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## Chapter 1: the youth of Louis

I'm a Babet. In the patois of our country a Babet is a simple-minded person. That's what you say when you are nice. You would say he's a halfwit when he annoys you.

For me it started early, at school. It was hard to sit and listen to the teacher. The teacher was a kind man. I could see that he was trying to help me, but it was hard to sit there and listen with other kids.

One day he called my parents. He told them that I was a good boy, but they had to face the obvious, I was retarded.

Since school was mandatory, they decided to keep me in class and let me do what I could. I spent all my school time at the back of the classroom. As I was always well-behaved, the teacher left me alone.

I was kept with the younger pupils. On the class photos, at the end of the school year, the teacher put me in the back, I was sitting, and the others were standing, and I was still a strong.

As I was kind, the other pupils called me the nice giant. I helped them when they couldn't open their snacks. I once even helped the teacher to reach a map of the world he couldn't get himself.

During the break I was often with the little ones. We had fun.

One day some older kids approached. Usually they stayed at the back of the schoolyard. There were five of them. They looked a little excited. I was sitting on a bench, eating an apple. The teacher was in the classroom preparing for the rest of the morning's work. They started heckling with a little one.

I got up and I got closer.

And then here's what happened:

One of them turns to me. He seems to be the leader.

— So, Babet, are you the watchdog? Are you looking after the little sheep?

I don't reply. I just stand between him and the kid.

He says to me:

— We're going to play a game: I'm the wolf and I'm going to eat one of your sheep. He doesn't have a very friendly smile.

He pushes me. I don't move and I smile. My smile is more friendly.

He tries to grab me by the neck. I let him do it. My idea is to play the "bag of grain" trick on him.

On the farm I bring the bags of grain in. They're very heavy. When they are full it is not a problem. If a bag is half full it is half as heavy, but it is twice as difficult to carry. It is floppy, it is harder to load on the shoulder, it feels like it is trying to escape.

So that when he grabs me by the neck, I don't try to get away, I put my arms around his shoulders, and I let myself being carried like a bag of grain. As he doesn't want to fall, he tries to stay up.

The trick is to put just enough weight so that he doesn't fall. As he's strong, I can let myself go. I just have to wait. Very soon his legs start to burn, he turns all red. As he gets tired, I put on less and less weight and wait. After a while, he can't take it anymore. Now, I must be careful not to miss the end of the game.

The moment he cannot hold me anymore I take off all my weight, I step back, I extend my hand to him and I say "you are strong!"

He's relieved and he's surprised. He shakes my hand and says "you too." We became friends.

### Chapter 2: where we see Louis talking with cars

My parents were nice, too. At first, they were sad that I was different, but they, too, got used to it. At school I learned to read. I like to read.

On the farm I helped as much as I could. I was always willing, and I am strong.

One day, I felt like going for a walk. I went down the small road and discovered the bridge.

It is old. It has two arches, a small one for a path and a large one for the big road.

The big road has two double lanes, two to go up, two to go down. There are always cars going up and down.

I began to look at the cars. As I watched them, I started to hear them. Some of them were talking to me. Some were doing well, and others were in bad shape. They were telling me what part hurt. It was becoming more and more accurate. I could even figure out which part was malfunctioning and when it was going to break. I could see it.

As soon as I was finished with my work at the farm I would go down to the bridge.

I told my father that I liked cars. He asked Uncle Fernand to take me as an apprentice in his garage. Uncle Fernand was kind, not talkative but nice. It suited me because I prefer not to talk too much.

I started by sweeping the workshop and tidying up. As I have a good memory, I quickly learned the names of the tools and parts and I would store them in good places. Then I learned simple jobs like changing a tire.

One day Uncle Fernand was angry. He had been on a car for hours and couldn't find the breakdown. I was watching him, and at one point I said, "There it is" and I pointed to a part on the engine.

He looked surprised and said nothing. I went back to sweep.

After a while I heard the engine of the car run smoothly. Uncle Fernand came to me and said: "How did you know about the car?" I told him I didn't know. I didn't dare telling him that the car had told me. On the next day he asked for my opinion on another car. I showed him a wheel. The following days he kept doing the same with other cars. Each time I was spot on.

#### He told me:

— I don't know how you do it, but you've been right every time. It seems you have a gift for mechanics. The way you figure things out is weird.

You must have gotten that from your grandmother, Leonie.

She was a healer and in the village they said she was also a bit of a witch, but no one would be brave enough to tell her. The thing is, she wasn't easy to handle.

During the war the Germans came to the farm to pick up a pig. It was Leonie who greeted them, we were in the fields. When we came back, they were sat drinking baco. Baco is a wine of ours. Leonie was treating a soldier who had a sprained ankle. She told him:

— It's done.

When leaving the chief gave her a military salute and said in French "merci madame" and they left without the pig.

At the time of Liberation, a guy from the city came with an armed troopers. He said:

— Hey, old woman, are you Léonie, the one who looks after the Krauts?

She looked at him from head to toe and said:

— Come back when you have learned to say hello.

She turned around and left them there. They left and we never saw them again.

# Chapter 3: where we get to know Leonie and Monsieur Dominique

Leonie had a friend, Monsieur Dominique. He was a retired Italian bricklayer. He was as small as Leonie was tall and they were as thin and dry as each other. He used to come to the farm from time to time. She offered him coffee and they would sit on the bench sheltered from the walnut dryer when the weather was bad and under the lime tree when it was dry. The lime tree was planted in front of the farm, facing south. It was tall and majestic.

They would sit in the shade of the tree on their own chairs. Léonie's back was against the trunk of the tree, Monsieur Dominique was sitting next to her.

One day, when I was eight years old, Léonie told me:

- The lime tree watches over us. It is big and strong: it is cold and wind resistant. It is tender, good for sculpting. It is generous: its flowers can calm you; its sapwood will help you get rid of bad blood. And above all, it climbs high in the sky and roots strongly into the earth. Between these two phases there is great strength. The lime tree is good, it gives you strength as soon as it makes its leaves. Let me show you how to gain this strength. She made me stand facing the tree, I took off my boots, I spread my feet, put my hands on the trunk at the same level as my face. Leonie stood behind me. She put her hands on mines. She said:
- Try not to think about anything, let the lime tree do it.

Very quickly I felt a tingling in my hands and in my feet and gradually the tingling sensations increased and joined in my chest. After a few minutes Leonie took my hands off. I felt some great warmth throughout my body, and I was well, and all joyful. She said:

— Thank the lime tree.

That's what I did.

— That's good, now you can go and play.

When Léonie was with Monsieur Dominique I never knew what they were saying to each other. They seemed to get along well.

Monsieur Dominique had told me that after the war there was a group of bricklayers from his village in northern Italy who had gone to Germany to rebuild the country. He told me:

— It was hard, and it was good. It made extra money for the family. We were using concrete. To make the concrete, you take five parts of sand, seven parts of gravel and two parts of cement. Cement is alive. To make it, you crush rocks, you make a powder out of it and you heat it very hard. It keeps the fire inside. When you mix sand, gravel and cement and you add water, the water makes the fire come alive and the fire comes out of the cement: it heats up hard. When the fire has left, it gets cold, it becomes concrete. Concrete is solid, it's easy, it's fast but it's cold. It is a stone that is dead.

Monsieur Dominique taught me how to build walls that are alive. He showed me how they do it in his country with assembled stones and the way we do it in our country with sand:

— It's long, it's beautiful and it's alive. And it's nice when it's over because it's good work.

I liked working with Monsieur Dominique. When he was working, he was always happy. He often sang tunes from his country, sometimes sad, sometimes cheerful. But even his sad songs were rather sweet than sad. He had taught me to sing with him. At first, I wasn't confident enough, but he encouraged me. Pretty quickly I was singing as loud as him and it was nice. He said I had a beautiful voice and a good accent.

He lived on his own in a small house at the end of the road.

Once or twice a year other people would come to visit him. They were always the same people, Italian bricklayers, elders, men from his village.

They arrived in the afternoon and left on the next day.

When they arrived they would always greet each other with the same sentence in Italian: "Saluto e fraternità!"

They sat around the big kitchen table. They took wine and supplies from their country out of their bags. Monsieur Dominique would put a glass and a plate in front of each of them. With the same gesture, each bricklayer would take out of his pocket a knife which he unfolded, and the meal would begin.

They would eat slowly, as if to appreciate better. They would speak slowly, as if to get along better. They would tell each other stories from their country, about their travels, about the past. As they spoke slowly, I understood almost everything they were saying. At the end of the meal Monsieur Dominique would serve coffee and I say goodbye. As I was leaving, they all looked at me, raised their hands and said all together "saluto e fraternità" to me. And each time it made me feel emotional to see that they had adopted me.

On the fireplace of the kitchen of Monsieur Dominique's house there were several photographs. They were old, black and white. These were photographs of families, except one: it was Monsieur Dominique in his best clothes. He looked serious, a little sad. On his jacket four medals were pinned. One day I asked him what those medals were. He said: "It was war. War is courage but it is courage that makes you sad afterwards. It's not like when you build a nice house. That's proper courage." He never spoke about it again.

One day he showed me his trowel. It was an Italian trowel with a thin, rounded steel blade. It had a rather long rod that made it manageable, a wooden handle patinated by years of practice, two shiny copper ferrules, each at one end of the handle. He made me take it in hand. It was light, supple and balanced like a sword. Mr. Dominique looked at it with affection:

— It has worked a lot and it did a good job.

After a while he said:

— La Dona likes you.

La Dona is the way he called my grandmother, Leonie. He told me that La Dona was the Lady in Italian.

Another day I was giving hay to the cows. Leonie was looking at me. She came up to me and said:

— I talk to plants and trees. You'll talk to animals and people. You'll see, with animals it's simple, they never lie. With people, it's harder, they always lie to themselves. She added:

- I'm going to leave soon. When I'm gone, if you need me, you call, and I'll come. Sometime later, one evening, at the end of the meal, she said:
- It's time. She looked at us for a moment and left the room.

The next morning, I found her dead next to the horse. She was peaceful. She looked well. The day of the funeral Mr. Dominique came in his best clothes. At the end of the ceremony he said to me:

— I'm happy, I'll be with La Dona soon.

*He pulled out his trowel:* 

— Here, it's for you. Take good care of it, it is a faithful friend.

On the next day the neighbors found him dead in his bed.

When I went to see him, he was still wearing his best clothes. He looked as quiet and rested as Leonie.

One day the municipality had a waste dump built near where we were living. I went to see it with my father. There were containers to sort out what people were throwing away. On one of the containers you could read "Papers." Inside there were lots of newspapers, magazines and books. I was surprised to see that people could throw away books. I went back to the dump. Marcel was the employee working there. I asked him if I could have a look at the books. He said to me:

— If you want, boy, if it can fill the empty spaces in your head. He agreed to let me take books with me. I started reading and learned a lot.

### Chapter 4: how Louis started talking to animals

At the farm we had animals: chickens, rabbits, four cows and a horse.

I started talking to them. It was even easier than talking to cars.

One day the horse stopped eating. It was getting thin. My father was worried, and he said that if it continued, he would have to take him down.

I talked to the horse. He told me that in the stable there was a rope on the wall. He was afraid of the rope. When he was a colt he had been tied up with a rope and it had hurt him.

I removed the rope and the horse started eating again. I explained it to father. He looked surprised; he didn't say anything. After that, I did the same with more of our animals and then with those of our neighbours. I talked to all kind of animals: dogs, cats, horses, cows, sheep, goats, chickens and even once a parakeet. Then people I didn't know and who had heard of me kept coming to me for advice.

One day, a gentleman came. He looked sad and worried. He explained to me that his mare was far away, in Normandy, that she was very weak, she hadn't eaten for several days. He had brought a photograph of the mare and asked me if I could do something. I said I didn't know but I would try.

I asked the mare if she would agree to talk to me. She did. She explained the problem to me, and I told her landlord what she was asking for.

He came back three days later and told me that she had started eating again. He was very happy, me too.

Since that day I have often used photographs, even on people I did not meet. They would send their photographs to me by mail.

One day a gentleman comes to me with a mare. She is a black and a little skinny. She is worried and you can see this in her eyes.

I drop her in a small paddock we have next to the farm.

The man tells me that she has been mistreated, she is afraid of men, it is very difficult to approach her and the more we try, the more she escapes.

I tell myself that I'm going to play the "I've no interest in you" trick.

As soon as I enter the paddock the mare moves as far away from me as possible, she stands against the back fence and she watches me from the corner of her eye.

I don't look at her. I move towards the middle of the paddock; I sit on the floor and turn my back on her. I take my knife out of my pocket, I start carving a piece of wood that I brought in, and I show no interest in the mare at all. All I care about is the piece of wood and my knife.

I learned two things about animals: they like to do well when they don't have to do something and, when there is no danger, they like to understand.

That is when they're quiet they are curious.

It's the same with the mare.

I don't ask her to come and see me, I'm quiet, and I'm doing something she can't see.

The owner told me what happened next:

After a while the mare turns her head towards me and points her ears in my direction.

She seems less and less worried and more and more curious.

She starts approaching me. She takes a step, she stops, feels, looks, listens, then takes a step. She ends up standing next to me with her head just above me. She tilts her head to see what I'm doing. I turn around to hide the piece of wood from her.

She stands up, a little worried, waits a moment, approaches again and leans toward me.

I can see her head over my shoulder. I make a gesture towards her, as if to chase a fly.

She jumps backwards. She comes back quickly, she insists.

I'm playing the fly trick twice again.

The third time, she doesn't move back her head anymore, I even have to push her away myself. That's good, she accepts contact.

When she drops her head again, I don't chase her away anymore, I gently raise my hand close to her head and wait. She has to make contact, whenever she wants to, however she wants to.

She approaches her nose and begins to smell my hand. She opens her lips as if she wanted to taste me. Later, I will have a chat with her. I wouldn't be surprised if she told me that she was missing her mother a little.

I give her a little punch on the nose with a finger just to let her know that I want to be her friend but that it's not okay to eat your friend.

She stops licking me and puts her cheek against my hand. I gently start caressing it by moving my fingers.

Little by little I can feel that she's starting to unwind until her neck is placed on my shoulder, it even begins to weigh heavy.

Then I came to play every day with the mare. Its owner came along with me and I taught him to do as I did.

They were both happy, I was pleased.

#### Chapter 5: the Trial

One day, a letter arrives at the farm. I am ordered to attend the Court for the illegal exercise of veterinary medicine.

Rural and Maritime Fisheries Code, Book II: Food, Veterinary Public Health and Plant Protection, Title IV: The Practice of Animal Medicine and Surgery, Provisions relating to the illegal practice of animal medicine and surgery Article L243-1, Article L243-2, Article L243-3, Article L243-4, Article L243-1

#### 1. For the purpose of this Chapter:

"Animal Medicine Act" means any medical act for the purpose of determining the physiological status of an animal or a group of animals or its health status, of diagnosing a disease, including a behavioural disease, injury, pain, a malformation, preventing or treating them, prescribing drugs or administering them parenterally;

2. Subject to the provisions of Articles L. 243-2 and L. 243-3, any person who does not meet the requirements of Article L. 241-1 and who, even in the presence of a veterinarian, practises habitual acts of medicine or surgery on animals as defined in 1 or, in medical or surgical matters, gives consultations, makes diagnoses or appraisals, writes prescriptions, issues prescriptions or certificates, or performs subcutaneous implantations.

In the office of Ms Hadjib, lawyer at the Court.

"Finally, something out of the ordinary. I was starting to be fed up with shoplifting and spousal assault. I know that this is the lot for young lawyers to start their careers with this type of cases. Moreover, being a woman, young, of Maghreb origin and settled in rural areas I cumulate the handicaps.

My client is a pretty nice guy: a big guy with a kid's smile on his face. It changes me from the creepy contacts I'm used to.

In view of the fact that the offence remains minor, the Correctional Court shall make a decision with the help of a single judge.

The judge is not really a cheerful character, but he has good reputation for integrity.

In support of his complaint, the opposing party produced written documents from my client's hand. These are several reports of sessions made on photographs of animals. When my client read the documents he didn't seem surprised, he even had a smile."

- There are two others that could have been presented.
- What do you mean?
- I can remember these three animals. When they spoke to me, they told me to be careful, that there was a trap.

— You mean they knew that the writings you were going to send would be used against you?"

It was not that precise, but they had felt that there was danger for me.

— And you did it anyway?

He seems surprised by my question:

— Yes, every animal had important things to say.

He explained to me how he works. I asked him if we could find a different way to present the reality, a way that would make him less involved.

He seemed surprised: he obviously did not understand my request. He replied:

— I told you how I do it. I don't see what I could change.

So we kept to the original version.

I had five arguments to dispel the opposing party's thesis:

- 1. My client only intervenes at the request of the owner of the animal,
- 2. He has no physical contact with the animal,
- 3. He makes no prescription of any kind,
- 4. He has never advised an owner to modify or discontinue a treatment prescribed by a veterinarian,
- 5. He simply repeats what the animal said to him.

I must confess that I am puzzled over the last point, but my client insisted that I present it to the judge in this way. That's what I did after I detailed the profile of the defendant. I particularly emphasized his academic difficulties and his rural life. I did not want to explicitly call him retarded, a Babet as he says himself, but if the judge saw him as a simple-minded man without malice it could only be favourable. That is what I did.

When I had finished my defence speech, the judge said:

— Thank you, Maître, for your structured and well-argued presentation. It seems clear that we cannot retain the burden of illegal practice of animal medicine since it is not characterized. Your client's practice is more in the context of the teaching the owner and the training the animal.

