

## **Background to the creation of the novel**

It so happened that a Russian writer asked me to help find an English translator for her book about medieval France. To determine the complexity for translation, quite naturally, I decided to get acquainted with this work.

From the very first pages, I began to find inaccuracies and errors in the description of the events and life of the characters, even their clothes and shoes. I had to seriously study the history of France. As a result, more than a hundred documents were collected confirming the problems of the novel.

That is, not a single serious publishing house will take a book in this form. I sent the author a brief description of my comments, and also offered my help in correcting errors. But the author refused to rewrite the novel. Declaring that this book was reprinted three times in Russia. What can be said about this...

However, the information I have collected deserves attention, because, as I am sure, the majority of people have no idea what the Middle Ages are. There are many reasons for this, primarily cinema. It is worth recalling any film about the Middle Ages and immediately there are a lot of errors. Most clearly in films about the discovery and conquest of America. For example, Europeans at that time wore stockings, not pants, and walked in pointed shoes, without heels. (Pants appeared in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century).

In addition to the details of clothing, I found out that terrible unsanitary conditions have blossomed throughout Europe. (The Pope forbade Catholics to bathe). For example, the statement of the Queen of Spain Isabella of Castile (end of the 15th century) is known. "I bathed twice in my life, the first time at birth, and the second, on my wedding day."

This, of course, is not a complete list of interesting facts.  
That is why I decided to write the novel myself.

Hero choice:

If you take a famous historical figure as a hero, you will have to imitate a story that someone has already written.

If you take a simple, unknown person who lived at that time, then you get an ordinary historical novel, of which there are a lot,

because a person living in his time cannot notice something interesting and special. And who can?

Only a man from the twenty-first century.

So you need to send in the past, our contemporary. However, you need a very good reason and technical capabilities. So I came up with this story:

In the southeastern suburbs of Paris began to build another high-rise building. They dug a pit, as expected, and at the bottom there was an old burial. Twelve warriors in chain mail with short sleeves. The wars turned out to be not Europeans, but Indians dressed in traditional clothes for North American Indians, moccasins, leather pants and jackets, and chain mail on top.

An expert was invited, and he determined the approximate time of burial. A few hours later, he uttered the last words of his life, "Strange, why are the corpses so well preserved? Maybe it was because of the clay, which created a closed container? Immediately after him, all five of his assistants died, who pulled out and laid out the corpses at the bottom of the pit. A day later, half of the inhabitants of Paris died out, the second half fled in panic, but no one survived. In two days, an unknown virus has spread around the world. By the time the Hero was sent on a mission, a vaccine had not yet been created, and there were no more than a quarter of the world's population left on the globe.

A few years earlier, French scientists had created a prototype apparatus for time travel. A properly working machine for travelling into the past was unlikely to be produced any time soon.

However, as soon as the epidemic happened, all countries took part and everyone who could at least somehow help was brought to the laboratory. The first person was sent a month after the tragedy. The second, six months later. The hero of the novel was sent a year later.

**Now, if you're interested, you can read the first three chapters.  
And after them you will find a synopsis of this novel**

# **VISCOUNT GIRAC DE LOPIER AN IMPOSTOR, SUMMER 1498**

Fantasy novel

Approximate number of words 138000

Author: B. Draguns

## **The first three chapters**

### **Prologue**

This story has been digitized from an ancient manuscript dating back to the early sixteenth century and made available to the public by Mademoiselle Marguerite de la Pierre, an arts student at the Sorbonne University.

According to Mademoiselle Marguerite, the reservation says that the manuscript can only be published two months after its discovery. On that day, during preliminary excavations for the construction of a new high-rise in the north-eastern suburbs of Paris an ancient burial was discovered, part of which is addressed to the descendants of the Viscount de la Pierre.

Details are not reported.

## Chapter first

### Where am I, and who am I?



“What happened? What on earth happened?”

My head was as heavy as lead. And I was so cold that all my muscles felt as if they were tightly knotted.

I only opened my left eye, because something was pressing against the right side of my face so I couldn’t open the other eye.

There was green grass next to me, and beyond that was moss covered with dried needles, which had presumably fallen from a pine tree. The moss led upwards, and I couldn’t see anything beyond that. I must be in some kind of hole.

I sniffed the air. It smelled of damp, moss and pine. I appeared to be in a forest.

I tried to move my arms, and then my legs. They appeared to be intact, at least, and I could even move them, although for some reason I really didn’t want to.

With great difficulty, I bent my arms at the elbows and propped myself up. It took even more effort to raise my body off the ground and roll over onto my back.

I really was in a forest, because, as far as I could make out, there were pine trees growing everywhere. It also turned out that I was not in a hole at all, but on fairly level ground, next to a small mound, or more likely a tree stump covered with moss.

“Oh my goodness, it’s so cold. But I remember it was hot. Or was it? No, it really was hot, because my body is still damp, meaning it was covered in sweat. Or perhaps someone poured hot water over me...”

If my body was wet, that was why I felt cold. But what about my clothes? I squinted and saw my naked torso with pieces of moss clinging to the sparse growth on my chest.

“So, let’s try to figure this out. I am naked and in a forest. The fact that I’m in a forest is a plus, because if I was naked in the middle of a city, that would definitely be a minus.”

I needed to sit up, or ideally to stand, and even better than that, to run around and warm myself up.

I managed to sit up almost straight away, but standing was not so simple, as I felt dizzy. Clearly, I had hit my head on something hard. My forehead was stinging and throbbing with every heartbeat, so that my whole skull hurt.

“What has happened to me? I can’t remember a thing.”

Steadying myself against a tree with my left hand, I raised my right hand to my brow... My skull wasn’t broken, thank goodness, and there didn’t seem to be much blood, but there was a rather firm, if not very substantial bump.

It didn’t appear to be winter, but more like a summer’s day. The sun was indeed shining, but its rays barely reached me because of the dense treetops. I wanted to go out into the sunshine and warm up.

I made myself sit down a couple of times. I was able to move, but my efforts didn’t make me any warmer. I needed to get into the sun.

Going to the left would be pointless, as the forest was thicker there, and I could see some fallen trees. To the right, however, it looked as though there might be a clearing. Moving my legs with difficulty, I set off in that direction.

“Ouch! That hurt,” I yelled when my bare foot stepped on a pine cone. “Who left these pine cones, and why are there so many?! And why do these stupid trees keep pushing me about?”

The clearing turned out to be small and covered with long, wet, green grass. The sun was scorching, and it was so warm and pleasant that I felt the urge to sleep straight away. I knelt down slowly, then lay on my belly and dozed off at once.

I have no idea how long I was asleep, and I don’t know how much longer I might have stayed like that, but it turned cold again, and I woke up. The sky was covered with clouds, and it looked as if they might gather together and send down a shower of rain. This time, I

managed to get up easily, and my headache was almost gone. Some thoughts began to occur to me...

“First of all, I need to put something on, because it isn’t comfortable walking around naked. If I meet anyone, they’ll think I’m mad, and then they won’t want to talk to me.”

I needed to cover myself up somehow. But with what? Grass, perhaps? People made clothes out of grass somehow, didn’t they? Surely I could, too. I was no more stupid than anyone else.

I just need a piece of string. I pulled up a handful of grass and wrapped it around my waist. It was too short, and I couldn’t tie it. What could I do to make it longer?

“Oh, I remember! I need to plait the grass, like a ponytail, and add in extra pieces as I go along.”

I tied a knot and began to plait. I fastened it with another knot at the end. The braid wouldn’t hold much weight, of course, but it was quite sufficient for my needs. Now I needed to cover the belt with blades of grass folded in half.

