism! Born French and become an Occitan separatist! A Munique's in 1938, a conscientious objector in 1939, a militiaman in 1939, a Waffen-SS refugee in the catacombs of the new religion of race in 1945... I don't think there is a bonfire big enough to burn me, either in Montsegur or the surrounding area!

Then, in a tone that replaced irony with firmness:

I am a child, it is true, but the future belongs to children. I will never give up. Today, as yesterday, I am willing to ally myself with the devil, if necessary, to achieve my goals!

Silent and with her eyes closed, Auda Isarn did not move. A bird hopped on the rocks near them. The voice of a villager urging on his animals rose from the depths and reached them with extraordinary clarity. Thin clouds carved the sky. The still-vivid scent of boxwood caused them slight dizziness, which was aggravated by their position, more

integrated into the sky than into the earth, the effects of the altitude bubbling up in them like champagne. In a voice coming from afar, Auda Isarn murmured:

"Roger, if you said to me now: let's go into the Endura and let ourselves starve to death here in Montsegur, I would follow you with the greatest joy! I have not the slightest doubt that, from a certain point in the trial, when you entered into the detachment from the flesh, you would turn to the Spirit that comforts and heals! You would understand how crude the religion of race, and therefore of matter, is. The flesh is destined to decay; only the Spirit can reach the Ineffable! Your invisible part is what represents eternity!

Auda took his hand and, in an increasingly persuasive and gentle tone...

"When I feel you are near the end but still able to respond intelligibly to what is essential, I ask you... Roger Barbaïra, Count *Faydit* de Miramont, is it true that you are prepared and certainly close to the moment of union you desire between your soul and your spirit?

"And I would answer: I am.

"Then I would send a message to my father, who would come out of retirement. A short message: apostolic man, a soul is calling you! He would climb Montsegur and say to you...

-I know, replies Barbaïra... It was the beginning of our play... "If your physical strength abandons you, may your spiritual strength sustain you".

-You are going to make the other faithful understand how much you despise your body.

-Let them throw it away!

"Man of God, do not delay in comforting him. If he leaves like this, I fear that his soul will wander for thousands of years in the bodies of living animals!

-Comfort me!

-I think you're nearing the end...

-May God have mercy on me!

-Ask this apostolic man to intercede for you before God!

-Let him ask God!

-Comfort me!

-Pater sancte, suscipe ancillam tuam...

They fall silent. The bird that was hopping and singing near them also falls silent. The setting sun sets the peaks ablaze. A red and icy light assails them. Shrouds spread across the valley floors. The silence kept in reserve by the caves of Tabe emerges from the abyss and strangles the mountains in a substance that is both hard and impalpable. The cold falls upon their shoulders. Roger Barbaïra says, trembling:

"Your memory is betraying you, Auda. You have forgotten an essential formula from the Consolamentum: 'The state of marriage, being a state of sin, must be banished from thought.'"

"That's true... And what would you say?"

"No! And I would say to your father: marriage is the source of all life, a state of grace and the first condition of eternity, because there is no eternity beyond the biological!"

It was now the middle of the night.



The snow arrived. It covered the peaks of Soularac and Saint-Barthélemy in a seamless blanket and covered Montsegur with only a thin layer that the crags tore apart. As soon as it began to fall, the boxwoods shook it off. Barbaïra swept it to the sides of the tent and around it.

The oil heater that Auda brought him provides the tent with a gentle, foul-smelling warmth. To avoid gaining weight, the outlaw continues to exercise bare-chested and climb the most difficult access routes to the *pog*. Climbing the fortress in snowy weather is a provocation.

Snow. Silence. Hardened cobalt sky. Silver grasslands, bronze crags. Hungry foxes inscribe the hieroglyphics of their passage everywhere. Auda's footprints on the *pog* form a net that closes in around the condemned man.

Barbaïra does not perceive the threats. Having lived for three months on a pedestal closer to heaven than to earth, he finds himself

strengthened by a soul nourished by space, silence and solitude. He would fall into hermit-like contemplation if he did not belong to a strict Order that guides the movements of the soul on the straight path of its conception of the world.

Snow. Night. Mild warmth in the tent. By candlelight, the Far Eastern ivory of Auda's body takes on the amber *patina* that time confers on this material to ennoble it. Long black hair spreads across her chest and covers her shoulders. Enriched by a virility protected and refined by solitude, Barbaïra possesses his cold lover with the hieratic brutality of a great beast and, at the same time, with the prodigality of a creator god.

It is a night like any other, one that will end like so many others. Barbaïra will plunge into the sleep of satiety without seeing anything new in the flames of her eyes, which rest on his shoulder until the first light of dawn. A night that could separate a little more what should be together!

In reality, it is not a night like any other, but neither he nor she had any premonition of what was about to happen... A heart-rending, dramatic cry suddenly bursts forth from under the canvas. Auda has just let out the cry of the animal admitted for a few seconds to the steps of the temple where the gods sit. The moan that covers the last echoes does not quite shape the silence into a well-adventured prayer... Taken by surprise, Barbaïra steps aside and, still lucid, thinks before plunging into the abyssal sleep that stalks him: finally, I can record my first victory.

Silence. Deep snow. Night. Black night, then white. The day fights against sickly languor and survives. It leans over the tent with the curiosity of the convalescent, eager to know if the world has changed while he was unconscious.

The world has changed. Auda and Barbaïra wake up at the same time. Auda smiles, an ineffable smile that is not that of Cathar belief, and asks:

"Roger, would you like a glass of water?"

¹ *pátina*.

She goes out into the snow, naked, and heads for the small cistern they improvised from a natural vessel and returns with a little ice-cold water mixed with snow.

"Drink, my dear!"

Barbaïra tries to catch the flames that danced yesterday in the depths of those pathetic eyes. The flames are extinguished. He manages to decipher her gaze, but all he finds in it is peace beneath a veil of languor. In his macho roughness, he expected a few words about the night's revelation, but as she presses herself naked against his chest, she barely says:

-Darling... I love you... I love you... I love you...

Shortly afterwards, she got up, lit the oil heater, prepared a small breakfast and presented it submissively and happily...
Would you like some more chocolate?... Butter?... Bread?...

They got up, got dressed and went out. Deep snow. Grey sky. Grey mountains. A damp, heavy atmosphere. It is the heavy snowfall of January. Auda Isarn walks back and forth in the snow. She has lost her thoroughbred attitude and walks with thoughtful, somewhat indolent steps, increasingly beautiful but freed from her reticence towards life, deprived of mystery. The mystery of Auda Isarn no longer exists. The daughter of the famous Toulouse healer once convicted of illegally practising medicine, initiated into Catharism by heretics whom the century totally ignores, has just fallen into the arms of a true lover.



The inhabitants of Montsegur are perplexed. That Auda Isarn they know so well and consider as foolish as the *ajistes* of yesteryear did not descend from *the pog*. They saw her climb up on Saturday, so she has been on the mountain for eight days. They would be concerned if they did not know her to be familiar with the paths. Given that in 1946 mountain rescue expeditions with hysterical *mises-en-scène* and airborne actors are not in vogue, they think

that she descended on the other side, via Caroulet... *one* can only *sympathise!* ¹

Auda Isarn did not descend from *the pog*. She is in her lover's arms and says:

"Roger, my dear, I'm scared!... I'm scared of you!

They won't stop coming here to look for you... to torture you in Carcassonne prison like Lou Ganet and Ferrocas!... You have to go to Spain! We can reach Spain in two days on skis!

There, we'll both be happy. I'll go with you wherever you go, I'll find work... and that's it, we won't stay here any longer! All this is terrifying!

The Count of Miramont confirms what he said before:

"I don't want to go to Spain, Auda!

She kisses him on the lips, presses herself against him, caresses his face and chest.

"I beg you, Roger! Leave Montsegur! It's a cursed place! Leave this France that you detest! Our homeland now is us! You've sacrificed enough for your convictions. Think of me! Think of us! Besides, we can get married if you want. I'll give you all the children you want. I'm yours. Totally. Blindly. You are the love of my life!

Roger Barbaïra returned her caresses.

"I've loved you for so long, Auda! I waited ten years to hear you say you want to be my wife! Phew! Now I know!

And then:

"Pay attention, Auda, by becoming my wife, you are also marrying a cause. I am making you Countess *Faydit* de Miramont, which has nothing to do with love. An aristocrat is valued for their power of sacrifice, nothing more. They must be above the commoners – ancient or modern, it matters little, since they are the same – with the mission of protecting them from external dangers... and from themselves! But to have that place that history denies me, we must escape the condition of *Faydit*... Have you thought about the dramas that await us?

¹ A woman *à la page*, that is, courageous and determined.

Auda shook her black mane like the fighting animal she still was, whose aggression only asked for a new outlet.

"I am your slave!" she muttered under her breath. "I will do whatever you want; wherever you go, I will go!"

A frank smile lit up his face, and he replied:

"Then we're not going to Spain. I have no desire to emigrate. After Montsegur, I'm starting over from scratch. I've thought a lot about what I plan to do and the steps you can take to help me."

She embraced him passionately again and said:

-I will do whatever it takes. I accept torture in your place.

Everything!

He smiled and said:

"Our enemies are people without convictions. They will be the first to be horrified by what they did to our comrades. Once the greatest danger has passed, find Marius Chabrol and explain my situation to him. Something tells me that he will resolve everything without much difficulty. We must begin with the most urgent matter: regaining freedom of action in order to recover the property. It is only from the ground up that blood can be saved, and this truth applies to all the battles for the liberation of Occitania!



When Auda Isarn descended from Montsegur, her lover had lost several kilos because he gave himself to her with a passion equal to hers. He returned to live among the clouds, between the two grey shrouds of snow and sky, but a balanced force now sustained him better than the exaltation that in September had led him to bring the cowards of the great Romanesque castles before the "People's Court".

Auda returned to *the pog* a few days later, embraced him enthusiastically and said:

"Everything is settled! I spoke to Marius Chabrol in Montpellier. He told me that he still has the utmost esteem and friendship for you.

"I had no doubt," said Barbaïra. "He is a communist militant, and there is nothing I can do about that, but he is also a comrade, a man of faith and, at the same time, a realist. I have confidence in him. As for the courts..."

And shrugging his shoulders:

"Those inquisitors carry no weight. None of them is capable of harbouring, as I do, a hatred seven times secular!

Auda Isarn brings her face close to his, illuminated by the love she draws from the contact of her flesh with that of her lover, and trusts in the success of the matter.

"What do you decide? Shall we go down together? To be with you... to live with you!... Wonderful, my dear!

Barbaïra shook his head and laughed.

"Not yet, Auda. I love you very much as my wife and my lover, but I also have duties that are not strictly related to love, at least not to the kind of love we share. I prefer to stay here until the hour of surrender. I will leave Montsegur with Raymond de Péreille knowing that the Grail is now in a safe place and with the certainty that I am leaving Montsegur to retake Miramont at the same time!

Auda rested her head on his chest, overflowing with pride at feeling flesh and blood with the man she loves, the heretic "clothed" in a new religion that is not his own and, ultimately, without wanting to know, when passions calm with age, which will triumph, the faith of his childhood or the light revealed in his carnal depths almost by chance... one night.

VII

On 16 March 1946, around midday, Roger Barbaïra, Count *Faydit* de Miramont, handed the keys to Montsegur to Hugues des Arcis, seneschal of Carcassonne, who was responsible for delivering them as a pledge to President Vincent Auriol. He was still wearing the German army's camouflage uniform and carrying his goatskin rucksack. Auda Isarn had brought the precious material acquired with his savings the day before.

There are still patches of snow on the slopes of *the pog*. The mass of prisoners treads the ground without paying attention to the spring flowers that rest on the new grass and occupy the space abandoned by winter. The sun shines and the *Faydits* remain haughtily silent.

Behind Roger Barbaïra and Raymonde Péreille are Jordan, their son, Guiraud de Rabat, their son-in-law, Bertrand de Péreille, their brother, and their respective servants. Then *Berenguer* d'Avelanet, Arnaud-Olivier, his son, Imbert de Salles, his son-in-law, Guillaume de Bouan, Arnaud Roger de Mirepoix de Bellisen, Faïs and Othon de Massabrac, his sons. Finally, Guillaume de Planha, Pierre de Lérans, Arnaud de Miglos, Gailhard del Congost, Pierre-Guillaume d'Arvinha... All pledged to the *murus strictissimus* of Carcassonne.

The car sent by Auda Isarn's new comrades waits at Montsegur and the *Faydit* takes his place in it. Two hours later, he begins to climb the access ramp to the city gate. Barbaïra says to the driver:

"That's not the way, dear. The inquisitors no longer operate in the count's castle. They have another address, the penitentiary on the Narbonne road."

The car turns around. There is little distance left to travel. The prison gates open for the condemned man who is going to cleanse his contumacy.



The inquisitor arrives at the end of the afternoon. It is raining. He appears in a beige raincoat and a soft hat with narrow brims. The prison governor returns the safe-conduct he has just shown with a fawning smile and leads him himself to the cells on the first floor along corridors whose walls have been freshly whitewashed to cover up the long traces of blood that stained them.

The Carcassonne prison ceased to be Assyrian in character the day a certain Sébédio, a garage owner in the city known as a resistance fighter, showed up at the gate. Gaby asked him:

"What are you doing here?"

Sébastien pressed the barrel of his submachine gun against his stomach with resolute gestures and replied:

"Kill you all if you don't leave this place within an hour!"

The "Gaby gang" disappeared without offering any resistance, continuing to ride "the Beast that rises from the abyss" and went in search of other places to carry out their exploits. From then on, the town stopped talking about prison and started talking about "Hotel Sébastien".

The director orders the cell to be opened, steps aside to let the inquisitor in, and retreats on tiptoe, visibly concerned not to attract the attention of that fearsome and feared character.

"Good afternoon," says Marius Chabrol.

"Good afternoon," replies Barbaïra.

They stand face to face, somewhat awkwardly. Chabrol throws down his waterlogged hat, takes off his raincoat, and places everything on the platform.

"Sit down," he says to Barbaïra.

"Thanks, I prefer to walk to stay in shape!" Silence.

The two men stare at each other intensely.

"You've lost weight," Chabrol remarks.

"That's natural," replies Barbaïra. "No victory has ever made our clan of wolves any fatter!"

Someone sings in a nearby cell... In a trembling voice...

Maréchal, nous voilà!... Barbaïra responds to the silent question from his former comrade.

-He's an old soldier... he's a bit deranged...

A guard's shout echoes along the walls... "Shut up!"... Silence. The sound of rain on the roof. Chabrol sees the black and grey city of Carcassonne in the distance under the unusual slate roof, trying to shelter from the rain in a Languedoc that only knows tiles. Question:

-You're good at history, tell me something... Was it really in the Visigothic tower that Raymond-Roger Trencavel was left to die?

"No, it was in a dungeon in the count's castle, but we don't know exactly which one."

Chabrol murmurs.

"Nothing could be easier for them than to get rid of an inconvenient prisoner by leaving him to die in prison, right, Barbaïra?"

"Nothing could be easier, in fact."

Silence falls again and lingers. Count *Faydit* de Miramont finally breaks it with an observation:

"You haven't changed, Chabrol! You still look at people like a priest hearing a murderer's confession... One must be very perceptive to guess the nature of the penance you are going to impose!"

"Indeed," murmurs Chabrol, flashing a smile completely devoid of charity.

The old militiaman returns to the same old song... "*Car c'est toi le sauveur de la France*"... "Silence in 21!" shouts the guard. Silence. The cell smells of mould and cabbage. Barbaïra paces from one wall to another like a fox caught in the act of capture.

"Sit down!" orders Chabrol. "You're giving me a headache."

Barbaïra sits down on the edge of the platform. Chabrol sits down next to him and says:

"Let's see... Let's start at the beginning. Why did you join the Militia and the SS?"

The prisoner shrugs his shoulders.

"You know very well! I explained my position to you in 1942, on the day everything was decided at the AJ in Roquefixade. I bet everything on the independence of Occitania through the German trump card.

"And you lost! Are you happy now?"

"No, I'm not satisfied!"

Chabrol grabs him by the arm, squeezes it hard and murmurs:

-To be honest, neither am I! The bourgeoisie ended up stealing our victory! Everything is just as it was before!

He takes a packet of cigarettes out of his pocket:

-Do you smoke, Barbaïra?

-It's forbidden!

"I don't care about the prison administration! In a few weeks, a few months perhaps, which is more likely,

I'll have more power than the prison governor. But Ramadier will want our heads at any cost!

"If I understand correctly," Barbaïra murmurs, "are we more or less, more than less, on the same side of the fence?"

Chabrol shakes his head.

-More or less, yes!

"In that case, do you give me absolution?"

"Calm down, let's take it slowly!"

The communist leader's brow darkened, his face became serious and his gaze stern.

"Why did you take up arms against the USSR?"

Barbaïra raised his arms towards the ceiling of the cell.

"I want to know about the USSR... It was Hitler who attacked them, not me.

-But did you fight on the Eastern Front?

-Hey, Chabrol, try to understand my position. I joined the SS of my own free will, a religious, political and military caste that could ask me to do anything... In exchange for that submission *perinde ad cadaver*, in the event of victory I would receive a position of command, that is, the government of a racially and territorially independent Occitania, ideologically subjugated, but subjugated by me, of course! I would bring about supreme freedom, racial freedom, and a form of socialism so advanced that in less than three months I would have all your communist friends on my side!

"You wouldn't have me!

-You never know!

-And the Militia?

"The Militia was just the antechamber of the SS. I am a gentleman, not a petty bourgeois!

The former secretary of the Narbonne "youth" scratches his forehead, thinks for a long time and asks:

"What if I asked you to renounce the SS ideology?"

Barbaïra bursts out laughing.

-Hey! Hey! That's like asking a Cathar to go to Rome!

The prisoner's singing resumes in the background and lingers like the sound of rain on the roof. Trencavel Castle

is half hidden behind grey clouds that thicken as night falls.

"Persisting in error is worse than committing it!" murmurs Marius Chabrol. The SS were criminals. Anyone who remains in the SS remains a criminal and an enemy of the Party. This is very serious, Barbaïra!

He raises his head, fixes a cold stare on the prisoner's eyes and adds:

"And enemies... must be eliminated!"

Barbaïra stands up and resumes pacing the cell. He says emphatically:

Poor Marius, once again you are a prisoner of dialectics! Dialectics is your sin and it will be your downfall! You claim to be realistic and rational like religious people! What do you know exactly about the SS? Nothing beyond the image given to you by hysterical propaganda. A load of nonsense! Just think, if Hitler hadn't made the tragic mistake of attacking holy Russia, instead of being here arguing, we would be marching together to destroy both the dictatorship of money and Christian superstition! I was defeated as an SS man, it's true, but you were defeated as a communist. It was stateless capitalism that won, and you yourself acknowledged it!

So, what do you say?

Marius Chabrol crushes the rest of his cigarette on the cell floor and says slowly...

"Even so... You spoke recently of religious caste... How is it possible that we could walk the same path together?"

The Count of Miramont raised his arms once more and shouted:

"It's obvious you know absolutely nothing! Let me do the questioning!"

"You're bold!" remarks the communist.

-Are you fighting against large monopolies and the tyranny of money?

-Yes.

-So do we. Do you fight against Catholic theocracy?

-Yes.

-So do we, and more effectively than you, because we oppose them with a competing religion, the only one that is now authenticated by scientific progress. Evolution does not depend on the economy, as you claim, it depends on man! We are materialists in the absolute sense because we have this notion at the level of biology, while your materialism remains relative at the level of the economy! When I speak of a religious caste in relation to us, it is to define the respect for the only god we have within us: blood, the source of all life and all evolution, good or bad...

And he emphasises his statements with a clenched fist...

"In relation to us, fellow believers in blood, you are nothing more than miserable reactionaries!"

Marius Chabrol frowns, seems to hesitate between two attitudes, then smiles and says:

"You're really bold, Roger! This is the first time a condemned man has ever called the Communist Party a reactionary movement in front of me! I've never seen anything like it!

You leave me completely speechless!

Barbaïra smiles back, sits down beside him and replies:

"The new Cathars persecuted by your Church, which considers itself triumphant, have beliefs as firm as the old ones!

The communist lights another cigarette and points to the neighbouring cell, where a "*Maréchal, nous voilà*" arrives, its Midi accent seeming to take away all its threatening power. He asks:

"Isn't there any way to shut that guy up? He's giving me earache!"

"Bah!" murmurs the *Faydit*, "we have to be charitable with the militiamen. In that stupid war that solved nothing, you and I took the most extreme, radical opposing positions, and that was perhaps what saved us... They were caught between two giant forces and paid, perhaps unjustly, for their hesitation in choosing between what they could not classify as Good and Evil according to their Christian conscience! History rejected them... like a river that deposits on its banks the good soil torn from the mountains!

Marius Chabrol does not comment. It is clear that he detests the militiamen. He seems immersed in laborious meditations. The prisoner eats a sandwich and drinks the orange juice that he had brought him as an enemy brother remembered from the days of the shelters. Then he raises his eyes and fixes them on the accused:

"Why don't you join the Party? I must remind you that it also fights for a free Occitania within a federation of democratic states.

"As for the federation, I already answered you in 1942 in Roquefixade. Until proven otherwise, I do not believe there is freedom in the homelands federated by Moscow. As for the rest, I think that the great biological discoveries that are emerging will inevitably lead you to overcome the historical and dialectical materialism that results from those discoveries. At that point, I will be waiting for you for as long as it takes.

Marius Chabrol patted him on the thigh and laughed openly, an attitude that conveyed more confusion than joy.

"When I met you at the AJ, I certainly didn't imagine you were so daring... On the contrary, you seemed very reserved, almost shy. Was it the SS that gave you that confidence?