However, there is one point that I must clarify: when he claims that animals are talking to him, is he telling fibs that could be assimilated with fraud, or is he being honest?

I was taken aback by this question and remained silent, not knowing what to answer.

My client raised his hand shyly, like a pupil at school.

The judge turned to him and asked:

- Do you want to answer my question?
- Yes, Your Honour.

He turned to me and said:

— *Can I?* 

I nodded, still not knowing what to do.

- Maybe I could do it in front of you.
- You mean to demonstrate in Court?
- Yes, if you will.

Obviously, the Judge was surprised and amused by this proposal.

- What do you need?
- A recent photograph of an animal, his name, the owner's agreement and the identified problem.
- Well, I suspend the session. It will resume this afternoon at 2:00 p.m. and we will begin with your demonstration.

People start leaving the Courtroom. I ask my client what he plans to do by 2:00 p.m. He shows me an old canvas bag next to him:

- I have food. I'm thinking of sitting on a bench outside in the park and waiting for the time to come, he says that with his usual broad smile.
- All right, I'll join you a moment before the case resumes.

At 1:45 I find him lying in the grass, his head on his bag, sleeping peacefully. As if he had felt that I was looking at him, he opens his eyes and gratifies me with his childish smile.

He's starting to annoy me with his smile and his relaxation, while I'm starting to lose it. I want to pressure him, just so that he understands what's at stakes:

- Do you know that you are facing three years in prison and a 30,000euros fine?
- That would be a pity, he said, smiling again.
- How are you going to handle the situation?
- I think I'll try to do my best. Thank you for having done the hardest part, since the judge understands that I don't practice veterinary medical. I think you can relax now; everything will be fine.

I am amazed at his calm. Is it naivety or real self-assurance? It is a mystery. As we approach the time of the hearing, we return to our seats.

The judge is settling in. He's turning to my client.

- So, young man, are you ready to show us your talents?
- I don't think so, Your Honor, but if you give me what I need, I will tell you what the animal will tell me, that I can do.

The judge smiles at this clarification.

He takes out an envelope and hands it to the clerk. The clerk gives it to my client who opens it. He takes a photograph out. As I lean over his shoulder, I see that it is a photograph of a rather big and healthy adult cat.

The judge goes on and say:

- This cat's name is Prince. For some time now, he has been marking his territory. He scatters the place in which he lives with odorous and unhygienic drops of urine. You have his owner's permission to talk to him, as you say.
- Thank you, Your Honor. Can you tell me if I also have permission to say publicly what Prince will tell me?

The judge hesitates for a few seconds:

- Yes, you have. I also ask that you explain to the Court what you do at each step of your process.
- With pleasure.

My client is focused on the photography.

After a moment his usual childish smile appears on his face.

- Prince has just agreed to speak with me.
- Does it happen that they refuse?" The judge asks.
- It is rare, but it happens.
- Then what do you do?
- -Istop.

I get an icy chill. I'm sure my client doesn't even realize that we've just come avoided disaster.

— Sometimes they are willing to talk to me, but they want me to keep our conversations to myself. Prince is okay with me telling you.

Second chill! Now I have no doubt: he's really a simpleton! And he's going to give me a heart attack.

My client is focusing on the photograph again.

Time flies.

The courtroom is that silent that you can hear pins dropping.

At times my client smiles, nods, whispers, listens.

After a moment that seems to me an eternity he says:

- It is done.
- So? the judge asks, with a hint of impatience in his voice, what did this animal tell you? My client is looking at the photograph again:
- He is a pretty quiet cat. He is fine. He has a big house, a big garden and an armchair he likes.

Then, looking up at the judge, he adds:

— For some time now a cat with a red coat comes to the garden. You have fed it several times. Your cat doesn't know if you want him to stay. If this cat doesn't stay, Prince will simply avoid him in the garden: everyone ignores and avoids each other. If he remains, your cat will have to establish a hierarchy with the new one. He trusts himself for that. He wants you to be clear with your intentions. In the meantime, since he doesn't know what you want, as a precaution he marks his territory.

As my client speaks, I can see the judge's facial expressions going from surprise to astonishment and to a form of admiration.

After a moment of silence he says:

— Young man, I don't know how you do it, but I have to attest to the veracity and accuracy of your words. Deliberation of the judgment seems unnecessary to me. You are acquitted of all the charges against you.

Visibly moved, the judge adds:

— Personally, I thank you and could not be more adamant as to advise complainants to get in touch with you, it seems that you can be of great help to them. The session is over.	

## Chapter 6: when Louis meets two young Ladies

After the trial life resumed its normal course, which was a relief to the young man. The debates and its demonstration stayed below the radar of the media. There was a plain paragraph in the local newspaper because the journalist in charge of the judicial section was on holidays. The person who was supplying for him did the minimum work. The young man's time is divided between farm work, conversations with animals that some people ask for, and dropping by the garage. Uncle Fernand only requests his presence for cases for which he can't find the problem.

He's in the fields. He's coming back from the cow's pasture. On the way he sees two young women on foot, each one holding by the bridle a magnificent horse.

One of them speaks to him in an approximate French:

- Nous problème cheval. Vous savoir où nous pouvons aller pour soigner le cheval?
- Are you English? he asks.
- Yes. Do you speak English? she replied, surprised that a peasant in the far end of France could speak the language of Shakespeare.
- Yes, a little.

Relieved, she explains to him that her name is Claire and that she's been riding on a trip with her friend Elisabeth, but her horse has been limping for a few hours now. She does not understand where the problem comes from. They're looking for a place where he can rest and have a vet examine her horse.

— Follow me, says the young man.

He leads them to the farmyard where they tie the horses. Then he removes the saddles with the help of the two young women.

What's the name of your horse?"

— It's Galahad. He is an eight-year-old English purebred.

"He is also English,' the young man thinks, smiling. May I have a look?

The young woman is a little surprised by this request. She would have preferred her horse to be examined by a veterinarian but facing the young man's kindness she can't refuse.

He approaches Galahad and remains motionless.

- What are you doing?
- I am talking with him.

Surprised, the young woman does not answer.

After a short moment the young man tells her:

— Your horse explained to me that the horseshoe under his right front foot is too small, it bothers him when he walks. He tried to walk more on the left side, but he can't do it anymore. Now it hurts his back.

After a moment of reflection Claire replied:

— I have noticed that he hasn't been walking as usual since this morning and I realize that he did tend to lean on his left side. How did you know? You didn't even check him. The young man replied with a smile:

- I'll explain to you later. But first, if you want, I'll call the farrier.— All right.
- The young man enters the farm. He comes back after a while.
- The farrier arrives soon. In the meantime I will take your horses to the stable and give them food and water.

That is what he did with the help of the two young women.

Then they go to the kitchen and he serves them a refreshment.

Claire's having a look at the place.

"It's rustic, charming and very clean," she thinks.

- Now can you tell me how you did it?
- I talk to animals. Galahad told me about his problem.

Surprised, Claire asks him:

- How did you get this gift?
- I don't know. It seems it comes from my grandmother Léonie.

At this moment they hear a car driving into the yard.

They come out. A man gets out of a van. He's a giant. He's in his fifties, with a beard and hair grey.

- Hello boy. So, you've been chatting with a horse again? He asks with a big smile.
- Yes. Allow me to introduce you to Claire and Elisabeth, two English ladies I met while they are horseback riding.

The man greets them with a gesture of his head.

— This is Monsieur Amédée, our farrier.

The young women say hello to him.

— Show me the patient.

The young man takes Galahad out of the stable and ties him to a wall in the yard.

- What do you think? asks the farrier.
- Look at his front right foot.

The farrier leans over the horse, raises his right foot, then the left one. He stands up:

— Who did this slob work? He exclaims.

The young man translates the question to Claire. Not knowing how to say slob in English he uses a simpler and more neutral word.

— The day before yesterday Galahad lost his right horseshoe. A farrier came and put on another one.

The young man translates the answer to the farrier.

The latter exclaims:

— Your guy should better choose another job! You'll see.

He takes his tools out of his van and, in a few seconds, removes the two front horseshoes. Then he raises Galahad's left foot and puts the right horseshoe on his left foot.

— Look! You see, the branch of the right horseshoe is narrower. In addition, one of the segments is more pinched at the back. It's like the size of your shoes is 12 and you're hiking with a pair of size 9 on, you're not going anywhere. Fortunately, the young lady did not

insist, she could have completely wounded this poor animal.

Claire leans over Galahad's foot and the young man translates the farrier's explanation.

— What should we do? She asks.

After being told what she had said the farrier answers her:

— I will put a proper horseshoe on. Let your horse rest this morning. This afternoon take him for walk in hand for an hour or two, then let him have a peaceful night. Tomorrow you can quietly go back to your trip. Take short stages for a day or two and everything will be fine.

The farrier does the work and gets paid for it.

As he gets back to his van he says to Claire:

— You were lucky to come across Louis.

Then, addressing the young man:

— Bye, wizard! with a frank and benevolent smile, see you later.

The three young ones take Galahad back to the stable and go back to the kitchen.

- So, your name is Louis?
- Yes.
- How did you learn to speak English?

In his own simple words Louis tells them about the garbage disposal, the paper bin: one day he found a French/ English dictionary and a whole lot of notebooks and school books for English courses. He explained that he took them and enjoyed learning.

- I find this language easier than French and I have a rather good memory.
- And how did you learn to speak? You have a very British accent, she smiles.
- One day, at the garbage disposal, a man brought an old radio. He said that it worked but that his wife found it bulky. I took it home. I get the BBC with it. They have interesting programs if you want to learn English.

Claire is surprised by the natural simplicity of this young man.

*She watches him as he talks to his mother:* 

"He is rather handsome, a bit rural but his smile is really charming. It's a change from the young aristocrats I usually meet" she thinks.

She's wondering how they're going to make it through the night.

Louis comes back and, as if he had guessed what Claire had in mind, he says:

- I spoke with my mother. We think it would be good if you stayed at the farm tonight. I can let you have my bedroom. You can sleep there with your friend and I'll take care of the horses.
- And you, where are you going to sleep?
- I'll go to the stable, I often sleep with the animals, I like it.
- Are you sure? you don't mind?
- It is my pleasure.

Claire talks with Elisabeth:

— That's very kind of you, we accept.

At dinner, simple, hearty and delicious, the father explains the farm.

Claire tells Louis:

— I'm really curious about your relationship with animals.

The father said to Louis:

— Tell her about the chickens.

Louis hesitates for a second and says:

— We've a neighbor, he has eight hens, redheads, good layers. One day he comes and tells me that they have been restless since the day before, worried and not laying eggs. He does not understand what is happening with them. I go to see. When it's a group or a herd, I go and wait. There's always an animal that comes to see me. It is the spokesperson for the group. After a while, a hen comes to see me. She tells me that it is the fox. I ask the neighbor what he thinks about it. He tells me that with the two big Beauceron dogs watching over the farm, no fox would come near.

I keep talking with the chicken and I finally understand the problem: the neighbor puts straw in the hen house. The hens use it to make nests where they lay eggs. The day before he had used a new bundle. A fox had urinated on the bundle. It was the urine smell that frightened the hens. We cleaned the barn and changed the straw with a new bundle. The hens calmed down and started laying again, it's that simple.

— It's not simple, it's extraordinary! Claire exclaims.

Louis smiles and blushes.

— Well, it's time to go to sleep. Louis, take these young ladies to their bedroom, the father says.

The next morning, when Claire and Elisabeth go to the kitchen for breakfast, they find Louis waiting for them.

- Are you getting up at the same time as we are? Asks Claire.
- Eh, no. I got up before. I fed your horses. I made Galahad walk, he no longer limps, you will be able to go back to your journey.

By the time they leave, Louis tells them:

— Don't talk about money for us, it would not please my mother, it's not the way we work when we help people.

Claire can't help but wonder how he had guessed that she was just thinking of a way to thank them.

After a moment of silence, she says:

— That's fine. However, in our country, when a person has helped us with such kindness, it is common to thank her. Have you ever been to England?

Louis, surprised, replies:

- No, I never left my village.
- I talked with Elisabeth, and we would like to invite you to spend a few days with us. We would be very pleased. I also know persons who would be interested in your approach with animals.
- Why not? Says Louis, obviously surprised by this proposal.
- Well, says Claire, I'm glad. I will be in touch as soon as we get back.

The two young ladies get on their horses.

Claire turns around.

- See you soon, she says with a big smile.
- See you soon, Louis replies.

He sees them slowly riding away on the path.

"She really is a nice person," he thinks to himself.

Life is returning to normal...Well, almost.

Louis often finds himself thinking of Claire, listening more regularly to the BBC. He wonders what England, her England, looks like.

Ten days after the departure of the two young women Louis receives a letter. The sender:

Claire Seymour
Highlore Manor,
Langley Park,
Windsor,
Berkshire,
England

He opens it with his hands a bit shaking.

Claire thanks him again for her and for Galahad, who is doing well, tells him that she often thinks of him and that she invites him to spend a week at hers. The letter includes a schedule of flight times to London.

Louis just needs to let her know which flight he will choose; she will send him the corresponding ticket and wait for him at the airport. Then she'll take care of everything.

He talks about this to his mother and father. His father says:

— Go ahead, buddy. It's time for you to go and see the world. Within two weeks we will have finished harvesting and Cousin Jacques can help me if necessary

The mother nods to agree.

#### Chapter 7: a noticeable entry into British territory

Claire is in the International Flight Arrival's Hall at Heathrow Airport. The plane from France landed an hour ago. Through the indoor window she had seen the passengers pick up their luggage and go through the exit door. Many people who were waiting for them were leaving, the hall gradually emptied.

She still can't see Louis.

Worried, she thinks, "I hope nothing happened to him, it's the first time he's been on a flight".

She goes to the company counter and addresses a stewardess:

— Hello, I am expecting a friend who was supposed to come on the flight from France.

Can you check if he was on this plane? She gives the stewardess Louis's name.

The latter checks on her computer.

— Yes, he was on that flight.

Seeing Claire's worried face, she adds:

— I'll check out.

She gets up, walks a few meters away and picks up a wall phone.

She comes back after a moment.

— Your friend has arrived. He is currently in the customs service. There seems to be a problem.

Claire turns pale.

- Would it be possible for me to see him? She asks, visibly very anxious. She tells the hostess about Louis's situation.
- Usually visitors are not allowed to enter the international zone.

Seeing Claire's sorrowful face, she adds:

— Do you have an ID?

Claire hands her passport.

— I'll see what I can do. She goes back to the phone.

After a moment she comes back.

— I have our head of security's agreement to let you in. If you will follow me.

She opens a door with her electronic badge and the two young women enter a corridor. They enter a large, windowless room. On a wall a sign indicates "Customs Control". She immediately recognizes Louis. He is surrounded by five customs officers. A dog sits next to him.

As soon as Louis sees her, he gives her a broad smile. He seems very relaxed.

One of the customs officers, apparently their leader, comes to her.

- Are you Claire Seymour? Major-General Sir Laurence Seymour's niece?
- That is correct.
- My respects, Lady Seymour. I'm John Westwood, security officer for the international airport area. I know your uncle. I have had the pleasure of meeting him on several occasions at official ceremonies.

Turning to Louis and addressing Claire, he adds:

— You know this person?

- Yes, he is a French friend I invited to spend a few days at our manor, she said with a weak voice. What's going on?
- Let me explain. Your friend is a strange character: when he presented his papers to the customs officer on duty, the latter asked him the usual questions, namely whether he came to Britain as a tourist or for business. Your friend told him that he didn't know exactly, it was a holiday trip but he might also have to talk to animals. My assistant was surprised by his answer. And, as you know, a surprised customs officer quickly becomes worried, and when he is worried, he checks.

He took your friend to this control room where he checked his luggage. Having found nothing unusual he continued to follow the procedure by bringing his colleague with a dog specially trained to look for illicit products. This is Ruby, said the head of security, showing the dog, still sitting next to Louis.

When Ruby arrived, he smelt your friend's luggage and approached him very quickly. Usually the dog turns around the person looking for specific smells that he has learned to recognize.

Instead, Ruby sat in front of your friend and started wagging his tail like he knew him. Faced with this rather unusual behavior, my deputy called me.

When I got there, I asked your friend what was going on, and he said, "I talked to Ruby". I told you, your friend is not an ordinary person. He added that Ruby told him he is very happy and very proud of what he does, he has only one problem: his master always keeps him on a leash. Is that right, young man?

— Yes, that's right, sir. In fact, Ruby considers himself as an experienced professional trained dog who knows his job and how to behave while on duty. He thinks he doesn't need to be kept on a leash all the time, that is just for beginners. He also told me that if he was free to move, he would be faster and more efficient in his work.

The Security Officer resumes:

— That's where we were when you arrived, Lady Seymour. What do you think? Asks the Safety Officer to the Dog Handler.

The latter hesitates for a few seconds.

- I think Ruby is not completely wrong. I may not have realized he has grown up and now I can give him more autonomy.
- It often happens to us with our own children, concludes the Safety Officer with a broad smile.

He turns to Claire and Louis and tells him:

— So this is true, you can talk to the animals. I'm surprised but reassured. I see no reason for keeping you here any longer. I wish you an excellent stay in the United Kingdom.

Claire and Louis are back in the hallway and heading towards the arrival's hall. She looks at him on the corner of her eye. Her legs are still a little shaky from what has just happened. He seems happy, calm and quiet as if everything was normal and usual. As soon as they enter the hall, Louis takes her by the shoulders and gives her a resounding kiss on each cheek.