As I was rummaging around, it began to grow dark. That was problematic. It might be cold again in the night. I would have to walk to keep from freezing. But where should I go? I needed to find some kind of road before darkness fell, and then I would be able to follow that. Otherwise, I would go around in circles in the forest. It would be best to walk in a straight line. But how could I do that? I needed to follow the setting sun: that would guide me along a straight route.

Darkness was rapidly creeping in. What did that mean? If I was at home in France, that would indicate I was in the south of the country rather than the north. It was already very dark, but I figured I might still be able to keep going.

Walking barefoot in a forest when you can’t see what you’re standing on, and when you keep stepping on pinecones and roots, is still rather pleasant. It was no surprise, though, that my progress was slow.

Eventually, when the pale moon glanced out again from behind a cloud, I spotted what looked like a road. At least, a cart had been along this trodden path at some point, and its wheels had left deep ruts.

“A road! Should I go left or right? What difference does it make?”

I turned right.

I had probably never walked through a forest at night, although I couldn't remember, so perhaps I had. Now, though, it was night in there, and I realised it was very frightening. Something, most likely an owl, made a muffled sound nearby: "Hoo-hoo." Then came "Ah-oo," from somewhere in the distance, possibly a wolf. Directly beneath my feet there was a rustling: "Ssshhh." It was terrifying! It was stupid of me, but I needed at least to grab hold of a stick of some sort.

What was the matter with me? Had I turned soft out of fear, or had a head injury rendered me incapable?

However, nothing happened to me that night, even though every sound left my nerves in tatters.

At dawn, when it was light enough, I entered a small hollow, where a thick fog had gathered. I could see about three metres ahead of me. Suddenly, the shape of a person, wearing clothes of a dusty brown colour and with a hood pulled up over the head, emerged from the fog and approached me. Naturally, I was eager to meet this person, but strangely I held my breath and froze. The same thing seemed to happen to him, too. We stood there, two metres apart, and said nothing.

"Good morning," I said, resolving to break the long silence.

He didn't reply, and immediately tried to hit me with the rather weighty stick he was holding in his hands. I stepped back slightly to avoid the blow. Grabbing the stick with both hands, I rushed forwards, took it, and tossed it onto the ground. I must have learned how to do that at some point. I couldn't remember, though.

The man turned around at once, apparently preparing to run away. However, he was clearly older than me. His face was that of an elderly man, and his hands matched his face. My hands were younger, so I had to assume my face must look more youthful, too. Consequently, his movements were slower as well. I managed to catch hold of his hood, and said, "Wait, let's talk."

He didn't reply, but pulled hard and even began to drag me along behind him. Then, leaving his garment in my hand, he vanished into the mist. I couldn't fathom how he had managed to slip out of his clothes so easily. I walked in the direction he had gone. As I emerged from the hollow, I struggled to spot him straight away. In the meantime, he had run halfway around the top and was now heading off back to where I had come from. He was a nimble runner. He was wearing a not-quite-white shirt resembling a short dress, with cropped sleeves, and

protruding from beneath it were trousers of the same colour that didn't even reach his knees. On his feet were sandal-like shoes, making it easier for him to skip between the roots and pinecones. Barefoot, I had no chance of catching up with him.

To my great delight, I was still holding his garment, which resembled a long, wide sack with sleeves sewn on and a hole for the head where a hood had been attached. On him, this outfit hadn't seemed so much like a sack, so there must have been a belt. I had to go back down into the fog, where I found the belt which turned out to be a piece of rope almost two metres long with knots on either end. Then I found the stick as well.

Discarding my grass skirt, I donned the sack and tied the belt around my waist. Now I looked like the kind of person you might meet in a place like that, and the next person I encountered might not run away quite so fast.

"The stick is a kind of weapon, so it may come in handy," I thought, turning it around in my hands. "I have a feeling I know how to use it to defend myself."

However, before an hour had passed, my happiness at my newly acquired outfit had come to an end. Straight away, something had bitten me on my right arm, just below the shoulder, and then again in a very sensitive spot in my armpit, and it was so unbearably painful that I threw off the robe.

There appeared to be nothing around my armpit, as I couldn't see or feel anything. So, I started to check the folds of the sackcloth, turning it inside out, and immediately discovered a dozen tiny insects that jumped away if I tried to catch and squash them.

"Well, I've managed to find them. So, what should I do now?"

The first thought that came into my head was to shake the parasites out. I shook the garment and hit it against a tree. Then I moved a little further away, put it down on the grass, and began to inspect it. Apparently, these insects were difficult to get rid of. I should clean the robe... but how could I do that? Should I give it a good soak in water, perhaps? Not long before, I had passed a place where I had spotted water, possibly a river or a pond.

I decided to turn back. It turned out to be a small lake. It must have been about nine or ten o'clock in the morning. The sun was



becoming hot. I found the water quite warm. Without hesitation, I soaked my clothes and carefully rubbed all the folds by hand. I wrung it out and then hung it on a bush to dry. Then I plunged in and scrubbed myself for a long time, pouring water over my body, especially my hair and my head. I really wanted to make sure there were no creatures left in my rather long hair.

It suddenly occurred to me that I ought to look at my reflection, as it might help me remember who I was. Because of the light breeze, though, there were gentle ripples on the surface of the water, so it took me a while to find a calmer spot after walking almost all the way around the lake.

The pool, with its dark bottom, made an excellent mirror, once I had climbed onto the trunk of a fallen tree.

I had already managed to examine myself reasonably well, establishing that I was a physically fit man, of at least one metre eighty and around ninety kilos. I wasn't bad-looking, but nor was I the sort who would show off his muscles in front of ladies. Too much muscle could even be detrimental for regular military work. Could I be a fighter? If so, I would have a square face with a low forehead, a broken nose, wide cheekbones, a large lower jaw, and an apparent absence of intellect. How could I lean over to take a closer look without falling off the tree into the water?

Balancing carefully on one leg, I took a step forwards, then knelt down very slowly in order not to disturb the calm water, and bent my head over the pool.

Suddenly, a black bird of some sort startled me as it sprang out from the tall grass with a loud cry and flew upwards, almost knocking me over.

I lost my balance, toppled into the lake, and began to tread water. That meant I knew how to swim. In that case, it would be best to swim across to the other side, rather than tramping back around the lake again.

Before falling, though, I had managed to glance at my reflexion. A high forehead. A straight, unbroken nose. The lips were somewhat thin; a trait always associated with stubbornness. Also, the lower jaw was quite masculine, but without being too much like that of a caveman. The hair was rather fair. The eyes were intelligent, and possibly blue, although I didn't have time to examine them.

“Well, I don’t need to worry about being stupid,” I thought, relieved. “But... why can’t I remember anything?”

Climbing out onto the bank, I lay face down on the grass. If it wasn’t for the hunger which my stomach was beginning to notice, it would all have been quite pleasant, warm and comfortable, as the tall grass even sheltered my back from the wind...

I fell asleep.

I woke up towards evening, not because it had turned cold, but because someone was poking me in the side with a hard object.

I opened my eyes and lifted up my head. A man was standing in front of me, dressed in leather clothing with metal plates, probably bronze, fastened to it. He was holding a spear. It was the blunt end of that same spear which he had used to wake me up by jabbing me in the side.

“Get up, stark-naked wretch,” he said in some strange-sounding language, although I understood him. “What are you hiding here for?”

I got up and looked around. There was another man standing nearby, wearing the same outfit. He was turning my only item of clothing around in his hands.

“Hey!” I protested. “That’s mine.”

“It *was* yours, but now it’s ours.”

The second man smiled spitefully and slung my sleeved sack over his left arm.

“What else have you got?” the first man asked.

“Nothing,” I admitted honestly.

“That can’t be true. You must have been hiding something under your body while you were sleeping,” said the other.