"Perhaps.

"Well, from now on, I won't mention your position in the SS again... Better yet, I don't remember it! And I don't see any reference to it in the proceedings!

He opens the trial documents he has just taken out of the folder, removes all the compromising papers and continues:

-Before giving you the green light, and since I am here on official business, I must ask you to account for the murder of Robert Robuffay.

Barbaïra starts at the beginning and recalls the long years of rivalry that led to the drama in the Basqui Valley. He wonders whether he should mention the search for the engraved stone tablets, but after

a few seconds of reflection, he decides to refrain. As for the rest, he hides nothing and recounts the episode with complete objectivity.

"That's what I thought," murmured Chabrol. "When you work underground, you can't believe women's stories. Besides, those are the instructions the Party gives for clandestine action."

He leans over the file for a few minutes and finally says:

"I'm going to hand your case over to the civil court. You'll get five years of national indignity and a seizure of assets, but limited to ten thousand francs. That way, you'll be able to get your vineyards back.

"I hope so!" replies Barbaïra in a grave voice.

The light has just been turned on. The cell appears cold and bare. Through the window frame, Chabrol sees the city of Carcassonne, which the rain seems to transform into ruins and cut out against the same backdrop as Peyrepertuse. He shudders slightly and murmurs:

"When it rains in Languedoc, I lose the will to fight for its independence!"

He gathers the papers in the file, puts them back in the folder and announces:

"I'm going to talk to the investigating judge and ask him to sign your provisional release. Tomorrow morning you'll be able to leave prison.

"Thank you. I'll keep that in mind. I remind you that one day you may have to answer before a court of law for the heresy represented by historical and pseudo-scientific materialism, and that I may be the president of that court!

In the meantime, I feel that we are going to go a long way together... or perhaps all the way, if you manage to free yourself from those reactionary preconceptions and Russian tyranny!

Marius Chabrol gives him a friendly pat on the back and insists:

"You're getting bolder and bolder, but you're probably right! Even if our paths don't cross, they are, from a certain point of view, parallel.

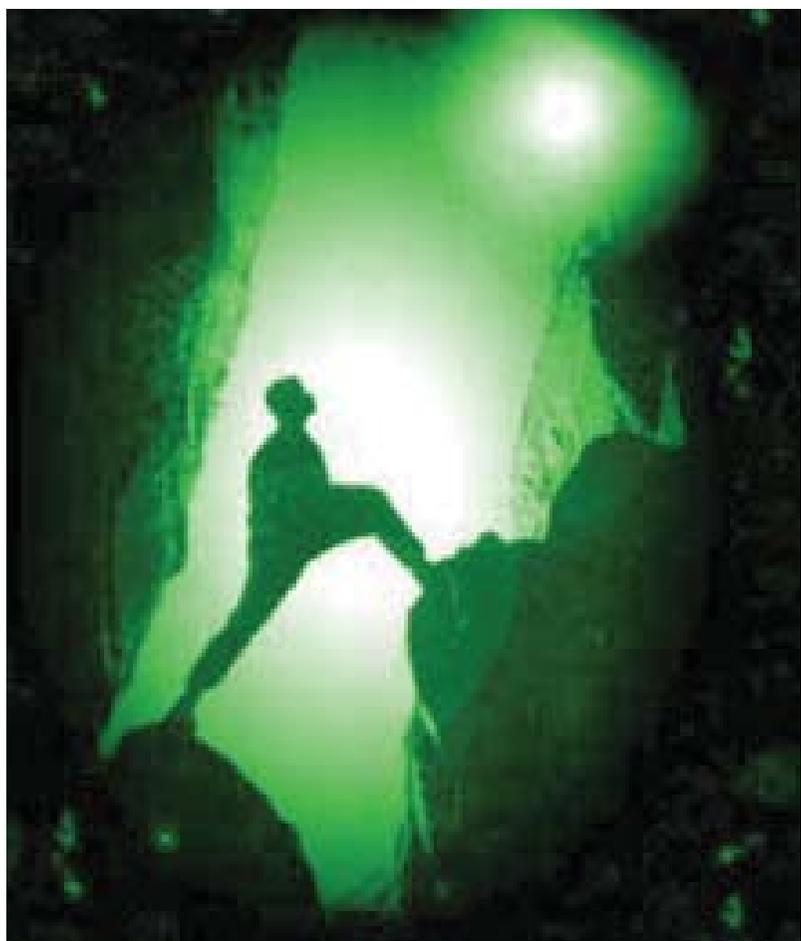
He shakes his hand and leaves without closing the cell door.



Three months later, Auda Isarn married Roger Barbaira in the strictest privacy and became Countess *Faydit* de Miramont.

III

GREEN LIGHT



The Count of Miramont watched his eldest son, Guillaume, eating his soup. His head was tilted slightly to one side, just as it had been when he himself was fourteen, and his free hand rested on the piece of bread beside his plate, a sign of the caution and mistrust passed down from generation to generation in the Barbaïra family, rather than something instilled by his education.

Roger Barbaïra feels younger as his son grows older. He thinks: my wife's Cathar friends are wrong to complicate the mysteries of reincarnation so much. The son represents the eternity of the father, there is no other!

Seated at the head of the table, he presides over dinner. Seated to his right according to age hierarchy are Guillaume, fourteen, and Amiel, twelve, and opposite him are his sisters Géralda and Yolanda. Raymond, the youngest, sleeps in the castle tower reserved for children... Five children in fourteen years of marriage... Auda sits at the other end of the table, very upright, thinner than before, almost as thin as the tall women of the Albigenese mountains, her long black hair tied back in a braid, her face tanned by country life, her deep eyes dimmed by the pinkish semi-darkness diffused by the lamp. The wild cherry sideboard takes on red tones. The fine Provençal earthenware plates appear as bright spots on the waxed trays. From high up on the wall, Roger's father watches over the life of the family who, although without him since 1950, still respects the lifestyle he established during his lifetime.

The children do not speak during meals unless they are given permission to do so. When asked a question in French, they must answer in Occitan, and vice versa. The pace of the exchanges is set quite naturally, without constraint. In 1960, the old language of the troubadours is spoken and written correctly in Le Pech.

There are no prayers to sanctify the food they eat. Auda and the children listen standing up to the passage from the *Chanson de la Croisade* by Guillame de Tudèle that their father reads, and they sit down after he gives the order. The ceremony is free of military rigidity

, and is part of a life devoted to the prosperity of the estate and to study.

Guillaume and Amiel leave in the morning on *their Mobylette*¹ for the secondary school in Carcassonne. Géralda, aged ten, and Yolanda, aged eight, walk to the communal school in the neighbouring village. Auda and her husband did not baptise their children. The question arose only once, in 1946, after Guillaume's birth, when the priest came to visit. Seeing him walk up the avenue of plane trees, Auda shouted:

'Roger, it's the "bad man" from Capendu...² Welcome him if you want, but I warn you that if you baptise our son, I'll leave you immediately!

He embraced her, laughing, and said:

"There is only one priest capable of convincing me of that necessity: Jean, Count of Mayol de Lupé... Unfortunately for the Church, I believe he remains imprisoned on the pretext of 'collaboration'³.

Barbaïra received the priest with his usual courtesy, accompanied him to the door and said:

"Pope Innocent III stripped my ancestors of everything. As a descendant of *Faydit*, it is not baptism that I expect from the Catholic Church, but... reparation.

-Let us see, my lord, let us see...

-My lord? It is not enough to grant me the title of nobility that we were unable to claim in 1666! You must restore to me the castle and lands of Miramont!

-But that's ancient history, my son!

-I am not your son, and it is only ancient history for the ignorant. Seven centuries are but a moment in the life of a great family like ours!

To his mother's great joy, Guillaume was not baptised. Neither were Amiel, Géralda, Yolanda, or Raymond.

¹ A small-engined motorbike from around 1960.

² This circumlocution, still used in remote areas of Languedoc, does not imply a value judgement per se, but perpetuates the distinction established in the 13th century between the "bons hommes" Cathars and the "mauvais hommes" representatives of the Church, then the enemy power.

³ Chaplain of the French armies in the East, of the French Volunteer Legion against Bolshevism and of the SS Charlemagne Division.

Dinner is now coming to an end. From the windows wide open onto the park come the last scents of autumn and, from time to time, a banana leaf pushed by a faint breeze lands on the table like a loose piece of a princely Vermeil service.

The children leave. Auda and Roger settle into armchairs that resemble large ships in the area where the shadows and the pink light from the lamp meet. Clad in a leather suit that reveals his youthful, muscular shoulders, Barbaïra has just returned from a trip and is a little tired. He leans back, crosses his legs and says:

"I met a man named François Montan in Nice.

"Did he make a good impression on you?"

"Yes and no... Yes, because he is a man of conviction, determined to fight to the end for the independence of Occitania... No, in terms of ideas. He lacks scientific rigour!

"For example?"

"Well... he characterises ethnicity solely on the basis of language! Not only does he ignore the biological substrate, he denies it! Just like UNESCO. This leads him to claim that Occitania is limited to the former linguistic area of Oc, thirty-one departments of the current hexagon, and ten million people who have arrived from who knows where! It's very dangerous.

Auda lights a lamp, begins her sewing and asks:

"Are there many people in the Occitan Nationalist Party?"⁽¹⁾

¹ For reference, see an excerpt from the statutes of the Occitan Nationalist Party, as legally registered. They give an idea of the tendencies of this movement.

a) *Determination of nations*: A study of the current linguistic state of humanity must be carried out in order to establish a list of nations based on the principle of intercomprehension.

b) *Borders of nations*: Territorial boundaries between nations should be drawn according to the linguistic affiliation of the population, provided that this affiliation is unique and stable.

If that affiliation changes due to recent immigration and replacement, that replacement shall also be null and void unless the former ethnic group is of low density; in the latter case, the territory shall be divided in relation to the

numerical importance of the two populations, but taking into account property rights.

Whenever necessary, exchanges of territories and populations shall be carried out to restore the territorial and human unity of a nation, considering that the sea cannot be a factor in interrupting that territorial unity...

In the event that a nation has no territory, it shall be given all or part of its former country, unless it is occupied by a nation with a high population density, in which case that territory shall be granted to it in sparsely populated regions... etc.

c) *Political and economic objectives*: Each nation must form a unified and sovereign state enjoying political independence and legal equality in relation to other nations.

Foreigners may reside in the national territory as long as the state authorises it, but they may not hold political or military office. Naturalisation should be granted only in exceptional cases and as long as it corresponds to real assimilation.

Each nation must be economically independent, that is, all important means of production and distribution must be national property or the property of members of the nation and the state.

All problems arising in international relations must be regulated by agreement between the independent nations concerned. Armed forces must be disbanded and weapons of war destroyed.

Principles defined by the statutes of the P.N.O.

The primary objective of the Party is to obtain the political, economic and cultural independence of Occitania within its ethno-linguistic boundaries, from Bayonne to Menton and Fenestrelle, from the Pyrenees and Leucate and Libourne, Montluçon and Romana.

The Party's second objective is to support the struggle for independence and unity of every nation in the world, as well as the struggle for understanding and collaboration among all nations... etc.

Economic and social plan

a) Withdrawal from the "small European" Common Market.

b) Foreign trade strictly controlled by the State.

c) Maintenance and creation of customs tariffs at the borders of the French State and, subsequently, establishment of customs tariffs between Occitania and France in order to protect existing economic activities and create new ones in the future.

d) Nationalisation of major natural resources, banks, large industries, large commercial companies belonging to foreigners in the French state and, in a second phase, all those belonging to non-Occitans.

No. Fontan founded it in the spring of 1959. As he was alone, he rode his bicycle around to visit his comrades and won supporters one by one. It is an effective but slow method. Well, it doesn't matter. The essential thing is that, as you can see, we are not alone as we were before the war. Occitania is on the move!

He takes a deep breath as if seeking a second wind to revive the fight, clenches his hands on the arms of the armchair and says:

"Do you remember the times before the war, Auda? The secular youth hostels... The people of Montsegur who thought we were crazy when we talked to them about liberating Occitania..."

Auda de Miramont smiled.

"I have a feeling they won't change their minds. François Fontan just replaced Roger Barbaïra, that's all!"

Barbaïra shrugged.

"It doesn't matter. Villagers are always reactionary in the worst sense of the word. The winds of emancipation are currently blowing from the left, and Fontan comes from the Communist Party or the Socialist Party.

Give my reply to all the people who condemn me for having worn the SS uniform, even though they don't understand why I wore it, and who want to lock me up with them in the ghetto of the right!

He relaxes, tilts his head back and murmurs:

"I was lucky to survive that stupid war to witness the birth of an Occitan nationalist party... brought to the baptismal font by a former communist!"

e) Priority for Occitania in state investments in relation to overseas investments and in relation to investments in the already developed regions of the French state...

Ways and means

The means of implementing this programme are propaganda and legal means, mass action and passive resistance and, finally, if effective and necessary, national liberation warfare. This means that the renunciation of force in international relations and disarmament are initially subordinate to the achievement of national independence and unity and that they must then be practised simultaneously by the different nations... etc...

The cold crept insidiously through the open windows. Auda stops working, gets up to close them. As she passes, she kisses her husband on the forehead, sits back down and asks:

"Is Gaussan okay with the fifteen hectares in Marseillette?"

"We've reached an agreement. I'm going to the notary next Wednesday.

In fourteen years of hard work and at the cost of a risky financial policy, the Count of Miramont had doubled the size of his estate, mechanised its operation to an extraordinary degree and built or rebuilt several farms. Auda shudders at the thought and ventures an observation.

"Do you think it's wise, Roger, for us to have a debt of two hundred thousand francs on our backs because of those fifteen hectares? We owe more than two hundred million old francs to Crédit Predial and Crédit Agricole!

Barbaira shrugged.

"It's the enemy's money! France is waging war on those who saved it in 1914 – imbeciles! – and is using Crédit Agricole to expropriate them under the pressure of an increasingly impossible debt. With this expedient, big capitalism is attempting the same operation as Marxism in Russia, but with far greater cunning and hypocrisy. Once war is declared, I will respond with brutality. When the time for decolonisation comes to Occitania, we will cancel all debts that could take away our countrymen's land! Pure and simple! So far, I have found no better way to take back from the north what it stole from the Miramonts in 1209.

Auda sighs.

"What if France bankrupts you before liberation?"

-It's a risk I have to take. Like fighting in the SS. I accept that risk. I'm thinking of buying the Alaric mountain and the forests and including Miramont Castle in the deal. And, if I manage to get that far, rebuilding it!

He gets up, goes to his study and returns with a stack of plans, which he places on his wife's lap.

"Look! We'll use the stones from the ruins to rebuild it faithfully according to the old designs..."

Auda leans over the designs, examines them and comments:

"But it's uninhabitable for people of our time! The thickness of the walls... Those tiny windows... Impossible to heat in winter! What would we do there?"

"Bear witness to the Barbaïra honour called loyalty! Be that as it may, we must expand the property and build... build... build!"

A slight noise startles him. The youngest member of the Miramont dynasty crosses the dining room entrance barefoot, running like a mouse in the bright sunshine and chirping half asleep, half awake:

"Daddy, come and put me to sleep!"

At four years old, Raymond looks thin and tall in his blue pyjamas. The pink light caresses his fine brown hair. Of all the Barbaïras, he is the only one who retains the pigmentation of the ancient Visigoths from whom they descend. Auda imposed her black hair and matte skin on the rest of the lineage.

Roger Barbaïra picks up his son and carries him to his room on the ground floor of the tower. He gently scolds the child, who does not want to sleep and demands with determination:

"Dad, tell me again... the story of the treasure!"

Roger Barbaïra pushes a chair to the other side of the bed, leans over the face that the light from the lamp makes look even older, and begins:

'Once upon a time... there was a great castle on top of a mountain...

'With very good men...' interrupts the little boy, who knows the story by heart.

"The good men guarded a treasure..."

Little Raymond fidgets, closes his eyes, and asks:

"Tell me the name of the treasure, Dad! Tell me!"

-It was called the Grail and promised immortality to whoever could solve its riddles... While the good men tried to solve them, the bad men from the north surrounded the castle on the mountain.

"You're scaring me with the men from the north, Dad..."

"Their names were Simon de Montfort, Guy de Lévis, Eudes de Bourgogne, Hugues des Arcis. They were terrible men, clad in iron, with great swords. They killed the women and children in the cathedral of Béziers... They waited at the foot of the mountain for the good men to starve to death so they could steal the treasure... But when they entered the castle, they did not find the Grail because the fairies had taken it away during the night... So they burned the good men at the stake..."

Barbaïra fell silent, assuming that the child was already asleep, but Raymond opened his eyes, grabbed her hand and whispered in a sleepy voice:

-The fairies... the treasure... do you know where it is, Dad?

-The fairies hid the treasure in Tabe Mountain. Much later, much later, men dressed in black who shook the world and who, in turn, wanted to decipher the Grail to become immortal, found it and took it to their country... They died like all those who had the Grail and failed to penetrate its enigma. But they had time to hide it in a mountain of ice where it awaits the arrival of new knights ready to risk their lives so that their children may finally discover the secret of immortality..."

Raymond whispered:

"I'm afraid, Dad, of the black men..."

"The Order of the black men, who recognise each other by the first letter of the encrypted pagan script, watches over the Grail..."

The child was now asleep. Barbaïra stood up and tiptoed out of the room...



Winter dilutes the grey monotony of the bare expanses, the gold of the plane trees and the red of the vines. The hundred hectares of Barbaïra's vineyards stretch as far as the eye can see, with black vines twisted like petrified flames of coal. The tramontana blows from the north in long

gusts. The sky vibrates like a sheet of steel blue from forgotten furnaces. An incisive purity cuts across the contours of the Montaña Negra and the pre-Corbières. Films of ice tremble on the surface of the streams. Auda says to her children:

"Wrap up warm and don't catch a cold on your *Mobylette*!

They have a light breakfast before going to school. The whole family is up at six in the morning. Coffee with milk steams in the cups. The Count of Miramont cuts thick slices of bread. He is already wearing his boots and black leather suit. Suddenly, the doorbell rings.

"Well, well," says the count, "who's coming to visit us at this hour?"

After a few moments, the old housekeeper appears, more wrinkled and tremulous than ever. She seems crushed and transfigured at the same time by half a century of voluntary service. With her authority even more reinforced after the death of the old count, she announces:

-Mr. Roger, they're police officers.

Surprised, Barbaïra raises his light eyebrows.

"Police officers?"

"They want to speak to Mr Guillame, they say."

The Count of Miramont stares at his eldest son, who has turned red. He asks him:

"Do you have friends in the police now? If not, what was the nonsense? Did you run a red light in Carcassonne? It wouldn't be the first time! With an engine between your legs, you want to make your way by any means necessary!"

Indeed, Guillaume Barbaïra is passionate about motorbikes, just like his father. He is not yet old enough to get his driving licence, but with the count's tacit permission, he sometimes rides the old *Norton* from the AJ era and, in his youthful exuberance, dangerously races along the small deserted roads in the surrounding area.

"I haven't run a single red light since I started taking lessons," he says, lowering his nose to his bowl.

Suddenly, Roger Barbaïra is startled. The angel of memory passes by! Seventeen years earlier, an unknown German had appeared in the same way at the gate of the estate, with a

perspective that was also fraught with danger, and it was that visit that sealed his fate. He remembers perfectly how his father tried to protect him, looks intently at Guillaume, who is about to get up, and orders him in turn:

"Stay there, don't move... I'll talk to them!"

He goes out. The frozen sand crunches under the soles of his boots. He walks steadily under the canopy of banana trees which, now stripped of their leaves, resemble the nave of a ruined cathedral with patches of sky between the arches. He opens the barred gate and lets the two policemen in.

"Good morning, gentlemen! May I ask why you are honouring me with this morning visit?"

A "Jeune Résistance" rage. Can we talk to him?

"Come back later tonight. He's already left for school."

The corporal shook his head, glanced sideways at his deputy, and moved forward almost timidly...

According to public rumour, your son hid those terrorists on one of your farms... We want to believe that it's just slander...

Barbaïra remains impassive, but the scar on his face turns from white to red, a sign of deep confusion. He asks curtly:

"Do you have a search warrant?"

"No."

"So this search is not imperative and urgent?"

-Not exactly, although... we would like to...

"Don't waste your time and leave my son alone! How can you expect FLN terrorists to be hiding in the house of a former militiaman sentenced to death in absentia in 1945 and to five years of national disgrace in 1946? Let's be reasonable, gentlemen...! I thought the police were more perceptive."

The corporal is startled. He says to his subordinate:

"My God, you're right! I had completely forgotten about that! An FLN member wouldn't hide in the house of a former militiaman!"

"And a former SS member!" adds Barbaïra in a threatening voice, fixing the policeman with a piercing gaze as he retreats.

"Apologies, Mr Barbaïra! We were mistaken, please don't hold it against us... Looking for two FLN members at random in a country like this is like looking for a needle in a haystack! Anyway, thanks for the reminder... We won't bother former militiamen again!"

"I hope so!" replies Barbaïra calmly, a hint of irony playing on his lips.

The police officers get on their bicycles and ride away. Barbaïra closes the gate and goes inside with his head down and a worried look on his face.



When he entered the dining room, everyone had already had their light lunch, but no one left the room. He said to Guillaume:

"You're not going to school today. Come to my desk, I want to talk to you!"

Guillaume leaves the room with his head down while his brother gets ready to leave and his sisters look for their school bags. Auda walks past her husband, who is about to leave, and murmurs:

-Even if he has done something really silly, don't be hard on him!

