

LA VENDETTA DES GADAGNE

“THE VENGEANCE OF THE GUADAGNI”

Written by Father Louis Vignon

Extract from the book being prepared “ Si Charly m’etait conte’ ”
(If I was told the history of Charly)

Published in 1975

Translated in English by Francesco Carloni de Querqui in 2010

PREFACE OF THE TRANSLATOR

Francesco Carloni de Querqui

I translated the following book “La Vendetta des Gadagne” during the Spring and Summer of 2010. It was originally published in 1977. It eventually also became part of the 3rd volume of the 4 volume book “Si Charly m’etait conte’ (“If the history of the town of Charly was told to me”)” by the French writer Father Louis Vignon. Father Vignon tells us how he went about writing the story in his introduction. Copies of it were on sale at the Gadagne Museum in Lyons. The Gadagne were originally from Florence, Italy and were called Guadagni. The French branch of the Family, Gadagne, was extinct in 1923. Descendants of the Italian original branch instead, can be found in Italy, United States, Canada and New Zealand. One of these Guadagni, Adriano, from Florence, Italy, was told by a friend who happened to go and see the Gadagne Museum in Lyons about the booklet written by Father Vignon and its author. Interested by this story of his ancestors Adriano contacted Father Vignon and the two became friends. Vieri Guadagni, Adriano’s cousin, invited Father Vignon to Masseto, a villa close to Florence, owned by the Guadagni family for over 900 years. Father Vignon describes the time spent at Masseto in the last chapter of “Si Charly m’etait conte’”. I plan on translating it soon.

A few years later the construction of an avenue called Avenue Gadagne was started in the town of Saint-Genis-Laval, where the Gadagne had a family castle, close to Charly. Vieri and Adriano Guadagni, as the French Branch of the Gadagne is extinct, were invited to inaugurate the opening of the construction of Avenue Gadagne. Adriano also told Francesco Carloni de Querqui, the translator, whose mother is Isabella Guadagni, cousin of Adriano and Vieri, about Father Vignon and his book on the Gadagne. Francesco is actually working for his cousin Vieri Guadagni the younger, in Denver, Colorado. Vieri the younger sent Francesco to France in 2003, and so Francesco was able to meet Father Vignon in person, in his Parish Rectory of Charly, a year before he died.

Father Vignon was a very nice, witty and charming person and Francesco relished the afternoon spent talking to him on the Gadagne Family and his research about it

Francesco Carloni de Querqui

INTRODUCTION

While I am waiting for the publication of the first two volumes of the history of the town Charly-en-Lyonnais (which I hope to be able to edit in 1977 and that will be of about 500 pages each volume), I am publishing the story of the “Vengeance of the Guadagni”. (Note of the translator: When the Guadagni went to France and settled and prospered there their last name became “Gadagne” and as such it is recorded in this book and I will use the French form from now on. Father Vignon uses the Italian word “Vendetta” instead of the French word vengeance, spelled as the English word “vengeance” probably because the Gadagne were originally from Italy.)

This is not an imaginary novel but a real story of “knights and swords” that is as fascinating as a novel... It illustrates the way of living and the mentality of certain nobles or gentlemen of the first half of the 17th century. They lived like the “musketeers” of the time, with passion, audacity and cruelty...

While I was studying that period of the history of Charly, I noticed that between the years 1611 and 1622 very little was recorded of the everyday life of Claude de Gadagne, at that time lord of Charly. He seemed to be absent for most of the period. Why did the Parish Register of Charly only record signatures of his wife, Eleonore de Colligny, and no mention of Claude or signatures of his on the documents of the Parish?

One day I found the explanation of the enigma in a document concerning the noble rent of the Petit and Grand Privas in the Archives of the Rhone Department (12 G 843). The document mentioned “the combat between Sir Claude de Gadagne and the Lord of Charlus in the year 1611...The aforementioned Claude de Gadagne had been sentenced to death “par deffault de contumax” by the Parliament of Paris in the month of July 1612”...

I looked for more information on the subject in the National Archives of Paris. I was able to find not only the document of the trial and condemnation of Claude de Gadagne (Archives Nationales, Paris, Parlement criminel: X 2A 610 verso) but also all the official papers on the interrogations and confrontations of the accused subjects and of the many witnesses that testified in the Parliament of Nevers, when the trial began in December 1611 (Archives Nationales, Paris, Parlement criminel X 2A 974, 1207 and 1289; X 2B 266 and 1181). I had really found all the information I needed.

From this bunch of 226 handwritten pages I extracted all the details of the story and kept, as faithfully as I could, the ways of speaking, the characteristic expressions, the vocabulary and the style of the people involved in the drama. For the exactitude and the color of the story, these citations from the original documents are printed in **"Rockwell Extra Bold"** characters.

I must admit that all these pages of archives are written in a **"really mean"** calligraphy, i.e. hard to read and understand at first sight. There are also many abbreviations and it discourages its readers fast.

However, the Archives Nationales of Paris were able to use modern technologies of photocopying those handwritten pages and this enabled me to try little by little to understand those mysterious documents...So for two years with a lot of patience I worked at deciphering those handwritten pages. I would never have been able to finish my work without the assistance of Monsieur Rene' Lacour, director of the Archives departementales of the Rhone and Monsieur Henri Hours, archiviste of the city of Lyon. I wish to thank them immensely for it.

A trip to the Region of "Bourbonnais" allowed me to visit the whereabouts of the drama, with the topographical details that made it possible to reconstruct the development of the story with exactitude: in the department of Allier, the Billaud pond, close to Lury-Levis, the narrow road of Mezemblin, the castle of Poligny (nowadays called Castle of Levis, bought in 1973 by the de Waldner family), and the melancholic ruins of the castle of Champroux, with its famous moat now completely dried out, in the department of Cher, the castle of Grossouvre, nowadays residence of a vacation center, the village of Sancoins, the roads that go from Grossouvre to Champroux, and so on.

With the help of a young man from Champroux, I questioned the inhabitants of the area. I noticed that they had only a very superficial knowledge of the story, deformed by its legend and the oral tradition. I also read the local publications on **"the crime of Mezemblin"** as it was called, in newspaper articles, booklets, brochures and parish bulletins: these stories are incomplete or inexact, because the authors did not have the opportunity to consult the real archive documents like I had.

Finally, I took a few pictures of the spots that I use as illustrations of my book.

I hope that the reading of this surprising story (where more than 90 people intervene) does not seem too complicated: to make things easier, I will add in the next chapter a list of all the participants in the drama, grouped by friendships and blood relations.

Louis VIGNON
Parish priest of CHARLY (Rhone)

LIST OF THE NAMES OF THE PEOPLE THAT PARTICIPATED IN THE
DRAMA

IN THE CLAN OF THE GADAGNE

**1. Sons and Daughters of the late Thomas III
de Gadagne and of Dame Helene de Marconnay:**

BALTHAZAR DE GADAGNE: the eldest, **“Lord of Champroux”**, husband of Renee de Clause: he is the mastermind of the crime.

CLAUDE DE GADAGNE, known as **“The Cadet of Beauregard”**, lord of Charly, husband of Eleonore de Colligny.

GUILLAUME DE GADAGNE, the young, known as **“The Knight of Beauregard”**, general of the galleys of the Grand Duke of Tuscany.

JEANNE DE GADAGNE, wife of Marc de Grivel, lord of Grossouvre.

ALPHONSINE DE GADAGNE, wife of Philippe Prevost, lord of Beaulieu.

**2. Brothers-in-law, nephews, cousins and
allies of the Gadagne:**

THE LORD OF GROSSOUVRE: Marc de Grivel, husband of Jeanne de Gadagne: in his castle of Grossouvre the plotters will meet before the crime.

THE LORD OF BEAULIEU, Philippe Prevost, husband of Alphonsine de Gadagne: he will intervene only to help the escape of the Gadagne.

THE KNIGHT OF MARCHAUMONT, Pierre de Clause, brother of Renee’ de Clause, Balthazar de Gadagne’s wife.

THE LORD OF SAINT-AUBIN, Louys de Grivel, son of Marc de Grivel and Jeanne de Gadagne, husband of Gabrielle de la Cressonniere.

THE LORD OF POUZY, nephew of Marc de Grivel.

THE LORD OF LA MOTHE, known as “the bastard of Grossouvre”, half-brother by adultery of Marc de Grivel.

THE LORD OF VERDUN, son of Guillaume de Gadagne, the elder (uncle of the children of Thomas III , lord of Boutheon in Forez, count of Verdun) and Jeanne de Sugny, first cousin of Balthazar, Claude and Guillaume de Gadagne.

THE LORDS OF MENETOU-COUTURE, Jacques and his brother Marc d'Anzely, cousins of Louys de Grivel.

3. The friends of the Gadagne:

THE LORD OF LA NAVIERE.

THE LORD OF NOUETTES, Gilbert de Montgibert.

THE MONK JACQUES DE BRIONT, messenger of the Gadagne.

4. Valets and lackeys:

MAHIET DAUMAS, sommelier of the lord of Champroux.

NICOLAS, groom of the lord of Champroux.

MEAUSSE, manservant of the lord of Champroux.

JEHAN GUILLAUME, cook of the lord of Champroux.

LOUYS DE CHAUX, young page of the lord of Champroux.

A MAID of the dame of Champroux.

MICHEL LALLEMENT, lackey of the lord of Charly.

JEHAN MOREL, groom of the lord of Saint-Aubin.

ESTIENNE MORABOUR, lackey of the lord of Saint-Aubin.

LEBUT, manservant of the lord of Saint-Aubin.

JEHAN ANDRE', lackey of the lord of Verdun.

JEHAN LESUEUR, lackey of the knight of Marchaumont.

CHARLES DE LA PLACE, lackey of the lord of Pouzy.

MEDARD ROBERT, lackey of the lord of Menetou-Couture the elder.

PIERRE BOURRASSEL, groom of the lord of Menetou-Couture.

CLAUDE ROUPET, lackey of the lord of La Naviere.

5. Mercenaries hired by the Gadagne

LE ROUX, nicknamed **"the giant"**.

LA BUFFETIERE, nicknamed **"the great villain"**

6. Other characters who helped the escape of the Gadagne

"THE MAN IN BLACK", aka the lord of Beaulieu.

THE LORD OF FOURILLES, Blaise de Chaumejean, captain of a company of the King's guards: he is sly and is able to organize the escape of the Gadagne.

THE LORD OF LA FONT, relative of the lord of Beaulieu.

THE LORD SAINT-MAGIRAN, relative of the lord of Beaulieu.

THE LORD CHATEAURENAUD, friend of the lord of Beaulieu.

THE SOCALLED LEVISURE, soldier of the lord of Fourilles.

7. A neighbor of Champroux

THE LORD OF GUEDEBOURG, Jehan de Chaverot, squire, got mixed up in the story in spite of himself.

IN THE CLAN OF JEAN DE LEVY

1. The family of Jean de Levy:

JEAN DE LEVY, count of Charlus.

DIANE DE DAILLON DE LUDE, countess of Charlus, wife of Jean de Levy.

FRANCOIS DE LEVY, their eldest son (brother of Charles and Marc).

THE COUNT OF SANCERRE, brother-in-law of Jean de Levy.

PIERRE DU BUEIL, count of Maran, nephew of Jean de Levy, and son of the count of Sancerre.

2. The little page of Jean de Levy:

JOSEPH D'ANGLARS DE BASSIGNAC, son of Antoinette de Gouzel de Segur, widow of Antoine d'Anglars, lord of Bassignac.

3. The lackeys and manservants of Jean de Levy:

ISAAC LAROZE, the faithful servant.

ESTIENNE PELEGE', manservant of Jean de Levy.

NICOLAS CHASTRON, hunter, peasant of Lurcy.

4. The gentlemen present in Poligny, the day of the crime:

THE COUNT OF MARAN, Pierre du Bueil, nephew of Jean de Levy.

THE LORD OF SAINT-BONNET, Bernard de Maumont, maitre-d'hotel of Jean de Levy.

THE LORD CLAUDE DE SOURNIAC, guest of Jean de Levy.

THE LORD JACQUES DE GOUDEAU, guest of Jean de Levy.

THE LORD OF BOISSAGUET, guest of Jean de Levy.

THE LORD OF MONTFORT, guest of Jean de Levy.

THE LORD OF ESPINOY, guest of Jean de Levy.

5. Other gentlemen, friends of Jean de Levy, who participated in the siege of the castle of Champroux:

THE LORD CLAUDE DE CREUZET, lord of Maisonneuve.

THE LORD OF BRIZON, nobleman from Auvergne, relative of the countess of Charlus.

THE LORD OF LIERMESSE.

THE LORD OF PONSU.

THE LORD JEHAN DE THIANGES, squire.

6. Other characters:

LORD FRANCOIS GUILLAUME, priest and lord of the manor.

JEHAN BOURJONNIER, blacksmith farrier.

MARTIAL COULAU, wool carder
PEASANTS.

JUSTICE AND CONSTABULARY

1. The judicial authorities:

HIS GRACE CHARLES DE GONZAGUE, duke of Nevers.
MY LORD JANOT, vice-seneschal of the Bourbonnais.
THE LORD OF SAINT-GERAN, governor of the province.
LAPLAIN, prosecutor of the King at Moulins.
MAITRE GUILLAUME DELANDES, councilor of the King at
the parliament of Nevers.

2. The law enforcers:

JEHAN DESPREZ, provost-marshal of Nevers.
NICOLAS MENUDEL, lieutenant of the judge in the jurisdiction
of the seneschal of the Bourbonnais.
PIERRE BILLARD, lieutenant general in the vice-jurisdiction of
the seneschal of the Bourbonnais.
CONDEMINE, clerk of Jehan Desprez.
BLAISE COUDONIER, clerk of Nicolas Menudel.
THE SIX BOWMEN of Nicolas Menudel.
JEHAN D'URBIZE, one of Billard's five bowmen.
NICOLAU, sworn surgeon, from Saint-Amand.
LE CHEVAUCHEUR (KING'S MESSENGER) of Saint-Pierre-
le-Moutier.
RECOUVERGIER (or RECONNERGUES?), lieutenant of
Poligny.
BERTELON, judge from Champroux.
A NOTARY of the countess of Charlus.
SIR REGNAULD, member of the court of Aydes.
SIR OF VILLEGINAST, assistant.
SIR OF DYSSARD, confinement commissioner .

FIRST CHAPTER

GRIEVANCES AND OFFENSES

Claude de Gadagne, squire, lord of Charly, “**the cadet of Beauregard**”, has become a killer, a wretched murderer, accomplice of his brothers Balthazar and Guillaume, in a dark story of family vengeance.

Since the year 1595, persistent quarrels had opposed the Gadagne brothers to Lord Jean de Levy, count of Charlus, because of rivalries concerning properties in the province of the Bourbonnais.

Jean de Levy (born in 1566, son of Claude de Levy) was a very proud person. Tall, generous and magnificent, he married the beautiful Diane de Daillon de Lude on March 16 1590. They had four children, of whom three were called Francois, Charles and Marc.

Sir Jean de Levy was count of Charlus, a fief located in high Auvergne next to the village of Champagnac; he was also baron of Granges, Maumont, Poligny and le Breuil, lord of Margeride, la Motte des Cros, Charnat, Saint-Sauve, Miremont and other locations...He was overly jealous of his several titles of nobility and privileges, excessively touchy on his honor, and his demeanor of superiority towards his vassals or neighbors had often caused hostile feelings towards him.