He takes a step back, visibly moved by his own gesture.

- Sorry, I wanted to, he whispers, blushing.
   So do I. She feels touched by this big fellow's emotion.

#### Chapter 8: how Louis becomes a Decent Gentleman

They leave the airport and get into Claire's car, an Austin Mini.

- Welcome to England and welcome inside the most British car, she exclaims in laughter.
- Where are we going?
- Home.

During the journey he tells her about his very first and very pleasant trip.

After a twenty minutes' drive the car stops in front of imposing gates. Claire honks her horn and the gates open.

The car takes a winding path through a magnificent and immense property with majestic trees and immaculately kept lawns. They drive along a meadow fenced with white barriers in which horses are grazing quietly. Louis recognizes Galahad.

- Hi, old boy, how are you?
- He is doing wonderfully, Claire replied.

The car stops in front of the porch of a house that is matching the splendor of the park.

— Welcome to Highlore Manor, Claire exclaims.

A man in his 60s approaches, dressed in a frock coat, black pants and shoes, a grey vest, a white shirt, gloves and a burgundy tie.

— Louis, this is James, our butler. He fed me, raised me, and educated me. He's going to make you feel comfortable here. James, this is Louis, our French guest.

To James' surprise and confusion, Louis advances towards him and shakes his hand warmly.

Claire can barely hold back a laugh.

Following James, they enter the house and settle down in the living room.

— This house is really beautiful, Louis whispers.

Claire has a smile:

— We'll be alone in this big shack, my parents are at our seaside house in Southampton and my brother Christopher is somewhere in Italy.

Tonight I'm taking you out into the world. You're going to rub shoulders with a sample of what we call the Gentry. You'll see, it's like a barnyard, with chickens, hens, turkeys and lots of animals that I'll let you discover.

Claire looks at Louis and suddenly realizes she has forgotten that he would certainly not have the appropriate outfit for this kind of event.

He is dressed in blue canvas trousers, a white shirt and a blue sweater. This outfit is simple, classic and tasteful, perfect for traveling but far from the standards of an evening reception outfit.

— You will need a more suitable outfit for tonight, she whispers visibly a little embarrassed.

James intervenes:

— If Lady Claire allows me and if Monsieur Louis will, I propose to fix this.

I think I will find everything we need in Mr Christopher's wardrobe. While saying this James examine carefully Louis.

He says, seemingly speaking to himself:

- The shirt and the jacket, good. The pants, perhaps a little touch-up will be necessary. Shoes too big, soles will do the job.
- Excellent! Exclaims Claire. You see, Louis, James has the same gift with humans as you have with animals: in seconds he knows everything about your figures. He also knows your personality, your strengths and your weaknesses. Nothing goes passed James. He has often helped me to sort out my relationships.
- I hope he will not throw me out, said Louis with a smile.
- If the gentleman will follow me, James replies, heading for the door.

An hour later Claire is reading in the living room. A door opens. She turns around and contemplates Louis, she is amazed. Louis is wearing one of her brother's party outfits. "He is really very handsome," she thinks. "He has a kind of grace, a natural distinction. It is as if my little French peasant has always worn this kind of clothes.

- Perfect! She exclaims. James, you are a magician!
- A gentleman is always easy to dress up, James replies.
- How are you feeling?" Claire asked Louis.
- Handsome! He replies with a broad smile. These clothes are superb and very pleasant to wear.

Claire is once again surprised by his blend of frankness, candor and simplicity.

The two young persons enter a huge hall illuminated by magnificent chandeliers.

Men in costumes and women in evening gowns form moving groups.

Claire grabs Louis' arm and walks into the hall.

Many looks are given to them. Claire is obviously very well-known and appreciated in this environment. She approaches the first group and make the presentations:

— Lady... Lord... Lady... Lord... Louis gets quickly lost in all these aristocratic names.

Claire continues to move from one group of guests to another.

Louis stands slightly back and observes the scene. She is given exclamations of joy and gestures of welcome every time.

Louis contemplates her. She is wearing a fitted dark blue sheath, fluid, simple and elegant dress, enhanced with a pearl necklace. Her hair is pinned up above her neck. Louis gazes at her graceful profile.

She turns to him and gives him a radiant smile.

At this moment a voice can be heard behind Louis's back.

— If I am not mistaken, I have the privilege of contemplating the lovely Lady Claire Seymour!

The strong and ironic voice is contrasting with the hushed and well-educated atmosphere. Louis turns around.

He is facing a young man who is about twenty years old, rather small and thin. He exposes a rather weary and disillusioned facial expression. He gives Louis a contemptuous stare.

<sup>&</sup>quot;I seem to be at the very heart of the British aristocracy" he thinks with an inner smile. He notices some eyes of curiosity.

Claire comes up to Louis and says:

- This is the young Lord Mortimer. Lord Mortimer, this is Louis, my French friend. The young man greets him with a slight nod.
- Welcome to London's high society, he says, in an ever-ironic tone.

Then, speaking to Claire with a voice strong enough to be heard by the other guests:

— I see that you still have the habit of bringing back exotic souvenirs from your travels. The tone of his voice is clearly provocative.

Claire turns to Louis, fearing a reaction from him.

The latter seems lost in his thoughts. After a few seconds he addresses the young man and says to him in a soft voice:

— I have a message for you. And he walks towards the terrace.

Surprised and disconcerted by this reaction, the young man follows him mechanically. Claire looks at them moving away. She keeps staring at them, anxious about what will happen next.

On the terrace she sees Louis leaning slightly on the young man and speaking to him softly.

The expression of the latter changes from contempt to surprise. Louis speaks to him again. Suddenly the young man tilts his head. He seems greatly moved.

With a very gentle gesture, Louis puts his hand on his shoulder and gives him a broad smile. They stand without moving for a moment then Louis comes quietly to join the group of guests.

Claire gives him an interrogative look.

Louis does not react, takes a slight step back and lets the conversation resume between the guests.

The evening continues in a hushed and elegant atmosphere, animated by the well-tuned ballet of the discreet and stylish waiters who walk gracefully carrying plates filled with refreshments between groups of guests.

After a while young Lord Mortimer reappears.

He's headed for Claire and Louis.

He speaks to Claire, visibly moved:

— Claire, I apologize for the inappropriate comments I made.

Turning to Louis:

— This time, I really welcome you among us and I sincerely thank you for the message. Louis stretches out his hand, which young Mortimer shakes warmly and says:

— Alexander, welcome as well.

Alexander smiles, greets them and walks away.

On the way back, in the car, Claire can no longer resist:

— What happened with Alexander? What did you tell him? Within seconds he looked completely transformed. He seemed relieved, even happy. I have never seen him like this! Are you a wizard?

Louis smiles and replies softly:

— As soon as I saw him, I heard a voice: a lady told me that, even though she had not

often shown it, she had always loved him and that she would always love him. She asked me to give pass this message to him, which I did.

— Who is this lady? His mother?

Louis smiles again and does not answer.

- But she died two years ago!
- I know, says Louis.

Claire is stunned by this revelation. After a moment of silence, she asks:

- Can you also "talk" with humans the way you do it with animals?
- It seems so. It started at the airport. Since I arrived in England I've been watching and listening a lot.

## Chapter 9: about the refinement of a British Breakfast

Louis enters the living room. Breakfast is served on a large table near a huge French door opening on to the terrace.

Despite the early hour the sun shines already into the room, it plays with the curtains and causes the woodwork to blaze.

He takes a seat at the table. It is set for two. It is garnished with many silver and porcelain dishes.

Louis enjoys lifting the lids and finding different types of food that make up a real English Breakfast served in a respectable house.

"I see that James has left nothing to chance," he smiles.

His smile widens when he realizes that a delicate cup of fine porcelain is placed in front of each guest.

"James seems to have enjoyed my manners".

The night before, when he was helping him become an honorable gentleman for the reception, James had asked him:

— Does Monsieur dip?

Fortunately, Louis took instructive readings thanks to the magical garbage bins near his home.

He had found a book which had amused him greatly: it had been written by an English miss and made an uncompromising comparison between the civilized British customs and those for at least rustic of the French people.

She had devoted a whole chapter to breakfast.

She explained that, like any properly educated person, she was surprised, even shocked, by the habit that many French people had of dipping various solid nutrients sparkled with various ingredients in their morning beverage. Subjecting a cup of coffee to this outrage was shocking but doing so to a cup of tea, the British national drink, was simply inconceivable! For her it was like adding lemonade to a glass of Mouton Rothschild 1982. When James had asked him the question "Does Monsieur dip?" Louis had answered: "no." He had sensed a very slight trembling in James's attitude, which he had translated into relief on his part. So James had put two elegant cups, not a cup and an horrible bowl. "If I continue to behave, he will end up holding no grudge against me for having had the misfortune of being born on the wrong side of the Channel," he thinks with a smile.

### Chapter 10: meeting Major Adrian and what happens next

Claire, Louis and the Austin Mini enter central London.

Mid-morning, the traffic is fluid. The small car can easily slip between taxis and double-decker huses.

Louis admires Claire's quiet, efficient and, quite frankly, British dexterity.

— We're almost there, she says.

She explained to Louis about the appointment they have with Major Hadrian.

- A military? asked Louis.
- Somehow, Claire replied with a mysterious smile.

They are driving along Hyde Park and park the car.

They take a side aisle that leads them to an imposing building within minutes. They walk along the building to a wide carriage door guarded by two soldiers.

On the side of the door you can read on a copper plate:

#### Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment

When the two young people walk through the door, one of the guards slightly nods to Claire.

They enter a large courtyard surrounded by two-storey brick buildings.

Claire and Louis turn right and enter the building. They open a door in front of the main entrance. They find themselves in a large room with walls covered with harnesses, saddles and various riding equipment, all of which are perfectly clean and methodically tidy.

In the middle of the room a man in military uniform is sitting at a desk.

As soon as he sees Claire he gets up with a big smile and comes to greet her:

- Hello, Lady Seymour. I will let your uncle know that you have arrived. If you will wait a moment.
- With pleasure, Lieutenant, thank you for your courtesy. The officer leaves the room.

Claire stops in front of a coat of arms hanging on the wall.

— My dear, you are now in the very heart of the British Empire Cavalry, she says in a solemn tone that ends in laughter. You are in the dispatching room of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth's 1st Regiment of the Horse Guards.

Look at its motto, she said, showing the coat of arms hanging on the wall: "Honni soit qui mal y pense". It is in French. It is possible that some of your ancestors served in this regiment.

- This would be funny, says Louis. Is this where we're going to meet Major Hadrian?
- Yes. Claire's eye sparkles again with a funny look that intrigues Louis.
- First we'll meet my uncle.



At that very moment the door opens, and a man enters the room.

He is of high stature, strapped in a uniform made up of a jacket, a tie and brown riding boots, beige pants and a shirt. He has graying hair, craggy complexion, blue eyes with a firm, direct look of a man who is used to commanding.

He comes towards Claire and, with a great gesture, exclaims:

- In my arms, my favorite and beloved niece! Claire rushes for an affectionate hug.
- Dear uncle, may I remind you that I am your only niece.
- Still, you are my favorite niece and my darling, he says in a burst of laughter.

He's turning back to Louis.

- Is he...? He asks Claire.
- Yes, uncle. This is my friend Louis, whom I told you about. If you don't mind, I brought him here so that he can meet Major Hadrian.

Claire's uncle examines Louis for a few seconds:

— Let me introduce myself: I am Major-General Sir Laurence Seymour, currently commanding the Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment composed of a squadron of Life Guards and of the Royal Horse Guards also known as the blues and a squadron of the Royal Dragoons, which has also been renamed, with great imagination, "the Royals". I am also the uncle to this lovely person, a task that has sometimes been as hard as leading my men. He gives Claire an affectionate yet crabby look.

Louis and Major-General exchange a firm and frank handshake.

— Follow me, young people, let's go to see Major Hadrian. At this time, he has completed his task and is in his quarters.

They walk through a corridor, then enter an imposing stable composed of a central alley lined with spacious boxes occupied for the most part by magnificent black horses. Everything is old, beautiful, functional and immaculate.

They enter a passageway that overlooks a beautiful riding stable in which eight horses and their riders are exercising.

Sir Laurence Seymour stops for a moment.

- This is the afternoon shift. These men are working the horses, then they will put on their parade clothes and they will perform the changing of the guard in front of Buckingham Palace. They will then perform a one-hour shift before someone takes over from them.
- I see there is a grey horse among the black ones, says Louis.
- That's right, says Major-General smiling. Black horses are mostly Irish Draught horses. We also have some Cleveland Bay ones. The grey ones are Windsor Grey. They are for riders who are trumpets in the musical corps of the Guard. They are not on duty, but they also have to do their daily training.

The group of three resumes the visit: a corridor, a second huge and magnificent stable then a stairway. They go up a floor and, to Louis's surprise, they enter a stable as large as the two previous ones.

— This is, to my knowledge, the only stable in Great Britain where horses are installed on

two levels. Come, I will show you an unusual and not very well-known viewing point. Sir Laurence Seymour opens a side door and they end up outside, on a terrace that runs the entire length of the building. It is bordered with a stone railing about four feet high. In front of them, a soldier is grooming a black horse tied to the railing. The latter has passed his head over the wall and quietly contemplates the traffic below. The upper deck of the double-deckers is almost at its height.

- How many horses do you have in this building? Asks Louis.
- Now 211, answers Major General.

Louis whistles with admiration:

- 211 Horses, right in the center of London, it must take a lot of organization, he said.
- I would say a military and British organization, Sir Laurence Seymour says. It's fortunate that we are both British and military, he adds with a smile.

We also get helped from civilians. The men I command are not enough of them to do the entire job. So, civilians regularly help us with working our horses. This gives them, for example, the privilege of riding on the galloping track in Hyde Park.

Claire is one of our most valuable auxiliaries. She's doing remarkably well. She was even approached by the British Olympic Dressage Team. But Mademoiselle regularly prefers to travel around the world.

He turns to Louis and adds:

- It's a shame for the Crown but it led to our meeting each other. Claire has told me that you might be able to help us with an issue concerning Major Hadrian.
- I would be very pleased to do so. I'd be delighted to meet him.
- I bet it will be interesting". Sir Laurence Seymour and Claire exchange a complacent smile.

Louis is starting to feel really intrigued.

They go through the center aisle of the fourth stable.

When almost arrived at the very end of the aisle, Sir Laurence Seymour says:

— Here we are.

Two more spacious and more sumptuous boxes take up the space next to the wall at the back of the stable.

A copper plate is affixed to the box to the right. On this plate Louis can read:

Major Hadrian Household Cavalry drum horse

He approaches and sees a huge bai horse motionless, in one of the boxes.

- Let me introduce you to major Hadrian, said Sir Laurence Seymour in a solemn voice.
- But it is a horse! Exclaims Louis.
- Yes, says Major-General, "He is also an officer in Her Majesty's army. Louis is stunned.
- Only the English would put officer stripes on an animal. That said, I don't mind. I even

find it noble, he thinks.

- Can you tell me more?
- Major Hadrian is part of the regiment's orchestra. He is the horse who carries the drums in parades. He's nine years old, he's of Shire breed which makes among the tallest horses in the world. He's 17.1 hands at the withers.
- 17.1 hands?
- That is the unit we use for horses. This height corresponds to 5 feet and 18.1 inches, that is, for the continentals about 1m80.
- Awesome! Exclaims Louis.

He's taking a closer look at the animal.

He is a giant: solid neckline, developed chest, straight back, round and well curved croup.

— He is both powerful and elegant. A splendid animal! Says Louis.

Sir Laurence Seymour seems to appreciate the compliment.

- He was recruited at the age of five. He trained for four years. Back then, he was called Good Boy, this was his stable name. When he was ready to perform his duties as a drum horse, he was introduced to Her Majesty the Queen. As tradition has it, on this occasion she gave him his officer's name taken from ancient history. She chose Hadrian. She also gave him the rank of Major, making him the highest ranked animal in the British Army.
- Then I have respect for him and for his office and rank, said Louis.

Sir Laurence Seymour smiles:

- I am delighted that you respect our traditions.
- You said there is a problem with Major Hadrian?
- Indeed. Throughout his apprenticeship he demonstrated exceptional skills and qualities. In addition to his uncommon strength he developed a solid, attentive and courageous personality. And do not be deceived by his imposing body mass, he is capable of great agility. He has already performed as a drum horse during four major parades, three of which were held in the presence of Her Majesty. Everything went perfectly. A fifth parade is scheduled for next month. However, for the past two weeks, Major Hadrian seems to have lost his energy. He is reluctant to exercise, he seems to have lost his vigor, he acts like if he is sedated. We have the best veterinarians and the most advanced diagnostic equipment. We have used all the means we have and have found nothing. No examination, no analysis could detect any anomaly.

This is all the more annoying that his current condition does not allow us to make him take part in the next parade».

- I see, says Louis simply. May I meet him?
- Sure, please, go ahead!
- Has Claire explained to you what I do?
- She simply told me that you talk to the animals. I am not going to lie about the fact that for an old soldier like me, this approach is somehow... exotic.
- Thank you for being honest with me. If you would like to be reassured about my way of doing things... I can assure you that I will not touch the Major, that I won't be giving him

any food, any medicine. I'll just talk with him and tell you what he's told me. So, the only risk you take is wasting your time.

— Young man, I have the weakness to believe that, because of my profession and my old age, I have learned to figure out who I am dealing with. I am convinced that, whatever the outcome of your intervention, I know that you cannot be a waste of time.