“Anyway, get out of here!” the first man ordered, and he almost prodded me in the belly with the sharp end of his spear.

I took two steps to the side and begged, “Guys, please give me my clothes.”

“Give us some money and you can buy it back,” said the second man.

“I don’t have any money.”

“No, you really *weren’t* hiding anything,” commented the first man when he had finished inspecting the place where I had been lying.

He grabbed my rope belt which had been hanging on a branch, threw it to his companion, and came back out of the grass.

“No money and no clothes,” the other man stated. Then he added, “Clear off, while you’re still alive.”

“But I’m naked. How can I walk around like this?” I objected.

“You can walk around naked or die, as you wish.”

“Or die whilst naked,” snorted the other man.

The first man pointed his spear at me, the sharp, metal point towards me and jabbing quite eloquently in my direction.

The tip of the spear was at least two metres away from me. That meant there was no way I could grab the weapon and throw it away. But I wasn’t prepared to walk about naked. Where was my stick? I glanced around and spotted the thin end sticking out of the grass in the place where I had dropped it when I arrived.

However, it was in an awkward place to my left, almost under the feet of one of the men. If I jumped and caught hold of it with my left hand, then I wouldn’t be able to pick it up, because the other man would hit me with his spear. If I snatched the end of it with my right hand, though, and then my left, I would be able to flip it over quickly and swat the spear onto the ground, or even break it. While I was doing that, though, the man holding the spear might be able to run me through with it. So, my first task was to swipe the spear away to the side, so that I wouldn’t have to swat it onto the ground. Meanwhile, pushing it upwards would mean turning the stick anticlockwise. Then I would be able to swing out, and on the way back up he would be hit on the ear with the thick end of the stick. He should fall. The other man hadn’t pulled out a weapon, but he could do. I needed to hit him on the forehead with the other end of the stick. He had to be behind me because I would need to take a couple of steps forwards to hit the first man. The only thing that was bothering me was whether I would be able to do it. If I knew what to do in theory, then I probably could do it in practice as well. What other option was there? Either I could carry on walking stark naked, or I could try to fend off these guys. I needed to disarm them and, more importantly, find out where I was.

“Well, there it is!!! That means I know how to handle this club. But something’s not right about all this. It doesn’t seem real.”

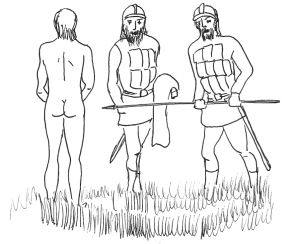
Everything went the way I had imagined, but it was very brutal, and I hadn't planned to kill them at all. Apparently, I didn't know my own strength. The first man received such a powerful blow that he fell down at once, his head in the water and, after twitching a couple of times, stopped moving. I hit the other man in his right eye and smashed his skull. He lay down and wheezed for a couple of minutes.

I took my clothes from him and put them on.

"How could I have been so stupid? There were two whole men here. I could have asked them questions and found out what I wanted to know, but now they're gone, and where can I find anyone else?"

## Chapter two.

### **My first encounter with clothes and a weapon**



Suddenly, the gentle breeze brought a most delicious smell of cooked meat from somewhere. It teased my nose, and my stomach responded, saying, “Let’s eat!”.

There was neither fire nor smoke anywhere to be seen, but perhaps the darkness was making it hard to see. I would have to use my sense of smell to find it. That turned out to be quite difficult, since the aroma disappeared straight away. So where should I look? I would have to wait until another gust of wind came along, so that I could work out which direction it was coming from. It was blowing along the shore of the lake. About fifty metres away, in a small hollow by the water’s edge, there was a fireplace made from piled up stones. My goodness, what an interesting stone construction it was! It was even covered on the top, and had a small chimney, about a metre tall, hidden between two large stones. With a stove like that, it would be possible to cook at night without anyone seeing the fire. It would need dry wood, though, so that there was no smoke.

In the middle of the stones, there stood a copper pot, inevitably coated with a thick layer of soot and covered with a thick, roughly hewn wooden lid. Something was simmering in the pot over a low flame.

On the very edge of the stove lay two wooden spoons.

At the side, there was the skin of a hare. Also, at the far end of the hollow, there was a small grotto, whose entrance was protected by bushes and covered with a canopy of branches. However, the entrance was exposed at that moment, which was why I spotted it. At its highest point, the grotto stretched to two metres, its width was about the same, and it was maybe three metres long, possibly a little more. Inside, there happened to be a lot of men’s clothing, both leather and cloth, along with women’s dresses. There were tall boots as well as slipper-like footwear. It also contained a whole stock of military ammunition.

Weapons, shields and swords, both large and small, were stored in there, as well. Two powerful crossbows were accompanied by a multitude of arrows. There was a large longbow and a quiver, also full of arrows. And a saddle for a horse. Plus, there was also a mountain of crockery and pieces of metal for some unknown purpose.

After washing one of the spoons thoroughly in the lake, I scooped out some of the contents of the pot. It was edible, but lacking salt, although some seasoning had been added: there was definitely garlic, and perhaps a few herbs. Still, I had something to eat, so I could assuage my hunger. Actually, the hare meat was rather chewy, and perhaps should have been cooked for longer, but I had no desire to wait, so I ate the lot.

Having regained my strength, I set about wondering what I should do next. I pulled up some grass to make a comfortable place to sit. However, darkness had fallen, and it was so comfortable next to the stove. The scent of freshly cut grass began to waft up. I no longer felt like thinking, and I fell asleep.

I was woken by the cold morning air and the pre-dawn dew that had settled. The first thing I needed to do was to bury these two poor fellows. Or perhaps I should start by seeing whether any of their clothes fit me. Or... In short, I needed something more suitable to wear. It was possible, though, that the insects I hadn't been able to identify might live in all these clothes. Still, nothing had bitten me in the night, which meant that washing with water and then drying out in the sunshine had got rid of the creatures.

I spent most of the day organising my new outfit. I picked out some clothes that were the right size. They seemed strange, somehow. But what would they have looked like if they weren't strange? I tried to remember, but I couldn't recall anything. I only liked the boots at first; they were made of a soft leather, and long-legged, reaching almost to my knees, with drawstrings on the inside. The soles were formed from several layers of thick leather. They were a little tight, but the long, pointed shape and the soft leather suggested that they would quickly mould themselves to fit my feet. The shirt was fine, but I couldn't find any pants. What did these people wear on their legs?



I examined the dead men and noticed that they were both wearing some kind of leather stockings. I found similar items in their store, but there was little choice: either tight fabric ones or a wider leather version. I selected the brown leather stockings. Apparently, they

fastened at the top with six laces. Then I found a jerkin, which was also brown, with holes for laces. However, it must be said, I didn't look particularly decent in this outfit. My backside was bare and from the front... it was quite a sight! I just needed... There was something at the back of my mind, but I just couldn't figure it out. No matter how hard I tried, I could not remember who might have worn such an item of clothing.

I had to find something to wear under my trousers, like underpants. But there was no sign of anything of that sort here. I would have to undress one of the dead men. I was surprised to find that, as I unbuttoned his stocking-like trouser legs, I immediately realised what kind of underwear they wore, as if I had worn it before, myself. How strange...

I found some off-white underwear. Then I spotted a long, black cloth jacket which would cover up the place where my white underwear was visible between the brown trouser legs. It fastened at the front with ten tiny buttons. I soaked all the clothes in the lake for an hour, then hung them out to dry.

It didn't take too much effort to bury the two robbers: I was convinced that they were, indeed, robbers. I had found a metal pickaxe in their store. With the help of the pickaxe and a small shield which I used as a shovel, I managed to dig a hole quite quickly in a sandy spot where no grass was growing.