He was feared because he was haughty and quick-tempered. One of his neighbors, Etienne de la Souche, lord of Saint-Augustin, had good and strong reasons to be resentful towards the count of Charlus: one day, in a fit of anger, the Lord of Levy **had smashed with a weapon** the coat of arms of Saint-Augustin. Another day, he had his servants **punch and beat with sticks his adversary's attorney in the middle of a trade fair in front of everybody**. Those were the kind of humiliations that were hard to forgive...

Jean de Levy was also accused of having taken advantage of the troubled political period of the Ligue to take possession of the castle of la Motte without paying anything for it to its legitimate owners. In 1598 he was taken to trial for it.

Several of these quarrels had seen Balthazar de Gadagne and his brother-in-law Marc de Grivel part of them. Balthazar owned the fortified castle of Champroux in the neighborhood. Marc, husband of Jeanne de Gadagne, was gentleman of the chamber of the King and lord of Grossouvre. The castle of Grossouvre was only fourteen miles from the castle of Poligny, a fief of Jean de Levy, in the parish of Lurcy in the Bourbonnais; the properties of Champroux on the other hand were touching the ones of Poligny.

A judicial instance regarding certain due income opposed Balthazar to the Abbot of the convent of Plaimpied; now, the lord of Champroux was aware that the count of Charlus had **instigated the Abbot against him:** again and always Jean de Levy...! Balthazar said: "**I would rather die than lose this case!**"...But in spite of that he lost.

Most of all, in that year 1611, a resounding trial was happening, started by the count of Charlus, concerning tithes to be paid, against Balthazar de Gadagne and Marc de Grivel. Jean de Levy pretended he had the **right to be paid tithes** on the properties inherited by the Gadagne of Beauregard. However Balthazar de Gadagne and Marc de Grivel maintained that their properties of the Bourbonnais were exempt from any tithes payment. His Grace Charles de Gonzague, duke of Nevers had cautiously put a stop to the trial in May 1611 by affirming that **the tithes in question would be confiscated and given to the judge of Sancoins.**

However, in spite of the trial being ended by the above decision of the duke of Nevers, the two parties were still angry at each other. Balthazar de Gadagne pointedly refused to greet Jean de Levy. Then His Grace the duke of Nevers personally wrote to both of them and invited them to his house to make peace.

And so it happened that on a certain day of June 1611, the count of Charlus went and had dinner at the duke of Nevers'. After dinner the lord of Champroux also came to greet His Grace the duke. The duke talked for a long time to each one of the two separately and then **had them meet in the same room** in front of friends of each one. There were the lord Claude of Sourniac, friend of the count of Charlus, and the lord of Menetou, friend of the lord of Champroux. The duke asked the two enemies to hug each other. **The friends also encouraged them to do so and finally the two walked toward one another and embraced.** They all remained quite late at the duke's house and then returned to their own homes.

However, even though the duke of Nevers **had asked them to promise not to remember the past but to live as friends,** the Gadagne refused absolutely to accept the verdict concerning the tithes that ended in the negative for them. Even if the count of Charlus had kissed Balthazar, his kiss was interpreted by the Gadagne as a condescending kiss of the winner towards the loser, and did not do anything to repair the offenses done to the Gadagne family honor. How could the Gadagne forget that during the trial the count of Charlus dared to say and even to write **cutting remarks and words of contempt** and even **irritating mockery** on their Italian origins? Jean de Levy had even doubted on the qualities of **squire** of Balthazar and Claude de Gadagne, due to the fact that after all they had originated from the thigh of a simple Italian banker!... The count had obviously chosen to ignore the fact that Balthazar and Claude's father, **the high and powerful Lord Thomas III de Gadagne, knight of the order of the King, gentleman of his chamber, bailiff of Beaujolais and Dombes, lord of Beauregard, Charly, Champroux and other localities,** had been nominated "**lieutenant-general of the King in the Bourbonnais**" in the year 1570,

and had married miss Helene de Marconnay, daughter of the governor of the Bourbonnais!...

The rivals met two more times. Once was two weeks after the embrace. The count of Charlus was going hunting on the borders of his property of Poligny with nine friends, all on horse. Among his friends were the lord of Buges, the lord of Bassignac the elder, and the lord of Sourniac. All of a sudden the count noticed the lord of Champroux and his nephew, the lord of Saint-Aubin, and three other mounted friends, altogether five cavaliers, on his property, next to the pond of Billaud. The count and his friends approached Balthazard and his group. When they were about one hundred yards away, the friends of the lord of Champroux **reared their horses so as to defy** the count and his friends. One of the count's friends could not bear such insolent daring and shouted raving: "**Champroux! You are going to pay for this!**"...However the count immediately calmed him down so as to stop him from rearing his horse too and said proudly: "**I prefer to die rather than to be unfaithful to the promise of peace I made to His Grace the duke of Nevers**"...Did Balthazar de Gadagne hear those words?

Anyhow that day, next to the pond of Billaud, in the circumstances of the encounter of ten horsemen against five, a Machiavellian idea sprouted in the mind of Balthazar de Gadagne. He had just found out that this was the perfect spot for an ambush, because the long edge of the pond blocked any retreat. He had felt himself the danger of the possibility of being attacked by the group of the count of Charlus, twice as large as his. That is why by an act of bravado he and his friends had reared their horses in front of the overwhelming enemy. Now, he thought, if he could only turn upside down the strength of the two groups, and come back by surprise with twenty horsemen against Charlus' ten, he could easily defeat the count and his friends. So much so because after the embrace at the duke's the count was less cautious as he thought **that no trace of dispute or enmity remained between them...**

The second time was an evening in the month of July 1611. The two antagonists met again on a country road next to Maringes. It was getting late and night was approaching. The lord of Champroux was going to see his mother at the castle of Charbonnieres. He was sitting in an open carriage, drawn by four horses. He had with him only the driver, called "**Signor Clement**", neither of them was well armed...Suddenly from the opposite direction came the count of Charlus, going towards his house of la Motte, with fifteen horsemen. When the count was about forty yards from Balthazar, he did not greet him at all but said in a loud voice to his friends: "**Here is the lord of Champroux on his way to spend the night at Malataverne!**" (Malataverne was a house of prostitutes). On saying this, the count had turned his face in the opposite direction with contempt. He made it clear that he himself instead was going to sleep in his castle of Menetou two leagues from there...Balthazar realized that he was again in a weak position in front of his adversary and bit his fingers out of pique. This Jean de Levy, always brilliant, swelling with conceit, flaunting his complacent superiority...made Balthazar livid with anger. He cursed and then softly added in a whisper: "**Wait you rooster! ...your days are numbered, we will kill you at the end!...**"

When Marc de Grivel, lord of Grossouvre, was briefed about the project of assassination, he approved heartily. He fostered the bitterness against Charlus with passion and aroused the desire in his brothers-in-law to avenge the honor of the Gadagne... Yes! The Gadagne had Italian blood in their veins! The insult made to their coat of arms had to be wiped out in a striking way and with force by a “vendetta”! Balthazar was brooding over his vengeance... **“We must kill the rooster”**, he had said. And the rooster was Jean de Levy, the count of Charlus, who was standing on his spurs...

SECOND CHAPTER

THE RALLYING OF THE GADAGNE

From that time on the Gadagne started to organize the plot to eliminate the haughty Jean de Levy. First of all they tried to assemble at least twenty attackers, including all of the Gadagne, their close allies, their friends and their servants.

In his fortified castle of Champroux, Balthazar de Gadagne was the closest to the castle of Poligny and the pond of Billaud where they had planned to attack the count; however he preferred to prepare his vengeance from Paris to avoid arousing suspicions. His wife, dame Renee' de Clause, remained in Champroux, to keep an eye on the movements of the count of Charlus and inform the conspirators about them.

Marc de Grivel, the brother-in-law, in connivance with his wife Jeanne de Gadagne, offered his castle of Grossouvre for the gathering of the conspirators, during the days immediately preceding the attack. Grossouvre was an imposing fortress with three round towers and an elevated dungeon.

Balthazar called his brothers:

First of all Claude de Gadagne, lord of Charly, in the Lyonnais, the one that was called **"the cadet of Beauregard"**; ensign of the King's guards, he was aggressive and brave.

Then Guillaume de Gadagne, the youngest of the three brothers; he was known as **"the knight of Beauregard"**, because since 1590 he was a knight of Saint-John of Jerusalem.

{Note of the translator: Beauregard was a castle, near Lyon, at St-Genis-Laval, owned by the three Gadagne brothers. Even though Balthazar lived in his castle of Champroux, Claude in his castle of Charly and Guillaume in Florence, Italy, Beauregard was for many generations the favorite residence of the family. So much so that two of the brothers had Beauregard in their name. Claude often signed simply "Beauregard". Beauregard was built in the same style of the villa of Masseto, strikingly ressemblant to it in many details. Masseto is the cradle of the Guadagni Family, near Florence, on Guadagni Hill, and has been owned by the family for over 900 years}.

Guillaume was daring and enterprising; his help was needed. Balthazar wrote to him in Italy, where Guillaume was **general of the galleys of the Grand-Duke of Florence**. He had just returned from a long eighteen months expedition against the Turks...Guillaume answered he would come to France as soon as possible and would be in Lyon sometime in August.

The brothers-in-law were also notified:

Philippe Prevost, lord of Beaulieu, la Roche and Briailles, was 31 years old; he was the husband of Alphonsine de Gadagne (sister of Balthazar, Guillaume, Claude and Jeanne). During the summer, he lived in his castle of Briailles, in the Bourbonnais, one mile from Saint-Pourcain. The mother of all these Gadagne, Dame Helene de Marconnay, widow of Thomas III de Gadagne, lived in the neighborhood, in her castle of Charbonnieres, seven miles from Saint-Pourcain.

They also called Pierre Clause, known as **“the knight of Marchaumont”**. He was the brother of dame Renee’ Clause, Balthazar’s wife. He was also knight of Saint-John of Jerusalem. They would have him come from Picardie, where he lived.

The lord of Grossouvre recruited his own son: Louys de Grivel, who was 24; he had married Gabrielle de la Cressonniere and was lord of Saint-Aubin in the Bourbonnais. He was also able to recruit his nephew, lord of Pouzy, who was only 19, whose castle was close to Lurcy.

They also recruited their cousins:

Balthazar was able to convince the lord of Verdun; he was one of the two sons of Uncle Guillaume de Gadagne, lord of Boutheon in Forez. Louys de Grivel won over his cousins, the two brothers Jacques and Marc d’Anlezy, lords of Menetou-Couture, 20 and 25 years old, with whom he often used to go hunting.

The conspirators were also able to recruit two of their good friends: Gilbert de Montgibert, lord of Nouettes, owner of a fief close to Grossouvre, and the lord de la Naviere, that the Gadagne brought in from Paris.

Finally, they were able to convince also the lord de la Mothe, known as **“the bastard of Grossouvre”**, illegitimate son of the late grandfather de Grivel, who owned a house in the area.

All said and done, they now had fourteen **“gentlemen”** in the conspiracy.

Furthermore it was decided that a few faithful servants would add to the number. They included Nicolas, Meusse and Mahlet Daumas, respectively horse groom, valet and wine steward of Balthazar, Jehan Morel, Etienne Morabour and Lebut, horse groom, manservant and valet of the young Louys de Grivel, and Jehan Andre’, manservant of the lord of Verdun. They were all known for their unreserved obedience to their masters. However as a further precaution they were not going to reveal them anything until the day of the ambush.

Finally, as they were expecting a bloodshed, they thought that adding a few hired mercenaries or professional killers would not be uncalled for. Balthazar de Gadagne would try to find them himself in Paris in the underworld of Faubourg Saint-Germain.

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During that time, Jean de Levy, shaken by the ups and downs of his trial, even though he had obtained what he wanted, became sick. **His doctor told him to have a change of scene as he had been with a fever for several months.** He decided to leave for a while his castle of Poligny and go and relax in his house of la Motte.

After some time, around mid-September, he moved again, with his servants and friends, to his castle of Granges, next to Tauves (in the Issoire region). He was baron of Granges and its church contained his family tombs. While he was there, next to the tombs of his ancestors, meditating on the frailty of life, did the forethought of a possible near violent death come to his mind? ... He decided anyhow to do his will. Even though he was still strong and healthy – he was only 45 – he made his will on September 24th of that same year 1611. It was a long will and many of its provisions showed his piety and his desire to have many prayers said for the eternal rest of his soul after his death.

However he was able to overcome his gloomy thoughts (after all, when you had to handle the sword as often as he did, a will was only a normal precaution...) and enjoy life again. He decided to return to Poligny in mid-October to go hunting in his large forests during the pleasant days of the beginning of the Fall.

CHAPTER III

MEETING OF THE CONSPIRATORS

IN THE CASTLE OF GROSSOUVRE

The three Gadagne brothers, Balthazar, Claude and Guillaume met in Paris at the end of September in their family palace in faubourg Saint-Germain. There they met their cousin the lord of Verdun. Also their friend the lord of la Naviere, who used to live in Saint-Honore' street when he was in Paris, came to see them. Thus, **they often had lunch and dinner together** and planned on how to ambush the count of Charlus. They chose the date: Thursday October 20th... **"Even if I have to sell my soul to all the devils of Hell, I will avenge myself!"** repeated over and over Balthazar de Gadagne, in his firm determination to kill Jean de Levy...

Balthazar had brought his wine steward Mahiet Daumas from Champroux. Mahiet was a big seventeen year old lad. He had also brought his horse groom Nicolas. Both were from the town of Moulins. The lord of Verdun had brought with him his lackey Jehan Andre', 18 years old, native of Polignac in Languedoc. Claude de Gadagne

instead arrived alone from Charly, in the Lyonnais. He decided to find himself a man servant. He found one in the **“hostellerie de l’Annonciation”** (Hotel of the Annunciation), in the same neighborhood of Faubourg Saint-Germain. His name was Michel Lallement, he was 18 years old, native of Reims in Champagne. He was badly dressed and wore broken shoes and he was ready to follow his new master in **a trip to the Bourbonnais.**

The lord of la Naviere instead hired a young lad of 14, Claude Roupet, born in Lorraine, parish of Nancy, who was unemployed in Paris, far away from his parents. The knight of Beauregard, Guillaume de Gadagne, paid good money to hire two rogues that he found in a Parisian tavern. One was a giant called Le Roux, whom Guillaume dressed all in black, and the other was a naughty rascal called La Buffetiere. Guillaume bought pistols, rifles and swords for both.

All together, well armed, they left Paris on their horses, on Friday October 14th. They stopped after 35 miles, at the town of Courances, where they spent the night at the house of the Dame of Marchaumont. The following day however Claude de Gadagne was sick and could not continue his journey. **So he gave some money to his lackey Michel Lallement to make him leave immediately and go ahead of the group until he arrived at Grossouvre and told Marc de Grivel that they were coming anyway even if a day late and to prepare a good meal for them.** Michel rode off immediately with Mahiet Daumas, laquey of Balthazar, while everybody else remained the whole day and the following night at Courances.