Father and son are now face to face. Roger Barbaïra asks:

-With what then, are in the net of the "Jeune Résistance"?... Why don't you look your father in the eye?

-But...

-Is it true or not?

-It's true, Dad...

-Don't answer in that tone. Say, "It's true!" but with pride!

Deeply surprised, the boy looks his father in the eye and murmurs:

-But... I thought...

-There's nothing to assume. Who got you involved in that network?

-Schoolmates who met Francis Jeanson.

-And what do you do in the Jeune Résistance?
-We collect funds for the militants of the French Federation of the FLN. We carry messages... We set up hiding places...
Barbaïra smiles.
-On your father's estate, for example. Where did you hide your two heroes?
-In La Charvensole, in a barn.
-And so... don't they freeze to death?
-Well...
"And from hunger?"
-My sisters steal food from the kitchen... and I take it to them during the night...
-Prolonged silence. Roger Barbarïa plays with the SS dagger decorating the desk. Guillaume looks down, embarrassed.
-Raise your head! Look straight ahead! orders the father.
Guillaume stands up straight, but feels increasingly uneasy and helpless.
-Why did you join the "Jeune Résistance" network? Do you think resistance is a good ideal?
-No.
-Then why did you join?
-Because I thought that people like us who are trying to liberate the country are in the same situation as the Algerians fighting for the decolonisation of their country... It's the same cause, isn't it? Since nothing is being done in Occitania, I realised that I had to help those who have the courage to fight. That's it...
Barbaïra doesn't answer, but the scar turns from white to red again. He stands up, slowly walks around the desk, approaches Guillaume, hugs him tightly and roars:
"You are truly my son! My eternity!...
Then he begins to pace back and forth, leaving the young man abandoned by the embrace that replaces the expected punishments, always severe and fair. After a while, he asks quietly:
"Why didn't you tell me? Don't you trust your father?"
Guillaume hesitates to answer but finally decides:
"Dad... you're a former SS officer, aren't you? I thought that..."

Barbaïra shrugged his shoulders.

-Don't be silly!... Well, maybe I am silly! I should have explained certain things to you a long time ago that Jeanson's friends cannot understand... To begin with, this: more than a million men served in the combat SS, and a million men cannot be summarised by two or three political prejudices! There were internal contradictions in that milieu; the German SS thought of the greatness of Germany, the foreign SS of their homeland, but we all agreed to give the race that made us what we are primacy over all other factors of human progress... I fought in the SS to liberate Occitania from Republican tyranny and replace it, if possible, with a Visigoth government! That was my problem, and it must be yours! When you are twenty, you will know even more important things. While you wait, help the FLN as training!

Guillaume was tempted to throw his arms around his father's neck, but he restrained himself with the discipline he had inherited and said only:

"Thank you, Dad. That's a nice surprise!"

Roger Barbaïra looked at him with emotion. Apart from the colour of his hair and the tone of his skin, he was exactly like him: medium height, sturdy, broad shoulders forming strong, developing muscles, a clear gaze full of boldness and frankness, a character similar to his own, quick to anger but firm, endowed with peasant patience and unlimited willpower. He said to him:

"I deflected the police's blow and used against them the image you had of those SS men who, in 1945, the ignorant classified as nothing more and nothing less than right-wing. If the police knew that we are neither right-wing nor left-wing, but at the forefront of evolution and open to all forms of audacity, we would have had trouble. Mr. Militant of the Jeune Résistance, you have to play it safe! Our enemies are diabolical, and the police are not as stupid as they seem! What is the problem with your FLN?"

-I think they have important documents that need to be taken to Tunisia and placed in a safe place.

So, it's a matter of getting them to Spain as quickly as possible. I'll take care of that myself. On the other hand, the Barbaïras have a high regard for the right of political asylum. Freedom fighters taking refuge in their home don't sleep in barns, especially at an altitude like this! Go and fetch them later tonight while two rooms are being prepared. They will stay with us until we can organise passage across the border. It will be a good opportunity to find out if the Barbaïras are capable of keeping quiet, which *I* am convinced *they are*, by the way!



The two men came at lunchtime. They still had some straw in their miserable, torn clothes. As honest disciples of the Prophet, they did not drink wine. Barbaïra said to them with a laugh:

"If you don't drink wine, there's no need to produce it! We are helping to liberate Algeria from colonialism, but you must uproot the vines and plant something else in liberated Algeria. The people of my homeland need to sell wine to survive, and they already sell it at a loss! Are you Kabyles?"

"I'm from Tizi Ouzou," said the first.

"I was born in Maillot," said the second.

"In that case, you are descended from Aryans, and as such, you are welcomed as equals in this house. You must favour the great Kabyle and Berber families and Aryanise Algeria, as we have done with Occitania, which we shall repopulate with Visigoths. Otherwise, your revolution will fail! Race is like a vineyard: bad vines must be pulled up and better ones planted in their place! Do you know how to ski?"

Suspicious, the two Kabyles shook their heads.

"That's a pity! You'll start learning in a few days. You'll fall so many times that you'll run out of swear words. But when we're near the border, be careful and curse silently, all right?"

"We are accustomed to silence and know how to suffer," said the older one.

A week later, Roger Barbaïra and his eldest son put them in a van, drove to the outskirts of Latour-de-Carol and secretly took them to Spain across the snow-covered mountains to the Segre Valley.



When Marius Chabrol's *DS19* entered the main avenue of the estate, the Black Mountain closed in on the view of the cherry blossoms with the precise grace of Japanese prints. Barbaïra took his comrade's hands and squeezed them for a long time.

They had not seen each other since 1946, but they wrote to each other regularly. Responding to several invitations, Chabrol came to the estate to spend Easter with his wife and son for the first time.

The former secretary of the Communist Youth had married a beautiful girl from Narbonne after erasing the image of Daniela Casanova from his heart. In the idealised perspective of adolescence, he had secretly loved the famous militant, as others loved Greta Garbo, without revealing anything to his comrades in the youth hostels of *the maquis*. Fallen in combat, inscribed by the Party in the fresco of its martyrs, she left an image that could not halo that love of which she never knew. With the passage of time, the dialectical process transformed the secretary of the "Jeunes Filles de France" into Saint Joan of Arc... And since man does not live by bread alone, nor does he live on dead loves, Marius Chabrol ended up marrying... a girl from the Narbonne petty bourgeoisie.

In 1947, under unclear circumstances, probably in exchange for certain political privileges, he came into possession of a large garage. And he began to prosper, initially thanks to the solidarity of *the AJIST*, with Gaston Reboul ordering machinery and gears for the two artificial textile factories he ran. He now had a *DS19*, like the representatives of the "two hundred families".

"So?" asks Barbaïra... Are you coming to
pay your fine?

-Pardon?

The Count of Miramont smiled and pointed his finger like a gun at the guest's heart.

"There is," he said lightly, "a Black Order composed of former SS officers, themselves heirs to officers enlisted in the Baltic Freikorps after World War I, Templars who survived the ban of 1312, Visigothic *Faydits* and Scandinavian Vikings... For twenty centuries, sometimes through covert actions, sometimes through overt actions, one day allied with Martin Luther, another day with the Cathar Perfects, alternately led by Gustav Vasa, Adolf Hitler and others, the Black Order defended the Grail, that is, a conception of man that ensures the perpetuity of the primitive Aryans, today a minority in the world, but still potentially all-powerful. It seems that the Black Order sentenced you to death in absentia in 1954!

Marius Chabrol rolled his eyes. Barbaïra burst out laughing, slapped him on the back and said:

"I'm joking! Let's get back to reality and, to start with, let's go to the terrace for a *pastis* ¹.

They left the *château* and settled under the arches of bare branches between two trellises of flowering fruit trees. A light breeze blew from the east. Finches and bee-eaters chirped. Barbaïra began again:

"As a philosopher once said, 'facts are stubborn'. They are what condemn you to death through your internal contradictions. You cannot be a member of the Communist Party and the P.N.O. without destroying yourself in a short time.

"How do you know I support the P.N.O.?"

"I was with François Fontan in Nice a few months ago.

Marius Chabrol lowered his head and Barbaïra continued:

"An honest militant like you might believe that the Russian state would respect the provisions of its own Constitution guaranteeing the linguistic and cultural freedom of minorities and

¹ Aniseed spirit drunk with water.

that the Communist International would also liberate oppressed small nations on the day of victory, but in light of recent events, this is not the case!

-What do you mean?

-Weren't the rebellious workers in East Berlin crushed?

-That proves nothing!

-And Budapest?

Marius Chabrol bent over, tilted his head until his nose was almost in the glass, and said nothing.

Spring sang through the blossoming cherry trees. An aeroplane crossed the sky, trailing a bee-like buzz in front of a silk thread woven by the white vapours of condensation at high altitude. A Languedoc song drifted from the service facilities. After a moment, Chabrol raised his head and said in a tone of disappointment:

-You don't need to give me examples. It's been a long time since I counted on the USSR to liberate Occitania! That's why I'm also a member of the P.N.O.

"And you're leaving the Communist Party?"

Chabrol shifted uneasily in his chair. He didn't answer, but closed his eyes and hunched over for a few minutes. Then, in a weary tone, as if waking from a dream, he said:

"Do you remember our meeting in Carcassonne prison fifteen years ago?"

"Debts of honour must be paid," said the Count of Miramont... How can I help you?

"Nothing, it's not about that. When I suggested you renounce the SS, what did you say?"

"That it was like asking a Cathar to go to Rome!"

"There you go! I'll give you the same answer!"

He twisted his hands as if trying to break invisible chains, slumped his shoulders and sank into his chair in defeat.

"I understand," murmured Barbaïra... "Like us, former SS members, your honour is also called loyalty?"

The communist shrugged his shoulders.

"Those are fine words. For me, the Communist Party represents the loves of my youth, the hopes of my twenties, the hope of a large family now, it is a faith!

"I know you are fellow believers, and that is where your strength lies, which, deep down, is of the same essence as ours. We both belong to the two secular churches that took the lead over Christianity. Meanwhile, I would point out that it is possible to free ourselves from a church... with the prophet's permission!

-I don't understand.

-Karl Marx said: "A people that oppresses other peoples cannot be a free people"... The spectacle of tyranny that Russia imposes on annexed Europe confirms this saying.

How can Russia export to Occitania a freedom that it does not give to its own people? Your real problem is not leaving the French Communist Party, it is freeing it from Muscovite tyranny. The path we can take together, which I spoke to you about fifteen years ago, involves this structural revolution.

I know that well... We tried that several times but achieved nothing. The Russians are very strong...

What are you waiting for? Gather your marbles, take them to Fontan and bring the best militants from Hérault with you! ¹

Chabrol clenched his fists and his face reddened, as if he were struggling to pull something out of himself. Then he buried his head in his hands and groaned in true despair:

"Impossible!... Impossible! I can't leave! All I can do is disappear, one way or another!"

Barbaïra shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't be silly!"

The communist muttered under his breath:

"I've thought about it very seriously... I don't sleep for weeks, I don't eat, I let the garage go to ruin, especially when I come back from Paris after a conference, or from Nice after a P.N.O. meeting... Under these conditions, it won't be long before I

¹ French department located in the Languedoc-Roussillon region. Its capital is Montpellier (Translator's note).

to declare bankruptcy. I'll flee to Australia or shoot myself in the head... I see no other way out!

He seemed truly desperate. He hadn't touched his glass of aniseed liqueur and was breathing heavily like an athlete who had reached the limit of his strength. Barbaïra stood up and grabbed his arm.

"Come on, old man, don't let yourself get down! Internal contradictions can also be overcome! Look how beautiful our country is!"

The evanescent sky gave way to the marriage between him and the earth in an exchange of bluish and pinkish hues. In the distance, the Black Mountain clung to the folds of his tunic and edged it at the bottom with long, flexible perspectives. The open sun emphasised its affectionate and still moderate light on the red roofs of the farmhouses, dotted here and there among the rows of vines tortured and blackened by the winter that was now gone, who knows where... A scent of wet earth and new flowers excited the sense of smell of the two men listening to the old songs of Oc that advanced at the crossroads of echoes...

Barbaïra swept the landscape with a firm gesture of his arm and said:

"Here is a dialectic that no internal contradiction can question! Come on, old friend, they're calling us to the table!"



Marius Chabrol barely moves his lips, but gradually allows himself to be won over by the warmth of the large family gathered around him, his wife and son. The sweetness of the present exorcises the ghosts of the past... Wine from Corbières, Serrano ham, *cassoulet* from Castelnaudary. Fruit preserved in the barns where Guillaume Barbaïra hid the F.N.L. militants before his father took them into his home... Much time had passed since that autumn, but for the local police, who had no contact with the enemy, the militia taboo continued to weigh heavily on Le Pech.

Marius Chabrol no longer treats Auda Isarn informally. He finds her more distant than before and cannot quite draw a line between the

the disturbing and mysterious girl he met at the Countess of Miramont's youth hostels. He seems, however, to find one through the other, but without being able to determine the place one occupies in relation to the other. Still, the one he remembers from the past seems to him, perhaps mistakenly, more alive than the wife of the great landowner. This nuance escapes everyone who did not know Auda Isarn before the war: the children, his wife, the old servant who commands the kitchen with familial authority. Chabrol believes he can read in the countess's eyes an anguish that her husband, comfortably installed at the top of the dynasty, certain of his wife's obvious loyalty to the destiny of the community, preoccupied with the reconquest of Occitania that he is attempting to carry out on his own, supported like a Saxon by the allies he detests, Crédit Predial and Crédit Agricole, does not perceive. Marius Chabrol tries to lighten the mood and asks Auda:

"Do you remember that piece from Lévis-Mirepoix's novel that we were going to perform before the war?"

'Oh, yes!' replies Auda in a deep voice.

"What impressed me most was the authenticity of your performance in the role of the Cathar heroine Jordane de Montaire... To me, you will always be Jordane! It is to her that I owe what little I know about the Cathar religion! I was eager to read everything that appeared on the subject after the book by that German, Otto Rahn. It is said that there are still Cathars in Languedoc and Albigeois... Is that true?"

"I don't know," replies Auda Isarn after a slight hesitation.

With the insidious technique of a communist militant, Chabrol takes his curiosity further and asks:

"It is said that there is still a Cathar bishop living in the confines of Ariège, a certain Déodat Roché. Do you know him?"

"No."

Roger Barbaïra pushed his plate away, raised his head and looked at the woman, his surprise evident in the movement of his eyebrows.

"You do know him, Auda! Just last year you went to see him... Try to remember! You went in the *Austin Cooper*... on the way back you broke the connecting rods!"

He turns to Chabrol and remarks:

"Auda and Guillaume are real executioners of mechanics!"

Auda de Miramont blushed, and her embarrassment did not go unnoticed by the communist's inquisitive gaze. He thought: this woman played the part most naturally. She was a true Cathar, and I wouldn't be surprised if she had ties to the sect, if it still exists. Religion is definitely not just the opium of the people, it's also for countesses,

despite her fortune and children! And he insisted:

"And what do you think of Déodat Roché? Auda replied, looking uncomfortable:

"Well, that's not exactly true. As far as I know, there are no Cathar bishops! Déodat Roché is hardly a bishop... At most, he can be considered a kind of theologian of modern Catharism.

"So, the Cathars still exist?" insists Chabrol, who is about to rediscover the somewhat sadistic joy he derived from his role as inquisitor during the interrogations of the militiamen.

"I don't know," replies Auda in a hoarse voice.

"Yes, you do!" says Barbaïra softly... "The Malaveyres and the Montgoradails are notorious Cathars!"

"I don't remember them," Auda claims in a languid voice.

From the way she swallows hard, Chabrol guesses that her throat is constricted. The stiffness of her gaze reveals the nervous tension that grows as the questions asked become more precise. And he thinks: this woman's life must have areas of darkness that escape her husband's insight. He should be more attentive!

"Once we talk about religion," says Roger Barbaïra, "you'll learn something interesting... Do you remember our colleague Guyot Peyrat?"

"The poet? How could I not remember him? He was an interesting guy.

"Do you know what he is now?"

"I haven't the faintest idea!"

"Reverend Abbot of the Order of Preachers!"

"What?!... Did I hear that right?

Barbaïra smiles and forces the tone of his reply.

-A Dominican, man! Do you know what that is?

Chabrol smiles mockingly.

"Of course I do! A champion of obscurantism. I just don't see how..."

-It's simple. In 1944, he managed to escape the firing squad in Perpignan and hid with the Dominicans. And he stayed there. He went from gardener to novice... a comfortable situation in which to devote himself to literature without worrying about tomorrow!

Sceptical, Chabrol asks:

"And do you believe in the ruse?"

-Of course! He came to see us five years ago. At that time he was a preaching brother, then he became a father. In the Dominicans, perhaps more than in any other Order, you don't move up the ranks without undergoing serious trials! From time to time I buy the *Termoignage Chrétien*, when the articles talk about him. Apparently, he represents the extreme left of Catholic thought.

Chabrol scoffs and says:

"So, in religion and everything else, Occitania is on the left? If we were to take stock of the evolution of the group of *ajistes* who in 1938 presented the first demand for independence in Montsegur, what would we discover?

Reboul, a 'social' boss who introduced worker profit sharing... Barbaïra, a former SS officer who speaks with a left-wing dialect and whose children harbour members of the F.N.L. Chabrol, a communist, and Guyot Peyrat, a progressive monk... In short, there is nothing like an agreement between left-wing men to make politics... on the right in favour of Occitania!

"You're forgetting the dead!" Auda Isarn de Miramont points out in a hushed voice.

The conversation stops abruptly. All that can be heard is the buzzing of a bee lost in the room looking for a way out when Jordi Couquet, bloodless, Lou Ganet, Robert Robuffay and Raymond Ferrocas, one with his chest pierced by German bullets, the

the other by French bullets, and then Estève Caberol, bulkier than a charred log, sit down around the table.

"The bill is wrong!" says Auda Isarn in a tone that startles her husband, who has heard that stark voice before, prophesying tragedies that never failed to come true.

The blood visibly drained from the woman's face. Her eyes flashed with a powerful effort of concentration and fixed on a point in space that revealed nothing to the other guests. The voice seemed to come from afar and announced...

"I see... I see..."

Roger Barbaïra pushes his chair back and rushes over to Auda. Leaning over her shoulder, he asks quietly:

"What do you see, Auda? Speak... Speak, my dear... don't be afraid... Speak!"

A prolonged silence hangs over the assembly. Suddenly, Auda Isarn lets out a piercing scream.

"I see empty places among the dead... I know those who are going to join the dead!"

Marius Chabrol's cheeks burned, then the blood drained from his face and he turned as pale as the sky at dawn. He pushed his chair back noisily and stormed out of the dining room.

"Speak, Auda! Speak!" murmured Barbaïra, holding the woman by the shoulders.

Auda seemed exhausted. She remained silent, petrified in a terrible effort of concentration. Finally, she let out a cry of true despair.

"No! Not the other one! Not the child! Not him, not him!"
No!... No!...

She fell backwards, rigid, her eyes closed, foam on her lips. The Count of Miramont lifted her up in his arms and carried her to the bedroom while her terrified children broke down in sobs.

II

A modern factory on the outskirts of Toulouse. Entire façades covered with glass panels mounted on a stainless steel structure. Tiled corridors. Ice water dispensers at the interior intersections. Green carpet in the waiting room of the managing director's office. Mahogany table and tan leather armchairs. On one rigid grey fabric panel, a painting depicting the *pog* of Montsegur; on another, a ceramic Cathar dove. Gaston Reboul stands up to welcome his visitors: Roger Barbaïra, Marius Chabrol and the C.O.E.A. delegate.

The Occitan Committee for Studies and Action had been founded a year earlier by Prof. Robert Lafont, president of the Institute of Occitan Studies and professor at the Faculty of Arts in Montpellier, in the hope of uniting the notables of commerce and industry, tacitly leaving it to François Fontan's P.N.O. to speak to the intellectuals. Its delegate, Roquebrune, bowed to Gaston Reboul and said:

-I am very grateful to my friend Barbaïra for arranging this interview. Renowned industrialists in Languedoc prefer the Parisian accent. I suppose that's not the case for you?

Reboul smiles.

-No, indeed. We can, if you wish, speak in the langue d'Oc... As for my success, my merits are few and weak. My father was born before me!

-Do not diminish those merits, which are so evident, Mr President... I know you have great achievements in the Resistance...

Reboul shrugs his shoulders.

"The Resistance? I don't know what that is. Let's get down to business, if you agree. Tell me about the C.O.E.A.

Roquebrune opens the folder, takes out a sheet of yellow paper and hands it to the industrialist.

"This is the first manifesto... It summarises our current tendencies ¹.

¹ Founded by the eminent Prof. Robert Lafont, the Occitan Committee for Study and Action (C.O.E.A.) emerged as the best-structured protest movement in the French Midi. Initially limited to the economic sphere with a clearly Marxist orientation, it would have taken a major

Reboul reads slowly, turning slightly towards his comrades from his days in the hostels... and speaks energetically, like a popular orator...

"Occitans!

In the 13th century, the Cathars had nothing more than a pretext for the conquest of Occitania...

In the 20th century, colonisation continues...

Do you see how the territory south of the Loire is being dismantled? What remains of the industrial sector is under threat everywhere: textiles, metallurgy, mining... Think of Decazeville, Bousquet d'Orb, the shipyards of Provence, etc.

New industries import their management teams and only offer you a ridiculous number of menial jobs. Go to Marcoule, Pierrelatte, Saint-Gaudens, etc.

momentum after the events of May-June 1968. For reference, see the text of a recent manifesto that sought to define this on a cultural level:

"After seven centuries of colonisation, the Occitan country was imprisoned in the massification of industrial society and blocked in a pseudo-Parisian and bourgeois pseudo-culture transported under the mask of decentralisation by a moribund administration. At the end of this process, there is a void: a relentless reduction in the number of creators of culture, intellectual suffocation, asthenia, impotence. The Occitan Committee for Studies and Action reminds us that culture is not a consumer good distributed by cultural supermarkets or civil servants, but a set of behaviours and dynamic relationships between humans and their historical, social and natural environment.