Apparently, the robbers had a little money: twenty-six coins of different denominations, but probably only one of them was silver. I had no idea whether the money was worth a lot or not much at all.

I felt fine. My head had stopped hurting. As long as I didn't touch it, the bump on my forehead didn't make itself known. The only thing that irritated me was that I hadn't been able to light the fire, so I had been forced to eat the hare stew cold.

The next morning, I woke up at sunrise once more, again as a result of the cold dew all over my face.

"Yes," I thought, "If I'm going to have to sleep outside, then I will need to find enough material to make some kind of canopy."

Today I needed to familiarise myself with my weapon and try to travel further. There must be people somewhere, and maybe even lots of them if I could find some kind of settlement. If nothing else, I needed to find food supplies.



What was more, it wouldn't hurt to find out some information about where I was, what year it was, and who was in charge in this part of the world, whether it was some duke or maybe a king. All I knew at that moment was that I was probably in my native France, because I had understood what the locals were saying, and could communicate with them in French. Or was it the Provençal dialect? I thought about that for what might have been about half an hour, but everything in my head was so mixed up that I probably needed someone else to help me unravel it all. What if I could speak both languages?

Strangely, when I picked up the crossbow, I knew straight away how to prepare it, aim and fire. It was as if I had used one many times before. The nearest tree was about ten metres away from me. After loading and firing two arrows at the tree from each crossbow, I was even more convinced of this puzzling notion. I fired the first arrow, simply aiming to hit the tree, but then I attempted to hit the first one with the other three, and they all lodged themselves into the tree no further than a centimetre away from the first. I left them there in case they came in handy. To hang something on, perhaps.

Of the ten swords, I preferred one which was rather light and reasonably long. There were several which were fairly similar to each other. After waving a sword a couple of times, I could say with great certainty that I was well-versed in how to handle one. That was strange, too, because I had no recollection of where and when I might have learned such a thing. I also grabbed a small but sharp dagger and slid it straight into my right boot.

There were two crossbows, twenty or so arrows, and a sword. I loaded myself up with all of them. The sword was appropriately fastened onto my wide belt on my left side. There was a simple metal clasp for this on the belt-strap.

"That is much better than the wooden scabbard that was also in the store," I resolved. "In the event of a fight, the scabbard would be rather problematic."

The crossbows, meanwhile, had to be hung by their leather strings on either side of me. It was quite cumbersome. Most importantly, I wouldn't be able to swing the sword with the crossbows under my armpits. Then it occurred to me that the crossbow was not a

defensive weapon, but an attacking one. I could defend myself with the sword. That meant I did not need the crossbows for the moment. I shoved them into my sack-like robe, making it into an ordinary sack, and slinging it over my shoulder, I set off on my way.

It was past midday, and my stomach had already begun its tiresome song about it being time to eat.

After walking five or six kilometres at a brisk pace, I was drenched with sweat because of all the clothes I was wearing, as well as the baking-hot sun. Moreover, my boots were bothering me. My feet weren't sore, but I couldn't get used to the long socks which kept falling down. I had to walk on my heels, with my feet turned outwards.

There was an open field ahead, so I decided to have a rest.

I climbed a small hill to shelter under some trees. Dropping the sack, I sat on the edge of it and began to examine my surroundings.

There was a forest to the right. To the left there was a large, uneven field, overgrown with tall grass. The mounds and ruts in the field looked like waves on the sea, except for the fact that, far away on the horizon, there were more trees. There was no settlement of any kind to be seen. The green of the field was intersected by the narrow, grey ribbon of a road winding between the hills. No-one was walking or riding along it.

Down below, at the bottom of the hill I had climbed, there was a ravine, through which a stream flowed. From the path, I hadn't noticed the stream. At first, I thought I should go down there and quench my thirst. Then another thought occurred to me, and I began to examine the ravine and the path leading alongside it more closely.

"It would certainly be an ideal place to ambush a wagon!"

The road was narrow. On one side there was a hill and boulders along the edge of the road, making it impossible to go around the hill, while the other side featured a ravine and no road. To stop a wagon, I would only need to block the road, with a fallen tree perhaps.

"But I'm not a robber, so why would I attack peaceful citizens? On the other hand, how else would I be able to talk to the local people? If I don't stop them, but just wave at them, they will try to drive past as quickly as possible. I could, of course, sit at the side of the road and call out with my arms outstretched, "Please give a poor man a piece of information!!!" That would be even more ridiculous. So, that's decided,

I won't attack, and I won't beg. All I need to do is talk. Who would I need to stop? Best of all, of course, would not be a peasant on a cart, but some important gentleman, if he doesn't have too much protection, that is. Otherwise, they wouldn't take any notice of me and would merely trample me with their horses."

I clambered down and found a good position by a large rock which provided an excellent hiding place. Now I needed to drag a tree over, stand it upright, as if it was growing there, and, when a carriage approached, block the road by pushing the tree over.

Very near the ravine, I found a suitable, small deciduous tree which I could lift. I hacked at its trunk with my sword so that I could quickly break it when I needed to. I drank some water from the stream and climbed back up the hill.

Just in case, I decided to load up both crossbows. So, I did. I would block the road, then pop up from behind the rock, with both crossbows pointing upwards. By doing that, I would be demonstrating my peaceful intentions. Then I would probably need to slowly lower the crossbows onto the ground, and only after that would I begin to speak.

However, no-one ventured along the road. An hour went by, maybe two. I was beginning to doze off as I leaned against the tree. But then a wagon appeared in the distance. A single horse was pulling it along slowly. Peering, I could even make out a person sitting on it, wearing grey sackcloth and a cap, rather like my first outfit. He seemed to be asleep, or at least drowsy, since he wasn't doing anything at all. The horse was walking of its own accord along a road it probably knew well.

I wondered what a simple, most likely illiterate peasant might be able to tell me. At that moment, though, my stomach rumbled as my hunger reminded me of its presence. If he was travelling towards some town or village, he might have food, and I could buy something from him. I did have money, after all. On the other hand, if he was travelling from a town or village, he might not be transporting food, and might be coming back this way having sold his wares and acquired all sorts of other things, but not food.

The wagon was already quite near, but I still hadn't decided whether to stop it or not.

“I won’t,” I decided firmly, and stopped watching it. Soon, the creaking of its wheels faded into the distance.

Judging by the position of the sun, it was already six o’clock in the evening. It would start to grow dark in three or four hours. Therefore, after another hour, or an hour and a half at the most, there would no longer be any point in waiting. I didn’t think anyone would want to travel through the forest in the dark. I would have to go without information and lunch for today.

There was, however, plenty of wildlife in the area. While I was sitting quietly, I saw a hare leap out from the bushes at the edge of the forest, grab something, and then disappear off into the bushes again. Then, a rather large bird landed literally ten metres from me and strutted around importantly for about five minutes. I could have shot it, but somehow I didn’t feel like eating raw meat.

If only I knew how to light a fire. But I didn’t, which was strange: if the local people knew how to do it, why didn’t I? Apparently, I had forgotten. There were some odd gaps in my memory. From the moment I picked up the crossbow, I had known how to use it, and I had handled the sword skilfully as soon as I found it.

“That must mean I have never held a tool for lighting a fire!” I thought, encouraged. “If no-one else comes, I’ll go back and have a good look, and even dig up the dead bodies if I have to. I absolutely have to get that tool from them!”

First, I saw dust in the distance, swirling up from the road, and then I spotted a carriage with a pair of horses harnessed to it. The carriage was moving fairly swiftly, which is why it was stirring up so much dust. Two men sat at the front, one of whom must have been the driver, and the other probably a servant. Also, something was moving behind the carriage... Ah, it was rider. If there was one rider, that was not so bad, but what if there was a whole group of them?