On Sunday morning the group was back on the road and galloped all day to catch up the time lost the day before, until tired and exhausted they arrived at the town of Aubigny-sur-Nere where they spent the night and rested their horses. On Monday they covered less distance and stopped for the night at La Charite’-sur-Loire sleeping at **the hostellerie du Lion d’Or (The Golden Lion Hotel).** On Tuesday October the 18th they finally arrived at the castle of Grossouvre for lunch.

To celebrate their arrival several conspirators joined them at the castle. There were the lord of Nouettes, the two brothers of Menetou, with their horse groom Pierre Bourrassel, and also Louys de Grivel, with three of his servants, his horse groom Jehan Morel, his lackey Estienne Morabour and his manservant Lebut.

The knight of Marchaumont had arrived from Picardie several days ahead of everybody else because his big lackey Jehan Lesueur **was riding a little horse and could not go very fast.**

This boisterous group of conspirators had a merry dinner and supper at the castle where afterwards they all slept. The following day they **played games, told jokes and laughed heartily** and ate and slept again at the castle. The lord de la Mothe, “Bastard of Grossouve” joined them that day, together with the lord of Pouzy, who had with him his young lackey Charles de la Place, fourteen years old.

The only one who was missing was Philippe Prevost, lord of Beaulieu, husband of Alphonsine de Gagagne and brother-in-law of Bathazar, Claude and Guillaume. He thought that this family vengeance was too risky. Each one of them was gambling his fortune, his castle and his own life. How long could they escape the King's justice after the crime? Maybe by running abroad? It was a price too high to pay for the death of Jean de Levy...

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On Tuesday October 18 evening, after supper, a messenger had arrived on horse at the castle of Grossouvre, from the Dame of Champroux, Balthazar's wife. He was a monk, all dressed in black, called Jacques de Briont, and he was bringing two letters, one from Blaise de Chaumejean, lord of Fourilles, the other from the Dame of Champroux herself telling what was happening at Poligny, Jean de Levy's castle.

The messenger Jacques de Briont, thirty years old, was a daring adventurer who had led an extraordinary life. Without any special vocation in life as soon as he was 16 he enrolled in the regiment of the King's guards under the command of the captain Lacourbe du Bellay, and other captains for 4 years. He participated in the siege of Beaune with the army of Bourgogne and then went and fought in Hungary with the knight of Haubecour.

Later on he wanted to quit the army life and became the manservant of the lord of Lyney, in Bourbonnais, for three years.

In 1603, he desired to become a monk and entered the Benedictine abbey of Saint-Gildas, in Chateauroux. One year later, **dressed all in black**, he made his vows, on October 18 1604, in front of Brother Jacques de la Louche, prior of the cloister, and twelve religious of the abbey. During four years he was the monk responsible for finance until he finished his studies and was ordained a priest on March 1st 1608. Unfortunately he became seriously ill two weeks later.

At this point he was inspired to go for a pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. He obtained a leave from his abbot, Messire Francois de Chevenion, from his prior and the monk assembly of Saint-Gildas.

However he was soon without money looking for a ship to take him to Jerusalem. He then met the knight of Beauregard, Guillaume de Gadagne, who was commander of the galleys of the Grand-Duke of Florence. He set sail under him and traveled **to many different locations of the Middle East, in the fleet of five well armed and equipped ships the knight commanded for the Grand-Duke of Florence.**

For eighteen months he had navigated in the Mediterranean without ever being able to disembark in the Holy Land, **because often the fleet of**

Guillaume had to battle against the Turks. Once they were five galleys against 45 Turkish galleys, another time they were five against four, etc...

Finally, unable to fulfill his vow, Brother Jacques de Briont disembarked in Italy. He went to Rome where **he confessed himself to Father Antoine Pacot, a Jesuit**, on April 12, 1611... Then he returned to France, on foot, with a church man called Estienne Aupier de Montmareau. Around Mai 16 1611 he was back in his abbey of Saint-Gildas at Chateauroux.

He stayed there only **12 or 15 days**, because the knight of Beauregard asked for his immediate help in exchange for all the time he had allowed him to travel on his galleys for free and also promised him he might pay him **good money** for his help. So on June the 1st brother Jacques de Briont asked from his prior and obtained **a new leave of six months to go and see some friends...** Since then he **followed Balthazar de Gadagne and his wife wherever they went.**

And that is how this monk-priest-adventurer was now at the service of the Gadagne who made him the messenger of letters to take from one to the other conspirators to tie the last knots of the plot. **He was always dressed in black, with a little scapular that he wore like a belt**, who would suspect him to be the enthusiastic accomplice of the plot against Jean de Levy? ... He probably ignored himself what was really going on... by being the messenger he thought he was only being a loyal friend of the Gadagne...

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When he read the letter of the Dame of Champroux, that brother de Briont had just brought, Guillaume de Gadagne exclaimed: **"Sacrebleu! Even if this will send me to Hell we will have to kill everybody in the house of the count of Charlus...including cats and dogs!"**

It was late and supper was over. So they gave the monk the abundant leftovers to eat and the bottom of several unfinished bottles of wine to drink.

They allowed the monk only a short night of sleep and dreams in the castle of Grossouvre. Balthazar woke him up **before sunrise the next day** and gave him a letter to take as fast as he could to his wife the Dame of Champroux. In this letter Balthazar asked his wife to send him **his big horse and also several weapons for the knight of Marchaumont whose horse was not very good.**

On his side, Claude de Gadagne gave the monk the answer to the other letter, a confidential sealed envelope to take as soon as possible, after his stop at the castle of Champroux, to Blaise de Chaumejean, captain of a company of the King's guards, who lived in the castle of Fourilles, seven miles from Saint-Pourcain. Blaise had an Italian wife, Hippolyte Louise de Piovene, and was a dear friend of Claude de Gadagne, having been his captain for a while. Under his command, Claude had been the ensign of the company....In his letter Claude asked the captain **to come to Champroux as soon as possible to end by his arbitration the dispute between the lord of Champroux and the count of Charlus.** In fact, without saying it openly, the Gadagne were telling Blaise of the imminence of the murder of Jean de Levy, and asking him to help them with his guards of the King, during their retreat after the murder and eventually to facilitate their escape to Italy...

Before leaving, the monk Jacques de Briont asked for some wine to drink; but **he was told it was too early in the morning to drink wine;** so he grumbled while mounting his horse... Then, holding his scapular on his chest **he galloped away** on his new mission.

CHAPTER FOUR

HUNTING AT POLIGNY

Jean de Levy returned to his castle of Poligny on October 15. Some friends joined him there to go on happy mounted hunting parties with him. There were his nephew Pierre du Bueil, count of Maran (son of the count of Sancerre) and his two friends lord of Boissaguet and lord d'Espinoy. Other guests of the castle were Claude Sourniac (the one who had witnessed the embrace of the two adversaries in front of the duke of Nevers), the lord of Montfort and Lord Jacques de Goudeau. Bernard de Maumont, lord of Saint-Bonnet was the maitre d'hotel of Jean de Levy and took care of the management of the castle. Poligny was a beautiful residence to go hunting, because it was surrounded by several prairies intersected with forests and ponds, full of game.

However, the coming and going of the hunters caused neighborhood difficulties between the owners of Poligny and the ones of Champroux. On Monday October 17th a hunter **sent by the Dame of Champroux,** in reality her valet Meusse, **was found with a lying dog next to the Billaud pond and this was prohibited by the ordinances of the judge.** Balthazar wife's intention was for Meusse to spy on Jehan de Levy. The count of Charlus sent his friend Squire Jehan de Thianges, to tell Balthazar's wife **that he did not want lying dog hunting so close to his house but he would not object to running dog hare hunting and bird shooting.** The Dame of Champroux answered with anger that **nobody from her house had been**

hunting in the property of the count and that she would **not tolerate any hunting of any kind in the land of Champroux**. As they were neighbors she thought it wiser **to prohibit any hunting on each other's property**.

For several days now deer had been seen in the forests of Poligny going after a domestic doe. That is why on Wednesday October 19th evening, the count of Charlus asked his hunter to beat the undergrowth for game. He also asked Nicolas Chastron to come to the castle early the next morning with other yokels from Lurcy to help him kill the deer. And so on Thursday October the 20th Nicolas came to Poligny with his friends **to get the guns** and go with Jean de Levy and his friends **kill the deer**. However that morning, in spite of their search no game was found and **this made the count angry. He called Nicolas "a rascal, too drunk to find the deer"** and he sent the yokels back home to Lurcy. He added however: **"Guys, come back tomorrow morning, on Friday, we will go and see what we can find in the forest of Tronset..."**

For lack of deer, they planned on going and shooting birds.

"Dear nephew would you like to come shooting with us this afternoon?" Jean de Levy asked the count of Maran. Pierre du Bueil accepted and so did the lord of Sourniac, the lord of Montfort and the lord of Goudeau. The lord of Boissaguet and the lord of Espinoy politely declined; they preferred to relax in the castle all day getting ready for the deer hunt on the following day.

"We will go shooting at the Billaud Pond" said the count **"get the horses ready for noon..."**

"May I come with you Father?" asked Francois de Levy, the young baron of Charlus. **But the count did not want his son to go shooting...** However, after lunch, **he feared his son would be upset about it and accepted to take him with the group.**

And so, in the early afternoon of Thursday October the 20th 1611, the count of Charlus, his son Francois, his nephew Pierre and their three friends went shooting. They took a little page with them, Joseph Danglars de Bassignac, who was ten, and two servants, Isaac Laroze and Estienne Pelege'.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CRIME OF MEZEMBLIN

That morning of Thursday October the 20th 1611, the Gadagne got up nervous. That was the day they had selected to kill the count of Charlus. Early in the morning, a mounted spy, Mahiet Daumas, wine servant of Balthazar, left Grossouvre to explore Lurcy; he knew well the surroundings of the castle of Poligny and even several servants of the count. His task was to meet Meausse, the valet of Balthazar's wife, on the spot. The two of them would ask and find out where the count of Levy would be in the afternoon, and then come back and tell the conspirators about it...Louys de Grivel, Marc's son, sent his lackey, Estienne Morabour, **ahead of the conspirators, towards Poligny, to see if the count was coming their way and to warn them about it.**

That same day, when everybody was sitting at the table for dinner, the lord of Pouzy realized his boots were broken. So he asked his young lackey, Charles de la Place, **to go to the nearby town of Saincoins and buy him a new pair and take them to his castle of Pouzy where he was planning to spend the night.**

At noon, immediately after dinner, Marc de Grivel armed everybody with the weapons he kept in his castle, and the party of avengers left Grossouvre. The group included twelve gentlemen, dressed in doublet and boots, mounting big horses, valued at least 200 crowns each, armed with swords and pistols, and several lackeys, horse grooms and servants, riding smaller less expensive horses, one of them pulling by the rein a bigger horse carrying everybody's coats and luggage, a lackey of Balthazar was even carrying **a parrot...** Everybody was well armed, with rifles, pistols and swords. The two rogues, the giant Le Roux and his buddy La Buffetiere sensed that the moment of the fight was getting close, so they were among the more resolute and merrier.

They all stopped at the town of Sancoins at the **"place des boeufs"** (Square of the oxen). There they waited as agreed for the spies to return. Eventually two hours went by and the conspirators took advantage of it to **take care of petty business** and have the shoes of their horses checked. Claude de Gadagne told his new lackey Michel Lallement **"Morbleu! What horrible shoes you are wearing!"** and gave him some money so that he could buy himself new shoes. Claude also

noticed that Michel Lallement's horse was limping and so he sent him to have his horse get new shoes with Nicolas, Balthazar's groom. The lord of Pouzy also had **the shoe of his horse fixed...**

Meanwhile the lord of Nouettes left his nearby castle all perky and joined the Gadagne group in Sancoins. He had his big rifle with him that he used to kill big game...

Finally the two mounted spies arrived from Lurcy: Mahiet Daumas had met Meausse in Lurcy as agreed. Between the two of them they had a lot of information on the situation of the enemy: the count of Charlus was shooting birds near the Billaud pond with his friends; there were nine of them, including the oldest son of the count, a page who was holding the hawk, and two menservants. They were all mounted, mostly the count of Charlus on a beautiful Spanish horse called **"Montaigu"**, the young Francois de Levy on a little white horse **not bigger than a small donkey**, the other gentlemen on big horses: one of the servants rode a common horse pulling a cart... (Mahiet Daumas and Meausse , the two spies, got most of these information from Jehan Bourjonnier, farrier, who fixed the shoes of these horses little before noon and learnt that the count of Charlus and the count of Maran were planning to go shooting birds in the afternoon). Jean de Levy had his pistols with him and wore his sword as usual; the other hunters had pistols or rifles; the servant riding the common horse had a sword; only the little page holding the hawk was unarmed.

These details on the enemy's strength were important for a good preparation of the fight. The Gadagne were happy about it and prepared their plan of attack... However they did not know that they too had been noticed; such a large group of riders in full day armed with pistols and rifles could not go unnoticed. Martial Coulau a wool carder, who was riding back and forth for his trade, noticed them in Sancoins and decided to follow them out of curiosity. This was the itinerary the Gadagne chose:” **“We are going to cross the Gue' de Bourg, then follow the road of la Carelle to the bridge of Anduise, avoiding the town of Lurcy. We are going to ride all together close to one another, with the servants upfront”**.

After this plan the group started moving again. Marc de Grivel, lord of Grossouvre, would not go with them, because of his age, he was 67, and of a fall from his horse, that injured him in two spots forcing him to wear a sling around his arm that made him unable to fight with a sword. When his three Gadagne brothers-in-law mounted their horses, from the **stocky black horse** he was riding he said in a loud voice:”**Hit him immediately! ...The rooster must die! Otherwise I do not want to see you again!”**

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It was a beautiful Autumn day, the countryside was gorgeous: the flat watery surface of the Billaud pond seemed to go on forever with trees on its edge. The sun was shining on the warm colored leaves going from a golden yellow to a dark red.

The hunters enjoyed every moment of the enchanting afternoon, their bodies full of energy, their minds alert. Jean de Levy was riding in his large and beautiful domain, surrounded by his noble friends, and felt happy and relaxed. The kids were excited and joyful: sometimes they would stop to look at the hawk gliding in the air, other times they would spur their horses to gallop after the dogs running to bring back the game. How good it felt to be intoxicated with country air and sun!

The shooting of a bird took the hunters after the curve of the pond on a small road **passing by a pretty little wood and a stream flowing down at the bottom, called Mezemblin, and not far from two or three houses of sharecroppers, called little village.** A light breeze made some dead leaves fall...

Suddenly everything takes a tragic turn; it is about four in the afternoon.

“Master!” shouts Estienne Pelege’ letting go of the two dogs that he holds on a leash and running in a panic towards the count of Charlus... **“I see a group of armed villains, riding their horses!”** then he runs away to alert also the count of Maran...

The group of at least 25 conspirators, who were riding in silence on the grass covered banks, suddenly appears on the path next to the Mezemblin stream. First come Balthazard, Guillaume and Claude de Gadagne; the rest follow thirty yards behind.

As soon as he sees Jean de Levy, the knight of Beaugard, Guillaume de Gadagne, swears loudly and then ads: **“ I feel bitten by the fire of Hell!”**...

“You traitor...you will die!” shouts Balthazar, approaching the count of Charlus with his pistols cocked...