Cultural creativity involves breaking down alienating mental structures, restoring ethnic dignity and creative development.

Indeed, only prolific and completely diversified creation will make it possible to put an end to the hierarchical, pyramidal, museum-like culture that is currently the most pernicious opiate of the people. At the same time, the will for cultural animation must be expressed through the destruction of the alienating values of so-called "civilisation" and the liquidation of cultural perfects and inspectors and other beneficiaries of domestic culture.

Cultural creation has no capital, no privileged laboratory, no chosen language. It must develop everywhere, from Occitania. It is a matter of lucidity and will.

Energy sources are exported and used elsewhere. Gas from Lacq... hydroelectricity...

Gaston Reboul places the manifesto on the desk and says to Barbaïra:

"What you say about textiles, for example, is not exactly true. My factories don't owe a penny to anyone outside Occitania. All my managers and workers are from here!

Roquebrune raises his hand.

"That's true, Mr President, but your case is an exception that proves the rule. For every industrialist who survives locally, how many bankruptcies and how many transfers from south to north?

"And from Occitania to the ends of the earth?" says Barbaïra. "The masters of the Saint-Girons foundry, for example, the Pincemins, exiled on the pretext of 'collaboration', who brilliantly rebuilt their lives in Argentina or were dismantled in Ariège!

A third of the people of Narbonne are up for sale to the highest bidder! says Marius Chabrol.

"And half of those in Aude and Lot!" confirms Barbaïra.

Gaston Reboul resumes reading.

"The land no longer serves the peasant. The fields have been transformed into deserts, the inhabitants are becoming proletarians and are leaving.

Some regions are like the Sahara (Reboul pauses, thinks about the bleak nature of the comparison and repeats the phrase printed in bold in the C.O.E.A. manifesto)... like the Sahara, military bases: Haute-Provence, Haut-Var, Haut-Lomousin, Landes.

The great resource that is proposed is... tourism! But who benefits from tourism? Look at the Côte d'Azur and the new "Occitan Florida"!

What to do? Those planning experts tell you: go live somewhere else in the name of labour 'fluidity'. Or else: become indigenous people to welcome tourists. Otherwise, go to hell!

Barbaïra quips:

"*Gauleiter* Sauckel was also an apostle of labour 'fluidity'. With one difference. If it is the Germans mobilising workers against their will, it is called deportation; if it is the technocrats preparing the deportation of Occitans, it ceases to be deportation and becomes a harmless movement of 'displaced persons'! Ha, ha!

Gaston Reboul finishes reading:

"Occitans! The C.O.E.A. calls on you to fight against internal colonialism! Occitan awareness and the path to our social progress!"

The industrialist returns the manifesto to the C.O.E.A. delegate and says:

"These are well-founded criticisms. I like the tone of your appeal and its relative moderation.

Barbaïra points out:

"Moderation that does not exist in the P.N.O.... François Fontan personally accosts tourists going to Montsegur and shouts at them: 'Don't forget that you are in a foreign country, in a colony of France!

"And does he ask them to show their passports?" Chabrol asks ironically.

"No, but that will come!"

Gaston Reboul concludes the digression and turns back to Roquebrune:

-However, I have my reservations about the conclusion...

Social progress? What does that mean? Is the C.O.E.A. a left-wing movement?

"Obviously," says Barbaïra. "Free Occitania is on the left. Once the right wing put itself at the service of French unity, it didn't know how to be anything else!"

Reboul plays with a letter opener. He continues with dreamy eyes and a slightly furrowed brow:

"As an Occitan industrialist, I want to position myself on the left, but not before I know how far the left intends to take the reforms. If Marxist means of expropriation are adopted, I say right now, as the factory manager, no!

"And I, as a landowner!" affirms Barbaïra.

"If it's a question of involving the staff in the management of the company, I might say yes, but on condition that I have people of good character at my side!"

"Therefore, of good stock!" exclaims the Count of Miramont.

"But in that case, I go beyond the personal interest in profits, which is currently the status of my companies, and I also associate it with prejudices and even financial and criminal liabilities in the event of bankruptcy!"

The silence that descends gives the exact measure of the gap between theory and the realities established by the "tenacity of facts" of which the philosopher speaks. Roquebrune senses that his diligence is in danger of turning in another direction and adds:

"Mr Reboul, we are left-wingers, but we will never fall for Marxism for the very simple reason that Marxism has not been left-wing for a long time!

Laughter.

"It's good for the East, as the other guy said!" Barbaïra fires back, turning to Chabrol, who doesn't bat an eyelid.

"Not even close!" murmurs Reboul. It's just a historical fact embedded in the pages of a history that expired long ago. In short, Mr Roquebrune, do you consider the old radical opposition and the SFIO and carry them over to the Occitan cause? The radicalism and socialism that have paralysed us for half a century are merely the modern form of the opposition that the Midi of France has been waging against northern France for seven centuries. The betrayal of these Parisian movements is evident today, and your socialism is returning to its origins now that the C.O.E.A. wants to build it on the basis of the Occitan nation.

Barbaïra smiles and observes in a tone of cutting irony:

"In short, National Socialism! Many people have already been hanged for that!"

"Social structures will be discussed later!" Reboul interjects. "Decolonisation takes priority!"

Roquebrune seizes on the point made by the industrialist.

"Precisely, Mr President. It's a question of means..."

There is a lengthy discussion about the means. At midday, Reboul stands up and says:

"He's right. The problem must be addressed from an economic perspective. The impact is stronger on the wallet than on the heart!"



The C.O.E.A. delegate takes a taxi to Matabiau station, where he continues on to Nîmes. Chabrol and Barbaïra walk up Bayard Street. The Count of Miramont says to his old comrade:

"In conclusion, is Prof. Robert Lafont's movement closer to the Communist Party than François Fontan's?"

"Ah?"

"That, whether Mr. Roquebrune likes it or not, it remains essentially Marxist because the driving force of history depends primarily on the economy? In that case, leave your party of fossils and Fontan's and go to the C.O.E.A. There, you'll feel like a fish in water!"

Until then disciplined by his usual coldness, Chabrol suddenly reveals a very lively mental agitation that he expresses through disorderly gestures. He raises his arms and says:

"You don't just abandon the Communist Party like that!"

He walks up the promenade and back down the street, continues walking a few metres and leaves it again to rejoin the tide of pedestrians who turn back in his wake.

"Then propose to the Central Committee that it include the decolonisation of Occitania in its dialectic. Did you do that for Algeria, or not?..."

Chabrol grumbles.

"Impossible, impossible! The USSR needs France too much to indulge in nonsense with de Gaulle!"

"Listen, Marius, you're going to be furious with what I'm about to say: you're a traitor! You betrayed both your party and your country! There's only one way out of this: cut off one of your legs!"

-I know, but which leg? The right or the left?"

He falls silent. He walks around like a madman for a while and Barbaïra has to quicken his pace to keep up with him. His gaze is free of all the physical burden of opium smokers, and his companion cannot tell whether he is caressing a future ground or clinging to an image from the past, that of Danièle Casanova, perhaps, or of the dead who cross his horizon as *a former maquisard*, vanished in the mists of a clear conscience.

"I'm thirsty," Chabrol grumbles.

He rushes into the road without looking at the traffic, which is very heavy and fast at midday, and goes straight into the café-restaurant he has just seen across the street, which seems to attract him with the magnetic force of a lantern.

"You fool!" shouts Barbaïra.

The mudguard of the vehicle that grazed him would have thrown him several metres away if the Count of Miramont had not pulled him by the arm and immobilised him with a force commanded by reflexes that act in tenths of a second. They emerged from the deadly whirlwind and Chabrol entered the establishment without showing any emotion.

"Very good, you scoundrel!" Barbaïra scolded him. "You can say you came close to staying there!"

"I want to know there!" murmured Chabrol. "At the point where I am now... The van was going to run over the leg I have to amputate!"

He gradually calmed down. They ordered two glasses of aniseed liqueur and the communist extended his hand to his friend.

"Despite everything, thank you, Roger! You don't owe me anything now! Carcassonne-Toulouse... A van against twelve bullets.

Accounts settled! Let's drink!

Marius Chabrol had been drinking heavily for several months.



Barbaïra is in a hurry to get to Le Pech. He had left little Raymond with a fever of forty degrees the day before and feels uneasy. When he reaches the entrance to *the château*, he sees the child playing on the lawn, half-naked, throwing stones at a cat on the

property, where there were dozens of them, and Auda sitting on a chair scolding him from afar:

"Raymond, leave the cat alone! You could hurt our friend Ferrocas!"

Barbaïra shuddered when she heard that name, taken from the hell of Carcassonne where the *Camisard* descendant had been dragged twenty years earlier. At that moment, she did not reflect on the meaning of the connection between the memory of a dead man and the living presence of the cat, and rushed to attend to the most urgent matter:

"What's the matter, Raymond, aren't you in bed?" Auda raised his head and explained:

"He had mumps... I managed to stop the disease from progressing last night, and now he's cured.

Auda de Miramont always treated her children herself; no doctor was ever called to Le Pech. She asked:

"Did you bring the notebooks from the last colloquium in Fanjeaux?"

A number of clergymen and historians met regularly in the Cathar city to try to advance knowledge on the subject. The results were published in the *Cahiers de Fanjeaux*¹ that Barbaïra brought to his wife.

"The only purpose of these colloquiums," she said as she leafed through the notebooks, "is to beat around the bush! With them, the Church is trying to smooth over the rough edges of history! The objectivity it claims in its study of heresy is a false objectivity. What it really wants is to crystallise Catharism in the 13th century, and it treats it with the freedom of spirit of a triumphant institution that does not fear its resurrection, even though it considers it possible!

Roger Barbaïra smiles and says:

"I am not interested in the Cathars and the Church, but I can say that with Reboul, Chabrol and myself, with Fontan's new nationalist organisation and Prof. Lafont's socialist organisation, we are in the process of giving Catharism a political dimension that Paris will have to remember.

Auda slowly turns the pages of the *Cahiers de Fanjeaux*, notices a signature and frowns.

¹ Édouard Privat, editor.

"That Canon Delaruelle detests the Cathars. He is probably the one manipulating the whole Fanjeaux affair for the reasons I indicated to you. He goes so far as to write that it was not the Church that lit the fires of Montsegur!

-Perhaps you are right, Auda! At Montsegur, more dangerous lords *Faydits* were burned than harmless Cathars!

Auda de Miramont frowns and remains silent. Always chasing the black cat, little Raymond passes in front of them. Barbaïra is startled again and asks his wife:

-Speaking of Ferrocas... Do you believe in reincarnation?

Auda looks at him intently, raises her head, smiles and replies:

-Why not? It's no less reasonable than believing, like you, in the existence of the Holy Grail!

-There's no connection between the two! Celtic and Germanic poets foolishly constructed a Christian legend based on an archaeological artefact whose ancient existence they knew about, so to speak, and there's nothing I can do about that!

He gets up, grabs little Raymond, lifts him up in his arms, sits back down in the chair and bounces him on his knees. The child is now full of health and shouts with joy. Auda concentrates on reading the *Cahiers de Fanjeaux*. The summer sun devours the canopy of banana trees without consuming it entirely. The cicadas scratch the air with their shrill cries that come and go through the underlying silence like a saw in the forest. No smell comes from the earth, as cracked as the bottom of a dry puddle. Barbaïra puts down his son, gets up, goes to the portable radio that allows him to communicate with the farms, gives orders, stops by the office, picks up two glasses, a bottle of aniseed liqueur and a jug of ice-cold water, and goes to his wife, who remains absorbed in reading the *Cahiers de Fanjeaux*. He asks her:

"Are you that interested in that?"

Auda does not answer directly and mutters as if responding to a question already asked...

I wonder how it is possible that a free man like Prof. Nelli allows himself to be drawn into the intrigues of Canon Delaruelle. That little canon is very careful, for example, not to invite Déodat Roché to Fanjeaux. It is very easy to see why!

Then, responding to the question posed by her husband:

"Of course I'm interested. Before starting a battle, it's a good idea to study the enemy's methods carefully..."

"A battle? Auda composes herself.

"Well, a controversy, let's say. Imagine that Guyot Peyrat had asked my father to participate in a new colloquium in Fanjeaux to analyse the position between modern Catholicism and current Catharism.

"So there is a modern Catharism?" asks Barbaïra, raising his eyebrows.

Auda blushes slightly.

"Let's say, a modern Cathar way of thinking. People like Malaveyre and Montgoradail, whose existence you reminded me of not long ago, represent a certain Cathar way of thinking. You know that as well as I do, don't you?"

Barbaïra smiles kindly.

"And do you want to contradict old comrade Guyot Peyrat, who was touched by intellectual licentiousness and superstition?"
Are you sufficiently armed to defend the Cathars?

Auda blushes intensely and beats a retreat.

"Of course not, but I want to accompany my father. He knows the subject thoroughly, and besides, I'd like to hear what that Dominican has to say about modern faith! It might be interesting..."

"Perhaps, yes!"

"So, are you in?"

"If it amuses you..."

"Before that, I'm going to ask Déodat Roché for advice. May I?"

-Of course, if you take the *Triumph*, don't wreck the engine like you did with the *Austin Cooper*!



Auda Isarn drove sports cars with the same style that once so impressed the German Otto Rahn. Sitting upright behind the wheel, firmly planted in the bucket seat, she had the attitude of a thoroughbred held back by a firm hand from which she tried insistently to break free, and she conveyed that roar to the accelerator. When she drove through Carcassonne on the outlying avenues with the engine in second gear at six thousand revolutions, the excitement that flashed in her eyes passed to the hearts of the pedestrians left behind on the street. Like her son Guillaume, she did not like red traffic lights and almost always ran them. Her fame spread from the municipal police to the traffic police. As the wife of the Lord of Miramont, too rich to be bothered with fines and transgressions and too disturbing for anyone to dare remind her of her past as a militiaman behind whom loomed the man from the SS, she benefited from unlimited indulgence in the city.

Auda Isarn drove recklessly, but with infallible precision. Barbaïra criticised her for wrecking several cars, but the courts never reported a single accident caused by her. The Montgoradails said to her one day:

If the Perfect Ones knew about cars, they would be seen driving in the same way, respecting all forms of life, even that of chickens, and therefore despising mechanics and matter!

Auda took the Limoux road, left Rouffiac-d'Aude in second gear with the engine at seven thousand revolutions and shifted into higher gears to reach 160 kilometres per hour on the Saint-Martins-de-Villeréglan straight. *The Triumph's* tyres let out deadly howls in the Alet gorges, the brakes smoked, and the rev counter needle remained in the dangerous red zone. He manoeuvred the steering wheel and the small gear shift with a calmness that belied his sparkling gaze. Thirty minutes after leaving Le Pech, she parked the smoking vehicle in the shady square of the small village of Arques. Despite the journey through Carcassonne, she had averaged 115 kilometres per hour.

The man who, according to public rumour, was the last Cathar bishop of Languedoc received her with evangelical charity. He was a tall, thin, very slender old man who walked slowly. His prominent nose, well balanced by large ears, adorned his reddened face, the face of a teenager with a surprising fineness in his forward-projecting brow ridges, and his completely discoloured eyes smiled. His whole person radiated intelligence and purity. All he needed was a black wool tunic from the Pyrenees to look like a perfect 13th-century Cathar, as one might imagine from the elements of tradition.

Auda Isarn remained in his company until sunset. When he said goodbye, the setting sun transformed the ochre bitumen of the facades into a film of gold. Arques had been dozing since midday. Beyond that vegetative existence, Auda imagined another that, seven centuries earlier, had swept away lords, bourgeois, artisans and peasants from the region in a whirlwind of love songs, drink and lofty metaphysical certainties... As if the heart of the country had suddenly stopped beating. As if Simon de Montfort's sword had cut a brightly coloured thread in favour of another fragile, grey one that unravelled against its will... The sun disappeared and the façades were left with the colour of cold ash. Motionless on the doorstep, the old man remained very upright and radiant with youth. He said:

"Auda, my daughter, do not forget to attack the fundamental errors... Remember that, for us, contrary to what uncultured people, that is, the ignorant, claim, there is no absolutely evil God nor an absolutely good God. That Nothingness does not represent absolute Evil, but rather primal chaos. Correct the legends that circulate about the Endura of our ancestors... A mere fast of three days at a time, one day water, two days dry bread... The Endura of annihilation was reserved only for a select few...

Covered in dead light, he greeted her with his hand without touching her, like the ancient Perfect Ones, and added:

"Do not deceive yourself, Auda, do not forget that modern Catharism is radical and not absolute..."

The woman glowed as if she had just captured a halo of dazzling light from mysterious sources. She calmly made her way to the vehicle. With an uninhibited style but always linked to the fastest driving, she rejoined the Carcassonne road.

III

Fanjeaux, a stone pyre, blazes on the hilltop when the summer sun sets it ablaze at midday. The markets in the square and the narrow, shady streets protect the survivors of ancient tortures. It is there that the ghosts of the *bonshommes* seek coolness and oblivion. Between the death of the siesta at midday and biological death, the ancient Cathar city continues to survive in a precarious balance...

Ruined houses. Crumbling parapets. Snakes coiled on the walls, reminiscent of the past. The prow of the stone ship, the Belvedere, a building constructed by Dominicans, stands tall with triumphant modernism and watches like a lantern of the dead placed at a crossroads where heresies intersect. The large glass openings frame a vast landscape that the rolling hills carry along in an ocean wave. In the distance, the collegiate church of Montreal sways.

When Mr Isarn and his daughter enter the conference room, three Dominicans are already seated behind a table. It is a commonplace setting with practical facilities. Neutrality is desirable for a building that welcomes both sacred and profane "colloquium" leaders alike.

Mr Isarn stops at the entrance to the room. He is an elderly man, short in stature, always very poised, like Déodat Roché. Apart from his English-style moustache, there is nothing remarkable about his face, although his eyes belie any kind of banality. Extraordinary eyes burning with small flames that remind us of the daughter, generators of impacts

unbearable for those who receive them, radiating a virile force that the people of Auda are naturally deprived of. He looks at the three Dominicans and says:

"Gentlemen, I see you seated at the table like members of a tribunal: the president in the centre, the assessors on the right and left! Have you perhaps confused the dates? In April 1207, in Montreal, not far from here, the meeting scheduled for today was not of an inquisitorial nature because the Inquisition did not exist at that time. It was a 'colloquium' between the Bishop of Osma, Domingo de Guzmán, Pierre de Castelnau and Brother Raoul for the Catholic Church, and Pons Jourdain, Arnaud Othon, Benoit de Termes and Guilabert de Castres for the Cathar Church. The notables arbitrated the discussion. Here are our people... May I introduce Messrs Malaveyre and Montgoradail...

Taken by surprise, the three Dominicans stood up and moved away from each other so as not to suffer the misfortune of a comparison similar to the one Mr Isarn had just made. The Reverend Abbot Guyot smiled and said:

"Let us be at ease, in great human brotherhood, without worrying about protocol...

Suddenly, he sees Auda and his tone changes. He shouts:

"Madam, go and knit nightgowns, it is not your place to speak in this assembly!"

Auda smiles and replies:

"You are mistaken about the time, the place and the people! We are not in 1207 in Pamiers, nor is the Countess of Miramont in Esclarmonde de Foix, nor is she knitting nightgowns!"

The Reverend Abbot Guyot blushes:

"My lady," he says slowly, "what gives you the right to address me informally?"

I read your articles and the texts of your sermons in *Témoignage Chrétien*, and therefore I reject the sacred character postulated by the habit. For me, you remain the old comrade from the youth hostels, nothing more!

With furrowed brows and a red face, Reverend Abbot Guyot sits down at the table, muttering under his breath. The other Dominicans seem agitated, and one of them breaks the silence that threatens to compromise the meeting desired by their superior.

"We are here," he says slowly, "to analyse the situation of modernism based on the surviving Cathar thought and the doctrine of our Order..."

Auda Isarn comments in an unyielding voice:

"Comrade Guyot represents only a small fraction of that thinking.

And he adds:

"Fortunately!"

The former *ajist* shifts in his chair but does not respond. The other friar turns to Mr Isarn and asks:

"Could you give us an overview of the evolution of the dualistic principle in modern Cathar heresy?"

Mr Isarn raises his hand as if to call for a suspension of the meeting and announces:

-I would like to make a preliminary statement... The margin that existed in 1965 between a colloquium in Fanjeaux and a session of the Inquisition tribunal is too precarious to make the existence of a modern Cathar heresy possible... My friends, my daughter and I are simply history lovers specialising in Catharism. I will now answer your question... Specialists in Cathar thought are divided into at least two schools of thought. My friends and I are particularly interested in the Albanian faction and, in particular, Jean de Lugio. We base our work on the Liber de *Duobus Principiis*, the only work written by a Cathar that has come down to us thanks to Abbot Dondaine... We are therefore... excuse me! We bring the testimony of absolute dualism.

-Which necessarily implies the divergences of yesteryear regarding the articles of faith and the rites of the Church?

It is evident... The world and everything in it comes from the evil principle... Purgatory does not exist... We reject the sacraments as presented by the Church. Condemnation of marriage. There is no resurrection of the flesh. Prohibition of eating meat, eggs, and dairy products. Prohibition of swearing. No to the right of punishment by temporal powers. There is no salvation outside the Church of the Paraclete. As for the second tendency, the of dualism, is represented

mainly, albeit with certain nuances and new interpretations, by Déodat Roché.