Turning to Claire he adds:

- If my favorite and beloved niece is interested in you it is certainly not by chance.
- Thank you for trusting me.

Louis opens the door of the box.

The horse does not react. He looks asleep. Only his ears have rotated in the direction of the box door when Louis opened it.

Louis now stands still.

Time passes.

From time to time Claire can see Louis's lips moving slightly, as if whispering. Sometimes he leans over the horse as if to hear him better. At moments a slight smile appears on his face.

- What is he doing? Sir Laurence Seymour whispers.
- He is talking with the horse, Claire says in the same tone.

#### Louis ends up saying:

- This horse is sad. He has lost his best friend.
- A friend? Asks Sir Laurence Seymour, frowning with surprise.

Louis remains silent for a moment.

- He was more than a friend, he was also his guide.
- His guide? Sir Laurence Seymour is visibly confused by this information.
- Yes. He was someone who helped him learning. He encouraged him and reassured him when he doubted himself.
- I understand. You're certainly talking about the squire who raised him, his instructor.
- Yes, but not as you understand it: this guide is not a human, he's a horse.

Louis does not give Sir Laurence Seymour enough time to recover from his surprise, he asks him:

- Can you tell me more about how Major Hadrian has learned his job?
- At the age of five he started with a classical break-up and was gradually introduced to particularities of his task.
- Can you give me some examples?
- He must get used to the presence and weight of the two drums, 25 kg on each side. He must be familiar with the music, especially the trumpets that play just behind him and with the sound of the drums.
- The drumming next to his ears must be difficult and stressful for him.
- In fact, the most stressful part for him is not the noise, but the very intense vibrations

that directly affect his body.

- What happened between Major Hadrian and the horse that preceded him?
- I can't tell you precisely. I'll call Captain Miller who's been following him since he joined the regiment.

Sir Laurence Seymour is moving away.

- He's really going to think I'm an enlightened person, Louis whispers and smiles. Claire gently puts her hand on his shoulder:
- I don't think so. On the contrary, I think he has a lot of respect for you. Otherwise he would have never let you come near this horse and he certainly would not have informed you of his difficulties.

After a while Sir Laurence Seymour returns with an officer in a slender and energetic pace.

Sir Laurence Seymour says:

— Well, Captain Miller, this is the young man I told you about.

They shake hands.

- Are you a veterinarian? Asked the Captain.
- No, in France I am an agricultural worker.

Claire can feel the Captain stiffening up. She must bite her cheeks so as not to burst out laughing when she sees his face.

The Sir Laurence Seymour also seems to be enjoying the situation.

"It really takes centuries of military discipline and some legendary British phlegm for the Captain to remain so stoic" she thinks, "and my little French peasant, ever so candid and sincere, he makes me melt!".

- This young man has questions for you about Major Hadrian, says Sir Laurence Seymour.
- At your command, answers the Captain while following the protocol as if his life depended on it. Louis who doesn't seem to be aware of the situation repeats his question:
- Can you tell me what happened between Major Hadrian and the horse that preceded him?
- In the last year of training, exercises are getting closer and closer to the actual parade situations. To help the new horse we systematically bring an old one with him. We have found that this presence often reassures younger horses. That's what we did with Major Hadrian.
- Do you do the same during parades?
- Yes, he was accompanied by an elder horse during the first three parades he took part in.
- What about the fourth one?
- For this parade Major Hadrian was alone for the first time and everything went fine.
- When did it take place?
- Two weeks ago.

- And what happened to the old one?
- Like all our horses, when they reach a certain age, they retire.
- What is the name of this horse?
- His stable name is Big Blue and his officer name is Horatius.
- Thank you, I'll make sure it's him.

Louis turns back to Major Hadrian and concentrates.

After a while:

— It definitely is about Big Blue.

Speaking to the Captain:

- Do you remember precisely the conditions of departure for Big Blue?
- He left on the day of the fourth parade.
- I see. I'll check something again.

Louis is reconnecting with Major Hadrian.

This time the connection lasts longer.

- I think I understand the problem: for Major Hadrian the fourth parade went very well. He was happy and proud of himself. He wanted to talk about it with Big Blue. When he got back to the stables, he couldn't find him. Big Blue was gone. He's been sad ever since.
- You mean that Good Boy is sad because he was separated from Big Blue? We can't bring him back. His retirement is very pleasant and comfortable, exclaimed the Captain, who is incredulous.
- Not exactly. The problem for Good Boy is not the separation, it is the fact that he does not understand it, that he has suddenly lost touch with his friend and that he does not know what has become of him.
- I can't see the difference, says the Captain.
- I'll take an example with cows. A cow gives birth to a calf. That calf is stillborn. If you immediately remove the calf, the cow will shake, grind and look for it for hours. If you leave the calf's body in its place, the cow will feel it, take the time to understand that it is dead and record the information. When this is done, it will walk away on its own and you will be able to remove the calf without any problem.
- This is remarkable and very surprising, exclaims Sir Laurence Seymour. And the same goes for horses?
- More or less. The principle is the same, the modalities are different. To accept the changes both need to understand the situation. Cows are animals of long time, more so than horses. That's why they ruminate. Ruminating is also digesting information. So, they often need more time. Cows and horses also have one thing in common: when the information is recorded, it is done, there is no need to go back to it.
- So, what should we do? Asks the Captain anxious about the outcome.
- I will inform Good Boy of what happened to Big Blue.
- Will you reassure him? Asks Sir Laurence Seymour.
- No, I can't. I don't have the power to reassure or convince him. The only thing I can do is give him the information with which he may reassure himself. Can you describe where Big Blue is for his retirement?

### The Captain intervenes:

— He is in a place called Home of Rest for Horses in the town of Princes Risborough in Buckinghamshire. It is a property of 200 acres, in the countryside. He has a large box. He goes out every day to the meadow. He is with many retired army horses. He is with some of his comrades, such as Captain Greatgun and Rommel called Long John, who are also retired drum horses.

Every Sunday the public is invited to watch the parade. The horses are not mounted. They are showed to the public in hand. Big Blue having the highest ranking and being the most recently arrived is at the head of the parade. According to the latest information, Big Blue particularly appreciates these parades. He is also children's favorite horse. They are allowed to be sat on him for photographs. He is a good soldier, faithful and courageous, he deserves it, says the captain, visibly moved.

- Well, I'm going to give this information to Good Boy and I'll help him to connect to Big Blue.
- Can you do it remotely? Asks Sir Laurence Seymour, visibly surprised.
- For this kind of thing I found that distance does not exist. I don't know why or how it works, I just know that it works, Louis simply replied.

He stands right in front of Good Boy and concentrates again.

## Time passes.

Then, very slowly, the horse lowers his neck until his head comes to rest on the Louis's shoulder. They remain like this for a moment. Good Boy sighs and then drops a big dung. Louis moves back and exclaims with a big smile:

— That's right, big guy! He scratches him vigorously between the ears.

The horse turns and begins to eat his hay.

Louis addresses Claire and the two officers.

- Job done.
- Is that it? Asks the Captain.
- The connection between Good Boy and Big Blue has been made. They could talk to each other. I don't know what they said. Good Boy seems reassured and happy.
- *Is there anything more to be done?*
- No, Captain, that's it for us. The rest is up to Good Boy. He's spreading the good news to all his body cells.
- Can you explain? Asks Sir Laurence Seymour.
- I'm going to take an example that will be clear to Brits, Louis said with a smile. When you put a tea bag in hot water you can see brown lines forming, they gradually become clouds of tea. After a while the whole liquid becomes tea. The same goes for the information that Good Boy received from his friend. It is making its way through its system until all the cells have received it. For a horse it is usually very fast. I think it will be done within two hours and Good Boy will be able to resume his activities normally». Both officers appear to be in shock.

#### Louis continues:

- I was about to forget; I must warn you of possible side effects: Good Boy will surely regain his energy and his vivid spirit. He may even go from one extreme to the other, from apathy to euphoria. Given his size and strength, I suggest you warn the persons who are going to take care of him to be careful for a day or two.
- Thanks for the advice, but I know my job, says the Captain in a snobbish tone.

They go back to the central alley of the stable and move away from Good Boy's box.

— I would like to treat you to tea or any drink at your convenience. I know it's not exactly the time, but I think Captain Miller and I need to gather our minds, said Sir Laurence Seymour.

### He tells Louis:

- That doesn't seem to be the case for you, young man. You have just done something that I consider extraordinary and you do not seem any more surprised than if you had given hay to a cow.
- That's right. At first, I was surprised. I even got a little worried and I got used to it. I'm reassured because I can't do any harm. At worst, it doesn't work, and the animal remains the same.
- Do you have any idea of how this works?
- None. I don't know why or how. I just know what I have to do, and I do it.

While talking the group continues its way into the building. They have now arrived in the main alley of the second stable when Louis suddenly stops.

He seems to be listening.

— Do you mind? He asks.

Sir Laurence Seymour has a gesture of acquiescence.

Louis turns to a beautiful black horse whose head and neckline come out of a box.

— He wants to talk to me.

Louis faces the horse.

## After a while he says:

- His rider is often stressed. He has sudden and uncoordinated movements. The horse has a hard time understanding exactly what he wants from him. He asks me that you tell his rider that everything is fine, that he doesn't need to be afraid, that he is doing a good job, that he will make it.
- Do you know this horse? Sir Laurence Seymour asks Captain Miller.
- Yes, it's Wellington, an experienced horse. He is ridden by one of our new recruits. I do find that this rider sometimes has a way to ride that can be tactless.
- From what I have just learned, your man needs to be reassured and encouraged. I am counting on you for that.
- At your command, Sir.

## Chapter 11: where it is possible to find animals in unlikely places

Claire, Sir Laurence Seymour and Louis have left the regiment building and are now on the sidewalk. They agreed that Louis would return the next day to work with some of the horses and to observe the work of the officers and riders.

- Are you returning to Highlore Manor? Asks Sir Laurence Seymour.
- No, Uncle, I will first take Louis to the Royal Astrid for an afternoon tea.
- I must say that it is a relatively acceptable canteen, Sir Laurence Seymour replies with a smile. You will see, young man, this place is eye candy. Fortunately, you have a down-to-earth nature. If this were not the case this type of place would soften you up.

After walking for a moment, Claire and Louis arrive in front of a Victorian-style building. They go up the steps of a staircase lined with columns. And enter the hall. A maître d'hôtel in his elegant outfit immediately comes to meet them:

- Good morning Lady Seymour.
- Hello Edward. My friend and I would like an afternoon tea.
- Certainly, Milady, if you will follow me.

A short moment later, Claire and Louis are comfortably seated at a table covered with a beautiful embroidered tablecloth and showing all the types of food one would find in decent afternoon tea: tea, of course, warm scones, bread rolls also served warm, cut length way and filled with butter or jam, thick cream, delicious clotted cream, pastries: mini pavlovas, mini-muffins, mini-cakes, mini-tarts, macaroons. Everything is mini and delicious.

Louis looks around the sumptuous setting of the main room of the Royal Astrid: he can see furniture and decoration in the most classical British style punctuated by exotic touches inspired by «Empire of the Indies»: genuine tropical trees, a glass roof that reflects a soft and subdued light, frescoes with discreet exotic motifs which alternate with large festooned mirrors.

Everything is soft and mellow: rugs on thick carpets, armchairs, tablecloths, towels, subtle luminous atmosphere, up to the irreproachable waiters who move with such discretion and efficiency that they seem not to touch the ground.

- How can you talk to animals? Claire asks.
- In fact it's quite simple: first I clear my head.
- That is to say?
- It's a bit like breathing: you blow, you breathe out, and then all you have to do is let the air in. So, I clear my head. Then I connect with the animal.
- How do you do it?
- It's simple, it's like connecting with a person before talking to her. Imagine you're talking to James: Before you start talking, you're going to connect with him. You can even talk to him when you turn your back to him, and he'll pick up the connection. It works the same with animals: imagine you're going to talk to him and just before that moment you connect.

The more easily and quietly you do it, the less effort you make, the more it works.

- All right, if you say so. Claire seems doubtful. And then what?
- Afterwards, it depends. When I talk to an animal who has a problem, I ask him to explain to me what is going on. Sometimes I talk to an animal, just for the pleasure of getting to know him and learning from him.
- And they really talk to you?
- Not always. Sometimes I hear words or phrases in my head as if someone had said them to my ear. Sometimes I see still or animated images, like in a movie. I can also smell or have a kind of taste in my mouth.
- If I understand correctly each of your senses can be activated, it depends on the animal.
- Yes, for instance with horses, cats and dogs I often hear sentences. But not always: remember, when we first met on the way to the farm, when I connected to Galahad I first felt like a burn on my right wrist. That's how I figured out where he was hurt.
- This is really strange.
- I don't think so.
- And with other animals?
- For example with pipistrelles?
- With what?
- Pipistrelles. They are small bats, very cute. They really have a head like a mouse, a small pointy nose and eyes like small black marbles. I like them, they're lively, intelligent, and very sociable. The females are very good mothers. Highlore Manor's are a bit fierce but very friendly.
- You mean you can find these bats at Highlore Manor? Exclaims Claire unbelieving.
- Yes, Louis quietly replied. I spotted them on the first night thanks to ultrasound. During the day they hide in the attic of the castle. There are few of them and they are barely visible. They come out at night to feed. When they fly, they guide their way by emitting ultrasounds.
- But you can't hear them, they're ultrasounds!
- Actually, I can't hear them with my ears, but I can still hear them. I don't know how to explain it.
- Did you talk to them?
- Not exactly. They're very discreet and fearful of humans. I've sent them pleasant sensations that I had received from their cousins in France: for example, the feeling of flying with rapid changes of direction. It's really fun. It made them feel reassured. They feel comfortable in your house: the attics are large and well ventilated; the surroundings are full of insects and nobody pays attention to them. They're okay with me telling you about them because they know you'll never hurt them.
- But I never saw them, I didn't even know they were there!
- I am not surprised, there are very few of them and they are very discreet. Even if they know you, they've learned to be wary of humans who think they're pests and sometimes even say stupid inaccurate things about them. If you want and if they agree, I'll introduce them to you.
- With pleasure, answers Claire, pleased and worried at the same time.
- And, you said, that sometimes you can see images in your head? Is that right?
- Yes. This is often the case with raptors. It's not surprising, sight is their most developed sense. At home I like to connect with buzzards.
- Buzzards?
- They are small raptors. They weigh about 1 kg and have a wingspan of 1m to 1m30.

They fly beautifully. They can glide for a very long time while playing with the wind and the currents. They are territorial animals, like crows, which they sometimes compete with when fighting over an area.

Buzzard are much better at flying than crows. When they are in competition, to compensate for lesser talent at flying, crows get together, and they will pester the buzzard in flight until it gives up and leaves. It's a real air duel that can last a long time, crows can be nasty and obstinate.

One day I helped a buzzard, I chased away the crows that had attacked him. He settled in an oak tree near the farm. Several times I flew with him.

- What did you do?
- I connected to him and it took off. Throughout my body I felt like I was flying. And I saw exactly what he was seeing. It was magical. It was such an extraordinary vision. Do you realize? A buzzard can see a rabbit from more than a kilometer away!

Louis is obviously still moved by this experience.

- The most fun I had was when he flew over me. He flew in circles around me, high in the sky and I saw myself looking up at him. I think that it was his way of thanking me for getting rid of the crows. Maybe I'm wrong.
- It's amazing! I wish I could talk to animals like you one day.
- I'll teach you, you'll see, it's easy.
- Can you also give them orders?
- Orders, no. I can't impose anything on them because I don't touch them. It's not like I'm holding a bull with a nose ring. Then he has no choice but follow me.

When I connect with animals I can only make requests, but it is always up to them to decide.

I have found that if I show them consideration and respect, if I speak sincerely to them as if we are on the same grounds, if I explain the situation to them in a clear and honest manner and if my demands are both reasonable and in their best interest, often they accept.

### After a while Claire asks:

- Do you have any examples?
- If you want, I'll show you right here.
- Here? But we are in the heart of London, in the afternoon tearoom of the Royal Astrid, there are no animals here!
- That's what you think. I've spotted at least three, Louis says with a malicious smile.
- Three animals here? Claire exclaims incredulously.
- They are no elephants or giraffes, they are small, but they are animals and I can connect with them. If you want, I'll start with the fly.
- Which fly?
- You see the beautiful palm-like plant to your right?
- Yes.
- There is a fly in the middle of the leaf that is closest to you. Can you see her?
- Yes, I think so.
- She is moving. Can you see her now?
- Yes, I can.
- Take your time and look at her.

After a few seconds, he asks:

- What do you feel?
- She seems to be worried. Claire is surprised with what she has just said. In fact, I don't know why I said that, that's just how I felt.
- Well done! You have put aside your beautiful intelligence, you let your feelings come to you. You see, it's easy.

Claire is obviously under a lot of pressure.

- I'm a little lost. This may be going a little too fast for my Cartesian intellectual brain.
- If you want, I will continue talking to the fly.
- Yes. But later I am sure I will ask you to teach me more.
- With pleasure, I think you may have a talent for this.

Louis is connecting to the fly again.

After a moment he says:

- She is very attracted to all the good things on the tables, but she feels that she is not welcome. In general, humans do not appreciate the company of flies, they annoy them. They tend to chase them away with their hands. All flies must do is landing a little further and people leave them alone. The fly has sensed that here it is different, that if she is spotted, she will be really in danger and that the humans will not leave her alone.
- Of course, says Claire. She realizes that the tone of her voice is a bit loud in the hushed atmosphere of the room. She looks up and sees that the maître d'hôtel looks at them discreetly.