The carriage was rapidly approaching, so I needed to run down if I wanted to block the road in front of it. I couldn’t make my mind up, though, since I hadn’t seen how many riders were following the first one. Eventually, at a bend in the road, either the wind blew the dust away, or simply because of the bend itself, I got a clear view of the carriage and a single rider accompanying it.

I raced down, placed the crossbows by the stone I had earmarked, on top of my sack. I snapped the tree trunk, hauled it onto my shoulder and climbed the steep slope to the road; with some difficulty, it must be said. I even thought I might not make it. Nevertheless, I succeeded before the carriage had even come into sight. I hid behind the rock, holding onto the tree with both hands.

“If it was windy, I wouldn’t be able to keep it steady,” I thought, and it also occurred to me that my imagination had led me to believe I would have no difficulty trying to communicate. “A lady must be travelling in the carriage, and it is probably her beloved accompanying her on horseback. If the lady is wearing a dress with a wide skirt, there won’t be any room for the servant inside, which is why he is sitting up above next to the driver.”

## Chapter three

### An unforeseen encounter



After that, everything happened so quickly that, regardless of how I had planned it, I couldn't help events turning out the way they did.

I dropped the tree onto the ground. The horses neighed and stopped. I leapt out from behind the rock, the two crossbows pointing upwards. I managed to take two steps to the side, then crouched to put the crossbows down. At that moment, a shot rang out, and a bullet whistled above me. The horses took fright and rushed towards the ravine, as there was nowhere else for them to go. The carriage tipped and was probably just about to topple over. However, I didn't have chance watch it. A man with a sword was rushing towards me: the same man who had been sitting next to the driver and who I had assumed was a servant. He swiftly changed the direction he was running in, because I had taken a step backwards when I got up and wasn't where I had been a second before. He appeared in front of me, brandishing his sword. I only just managed to stand up fully, holding the two crossbows. But I couldn't aim them and fire at him. The distance between us was too short, and there wasn't enough time. At that moment, he suddenly changed his mind about slicing me with his sword, and lunged forwards. I moved out of the way, and he fell onto the ground. An arrow was sticking out of his back. The rider had fired at me with his crossbow, but he had hit his own man.

"Well, I had been hoping to have a friendly chat with you!"

Now, though, I was able to act. The rider posed a real danger to me, and he had already managed to calm his horse down and pull out his sword. At that moment he was spurring on his horse and galloping towards me. We were only about ten metres apart. I took a shot at him from the crossbow in my right hand, because I was standing with him on my right. He saw me lift the crossbow and he deftly held out a small

round shield, rather like the one I had used to dig a grave for the two robbers. My arrow was already in the air, and would probably not reach its target, so I fired one slightly higher from the second crossbow. As far as I could see, both arrows hit the shield. However, either the shield wasn't sufficient to stop my arrows, or one of the arrows hadn't actually hit it, because the rider instantly flew out of the saddle and dropped onto the ground with a thud.

To my left there was a sound of wood snapping, and out of the corner of my eye I saw the roof of the carriage race past then disappear into the ravine.

I was left on the empty road with four sword-wielding men.

"Well," I thought, "where did you come from? I was hoping to meet the beautiful woman who had been travelling in the carriage. Instead, here is a whole bunch of armed cutthroats."

For the moment, though, I only had three opponents. The fourth, who was apparently their leader, did not have his sword and was arming himself with a harquebus. I tossed the crossbows into my sack behind the rock.

I clearly understood that fighting an opponent who had a two-handed sword like the ones these guys had, was no joke. I may already have known this for a long time, though. Given its weight, which was over five kilograms, this kind of sword could not only chop off an arm or a leg, but it could slice a whole person in half. Therefore, it would be absolutely stupid to attempt to fend off these blades with my light sword.

Generally speaking, a real fight involving sharp weapons is very dangerous. All you need to do is yawn, and you're dead. Only in films do people wave their swords around with great flourishes for five minutes at a time... How did I know that? And what did this word 'film' mean?

"Well this isn't going too well. If only you guys had light swords like mine, and I had one like yours!!! What would I do then?" I marked time, flexing my arms and legs. For some strange reason, after these gentle stretches, I was able to declare confidently that I could chase all three of them, and maybe the fourth, down the road. Also, which was exceedingly strange, even now, I was no longer afraid that I only had a light sword, and I began to think quickly.

The fact that they all had two-handed swords was good. If they had a variety of swords, it would have been worse. All I needed to do was play on the weapon's drawbacks. And there were plenty of those. If the opponent dealt a blow with a sword like that, he would find it very difficult alter the original direction of the thrust. There was no arguing with that kind of weapon, whilst attempting to parry or fend off a blow. In the worst case, you could block with your own weapon, in order to somehow alter the direction of the impact. But the best course of action was to avoid being hit at all. Fighting this kind of opponent meant moving constantly so that he couldn't reach you. It involved leaping about and waiting until you had access to an unprotected area. These guys were, of course, well protected. They were wearing chain mail on their bodies, topped with metal plates, and they wore helmets on their heads. Only the face was uncovered. However, any person will shield his face as a matter of priority. That left just the arms and legs. Even with ten plates of armour on their arms, I could still break their bones with my sword. But how could I get to them? Their leather leg coverings were reinforced with plates of a thicker hide. I could get them in the side, though. Now I had no doubt that, with my light sword, I was more agile, and could strike more quickly from different angles. Plus, I was firmly resolved not to run away, even though I had initially wanted to when I first set eyes on the three of them.

"Come on then, guys. Advance one at a time, please, and let's see who is in charge here!" I challenged them, drawing my sword and stepping forwards so that I had a couple of metres behind me, before the fallen tree, in case I needed to step back.

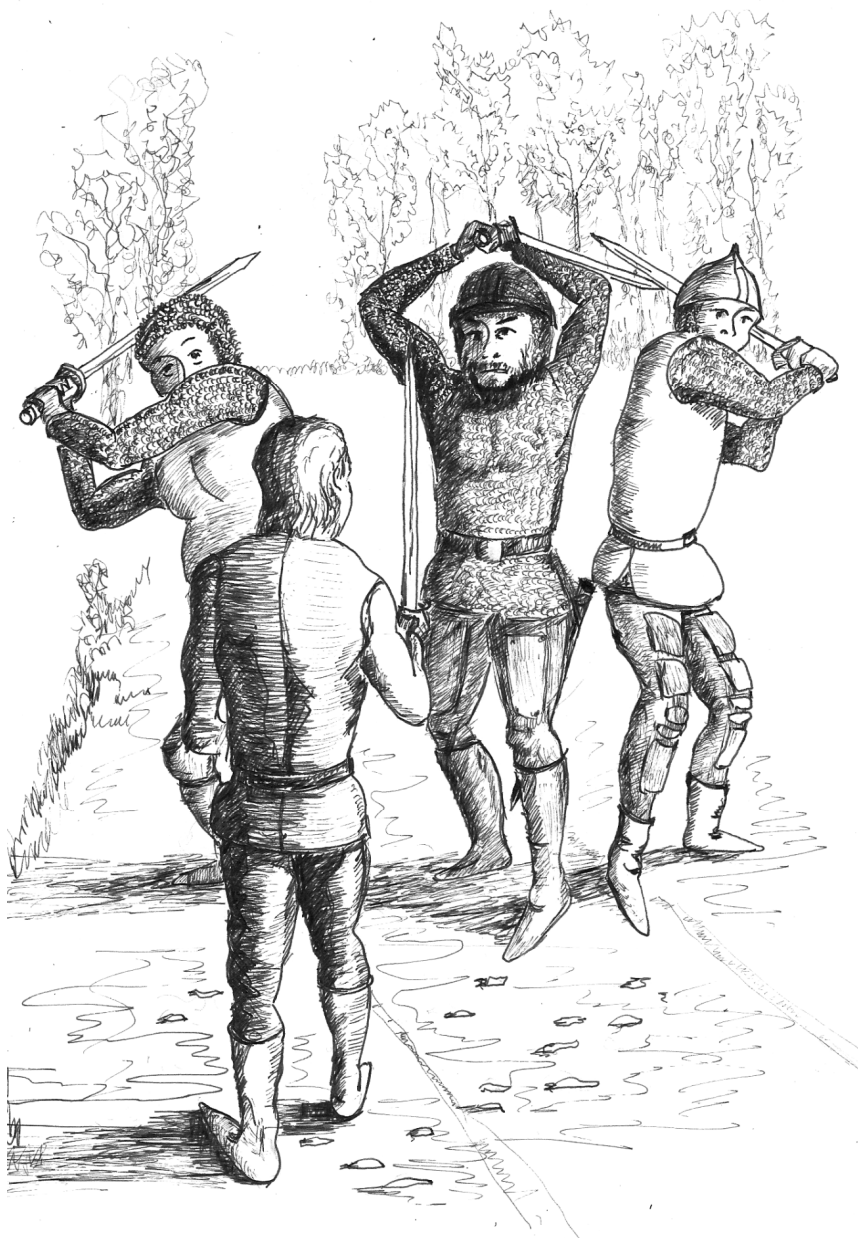
I wasn't in a bad position. On my right was a large boulder. Next to it, lay their companion. They wouldn't trample on their own man. To the left and behind me was a tree with long branches which stretched out close to me. That would make it very difficult for them to reach me.