Jean de Levy recognizes his enemy who is attacking him with a large number of followers and answers with contempt: **“Puny! Like a Gadagne...”** and bravely faces his adversaries. Immediately the young Francois de Levy on his white pony puts himself next to his father; the little page also gets close to them, instinctively, like seeking shelter in front of the danger. The two children flank the count, who is

standing stoical and motionless on his Spanish horse in the middle of the path..."Be brave, children, be brave!" he tells them.

Balthazar shoots first and wounds the count's left arm. Jean de Levy immediately fires back and seriously injures Balthazar at his thigh. Simultaneously Guillaume shoots the count in the stomach, while he is himself wounded by the count of Maran, **shooting** cautiously **with his rifle** from behind a tree.

Francois de Levy in the meantime, riding his little pony, tries desperately to protect his father by moving his sword up and down in front of the attackers. However somebody strikes him with a sword **just under the belly button**. On the other side of the count the young page is being hit also...All this lasted maybe twenty seconds ...

Seriously wounded the young Francois **gallops away in the nearby fields on his little white horse...bleeding heavily and having lost his hat**...Disabled and deathly pale he falls on the ground and moans. His enemies finish him by five violent blows with their swords that smash his head...

Lord Jacques de Goudeau runs away; no friend is there to defend the count...Then Isaac Laroze, Jean de Levy's brave manservant, steps forth **and puts himself in front of his master**, who is unsteady on his horse and is bleeding grievously. When he sees this Balthazar **throws his empty pistol on the count's face, but the weapon flies over Isaac's head and falls in the stream**. The count is dying and falls backward, lying on the back of his horse. Isaac then wounds Balthazar's arm with a heavy blow of his sword, but is unable to stop the lord of Saint-Aubin from going around him and attacking the now defenseless Jean de Levy. Without pity every one of the attackers is now trying to finish the count who is too weak to react. Claude de Gadagne drives his sword in Jean de Levy's lower belly; his weapon goes through the whole body and comes out from the count's back under his elbow; from the back Saint-Aubin pushes his sword through Jean de Levy's body till it gets out of his stomach. The count falls from his horse... While he is lying on the ground the lord of Pouzy sticks his sword down through his chest.

The fight now expands against all of the count's friends. Balthazar shouts: **"Kill! Kill them all!"** and in spite of his wounds together with his brother Claude gallops after the count of Maran and the lord of Montfort; however a third wound that he gets at his hand from **a gunshot** from the lord of Sourniac stops him short. He falls on the ground, full of blood.

The lackeys and rogues of the Gadagne did not remain inactive during the fight: **while Guillaume de Gadagne and his friends shoot with their pistols and pierce with their swords Jean de Levy, eight or ten of their menservants go around the fighters, armed with their swords and try and imitate their masters' behavior. A big man with a thick black beard attacks from**

behind the lord of Sourniac **and severely injures his arm**; likewise a sword touches him lightly **making a red mark between his eyes** and **a more serious wound in the back of his head**. Pierre du Bueil, count of Maran, is also wounded, **hit from behind with a sword by a large lackey dressed in blue...**To save their lives, the count of Maran and the lord of Sourniac run away, imitated by the lord of Montfort and the valet Estienne Pelege', who manage to escape unharmed.

Isaac Laroze, the count's faithful servant, who tried to protect his master with his body, is still in the battlefield. **Two or three of Balthazar's men attack him and beat him on the head with the butts of their rifles,** using them as cudgels...**and a heavy blow on the lower part of his back seriously injures him,....he would have died if he did not ward off some of the blows with his sword, because Balthazar wanted all of his enemies dead and he could not escape fast enough because he was riding a mean horse who used to pull the count's cart...**However, who knows how, he was able to get out of it alive...

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When the battle was over, and they were counting the wounded and the dead, they found out that Joseph d'Anglars de Bassignac, the little page of the count, who was only ten and unarmed, had been killed by a sword during the attack. Nobody ever found out who killed him...

At this point they realized that several of the younger servants of the Gadagne had disappeared, mostly Medard Robert, the young (14 years old) valet of the lord of Menetou, Claude Roupet (15 years old) lackey of the lord of la Naviere, and Michel Lallement (18 years old) lackey of Claude de Gadagne...In fact, they did not even participate in the fight; as soon as **they heard several pistol and gunshots** and saw **a lot of smoke and many of their group draw their sword ready to fight,** they got scared and remained behind. **They crossed the little nearby stream and hid four hundred yards from there, one in the vineyards, the others in a meadow next to the hedges...**

Now the murderers needed to disappear quickly; for sure the six survivors of the count's group were going to sound the alarm at the castle of Poligny. However the conditions of the wounded of the Gadagne group needed immediate care and made the immediate and long escape prepared by Claude de Gadagne and the lord of Fourilles impossible.

“Ventre-saint-gris! (Holy-gray-stomach!) **I am dying!”** moaned Balthazar de Gadagne, livid with pain, caused by three serious wounds: his thigh was wounded by a gunshot, his right hand by **a rifle shot** and his left arm was cut by a sword, and he was bleeding heavily. Guillaume and Claude de Gadagne were also wounded and so was Jehan Andre’, the lackey of the lord of Verdun, wounded by a nasty sword blow on the arm... Where to find a close haven? The closest was Balthazar’s fortified castle of Champroux, surrounded by a huge pond, only three and a half miles from there! Even though they could not remain there too long because the police of the Duke of Nevers would soon be after them...they needed to cure the wounded and so the whole group planned to entrench in the castle.

“Let us go to Champroux! Its walls are high and solid! We shall fortify ourselves in there and if they besiege us morbleu we know how to fight!”...

The wounded were hoisted on the bigger horses and the Gadagne left hurriedly the premises of the crime, without even looking at the slaughtered bodies of their three victims...Their servants **running as fast as they could after them.**

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The three young servants of the Gadagne, Medart Robert, Claude Roupet and Michel Lallement, who hid themselves far from the fight because of fear, were now left alone on the premises. They got out of their hiding place only when the only noise they could hear around them was the silence of death. They did not know where their masters had gone and their horses had disappeared so they foolishly asked **a peasant they saw in front of his house the way for Champroux...**They were walking on that road when fifteen minutes later they heard the noise of three or four horsemen who were probably looking for them. They soon realized **that the riders were gentlemen from Poligny whose intention was surely to find them and kill them** so they quickly **hid under a big bush on the side of the road...**They finally arrived to Champroux when it was dark and the drawbridge was already raised. Even though the people of the castle recognized them they did not want to lower the bridge. **So they were forced to wade through the moat** and enter the castle drenched, cold and shameful while all around them was a great commotion.

CHAPTER SIX

NEWS ABOUT THE TRAGEDY ARE DISCLOSED AT POLIGNY

When the Count's friends arrived in the castle of Poligny and told about the Gadagne ambush and the resulting death of Jean de Levy, his son Francois and the little page, everybody was astonished and shocked...Nobody was expecting such a treacherous attack from the Gadagne! They all remembered **how the count had embraced Balthazar not long ago...who could have imagined!...** The lord of Champroux **had an excellent reputation of being a nice gentleman** , how could he have done **such a mean action!...If anybody in Poligny would have suspected anything, so many of the count's people would not have remained idle in the castle**, and his friends Boissaguet and d'Espinoy, and the many servants and the maitre d'hotel Saint-Bonnet **would have all gone with the count to protect him...**

Without waiting any longer, but arming themselves with a lot of weapons, the gentlemen, friends and guests of the count, went to the road next to the Mezemblin stream, where they found the corpses of Jean de Levy and the little page. They were lying on the ground and a hunting dog was guarding them and barking desperately...The beautiful Spanish horse of the count had been shot also and was lying dead next to its master...The body of young Francois de Levy was found farther away, also lying on his back in a field...The murderers had disappeared.

The lieutenant judge of Poligny, my lord Claude Recouvergier (or Reconnergues?) was immediately notified; he came to identify the bodies and drafted the statement of the crime. He noticed that **"the point where the count of Charlus was killed was right in the center of his judicial district of Poligny..."**Then the bodies were removed and sadly brought back to the castle of Poligny; they were laid in the chapel of the castle, on the cold slabs, in front of the altar...

Then, hastily the maitre d'hotel Bernard de Maumont wrote in the name of Dame Diane de Daillon de Lude, widow of the count, two law complaints, one to my lord Janot, assistant seneschal of the Bourbonnais, the other to my lord Jehan Desprez, provost of the marshal of Nevers.

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My lord Nicolas Menudel, lieutenant of the judge of the jurisdiction of the seneschal of the Bourbonnais, 30 years old, **was sound asleep in his bed**, when, around midnight of the night between Thursday and Friday he was awakened by somebody banging on his door. It was Bertelon, ordinary judge of the jurisdiction of Champroux, who was in a panic and was desperately trying to alert him. He was sent by Balthazar's wife, the dame of Champroux, with an **oral recommendation** that there had been a **fatal encounter** between Balthazar de Gadagne and Jean de Levy..., **that the count of Charlus with forty or fifty people had ambushed the lord of Champroux...**, that the lord of Champroux, Balthazar de Gadagne, **was so severely wounded that he was dying**, and Bertelon thought **that he might find him dead when he returned to the castle of Champroux...**, **that Guillaume de Gadagne, the knight of Beauregard, had also been wounded by a rifle shot...** Therefore could the lieutenant of the judge Nicolas Menudel come urgently, even though it was the middle of the night, to the castle of Champroux...

On hearing these frightening news, Menudel immediately woke up his clerk, Blaize Coudonier, and sent for the six or seven archers that he had available at that moment in his town of Moulins. **He was getting ready to leave with his boots on**, when, around two in the morning, somebody knocked at his door again... This time **it was a messenger sent by the countess of Charlus with the complaint** written by her maitre d'hotel. The letter was addressed to my lord Janot, assistant seneschal of the Bourbonnais; but as Janot was at that time absent from Moulins, because he happened to be operating in Chantelle with most of the archers, the messenger had come to find his assistant Menudel. The letter announced **the great tragedy of the death of Jean de Levy, his son and his page, murdered by surprise** by the Gadagne... The assistant Seneschal was thus requested **to come to Poligny with his archers to find out about the crime.**

When he got these **second news** Nicolas Menudel, presuming one of the two complaints was not completely truthful, decided that the best way to find it out **was to go where the dead people were.**

Taking with him six archers and his clerk, he left Moulins early Friday morning to get to **the scene of the crime.**

They arrived shortly after noon on the road of Mezemblin, close to the Billaud pond. There they found my lord Jehan Desprez, provost of marshal de Nevers, who had arrived before them and started **to make enquiries**. As they ascertained that the ordinary judge of Poligny had already taken the corpses, Menudel and Desprez skimmed together the battlefield looking for clues of the crime and signs of the combat. They discovered Balthazar's pistol in the shallow stream and picked it up, and in the grass Francois de Levy's hat.

Later on between three and four in the afternoon they went together to the castle of Poligny where **they found Dame Countess of Charlus in bed. With many tears she told them how the murder was done.** Menudel and Desprez, each one with his clerk **recorded the statement of offence** and wrote up their notes.

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At five in the evening, while they were still writing, a new group of horsemen arrived in Poligny. It was Pierre Billard, lieutenant general of the viceseneschal of the Bourbonnais, 37 years old, living in Saint-Amand; he had heard of the crimes through a middleman. He had followed the legal procedure and sent for the sworn surgeon of Saint-Amand, Nicolau. With the reinforcement of five archers they all went to Poligny...

As soon as they were there, surgeon Nicolau was asked to please **apply bandages to the wounded**, who were moaning in their beds: the count of Maran, the lord of Sourniac, and the servant Isaac Laroze.

When Nicolau finished his job, with balsam, lint and elixir administered to the injured, Menudel, Desprez and Billard asked him to go with them and **inspect the corpses**. All together they went **to the chapel of the castle where they found the bodies** of Jean de Levy, his eldest son Francois de Levy, and the little page Joseph d'Anglars de Bassignac. Nicolau **opened a table and laid the three bodies on it**. Then they all performed **the mournful examination of the corpses and of the amount of injures and wounds each had:**

It was a very pitiful sight: the son (Francois de Levy), **...a thin young man...was extremely chopped up by five large cuts on the head, the slightest of which reached and exposed his brain, his whole head was shattered to pieces; he also had a sword wound just under his navel that opened up all the inside of his body. The father** (Jean de Levy) **had a pistol or rifle**

shot in the upper part of his left arm that had taken away all the fat of the arm, a pistol shot in the stomach that crossed the body from side to side, a sword blow that also went through his whole body, and two other blows, one from the lower right side of the stomach getting out just under the elbow, and the other entered under the left arm and got out from the lower stomach...We have never seen more violent sword blows than these...The page also had a sword blow going through all of his body...

At that moment, in front of the tearful countess of Charlus, and of all the inhabitants and the guests of the castle of Poligny, Father Francois Guillaume, chaplain of the parish of Lurcy, came in the chapel and recited the prayers for the dead.

Strange destiny! In the chapel was kept **a church missal at the end of which on six little sheets of paper were written the records of the Baptisms** of the count's children. These Baptisms had been done in the chapel of the castle of Charlus or in the chapel of Poligny. You could read: **"In the year 1595, on Friday the 10th day of May, in the chapel of the castle of Charlus, was baptized Francois de Levy, son of the high-ranking and powerful lord Jean de Levy"...on Sunday the 18th day of the month of June** (the exact date of the year was missing, because many lines of the page were torn) **was taken to be baptized by two poor...Charles (?)...child of the count of Charlus..."**and again:**"On the 5th of May 1603, a son called Marc de Levy, baptized in the chapel of Poligny"**; the godfather was **the lord of Grossouvre**, Marc de Grivel; the godmother was **Renee' de Clause**, Balthazar de Gadagne's wife. The register had their signatures in it...Unbelievable and cruel end of the story: how in less than ten years, they were able to become the murderers of the family father who had honored them by making them godparents of his child!...they had also murdered the older brother of their godson!...Today, in the chapel of Poligny, contrary to the joy of those baptisms, there were tears.

The countess was going to pass out so she returned to bed. She called Billard in her bedroom and asked him to present another complaint, **and asked him to assist her in court. He promised he would, because there was enough evidence to have the criminals arrested...**Billard started writing his pages of statement of offence because **he did not want to miss any detail in the statement...**

Finally, after each one of them prepared his statement of offence as best as he could, the provost Jehan Desprez, the lieutenant of the judge Nicolas Menudel and the lieutenant general Pierre Billard decided that there was nothing else they could do that night...They did not care too much to try to capture the murderers because they were all very tired and **they did not have many archers with them...**This is

why they agreed **to postpone the arrest of the criminals until the following day.**

So they took leave of the countess widow and left all together with dignity (with their clerks and their eleven archers) **and went and spent the night in the town of Lurcy.**

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE GADAGNE ENTRENCH THEMSELVES IN CHAMPROUX

The castle of Champroux, where the Gadagne group had found refuge after the crime, was in great turmoil. With the exception of the wounded, who had been put to bed and were taken care of, everybody was walking back and forth, weapons in their hands, guarding the castle...Immediately, in the night between Thursday and Friday, watchmen armed with rifles were put on the battlements of the dungeon to keep watch on the surroundings of the fortress, with its large pond full of water all around it. Expecting an attack the drawbridge was kept raised.