-Why did he not come too?

-He never attends the Fanjeaux colloquiums. He is a very solitary person.

A feeling of unease hangs over the assembly. Auda draws strange figures on the blank sheets of paper in front of her and seems indifferent to the sombre gaze that the former prior Guyot Peyrat of the Order of Preachers casts upon her...



They have lunch in a modern restaurant. In terms of comfort and cleanliness, the rooms leave nothing to be desired. The manager, a former student of the hotel school, displays the utmost competence and refinement of a cultured person. She answers all questions, whether it is to get an extra pillow or a rare book on Catharism, which she immediately retrieves from the library.

The sun is scorching. Fanjeaux is at rest. Mr Isarn, his daughter and their friends stroll through the shady tunnel that the narrow streets open up through the town and return to Belvedere at the scheduled time for the resumption of the colloquium.

Reverend Abbot Guyot seems to have mastered the outbursts of anger provoked by Auda's unusual presence and opens the session in a measured voice.

"This morning," he says slowly, "we talked about Catharism and, therefore, about the past. It is of no interest to know whether it is based on the Scriptures like the Catholic Church. The Bible is entirely functional. It is not a question of discovering an essence, some speculation about the eternal, a non-historical period..."

Auda interrupts in a clear voice:

"You speak like my husband, who sees the Bible as nothing more than a monument to Jewish imperialism, a compilation of directives from the Jewish conspiracy against the Roman world. Only... I must remind you that Barbaïra is a former SS officer!"

Reverend Abbot Guyot blushes again, suppresses a gesture of irritation and continues:

"The essential thing is to reduce faith to its elemental, primitive core. God is summed up in that which has no form, that which is not recognised!

"In that case, do you agree with us?" asks Mr Malaveyre. "Are you a Cathar, Your Reverence? Because, for us, God does not think; thought is movement, and the absolute God is completely immobile. It is the Spirit that comes after the one who thinks. May I, Reverend Abbot, convince you of the heresy of the Cathars?

"To that point!" says Auda, shrugging his shoulders.

The Reverend Abbot Guyot dismisses Malaveyre's question, whose irony escapes him, and continues:

-God is reduced to that enormous, moving, shapeless thing, that manipulated thing, the masses. In other words, the meaning of the world, the global and universal significance of history, remains intact in the passion of the human masses! ¹

-That is dissolving God into the becoming of humanity! objects Montgorodail.

-Childish censorship!

Mr Isarn raises his hand to ask for the floor, which is granted to him, and says:

"I am pleased to know that God became a Marxist with the help of a preaching brother! You are certainly unaware that when St Augustine used the word 'mass', he always accompanied it with the genitive 'perditionis', *massa perditionis*, *massa damnationis*... In our day, Father Chenu points out that the noun 'human masses' was taken from the language of physics. One cannot be more materialistic, can one? ... In the 13th century, we already condemned the materialism of the Church of Rome, but thanks to you, materialism is now advancing by leaps and bounds.

¹ Guyot Peyrat's statements will not fail to surprise the reader. The most discerning Catholics will immediately understand that the former *Ajist* is merely repeating word for word the texts of the sermons and articles of his spiritual master, the Reverend Abbot Jean Cardonnel O.P.

a giant on this path of denial, once God himself becomes matter, that is, substance. You are truly a heretic, but not a Cathar heretic, contrary to what my friend Malaveyre says, since Catharism maintains against you the essence of Christianity: the triumph of Spirit over Matter!

Reverend Abbot Guyot begins to show signs of nervousness.

"Do you not understand me?" he shouts. The God in whom I believe manifests and reveals his divine traits through the rejection of evasion for the elites.

"Heresy! According to your creed, the love of the Father and the Son is offered to all men without distinction!"

Mr Isarn smiles and adds in a tone that contrasts sharply with that of the Dominican:

"The Cathars who want to die for the masses, precisely, that is, for matter, in order to be reborn in the Spirit, would now be accused of fundamentalism and, as fundamentalists, burned again if your delusions triumphed within the Roman Church!"

Reverend Abbot Guyot cuts off heads with a sharp gesture and confirms:

"That will be taken care of by Fidel Castro, Che Guevara and that Camilo Torres, made father of Christ, who claims to live the love of his neighbour full-time!"

The discussion continues until nightfall in the tone of a religious war. The twilight that weaves the superstructures of Fanjeaux into a square of blue silk erects a barrier of ice between the two groups. They part without exchanging any words of courtesy.

"Let's go!" says Auda Isarn. "I don't feel like having dinner in front of friars who eat meat like cannibals!"

"There are no restaurants in Fanjeaux," Montgorodail informs her. We have to go to Montreal.

"Patience!" says Mr Isarn. We fast and pray that these unhappy Dominicans will one day come to us to ask for the Consolamentum to save their souls.

They go to the cemetery and pray fervently until nightfall. On returning to Belvedere, Auda objects to her father:

"That Guyot Peyrat has changed so much that I wouldn't recognise him if he didn't have the same accent as before. He must weigh over a hundred kilos now! Did you notice how he sweats when he gets angry?"

And he adds with a laugh:

"The notion of mass suffocates his flesh and spirit!"

"You're not very charitable, Auda," says the old man.



The discussion resumes the next day with Mr Isarn presiding over the session. He gives the floor to the daughter, who addresses the former *ajiste* and says, after consulting the notes she took the day before:

"Yesterday you said... that God is present in the masses. And you spoke of God's hatred for the elites."

The monk fidgets in his chair, raises his eyebrows, still somewhat patient, and finally shouts:

"Once again, my lady, I ask you not to address me as "you"!"

"Impossible! By transporting you back to the time of the hostels, I am returning you to that mass whose promotion was attempted in the *Ajist* movement. And I treat you with great consideration, since it was not from that mass that the undifferentiated man of your dreams emerged, but, on the contrary, the testimony of those elites who, according to you, justify God's hatred!"

The Reverend Abbot Guyot is being ironic.

-I would like to know how that happened!

-Almost all of our comrades preferred death to easy surrender! Robuffay could renounce love, Jordi Couquet, Ferrocas and Lou Ganet could renounce the Militia, and Caberol could renounce anarchy!

None of them did! Although agnostic, they behaved like new Cathars capable of dying, like the ancients, for something that transcended them! That is what separates the elite from the masses! The masses never willingly climb onto the pyre!

Reverend Abbot Guyot shrugs his shoulders and replies:

"In short, my lady, are you saying that the masses only exist because of the elite?"

"Exactly, and I will explain why, since you have become an apostle of the masses. Because, at the very moment when

Guyot Peyrat, *ajiste*, poet of the langue d'Oc and Occitan nationalist, was about to rise above them with his testimony, he preferred treason to death!

The friar blushes violently, stands up, shakes his white robes and says in a hoarse voice:

"My lady, my lady! Please!

There is great agitation in the assembly. Malaveyre and Montgorodail frown and seem to disapprove of Auda's attitude. A Dominican addresses the president of the session and protests...

"We did not come to Fanjeaux to settle scores! Mr

Isarn agrees and says to his daughter:

"Auda, Guyot Peyrat's past is not at issue. Neither is yours. Return to the theological plane or be quiet!"

Auda Isarn stands up. Her eyes sparkle and shoot flames from the past. She returns to the attitude of a fiery animal held back by the reins, pacing back and forth across the room and announcing in a hoarse voice that persuades men to their very core:

"I apologise, but I will not be silenced! We are in Fanjeaux, the martyred city of Catharism and Occitan land. Guyot Peyrat's betrayal denies who we are and what we are trying to become again.

He faces the monk and points his finger at his chest:

"Behold," he begins slowly, "a poet of the langue d'Oc who, in 1939, fought harder than any of us for the liberation of the country. He is the same man who, under the cover of a Catholic order, has just said that..."

He returns to his place and consults his notes again...

"He just said: 'The passion of man as a mass nullifies what he feels and has within himself'... Is that true?"

-It is true, and I stand by what I said! replies the cleric.

-And he goes on to say: "The fact of having nothing, of being nothing that does not belong to everyone, reaches such a root, such a radicalism, that it causes the masses to rise up... etc. Is that true?"

-Perfectly!

-And this: "Such is the logic of liberating love that gives everything, even what constitutes man's last defence, his supreme possession, his most legitimate private good: his body..."

Auda stands up again and approaches his former comrade:

-According to your claim, must I identify with the masses in order to be born of God? Does the individual man no longer exist, only the mass man? Must I even throw my body into the crucible of indifference to please your God?

Isn't what we have in others what is called universal miscegenation, genocide, therefore? Do you deny the reality of the human fact and replace it with what you define as "universal consciousness of humanity en masse"? Men cease to be tall or short, thin or fat, like you, black, white or yellow, good or bad, intelligent or stupid... Are they a "mass", each one part of an undifferentiated whole?

Reverend Abbot Guyot says mockingly:

"But... are you racist, madam? I see that your marriage to a former SS officer has borne poisonous fruit!

"Don't use the language of ignorance, Peyrat! Answer my question: in the mass world you dream of, do all particularities disappear? What difference does it make to anyone whether someone is Breton, Flemish, Norman or, why not, Occitan?

"It's obvious!"

Auda lets out a cry of triumph:

"This is where I wanted to get to, gentlemen! This friar betrayed Guyot Peyrat, the nationalist, and at the same time committed treason against all of us! Did we come here to talk about the Cathars? Well, let's talk! What I will not forget is that this supposed heresy was the pretext for the conquest of our homeland! By burning our Perfects, who were more children of Occitania than of Manes, Innocent III and the Capetians gave strength to the process that tends to suppress the small homelands, the only ones capable of making us different from one another, that is, as God intended us to be! This traitor did not sell out to the enemy in 1944 because he did not have the courage to face the ultimate consequences of the choice he made! You are a wretch, Peyrat, but your rhetoric is powerless against the testimony of our dead, the old and new Cathars!

Mr Isarn bangs on the table and shouts:

"Auda, please! Stop insulting your former comrade!
We are enemies in matters of faith, but we are civilised people!

"I am using the same delicacy that Simon de Montfort used!" and he sinks into his chair.

Reverend Abbot Guyot was sweating profusely. Nevertheless, he resumed the familiar tone of the days of the hostels and murmured:

-I didn't know you were so knowledgeable about the philosophy of history!

I admire you, but you frighten me!

Auda didn't move anymore, she remained leaning over the table, her head down, her hands in front of her eyes to hide her tears.



The conversation continued into the night in a passionate tone, but without the violence that Auda Isarn had just communicated to her. Lost in a dream, her eyes wide open to the soft, rolling landscape stretching beyond the large glass windows of the room, she did not speak again. The horizon took on bluish tones. The collegiate church of Montreal, nestled in the undulating hills, lowered the candle cloths and prepared for the night.

Mr Isarn conducted the debates with exemplary fairness and reprimanded Auda during the lunch that separated them from the monks seated in Belvedere, but at the end of the day his face showed a certain hardness. Through small gestures that enhanced his hitherto relatively subdued personality, he seemed to gain a kind of density that surprised the three Dominicans. He told them:

"In April 1207, at the time when Domingo de Guzmán's still peaceful crusade was confronting its theses with those of the Cathars in Montreal, Pamiers and Fanjeaux, it was customary to submit discussions to the arbitration of local notables. I brought mine, as tradition dictates, but I notice that yours are absent. That is logical. As representatives of a triumphant religion, what need do you have for arbitrators?"

He pauses, full of innuendo, and continues:

"Reverend Abbot Guyot, are you familiar with the miracle of Fanjeaux?"

The monk smiles. He had regained his confidence after the Countess of Miramont stopped speaking.

"Of course I do!" he replied. The scene was painted by Fra Angelico... St. Dominic and Guilabert de Castres were writing the usual libel for each of the parties... In Fanjeaux, the arbitrators decided to put two scrolls of memoirs to the test of fire. While the Cathar one burned normally, St. Dominic's rose with the force of the fire and burned a beam that supported the mantelpiece... The experiment was repeated three times, and on all three occasions the orthodox parchment emerged intact from the brazier and singed the crossbeam with deep burns... That beam is still shown to poor tourists in the church of Fanjeaux, but the whole story is a hoax, of course!

"Don't you believe it?" asks Mr Isarn in a grave voice.

The three Dominicans jump up from their chairs, but Reverend Abbot Guyot composes himself and affirms:

"I have no doubt about it. Stories of this kind are nothing more than tinsel of faith!"

Mr Isarn smiles slightly and says slowly:

"I admire you. I wish I could be as certain as you are about the things in this world that remain hidden."

There is a silence and the Dominicans look at each other in surprise. Auda's father continues:

"Since arbitration is impossible, I propose a test identical to the one that gave victory to Domingo de Guzmán.

Reverend Abbot Guyot shudders.

"What? Do you intend to light a bonfire in this room? Mr

Isarn smiles.

"By no means! The fire would spread throughout this magnificent building paid for by the Dominicans and consume it entirely, showing them that God is not with them now, if He ever was! No, I propose something simpler but which, I think, is beyond your expectations... Since you give matter a prominent place in God's work - *masa perditionis*, *masa damnationis* - I hope you have great powers over it, for if not, it will be an

usurpation of functions on your part. I would like you to give us that proof!

"I don't understand!" says the monk.

Mr Isarn stands up, takes a Bible from the library shelf, places it on the table and says to the Reverend Abbot Guyot in a voice that seems to come from far away:

Without touching that Bible, even with the tip of your finger, a man of your stature who encloses God in matter and brings Him down to earth must be capable, at the very least, of achieving a beginning of transfiguration. Like the first of the angels, you can say to that Bible: "Get up and walk!"

What do you think?

The friar shrugged his shoulders.

"You're joking with me!"

"I'm not joking. Are you capable of moving that book without touching it or not?"

"That's not the point, you're setting up a false problem here!"

"Not at all! Considering your gallery of miracles, supernatural forces must now be working in your favour, just as they worked in favour of Domingo de Guzmán, your spiritual ancestor!"

A long silence ensued. Reverend Abbot Guyot frowned as he stared at the Bible in front of him. Then he shrugged his shoulders again and roared angrily:

"I do not believe in miracles! Miracles are nothing more than embellishments of outdated theologies!"

"Well, I do believe, and that is the essence of what separates us from you!"

Almost at the same moment, his face froze in an effort of concentration reminiscent of his daughter's, but at a higher level of intensity. His brown eyes emanated a clarity that was unbearable for anyone looking directly at him. It did not radiate, but converged on the book lying on the table between the Dominicans and the Cathars... A heavy silence now reigned in the room. Nothing happened for several minutes, but suddenly Reverend Abbot Guyot saw that the Bible was no longer on the table. He felt an icy chill run down his spine.

back. He dropped his lower lip in astonishment, shared by the other two clergymen.

The Bible remained suspended in mid-air for a few seconds and then began to move slowly in their direction. Frightened, they pushed their chairs back as if to flee. The book passed in front of them at eye level, recoiled, brushed against the large glass windows, rose slowly towards the ceiling, reached the corner of the room and continued along the partition to the back of the room. As it moved away, the light emitted by Mr. Isarn's eyes increased in intensity and his face took on a pale hue that ranged from livid to cerulean. Thick beads of sweat formed on his forehead and cheeks.

The Bible turned around the room and landed on the table in the same place it had been before. Auda's father took a step back and closed his eyes. Shortly afterwards, the colour returned to his cheeks and he said in a subdued voice:

"There you have it..."

Red with anger, Reverend Abbot Guyot stood up shouting and waving the sleeves of his habit:

"Lies! Black magic! Witchcraft! Heretic!"

Mr Isarn wiped his forehead and gradually regained his composure. He asked with a smile:

"Have you already set the date for my execution? And then:

"Call it what you like... As representatives of that accursed intellectualism that cuts off the sources of faith and imprisons you in non-being, I think you should be burned for witchcraft! Faith that has lost its magical character ceases to be faith! And if what I have just done horrifies you, I remind you that the Perfects you burned in the 13th century were initiates, a dignity that Guzmán and his companions did not have!

The Cathar faith has no need of worldly temples to survive; the true temples are within us!...

Farewell, Reverend Abbot!

The Cathars turned their backs on the Dominicans, left the room and departed Fanjeaux in Barbaïra's *Mercedes*, which Auda drove with a light hand and a heavy foot.



Auda arrived at Le Pech with burning cheeks and shining eyes. He shouted in such an excited tone that the Count of Miramont was startled:

"I have just witnessed something extraordinary: the Dominicans confused by the Cathars, and confused by them as heretics!

Barbaïra looked at her intently and said:

"You seem very interested in little games of wit! I thought you had gone to the Fanjeaux colloquium out of curiosity alone!

Auda beat a retreat.

"I admit that I was, but it was worth the trip to witness scenes that erase seven centuries of history, don't you think?"

-I believe that Occitania's future is not linked to Catharism, which has already been the cause of misfortune once before! I would very much like you to agree with me on this point, but unfortunately, I think you are confusing the essential with the incidental. I know of your long-standing fondness for Catharism, but that leads nowhere. Like Marxism, it is not the driving force of history!

And he added...

"Speaking of Marxism, I received a letter from Chabrol today. He says he is going to Paris because he has been invited to appear before the Central Committee of the Communist Party. He thinks they are going to ask him to withdraw his support for François Fontan and to forbid party members from joining the P.N.O. He doesn't know which side to take and, once again, he's asking for my advice.

-What did you say?

-Three words, the usual ones: leave the Communist Party! But I don't see how he's going to get out of a situation that has destroyed his life since he discovered the Communist Party's subordination to Soviet imperialism! I really don't see it!

A few weeks later, *Midi Libre* would bring that answer that was not forthcoming... The newspaper announced, signed by *Ariège*:

"Montsegur in mourning

Late last Sunday afternoon, a tragic accident cast a shadow over a beautiful sunny day, ideal for tourism, now in full swing and favourable to the old Cathar citadel. A garage owner from Narbonne, Marius Chabrol, who was visiting the castle, was the victim of a fatal fall in the Trébuchet gorge. The body was found the next day near the cliffs on the south-western slope by a team of young speleologists currently engaged in historical research.

Alerted by a phone call from the family, they began the search, which was quickly successful. The victim was well known to the inhabitants of Montsegur, who cannot believe the accident. Indeed, as a former youth hostel leader before the war and a hero of the Resistance, Marius Chabrol knew the *pog* very well, having climbed its slopes for more than thirty years... Could it be that he was overcome by vertigo when he saw the abyss so close? Did the fog that rose at the end of the day prevent him from seeing the edge of the cliff? There is much speculation about the cause of this unfortunate accident.

The victim leaves a deep sense of loss in Narbonne society. The large political family to which he always belonged held a moving funeral for him.

The Count of Miramont passed the newspaper to his wife and remained motionless, his eyes downcast. Auda made no comment, but the blood drained from her face. They sat in silence for a long time, like two strangers.

A bee flew around the room and its buzzing summoned Guillaume and Amiel's *mopeds* as they arrived from school. Little Raymond played in the garden, shouting loudly. Tractors groaned in the distance. The scent of the moors drifted down to the farm and spread around it. Everything conspired to maintain a peace that he and the woman knew to be deceptive. Auda, who had slumped in her chair, sat up and said:

"He didn't betray us either!"

Barbaïra raised her wet eyelids with a silent question in her eyes because the woman had not yet told her the details of the conversation in Fanjeaux.

Auda did not deem it necessary to respond to the request.

IV

Guillaume Barbaïra was turning twenty. As he blew out the candles on his birthday cake, his father said:

"The time has come to deal with serious matters!

A science graduate, among the top ten at the Grignon agricultural school, the eldest son of the Miramonts liked serious matters and treated them with the same interest and tenacity as his father, who said of him with pride: "Good blood doesn't lie." In all aspects of his young life, he outshone his brother Amiel, who was somewhat jealous of him; his sisters Yolande and Gèralda were no more than the good-hearted maid in the patriarchal universe forged by the Count of Miramont, who added:

"You're on holiday, it's time for excursions! Tomorrow we're going to visit a place in Ariège that everyone has forgotten, except, of course, the Michelin guide."

After passing through the village of Comus, Barbaïra's Mercedes entered the La Frau gorges and his son fell abruptly silent. The road narrowed from the Aix-les-Thermes-Quillan national highway to a single lane, making it impossible for vehicles to overtake or pass in the opposite direction. A succession of rocky walls jutting out from the ravines, rising to a height of several hundred metres, created chicanes that limited visibility to a stone's throw. The sheer walls bore horrible scars, the result of primitive geological chaos and erosion. Fir trees struck by lightning hung from the rough walls. The horror of the passage justified its name: Gorges of Fear.

They reached a slightly wider space halfway through the gorges, just where the road built by the Bridges and Roads Administration ended. On the left, a rural road gained momentum to climb a steep slope.

"It's that way!" said the father as the big *Mercedes* bumped along... "You'll see how impressive the contrast is between the gorges and the high valley of Basqui!

In a few minutes they reached the centre of the forest cirque, the spot where the Aurochs-Platz camp had once been set up, but of which there was not the slightest trace in the bluish grass. The fortifications built with stones from the Blanc estate had crumbled. Stone had returned to stone. The farmhouse itself, now dilapidated, was nothing more than a pile of ruined walls. Only the trees of the forest that the Lévis, now Mirepoix, had received from Simon de Montfort had grown in height, stature and majesty. Barbaïra said to his son, who was excitedly discovering the great medieval forest:

"It is the most beautiful in Europe!"

Elegant as Jurassic fir trees and as tall as them but spread out over a much larger diameter, the beech trees stood at an altitude of up to 1,800 metres on one side and, on the other, standing in formation, they bordered the edge of the forest and stood guard at the borders of the plain caressed by the fine light of the summer sunset.