Holding my sword in my right hand, I raised it above my head. All three of them smiled. Clearly, I was an absolute idiot in their eyes, for trying to fight three men with heavy swords.

Nevertheless, they were not prepared to fight me individually. Together, they rushed three metres forwards, until they were just two metres away from me. They brandished their two-handed swords in a downwards swipe, and resolved to split me into quarters. The man in the middle would slice from the head downwards. The one on his right



would cut inwards from my left shoulder. Then, their companion on the left would start from my right shoulder.



If I had remained standing there, no doctor would have been able to put me back together a moment later. I was in an awkward situation: all three swords would hit me at once, while just one would be sufficient to kill me. They would advance and strike, even if I leapt one metre backwards, as two metres would be impossible. Therefore, I needed to make a bluff move, allowing me to turn and jump further away. Their next blow would not be quite so coordinated, and one of them might be slightly delayed or early, enabling me to attack him.

They had already begun to move forwards. I slashed the air with my sword, right in front of them, then turned around, sprang away, and immediately spun back to face them. My apparently harmless action seemed to have taken them completely by surprise. But, even if I stepped forwards and hit one of them with my sword, what good would that do me? At best, I would scratch the armour on one of them. However, they were all intimidated, so they didn't advance and wield their swords, but instead froze like statues.

"That's good," I realised, "because I've disrupted their coordination which was very dangerous for me." At the same moment, I returned to my original position in two bounds, and waved my sword, clearly displaying my intention to attack.

The first to react was the man on my right, and he moved towards me, his sword swinging into action. The one in the middle was slower on the uptake, but I spotted him out of the corner of my eye and dodged the sword of the man on the right, springing to the right and forwards. I immediately struck him on the left leg with my sword, hitting just below the knee, on the side of the leg. I didn't know whether I had broken the leg, but I had probably injured him. I hadn't seen which direction their swords were travelling in, and I only heard the clash of metal on metal. At that moment, I leapt up and spun around from left to right, turning two hundred and seventy degrees. The first of my opponents began to fall. Clutching my sword with both hands, I stabbed as hard as I could in the place where the arms of the man in the middle ought to have been. However, he had managed to shift his position, and the point of my sword missed his arms and hit his sword on the blade, near the hilt. At that moment in time, the sword was horizontal to the ground. The blow from my sword, plus the entire mass of my opponent's sword, from hilt to blade, which acted as a counterweight, hit him on the hands. At that moment in time, the sword

was horizontal to the ground. Such a blow made it impossible to keep hold of the sword. As was to be expected, the sword fell. I swiped again over my left shoulder. I was hoping to hit the last man, the third of my attackers, but he managed to jump back. Meanwhile, the second man, who turned out to be quite nimble, appeared half a metre away, a shining steel blade in his hand, and he wielded his dagger, intending to strike me from above. Since his hand had been weakened by my attack, I didn't think the weapon posed much of a threat to me. Nevertheless, I didn't want to put that theory to the test. The sword in my hands was pointing away from him. I had no option but to hit him in the face with the handle. I struck him, apparently, on the nose. There was a crunch of breaking bones, and my opponent fell.

At that moment, I felt something tap me gently on the right thigh.

“What the devil?!”

The first man was now sitting on the ground and trying to jab at me with his sword. If I hadn't taken half a step as I hit the second man in the face, I would have received the full force of the blow on my leg. Now the first man was attempting to swing his sword in a horizontal movement to hit me on the legs. If he had done this the first time, I would be on my knees at best by this point.

“Wow, he's a good solidier, still trying to fight when he's wounded and sitting on the ground. But why have you taken your helmet off and exposed your neck, my friend?”

There was nothing left to do but cut off his head, since I wasn't so sure I would be able to move far enough away to avoid being slashed on the legs by his sword.

The third man moved three or so metres away. I glanced in the direction of their leader who, a minute ago, had been trying to load his harquebus. Things wouldn't go too well for me if he succeeded in completing his preparations.

My worries turned out to be unfounded, though. The guy with the harquebus was standing open-mouthed in amazement, having completely forgotten that he needed to load his weapon.

“Drop it!” I said threateningly, walking towards him with my sword held out in front of me. I was still five metres or so away, and my actions posed no real threat. But they did have the desired effect.

He dropped his pistol-like weapon on the ground and shouted a short, strange word that didn't resemble anything I recognised.

At that moment, the remaining man, armed with a sword, rushed at me with a wild scream: "Aarrgghh!" I quickly figured out which leg would be in front when he came near to me. That way, I could see how he might attack. He was a robust fellow, but he had been eating rather well of late and his waistline had grown. As a result, his armour didn't fit properly over his large belly.

If I moved forwards suddenly, he wouldn't be able to hit me. It worked. He just swung his sword, revealing his belly, and hurtled onto my sword which ran through him in an upwards direction. My opponent gasped and slumped onto his knees.

Straight after that, I heard the sound of hooves. I glanced round and spotted their leader, his body flattened against the back of the horse, heading off in the direction he had come from.

If my crossbow had been loaded, I could have attempted to fire an arrow at him, but the primitive weapon was not yet prepped...

The first man was headless, so I couldn't ask him how he was feeling. The second was also lying completely still, having apparently died straight away. The third man was still wheezing, but he wouldn't live much longer, so it was pointless asking questions. The horse-rider was lying on his back without moving, covered by his shield. The first of the attackers, over by the boulder, also showed no signs of life.

"Not again, damn it! I wanted information and all I have is dead bodies. If it carries on like this, I'll never find anything out!"

There had been another man with them, driving the carriage. I needed to check whether he had run away, in case I could get some information from him. I walked over to the ravine.

At first glance, the carriage didn't seem damaged. It had rolled down about five metres and was hanging with its front wheels caught in the branches of a tall tree. The back wheels, though, were still on the ground. The horses were also unhurt, and calmly munching the juicy grass by the water's edge. The driver had not been so lucky, though. Unlike the others, he hadn't jumped out, and was now dangling, his chest impaled on a broken branch.