Around three in the morning of Friday October 21st the alarm was raised in the castle when the lord of Pouzy, 19 years old, nephew of Marc de Grivel, appeared in front of the raised draw-bridge. In the darkness they recognized him by his voice...After participating in the murder of the count, his son and the page, he had momentarily left the Gadagne group to return in haste to his house of Pouzy, to inform his household of what had happened. **He remained there just fifteen minutes, after putting on the new boots bought by his young lackey Charles de la Place in Sancoins.** He had barely the time to say good-bye...That house he was now leaving would he ever be able to return to it?...And in how many years? United now to the destiny of the Gadagne, willful accomplice of murderers tracked down by the law, he had chosen to return and join them, on that night, in Champroux, till death did them apart...

Eventually Friday in Champroux had gone by without any attack from the outside; they had used that time of respite to fortify the castle, the servants collected wood and other materials to strengthen the defense of the place...The knight of Beauregard, Guillaume de Gadagne, was a good strategist and knew all the tricks of warfare, being the general of the galleys of the grand-duke of Florence. He had the servants dig a breach in the fortification of the castle, at the level of the pond, next to the stables, on the opposite side of the draw-bridge. Then he had the breach strongly entrenched from the inside of the wall...When they told him that the hole, even though fortified, was going to facilitate the penetration of the enemy in the castle, he giggled in his beard and answered: "If it does, may the devil take me!...Morbleu! We will outsmart them..."

However, a little before sunset of that day, a knight approached the castle, hailing for the draw-bridge to be lowered. The strict order was not to lower the draw-bridge at all, so the visitor got impatient...Come on! Did they not recognize him from his outfit! He was dressed as a clergyman...the devout monk Jacques de Briont! ...He was coming back from his mission...

Indeed three days earlier the messenger-monk had gone to request the aid of Blaize de Chaumejean, lord of Fourilles, captain of the King's guards, as he had been ordered by the Gadagne. He gave Fourilles Claude de Gadagne's letter and slept in **Fourille's house** Thursday night. Friday morning the lord of Fourilles asked him to accompany him to **the house of Bonpre'**, seven miles from there, to contact Dame Eleonore de Coligny, Claude de Gadagne's wife. That house belonged to Claude de Gadagne, the cadet of Beauregard, lord of Charly. There the lord of Fourilles and the monk de Briont learned the **"tragic news"**; one of Eleonore's lackeys told them that **"the lord of Champroux had been injured when he met the count of Charlus but that there were also wounded people on the count's side"**...but the lackey did not know more... Worried about these happenings the monk proposed to return immediately to Champroux; however Fourilles told the monk he had to go alone because of preparations of the highest importance blocked him until the next morning...

That is why Jacques de Briont was now alone in front of the castle of Champroux trying to convince the guardsmen to let him in **while it was getting dark fast...** Finally they let the draw-bridge down for him and the monk and his horse could get in.

As soon as he heard him come in, Balthazar de Gadagne, **who was lying injured in his bed**, called the monk de Briont and told him: **"Briont! I am severely wounded!"**... Then he told the monk his own version of the battle, mentioning the deaths of Jean de Levy, his son and the page...The monk wanted to hear his confession of the horrible crime there on the spot to get him out of the fire of Hell, where, without God's forgiveness, he would surely burn forever... But he did not dare to mention it to him, also because it did not seem that the lord of Champroux was going to die soon...So for the time being he just told him about his mission with Fourilles and how Fourilles was slow in going about it. Balthazar voiced his disappointment that **"the lord of Fourilles would come so late!"**....After which the monk wished him a good night and went to his own room to sleep because after his long gallop to Champroux he was exhausted...

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Very early Saturday morning the watchmen reported the arrival of a mounted gentleman, only armed with his sword. It was a neighbor, Jehan de Chaverot, squire, 28 years old, lord of Guedebourg, a house ten miles from Champroux. He was not really a friend of the Gadagne, as for the last two years his relations with the lord of Champroux had been difficult. **The Dame of Champroux wanted to send the police to seize the house of Guedebourg, pretending that the Gadagne owned the fief and certain annuities on the properties of Guedebourg.** Because of this disagreement, a year ago Jehan de Chaverot **brought papers and documentary evidence of ownership to the Dame of Champroux...**This is why when on Friday **he heard rumors about the death of the count of Charlus and the lawful consequences that would follow,** the lord of Guedebourg decided to come as soon as possible to Champroux **to get his papers back before they got lost in the confusion that would probably happen in Champroux...**

Balthazar de Gadagne gave permission to let Guedebourg in the castle at six o'clock on Saturday morning...

When Guedebourg was in the castle **the first person he saw was Claude de Gadagne, the cadet of Beauregard; he also saw the lord of Saint-Aubin, and then two more gentlemen, one was lying in bed next to the bed where Saint-Aubin was, the other was standing, and they were called the lords of Menetou and were brothers. He also saw the lord of Pouzy. He did not see immediately the lord of Champroux, because he was in his room in bed; the doctor told him he was resting and he would be able to see him only after a bandage was applied to his wound. Soon after, he saw several people getting out of their bedrooms, among whom the knight of Beauregard, Guillaume de Gadagne, the lord of Verdun, a big thin man called Le Roux, and then Meausse, manservant of Balthazar, a certain de la Mothe, called the bastard...and also two more guys one called Le But, and the other La Buffetiere...**

When Balthazar de Gadagne's wound was dressed, Guedebourg was able to enter his room, and **he saw that the lord of Champroux only seemed to be wounded at the thumb of his right hand and nowhere else, even though Balthazar assured him he was also wounded at his thigh and at his left arm. Guedebourg asked him how it had all happened...**The lord of Champroux answered **that he had met the count of Charlus and that they had immediately started fighting...**

They did not have the time to talk any longer or to mention the papers and contracts that the lord of Guedebourg wanted back because all of a sudden they heard noises and the alarm sounded from the dungeon. Guedebourg approached the window, protected by an iron gate, and looking outside he saw **archers besieging the castle and provosts advancing towards the main entrance** while armed defenders were getting ready to defend the place...

The unlucky Guedebourg did not know yet in what mousetrap he was caught nor the unpleasant consequences that were awaiting him for being mixed with the Gadagne troop...But of all things why did he insist in getting into the **“galley”** of the knight of Beauregard?

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE SIEGE OF CHAMPROUX

Three hours before sunrise on Saturday October 22nd, the lieutenant general Pierre Billard, the lieutenant of the judge Nicolas Menudel and the provost Jehan Desprez, after a short night's sleep in the town of Lurcy, got up to accomplish what justice required i.e. the arrest of the Gadagne, fortified in their castle of Champroux.

They mounted on their horses, all together about twenty five or thirty people, including knights, clerks and archers, and together they started riding towards Champroux, about three and a half miles from Lurcy.

When they arrived to the stream called Mezemblin, **where they were told the crimes had been committed**, they found fifteen or sixteen horsemen, **including servants of the countess of Charlus and gentlemen armed with breastplates, pistols and long wooden spears. They all seemed very emotional, as they had spent the night at Poligny.** Among the gentlemen were the King's courier of Saint-Pierre-le-Moustier, Claude Creuzet lord of Maisonneuve, the lord of Liermesse, the lord of Brizon, old gentleman of Auvergne, related to the countess of Charlus, and the lord of Ponsu. They all joined Billard's troop to increase its strength. All together they continued their march towards Champroux.

Around seven or eight in the morning, while they were crossing the woods close to the castle, they noticed **a man dressed in blue, a strong lad with a powerful black beard**, who was carrying bundles. It was the lackey Mahiet Daumas. **The Dame of Champroux had sent him early in the morning to get some wood** and now he was returning to the castle with some bundles.

"Here is one of the rascals!...Stop! Get him!" shouted the lord of Creuzet and immediately ran towards him armed with his gun. The other gentlemen grabbed the lackey by his neck. Alone against everybody Mahiet was unable to defend himself or to flee...**Both of his arms were tied together** on the spot...When they asked him **if he was present on the scene of the crime, on Thursday, when the murder had occurred**, he denied and added **that if he had been present they should have no pity for him!**...However he blushed when he swore about his innocence on his **"heirloom of Heaven"**...Nobody believed him. They gave orders to take him prisoner to Poligny; that was immediately done and Mahiet Daumas was to be **kept**

two days in Poligny with nothing to eat or drink until Monday. Eventually they gave him a glass of wine and some bread, they even started offering him bread on Saturday evening, but he refused to eat it...

This first successful capture seemed a good omen, and the troop of provosts, clerks, archers and gentlemen continued their cautious approach of Champroux.

When they got out of the wood, the high dungeon appeared above the pond. Then, Billard **addressed** all the gentlemen of Poligny with the following words: **“Gentlemen, we are in view of Champroux; we ask you not to get any closer to the castle than the distance of a gunshot, because if the accused are willing to obey the King’s orders we have enough archers to arrest them... Wait for us here. We are going to get on the first bridge; if you see them act as rebels and attack us, come and help us; otherwise if you come with us immediately some of them might get scared and start shooting at us with no reason... “**

The gentlemen of Poligny agreed to remain behind, at a distance. Then Billard, Menudel and Desprez, **taking only six archers with them, bravely got on the first bridge of the castle facing the moat and the outside wall.**

That was the moment when the lord of Guedebourg had seen them from the window, and that they had sounded the alarm in the castle.

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Then twenty five or thirty men came out of the dungeon of Champroux crossing the inside drawbridge with rifles, pistols and long spears, and climbed on top of the outside wall to reinforce the other defenders. This caused Billard and his companions to address them as follow:”Stop where you are!...Obey the law!”...But they did not seem to care and aimed their weapons at the provosts as if to shoot at them at any moment...

Then Billard standing in front of the draw-bridge pronounced loudly the customary summons: **” In the name of the King, you are under arrest!”...**

There was no answer, only whispers behind the battlements...However, Billard, Menudel and Desprez, **who saw the defenders bending down behind the battlements**, repeated their summons this time addressing them to the lord of Champroux and his brothers and the other accomplices, for them to surrender...but in vain! They repeated their summons a third time **and then again for a long time**, shouting **"Defendants, surrender and obey the justice!..."**

Nobody answered **except finally a maid, who talked from behind the raised draw-bridge saying that nobody was in the castle except the Dame of Champroux who was ill...**The provosts asked **the maid to tell them her name but in vain...**

For the last time, exasperated, Billard, Menudel and Desprez repeated their sommatons, with no other results but swearing and laughing from behind the walls, **the defendants refusing to obey...**

So the officers of justice went back about eighty yards **to compile the case of the starting of a rebellion...sending written notice of it to the King's prosecutor, Laplain de Moulins, asking him to come and inform the lord of Saint Geran governor of the province...** When they finished the letter they gave it to Jehan d'Urbize, one of the archers, **telling him to take it as fast as he could** to Moulins.

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Jehan d'Urbize was mounting his horse to leave for Moulins, at ten in the morning, when the archers shouted that horsemen were coming from the road next to the pond on the right of the mill.

It was the lord of Fourilles, captain of the King's guards and friend of Claude de Gadagne, who was finally arriving on the scene, with a servant of his and a soldier called Levisure (or Levesure?). Three more people were accompanying him, the lord de La Font, Lord Saint Magiran, who were both related to Philippe Prevost, Alphonsine de Gadagne's husband, and **a man dressed all in black**. All six were riding big and beautiful horses.

At this moment **appeared** those that were hiding in the castle: **the knight of Beauregard with two or three others came out of the dungeon, the knight was not wearing a doublet, just shirt and chausses, with an arm in a sling and his unsheathed sword in the other hand, the other two had guns in their hands...They were talking loudly and in a jolly tone of voice as if they were happy to see Fourilles,** which in fact they were as they knew that Fourilles was coming to help them.

On the other hand, when **the gentlemen of Poligny, who had remained behind,** saw the lord of Fourilles and his companions on the road bordering the pond, **led by Creuzet and Brizon, they galloped full speed, with their pistols armed ready to shoot, toward Fourilles and his men shouting "Stop where you are!"...But** Fourilles answered that **he was not there to displease anybody** adding **"Do not touch me! I am here to do the will of the King!"...**

When they saw that the two rival groups **were getting excited,** Billard and Menudel feared **that a combat was going to start with negative consequences for everybody and to prevent it they put themselves and their archers between the two groups.**

Then Billard told the passionate gentlemen of Poligny to please back up, ordering them **not to get any closer, remaining at a rifle shot distance, for fear the people in the castle might get nervous and come out ready to fight or start shooting from the top of the walls...he summoned them again to retreat immediately to avoid more serious trouble...**

So the Poligny group did in fact retreat, inadvertently leaving the Fourilles group the only occupants of the road next to the moat. No one of the Poligny gentlemen or of the archers happened to be on that side of the castle and so they could not see the surroundings of the mill, and even less the side of the castle wall where the **breach** in the fortification had been made, at the level of the waters of the moat.

Fourilles dismounted from his horse and walked resolutely towards the draw-bridge. He asked Billard and his archers, who were blocking the way, to allow him to get into the castle.

"No sir!...you will not get in..." answered Billard and the two exchanged **some angry words.**

Billard added: **"Sir, you want to take away with you those who already want to escape from the castle" ...**

Fourilles answered: **"Cool it, Billard, cool it! We all know what you are able to do!"**

“I have always obeyed the law!”

“That is what I mean, sir...me too! If I was not a law-abiding citizen the King would not ask for my service!”

Having said these words Fourilles became authoritarian and affirmed **that he was there on behalf of the King and the Queen** and ordered Billard to let him enter the castle,

Then he turned towards the lieutenant Menudel and the provost Desprez and revealed them **that he was not only an emissary of the King but also a deputy of the supreme commander and of the marshals of the French armies, to arbitrate in the grievances between the count of Charlus (may God watch over his soul!) and the lord of Champroux...That he could reveal his rank of Captain of the King’s guards...That he wanted to enter the castle alone...That his intent was to help justice prevail...That he was certain that the defendants would stop their rebellion and would obey him immediately...And that he would inform the Queen about the whole affair...**

At this point, **given the important position of the lord of Fourilles**, Billard, Menudel and Desprez discussed among themselves...then **they called the lord of Brizon** (the oldest of the Poligny gentlemen and relative of the countess of Charlus), **and told him the intentions of the lord of Fourilles.**

The lord of Brizon did not perceive Fourilles’ mischief and admitted **that there was nothing wrong in his proposal. Given Brizon’s favorable advice**, Billard, Menudel and Desprez **agreed to allow Fourilles to enter the castle, upon his promise on his gentleman’s honor that he would stay only one hour in the castle and not give the defendants any help of any kind...but instead that they would surrender the outer wall of the castle to the provost...**

Under these conditions the daring captain of the King’s guards, entered the fortified castle, feather in his cap, head-high, with everybody looking at him, and cheerfully walked through the draw-bridge that the guards of Champroux quickly lowered for him,...while everybody in the castle was smiling amusedly.

However the lord of Creuzet, a gentleman of Poligny, on seeing this, went and protested strongly with the lieutenants and the provost, **reproaching them and accusing them of conspiracy with the lord of**

Fourilles...suspecting even that they all had a plan to facilitate the escape of the defendants...

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Now, while the lord of Fourilles was negotiating with Billard and his companions in front of the draw-bridge, **the man in black** that arrived with Fourilles' group, was trying desperately to remain unnoticed by the archers. Who was this mysterious **man in black?** ...What was his intention in coming to these troubled premises?...