Impenetrable forests. Giant beech trees. Solitude that sent shivers down your spine, even at the height of the benevolent season. Not a man or animal in sight. Behind the black border of trees, an unsettling mystery was unfolding. A secret discretion, old as the millennia! From this exceptional landscape emerged a force impossible to translate into ordinary terms, made up of millions of silent, irresistible, yet peaceful growths. Barbaïra says:

"Here, my son, space is born of time!"

All around lived with a fearsome force, and yet nothing seemed to live, except for a torrent that leapt from channel to channel and tore its silver robe on the tips of the rocks,

blowing through the tunnels dug along the banks and reciting romantic verses on the bed of soft sand...

They approached, leaned over the waters to listen to the rumblings born in glacial potholes, and remained motionless for a long time. The son finally said:

"It's strange, Dad... they sound like human voices!"

Roger Barbaïra shuddered, looked at his son out of the corner of his eye and replied energetically:

"They are human voices, yes! The mountain fairies are singing and answering each other... Listen!

They leaned even closer to the stream, which dissipated long trails of fiery light. They heard moans, stifled notes played endlessly, long violin cries... Choirs of villagers and knights. Roger Barbaïra said slowly:

"It was here that Richard Wagner and Beethoven saw nature steal the secret of telluric music. Two composers you admire and know well, isn't that right?

"Yes!" acknowledges the son in a muffled voice.

They listened for a long time, leaning over the water, until Barbaïra turned to Guillaume.

"Aren't those the themes from the *Pastoral Symphony*?"

Guillaume did not answer immediately. He strained his ears with almost painful attention, then shook his head and said:

"No... It's not the *Pastoral*... It sounds like one of the themes from *Parsifal*... Listen, Dad... the central motif of the Grail! Mi-Fa-La-

La... Mi-Fa-La-La...

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely. It's when Gurnemanz says to Parsifal: 'If you are pure, you can expect drink and food from the Grail...' Yes, yes, I remember it well. In Bayreuth two years ago, with Mum and Amiel... It's the decisive moment when Gurnemanz puts his arm around Parsifal's shoulders, grabs him by the waist and leads him inside.

Roger Barbaïra scrutinises Guillaume's eyes and asks in a hoarse voice:

-And what does Parsifal say?

Guillaume thinks for a moment, his eyes lost in the immensity of the forest but also focused on his memories of Bayreuth.

"I think," he says slowly, "it's the moment when Parsifal asks Gurnemanz, 'What is the Grail?'"

Roger Barbaïra puts his arms around his son's shoulders, gently wraps an arm around his waist and leads him away. Twilight filled the open space between the black trees and blue grass with layers of fading light. The smell of ancient humus, both virile and nauseating, gradually replaced the warm scents of the afternoon. The setting sun blazed behind the La Peyre gorge. The scene was changing imperceptibly. The forests thickened in mauve shadows that extinguished all relief. The crags that crowned the last flashes of light suggested towers of Romanesque castles. Legendary Montsalvatches with secret staircases opening onto halls populated by knights, suggested by the last trees struggling against the high altitude with their slender silhouettes...

Barbaïra sat down on the grass with his son and told him the whole story of the search for the stone slabs engraved with "cryptic pagan writing", from the first explorations of caves in the company of the German Otto Rahn to the setting up of the camp at Aurochs-Platz. Guillaume seemed disturbed. Initially incredulous, despite judging his father incapable of inventing fables, he gradually became absorbed in the vicissitudes of his adventure and ended up sharing fully in his hopes, concerns and disappointments. When he reached the end, Guillaume asked:

"What happened to those pieces?"

It was now the middle of the night and the Shepherd's Star was beginning to shine. Pinkish reflections crept across the inaccessible heights. Father and son perceived each other's faces as light spots melted into the blackness of Rembrandt's paintings, which, as time passed, turned completely black.

"On 2 May 1945," Barbaïra said slowly, "an SS company on 'special assignment', composed entirely of

officers, much like the regiments that died for the Tsar of Russia against the Red Army, with no hope of saving anything but their honour, were stationed in the Tyrol, at the crossroads of the Innsbruck-Salzburg and Gmund-Zell am Ziller roads. The day before, three of its leaders, a Frenchman, a Norwegian and an American, boarded a long-range aircraft that took off from the Munich-Salzburg motorway and flew them to an unknown destination. I now think they were dropped off in Tibet ¹ ... Judging by the measures taken and the fact that the expected American offensive in the west and the Russian advance in the east had been halted for some time, the special purpose company was awaiting some important event. Finally, at night, a heavily guarded motorised column from Berchtesgaden entrusted the company with a lead chest with the mission of hiding it without delay in a glacier in the Zillertal. This chest contained the engraved stone tablets that the Cathars had hidden in a cave during the siege of Montsegur shortly before their surrender and which had been found here...

He pointed his finger at the summit of Mount Cassou, but the darkness of the night prevented the gesture from being seen, and at the same time, the light of the rising moon transfigured the designated target. The torrent now roared with less intensity than during the hot hours of the day. Deeply ecstatic, Guillaume heard both its song and his father's voice and imagined that the call of the jumping waters translated Titurel's invocation:

May the Grail come to us!

-So those precious tablets, Barbaïra continues, which Christian poets Christianised in the form of the Grail but which, according to German specialists, contain a strictly pagan message as important to the Aryans as the Ten Commandments of Moses were to the Jewish people, have been travelling with the glacier for twenty-four years ². The ark should reappear in the frontal moraine between 1990 and 1995. It must not fall into foreign hands, but into the hands of the Black Order because, if not

¹ See our work *Les Hérétiques*, Presses de la Cité.

² Saint-Loup completed this work in 1969 (Note by Portuguese translator António Carlos Rangel).

otherwise, the law will once again be circumvented and the white world will be thrown into chaos once and for all. Its guardians must therefore have perfect knowledge of the area. The journey I make every year represents my watch. It is not I who set the date and the length of time I must remain there. It is almost certain that by 1990 I will no longer be in this world, so you will take my place. If anything happens to you, your brother Amiel will take your place... and then Raymond. The chain of generations may have some broken links, but it must continue to extend between the past and the future...

Stunned and enraptured, Guillaume listens to his father and feels a kind of sacred fury against invisible enemies boiling up inside him.

"When am I going there?"

I suggest you make your first trip to Tyrol during the holidays. There's no rush. For now, just get to know the terrain and observe those who go to the Furtschlag refuge. Among the walkers and mountaineers there are curious people, too curious... Austrian lieutenant Franz Gottlich disappeared in 1946 in the Altaussee region, Helmut Mayr and Ludwig Pichler were murdered in the mountains, Gert Gerens, a diving specialist like you, was found dead in a ravine after exploring Lake Töplitz, and Emmanuel Werba was found decapitated on the Gastein mountain.



The forest breathed damp air. Dew covered the foliage, turning it into silver chain mail in the moonlight. The cold descended from the mountain and the two men got into the car.

"If you knew what I'm going to offer you on your twentieth anniversary," said Barbaïra, "you'd trade the Mercedes for a helicopter to get to Le Pech faster.

Guillaume shifted in his seat.

"Is it something I'm waiting for? A diving watch?"

"Nothing like that!"

"A double-barrelled shotgun?"

"Not even that!"

"Rameau's treatise on harmony in its original edition?"

-No! Don't try to guess. Just like the important document on the table that the spy doesn't discover, what I'm offering you is close enough to spark your imagination. A little more patience!

They are heading towards Carcassonne. It is eleven o'clock when Barbaïra stops at the garage door. He gets out of the car and opens the door of the adjoining garage that houses the woman's *Triumph* and the service *Renault* that the son drives.

When the light comes on, Guillaume lets out a restrained exclamation that translates the anguish of the wait finally over into enormous enthusiasm. Before his eyes, stretched out in the apocryphal immobility of a beast stalking its prey, he sees a brand new BMW motorbike.

"It's a *600 Sport!*" he says without hesitation... "It was made to go 170 kilometres per hour! The first thing I want to do is push it to the limit to see if the Germans are *bluffing!*"

"Slow down! Slow down!" advises Barbaïra... "One hundred and seventy kilometres per hour on two wheels is serious business!"

Guillaume hugs the Count of Miramont with youthful enthusiasm, immediately forgets him, grabs hold of the machine, starts it up with a kick of the pedal, leans over it, captivated by the silky purr that its enormous power hypocritically offers in return, mounts it and launches himself into the night, closely followed by his father's advice...

"Don't drive like a madman!"

He returns ten minutes later with a glowing, frozen face, incandescent eyes, and says in a hoarse voice:

"What a formidable machine!... Oh, Dad, with this beast between my legs, I feel like the master of the world!

Petrified by a joy too intense to be expressed, he murmurs, leaning halfway towards the motorbike:

"I baptise you *Emperiglada!*"¹

¹ Lightning. Don't forget that in Le Pech, conversations are conducted indifferently in French or in the langue d'Oc.

Barbaira smiles and says:

"You found the right word. It's not a machine, it's an animal that spits lightning!

A new impulse throws Guillaume into the arms of his father, who gently pushes him away and says:

-Don't thank me. In a way, I just knighted you at Aurochs-Platz. Now I'm giving you the means of a knight. The motorbike isn't a contraption, it's the medieval horse. It retains the old skills, it climbs, it jumps, it turns like a horse, but four times faster. Above all, maintain the "chivalrous" position, which is more than a position, it is an attitude towards life. It appeals to audacity, precision, endurance and the courage of gratuitous action. It is the very essence of chivalry!

Riding at 150 kilometres per hour and attacking corners at the limit of flight is the gratuitous act par excellence!

Enveloped by the alliance that is about to be concluded between him and the animal, Guillaume stops listening to him.

"An attitude towards life," Barbaira continues, "and, of course, towards death as well.

He grabs his son by the arm, pulls him out of the magic circle enclosed by the *BMW* and asks him:

"Have you seen how in American or French films about the dubious exploits of motorised 'black jackets', the boys decorate their machines? Always swastikas, iron crosses, SS runes!

"That's true, yes!"

"They're SS in the making, but prisoners of cheap folklore because no one initiated them! Yet, without knowing why, death fascinates them! They think that the vocation of the SS is to kill themselves, since their mission is to contemplate death without flinching during their lifetime in order to one day master it!

Barbaira takes a small object out of the bag and places it in his son's hand. It is the silver metal *totenkopf* that adorned his Waffen-SS helmet and cap during World War II.

"It was the one I wore in the Battle of Berlin," he says quietly... I couldn't save any others, so it's irreplaceable! Stick it on your machine, like the "Hell's Angels". They don't know

what they're doing, but you do. Death is an adventure that must be mastered. Eternal life is in this world and not in that of your mother's Cathar friends...

He wanted to add: and not your mother's, obviously. But he kept quiet. Deeply moved, Guillaume also fell silent, circling the animal and stroking the silver sides of the large "custom-made" fuel tank, the armour plating polished to a matt tin finish. He carefully puts the *totenkopf* in his wallet and says to the Count of Miramont:

"Dad, I'm going to get ready and open the throttle all the way to Narbonne, alone in the night with the beast... Just so I can reach the seaside at La Nouvelle... And when I get there, I'll watch the sun rise!

He puts on his overalls, puts Roger Trencavel's helmet on his head, adjusts his glasses and puts on his gloves. Now with his ears covered, he cannot hear his father's last words of advice:

"Don't go crazy! The *BMW* is not a *Mobylette*, and besides, you have bad habits... Remember that no military force cared as much about protecting the lives of its men as the Waffen-SS. Pay attention! You don't know the beast yet. First, you have to caress it and master it!"

But Guillaume had already left. Barbaira only saw the red light of the machine disappear like a shooting star in the summer night.



The film about the Albigensian Crusade and the Cathar epic presented on television has just traumatised the whole of France. In Languedoc, he plays the role of a German writer who, in 1937, taught a small group of *ajistes* the history of his country. From then on, nothing is the same as before. Questions that were asked seven centuries ago begin to be asked again. And not on the scale of specialised teachers or "folklorists", but on the scale of the masses.

Roger Barbaïra notes that the attitude of the neighbourhood has also changed. The former militiaman who wanted to liberate Occitania is no longer viewed in such a negative light. Some families, initially hostile, now visit him. He is now a member of the General Confederation of Winegrowers of the Midi and gives advice that is always listened to. Through his son Amiel, left-wing groups invite him to attend their meetings.

A left-wing meeting in a huge room on the ground floor of a building near the old bridge in Carcassonne. A former communist who, curiously, has the name of a 13th-century Perfect, d'En Marti, welcomes representatives of the groups involved in the Occitan cause. He found the courage that Marius Chabrol lacked and distanced himself from the Communist Party. He is still quite young. Dark-haired, short and athletic, he was sparing with words such as "bogeyman" ¹ truly responsible, weighing his words and accompanying them with an energetic gaze. He radiates a calm and confident strength. He is a materialist who suddenly dives into the epic. He receives Jonquièrre, delegate of the P.N.O., then Campelong, representative of the Occitan Study and Action Committee, followed by the boys from the Occitan Socialist Party ² and finally, some young anarchists led by Breil, a fine, tall, young man, blond and almost diaphanous, who speaks the language of the courts.

As he enters the smoke-filled room accompanied by Amiel, who has just left the PSU, where he gave free rein to his school philosophy, for the PSO, which allows him to enjoy the status of "man of the left" without betraying the Barbaïra dynasty of Miramont, he feels thirty years younger... There are hardly any teenagers, boys and girls, arriving on Mobylette mopeds after the workshops and offices have closed. *Blue jeans*, black leather jackets, high-heeled boots with high tops, wide belts, collars...

¹ As in the original (Portuguese translator's note).

²Founded by Robert Allan, for a long time the Occitan Socialist Party had only an embryonic existence due to the interstitial position it occupied between a P.N.O. that surpassed it on the right and a C.O.E.A. that surpassed it on the left. Currently, it is progressing rapidly.

Shirts open in anticipation of forgotten ties... As in the old youth hostels, everyone is on first-name terms. A litre of red wine is passed around and everyone drinks from the neck of the bottle. The girls assume a falsely uninhibited simplicity, like those who once frequented youth hostels. Like the boys, they drink straight from the bottle and settle where they can, at the side of a bed, on a window sill, or even on the floor...

In this suddenly rediscovered working-class environment, Barbaïra feels perfectly at ease, but at the same time rejected. He thinks: watch out. I run the risk of being trapped in my SS skin like in a ghetto... Life isn't that, life is them... The future of Occitania lies on the left, and it is on the left that I will find my reserve of knights... The struggle will do away with the old notions of right and left, even though these classifications still count today. My children are right.

Comrades! announces En Marti, the new Cathar. We are gathered here to attempt unity of action between the P.N.O., the P.S.O., the C.O.E.A. and the anarchists! Objective: decolonisation. You, Campelong, explain the position of the Action Committee... Are you aware that your opportunistic tactics are being criticised? You are too often on the side of power!

Campelong explains the group's tactics, justifies their prudence and announces that all bridges with Paris are now cut. He knows the subject well and speaks like an educated man.

-And the P.N.O.? Where do you stand?

The P.N.O. delegate presents the issue in accordance with the thinking of François Fontan. The party's founder enjoys great prestige. He is a theorist of ethnicity. He gave his definition in several pamphlets with which Barbaïra disagrees. Fontan is also a disciple of the German philosopher who emigrated to the United States, Wilhelm Reich. On that subject, the delegate concludes:

"Comrades! Next, we will proceed with the sexual misalignment of the Occitans!"

Marti, who until then had been listening patiently, raised his head and cut in with a deep voice:

"Oh, no! No, old friend, no! Those stories are for later! Let's get back to the matter at hand: what means of action can we use to achieve rapid and total decolonisation?"

Barbaïra thinks: excellent! Finally, a left wing that En Marti is going to... realign itself with chimeras... There he is, setting foot on Occitan soil, in a world where "facts are stubborn".

The C.O.E.A. delegate asks to speak and joins En Marti on realistic ground:

"En Marti is right! We must define the means of action! First of all, we must seize the opportunity that is within our reach! On 24 March, de Gaulle said in Lyon: 'The centuries-old effort of centralisation is no longer necessary. On the contrary, regional activities are the driving force behind tomorrow's economic power'. The government is preparing regional assemblies. Perhaps it would be wise for us to join them!"

"Stop!" cries Barbaïra... "Stop!"



An awkward silence hung over the assembly of young people. The Count of Miramont had promised himself not to intervene in the debates, leaving that to his son Amiel, believing that the experience of one generation cannot be passed on to the next. but he could not contain himself and ended up blushing like a young man under the weight of the converging gazes that seemed to fixate on his grey hair and the fine wrinkles on his face, as if to imply that youth dispenses with the older generation. He smiles apologetically and says:

"Comrades, I came here with my son because we are fighting the same battle. Before the war, I was part of a group of *activists* who, like you, had just discovered the state of underdevelopment that France, a colonial power,

had imposed on Occitania... Being with you this afternoon makes me feel thirty years younger!

He paused, seemed to dream for a few seconds, and continued:

"Yes... It's the same spirit... Almost the same language. My comrades belonged to the Communist Party, Trotskyist groups and the S.F.I.O... and there was also an anarchist! And then suddenly, what threatens you today also happened to us. That is why I am speaking up. Pétain also promised decentralisation. Our group was divided into Pétainists and *Maquisards*. With all that, we lost five comrades, three on Pétain's side and two on the *Maquis* side. And all for nothing, since Pétain lied yesterday just as governments lie today... Presidents of the Council succeed kings, but French politics never changes... De Gaulle lives on in Blanche of Castile, Saint Louis, Richelieu, Napoleon and Clemenceau! It is a waste of time to ask those who govern to saw off the branch of the tree from which they rule over you... It is not, shall we say... reasonable...

He hesitated a little before concluding, looked at his son and finally made up his mind.

"History does not refer to a single people made free by the meekness of their oppressors! That is why I say to you: do not enter these assemblies at any price. It is a ruse, a ploy to disarm the liberating violence that is building up in the Midi. Be wary!

Barbaïra's speech is met with laughter, and he blushes again and frowns, thinking that the young people are mocking him. Immediately, he understands the reason for their reaction and relaxes.

"You can trust us," says En Marti in his deep voice, "we know the bad faith of power well.

Barbaïra replies:

"Bravo! I confirm that today's young people have a political maturity that was lacking in youth hostels."

The session ended in a general mood of good humour.



Barbaïra and his son leave Carcassonne and travel silently through the night. Amiel says:

-Dad, you spoke very well when you praised violence.

What we need is a Simon de Montfort from the langue d'Oc.

-He was a Viking, a man of Scandinavian descent who came to Normandy, then Île-de-France, and later Occitania... The same route taken by northern civilisations tired of the ice who rushed south, towards the sun, towards the Mediterranean, that great whore!

Amiel stirs slightly in his seat. The green glow of the dashboard highlights his furrowed brow. He replies:

"Not necessarily! Think of what Israel did..."

He falls silent. The silky purr of *the Mercedes* drowns out the silence. Shortly afterwards, Amiel shifts again in his seat, tormented by something he dares not reveal, but finally makes up his mind:

"Look, Dad... the meeting... those guys who want to do something... It's fine, I think it's very good... but they seem very out of touch with reality. Far from the battle they really need to fight. As for me, I don't want to wait any longer and I'm going to ask you for something that will make you jump..."

Roger Barbaïra glances at him quickly, surprised by an impetus that doesn't fit with the image he has of his son, who is generally reserved, almost shy, always a little overshadowed by Guillaume's dynamism.

"I want to ask you to allow me to enlist in the Israeli army..."

Barbaïra slams on the brakes. The *Mercedes* nosedives and comes to a halt. He lets go of the steering wheel, raises his arms and exclaims:

-So it continues? With Guillaume, it was the FLN!

Now, with you, it's the Jews? What did I do to offend the god of the Cathars for your mother to give birth to such freaks?

Amiel avoids the eyes fixed on him. He gazes through the windscreen at the river of black asphalt running between the verges outlined by the beams of light from the headlights. Barbaïra grabs his chin with her thumb and forefinger and pulls him towards her.

"Look me in the eyes," she murmurs hoarsely, "and tell me one thing:

do you want to join the Jews to annoy a former SS officer, or is it for an ideal?

Amiel protests.

"Annoy? No, not at all. We came to a world where adventure no longer exists. I want to go to Israel because the Jews are fighting for the same ideal as us. And they don't waste time arguing, they shoot to kill!"

Barbaïra grumbles.

"All right, but Israel isn't Occitania. An Occitan fighting for Israel is as stupid as a Frenchman buying 'Russian funds'. The French love to meddle in other people's affairs, but I remind you that, according to our law, you are not French!"

He starts the *Mercedes* again and drives off heavily.

Your story about Israel doesn't hold water, and the Jews themselves will make you understand that if you keep insisting. They don't want anything to do with you because you're not of the same race as them,

do you understand? You can't be Jewish by ideal! Or Visigoth! Each ethnic group fights for itself and can do nothing for the others.

They arrive at Le Pech. The garages are empty. Guillaume Barbaïra has left for Tyrol in the *BMW* and Auda has gone to Toulouse, which has been attracting her more and more since the Fanjeaux conference. Barbaïra grabs his son's arm and takes him with him...

"I'm happy to know that you want to fight. When you're twenty, I'll talk to you about serious matters, as I did with your brother. In the meantime, devote yourself to our sector and keep your feet on the ground. The struggle for Israel concerns the Jews of France, it's not our business. A little more patience, the trials that are assigned to us will come. The winegrowers are grumbling with rage from Carcassonne to Montpellier. Two harvests blocked in the cellars, not a penny in the banks, Algerian wine flooding in. The Midi will rise up for insignificant reasons, it's true, but we have to start somewhere.