"Well, it's worth taking a look to see what he was guarding so desperately."

The carriage door was open, and I peered in. No-one was inside. There was only a rather large trunk in the middle. I attempted to pull it by its brass handle and realised that it was extremely heavy. However, I really didn't want to climb into the carriage, because the front part could slip away from the branch at any moment.

Eventually, I succeeded in dragging the trunk to the edge. "Let it fall," I thought. "If there's anything breakable in there, it will already be broken." The trunk fell onto its side and opened straight away.

"Apparently falling has its advantages," I thought, noticing the ingenious lock with which the trunk had no doubt been fastened. I didn't need to break the lock or look for a key.

On the top, lying on red cloth, was a letter rolled up into a tube. A thick, red string was tied around it and attached to the paper with a wax seal.

"I'll deal with that later," I thought, and set the letter aside. Lifting up the red cloth, I discovered twenty or so black bags tied with the same red string, and on each sack, or rather on each red string, there was a tag with numbers and letters.

What might this mean?

Cutting the tightly wound string on one of the bags with my dagger, I glanced inside and found coins, clearly made of gold.

"Oh, my goodness! I've spoiled someone's party. And that someone must surely be a very important person. What should I do?"

Should I hide the money as quickly as possible, and then get out of there? But where would I go? It might be better to play stupid and pretend I had seen nothing and had no idea about the money. After that, I would just need to quietly pull the carriage free and ride somewhere in it, without any gold in my pocket, of course.

I glanced around quickly and found a spot that would make a perfect hiding place. Some tree roots stretched out over the ground, and it would be quite easy to dig a hole under them, deep enough to hide the gold. So that is what I did. I used a cloak I had found in the carriage to carefully bundle up the soil I had removed. Then I took the earth away and shook it into the stream in order to leave the least possible trace of what I had done. In less than an hour, it was all ready. I transferred all the bags of money across. I broke the seal on the letter. It was not written in my native language, but in some different tongue, although I

understood it, despite the ridiculous, decorative monograms that made it more difficult. “Dear Cardinal, please find herewith the agreed sum as well as a personage whom you may trust completely.....” I read. Well, I could read it in more detail later. I unrolled the whole letter. It appeared to be some kind of delivery note with towns, names, amounts and a grand total of fifteen thousand one hundred and sixty-five livres. The red cloth that had covered the bags might come in handy, so I wrapped the letter in it and hid it in the hiding place. Even if the leader had gone to get help, he wouldn’t find anything now. If I was caught and tortured, of course, I would probably have to confess.

Another trunk was fastened between the back wheels, so I opened it. There was a pile of clothes inside. Amongst the clothes, I also found a little food: six bread rolls neatly wrapped in paper with a sweet filling which tasted familiar, but I couldn’t remember what exactly it was. To the great delight of my hungry stomach, I devoured the rolls and washed them down with cold water from the stream.

I kicked the trunk that had been in the carriage back inside, but first I stuffed all the clothes into it.

Now I needed to move the bodies out of the way so that I could take care of the carriage. I dragged all five of them into the ravine so they couldn’t be seen from the road.

I needed to pull the carriage back, but the shafts were not there. Perhaps I could pull it out by holding on to the edges. But how could I harness them up? Luckily, this carriage had wooden wheel arches which evidently served as shock absorbers. The main part of the carriage was attached to these with thick leather straps. The wheel arches, I supposed, must be flexible, like a longbow, thereby softening the jolts on the inside. I couldn’t attach the harness to the centre, as that was where the trunk was fitted. So, the right wheel arch would be best.

Again, strange as it may seem, I knew how to handle the horses. I unharnessed them, led them back, and then harnessed them once more. However, they couldn’t pull the carriage off the tree.

“Oh! They’re more likely to snap their traces,” I thought.

I really didn’t want to, but I had to cut off the branch. I grabbed my sword and began to hack at the wood. It made me sweat because the sword was no axe, so I had to be careful chopping wood with it, otherwise my hands would be hurt in the same way as my second

opponent had been injured earlier, and I wouldn't be able to carry on working for at least an hour.

Eventually the carriage was standing on all four wheels, and the horses were able to pull it out onto the road. Only the driver was left hanging on the tree. After a moment's reflection, I decided to take him down, even though I really didn't want to climb the tree and cut another branch.

It was beginning to grow dark when I dragged the driver's body onto the road.

"What am I going to do with all these bodies?" I wondered. "The best option would be to bury them. That would require a more suitable place, ideally further from the road, because I will have to dig a big hole and I won't be able to do that quickly. It will be completely dark soon, and I'm pretty tired. But if I don't do it today, someone might come tomorrow and see..."

Somewhere not far away, from over where the carriage had appeared, a horse whinnied. One of the horses near me gave an answering neigh, presumably in some kind of greeting.

"Well, you've had it," I thought. "That's probably their leader coming back with reinforcements."

"Hi," someone said, from very nearby. I spun around at the sound of the voice and grabbed the hilt of my sword.

In front of me, about three metres away, stood three men in grey sackcloth, with hoods on their heads. Two of them were holding short swords, while the third was armed with a crossbow aimed directly at my chest.

"These can't possibly be the reinforcements the leader galloped off to get," I thought. "More likely, they're former peasants who have got hold of some weapons and become highway bandits."

"Judging by your clothes," the man with the crossbow went on, "there were two of you against five mercenaries. They're tough blokes," he said, with a hint of admiration in his voice. "How did you manage to beat them?"

"He wasn't with me," I replied, nodding my head in the direction of the driver. "He was driving that carriage."

"You're lying," the man who was standing on the left said in a hoarse voice. "Why were you dragging him over here?"

“They need to be buried, but digging a separate hole for each of them would be too big a job. Especially at the roadside, so I thought I’d take them further into the woods.”

“That’s true,” the crossbowman said, then added with obvious mistrust, “but are you trying to say that you gave five mercenaries and a driver a good hiding all by yourself?”

“No, of course I’m not trying to say that, because I didn’t. The driver died without my help. One of them was accidentally shot by his own people. I did manage to fight the others, somehow...” In an attempt to be more convincing, I flung my arms out to the sides to show that I had no idea how that might have come about.

“He’s lying,” said the man with the hoarse voice. “There must be some kind of sorcery going on. He might be a sorcerer himself; we should give him the once-over.”

The interrogation was starting to bother me. Moreover, if they did accuse me of sorcery, the talking would go on all night.

“So, you want to know about my sorcery, do you?” I retorted irritably, drawing my sword. “Come here, and I’ll show you.”

Fighting the three peasants would be easy, but then there was the crossbow. It could only fire one shot, though, so I would just have to dodge it once, and then I would sort them out...

Something very heavy hit me from behind, on the back of my head, and I lost consciousness.



## **Synopsis.**

The hero woke up in medieval France, but due to hitting his head on a stump, he temporarily lost his memory. He does not remember who he is, where he is and why. Everything is new and incomprehensible to him.

The hero meets a local resident and unexpectedly receives the first clothes. Robbers attack him, the hero fights with them, wins, gets clothes, weapons and food.

In an attempt to get at least some information, he stops the carriage. But in this carriage there are armed people who attack the hero. He, surprised by his own skills, wins the battle.

By coincidence, there is a large amount of money in the carriage. The hero hides money by digging a hole.

In the evening, the hero is attacked by three armed peasants and some man strikes the hero on the head, depriving him of consciousness. However, thanks to this blow, the memory returns to the hero.

The next morning he wakes up and remembers who he is and for what purpose he came there. He is Jack Manu and his mission is to save humanity.