She realizes that for long minutes, absorbed in their conversation, they have not touched the cakes in front of them. She continues in a low voice:

— We should taste some pastries and drink some tea. Edward, the maître d'hôtel seems as worried as the fly. He must be thinking that there is a problem. A guest with a problem is certainly a source of great stress for him.

She adds, smiling:

— And if he knew that a fly was walking a few meters from this gentleman's bald head sitting to my right....

What are you going to do?"

- I will explain the situation to the fly. I will confirm that she is really in danger and that there are plenty of other places close to here that are less risky and where she can find what she needs. I'll ask her to leave, and if she agrees, I'll show her the way out.
- I must be dreaming, says Claire with a smile. I am in the company of a charming young French man in one of the chicest places in London and this young man is about to guide a fly out of this very nice place. And the worst part is that I know that he's capable of doing it!

Louis connects to the fly.

Claire sees his lips move and soon his usual smile appears.

Quite a long time passes.

— Job done, says Louis. "It hasn't been very easy. Flies are very independent and fearless animals. They rely mainly on themselves. She accepted my request because she had sensed the danger before I spoke to her. I nevertheless had to explain. When she decided to leave what followed happened quickly. I just showed her the way out. I told her to wait at the top of the front door until she could get out.

- How could you give it such precise instructions?
- I simply visualized the top of the door and then showed the door opening when a person enters, like in a film. I did it again when someone came out. That was enough.
- Did you see her leave?
- No, she is too small.
- Have you tried to fly with it like with the buzzard?
- I can't do it. I tried once with a fly that was rather friendly. As I started to see through her eyes, I felt like my brain was going to burst. It was over filling with hundreds of very vivid images. I immediately cut the connection and I had a nice headache for a while.
- Do you have any idea of what happened?
- Not really. This may be due to the configuration of a fly's eye: it can see at 360° and is made up of six thousand facets. Each facet records an image. I think my brain must have received twelve thousand images simultaneously. Unlike for the fly, my brain is not capable of processing them at all. This is one of the reasons why I am very respectful of flies, they are wonders of nature.
- So you're not sure she's out?
- I didn't see her leaving but at the end of the connection I got a signal that I felt was warm and soft and since then I haven't seen her.

Claire remains silent for a moment and contemplates Louis who quietly sips his tea.

- And what about the other animals?
- There is a small spider on the ceiling, top left, at the back of the room. Louis makes a discreet gesture in that direction.
- And a mouse hidden behind the big cabinet against the wall to my right. Claire remains silent. She contemplates Louis again with an admiring and affectionate look.
- You really are a funny character, she whispers.
- Worse than that, I'm a Babet, Louis replies with a smile.
- One day you will explain to me what that word means. What are you going to do about the spider and the mouse?
- Actually, there's nothing left to do. They were experiencing the same fears as the fly. They felt my connection with her, and they also decided that this room was a place with no future for them.
- For sure! Says Claire, holding back her voice. I can imagine the scene: a mouse walking on the beautiful carpets of this room and trotting between the tables in the middle of the afternoon tea. This could make to the front page of the Times. Edward would only have the option to end his career and avoid scandal and decay.

This image seems to amuse him enormously.

— As they were decided to leave, I simply suggested the direction. For the spider it's easy, she won't have any trouble finding a quieter place. The mouse had considered going down into the basement, I advised her to be careful, avoid bumping into rats who are the masters of the underworld and who are rather fearsome when facing intruders.

She finally decided to try her luck in the attic of the building.

- Bravo! You have just saved three animals, the reputation of this venerable establishment and Edward's honor, says Claire with a smile.
- You've earned this little cake, she adds, putting an appetizing, brightly colored pastry on Louis' plate.

After enjoying the most tasteful cakes, Claire added:

- So you can guide animals from a distance?
- Yes, for their own good. For example, imagine a bee or wasp entering your room through a window. She does it because she is looking for food. In your room there is nothing useful for her and she may not be able to leave again.

For you her presence brings no advantage and may even represent a danger. So, you're both better getting her out of your room.

To do so, you only need to connect with her kindly, as an ally and not as an enemy who wants to harm her. Then you stand between the window and her, you spread your arms, as if to guide her, without gesticulating, it is not a matter of making her flee but accompanying her towards the exit. You look out for an open window see what you can find, a tree, a flower, a bench and you invite the bee to join it. It works every time because it's in both of your interests and because it's respectful of you and the bee itself".

### After a while, Louis ads:

- Sometimes animals guide me.
- They guide you?
- Yes, to avoid a danger for instance. One day when I was ten years old, I was in a forest I knew well. The fog broke out. It was a very dense autumn fog. I couldn't see passed ten meters. I kept walking, thinking I was heading towards the farm. At one point a bird that looked like an owl flew close to me. It brushed passed my face and went to land on a branch a few meters away.

It surprised me, I stopped. Then I went back my way, and the bird did the same movement again. Every time he landed, he pointed a different direction to me.

I got the message. I kept going very slowly and very cautiously. After taking a few steps I was at the edge of Mathieu's hole. It's a sand quarry that is made of a 10-meter-deep hole. If I had continued my way normally, I would certainly have made a nice fall. Besides, it's a secluded spot where I could have stayed for a long time without any help in sight.

- It seems for you all animals can only be friends and that none is harmful.
- I am a peasant. As your uncle said, I am down to earth. This state of mind has taught me to face reality from very young age. I am not saying that some animals are pests, this would make me judgmental on them which is something I will not accept. I believe they are, by nature, worthy of consideration and respect. Nevertheless, if I refuse to question what they are, sometimes I don't accept the consequences of what they do.

Louis seems quite surprised by this long tirade he has just uttered.

## Claire goes on:

- Saying that, you really have to explain to me what a Babet is. Can you give me an example of the difference between doing and being?
- Okay. If you want, let me tell you about slugs.
- Oh yes! Slugs! They are one of my favorite pets. And their coat is so soft!'. Claire is ecstatic with a mischievous smile.
- That is not what my mother thinks. At the back of the farm she has a large vegetable

garden. From time to time she must remove some slugs. They do like salad sprouts. One year she had to face a proper invasion: there were really a lot of them and they were attacking the whole vegetable garden.

She asked me to intervene.

I sat in a chair in the middle of the driveway and asked to speak to a slug spokesperson. After a while I saw one crawling slowly towards me. I recognized it because it wasn't trying to climb on a plant for food.

I explained the situation to her: I have consideration and respect for what she is and for what her fellow animals are. At the same time, I can't let them keep doing what they do. They're destroying our vegetable garden, it's feeding us all year round, it's not fair to us. I asked her to pass my message on to all slugs: I asked them to leave and find food further away. It's not against them, it's for us. I told her about a very close place where they would find everything they need without causing problems.

I also said that when they would be gone, to thank them, we would drop off our kitchen leftovers that they enjoy munching on.

- So what happened?
- They were all gone the day after. I saw some of them on the spot I had told them about, the others were gone.
- If I had not seen all that you have already done with animals, I would find it very difficult to believe you.
- I understand that. That's why you're the first person I tell this about.
- Thank you for trusting me. And had they not left, would you have killed them?
- No, I would have caught them and taken them away from the garden and released them. I think they knew I was going to do so and that, because I'm not a slug, I might choose a place that was not suitable for them. I would not have done it out of revenge but out of ignorance, which would have been the same for them.

## Chapter 12: where the British and French seal a mutual recognition pact

Back to Highlore Manor.

Louis and James enter the kitchen.

It's a decent size kitchen, lit by large, pointed windows overlooking the park. An assortment of copper pots and kitchen instruments are hung on the wall facing the windows. A huge stove is settled between two big Welsh dressers at the back of the room. The centre of the room is taken by an imposing table.

Everything is beautiful, harmonious and immaculate from the small black and white tiled floors to the ceiling supported by massive oak beams.

— As Monsieur Louis asked, I will show you how tea is prepared and served in a decent house.

While saying this James opens a closet of one of the Welsh dressers.

— I am delighted Monsieur James and thank you so much for this, Louis says.

James interrupts his action and turns to Louis.

He seems embarrassed.

- With your permission, I suggest that you simply call me James. In Britain, the term Monsieur is used by people from the same rank.
- That's what I understood, says Louis. And that's why I call you Monsieur James. I don't know what Claire told you about me. In France, I am the son of a peasant and agricultural worker. I was raised with respect for elder people, and I sincerely believe that you are entirely worthy of consideration and respect. So, for all these reasons I can't just call you by your first name.

Louis can feel that, despite his British phlegm, James is touched and a bit puzzled by these remarks.

- Thank you, Monsieur for this sign of consideration.
- I, too, have a request for you," says Louis. In my country, logic would have me calling you Monsieur and you calling me by my first name.

Hearing these words James cannot hold back a slight movement and a trembling of eyebrows.

Louis is well aware that these facial expressions, although almost imperceptible, are the sign of a great surprise, even of a certain dismay from James. He goes on quickly:

— I think it would be inappropriate for you to call me Louis, especially because of Claire's sympathy for me.

Therefore I suggest that the British and French move forward, adds Louis with a broad smile: "I call you Monsieur James and you call me Monsieur Louis, okay?

James is hesitating. He seems torn between an ancestral respect for respectability and an equally ancient tendency for his peers to conform to the desires and even the whims of the gentlemen they serve.

He finally lets go:

- Agreed, Monsieur.
- Monsieur...

Louis doesn't finish his sentence purposely and looks at James with an encouraging smile.

— Monsieur Louis.

James seems both pleased and surprised at what he sees as a bold move on his part.

— Bravo! Exclaims Louis. Let us shake hands to celebrate this alliance between our two nations.

Louis holds out his hand to James.

This one seems to be again confused.

#### Louis continues:

- This is the handshake we made when we first met, when you welcomed me on the steps of Highlore Manor. Do you remember?

  James nods.
- I saw you were surprised. Despite what Claire might have thought, I knew what I was doing. In order not to embarrass anyone, I propose that in the future this agreement remains between us. Do you agree, Monsieur James? Will you please accept shaking hands with me?

After hesitating for a few seconds:

- I get your point Monsieur Louis, James answers with a smile while shaking hands vigorously and cordially.
- Well, now, how about teaching me how to make a proper cup of tea?

## Chapter 13: where it seems that an officer did not follow Louis' advice

It is 5 pm. Claire and Louis are settled in the living room of Highlore manor. They are having tea and talking peacefully.

Claire tells Louis about the story of this house and her ancestors.

Suddenly, through the window that gives onto the terrace, they can hear a car braking on the gravel of the driveway, then a loud bell ring.

A few seconds later the Sir Laurence Seymour intrudes the living room, followed by James who is trying to catch his coat.

Sir Laurence Seymour approaches the two young ones and with great gestures he shouts:

— He fell! His nose straight into the sand of the arena!

He bursts into laughter that makes his mustache tremble.

— What happened? Claire asks.

His uncle laughs so hard he can't speak. He ends up saying:

— I wanted to be kept informed about Good Boy going back to training. I went into the corridor that overlooks the training arena. When he came in, with Captain Miller holding him by the bridle I immediately saw that he was, how can I put it? Joyful. He was harnessed for the ride. I was surprised to see that Captain Miller wasn't going to use a tether, following your recommendations. I let him do, as the Captain said, he knows his job.

When he got onto the saddle, Good Boy wanted to take control of the reins, straight away. Obviously, he was in a mood for fun. When the Captain tried to bring him back into taking commands, he was simply and properly thrown off!

Claire's uncle burst out laughing again.

- And then, for a good quarter of an hour, no one could approach Good Boy. He made a succession of galloping starts, volts, rushes, like a colt loose in a field after a night in the box. When he finally calmed down, he became calm and quiet again.
- I'm not surprised, says Louis, when a spring has been pressed down it has to be released at some point.

Sir Laurence Seymour adds, addressing Louis:

- I have already expressed the admiration I have for you. I am impressed by your ability to communicate with horses. I also think you can be very helpful to the staff, more precisely to the officers who oversee training recruits. If you wish, I would like to take the time to explore with you the possibility of working in the future with the regiment on a regular basis.
- I would be delighted and truly honored. Louis replied, surprised to see how enthusiastic his interlocutor was at this proposal.
- How about spending a day with us the day after tomorrow? A little surprised Louis answers:

- Why not. How do you see things?
- In the morning you can attend training sessions with our horses followed by a working session between the officers and their subordinates. In the afternoon, I would be delighted if you could meet with the officers and share some of your ideas with them.
- What ideas?
- The ones you think are the best to share. I trust you. I know this will go quite well.
- Well, I'll do my best.
- As usual. In the meantime, I must leave you, duty calls me," said Sir Laurence Seymour with a mischievous smile "I must have a drink offered by Captain Miller to all the officers. This is the tradition when one of us falls from a horse.

He leaves the room with a joyful step.

Claire contemplates Louis, who looks at her quietly.

— My little French peasant, I love you, she whispers. Louis turns red and lowers his eyes to his cup of tea.

Claire and Louis spend the next day visiting the English countryside. They have lunch in an inn by the river. The weather is superb, the landscapes are charming: hills, valleys, large meadows, beautiful forests, villages with pretty houses.

Louis is happy. He contemplates Claire when she speaks, laughs, smiles, makes faces, thinks, dreams.

"She is beautiful".

In the middle of the afternoon they go back to Highlore Manor. Just as the Austin Mini stops in front of the beautiful building, James is on the front steps, a telephone in his hand. He waves to Claire.

The latter joins him.

— Your uncle, Major-General Sir Laurence," he said, handing her the telephone.

Louis approaches and hears snippets of the conversation:

It looks like her uncle has cut her off. He seems to be in a hurry.

After a moment, Claire says:

— Yes, well...I see. I'll ask him.

She turns to Louis:

- My uncle received a request from a seemingly high-ranking person who is having trouble with one of her dogs. She has consulted experts who couldn't find what was causing it. She's heard about you, and she wants to know if you'd be willing to see that pet.
- Of course! Louis replies, with pleasure, if I can be of some help.

Claire's uncle has heard Louis' answer over the phone.

He goes on loud enough for Louis to hear:

— Well, you're doing me a great favor. I will pick you up tomorrow at nine o'clock. Claire, you must make sure James dresses Louis appropriately for the occasion.

- Yes, uncle, just tell me if we're going to a farm or to Buckingham Palace. Claire smiles. After a second of hesitation:
- Well, it's not Buckingham Palace, but act like it is, Sir Laurence Seymour says. See you tomorrow. He hangs up.

Claire looks at Louis, surprised.

— I have never seen my uncle so excited. He is more excited than if he was going to war with his regiment. I'm wondering who we're going to see. Maybe a senior officer, or even a member of the government, a minister...

## Chapter 14: where we learn to make tea properly

Claire went upstairs to her bedroom to get changed.

At five pm she came back to the living room to join Louis and have tea.

He is sitting by the large French door that overlooks the terrace. In front of him, on a table with the beautiful embroidered tablecloth all the food for an afternoon tea that James has a talent for is displayed.

She sits next to Louis.

The latter gets up, gently takes a teapot and begins to pour the tea slowly into the porcelain cup in front of Claire.

- Two-thirds of the cup, not less, not more, he whispers.
- What do you say? She asks.
- When you pour tea you have to fill the cup up to two-thirds of it, no less, it would not be generous, and no more, it would be embarrassing for the person who is going to drink it. Imagine if I filled it up to the brim!
- Where did you learn this, she says.
- I had an excellent teacher. I will introduce him to you on occasion, Louis replies with a mutinous smile.

Claire, perplexed, brings the cup to her lips.

At this moment James enters the living room.

Seeing Claire drinking, he approaches and asks her:

— Does Lady Claire find tea at her convenience?

Surprised, Claire nearly spills her tea.

Of course this tea is at her convenience! James has been making it for her since the age when she is allowed to drink it. He always makes it perfect which is one of his characteristics.

She turns to James and is surprised when she sees that he is smiling.

James, the undisputed "stiff upper lip" champion that could be translated as "in all circumstances keep the upper lip still" or in other words "never show the slightest emotion", James is smiling!

And James turns to Louis and seems to have showed him what might seem like a discreet wink.

— What's going on ? She thinks, stunned.

Louis then gets up and, taking a university professor like voice begins a lecture and proclaims:

— In a respectable home, making an acceptable tea requires, among other precautions: To make tea:

In a kettle bring water to a boil. If, inadvertently, the water boiled for more than a minute do not use it and start again.

Use a porcelain teapot and fill it with boiling water.

Allow the water to cool to the appropriate temperature for the tea. For this, if necessary,

refer to the official table of tea making. For Ceylon black tea, the indicated temperature is 190°F or 90°C.

Check the correct temperature using a thermometer specifically designed for this purpose. It is made of a long and thin body, with a cork cap at the end allowing a safe and comfortable grip.

When the recommended temperature is reached, immediately plunge the tea leaves into the teapot. These leaves will have been previously stored in a container preserving them from light, humidity and significant temperature variations.

Note the exact time of immersion.

Never use a tea filter because it stops the leaves from spreading and all the aroma from revealing itself.

The use of tea bags may be considered exclusively in extreme surviving conditions. They are like instant coffees to espressos made by Italian baristas.

Let infuse. Never try to speed up the infusion by brewing the tea or stirring the teapot, this would be lack of consideration to the brew being made.