In reality, he was risking a lot if the law officers would recognize him here: because he was **"a Gadagne!"** ...He was the lord of Beaulieu, Philippe Prevost, Alphonsine de Gadagne's husband... When Fourilles had informed him how things were starting to go bad for the Gadagne, he had bravely decided to come to the help of his brothers-in-law, even though he had refused, as we know, to join them in the murder of Jean de Levy...

For a moment, Menudel and Desprez had seen him before, **but then the man in black had very discreetly retired on the road of the pond behind the mill.**

At the same time **Claude de Gadagne and the giant called Roux, crossed the outer courtyard of the castle, both wearing only high boots and shirt, nothing else.** They got to the breach, crossed it and **entered in the moat with water above their knees. Each of them had a sword in one hand and a loaded pistol in the other. They went towards the road on the edge of the moat where the man in black was standing.** Immediately Beaulieu **descended in the water also and joined them. The cadet of Beaugard grabbed his hand and guided him where the water was shallow and then through the breach and inside the walls.**

The knight of Beaugard, Guillaume de Gadagne, had seen everything from the top of the dungeon. He quickly ran downstairs and into the outer courtyard.

"Good morning, my dear brother-in-law!" said the lord of Beaulieu to the knight of Beaugard, while getting the water out of his boots and rinsing his drenched chausses. Guillaume was still only in shirt and chausses with his arm in the sling. **Then Beaulieu asked him how injured was his arm and also how was Balthazar, having heard he was near-**

death...They answered him **he was hurt in three spots...** Beaulieu answered that **because of his affection for Balthazar he would like to enter his bedroom and take care of him and look after his wounds...**The knight started laughing: **"He is doing better, nobody will stop you now..."**

By a concealed staircase they went up to the room where Balthazar was slowly regaining his strength. Fourilles had preceded them going through the large halls...They chatted together for **about half an hour** drawing plans of evasion.

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However, Menudel, Desprez and Billard were worried about **the disappearance of the man in black**. None of them had seen him get in the back wall of the castle through the breach and enter it in secret. **If they had seen him do it they would have stopped him!...** Were the lord of Fourilles and **the man in black** making fun of them? Did those companions of Fourilles and of the man in black come on purpose **to help the defendants and prevent them from being caught by the police?...** Maybe they even had accomplices hiding in the woods behind the pond?...Our three friends decided to keep a better eye on how things were going!

As a precaution, Menudel decided to go and make an accurate inspection **of the road next to the pond up to the right of the mill**. On his way he met Fourille's companions, who, as we remember, were blocking the way so nobody could see what was happening in the back of the castle, where the breach had been opened. First he ran into the lords de la Font and Saint Magiran, whom he waived at in silence, then into the soldier Levisure and Fourilles' valet. **He talked with them about the tragedy that had happened two days before,** trying to get some information from them... But they were not very talkative and for good reason!

From that spot of the road around the moat, Menudel finally saw **the breach** in the outer wall and how it had been fortified. However he did not see anything unusual in it, because **the pond was so large in that spot** that he thought it would be impossible to get in the castle through that way...

On the other hand Billard **feared an exit in force of the besieged** by the draw-bridge in front of the castle, **united with an attack on a large scale by the accomplices hidden in the surrounding woods,** so he grouped all his archers in front of the draw-bridge **and told them to**

guard that spot of the bridge because that was where the main combat was going to take place.

Suddenly, a gentleman called Chateaurenaud rode out of the woods and advanced to one hundred yards from the castle, **mounted on a beautiful chestnut colored horse;** (was he trying to compete with the lord of Fourilles?)...**Sword in hand, he wanted to bargain his entrance in the castle, loudly shouting from afar that he wanted to talk to the lord of Beauregard.**

However this time Billard decided to be uncompromising. He refused to allow Chateaurenaud to enter the castle and ordered him not to get any closer.

When he heard these new noises of discussion, the cadet of Beauregard, Claude de Gadagne, appeared from behind the battlements of the castle, always dressed in boots and shirt, and shouting he asked: **"Who is it?"...**

Chateaurenaud introduced himself and then told Claude **how sorry he was of his misfortune, but that he should not be sad, because he had enough friends to make the besiegers retreat, including mostly the lord of Creuzet and the Poligny group, adding and swearing that if he so desired he had the means to make them run...** And then to scare Billard he pretended he was leaving to get reinforcements affirming **that quite a few armed horsemen were not far from there,** and promptly spurring his fiery horse **he disappeared in the distance waving goodbye with his hat...**

Billard trembled with fear...By the devil's horns! Hell itself was getting into the game... There were no more doubts, the situation was getting ugly. **He started counting friends and foes: there were at least fifty people in the castle, counting gentlemen, lackeys and guards...all ready to fight to the end after their crime!....**And then **Chateaurenaud disposed of at least fifty or sixty horsemen, hidden in the woods, to help the besieged in their escape...**

Menudel and Desprez agreed with Billard...How could Billard's twentyfive archers, even with the help of the fifteen or sixteen knights of Poligny, have any chance of winning the battle if they were attacked simultaneously front and rear?...

{In reality, Billard, Menudel, Desprez, their archers and the gentlemen of Poligny, added up to 45 men, outnumbering the defendants; altogether the Gadagne did not have more than 30 fighters, composed by 22 gentlemen and servants (of the 25 that had participated in the crime) plus the lord of Fourilles and the lord of Beaulieu, inside the castle, reinforced from the outside by the four companions of Fourilles, and Chateaurenaud who was really all alone in the woods!}

The three provosts were lost in their worries on the outcome of their situation according to how they imagined it, when they saw **a little peasant boy**, ten or twelve years old, arriving on foot from the road of Lurcy. He was carrying a basket full of different kinds of cheese and he asked permission to enter the castle. It was Charles de la Place, the young page of the lord of Pouzy: nobody recognized him in his peasant outfit. Was he carrying a verbal message?...We cannot say for sure. But he wanted absolutely to join his master in the castle.

Desprez asked Billard: **"Sir! Are you going to allow that young child to enter the castle?"**... Billard answered he would because he saw in that child only innocence...So he allowed him to go through the draw-bridge, and of that **he was guilty...**

When he saw that, the lord of Creuzet, one of Poligny gentlemen, complained to Desprez, saying that **"nobody should be allowed to enter or exit the castle"**. He advised Billard **to be stricter in doing his duty.**

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As it was already past noon, the people inside the castle started to get hungry. The Gadagne quickly ate a good meal, **putting however one of their valets next to the buffet to avoid the bottles of wine being stolen and greedily consumed by the other servants!...**

While food was brought to the riflemen on guard on top of the walls, Fourilles thought that his companions **who were still waiting for him on the road bordering the pond** would not mind eating and drinking also. However who was there able to leave the castle and bring them provisions to eat without risk?...Who? But of course the little page Charles de la Place dressed as a peasant!

So Charles came out of the castle by the draw-bridge and **took a few bottles of wine with bread and cheese** to Fourilles' friends, with Billard's permission. Soldier Levisure drank first, then de la Font and Saint Magiran, finally Fourilles' manservant; and **they ate bread and cheese**. They drank again and agreed **that Billard had been nice to allow those bottles of wine to be brought to them...**

On seeing them eating and drinking, Menudel and Desprez, **who were sitting on some big stones next to the road, facing the fortified breach**, started having hunger pangs. **They remembered that they had been up since very early, three hours before dawn,**

and now for over an hour they had been on guard in front of the castle, with nothing to eat or drink!...

So, very humbly, they asked Fourilles' companions if they would be kind enough to share some of their provisions with them; they got a bottle of wine... **both of them drank a big gulp and gave back the bottle empty.**

Encouraged by his friends' example, Billard left the guard of the draw-bridge and walked up to Fourilles' companions, and **without feeling guilty of negligence, he asked them something to eat and drink; they gave him a little piece of bread and a little wine in a tin cup.**

Seeing all this from their distant position, **the Poligny gentlemen jeered at the provosts...** Then they started thinking **that maybe there was complicity between Billard and Fourilles, as the wine was coming from inside the castle...and that the bottle of wine could be used to send written messages to the besieged...**

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After a while the lord of Fourilles, Blaise de Chaumejean, came out of the castle, as he had promised, but he looked disappointed. With a disillusioned voice he told Billard, Menudel and Desprez the results of his meeting with the Gadagne: **"Those guys are desperate...In spite of my reprimands, they made up their minds to die in the castle; the knight of Beauregard believes he is on a galley, in the sea, and that he is fighting the Turks...I did all I could to make them surrender to justice...They do not want to do it!"...**

While he was saying these words Fourilles **seemed really upset that the Gadagne chose to end their days in such a tragic way...**

Then Billard finally felt his warrior soul awake in him and declared to Fourilles that he saw only one way to make the besieged surrender: break through the draw-bridge with most of his archers...And he was getting ready to order the attack saying **he was firmly resolved to conquer the castle by force.**

But immediately Fourilles **thwarted his order** by revealing that the besieged had put **some nails shooting cannons aimed at the main entrance and that if Billard and his archers forced the**

entrance to the main courtyard they would be caught in the crossfire.

Fourilles, more cunning than ever, told the provost that they had to choose a less dangerous solution...He proposed the following:” **Even though you might think I am crazy, I accept to go and talk to the besieged another time and tell them to allow Billard and his archers to enter peacefully in the courtyard of the castle, while the Gadagne would retire for three days in the dungeon...During that time, we would get some message from the King or advice from the governor of the province, concerning what we should do with the besieged”...**

Billard, Menudel and Desprez **agreed that Fourilles’ plan was good, also because Fourilles was sure to convince the besieged about it.** And Fourilles **entered the castle again.**

But he **came back out immediately** dismayed saying that **the besieged were stubborn and were unwilling to surrender courtyard or dungeon...They were so resolved to die, that you could only have them blown up into pieces by the cannons!...**

And not finding any other way out Fourilles **asked for his horse;** however **before mounting it he shouted to one of the sentinels of the castle to call the cadet of Beauregard, also because the cadet had previously served as ensign under his command.**

Soon the cadet of Beauregard, Claude de Gadagne, **appeared on top of the wall, his sword unsheathed, wearing a frock jersey.**

Solemnly Fourilles shouted these last words to the cadet:” **Beauregard! You never believed me when you were under my command; for a sober man, who drank only water, I have never seen anybody like you! ... I advise you to obey these gentlemen and the rule of justice!”...**

The cadet answered pathetically **that he preferred to die rather than surrender...**

Menudel heard the conversation between the two men...However he was not fooled by those solemn words, suspecting instead that it was just a rehearsal **and that Fourilles and Beauregard were making fun of them...**

At this point Fourilles was happy to have played successfully his part **and joined his companions who were still on the road bordering**

the moat; they all mounted and disappeared at slow trot in the woods. **The man in black** however who had arrived with them in the morning was not in their company.

Everything was now ready in the castle for the defendants to try and escape.

Menudel and Billard were undecided on what else they could do, **so they put sentinels in form of an "s" far enough from the moat...**It made them feel secure.

CHAPTER NINE
THE GADAGNE ESCAPE

Seeing that after Fourilles' departure everything was slowly quieting down, and thinking that the lieutenants did not seem to need them for the moment, the gentlemen of Poligny (Creuzet, Brizon, Thianges, Liermesse, Ponsu, etc) decided it was time to **have dinner**. Was it not already past three in the afternoon?...So they gave the slip to Billard's troop and returned to Poligny to eat something better than bread and cheese and to drink some good wine.

In the meantime Desprez told Billard **that everybody needed to return to their guard-post and Desprez himself returned to his, next to the mill.**

However Billard was worried as to where him and his archers could rest from their tiredness and spend the night so he said that **first of all they had to find where they could sleep that night...**

As a precaution **he sent two sentries to Desprez' advanced guard-post**, just in front of the fortified breach. **Then he took Desprez to a little house ten to twelve yards from the moat of Champroux to see if it was possible to make the best of it and lodge there.** Then Billard told the archers **to join them and give their opinion on that lodging; and then he took Desprez by the arm and pulled him inside the little house...**The door of the house **was facing the front of the castle.**

And **while they were visting the little house..., they heard people say that the besieged were trying to get out..., some lookouts started shouting: alarm!...**

Morbleu! They were escaping!

Desprez and Billard rushed out of the little house and **saw several riflemen on top of the walls just above the draw-bridge who seemed ready to shoot on them...and eight or nine horsemen** getting ready to gallop out of the castle.

Then Desprez, Billard and Menudel with six or seven archers **advanced toward the main entrance of the castle as it seemed that the Gadagne wanted to get out from there...and in fact the**

defendants were lowering the draw-bridge that was keeping it closed.

Billard ordered the archers **to fight against anybody who would try and get out...** So the archers **followed his order and assembled in front of the draw-bridge with their guns ready to shoot.**

On the other side of the draw-bridge **the riflemen of the Gadagne were also aiming their guns at their opponents shouting:” Don’t move! Don’t move!.. and they seemed to want to facilitate the escape of the horsemen through the draw-bridge.**

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While this little scheme was going on **in front of the draw-bridge where Billard, Menudel and Desprez were posted,** the besieged were really escaping **over two hundred yards from there.**

Nine or ten gentlemen, wearing chausses without doublet, holding guns and swords in their hands, mounted on strong and fast horses, passing in between the dungeon and the courtyard, reached unnoticed the breach in the back wall, exited the castle from there and crossed the moat riding on a hidden shallow path unnoticeable from the outside...

However, Billard and Desprez **had posted a sentinel each in the back of the castle from where the escape took place...**but the sentinels frightened by the number of the fugitives **ran away instead of sounding the alarm,** so much so, **that one of the fugitives fell in the water next to them, but they ignored him so he was able to calmly get back on his horse and ride away with the rest...**

[Altogether the fugitives were eleven: the lord of Pouzy, the knight of Marchaumont, the lord of Verdun, Saint-Aubin and his valet Lebut, the two brothers de Menetou-Couture, the lord of Nouettes, the lord de la Mothe, called the bastard, and the two rogues Le Roux and La Buffetiere.]

From his distant position, Billard, beside himself with rage, saw the besieged **leave the castle and cross the water, without the two sentinels being able to stop them, and now they were so far it was impossible to repel them back in the castle...** **“Morbleu, he yelled at his archers, they are escaping as you can all see! Let’s go after them! What are you waiting for?” ...**

However, **two or three times** Desprez told Billard **that they needed to leave some of the archers in front of the castle,** but Billard swore and answered **that they were barely enough to go after them** and he added **that he was going to gallop over all of the Gadagne’s dead bodies...**

Without one more word, the lieutenants and the provost, with their archers, **hastily mounted their horses to ride after them, even though the Poligny gentlemen were not with them any more because they had gone home for dinner...** Billard was well aware of the urgent need for reinforcements and **he sent an archer to the gentlemen to tell them that they were following the defendants who were escaping towards the woods of Civray...**

At this point, abandoning completely the custody of the castle, Billard, Menudel and Desprez, with all of their archers, rushed after the fugitives; **they followed them for three miles but it was waste of time because of the early start of the defendants and of the time it took them to get ready...** And finally as the distance between the two groups increased to the point that they lost the tracks of the fugitives in the wood of Ciray, they had to resign themselves to abandon the pursuit.