Peasant robbers come up with an original plan on how to start robbery throughout France and offer Jack to enter his service. Jack refuses. Then the robbers offer to go to the service of Jack if he teaches them how to fight. Jack accepts the offer. Now Jack will travel under an assumed name - Baron Donovan De Manu. The rest will become his servants: treasurer, guard and page.

This small group is heading north to the city of Mand.

In the morning, near the city, they are attacked by a group of peasants who have decided to engage in robbery. Baron de Manu and his assistants successfully cope with the attack.

Jack realizes that in order to fulfill his mission, he must assimilate into the local medieval society, but without the money in the first place, his plan is unworkable.

Therefore, in the town of Mand, having met Banneret Zhope de Kalenu, Jack finds out what interests him and decides on an adventure. Zhope de Kalenu wants to destroy his competitor, who has a whole village of craftsmen who sew military clothes and prepare, for shipment, a large batch of these clothes.

Jack proposes to destroy the village and the shipment of ready-made clothes. Banneret is delighted and agrees to the proposal.

Through simple combinations, Jack manages to organize the complex business of robbing a large and greedy manufacturer. He receives the whole batch of goods and helps to escape from the village all the workers, their wives and children, who are kept there as slaves. Some of them sail in boats, and some must go on land. The Baron promises to take care of them.

Quite unexpectedly, he and his comrades are faced with the insidious treachery of the owner of the inn, in which they have to temporarily stay. Together with his accomplices, he planned to kill and rob them. The plot is uncovered and the perpetrators punished. Meanwhile, the inn holds many surprises: They find five corpses, as well as a lot of hidden money and jewelry of the unfortunate victims who, to their misfortune, stopped here.

The only survivor, a young woman, has a severe cold and is literally dying. The Baron decides to treat her by building a bathhouse, makes everyone work, and does not sleep himself until morning. By morning, the woman herself, naked, jumps out of the bathhouse.

So much effort to save the life of a stranger - this act amazes all workers.

For a while, the Baron manages to use the inn to his advantage.

But, the artisans who came to him are declared state criminals and a reward is appointed for their heads.

But the greatest danger, for everyone, is the head of the artisans, for whose head a very large reward has been assigned. The Baron meets the mother of Jean, a cook boy who works for him. She is a very beautiful Italian woman with hypnosis. The baron sends the head of the artisans to Italy, accompanied by an Italian woman, whom he asks to return.

Unexpectedly, the Baron learns that the suspicion of the local authorities, in the loss of military uniforms, falls on Baneret, who is arrested, but so far he has not been tortured.

Need to leave urgently. The artisans and their wives put on military clothes and they all leave together. But, people who do not know how to walk in formation, even in military clothes, are still not military. And, if they learn to walk in formation, then any officer, having met with them, may demand an explanation of who they are and

where they are going. If you don't know any names, you can't explain. Therefore, you can only go at night, when no one is driving, along the roads.

We decided to go to Toulouse. The baron sends Jean to Toulouse, who is now dressed as a page and who has been given a horse. The task is to find an estate that is for sale and find out what they say about the artisans.

In search of a clearing for lodging for the night, the Baron goes ahead and meets with three mercenaries who undertook to guard two women, but killed them and robbed them. The Baron enters into an unequal fight and miraculously wins.

For the first day of hiking in the forests, everyone is very tired, but it starts to rain. The baron asks people to rest a little, and at night go along the road so as not to freeze and not get sick.

But the next day, quite a few people were sick. The Baron orders a halt for two days until the sick can walk. Two days later, only one teenage girl had not recovered from her illness. It would be possible to go, but the Baron orders to stay. After that, the attitude of all people changes dramatically. The Baron does not guess anything, but wonders why no one else argues with him.

Only a few days later, the woman acting as a doctor explains to the Baron the essence of what happened. Everyone heard about how the Baron saved a woman, but did not really believe in it. But when, due to the illness of their people, he stopped traffic for two days, and then, because of one girl for another day, no one doubts the phrase that one of the workers said back at the inn. "If our Baron said to do it this way and not otherwise, then there is no need to argue, you need to run and do it exactly as it is said. Because to save your skins, our Baron will do more than any of you would do to save your best friend!"

Before Toulouse itself, six mercenaries decided to attack them. As agreed, the artisans hid in the bushes, thinking that soldiers were coming. The Baron did next to nothing. The artisans and their wives who jumped out cut and tore all the attackers to pieces, and in ten minutes they were again ready to set off.

Jean, in Toulouse, did not find an estate that could be bought and told the bad news - they were looking for craftsmen, so no one would find work here.

But Jean overheard a conversation in which one person promised another to give his dilapidated castle in exchange for some cards.

Jack guesses that these are maps of the path to the New World, compiled by Colombo. Jack sends Jean to follow the man who has the castle. Jean, by this time, is already a good scout and not only finds out everything, but gets to know the Viscount.

The next day, Jean introduced the Baron to Vicomte Gilles. The baron, for a start, intrigued the Viscount, saying that he knew a map of Novaya Zemlya, north of the islands that the Spaniards had found. In addition, he laughed at the Spaniards, who travel a very long way, and you can reach the New Land in just 1000 leagues. Baron came up with a very entertaining story to explain.

But, the main task of the Baron was not a castle, but a title, which was still impossible to buy at that time. Therefore, the Baron came up with an even more entertaining story, why he, a German Baron, needs to become a Frenchman, with some kind of title.

The Viscount, who wants more than anything in the world to get a map of America, agreed to do everything possible to help the Baron become a Frenchman and the castle promised to give for the amount that the Baron offered - two-thirds of the money that the Baron had.

Two days later, Vicomte Gilles fulfills his promise. The Baron can now call himself Vicomte Gerac de la Pierre. This is the name of a cousin of the Viscount, who drowned in the Mediterranean four years ago. And the castle, now rewritten to the new name of the Baron.

The Baron draws a map of North America, then part of Europe and Africa. Explains where Colombo is and how to get to the New World as soon as possible.

Suddenly, the Vicar appears, who, yesterday, helped the Viscount draw up documents and who is aware of all the machinations. The viscount flees from the room, and four warriors from the city guard appear in his place, with swords in their hands. The cunning Vicar is not going to arrest the imaginary Baron at all, he wants to get a lot of money. But the Baron does not know about this, so in a short skirmish he kills four soldiers and a groom who wanted to at least scratch the Baron's face with a pitchfork.

Viscount Gilles surrenders and begs for mercy. The baron, who is now Viscount G rac, promises to spare Gilles' life if he behaves well,

and to begin with, he will introduce all his acquaintances in the city and near the castle, to which they will go tomorrow. Gilles agrees.

The next day they go to the castle. In the evening, Vicomte G rac gathers all his men and proposes to send two scouts to Paris, and maybe further, to pass all the cities along the way, in search of places where they can find work for artisans. He wants to send the second two scouts to Bordeaux, and then up the river Lot, in order to find all those artisans who sailed in boats.

“If your friends are in trouble, you will give them money so that they can get to our castle,” says Viscount Gerac. The artisans are delighted with the noble deed of the Viscount.

Jack Manyu begins to realize that with these people, he can start creating a spy network to find the 12 warriors as soon as they set foot on French soil. Only one problem is where to get the money. Without money, a serious organization cannot be created.

As it turned out, there is no drinking water in the castle and never has been.

Jack began to think and came up with the idea that it could be obtained from sea water, while producing salt, which, in those days, was not much cheaper than gold. Artisans may well make some semblance of a large moonshine still.

- That's where I'll get the money, - Jack was delighted - Now I know how to complete the task.

In addition to the main plot, the novel contains a description of battle scenes with the use of edged weapons.

Jack starts a little love affair with a maid and falls in love with an Italian woman, Jean's cook boy mother, without even realizing it. (They will be married in Milan in the next book.)