He takes Amiel's arm again and they both enter the house.

"I know the man capable of leading the beginning of the revolution that is brewing. It is André Castéra, a small winegrower from Montredon. You are going to visit him on my behalf. I will pay for your trip. He will certainly give you interesting things to do. Perhaps some C.R.S. to bring into line. I would rather see you mistreat them than see them mistreat others.

C.R.S. who keep Occitania under their yoke, mistreating Arabs. After the battle of Poitiers, we have nothing to reproach the Arabs for... And now let us go to sleep!



Due to a delay in delivery, Guillaume Barbaïra's letter arrived at Le Pech at almost the same time as the telegram from the French consul. The letter read:

"I have just spent two unforgettable days at the Furtschlag refuge. The journey was uneventful. In the Rhône Valley, I pushed *Emperiglada* to 175 kilometres per hour and did the *egg* ¹. In Switzerland, despite heavy traffic, I averaged 90. After arriving in Dornauberg, I asked the innkeeper to take good care of the animal while I was away. I put a cover on it to protect it from the dust.

I followed the routes marked on my father's map and arrived at the refuge at sunset. I met two Austrian mountaineers who were planning to set off at four in the morning to climb the Hochfeiler. I got up at the same time as them and climbed up to the frontal moraine. What chaos! When the time came, how would it be possible to find the thing amid all these crags, pieces of rock, piles of stones and these seeping waters? I appreciated the wisdom of the arrangements made and became convinced of the need for the search team to have a thorough knowledge of the terrain. They would have to act quickly, as the shelter seemed to be very popular and because the entire length of the moraine could be seen from the platform.

¹ An elongated position taken by motorcyclists to resist air pressure at high speeds.

The following night I stayed alone, then a crowd of young people, like *scouts*, arrived. In the afternoon, I was struck by a man in his forties, probably English, but I'm not sure. He went for a walk on the moraine, like I did the day before. I followed him discreetly. At dinner, I forced a conversation with him, but he spoke English almost as badly as I did. First well-founded suspicion. He gave me his address (real or fake!) under the pretext of alpine solidarity. The same justification for the photographs. Large close-ups of his face. And then: 'OSS 117 saves the Grail'. Formidable!

I went to pick up the beast in Dornauerg. After posting the letter, I set off for Innsbruck at full throttle. I still have a lot of work ahead of me to tame the beast, which sometimes tries to escape at speeds of over 150 km/h. Magnificent in the bends. I am the master of the world.

Kisses to Tyrann and Madone."

The telegram from the French consul read:

"Guillaume Barbaïra stop Serious accident stop Urgent family presence stop Zell-Krankenhaus".

Pale and feverish, the Count of Miramont handed the postman a large sum of money while Auda prepared the medical kit.

"You drive!" he said to his wife.

They raced up the Rhône valley like madmen. At a certain point, Auda lifted her foot off the accelerator of *the Triumph* and murmured in the harsh voice that Barbaïra knew so well:

"It's useless, it's too late!"

They crossed Innsbruck at daybreak. Guillaume's body lay in a bed in the clinic, his head bandaged, his eyes closed, his face peaceful. The surgeon reported:

"Double skull fracture. He died without regaining consciousness."

Unable to utter a sound, Barbaïra gestured to the Austrian police representative to speak. The surgeon translated... That he had last been seen crossing Schwarz like a flash... The frightened villagers alerted the traffic police by telephone... He must have lost control on a bend a little further on...

Surely at over 120 km/h, because they found him far from the road, on the banks of the Inn... The machine swept away by the waters and certainly destroyed... The boy was in a coma when the police officers discovered the body...

Barbaïra listened to the policeman without really understanding... Speed... alert... bend... skidded... water... won't see anymore... the animal... all his vital force was concentrated in the look he gave the woman, a desperate plea.

"I don't bring the dead back to life," whispered Auda.

They left the clinic with their heads bowed, like old people, and sought refuge in a hotel. At the end of the afternoon, the official arrived with papers to sign... How did they wish to repatriate the body?

Barbaïra shook his head and expressed his wishes in a few words... For the moment, his son had no other homeland beyond the Zillertal... The body would therefore rest in the nearest cemetery to the glacier overlooking the Hochfeiler... And he produced a thick wad of banknotes, confirming his desire to purchase a burial plot...



Days later, the hearse climbed the Zillertal valley, followed by the Triumph that Auda drove with a distracted hand. The summer afternoon weighed heavily on the landscape. The hay, arranged in small pyramids, exuded balsamic scents. The sleepy cows occasionally shook the bronze bells hanging around their necks, and that music seemed to fall drop by drop, like the last bars of the *Pastoral* falling note by note...

With shining eyes, Auda mechanically lined up in front of the car, following the black silhouette of the van as it passed through the villages, standing tall like the setting of the operetta *Cheval Blanc*, with brightly coloured or varnished inns and estates with whitewashed walls decorated with simple paintings. Barbaïra seemed to look at these images, which disappeared as quickly as they appeared, but without really seeing them. The silence that weighed between him and the woman after confronting their dead son seemed to grow thicker by the hour...

They travelled slowly. Upon arriving in Mayrhofen, the Count of Miramont had the feeling that it had taken more than twenty years to travel the few kilometres separating Zell-am-Ziller from the top of the valley. He shuddered when he saw the tourist lodge opposite the cemetery... It was there that on 2 May 1945, shortly before dawn, the special forces company transporting the Grail to the new Mountsalvatge abandoned their trucks...

The end of the petrol supply coincided with the end of the passable road... Van Herdrick gathered the company and ordered them to form a block. Instead of rain falling further down, snow was slowly descending and covering the ground and their helmets. The torches found in the house of some locals in Zell-am-Ziller burned brightly despite the snow... snow that fell with funeral-like slowness. The company formed a block next to the cemetery... The Waffen-SS, all officers, representatives of the small European homelands that were not yet named on the maps and probably would not be after the military defeat... Dressed in camouflage uniforms with ammunition belts crossed over their chests... their faces tense... they assumed that the commander was going to present them to the Führer...

Van Herdrick announced their ascent to Valhalla... The rifles trembled in the hands of these men, bearers of the gold medal for hand-to-hand combat, while others wept silently, sheltered by the visors of their helmets.

The snow continued to fall. Streams of blood ran from the torches to the shoulders leaning against the cemetery wall. Van Herdrick did not give a speech, did not speak of honour and loyalty, he simply shouted as usual:

"Comrades, Sieg Heil!"

The men responded "Sieg Heil" and in long lines they set off up the mountain, bent under the weight of the lead coffin...

No one knew then what it contained, but now Barbaira knew. As he entered the cemetery behind the urn of his son, carried by men dressed in leather shorts, green stockings, white shirts and Tyrolean hats, he felt crushed by Guillaume's escape, which destroyed a part

of his eternity according to the race. Auda walked slowly beside him, burdened with an increasingly opaque mystery.

The coffin was lowered into the cave. Barbaïra and the woman threw handfuls of earth on top of it. The men repeated the gesture and immediately withdrew to a respectful distance. The gravedigger pushed the stone lid... A mere rectangle of granite. A name: Guillaume Barbaïra, Count *Faydit* de Miramont... The rune of life and the date of birth: 1946... the rune of death and the date of death: 1966...

No clergyman of any recognised denomination would have blessed the body. Roger Barbaïra stamped his heel, stretched out his right arm over the "stone engraved with encrypted pagan signs"... and his arm seemed to lengthen to cover it entirely in the blue shadow of twilight, which transfigured all forms and gestures and aligned them with the dimensions of the Hochfeiler, which at an altitude of three thousand five hundred and ten metres still glowed in the sun with its ice belt taking on the colour of peach blossom.

No one heard the Count of Miramont, now old in his threatened eternity, murmur the verse of Wolfram von Eschenbach's Grail... "Truly, your name is Parsifal... Which means rightly tormented..."

No one. Hearing the client repeat at the grave the ancient Aryan greeting long forbidden by law and morality, the funeral home staff and the gravedigger fled in panic. Nor did they see Auda, broken with sobs, fall onto the gravestone, crying out her anguish in the style of the ancient mourners. But even if they had heard, the words spoken would have meant nothing to them:

"She did not receive the Consolamentum! All is lost!"

V

Amiel Barbaïra did not join Moshe Dayan, military leader of the Jewish state, but rather the secret army of winegrowers that

André Castéra would gather in a few hours or on leave, depending on the needs of the moment.

He met the man for the first time in Montredon, near Narbonne. Castéra was sitting with his picnic basket in the shade of a hundred-year-old oak tree on the slope of a hill covered with thyme and lavender. Around him was a staff of fellow countrymen. Their faces were weathered by the sun and wind. Their shirts were half unbuttoned, their chests hairy. Faded blue trousers. Slippers on their feet. From the litre of old wine, a necklace of rubies rained down on each throat. The sun danced on the five hectares of Castéra's vineyards. The colonels addressed the general informally, and the general announced:

"I say the same thing to you that I said to Marcelin Albert in 1907: 'As in the days when the Albigensians defended their country and their faith beside the walls of Carcassonne, the army of winegrowers is camped today in the ancient capital of Carcassès. The new ancestors of other centuries fell as heroes to defend it. Brothers winegrowers, be worthy of them!'"

The general staff greeted the chief's speech with the ancient cry of the poor of Occitania:

"The Midi wants it! The Midi shall have it!"

André Castéra added in a threatening tone:

"And, if necessary, Languedoc will become Cathar once again! I will make this known to all the journalists in Paris!"

Like Saint Louis, Castéra was preparing, not to serve, but to administer justice, in the shade of the oak tree, to the wine producers of the seven departments of the Midi, provisionally federated in a protest action that was peaceful in principle but violent if necessary.

When he spoke of the land and the vineyards, his face glowed like that of a young man evoking carnal loves. As if he had just discovered happiness. This kind of transfiguration impressed Amiel Barbaïra more than the man's great stature and flexible delicacy, the ascetic finesse of his sunken face, his cheeks cut by two deep vertical wrinkles, his imposing, pointed nose revealing intuition and curiosity, his clear eyes and bushy black eyebrows. He spoke with some difficulty due to a recent operation

that left him with almost no teeth, so he needed more time to adapt to that emptiness.

"You will get from the government whatever you can wrest from it!" That is what Dr Féroul said in 1907, Castéra continued. It is now 1967, but nothing has changed!

The general staff of the wine action committee gathered around him in the bucolic landscape were preparing large demonstrations. On 16 March 1967, he planned to simultaneously launch hundreds of thousands of discontented villagers in Carcassonne, Montpellier and Dranguignan. The aim was to force the government to release the two harvests held in the cellars, review the price per *hectolitre*¹ and put an end to the importation of Algerian wines.

"That's what I was telling you, son," replied Barbaïra when Amiel returned from Montredon, fascinated by Castéra's personality... As in 1907, they are going to fight to receive alms from the government, and the government is going to give it to them. Then the franc will be devalued, prices will be raised, and once again, the Midi will reach out its hand... And it will continue like this as long as the colonial regime survives. They should not be fighting for the price of wine, but for the price of freedom. A very high price. The price of bloodshed!

He placed his hands on Amiel's shoulders and continued:

-Regarding Castéra, do not get your hopes up too high, despite him belonging to the great Occitan race who know how to do everything. It is from among them that France chooses its senior officials, presidents of the Republic and generals. France is not stupid! Castéra could be, if he wanted to, the head of our liberation army, but even if he were, he would not understand our historical situation in the slightest. I know what he's like! At the end of meetings, he orders everyone to sing *La Marseillaise* and wave the tricolour flag! You couldn't be more naive, but everything could change if one day he perceives his internal contradictions and manages to overcome them... Unless he decides to flee like Marius Chabrol, but that's unlikely. Well,

¹ degree/hectolitre of wine.

he is a villager. A vine dies but does not commit suicide. Anyway...

He left the office with his son...

"Tell your mother that you are authorised to follow Castéra, but don't tell her that... I encouraged you to go with him!"

Radiant with joy, Amiel looked for Auda in the mansion but did not find her. She had just left for Toulouse. After Guillaume's death, she was absent more and more often and took a long time to return. Her presence in the *château* seemed almost unreal. The sound of her voice, rarely heard, came from an area of indefinable silence and returned there almost immediately. An invisible mist enveloped all her gestures and gave them a strange slowness, as if preventing them from being fulfilled. In the park, at dusk, along the brightly lit corridors, the light in her eyes, always something special, seemed to exist on its own, almost independent, deprived of ties to the flesh imprisoned in mourning clothes. From time to time, men and women unknown to the Count of Miramont visited her at night, and the windows of the north tower, which had become her domain since they began sleeping separately, were lit until the wee hours of the night...



On the morning of 16 March 1967, thousands of cars are on their way to Carcassonne. Winegrowers and their wives advance with heavy faces, hard stares and closed lips. Many car roofs are laden with sacks of sulphur, walking sticks, hunting rifles, cartridges loaded with pellets and, in some cases, grenades and submachine guns from the war, hidden after the dissolution of the *maquis*.

The sun comes out to greet them. So does André Castéra. At three o'clock in the afternoon, twenty thousand demonstrators fill Charles de Gaulle Square, among them Amiel Barbaïra and his comrades from the P.S.O., with rattles hidden under their clothes and Molotov cocktails in their pockets.

Many settlers who keep arriving are unable to join the human tide. They turn around and go to walk the

streets of the city. The placards waved at the ends of sticks read: "Winemaker, mortgage your skin to Crédit Agricole, but leave your bones for the debt collector...", "Storm in the Midi: 1907-1967...", "Win or die with Castéra". The winegrowers of Embies carry a small urn bearing the words: "*Paisans rébelio té*" (Rebel peasants). Those from Portella proclaim: "Government, remember that hunger has no law". Those from Villemoustaussou prefer to play with words: "*Villemoustaussou? Non. Ville sans le sou*" ¹. There is no shortage of humour either: "Priority for my wine, I am a naturalised Algerian!".

Shop windows proclaim solidarity between town and country: "Locked in solidarity with the winegrowers...", "Drink wine...", "Any Frenchman worth his salt drinks wine, donkeys and camels drink water". In every street in the town, the anthem to wine is sung in a tone of anger.

Mr Fit, president of the Carcassonne Chamber, welcomes the demonstrators and Mr Azibert, president of the Chamber of Agriculture, approaches the microphone... Shouts, boos, whistles. He cannot make himself heard. Castéra intervenes, calms the crowd, and Azibert delivers a speech. Benet, president of the Midi Wine Confederation, speaks in turn, but it is Castéra whom the crowd is waiting for. He says to him:

"The government isn't listening to us! Raquel Welch's miniskirt causes more of a stir than the three thousand winegrowers' wives marching through the streets of Narbonne!

He speaks with some difficulty and has to drink frequently from a glass of water, his toothless mouth as demanding as a car radiator in the Sahara. Someone in the crowd shouts:

"Pourios aou mens béouré du bi!"

Could Castéra at least drink wine?... wonders Amiel Barbaïra... Of course he could, but what is he waiting for to start spitting vitriol?

¹ In French, this forms a couplet that translates as "Villemoustaussou? No. A town without money".

Castéra prepares himself and says:

-Now, we must fight! Action awaits us!

"To the Civil Government!" shouts Amiel... "Hang the governor!"

Castéra is a great popular orator. He keeps the twenty thousand excited people gathered in front of him attentive, but he preaches legality and protest action. At no point does he raise the political issue. Only Jammes, president of the Eastern Pyrenees winegrowers' union, brings it up:

"On 20 February, three thousand Catalans affirmed their desire for national unity!"

"Bravo!" shouts Barbaïra, who interprets this as a call for unity between the two Catalonias... Long live free Catalonia! Long live free Occitania!

His neighbours look at him somewhat perplexed, and he thinks: clearly, I'm not on the same wavelength as them! I'm talking about freedom, and they're thinking about their wallets. It's normal, but it doesn't matter. And he shouts again:

"Long live free Occitania!"

Castéra now addresses the women:

"Wives of the winegrowers!... In the processions that are being prepared, avoid going with those at the front! You saw how the CRS in Narbonne treated them! First, let the men who were chosen go first!

The procession forms amid great turmoil. Barbaïra and his comrades from the P.S.O. make their way to the front, but at the head of the procession is the delegation responsible for delivering the ritual motion to the civil governor, Dufay: The winegrowers of the Midi, gathered in Carcassonne, Montpellier and Draguignan on 16 March 1967... demand... protest... affirm... expect...! Immediately behind the delegation composed of Castéra, Desbarrat, Francès and Cazes, associations of former combatants march with banners, followed by wine industry personalities and, finally, the crowd...

The delegation passes, but the crowd collides with the C.R.S. trucks positioned in a zigzag formation at the intersection of Barbès and Gouvernement Civil streets. It is half past five in the afternoon. Suddenly, a hail of pegs

and pieces of cast iron from torn-out and shattered railings, bottles and paving stones rains down on the Praetorians. For a few minutes, they stare at each other, on both sides. The demonstrators shout:

"If you're men, attack!" The

CRS respond:

-Cowards! Slackers! Loud

rumours, rhyming phrases:

-A-sse-ssi-nos Nazis... a-sse-ssi-nos Nazis... C.R.S. SS...

C.R.S. SS...

The sun struggles to penetrate the narrow, deep streets of the city. The acrid smell of the first tear gas grenades suddenly gives the atmosphere a special flavour. Amiel Barbaïra shouts to his comrades:

"The trucks!"

They throw several Molotov cocktails at a truck, which catches fire. All around, faces contorted with anger. A man is attacked by the C.R.S. and falls. Others throw sacks of sulphur into the nascent fire, which suddenly becomes brighter and hotter. The riot police grab the fire extinguishers and flee when the petrol tank explodes in a huge black "plop" covered in golden flames. Other demonstrators dodge the police down Jean-Bringier Street.

"Come on!" says Barbaïra. "Helmets on your heads!"

Like cautious revolutionaries, they put on motorcyclist helmets that protect them but at the same time mark them out for blows among the crowd fighting bareheaded or covered with caps and Basque berets. The tear gas grenades do not make them retreat a single step. A group that has just dismantled some high railings carries them at the front like a kind of mobile shield, to which the hands of winegrowers and CRS officers cling tightly together. Slowly, metre by metre, the mobile barrier pushes the Praetorians towards the Civil Government building. Shouts. Insults. Gnashing of teeth. Dull echoes of kicks. Moans of the wounded. Calls from firefighters. Women's screams in the distance. Combatants fall on both sides. In the fog of tear gas that weighs with all the technical indifference on defenders of

order and demonstrators, it is increasingly difficult to distinguish helmets and uniforms from caps and clothes. The smell of burnt petrol mixes with the smell of gas. The municipal fire brigade rushes to the scene with an intervention vehicle, but is forced to stop. A hundred arms lift the vehicle and overturn it with its wheels facing upwards before the firefighters have time to escape.

Against the backdrop of grenade explosions, the sound of shop windows being smashed and large glass panes crashing onto the pavements can now be heard. Amiel Barbaïra fights with a rage that completely unleashes his instincts. He has been waiting for this day for many years. He fights as if his brother Guillaume were watching him. And Guillaume says: I didn't think you were capable of so much! The grimace that freezes his mouth extinguishes the shyness of a peaceful student. If he stops, it is to hurl insults at the C.R.S. or to give orders.



Amiel Barbaïra shouts to his comrades in the P.S.O.

"Change of sector! Everyone to the station!"

They get rid of their belongings as best they can and run to the station. When they arrive, they find demolition work well underway. Stunned and amazed, they watch a man of short stature and even fragile build lift a box that must weigh at least a hundred kilos. He seems to lift it with a slow-motion movement, then throws it against the ticket office... The box smashes through the window, falls on top of the desks and crushes them. Immediately, an even more insignificant man, but transformed into a Hercules of rage, grabs another box as if for fun, throws it towards the boss's office and everything collapses. Little by little, manoeuvred by supermen of the day and now turned into a battle tank, the box continues on its way, devastating all the administrative offices. A well-groomed old man with a sparse beard and a monocle follows in its wake with short steps and finishes the job, pointing his silver-knobbed cane at the still intact windows and knocking them down one after the other... After the main event,

the accessories! He seems to take the joy of a prince turned child from the exercise...

Seven convoys are stopped from one end of Carcassonne station to the other. Traffic lights are broken. Rails are unscrewed. Telegraph poles knocked down. Derailed carriages obstructing the tracks. A septuagenarian waiting for a train holds out her acoustic horn to get an explanation of what is happening, opens her mouth with a big smile and says:

-Ah, in that case, I'm staying! I like excitement!

Sitting in a police vehicle behind a microphone, a civilian inspector prepares to report on the situation. Barbaïra and his comrades spot him, jump on him and push him over the door. Rubber truncheons emerge from their clothing and begin to strike. A group of winegrowers, less radical than the young people, save the policeman from certain death and lock him in a café. They then return to the vehicle, release the handbrake, push it and throw it into the Canal du Midi. With flawless timing, another team opens the canal gates and the current carries the 203 to its destination, while the cranks are thrown into the water so that they cannot be used by the gatekeepers.

There is no commotion in the station area, whose possession by the demonstrators is not questioned. The situation disappoints the young revolutionaries of the P.S.O., who return to the Civil Government. It is seven o'clock and night is falling on the city. The windowless shopfronts open wide onto the promenades. The broken glass under Barbaïra's feet crunches like wheat in a millstone. The tear gas hangs at head height like clouds on the side of a mountain after rain. The silhouettes of the combatants contort amid a grey that turns to black, and the fighting continues unabated. Not far from him, Amiel Barbaïra sees a young villager skilfully grab the grenades ready to explode and throw them at the C.R.S.

"It's the noble gesture of the sower!" comments a comrade from the P.S.O.