Remove the tea leaves at the exact moment when the infusion is optimal with a small spoon. To know the adequate duration, refer to the official table of tea making. For a Ceylon tea, the duration of infusion is three minutes and thirty seconds».

During his lecture Louis stood up and walked back and forth along the table, with his hands crossed behind his back, his head slightly leaning forward, a focused look, with the typical attitude of a teacher who is giving a lecture. He sometimes made a gesture with his hand to support something that was important.

— Let's move on to the next step: serving tea.

At this moment Louis' attitude changed: he placed himself beside Claire on her right side, leaning slightly towards her. He put on his respectful and respectable face and continued with imitating James's voice:

To serve tea to Lady Claire I must first enquire about her possible wish to add milk or sugar.

Indeed, as I had the honor to tell Milady, a cup of tea must be filled to two-thirds of it, no more, no less. The amount of liquid to be poured into the cup depends on whether milk or sugar is added".

Claire, bursting with laughter:

- Now I know who your teacher was, she says, turning to James.
- I hope he is pleased with his student, Louis says, showing his anxious face.

James can't help but smile:

— Monsieur Louis has perfectly complied with my suggestions and the tea he has prepared seems excellent to me.

## Chapter 15: where Louis helps an animal of high lineage

— 8:45, my uncle will be here soon, Claire thinks.

At this moment James and Louis enter the living room.

— If Lady Claire will check, said James in a solemn tone.

Claire turns around. James is obviously satisfied with his work:

A well-cut mouse color suit on a vest of slightly lighter color, a sky-blue shirt, a deeper blue tie with very light green polka dots patterns, a matching pocket handkerchief, and a pair of shoes in chamois leather.

She's looking at Louis. He's handsome. She is once again amazed and delighted at the ease with which he can fit into clothes so far from his modest origins.

"Handsome, natural and elegant". She thinks.

They can hear a car approaching. They go to the porch.

Sir Laurence Seymour gets out from a beautiful black Bentley of a somewhat old design.

He is accompanied by a man in master driver's uniform.

They enter the car and sit at the back. The car starts.

- The person you are going to visit was kind enough to make his driver and his car available to us. It will make the journey easier, said Sir Laurence Seymour.
- Where are we going, uncle?
- I can only tell you that this is a person who holds important positions. She is quite well known. She wishes your intervention to remain confidential. She doesn't intend to appear on the front page of a tabloid. I know I can count on you.
- Certainly, and the two young people answered back together.

The chauffeur drives the imposing car with agility and dexterity.

They are in central London. They go up St. James Street. The street has a right-hand corner to the left, with an imposing red brick building.

Louis has just enough time to distinguish in the center of the building a carriage-door topped by an imposing square clock, flanked by two octagonal towers with crenels. At the bottom of each tower there is a Lancet arch door and in front of each door, an armed soldier wearing the uniform of the Guards.

Without even slowing down, the car rushes into the passage through the carriage-door. As it passes the Guards, they stand to attention.

The car stops in the middle of a square courtyard surrounded by four-floor old buildings.

— Colour Court, says Sir Laurence Seymour. It's part of St James's Palace.

The occupants leave the car. Guided by the driver, they head for a second projecting octagonal tower in the center of one of the façades.

They enter through the door of the tower and come to face an officer in uniform who is obviously waiting for them. He welcomed them with appropriate salutations, addressing Sir Laurence Seymour:

— My respects, Sir. If you will follow me.

The driver, having completed his mission, leaves.

They follow the officer through a series of corridors to a spacious room with leather armchairs and coffee tables.

Speaking again to Major-General:

- With your permission, I will ask you and Lady Seymour to wait here, please.
- Are you sure? Asks Sir Laurence Seymour.
- Absolutely. Those are the precise instructions I have received. I also have orders to make your waiting time as pleasant as possible. I suggest you settle in comfortably. A steward will come in a few moments to offer you a snack and refreshments at your convenience.
- So all we have to do is to be patient? Says Sir Laurence Seymour, with a fatalist tone, while settling down in a wide leather chair.
- If you will follow me, said the officer to Louis.

They are returning to the corridors.

The officer opens a door, lets Louis go through, closes it and walks away.

Louis is in a medium-sized room, lit by two large windows that overlook the square courtyard. A small bald man sits at a desk that occupies the center of the room.

At the entrance of Louis he gets up and moves forward.

He is wearing a classical outfit, similar to a butler's, but it has something extra, something more distinguished that immediately suggests that he is a person who occupies significant positions. His posture and his gaze confirm this. He is both a servant and an individual who is used to being obeyed.

— Hello Sir, he said with a welcoming smile. Thank you for your prompt response to our invitation. My name is Henry... After a brief moment of silence, Henry, that's fine and quite enough for what we have to do.

Louis is intrigued and amused by this introduction.

- As Sir Laurence Seymour has explained to you, I am in the service of a person whose dog has a behavioral problem. Up to now we have not been able to find why. We have been informed that you have some skills in this matter. Thank you again for your kindness to agree with helping us.
- That's the least I can do for you. Can you explain the situation to me?
- Certainly. First, I must insist on the fact that this conversation and its extensions are strictly confidential.
- I promise not to share any information about what is to follow with anyone, including Sir Laurence Seymour and Lady Seymour, Louis said quietly.
- I would not have allowed myself to make this request to a gentleman, but since you take the initiative to commit to this yourself, I take note of it and thank you.

  The short man seems relieved and reassured by Louis's initiative.

After a few seconds, he goes on:

— The pet is called Cyrano, he is eight years old and is of the Welsh Corgi Pembroke hreed

He is a dog who is usually peaceful and of quiet mood. For the past few weeks he has been behaving in an unusual way: he sometimes has outbursts of excitement, he suddenly starts running around without concern for his entourage. This poses a serious problem for us: his mistress being a Lady of a certain age, we fear that one day Cyrano's untimely and disorderly outbursts will make her fall.

Given her age and her lifestyle, an injury would be a real concern.

My mistress is very attached to Cyrano. If we do not find a satisfactory solution, she will have to bring herself to part with him.

- I understand. May I see Cyrano?
- Sure, he's in the next room, follow me.

After almost an hour, Henry and Louis enter the large room where Claire and Sir Laurence Seymour await them.

The latter gets up with a jump, obviously impatient.

- So? He asks Louis.
- Good morning, Sir Laurence Seymour, says the little man. I think we've met before.

Sir Laurence Seymour gives him a salute with a respectful expression on his face that Claire notices.

- Indeed, I am delighted to see you again. So, were you satisfied with the performance of this young man?
- Satisfied is not the word I would use.

A few seconds of silence.

Claire can feel Sir Laurence Seymour tensing up a bit.

— I would say rather surprised, even stunned. If I allowed myself to swear, I would go so far as to say that it was a hell of a performance.

As soon as Cyrano saw him, the dog came to lie at his feet. He didn't move the whole session. He looked like he was listening. After twenty minutes his behavior had completely changed. I'm not allowed to tell you anymore, but obviously the problem is solved. Louis intervenes:

— As I told you, it is possible that he might repeat his embarrassing behavior. He will do it less and less often, gradually, it should be less long and less hard and then it will disappear completely. In case it starts again we now know what to do.

I think that is the most extraordinary part of your intervention," says Henry. You gave us a simple and easy way to help Cyrano! And now that we know, it seems so obvious! Henry is visibly moved.

On behalf of my mistress I once again express my most sincere gratitude. She's going to be happy to be able to keep her favorite dog with her.

In the car, on the way back to Highlore Manor Sir Laurence Seymour is slightly agitated on his seat. He feels obviously torn between his old soldier discipline and his devouring curiosity. Not being able to hold it in he says to Louis:

— So?

After a few seconds Louis answers:

- I did the right thing. It was quite simple. I'm glad I was able to help this lady and her dog.
- And do you have any idea who that might be? Claire asked.
- I understand that it is better that I do not try to find out. That is what I am doing, he answers with a mischievous smile.

## Chapter 16: where Louis receives a beautiful gift

The next morning Claire and Louis are having breakfast on the terrace.

They see the black Bentley coming up the driveway and stopping near the front porch. The driver who had taken them to London the day before gets out. He goes up the stairs and rings the front door. James comes to open it. He hands him a packet and goes back to the car that starts slowly.

A moment later James approaches the two young persons, carrying a small black packet on a silver platter.

— For Monsieur Louis, he says, leaning towards Louis.

Louis takes the packet and puts it on the table.

Claire approaches.

- What is it? She asks.
- I don't know, there's no signature, no note, no address, nothing.
- Open it, she says, intrigued.

Louis delicately unties the velvet fabric.

Inside he discovers a small black box.

He opens it carefully.

— A watch, exclaims. Look, it's beautiful, sober and elegant!

Claire takes a closer look.

She seems suddenly moved:

- It's not just any watch! She exclaims. "It's a Longine!
- You seem to know it, Louis whispers, surprised.
- I would peacefully fall asleep when a child listening to the gentle ticking of this watch, Claire says in a dreamy voice.

This is almost the same watch that King George gave my grandfather for his service to the Crown during the war. Since my grandfather was not fond of honours and ostentatious luxury, he accepted this watch which is not an object of luxury but a reliable and accurate companion quite suitable for a British officer. And even though he never said it, I know he was also proud of gentleman-like elegance it gave him.

The king gave it to him on a one to one occasion during a private visit to Highlore Manor. After a moment, Claire adds:

— The person who chose this gift understood that you look like my grandfather.

## Chapter 17: about the difference between whisky and whiskey

Louis is alone in the Highlore Manor's living room.

Claire went to visit a friend. She is supposed to be back in an hour. James is approaching him.

- You asked for my services, Monsieur Louis?
- Yes, Monsieur James, I have a request for you. I need you to teach me more.
- How can I help you?
- —I really appreciated what you taught me about tea. What else can you teach me on how to be a gentleman?

James thinks for a second.

— I'm thinking of another drink just as sacred to us Britons as tea. If you'll follow me.

Louis follows James to the kitchen and makes him sit at the big table.

He opens a drawer and takes out a bottle and two glasses.

He puts the glasses on the table and presents the bottle to Louis.

- Is it a bottle of whisky? Louis asks him.
- No, it's whiskey, Irish whisky. You can tell thanks to the E added before the Y. Irish whiskey takes its name from the Gaelic term "uisce beatha" which means brandy. It is different from Scotish scotch and American bourbon by the type of grain used and the number of distillations. American bourbon is distilled only once, the malt used in Scotish scotch is usually toasted and distilled twice. Irish whiskey is the only liquor distilled three times.

James spins the bottle in front of Louis.

— This one is quite special: it is a Loughran and Grady, Single malt, twenty-five years old. Single malt means that it is a vintage that has not been mixed with other whiskeys. It was first aged in an American oak cask having previously contained Bourbon then in an ex-sherry cask, before being refined a few months in an ex-porto cask. It is a limited edition, each bottle has its own serial number as well as the number of the Porto cask in which it has been refined.

For me, it is the best whiskey in the world. It is both powerful and sweet and delivers incomparable aromas.

James is obviously moved.

- I suggest you try it.
- I assume that there is a protocole to follow just like for tea.
- There are some rules to follow to fully enjoy the tasting, but you'll see, they are simpler. He adds:
- It is necessary to use tulip glasses like these. They are flared in their lower part and narrower at the neck. This tightened neck allows to concentrate the aromas.

To appreciate all the flavor it is better to drink the whiskey at room temperature, the cold neutralizes the aromas and anesthetizes the taste buds. Are you used to drinking strong liquors?

— I hardly ever drink alcohol, just wine from home occasionally and once or twice a few drops of brandy so as not to offend the neighbours who had invited me.

- I see. So we'll add water.
- Will this not alter the whiskey?
- Certainly not. It's the only alcoholic beverage that doesn't get altered when adding water to it. It is quite the opposite actually: for a person who is not used to strong alcohols added water stops the impression of unpleasant burning, it reveals the richness of the aromas and it reveals them even more.
- I bet you are not going to add tap water, says Louis with a smile.
- Indeed. James smiles back and takes a second bottle out of a closet:

This is the only water this whiskey will accept: Rockwell Still. It is obviously Irish. James gently opens the bottle of whiskey and fills each glass with an inch of the their contents. Then he slowly adds the same amount of water into the glass for Louis. The latter says:

- I think it is worth a toast. To whom would you like us to raise our glasses? I propose to drink to the health of Her Gracious Majesty the Queen.
- I appreciate your attention and I accept it. This is what we call the Loyal Toast. Louis and James stand up and face each other on either side of the table. They raise their glass together and simultaneously:
- To Her Majesty The Queen.

Louis takes a sip of the whiskey and gently lets it go down his throat.

— It's strong but I don't feel a burn.

After a few seconds:

- I am not experienced enough to put the right words on these sensations. All I can tell you is that they are very pleasant.
- I'm glad you enjoy this experience.

They sit down and take a second sip together.

- Mr James, you're a butler, aren't you?
- Yes. That word comes from the old French word bouteiller. In the Middle Ages, this was the title given to an officer who supplied wine to the royal, imperial and princely courts. If he was a cupbearer, he also served the monarch on great occasions. In English courts the word bouteiller became a butler.
- How did you get into the service of Claire's parents?
- My father served Lady Claire's grandfather during World War II in the 2nd Horsehold Cavalry Regiment. On July 12, 1944 they landed at Graye-sur-Mer in Normandy. They served together the whole time while France. On 3 September they were the first allies to enter Belgium, they liberated Brussels. They also participated in Market Garden Operation at the Harnhem Bridge in Holland. They served in Hamburg to end. My father was Claire's grandfather's driver and aide-de-camp. He was driving the Commander Seymour's Daimpler Scout Car Dingo. It was a large jeep, not very well armoured, but very agile and manoeuvrable, which the commander preferred over his armoured command vehicle.

When the war was over my father remained in his service. When he retired, I took over.

- Are you English?
- Not entirely, I have Irish roots. Do not see any chauvinism on my part in preferring Irish whiskey. I think I'm being objective when I say that this is the best whiskey in the world. James smiles. He goes on:
- I'm originally from Burren. This is land in Clare County, in the province of Munster on the west coast of Ireland, facing the Atlantic. It is a Celtic country: stones, rocks and the sea.
- Is it a beautiful place?
- Let us say that it has its very own charm. Edmond Ludlow, an officer serving Oliver Cromwell, described it as a country where there is not enough water to drown a man, not enough trees to hang him, not enough land to bury him.

After a few seconds of silence, James adds:

— But this is my country.

He is visibly moved at this evocation.

At this moment a lady enters the kitchen.

She's in her fifties, energetic and smiling. She is wearing a blue blouse, a dress of the same color covered with a wide white overall.

- Who are these intruders in my kitchen? » she exclaims, with the twinkle in her eye.
- Good morning, Mrs. Morgan, let me introduce you to Monsieur Louis, Lady Claire's

French friend, Monsieur Louis, Madame Mary Morgan, our cook.

Louis gets up to greet her and shakes her hand to Madame Morgan's surprise. James said with a smile:

- It is a French custom, I will explain.
- Are you also Irish? Asks Louis.
- Heaven forbid! I am Scottish and proud of it. I'm originally from Aberlady. It is a coastal village located about eighteen miles east of Edinburgh, on the south shore of the Firth of Forth Inlet, on the shores of the North Sea. It is a land between the moor and the sea.
- This sounds similar to Mr James' description of his homeland.

Madame Morgan seems surprised by that comment.

- Maybe I've never thought about it.
- Is it true that all Scots belong to a clan?
- No, but I do. I have the honor of belonging to the Morgan clan. Our motto is Fortis and Fidelis, which means brave and faithful".

Obviously Madame Morgan is proud of her affiliation and happy to talk about it.

- I apologize if my questions seem childish to you but I want to learn as much as I can about this country and its culture and traditions
- There is never any offence when it comes to learning.
- May I ask one more question: are you not wearing Scottish fabrics?
- I have something more Scottish. By saying that, she flips the lapel of her blouse.

She shows Louis a beautiful silver brooch with a ring drawn on it on which the motto of her clan is engraved around a thistle flower in its centre.

— This brooch never leaves me, it is my land and my blood. She says in a calm and proud tone..

Louis goes on:

— Excuse my curiosity again, are you a widow?

Slightly surprised by the question Mrs Morgan answers:

— Indeed, my husband was a Navy officer. He was serving on HMS Sheffield when he was hit by a missile during the Falklands War. He was one of the twenty victims. I also have a son, Scott. He is an officer on HMS Vanguard. He is very often at sea, I don't see him much. She sighs.

After a few seconds of silence, she goes on:

- Why are you interested in our origins?
- I do this for two reasons: first, I like to get to know the people I meet, particularly here. I'm learning a lot, it's the first time I've been out of my village, Louis says with a smile. And for a moment I could hear a voice in my head that speaks to me of you.
- A voice in your head? Exclaims Mrs Morgan, surprise. James has a discreet, amused smile.
- —Yes, in my head. Has Claire not warn you? In my country I am what is called a Babet. It's a nice way of saying that I'm a little simple-minded. And simple-minded people sometimes hear voices. Maybe it's because their brain is not full, so there's room for other people to talk to them. We have a famous historical example which was not beneficial to the English, her name was Jeanne and she kept sheep».

James' smile grew at the same time as the stupor grew on Madame Morgan's face. Louis doesn't give her time to react:

— I would like to understand one thing about both of your origins. Since my mind is slow, I need to visualize your answers in the space of this kitchen. May I place you in this room? — Yes. Madame Morgan answers after a few seconds of hesitation. She seems increasingly confused by the turn this conversation is taking.

James nods.

Louis asks James to show him where the North is.