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All these incidents were in reality a smart diversion imagined by Guillaume de Gadagne. It was during the pursuit that moved officers and archers away from the castle that the second phase of the evasion was to take place, more delicate because it involved the wounded Gadagne and friends: **the knight of Beauregard** (Guillaume de Gadagne with his arm in a sling), **with other five or six, including Balthazar de Gadagne,** loaded across the rump of a horse because of his serious injuries, wrapped in bandages around his thigh, arm and hand, **left the castle by the main entrance across the lowered draw-bridge...** As strange as it may seem the exit by the draw-bridge was not guarded by

anybody!...With them in the group, were also escaping Claude de Gadagne, the cadet of Beauregard, and Philippe Prevost, **“the man in black”**, and the lord of la Naviere, with two servants of Balthazar, Nicolas and Meusse, who carried the luggage.

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Desprez, Billard and Menudel **followed the fugitives for over three miles in vain and finally returned to the castle...** That is when they found out with astonishment **from a gentleman of Poligny** that during their absence the **rest of the defendants had left the castle passing on the draw-bridge.** Among them were **Balthazar de Gadagne and his two brothers who had thus easily evaded.**

Indeed the lieutenants were appalled at the sight of the draw-bridge still lowered for an easy exit...The provost refused to believe **what had happened...**Even worse! At that moment they did not even know **what path or road the second group of fugitives had taken.** It was only on the following day, Sunday, **that they learned from some of the people of the countess of Charlus** that the Gadagne brothers **escaped from a different path than the first group. They had taken the road used by Fourilles...**Damned Fourilles! Now there were no more doubts on his complicity! ...

After he calmed down, Desprez told Billard **that they still had to guard the castle and find out who was still there.**

Billard answered:” **There is nothing else for us to do here as the defendants are gone!**” and he added **that he wanted all of them with their archers to go and spend the night in the town of Couleuvre...**

But Desprez replied firmly **that they should not do it** if later on they wanted people to believe in their correct behavior in the whole story.

They then entered the castle **easily climbing over the defenses, even though some of the castle defendants started pointing their guns at them...** But eventually **the people of the castle did not stop them and they were able to spend Saturday night in the servant quarters of the first courtyard.**

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When they learned about the evasion of the Gadagne the people of Poligny were very angry and the countess of Charlus distressed. They sharply reproached and treated as incompetent Billard, Menudel and Desprez **for having allowed the besieged to leave the castle right in front of their eyes and nose without doing anything to stop them or even shooting at them.**

Billard tried to justify himself by saying **that even if they had a thousand soldiers he and his companions could not stop the defendants, who had a large number of followers, from escaping...Should they have besieged the castle?...They would have needed at least fifteen hundred men to encircle the fortress, that was hard to attack because of the moat, very large and full of the beautiful waters of the Bourbonnais...**

Menudel confirmed that **nobody who sees the location, the situation and the construction of Champroux can disagree with Billard...**On the other hand, it was unthinkable to believe you could run after the Gadagne and catch them **because the defendants were all riding big and powerful horses, the least of which was worth two hundred crowns...** Menudel added that **Balthazar 's chestnut color horse is valued two thousand pounds, and that the cadet of Beauregard, Claude de Gadagne, always has five or six good horses with him...**

In short **you had to admit that the lieutenants and the provost had honestly done their very best with great hardship and fatigue even though this could not diminish the great sorrow the Dame of Charlus was feeling.**

CHAPTER TEN

LACKEYS AND SERVANTS ARE CAPTURED SEIZURE OF THE FORTIFIED CASTLE OF CHAMPROUX

On Saturday October 22nd evening, a few hours after the escape of the Gadagne, Bernard de Maumont, lord of Saint-Bonnet, maitre d'hotel of the countess of Charlus, widow of Jean de Levy, **came to the castle of Champroux, with power of attorney from the countess.** He was assisted by a notary and two gentlemen, one was a member of the court, Sir Regnauld, the other was the lord of Villeginast. They declared that the countess of Charlus **wanted the prisoners taken to the prison of Saint-Pierre-le-Moustier instead of Moulins.**

That was a bit premature because the “prisoners” were not captured yet. Indeed the Dame of Champroux, Balthazar’s wife, her servants and other people living in the castle at the time, had retired in the apartments of the castle itself, behind the second draw-bridge, and left only the servant quarters of the first courtyard to the officers of the justice and the archers.

It was only the following day, Sunday October 23rd **at about one o’ clock in the afternoon, that the Dame of Champroux had her servants open the door of the dungeon and the archers could enter the apartments of the castle.** The archers immediately assembled all the **“prisoners” in a large room of the castle** and tied their hands. Then provost Desprez, helped by his clerk Condemine, started to make the inventory of the prisoners, how many there were, their names and their occupations.

Among those who were just captured were the poor servants abandoned to their sad destiny by their masters who had escaped without them:

- Jehan Lesueur, lackey of the knight of Marchaumont,
- Claude Roupet, lackey of the lord of la Naviere,
- Charles de La Place, lackey of the lord of Pouzy,
- Jehan Andre’, lackey of the lord of Verdun; he was wounded,
- Medart Robert, lackey of the lord of Menetou-Couture, the elder,
- Pierre Bourrassel, groom of the same,

- Michel Lallement, lackey of Claude de Gadagne, lord of Charly,
- Estienne Morabour, lackey of the lord of Saint-Aubin,
- Jehan Morel, groom of the same.

There was also the monk Jacques de Briont who, repented and pondered over his tragic recklessness in the bad part he had been entrusted with.

There were also Jehan Guillaume, Balthazar's cook, and Louis de Chau, young page of Balthazar. Both swore on their hope of going to Heaven that they had been busy doing their chores and did not understand why they were taken prisoners.

Finally, there was the unlucky lord of Guedebourg, Jehan de Chaverot, who had unwisely entered the castle just a few minutes before it was besieged; he was protesting his innocence, explaining in vain the story of his papers and contracts, and struggled like a madman in a cage...

They were all there, assembled in the large hall, when suddenly they heard voices of angry people yelling at one another, getting closer and closer; all of a sudden, somebody opened the door leading into the hall, and they saw Fourilles and Beaulieu, - them again!- arguing with the provosts...

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A few hours after the escape of the Gadagne, on Saturday afternoon, the lord of Fourilles and the lord of Beaulieu met, as planned, in the house of Saint-Aubin, belonging to Louys de Grivel, son of the lord of Grossouvre, about fourteen miles from Champroux.

Beaulieu had just parted from his Gadagne brothers-in-law, who were galloping towards their destiny of exiled, in the direction of **“la Franche-Comte”**...¹

1. La Franche-Comte' is a region of Eastern France that at that time belonged to Spain. If the Gadagne could reach it without being captured by the French police they would be safe. In his deposition in court, during the trial, to diminish the accusations against him, Beaulieu tried to convince the judges that he had left the castle of Champroux with Fourilles and not with his Gadagne brothers-in-law at the moment of their escape. But Billard, Menudel and Desprez witnessed against his statement.

After he left the Gadagne, Beaulieu passed by a village called Saint-Plaisir, where he stopped **to have his horse shod**. Then he made his way towards Saint-Aubin to his appointment with Fourilles; Fourilles was already there with his group of gentlemen, servants and soldiers.

At Saint-Aubin Fourilles and Beaulieu **did not find anybody except a peasant** whom they asked **some oats for their horses**. The peasant **kept them for a long time**. Their intention was **to return each one to his own house**, as their role in the escape of the Gadagne was practically over. 2

2 It seems that the role of Beaulieu and Fourilles was to prepare the different stages for the escape of the Gadagne, mainly the first one. From Champroux to Franche-Comte' there are about 160 miles. Probably this was their journey: Champroux, Franchesse, Villeneuve-sur-Allier, thus avoiding the bridge of Moulins, Gannay-sur-Loire, or Bourbon-Lancy, Luzy, Autun, Beaune, Dole... No doubt they avoided spending the night in important towns and they only slept in friends' houses or castles who had been forewarned by Fourilles' messengers.

Leaving Saint-Aubin, Fourilles and Beaulieu met a few peasants on the road coming from Devers Bourbon (the Archambault). The peasants told them about **the escape** of the Gadagne and their friends from the castle of Champroux, and they added that they heard the archers had taken over the whole castle.

On hearing this Beaulieu and Fourilles **changed their mind** about returning to their own houses that same night. They decided **they could not abandon the Dame of Champroux, Balthazar de Gadagne's wife...** So they would return the following day to Champroux and see **what was going on**. They would appear in full daylight, conspicuously; that would help eliminate any suspicion on their participation in the planning of the escape...

So they turned around and **spent the night at Saint-Aubin**.

The next day, Sunday, in the morning, when they approached Champroux, **they heard that the apartments of the castle, i.e. the dungeon, were not yet taken by the archers**, as they had been told, and that **the provosts and the archers instead had spent the night in the servants quarters...** However they were somewhat fearful to present themselves at the draw-bridge, being conscious of their role in the events of the last few days, **and moved five miles away from there to a house called Auroux, that belonged to Balthazar, to have some lunch...** But **the farmer did not want to let them in...** So **they went and got bread and wine at the nearby village and oats for their nine horses**.

After that, still worried about what was going on, **they sent a peasant to find out what was really happening at Champroux**, pretending they did not know anything and that they were surprised to hear **that the lord of Champroux, the knight of Beauregard and their friends had really escaped from the castle. After all, they said, the only news they had heard about it was from a few passers-by that same morning.**

They waited patiently for the peasant to return. **When the peasant came back he told them that he had not been able to enter the castle because there were so many men of the count of Sancerre that it was hard to get in....**Cornebleu! ('Blue Horn!) So the count of Sancerre was in Champroux!...They knew him well. He was Jean de Levy's brother-in-law. He was also the father of the count of Maran, Pierre du Bueil, the one who had been seriously injured during the killing of the count of Charlus and the two children. Animated by a desire of retaliation, the count of Sancerre had arrived that Sunday with his friends, wearing his breastplate, riding his reddish-brown horse, a pistol on either side of the saddle, and a rifle in his hands, like if he was going to war. He wanted to demolish everything in Champroux...It was not the best moment for Fourilles and Beaulieu to be there...

So they resigned themselves to remain some more time next to the house of Auroux, until Sunday evening, **when they heard from another peasant that the Dame of Champroux had surrendered the dungeon to the provost and his archers, and that the friends of the count of Sancerre had left...**

On hearing this, Fourilles and Beaulieu mounted their horses to return immediately to Champroux. However, at that moment, the three gentlemen that had been with them until now (La Font, Saint Magiran and Chateaurenaud) declared a little embarrassed that they did not want to prolong their adventure any longer... and each one of them returned separately to his own house.

So Beaulieu and Fourilles left for Champroux accompanied only by their three servants and the soldier Levisure...After travelling five miles **they arrived in front of the lowered draw-bridge of Champroux, with their six horses.**

They dismounted **and talked with the archers that were guarding the door; however the archers refused to let them in...**

Demoralized, feeling that even Heaven was against them, they decided **to go and spend the night at Coulevre, in the parish of Champroux...**

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The following day, Monday, after a good night sleep, Beaulieu and Fourilles decided to use a different tactic. On the day before they had been too shy and hesitant. Morbleu! (By the death of Blue) They had to go in with more decision, straight to the point, and act with recklessness...What did they have to fear, as long as, until refutation, their interventions were only the result of their honest behavior!...

For the third time in two days, they returned to Champroux, and, on arriving at the draw-bridge, they boldly ordered the archers to let them in, shoving them around, saying they wanted to talk to the provosts.

Accordingly, the archers took them inside the courtyard to Desprez, Billard and Menudel. At this point Fourilles became dashing and reminded the provosts that he was always acting in the name of the King and of the marshals of France and he asked them **to make sure there was no violence or trouble inside the castle**, as there had been on the day before when the count of Sancerre wanted to break everything. **And that the provosts should act with equanimity according to their rank and public office.**

Then Fourilles, regaining his old daring self, had the nerve to say that **he and Beaulieu could take care of the castle and guard it** while the provosts could go back home...Even though Billard, Menudel and Desprez refused to accept this proposal,...the main thing was that Fourilles and Beaulieu were now inside the fortress and they did not plan on being let out soon!

And very naturally, they made themselves at home in the castle, after all the lord of Beaulieu was the owner's brother-in-law and so had the right to live in it, until **the provosts allowed them to sleep in one of the rooms of the dungeon. They were forbidden however to enter freely in any other of the rooms of the castle.**

Encouraged by their success, Fourilles and Beaulieu tried to speak with the prisoners. They approached the hall where they were assembled **and saw how the provosts had put all the servants of the Gadagne**, including Mahiet Daumas, brought back from Poligny, **in the big room, tied and guarded by the archers...**At this point Billard, Menudel and Desprez reacted sharply and after a bitter argument **forbade them to talk with the prisoners in any way.**

Defeated on this point, Fourilles was however able to quickly regain his advantage by the abundance of his suggestions, like the fact that the Dame of Champroux, innocent but in bad health and bed-rest, could not leave the castle until she got better...on the other hand all her servants were imprisoned and nobody was left to take care of her...however the provosts could not remain in the castle forever...Need be was to **appoint commissaries** to carry out the takeover of the castle, **also by leaving a few archers in it...**

The idea was not bad; Desprez approved it, because he did not want to be stuck in the castle as he knew that other urgent tasks were awaiting him elsewhere to continue his investigation...Fourilles and Beaulieu offered to be nominated commissaries...But Billard, Menudel and Desprez carefully pondered and **chose to nominate a certain mister Dyssard**, an honest man, **unknown to the Dame of Champroux, as she herself stated...**Fourilles and Beaulieu had never met him either, but they heard that **he lived between seven and ten miles from Moulins and was very wealthy. And so after the provost appointed mister Dyssard, the Dame of Champroux sent for him...**

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The next day, Tuesday October 24th 1611, after the arrival of mister Dyssard, the provosts, who had finished their inventories and legal statements, ordered the fourteen prisoners to leave the castle and be taken to the prison of Moulins...

Desprez was not going to accompany them because **he had to go by the castle of Grossouvre and seize the properties of the lord of Saint-Aubin, and then do the same with the houses of the lords of Nouettes and Menetou.** Billard and Menudel, with their archers, would escort safely the prisoners to the jail...

When the prisoners departed, seeing them all piled up and tied in carts, the lord of Beaulieu, emotional at the thought that he was still free, but for how long?..., could not refrain from shouting: **" May God protect you all, gentlemen!..."**In the meantime, Balthazar, Guillaume and Claude de Gadagne, the real culprits, were galloping towards the Franche-Comte', to escape the justice of the King.³

3. La Franche-Comte', region of Dole and Besancon, belonged to Spain in 1611. It was annexed by France in 1678, following the treaty of Nimegue.

E P I L O G U E

The trial for the vendetta of the Gadagne started in the city of Nevers where the fourteen prisoners picked up in the castle of Champroux had been taken.

The preparation of the case for trial was made by Master Guillaume Delandes, councilor of the King in his Parliamentary court, nominated commissary to solve this dark story. On December 8, 1611 he started to cross-examine the detainees.

Marc de Grivel, lord of Grossouvre, in whose castle the conspirators had assembled, was the first to be indicted. His interrogatory lasted until December 29; he was cross-examined by over twenty witnesses and was recognized guilty of premeditation.

Then it was the turn of the two lackeys, Mahiet Daumas, wine steward of Balthazar, and Jehan Andre', manservant of the lord of Verdun. They were accused of being directly involved in the combat of Mezemblin, and even of having wounded the lord of Sourniac and the lord count of Maran.