The young student tries to help the boy, burns his fingers, curses and gives up. Barbaïra spits, coughs, complains and asks:

"Where are the submachine guns?"

"I haven't seen any yet!"

"What a shame! Some guys have them and don't use them.

We have to shoot, for God's sake! What are you waiting for? One good burst and we'd see the C.R.S. fleeing from here without asking anyone for their papers!

Barbaïra throws off his motorcycle helmet, which is making him sweat. He cleans his goggles, which more or less protect him from the tear gas, and shows his comrades a group of winegrowers charging at the

CRS, singing *La Marseillaise*. In the front row, a sixty-year-old former combatant from the 1914-1918 war, who is part of the delegation responsible for laying wreaths at the war memorial, charges forward with his association's flag, the cloth rolled up around the pole, the tip lowered, and wields it like a spear...

Barbaïra shrugs his shoulders:

"And they're singing *La Marseillaise*! Bunch of idiots! Damn it, some of them have brought shotguns and grenades! I don't know what they're waiting for!"

Castéra knows that there is no shortage of shotguns and grenades among the demonstrators. Deeply concerned about the level of popular anger, he travels around the city in all directions, calling for moderation. If he gave the order to fire, the Civil Government would be conquered in an instant. The governor, literally surrounded, was forced to ask him to prevent the worst. And Barbaïra thinks: that man has weapons and he's not handing them over. He's betraying Occitania! He has to answer for that!

Suddenly, he stops thinking. A group of C.R.S. officers coming out of a side street attack the P.S.O. group. Just as he is about to put on his helmet, Amiel Barbaïra is struck on the head with a rifle butt and falls unconscious. The Praetorians disappear into the night in search of other adversaries, while the young demonstrators, less severely injured, carry the body away from the battlefield.

The cries gradually fade away. The darkness turns blue. In the devastated centre of the city, people begin to wander around in a daze. In all the villages of Carcassès, armed men with shotguns await the return of the combatants. Unease reigns. The radio reports grenades and many wounded. Even dead. If the dead do not return, if the civil governor does not release the eight imprisoned demonstrators (among them a paratrooper and a... C.R.S. candidate), if the police touch a hair on Castéra's head, the two wine harvests stored in the cellars will be transformed into waves of blood...



When Amiel Barbaïra arrived at Le Pech in the ambulance that had taken him to the clinic for an X-ray, he was still unconscious. The Count of Miramont stands rigidly at the head of the bed. He looks at his wife with anguish and says:

"Auda, I beg you! Do something!"

The woman gave the wounded man a dull look, shook her head and murmured:

"There is nothing more I can do for the Barbaïras... I gave them everything, everything I had. Call the doctor."

For the first time, a doctor is called. Time passes. Nothing moves in the *château*. Young Raymond and the little girls are unaware of what is happening and sleep on. The moonlight bathes the vineyards, making them look like flat furrows. In the distance, on the road, cars from Carcassonne pass by. One of them turns off, enters through the iron gate and drives up the central avenue.

The doctor examines the injured man at length, looks at the X-rays and says:

"There is no skull fracture... just a severe concussion. What worries me most is the paralysis of the lower limbs. It could be that your son will be more or less paralysed as a result of this accident."

Amiel wakes up at dawn and asks why they leave him in the dark... He looks again, shows signs of appetite and eats a small breakfast. He immediately tries to get up, fails, realises the tragic nature of his physical condition and bursts into tears. Auda cries with him, face to face, and the Count of Miramont says in a strangled voice:

"The doctor says you'll be fine... A few rehabilitation sessions a week. In less than six months, you'll be walking normally."

He falls silent and disappears through the corridors of a *château* now plunged into silence.



Silence. Long, sad evenings. Away from the Count of Miramont, the little girls read in a corner of the living room around their mother. Little Raymond puts together the pieces of a *Meccano set* with his usual energy, twisting or breaking anything if he doesn't like the assembly. Lying on a bed of rest with his legs stretched out, Amiel dreams. Then he gets up with difficulty and leaves the room with the help of crutches. Auda also leaves, leaving a cold kiss on her husband's forehead. She is increasingly absent from Le Pech, sometimes for a whole week. When she is present, she retires to her rooms after a few minutes of reading in the drawing room. Later, a large, silent black car with its lights off enters the park and the countess's guests arrive at her house as an example of discretion...

When he wakes up in the middle of the night, Roger Barbaïra thinks he hears singing that crosses the barrier of the walls with the supernatural spirit that superstition lends to the voices of angels, and Auda's voice mingles with them in the distance. Over time, she ended up creating a private domain, and, invisible as it may be, the border surrounding it is no less impassable. Although sexual relations had long since diminished and ceased altogether after Guillaume's death, she knew her husband to be faithful in the flesh but unfaithful in spirit.

He does not exaggerate the importance of the situation. Although he suffers because of it, there is nothing he can do about it. Auda takes care of the children, especially the daughters, whom she often takes with her to Toulouse. She manages the household chores without ever getting bogged down in details and commands zeal and loyalty because of the nature of her orders, which seem to come down from the heights where God the Father reigns. But her eyes no longer radiate the light of yesteryear; Barbaïra sees only the ashes of dead flames in them.

The Count of Miramont thinks with anguish that Auda is dying, even though he has never seen her ill. He does not dare to have her examined by a doctor or psychiatrist, nor does he ask his father-in-law for advice, as he is impossible to find despite several attempts. The Countess of Miramont seems to already be living in the timeless realm of the ghost charged with guarding the *château*, which she will become when the man who is trying to restore her title and consolidate his dynasty disappears.



Summer begins to gild the vineyards. The cicadas once again pierce the silence with the heart-rending precision of a saw sinking into wood. The earth breathes hot breaths and the depressions offer the sun a face of cracked clay. The new harvest will soon enter the now empty cellars, unblocked by the authorities after the demonstration in Carcassonne.

Amiel is getting better and better, as the doctor had said, and her full recovery now seems possible. However, although less heavy, the atmosphere of the evenings retains an almost timeless character.

One afternoon, when they are alone in the living room, Auda looks up from her book and asks Roger Barbaïra:

"Do you remember, Roger, that play we were going to perform before the war?"

The Count of Miramont starts, as if alerted by some undefined danger, looks into his wife's eyes and replies:

"Of course I do!"

"What ever became of that horrible *mère aubergiste* who spent her time cutting lizards?

"I never heard of her again!"

"Neither have I, which is rather curious, because there is an invisible bond between that woman and me!

"A bond?" murmurs the Count with the utmost perplexity...
"The Countess of Miramont can think what she likes in matters of religion, but she has no right to engage in shameful relationships!"

Auda smiled faintly.

"You don't understand! The relationships I'm talking about are purely subjective. Like you, I never saw that woman again..."

Pleasantly surprised by the familiar tone the conversation is taking, a break from the usual brief exchanges, Barbaïra thinks: what's going on? Is my Auda coming back down to earth?

"I mentioned that woman," she continued, "because she played the role of Brunissende de Montaure and I played the role of her daughter Jordane..."

Do you remember?

-The rehearsals made such an impression on me that I can recite the entire play from memory... Yes, yes!... The clash between Pons de Montaure, the Occitan lord, and his wife Brunissende, the Cathar...

Look, I remember it! Pons de Montaure entered the scene and said: Did you send for me, madam?

Auda Isarn nods her head in agreement.

-And Brunissende replies: "Upon my soul, I wanted to spare you the cruelty of this conversation, but there is no time, sir!

You sang too much about the joys of spring and the sweetness of love for me to be able to show you the world as I see it!

"The world? Could it be that seeing it through your beloved eyes would make it seem less kind and beautiful to me?

"My poor knight, you speak the language of Satan put into the mouths of men to help you deceive yourselves!

Brunissende, you have misunderstood the words of the Perfect Ones. They could not have urged you to torment a man who

never wished evil and who likes to see people laughing around him. Have you forgotten what it means to be a father, a mother and a child?

-Lies! You are nothing to me anymore, and my children are my remorse.

-Is it then Satan who gives me this suffering, or those men in whose name you speak and whom I consider so pure?

-You suffer because you are ignorant!

-What I know, what I see, what I feel, is that I love you, Brunissende. Is it possible that, having written so many songs for you, you thought they were insincere? Brunissende, I beg you, look deep into your heart and, if I am dear to you in any way, if by some thread of memory, compassion, or friendship, you still feel bound to me, swear to me that you will not tear me away!

After looking deep into my heart, I swear that there is absolutely nothing that binds me to this earth!



They fall silent. The scents of the night pour in through the living room window. Somewhere, a scops owl hoots. Cars passing by from time to time announce their rumbling in the distance, making it crackle outside the park, then gradually fading away and dragging it off to who knows where. A door slams. The old servant arrives from the farm, on foot, and the moving beam of light from the electric torch she uses wanders across the canopy of banana trees. Auda says slowly:

"My life was so full that I had to play the roles of Brunissende and Jordane at the same time. But it doesn't matter because, despite everything, things happen as God wills..."

Roger Barbaïra raises his eyebrows and looks surprised.

"I don't understand!" he says uneasily.

Auda gets up, sits down next to him on the sofa and takes his hand. The contact awakens old passions that lie dormant within him.

"Auda!" he murmurs in a strangled voice... "Auda! What's going on?"

"Nothing special, my poor Roger. Whatever has to happen will happen. I'm leaving next week."

Barbaïra looks at her intently as he leans back slightly, still holding her hand in his.

"You're leaving? Well... it's not the first time!

Silence erects an insurmountable wall between them.

Moments later, Auda continues in a weary voice...

"Yes, Roger, but this time I'm not coming back. Forgive me, I've suffered too much!"

Roger Barbaïra stands still, his eyes wide with horror and his throat dry. He knows perfectly well that it is pointless to question the decision of this woman, whose character he knows so well.

"Where are you going?" he asks in a tired voice.

"To a retirement home we have near Bergamo, in Italy."

"Retirement! But you're not even fifty yet!"

Auda smiles wistfully.

"My poor Roger, I am already an old woman. I have little time left to make peace with God."

"I understand..." murmurs Barbaïra, lowering his head... "I understand."

Auda caressed his hand with extreme tenderness.

"Roger, I loved you with all my strength and I still love you in some way. For you, I defied the will of those who wanted to make me one of the chosen ones and upset my father, who expected me to be among the Perfect Ones. I agreed to marry you and give you five children. I am at peace with life as you conceived it, but I feel guilty before the one who sees everything and who will judge me! I must redeem myself and save the children who can still be saved!

Barbaïra jumped up from her chair and let go of the hand that was trying to hold hers in a desperate impulse of tenderness.

"Exactly," she said slowly, "what retirement home are you talking about?"

Auda smiled.

"Let's say, Roger, that you've known her for over thirty years..."

Do you remember that convent of women officially called ' ' ?

Catholic by day and Cathar by night, where Brunissende de Montaure retired? It is near Bergamo. It will be officially consecrated to the true faith when the Catholic Church, mired in worldly matters, is completely lost, which will be soon! Our religion will be resurrected, just as Occitania will be reborn thanks to men like you and your sons. We have not belonged to each other for a long time, Roger, and the holidays we grant ourselves, perhaps too indulgent, will end today. That is all.

Crushed by the woman's decision, Barbaïra searches for words to respond but finds none. His heart feels trapped in a block of ice and his thoughts wander through spaces where death weighs heavily. All life retreats from the night. The moon lies down, the vineyards are drowned in darkness, the birds fall silent, the flowers deny the world their perfumes. And who knows, perhaps the old maid, struck by a stroke, lying in the grass on the path to the farm...

Suddenly, she finds the words she needs to cry out her concern:

"What about the girls?" she cries.

"Yolande and Géralda are coming with me, of course. They belong to me and they agree to this, since I began preparing them long ago according to the Spirit. I'll leave you the boys. We have different missions..."

Roger Barbaïra was about to protest, but he realised that nothing could oppose the logic and rigour of the choice. By talking about different missions, by reminding him that they no longer belonged to each other, she swept away all compromises. He thought about what he could say to her, but only the most regrettably banal thing came to mind:

"Do you write?" he asked in a solicitous and anguished tone.

"Of course I do! Let's see... We are separated in the material world for reasons beyond our control, but we are together in spirit, as always, until death! You are no longer my husband, but you are still my knight.

She gave him a light kiss on the forehead and left. Barbaïra was left alone, overcome with sadness. After a while, all he felt inside was the pride of a wounded male. He got up, closed the windows, turned off the lights and went into the hallway... He remembered

that triumphant night in his tent of reprobation, set up twenty years earlier among the box trees of *the pog* of Montsegur, and he thought: you will never fully conquer a woman if you let her parents talk to her about the good Lord in any form!

He left the *château* and entered the garage that had recently housed Guillaume's *BMW*. The old *Norton* from his hostel days, always in working order, was waiting for him. He sped off into the night. He tried to rediscover his style of leaning to the limit of adhesion, as before, but, narrowly escaping a fatal crash, he cut the throttle and realised that he was now afraid to carry out gratuitous acts as he had done in the past.

After returning to Le Pech at normal speed, he felt ashamed of himself and thought that if Auda could see another future open up before her, he had already had his time.



As planned, Auda Isarn left Le Pech a week later. She looked at the big *Mercedes* that Barbaïra had just offered her and said:

"I'll sell it after I get to Bergamo!

"The money is for your poor, isn't it?"

"No, I'm going to burn those bundles of impure banknotes. The less money men have, the sooner they will ask for the Consolamentum."

Twilight wove a blue silk robe around the trees. Tireless, the cicadas gnawed at the silence, eager for space, forced to wait for nightfall to impose itself. The offensive of perfumes wore off in successive waves. Roger Barbaïra stood with his children by the car, rigid, staring at the open gate at the end of the grove, dressed in a black leather suit, riding trousers and black boots, the small insignia of the first class Iron Cross in his buttonhole. Amiel wept, leaning on the cane that now replaced his crutches. Accustomed to seeing his mother leave and return despite his sisters' chatter, young Raymond did not understand the reason for his brother's tears. He watched the family's behaviour out of the corner of his eye

and wondered whether he should cry like Amiel or laugh like Géralda.

"Did you bring the luggage downstairs?" asked the Count of Miramont.

"We don't have any luggage."

Indeed, the *Mercedes'* luggage compartment was completely empty. Barbaïra saw only three small travel bags on the back seat and, in the rear side compartment, a long black woollen dress from the Pyrenees reminiscent of those worn by the Perfects during the Crusades. He advised in a strangled voice:

"Don't wreck the car before you sell it." Auda shrugged.

"Don't worry. I'm in no hurry now, I'll take it slowly."

The tone of her voice startled him. He studied the woman's face more closely. The tone of her voice and the lines of her face were part of two complementary harmonies that reflected a calm and pure happiness. In her slightly veiled gaze, the flames of her former anxieties had been completely extinguished. By some new grace, Auda Isarn's gestures seemed to convey a state of weightlessness, and the twilight gave her body an increasingly disconcerting unreality.

Seeing this, Roger Barbaïra's discouragement subsided. He thought: finally, my Auda has found happiness. So much the better for her! And he asked her:

"Why are you going out at night? It's dangerous."

She made an angry gesture, considering that the landscape was still visible around her and that the night would also deprive her of the past, and replied:

-I need the night. I don't go, I disappear.

After a cold embrace with their father, Yolande and Géralde fidgeted in the back seat. He returned their kisses, but without conviction. He wasn't interested in his daughters, and they took up little space in his life. An overwhelming urge to cry strangled his throat and stung his eyes. He held back. He didn't want to show tears in front of his children. Auda remained motionless, leaning against the half-open door, as if pondering the reply she had just made and trying to complete it in order to make it

perfectly intelligible to her comrade, husband and, now, old friend...

"As the Eternal One said," she murmured, "you will leave as an emigrant with your luggage so that they can see that they are a rebellious house..."

She embraced his head without touching the rest of his body and sat down at the wheel. Barbaïra could now see his features more clearly, torn from the diffuse shadow by the lights on the dashboard, and could find no words to describe the nature of the happiness that appeared on his face. Auda leaned her head against the half-lowered window and said again:

"Roger, I'll wait for you as long as it takes..."

The car began to roll slowly. The red lights of the tail lights suddenly replaced the spotlight. Roger Barbaïra gestured with his arms, tried to hold on to something that was slipping through his fingers like water, and gasped like an animal suddenly deprived of its mate...

"Auda!"

But Auda could no longer hear him. The vehicle glided slowly under the canopy of banana trees. The Count of Miramont was now crying, but silently, because although Amiel and Raymond could not see his tears, his sobs had brought them... They clouded the beach with light as the *Mercedes* sped away. The red lights flickered like phosphorescent stars, soon swallowed up by the summer night, and everything began to spin around him.



Summer is dying. Euphorbia dresses the hills in red. The vineyard awaits the men who will pick the bunches of grapes. The chestnut trees drop a myriad of golden pieces onto the paths. André Castéra and the first commandos of the winegrowers' army prepare to cut off French train traffic on the Bordeaux-Nice line on 29 November. Some of the promises made by the government were not kept. The Midi wants... The Midi will have...

Amiel Barbaïra has just paid the last instalment for his first victory in the Carcassonne riots. He is now walking normally but, as he is still too weak to accompany his father on the long Sunday walks, he gives up his place to young Raymond, now eleven years old, who is proving to be a tireless walker and daring climber.

"Tomorrow we're going up to Montsegur!" announces the Count of Miramont.

Raymond has never been to Montsegur. They get into the *Triumph*, which has since been fitted with a new engine, and set off...

"There used to be a youth hostel there... The Germans burned it down. The forest has grown back. You can't even see the ruins..."

"Here is Lavelanet. My comrade Reboul learned to be a skipper here and is now a great industrialist..."

-Can you see up there? It's the cave of La Frau... The *maquis* used it during the war...

And then:

-Look, little one... Montsegur!

In the somewhat theatrical upward movement corresponding to the progression of the vehicle that animates it, the *pog* gains altitude after the Seguelà gorge and climbs invisible stairs suspended from the sky. The fortress rests on the summit like a crown of ash. The forest of giant boxwoods and beeches spreads out on its slopes like a green, almost black blanket, embroidered with golden initials. Much higher up, in the sky, the castle of Raymond de Péreilhe, all pale stone against the tinny blue of the fine autumn light, takes on an impressive air of unreality.

The young Barbaïra gazes at the *pog* with critical eyes and says:

"It looks like a big rock. Puylaurens is better!"

The Count of Miramont stops the carriage in the Seguelà gorge and his son asks:

-Dad, those cruel men from the north who killed creatures in Béziers and threw good men into the fire, the hidden treasure, lost and found again by the men in black that you talked about when you put me to sleep... is that a credible story,

or not? Géralda told me everything... She said it was a play you were going to perform up there, in the ruins, but you never got to perform it... And that you tell that story to everyone as if it were true.

Roger Barbaïra did not reply. The boy insisted, with a note of bitterness in his voice:

"Is the treasure of the Grail also credible conversation?"

The Count of Miramont forced a tired smile and replied:

"You are still too young to understand. When you are twenty, it will depend solely on your will whether it exists or not.

He started the car again and murmured:

"To each his own Grail..."

They have lunch at the Coste restaurant. The Bouquets always have menus for customers who arrive. Although they are now old, they continue to maintain the friendly and familiar style that writer Otto Rahn likes so much. Fiel, Barbaïra visits them whenever he passes by, but he does not have lunch or dinner there. He got into the habit of going down to the Coste, perhaps because the small businessman seems more connected than anyone else to the fate of the old fortress. He only works in the restaurant if the Historic Monuments department allows him free time. Not much, really, just draining the water from the walls, preventing the portcullis beams from giving way, and ensuring that the staircase leading to the upper eastern part of the enclosure is in good condition. He helps the young speleologists of Ariège to clear the terraces overgrown with boxwood on the northern slope of *the pog*. He also believes in the treasure of Montsegur.

Barbaïra holds him in the highest esteem and it is at his house that he now has lunch with his son. On the menu are some gastronomic dishes that he does not order... Serrano ham, typical regional dishes. The three Pyrenean dogs, Jericó, Hermine and Laïka, huge animals with white fur, occasionally wander around the tables. There are no more than two hundred of these dogs in the whole of France. The Count of Miramont strokes Hermine and says to his son:

"They are a noble breed and, for that very reason, they are endangered. French society only likes small dogs. Democracy was also made for dogs!"

Raymond does not hear him, immersed as he is in the guest book that Mrs. Coste religiously keeps since the inn opened. Tourists of all nationalities who climb the *pog* in ever-increasing numbers leave their mostly questionable testimonies of their genius there. Young Raymond tries to decipher them diligently because, apart from Occitan and French, he also knows a little German. His father wants him to one day reign on his own scale in a Europe of small, liberated and federated homelands, and therefore gives him the means to fulfil that ambition.

Barbaïra has just finished his coffee when Raymond gets up to show him the golden book...

"Dad, look what these people wrote..." Barbaïra leans over slightly and reads:

"On 11 September 1964, several descendants of Eleazar de Grave, a martyr of the Crusades who died in the prisons of Carcassonne, came here to gather and lay flowers at the monument to the memory of the Cathars... Als Catars... Als Martyrs del pur Amor Crestian..."

Signed: E. de Senneville-Grave, Frédéric de Grave ¹

Roger Barbaïra raises his head again and remains silent.

Raymond insists and points to another inscription.

"Look, Dad... Here... What does the lady mean by this? Cécile de Senneville-Grave had written on 10 August

1965:

"It's never too late."

Roger Barbaïra, Count *Faydit* de Miramont, prepares to close the book, hesitates for a second, gets up and leaves it open on the table.

1968.

END

¹ Several branches of this large Occitan family currently live in Paris.

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BOOKS