Then he spreads a small piece of furniture and chairs and places Madame Morgan facing east and James facing west. So they are now back to back.

— I find that you have three points in common: you are of Celtic origin, you were born of heathland and sea. For you Madame Morgan the sea is east and west for you Monsieur James.

Louis takes a few seconds to make the third point:

— And a voice told me that you both have the sea in your eyes!

After a few more seconds:

— Turn around and look at the sea.

Madame Morgan and James rotate slowly to face each other, Their eyes look for each other and finally meet, first hesitantly then more frankly. Pretty soon they seem attracted by each other like magnets.

Louis feels the same energy as the one of the lime-tree going through them. James gently takes Mary's hands.

— Well, I'll leave you, I can hear Claire's Austin Mini coming. He leaves the kitchen quietly.

## Chapter 18: where we see Lady Claire Seymour become a horse

Claire and Louis are in the Highlore field sand paddock.

It is edged on one side by magnificent stables and fenced on the other three sides with a white barrier.

Louis says to Claire:

- You want me to continue teaching you how to communicate with animals. I suggest we do it with Galahad, do you agree?
- Oh yes! Exclaims Claire, enthusiastically.
- The idea is to no longer think but just feel. That's the first step. Close your eyes. Sight is often what makes you think.

Claire closes her eyes.

— Now focus on what you feel, the ground beneath your feet, the air around you, the smells, and what you hear. Let it in.

After a moment Louis sees a slight smile appearing on Claire's face.

- You're smiling, it's good, you're feeling it. Keep that smile, don't let it go, it's your guide and your support.
- Now we will go to the second stage: you are a horse: you will reproduce the movements you usually do with Galahad but you are the horse. Don't worry about whether your movements look right outside, just feel them in your body. Go ahead.

Claire is in the middle of the sand paddock.

*She starts walking slowly.* 

— It's nice, keep quiet, start with very simple movements, Louis says.

Claire moves around the sand paddock.

After a long moment:

— Now stop, close your eyes and move again while remaining still.

Louis takes both hands of Claire into his hands.

After a couple of minutes Louis starts again:

— Good. Now come back slowly.

Claire sighs and opens her eyes.

It's amazing. I was moving without moving. I couldn't see myself, I felt like a horse, it was simple and obvious.

— Bravo! You see, it's simple if you agree not to question yourself, not to doubt and to let the movement take place.

Claire is very moved.

Louis goes on:

— If you want this afternoon we will continue with Galahad.

Claire's eyes are starting to shine.

- You mean I'm going to do the same thing when I ride Galahad?
- Yes, if you like.
- What if we do it now? Asks Claire enthusiastically.

- I think it's best to let it sink in. And after a few seconds he adds, besides I'm hungry!
- Okay, let's have lunch.

Claire and Louis are back in the large hall of the manor. James has set a table for their lunch in front of one of the large bay windows overlooking the park.

- Where does your knowledge of horses and equestrian art come from? Louis has a big smile:
- I don't think I have any knowledge. I just listened to horses and they taught me what I know.
- Can you explain to me how it happened?
- A few years ago an equestrian center was set up near the farm. One day I found a horse in the meadow with our cows. I was a little surprised. I approached him and he started talking to me.
- Can horses live with cows? I must admit that this idea is not very common in British customs. Maybe we are too attached to the aristocratic side of our horses, Claire says with a smile.
- A cow raised with horses may end up thinking she is a horse. She likes to be in contact with horses. The problem is that they don't have the same signals as horses.
- Which signals?
- For instance, when a horse is angry it drops its ears and that means nothing to a cow. The angry cow lowers its head, horses straighten it up. And the cow has horns" he adds with a smile. Despite that, as they are pretty quiet animals, cohabitation can last. It's fun to see how they end up adapting.

## Louis continues:

— Just as I was talking with the horse a gentleman arrived. He was driving a big SUV. He got out and came towards me. He seemed upset. He said: "what did you do with my horse? I've been looking for it everywhere since this morning".

I told him I was glad he found it. He calmed down a bit. He went on to say:

— Well, I won't bother you any longer, I'll get him back.

He seemed relieved to have found his horse but he was still annoyed.

He took a halter and a tether and he went into the meadow. As soon as the horse saw him approaching, I felt him getting worried. He felt pressured and this didn't suit him at all. He started dodging the man. He always managed to get one or more cows between himself and the man.

My cows are rather peaceful animals but they soon felt something was going on. It was as if they understood that the horse wanted to avoid the man. They then considered him as an intruder. They started staring at him. When a cow stares at you and starts to lower her head, it's not a good sign. The message is clear: "You are not welcome, step away, if you insist I will make you leave". La Mauricette, who is the head of the herd, began to approach the man slowly. She didn't seem friendly at all. I saw that the man realized that there was a problem. He stopped. Mauricette stopped ten meters away from him, staring at him. Obviously the man didn't know what to do.

I walked up to him, quietly, smiling. I said: "I know my cows well, if you want I'll get your horse back".

He hesitated for a few seconds, and then he seemed relieved and he said, "If you like", he handed me the halter and the tether and came out of the field. He looked disappointed. Mauricette could smell me from a distance. As soon as she recognized me she relaxed, walked away and started grazing again. The other cows that were connected to their leader got the message and did the same".

- And then how did you do with the horse? Asks Claire.
- I had several options: I could play the "I'm not interested in you" trick.

Louis explains to Claire how he reconnected with a black mare who refused to be approached on the farm.

It's simple, I don't go to the horse, the horse comes to me and decides on the timing and to attract it I use its curiosity.

- And curiosity is enough?
- Yes, if the horse is relaxed. A horse is only curious if it feels safe. So I sit in the grass and I do something that the horse won't be able to see. It will come and see what I do on its own.
- Is that what you did with that horse?
- No, it would have been too complicated because of the cows. They know me well, I often play with them and they are just as curious as horses. If I had started my game they would certainly have come first which would have made it more complicated.
- So how did you do it?
- I spoke with the horse. He told me that he feared the man would be angry with it. He was afraid of his anger. That's why he didn't want to get close. I told the man what his horse told me. He replied that in fact he had been very afraid, that he had a lot of affection for his horse, that he was angry with himself. He knew that the fence of the pen in which he had put his horse was not in good condition, that he should have repaired it a long time ago and that he had neglected to do so.
- So, if I understand correctly, his anger was mainly related to his fear.
- This is often the case. When someone is angry you may wonder what he is afraid of and often the intensity of the anger is the same as the intensity of the fear.
- And then what?
- I told the horse what his owner had told me. It seemed reassured. I asked the man if I could take his horse back to the equestrian centre, he agreed, and then I asked the horse if he agreed. He said he would.

You see, it's simple.

— Simple, indeed, says Claire with a smile.

The most surprising part of this story is certainly that you are convinced when you think that what you have done is simple.

- Let me explain why I say it is simple: if you ask me to tell you what time it is, is it simple?
- Yes, so far I agree.
- It's simple because we both speak English and I have a watch. So, if you talk to a horse and you make a clear and consistent request, it's simple.

- What happened next?
- I took the horse back to his stable. A quarter of an hour's walk enabled us to get to know each other better.

When I arrived at the equestrian center his owner came to meet me. He was smiling and relaxed. He told me his name was Alexandre. He put his horse in a paddock and offered to show me around. He explained to me that he was running a team of horse owners taking part in show jumping competitions.

He did not understand why his horse had escaped or even why he went to a meadow with a herd of cows when in the club he gets all the attention and all the comfort a horse can dream of.

I replied that in my opinion a horse does not work with logics but only according to what his emotions tell him and that I have my idea about the reasons for his escapade. I explained to him what his horse had told me: he takes part in jumping competitions. At first he liked it, it was a fun and exciting game. But gradually he felt more and more tension in his rider, fear, annoyance, stiffness and sometimes even brutality and no more joy. He took on as much as he could and this morning he went looking for a quiet place. That's what he found with the cows.

Alexander looked surprised and then, after a moment, he said:

— I see what it is: I realize that my behaviour has changed. At the beginning I was delighted to have set up this superb equestrian center. Then quickly I set myself the the goal to increase my club's notoriety. To achieve this you need to come up with good results in competitions and, as I am the director, it was up to me to set an example. I put a lot of pressure on myself.

He adds, thoughtfully:

- It is true that I no longer have as much pleasure as I had before I started taking part in competitions.
- Have you seen each other since then? Asks Claire.
- Yes, I helped Alexandre and his horse to have fun again. It was easy because Alexandre realized what the problem was. I just showed them how to connect.

Then I returned regularly to the equestrian center to talk with horses and competition riders. It was very interesting and I learned a lot. It is a rather particular environment. It is sometimes tricky for horses because of the tension related to competitions.

Lunch is almost over.

— Come on, said Claire, impatient as she raise with a leap, let's go and see Galahad!

Louis is in the sand paddock. Claire joins him. She holds Galahad with a lead. Louis approaches. Galahad leans his head in his direction.

- He recognizes you, said Claire, smiling.
- Of course, we are old friends. I have thanked him several times for allowing me to meet you. Saying this, he vigorously scratches his neckline and goes all the way up to his ears.

Galahad seems to appreciate very much.

- If he were a cat, he would probably start purring. Should I get on the saddle?
- Before we will exercise in hand.
- If you want to. What should I do?
- You stand at Galahad's shoulder, you connect with him and start with simple exercises.

Then, if you want, you can do some more complex ones.

Louis removes Galahad's halter. Claire stands at the shoulder of her horse.

— Connect to him, visualize a movement and do it, quietly.

Louis sees Claire taking a deep breath and she starts walking. Galahad immediately does the same.

She hesitates a bit, then quickly her movements become fluent. They follow straight lines, circles and then loops in the sand paddock. Galahad is obviously very focused, listening to Claire. He seems to enjoy the game and accompanies her in each of her movements.

She stops, starts again and accelerates the pace. Then she starts trotting as a horse would. Immediately Galahad imitates her.

After some more figures Claire and Galahad return to Louis and stop at his height.

- This is extraordinary! She exclaims.
- Wait, before you talk to me you must tell Galahad the exercise is over and he can disconnect.

That's what Claire does. She says:

- It's really extraordinary: it works! And it's simple! Is it always so easy?
- No. It is sometimes more difficult at first. It worked because you are confident, you have confidence in yourself and in Galahad, your intensions are clear, you follow through on your intentions and you do not question yourself.
- Now you're going to do the same thing on Galahad's back.

Claire and Louis put a saddle on Galahad.

— You think of a movement, you visualize it and you ask Galahad only in your mind. When he executes the movement you also do it in your head. It must be inside, I don't want to see anything from outside. You don't need to do it physically, just feel it. It's just energy that comes from your mind, goes through your body, and connects to Galahad's mind. So that for him the sensations will be consistent.

- That is to say?
- There will be a consistency between what you are asking for, the feelings you pass on to him and the sensations it will feel when doing the exercise.
- And that's enough?
- No. A horse works with feelings and emotions. Sensations are good. Emotions remain. If your indications are good but you have an emotion that is not adapted it will interfere with the connection.
- Can you give me an example?
- If you are angry, annoyed, afraid, doubtful, Galahad will feel it. For a horse the emotion of his rider is stronger than the indications he gives. Moreover, parasitic emotions will affect your contact. If you are upset not only will he feel it immediately but in addition

your demands will no longer be fluent or right.

— And what should I do?

Louis has a smile on his face.

— You know I'm more used to talking to animals than to humans.

He thinks for a moment.

— I have four words that come to my mind: grateful, joyful, confident and quiet.

Claire is puzzled. Louis goes on:

— This is all I can say to tell you about state I am in when I need a good connection with an animal.

You express your gratitude to Galahad because he is kind enough to accept you riding him. I think every rider should do it every time a horse accepts him on his back.

You're having fun playing with Galahad. If riding is a chore for a rider I advise him to do something else or to get back to it when in a better mood, if he persists I think it is lack of respect towards himself and the horse. You have confidence in yourself and in him. You don't know if you will succeed but you know that you will do your best and so will him. And no matter what happens, you make sure you stay calm and relaxed, quiet.

- Okay, I'll try.
- Do more than just try, just do it, says Louis with a smile. If you want I've got a trick that can help you, are you up for it?
- With pleasure!
- Smile before, during and after.
- Is smiling enough?
- No, but it helps. When I am happy, confident and quiet I smile. And I realized that smiling makes me happy, confident and quiet. It works both ways. So, I advise you to smile and you can tell me if it works for you too.

If you want, I have two more suggestions.

- Yes. I need you to guide me, this is all so new to me.
- If, at some point, Galahad does not do as you asked him, take it as normal. Don't forget that he is always doing his best and that it is like you when you are learning something new to do. Stay calm, come back to an easier exercise and when he is successful you can offer him to do a more difficult exercise again. If he still can't do it, it may be too soon for him or for you. Don't beat yourself up, it's pointless and disrespectful.

Later, you can quietly watch how to gradually bring him to do what you want.

One last suggestion, the most important one for me: do not immediately repeat an exercise that Galahad performed correctly or he will think you are not satisfied and he will want to do it in a different way. And when he does well, do not forget to congratulate him. If we want to improve we must first know what we are doing well. This is true for animals as for humans. A horse does not know what a successful pirouette is, you do. So, you have to tell him when he does the right thing. Go ahead, quietly. Louis puts a hand on Claire's shoulder and gives her a nice smile.

Claire gets in the saddle. Galahad stays still for a few seconds and then starts to walk. He performs several figures, starts trotting and then galloping. Claire and Galahad move gracefully in the sand paddock.

Louis feels touched. He contemplates this beautiful and harmonious couple.

After watching them progressing for half an hour he intervenes kindly:

- Well done both of you! It was really great.
- Do you think it's time to stop, that Galahad is getting fed up?
- I think it is better to stop before he does. For me, the ideal time to stop playing is when you still want to keep going. It avoids getting bored and gives more pleasure when you do it again.
- This again is wise.

I thank you. Thanks to you I have just experienced a powerful and beautiful moment," says Claire with a look of gratitude and admiration. To thank you, tonight I'm taking you to London, she says. She adds:

- You guided me all day, it's my turn.
- Where are we going?
- You'll see, Claire says, while giving him a loud kiss on his cheek.

It is 7 p. m.

Claire and Louis go down Regent Street in the little Austin Mini. Walking past the Burberry store, Claire whispers:

- Someday I'll have to take you shopping. Even if James does miracles, it would be better if you had some clothes of your own. I would be happy to see you wearing British clothes.
- This is where I really need a guide. At the farm I mostly have work clothes.

After a few seconds he adds:

I must admit that I am beginning to get a taste for beautiful things. I could only be delighted to let you continue making me into an acceptable gentleman.

— James immediately saw that you already are a true gentleman. You just need the outfit. As you often say, it's easy.

*She added:* 

- James seems to like you very much.
- I like him very much as well. I think he is a gentleman. He has a heart of gold. Louis whispers, talking to himself, "He's only missing one thing, but he's nearly there. Claire looks at him intrigued.
- What are you thinking about?
- I'd rather he told you himself if he wishes, Louis replies with a big smile.
- I'm intrigued by your remark, she said, smiling back.

Then she focuses again on driving.

They arrive at Piccadilly Circus, continue towards St James Park, turn left into Pall Mall and park the Austin Mini. They walk up Pall Mall, stop in front of the equestrian statue of King George III. Louis takes a look walking around the statue.

— Enough horses for today, said Claire in a determined tone, taking his arm.

They're passing the Brazilian embassy.

"Another poor neighborhood" thinks Louis, amused.

They're going into Haymarket.

They have diner in an Indian restaurant. Claire chooses the dishes. Louis lets himself be guided. He enjoys these exotic, strange and delicious meals.

They leave the restaurant and cross the street. The air is fresh. A small London drizzle makes the pavement shine. The two young persons walk under a large umbrella, which they took on James' advice. They pass in front of a huge building of glass and grey concrete, incongruous in this district with classical architecture.

Claire takes a glimpse at the reflexion of the two of them she can see in a bay window on the ground floor. This image makes her smile.

They walk for a few meters and face a surprising building: magnificent double doors in varnished wood and bevelled glasses sheltered by a superb canopy. This one is adorned with wrought iron scrolls. This one is enhanced by a pediment supported by four columns with fluted bodies topped with a capital decorated with volutes and acanthus leaves in the purest style of the Greek temples. The whole is capped with an adornment that is shaped like a roof of elf's hut. A kind of bell tower was placed at its summit to give it an extra touch.

At the pediment of this building is engraved:

## Her Majesty's theatre

They enter an imposing hall. Claire, with a determined step, skirts a long line that has formed in front of the ticket office to a desk where a lady in black dress and white blouse welcomes her:

— Good evening Lady Seymour, if you will follow me.

Louis is impressed:

"Boy, you seem to be accompanying one of the personalities of the British aristocracy," he thinks amused.

He takes a look at Claire who seems to find all this quite normal.

They walk down a long corridor, up a large marble staircase.

The lady opens a red leather padded door and let them through.

Louis takes a few steps and stops, dazzled.

He is on the first balcony of a splendid and immense Italian theatre: superb red velvet armchairs arranged in a circle arch on three levels separated by scalloped railings and crowned with copper handrails, clear walls adorned with columns framing majestic doors that form as a case to rows of armchairs, brightly arranged light bulb dots sculpt every detail of ornament and give an impression of remarkable depth.

Louis takes a few steps. He looks up. He is captivated by the immense ceiling, entirely decorated with frescoes that combine different ochre tones and give an impression of extraordinary volume. A monumental and sparkling chandelier sits in the middle of the ceiling.