For the other lackeys or valets, Jehan Lesueur, Claude Roupet, Charles de La Place, Medart Robert, Pierre Bourrassel, Michel Lallement (Claude's lackey), Estienne Morel, Jehan Guillaume and Louis de Chaux, the interrogatories revealed that all they did was to follow their masters...As they had already spent two months in preventive custody, first in Moulins, then in Nevers, they were all released.

The monk Jacques de Briont, who upon his request had been imprisoned in a church jail, appeared in front of the Parliament of Nevers on the 8th and the 9th of December. Accused of having been seen on top of the walls of Champroux with a gun in his hands, he swore on **"his hope of going to Heaven"** that **he had not handled any gunpowder or wick for the last six or seven months...**His complicity in the crime was judged minimal, and they recognized his thoughtlessness and his good-faith.

The lord of Guedebourg, Jehan de Chaverot, after two months of jail, was able to prove his innocence and was permanently cleared of any suspects.

On the other hand, the preparation of the case for trial of the **"escape business"** quickly revealed the **mistakes made** by Desprez, Menudel and Billard, the provost and the lieutenants of the jurisdiction of the seneschal of Nevers, who were in charge of the arrest of the Gadagne. They were blamed for **not having done all their duty...**That is why they were also imprisoned and put on trial as defendants. They were interrogated unsparingly for ten days, from December 9th to the 19th, and then they were confronted with the

gentlemen of Poligny (the lords of Crozet, Brizon, Thianges, Maumont...), who severely condemned them...To exonerate themselves a little bit, Desprez, Menudel and Billard called into question Beaulieu and Fourilles accusing them to **act in agreement with the Gadagne** in the preparation of their escape.

The lord of Beaulieu, Philippe Prevost (Alphonsine de Gadagne's husband), appeared in Nevers and was examined on December 16...As he did not participate himself in the murders, he succeeded in convincing the judges that his presence in the castle of Champroux was due only **to help his wounded brothers-in-law, the Gadagne.**

Fourilles, the shrewd captain of the King's guards, claimed that in Champroux he had **only obeyed the King's orders, to advise the defendants to obey the justice...**His attitude was so ambiguous and skilful that he was absolved for lack of proofs of his guilt.

On December 29, 1611, the commissary Guillaume Delandes of the Parliament of Nevers gave the following sentence: the lord of Grossouvre and the two lackeys Mahiet Daumas and Jehan Andre' remained in prison; Desprez, Menudel and Billard instead were freed, on the condition that they had to appear in court again if ever the court requested them to...by the same sentence Beaulieu et Fourilles remained free but at the disposal of the justice...The Gadagne brothers instead, and their accomplices who were "gone" were sentenced to be captured, but...where were they?

At this point the trial of the main defendants was entrusted to the Parliament of Paris where the evidence against them was taken on February 6, 1612. The three prisoners, Marc de Grivel, Mahiet Daumas and Jehan Andre' were transferred from Nevers to the Prison de la Conciergerie in Paris.

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By ruling of the Great Council, on July 21st, 1612, the tribunal of the Parliament of Paris, sentenced to death Balthazar de Gadagne, lord of Champroux, and his two brothers: Claude de Gadagne known as **"the cadet of Beauregard"**, lord of Charly, and Guillaume de Gadagne, known as **"the knight of Beauregard"**. They were declared **"in spite of their absence, attested and convinced guilty of the murder of Jean de Levy, count of Charlus, of his son**

Francois, and of the young page Joseph Danglars de Bassignac", crime committed in Mezemblin on October 20, 1611.

They were sentenced **to have their arms, and their legs, both upper part and lower part, and their lower back broken on the scaffold erected in the place de Greve of the city of Paris; then their bodies would be tied to wheels placed next to the scaffolds, their faces turned toward the Cross, and kept there until God decided their life was over...**

However, as the culprits **had not been captured yet** (as they escaped to Franche-Comte') their executions were made symbolically, **in effigy, their portraits were tied to the scaffold, both in the place de Greve in Paris, and in the main squares of Saint-Pierre-le-Moustier, Moulins and Nevers.**

Then the Court confiscated the goods of the Gadagne brothers, **"all and each one, taken by the court, to be given to who it will decide... On the totality of these goods were taken beforehand the sum of 30,000 Parisian pounds,** that the court auctioned one third to the widow countess of Charlus (Diane de Daillon), the two other thirds to the children of the deceased count of Charlus. Furthermore 2,000 pounds were given as **a civil reparation** to Antoinette Danglars de Bassignac, the murdered little page's mother. And 8,000 more pounds were set aside to pay **for the food of the inmates of the Conciergerie** in Paris and 4,000 pounds **for the expenses of the Tribunal.**

On the other hand, 6,400 pounds were destined **to build and found a chapel** on the site of the murders, in Mezemblin, in the Bourbonnais. In this chapel, dedicated to saint John the Evangelist and saint Francis, would be **celebrated every day and forever a Mass for the salvation of the souls of the deceased count of Charlus and son;** in this chapel **a metal leaf would be attached with the inscription of the ruling of the court.**

Furthermore the destruction of the fortified castle of Champroux was ordered as follows:**"the house and the castle of Champroux, where the mentioned culprits retired and rebelled against the rule of justice, will be razed to the ground and demolished, the moat will be filled with dirt, with defense for anybody to rebuild it or prevent the demolition punishable with being declared guilty of the mentioned murders. The chapel will be built with the stones of the destroyed castle."**

The Court of the Parliament of Paris also sentenced to death the fourteen accomplices **who were absent** i.e. the brothers de Menetou-Couture, the knight of Marchaumont, the lord of Saint-Aubin, the lord of Pouzy, the lord of Verdun, the lord of Nouettes, the lord of la Naviere, as well as their sidekicks, the bastard of Grossouvre, the valets Nicolas, Le But and Meausse, and the mercenaries La Buffetiere and Le Roux, **all found equally guilty of the three murders.**

Then the Court tried the case of the three prisoners of the Conciergerie prison. The lord of Grossouvre, Marc de Grivel, **was banished from the Kingdom of France forever,** and all his properties **were confiscated to compensate** the families of the victims.

The two lackeys, Mahiet Daumas and Jehan Andre' , **were banished for five years** from the jurisdiction of the provost of Paris, of Saint-Pierre-le-Moustier and of the jurisdiction of the seneschal of the Bourbonnais.

The five other defendants, Fourilles¹, Beaulieu, and the police officers Jean Desprez, Nicolas Menudel and Pierre Billard, were let free **with the obligation to appear in Court one month after their arrest...**

1. The lord of Fourilles, Blaise de Chaumejean, was killed in the siege of Montauban in 1621: he was then Marquis and Field Marshall at the service of the King.

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Since the beginning of the trial, Eleonore de Colligny, wife of Claude de Gadagne, lord of Charly, sensing that the properties of the Gadagne would be confiscated, hastily requested **a separation of goods from her husband,** and she obtained by a sentence of the chancellor of Moulins on November 7, 1611. Then, putting up with her shame in silence, she came with her two young daughters Gabrielle and Anne, to live in the Lyonnais, in her estate of Beaugard, at Saint-Genis-Laval, or in her castle of Charly. However the separation of goods must have been only a legal formality because during the period of exile of Claude de Gadagne, Eleonore de Colligny met her husband at least twice (in Italy?) and gave him two more legitimate daughters: Jeanne and Claudine de Gadagne, who were baptized in the church of Saint-Genis-Laval, in the absence of their father. (Jeanne, on March 22, 1614; Claudine, on January 14, 1615).

As the seizure of Claude de Gadagne's properties was taking a long time, Diane de Daillon, Jean de Levy's widow, fiercely claimed it in 1614. At that time Claude de Gadagne owned in the Lyonnais the properties of Beauregard and Laye at Saint-Genis-Laval, the estates of Charly and the one of Pravieux, and the house of Bonpre' in the Bourbonnais. The sale of **a portion of the properties of Claude de Gadagne** was actually ordained on August 22, 1617. To that effect, a whole series of transactions and lawsuits took place, mostly concerning the noble rent of **"Petit and Grand Privas"**, belonging to the possessions of the castle of Charly.²

2.Lawsuit of the noble rent of "Petit and Grand Privas: Archives of the Rhone Department: 12 G 842 and 843.

After having dried her tears and obtained the punishment of the culprits, Diane de Daillon, in her adversity acted as a practical woman. With the money obtained from the financial compensations, she successively bought the properties confiscated from the Gadagne: the estate of Champroux, whose castle had been razed to the level of the water of the moat, the property of Avreuil, as well as the castle and the estate of Montverin, where she retired when her son Charles became of age.

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Claude, Balthazar and Guillaume de Gadagne, as well as their companions, did not remain a long time in Franche-Comte'. By December 1611 they had already crossed over to Italy; Florence was the city where the Gadagne had originated from and, just before the crime, Guillaume de Gadagne was **the general of the galleys of the Granduke of Tuscany**...Forced into exile, the Gadagne remained in Italy for over nine years.

However, from 1618, Claude de Gadagne would come back sometimes to France in spite of his death sentence...On January 20th 1618, he was at Saint-Genis-Laval, appearing in public in the church for the Baptism of Claude Bergier, of whom he was the godfather, and he signed the Parish Register. A few months later, on April 25th, he appeared in the church again, godfather of Claude Camet. He was there again in the year 1619: on August 11 for the Baptism of Claudine de Laforet, then on November 11 for the Baptism of Claude Pignard...Every time Claude de Gadagne signed the Parish Register without the people denouncing him or the police harassing him.

In the year 1621, Claude and Balthazar de Gadagne, together with their nephew Louys de Grivel, lord of Saint-Aubin, and two other accomplices, Gilbert de Montgibert, lord of Nouettes, and Jacques d'Anlezy, lord of Menetou-Couture, decided to give themselves up to the justice, and actually **went and were incarcerated in the prison of Rouen.** Claude de Gadagne was following the advice of his friend Francois de Lesdiguieres, at the time duke and marshal of France, under whose command he had formerly served as **company ensign and military flag carrier.**

From the prison of Rouen, Claude de Gadagne wrote **a petition** to the King Louis XIII to ask for his Royal pardon, stating how he **had always been inclined towards the service of the King, having been nourished and brought up next to the King and employed in the regiment of his guards, and taken advantage of all the opportunities to serve his country in foreign wars.** Claude de Gadagne also asked the King's pardon for his brother Balthazar and for the other **participants in the crime,** pleading the King to grant all of them **the "privilege of Pride". ("le privilege de la Fierite" is the original French historical name)**

On his side, marshal de Lesdiguieres intervened personally in a letter of recommendation, addressed also to the King, in which **he was attesting the gallantry and the loyalty of Claude de Gadagne and hoped for him to be granted benevolent mercy.**

The Gadagne were thus expecting to benefit from the "privilege de la Fierite" that could only be granted in the branch of the Cathedral of the city of Rouen.

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The **"privilege de la Fierite"** was a custom that allowed the absolution, once a year, on the feast of the Ascension, of criminals who were sentenced to death.

This privilege dated back to the VII century, in the time of Archbishop Saint Romain. Around the year 630, a horrible dragon, of an unknown species, devoured people and animals, sunk the ships that were navigating on the Seine River, and caused great distress in the whole area of Rouen. One day, the archbishop Saint Romain resolved to attack the monster himself in his own dwelling. But he could not find anybody willing to go with him. Finally he took a

murderer with him. Because he was already sentenced to death, the criminal had nothing to fear. They went together to the cave where the dragon lived, and with the sign of the Cross as his only weapon, Saint Romain threw his stole around the neck of the dragon to hold him. Following the Archbishop's order, the murderer grabbed the stole and dragged the monster by it until the center of the city of Rouen, without the dragon putting up any resistance. There they burned the dragon on the stake and threw its ashes into the Seine river. Everybody thanked the archbishop with shouts of joy for having freed them from their common enemy, and in this public festivity the criminal was absolved of all his crimes and set free.

Word of this wonder immediately spread everywhere, and King Dagobert wanted Saint Romain himself to tell him all about it, which he did. And so that the remembrance of it would remain forever, King Dagobert allowed the branch of the cathedral of Rouen to set free every year, forever, on Ascension Day (which was when the marvelous fact occurred), a murderer who happened to be imprisoned in the jail of Rouen.

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And so, in the year 1621, the branch of Rouen chose Claude and Balthazar de Gadagne, and their three imprisoned accomplices, to be the beneficiary of the great privilege of the Fierte' and **they assigned them to the Parliament of Rouen** to discuss their case. However Diane de Dailon refused to appear at the Parliament of Rouen and thus created a conflict of jurisdiction that transferred the case to the Great Council of the King in Paris.

So it was only the following year, on March 18, 1622, that the Great Council of the King granted the privilege of the Fierte' to Claude and Balthazar de Gadagne and their three accomplices **for the abolition and acquittal of their death sentence.**

The ruling of the Great Council stated **that they would benefit from the Privilege of the Fierte' for the safety of their lives and well being of their persons...provided that they would keep away from the King's Court and from the region of the Bourbonnais, that they would never be in the presence of Dame countess of Charlus and her children; and if by chance they would find themselves in her presence they were due to take off immediately...**The Great Council limited the amount of financial

compensations **to 72,000 pounds...**Following this the King decreed **no more action on their persons and goods and imposed silence forever on the case to public prosecutors and everybody else...**

Following this preferential ruling, Claude and Balthazar de Gadagne and their three accomplices went to the cathedral of Rouen on Ascension Day 1622. There, in front of the clergy and all the people, the five convicts **converted and repentant, putting up with all the ignominy that criminals are subject to be granted the privilege, ... lifted the Ferte'**, i.e. humbly carried the stole of Saint Romain during the penitential procession...

Thus Claude de Gadagne, lord of Charly, and his brother Balthazar de Gadagne, lord of Champroux, were publicly absolved of their crime...3

- 3. In May 1634, Claude de Gadagne obtained from King Louis XIII "pardon letters" that definitely rehabilitated him, in appreciation of his services in the Royal armies, in particular during the siege of La Rochelle (in 1628), then in the wars in Germany and Lorraine, as well as in the Languedoc disorders (National Archives, Paris X 2B 416)...Claude de Gadagne died on March 25 1641 in the town of Juvisy-sur-Orge, near Paris. He was then maitre-de-camp (major) of a cavalry regiment that he himself maintained for His Majesty's service. His corpse was put in a lead coffin, inserted in an oak wood second coffin. But beforehand a surgeon had removed his heart and put it in a heart shaped lead box about 6 to 8 inches wide and with no inscription on it; said box containing Claude's heart was put in between the two coffins. Then Claude de Gadagne's body, thus honored, was taken to Saint-Genis-Laval in the Lyonnais, and there, following the will of the deceased, it was buried in the chapel of Saint Catherine of the convent of the R.P. Recollets, that he had generously founded in 1605.

These Gadagne, with their impassioned minds, were really amazing characters!... From Italian ancestry, wealthy patrons, gallant gentlemen, renowned for their charity and generosity, they had risked their life, their reputation and their fortune, to embark on the worst vengeance plan to save their family honor...4

4.National Archives, Paris, criminal Parliament: X 2A 610, 974, 1207 and 1289; X 2B 266 and 1181.

Their coat of arms bore:" **Two golden branches with thorns in the shape of a Cross, their crest the head of a silver unicorn, held by two lions, and their motto: "Exaltabitur (Will be exalted)" ...**

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