Louis seems fascinated, as if attracted by this magical place.

Claire makes a discreet signal to the lady to ask her to wait a moment.

Louis tears himself away from contemplating the room.

They follow the lady to the two central chairs in the first row of the first balcony.

— I wish you a good evening, she says as she leaves.

They enjoy an ideal view of the entire theater and the stage below.

— You look thoughtful, says Claire.

Louis replies in a soft and distant voice:

"It is a magical place. As soon as I entered, I felt presence. So much has been happening here for a long time. This place is full of emotions. It almost made me dizzy.

- This theatre is three hundred years old. It has seen so many artists, so many exceptional moments! This theatre is steeped in history  $\cdot$ .
- Yes, certainly.

The room is almost full.

Claire sees Louis bending over to contemplate the audience from the lower floor, turning to do the same with the second balcony. Obviously he is determined not to miss a thing from the rustling show of the members of the audience who are settling down.

Claire watches him. She is moved by the amazed childish look on his face.

The intensity of the lights in the room begins to dim.

- By the way, what show are we going to watch?, there was so much to see that I forgot to look at the poster, says Louis.
- You'll see, I think you'll like it. I'm just telling you it's a musical.

The room is now completely immersed in darkness. The curtain opens and the show begins.

The curtain closes after six enthusiastic recalls from the audience. The lights are turned on.

— So, did you like it? Asks Claire.

Louis remains silent for a moment. He seems to have a hard time detaching himself from the show he has just watched and coming back to earth.

He ends up saying:

— It was really amazing! I don't know what else to say. I'm lost for words.

He gets up, faces Claire.

— Thank you for this wonderful moment. I will not forget it.

With a spontaneous impulse he holds Claire in his arms and gives a tender kiss on her cheek.

He is holding her in his arms just a little bit longer than what you would usually do when hugging a friend.

The two young people can feel a sense of well-being that was not induced only by the show...

When they walk again under the big black umbrella in the direction of Claire's car Louis asks her:

- What was the name of the show?
- It's the phantom of the opera.

# Chapter 19: when a farm worker discusses pedagogy with Officers of Her Gracious Majesty

Claire and Louis spent the morning in the buildings of the Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment.

They attended the working sessions of the horses and two sessions led by officers training two groups of eight riders each in the riding arena.

It is 2 p.m.

Claire, Sir Laurence Seymour and Louis enter the regiment's meeting room.

As they enter the six officers stand up and stand at attention.

— Well, gentlemen, have a seat, said Sir Laurence Seymour.

The officers sit around tables arranged in an a semi-circle facing a large white board.

— I don't need to introduce my niece Claire, who is with us, since you already know her. Claire takes a sit next to one of the officers.

Making a hand gesture towards Louis, Sir Laurence Seymour goes on:

— I am pleased to introduce this young man from France. His name is Louis. I wish we take time to discuss with him as he has a great knowledge of horses and fascinating abilities to connect with them.

I think his expertise can help us. And, even if he denies it, he also has a great knowledge and experience with people that can be useful to us in our profession as instructors.

Louis gives a head salute to the officers and a hand sign to Captain Miller he has spotted.

— Now I'm going to let you get acquainted. I will stay with you, but I won't intervene, unless required, says Sir Laurence Seymour.

He goes to sit next to Claire.

## Louis says to them:

— I am delighted to meet you. I was here the day before yesterday, Sir Laurence Seymour took me on a tour of your facilities and explained your activities. I am very impressed, and I thank you for welcoming me.

After a moment of silence, seeing that Louis has no intention to keep speaking, one of the officers asks him:

*In France you, are a veterinarian?* 

— No, I'm a farm worker. My parents have a farm, I help them.

Claire can feel the officers being surprised.

She smiles.

- Are you more of a dressage or a jumping rider? Do you take part in horse shows?
- Not really. I'm more used to cows and chickens. I sometimes go to an equestrian center near our farm to talk with the horses, but I don't ride them.

Claire and Sir Laurence Seymour exchange amused looks. The officers seem really dismayed. Only Captain Miller seems to appreciate the situation.

Sir Laurence Seymour leans over to Claire.

- Maybe it's time for me to step in, he whispers.
- I do think it would be helpful.

Sir Laurence Seymour makes a hand sign. The officers turn to him.

— I told you that I would not intervene, but I think it is necessary to do so.

You are all familiar with Major Hadrian and the difficulties he has to face. We've asked for several specialists' help and we've had no results. The day before yesterday, this young man has spent some time with Major Hadrian. The results are spectacular: Major Hadrian is back to his normal self, he adds with a smile.

Captain Miller raises his hand.

Sir Laurence Seymour gives him the floor.

— I know Good Boy well. I have been his instructor since he joined the regiment. I must admit that I have some knowledge of horses and yet, like all the experts we consulted, I could not find any solution to his difficulties. I couldn't even understand what was going on. I can attest that this young man identified the origin of the problem and solved within minutes.

He adds with a smile:

— I have also found that it is better to follow his advices.

Turning to Louis:

— I thank you very much for your help and I am very interested in continuing working with you.

Louis thanks him with a nod.

Sir Laurence Seymour addressed the officers:

— Do you have any other questions or comments?

As the officers keep silent, he tells Louis:

— Well, I'll let you handle this.

Louis stands in front of the large white board.

— I thought of an exercise during which I propose that each of you behave like a horse. Claire can see the surprise on the officers' faces.

— It's not about thinking, it's about feeling. As the exercise goes on, remember what you feel.

Louis puts a sheet of paper with four magnets on the large metal white board hanging on the wall. Then he asks for a volunteer.

After a few seconds of hesitation, one of the officers gets up. He is a tall fellow with a clear and straight eye. He approaches Louis.

He hands him a felt-tip pen and says:

— Can you draw a square on this piece of paper?

The officer hesitates, presumably expecting further instructions.

Louis says nothing to him and encourages him with a gesture of his hand.

The officer goes ahead and draws a square.

— Thank you, said Louis.

He fixes a second sheet of paper on the board next to the first one.

— Can you draw a square again?

The officer seems surprised and after a few seconds of hesitation he draws a second square.

Louis repeats the exercise eight times in a row.

Then he tells the officer:

— The first part of the exercise is over, thank you for your participation. Can you tell me what state of mind you were in when you volunteered?

He thinks for a few seconds.

- I was curious and interested, especially after what Sir Laurence Seymour and Captain Miller had said about you.
- So you were interested and motivated. If you were a horse, things would look good. And then when I asked you to draw the first square?
- I was a little surprised. I was expecting more accurate instructions. As you said nothing, I finally drew the first square.
- And then when I asked you to draw squares again?
- I just did what I was told, but I felt less and less motivated. I must tell you that I couldn't wait until the exercise would be over.
- So within minutes you went from desire and motivation to obedience to orders and eventually loss of interest.

Louis turns to the other officers.

- Can you tell me how you felt during the exercise and can you imagine what your reaction would have been if you had been in your colleague's shoes? The officers looked at each other. One of them speaks:
- When you asked for a volunteer, I was curious but more reluctant than my colleague who volunteered. I wanted to wait and see.
- And then what?
- Every time my colleague drew a square, I expected a reaction from you. You made no comment. I couldn't see any logic or consistency in your behavior and your requests. I didn't know what you were heading.
- And what did you feel?

After a few seconds the officer replied:

- Annoyance. I think if I had done the exercise, I would have been tempted to express my annoyance.
- Would you really have showed it?
- I am not sure.
- What could have prevented you from doing so?
- Discipline, answers the officer with a smile. I am a soldier, and I'm used to following instructions, even those I don't understand.

### Louis turns to all the officers:

- Your two colleagues had two different reactions to this exercise, one rather disinterested, the other annoying. Some of you had other reactions? An officer intervenes.
- I also felt annoyed, but I think I could not help but express it.
- Were there any other reactions?

A moment of reflection. No officer intervenes.

— Thank you. To put it in a nutshell there are two types of emotions: loss of motivation and annoyance and two types of annoyance: submission and demonstration. So, there are three different reactions. Can you tell me who feels what?

Each officer speaks in turn.

— I see that your reactions are rather evenly divided.

What conclusions can you draw from this exercise?".

Claire and Sir Laurence Seymour obviously appreciate the situation.

- I can see six brains fuming, Claire whispers.
- Excellent, it's good for them. I'm looking forward to the next one, Sir Laurence Seymour says.
- I have my idea about what will follow, I've already had a private lesson, Claire adds.

## One of the officers intervenes:

- If I go back to the beginning of the exercise, it seems to me that you have triggered curiosity in all of us, some of us being motivated enough to participate and others being more cautious.
- Can this also be found in horses?
- Yes, I think so. Some are willing to engage from the beginning, they replied spontaneously, others aren't against taking part, but they remained cautious.

#### Louis intervenes:

- How can you translate your end-of-exercise reactions into horse behavior? Captain Miller speaks:
- The first reaction reminds me of a jaded horse, who is looking forward to returning to its box. As for the annoyance, some horses keep it to themselves. I think it's not good for their performance or for their health in the long run. For those who are protesting, it probably translates into what we call defense mechanism.
- If I understand correctly, none of these behaviors is suitable?
- That's for sure.
- In your opinion, what makes a horse go from desire to demotivation or annoyance within minutes?

An officer who had not spoken yet says:

— If we apply this example to horses I think it can happen if we repeat the same exercise several times without giving the horse any instruction.

## Another officer continues:

— The horse will get even more fed up if he has performs well.

### Louis intervenes:

- If the horse has performed correctly and you don't tell him and you make him do it again, what will he think?
- That his performance is not correct.
- And then what?
- He will try to change the way he is doing things.
- What if you continue?
- He will grow weary or annoyed.
- Bravo! You speak horse language very well!

Louis takes a moment for everyone to register the information.

— What code of conduct can you come up with for a rider from this example?

- Tell the horse when he did well.
- Sure. Anything else?
- Do not repeat a successful exercise.
- I think it's a good idea" confirms Louis. Or if you do it again, I suggest you tell the horse first that he has done very well and allow yourself to do it only once. Tell him that it was great and that you're just doing it again for fun".

After a moment of silence Captain Miller intervenes:

- We were not educated in this way, but we were rather made to worship repetition exercises. Louis goes on:
- I am not judgmental on your methods. Horses simply ask for consistency: either you consider them as simple instruments, or you want them to be true partners. It is up to you to choose. Just know that they will only give you consideration and respect if you give the same to them. That's what all horses tell me every time I talk to them.

#### Silence.

Sir Laurence Seymour says:

— Young man, what you have so cleverly told us reminds me of a quote from one of the greatest French squires, François Baucher. He said, ask often, be satisfied with very little, reward a lot.

## Chapter 20: where we see Scotland and Ireland sealing a more than fraternal union

Back to Highlore Manor.

It is 6 p. m.

Claire and Louis are comfortably seated in deep leather armchairs around a coffee table.

— I found your intervention with the officers very fair and powerful, says Claire.

She adds:

- How did you come up with the idea of drawing squares?
- I don't know, it came to me spontaneously. I wanted them to stop thinking and start feeling.
- That was very clever of you. I know these officers well, and, like all military personnel, they are taught not to take their emotions into account. And they're British, which doesn't help, she adds with a smile.
- Yes, that's what you call stiff upper lip?
- Exactly: stone-faced like marble statues!

I also noticed that you didn't go as far with them as you did with Galahad and me.

— I am trying to implement two parts of the squire Baucher's motto, that your uncle taught me about and that I wasn't aware of: be satisfied with very little and reward a lot.

At this moment Madame Morgan and James enter the living room and move towards them.

— If Lady Claire and Monsieur Louis allow it, we have an announcement to make to you, says James in a somewhat solemn voice.

He seems very moved.

— Please, says Claire slightly surprised.

Louis smiles, as if he already knew what James was about to say.

— This is a decision we have made and we want you to be the first persons to know.

After a few seconds of hesitation, he goes on:

— Madame Morgan and I have decided to get married.

Louis sees Claire's features move quickly from surprise to joy.

— This is wonderful news! she exclaims.

She gets up, visibly touched.

Louis followed by Claire goes to give Madame Morgan a kiss on both cheeks. She immediately flushes.

Then he turns to James and shakes his hand warmly.

— Talking about emotions! says Claire. I think we all need to sit down.

After hesitating for a few seconds Madame Morgan and James take seats around the coffee table followed by Claire and Louis.

— Where is this coming from?, why now, you've been working together for so many years, Claire asks.

Madame Morgan and James are smiling at each other.

- This happened thanks to Monsieur Louis, Madame Morgan says. He made us see the sea.
- The sea? asks Claire.

Louis explains to her what happened in the kitchen. He goes on:

- When Madame Morgan appeared, I heard a voice. It was a man's voice telling me that he had been watching Mary being so lonely for so long, that there was a good and loyal man beside her and that he was getting fed up with watching these two persons visibly made for each other and so blind to each other. He asked me to intervene. That is what I did. It was so obvious that all I had to do was make them look at each other.
- Where did that voice come from? Asks Claire, visibly intrigued.
- I do not know.

After a few seconds, Madame Morgan intervenes:

— I think I know. It's Edward, my first husband, she says, very moved.

*She adds:* 

— He knew that his job was dangerous. He made me promise that if anything happened to him, I would not remain alone. Caught up in everyday life, I had forgotten my promise. I think that thanks to Monsieur Louis he reminded me of it.

Claire looks at Louis.

— You are not a wizard, my little French peasant, you are an angel, she thinks, impressed and moved.

Louis intervenes:

- Have you already discussed about the arrangements?
- Not yet, madame Morgan says. If my future husband agrees, I want to respect our traditions.

James nods with a smile.

— During the ceremony I will have to wear a new object, an old one, a borrowed one and a blue one.

For the new one, it will be a dress that I will make. I already have an idea.

As for the old object, it will be the brooch I always carry close to my heart: my land and my blood.

For the borrowed object, I have no idea yet.

Louis intervenes:

— I have a suggestion, if you don't mind.

He takes out a small, shiny, brown oblong object from his pocket. He puts it on the coffee table.

— It is an acorn that comes from an oak tree. One day my grandmother Léonie gave it to me. She told me: "in this acorn there is a huge oak. Keep it. The day you find your bride, plant it, water it, it will grow into an oak and ensure your family continues to grow generation after generation. I'll lend it to you.

Madame Morgan hesitates, visibly moved.

- May I, really? she asks.
- My grandmother Léonie told me it was a good idea.

Madame Morgan gently takes it in her hand and stares at it with a smile.

— What about something blue? Ask Claire.

James intervenes:

- With my future wife's consents, I think I have something that may be appropriate. He pulls a necklace out of his jacket's inner pocket. It is a gold chain that bears a small jewel that represents a beautiful flower of a deep blue color.
- It is a jewel that my mother gave me. It is a gentian, the symbolic flower of my country of Burren.

All four share an intense emotion: Louis has his childish smile, Claire and Madame Morgan have eyes filling up with tears, even James has trouble containing himself. After a few seconds he adds with a slightly shaky voice:

— I hope you will do us the honor of attending our wedding.

## Chapter 21: when Louis makes his statement

Louis' stay in England is coming to an end.

Tomorrow morning he has to fly back to France.

He is on the terrace with Claire and Sir Laurence Seymour.

The latter offers to Louis to come and spend a week with the regiment in a month time. He goes on saying:

— This will give us time to plan your interventions in the regiment. If you agree, you will continue to work with some of our horses. You also made a very strong impression on the officers you spoke to. They are eager to work with you again.

I will also make sure you have some spare time because, after your intervention with the dog of the LADY (insisting on this word with a big smile), it is not impossible that you will be approached by people working with her again. Does that suit you?

Louis tells him:

— Talking to animals is no problem. However, for your other requests, I don't know if I could really be useful beyond what I have already done with your officers.

#### Claire intervenes:

- I think you'll be able to do it. All you have to do is to come up with new ideas. I can help you with that.
- How?
- If you don't mind, I'll tell you later.
- With such an assistant as Claire, you can no longer refuse" exclaims Sir Laurence Seymour.
- All right, I give up. That's okay.
- Well, I'm delighted. I'll ask my assistant to sort out your trip and your stay.
- If you don't mind, uncle, and if Louis agrees, I can't see him staying anywhere else than in Highlore Manor, says Claire, unless he prefers to sleep in a box in your regiment, she says with a smile.

Later in the afternoon, Claire and Louis are sitting on a bench in the park, in the shade of a huge oak tree.

- You're leaving tomorrow, said Claire, thoughtful.
- Yes. You said that you can help me come up with new ideas about the behavior of horses and their good relationship with people. I think I really need it. How do you see it?
- It's very simple: I'm going to France with you, she says with a broad smile. Louis, surprised by this idea remains silent.
- Did you think I was going to let you go quietly? I'm more tenacious than that: I have you, I won't let you go. To get away from me, you would have to run very fast and very far. And then, on the farm I will make myself useful. I intend to make my living by working. I

may be an English Lady, but I am not afraid to get dirty.

Claire speaks quickly, with a cheerful and compelled tone while looking at Louis' face.

Obviously, she is anxious about the way he will react to her offer.

Louis nods to interrupt her.

— I have something to tell you. I'm not sure how to do it, I'm not used to it...

After a silence, he looks at Claire straight into her eyes and whispers:

— I love you.

He goes saying:

— I'm glad you're coming with me.

With tears of joy in her eyes, Claire grasps Louis' face in both her hands:

— I love you, my little French peasant.

She puts a sweet kiss on his lips.

The End

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