

overnight in the small shed that leant drunkenly against the farmhouse wall and the chickens were kept in the henhouses close by although even those were dilapidated. The way of life of the farmer and his wife closely resembled that of many farmers in the Middle Ages and since but now most except those on the very margins of agriculture had succeeded in improving their lot under the Common Agricultural Policy. It was said that until the turn of the Twentieth Century rural France was made up of thousands of small communes each having very little contact with others and living their life in peaceful obscurity and that was still the case around Villedar.

The Luchon's had gained little from the CAP; they lived solitary lives and were destined to see out their days in poverty and hardship but at least, as they reassured themselves regularly they still had each other, and their dedication to their long marriage was as strong as ever. If you hadn't known the location of the farm you would never have ventured along the narrow track from the tarmac road that disappeared up into the scrub and was barely wide enough for their old and battered Peugeot van. That van wasn't quite as old as the couple but when it came into the village everyone could see it was on its last legs, *just like the old couple* as the villagers commented regularly, for they were both born in 1938 just before the Second World War and had been rearing poultry out there for more than fifty years. Somehow they subsisted from year to year and kept their independence: grew their own vegetables, ate the eggs and sold the corn-fed chickens at the local market in Villedar. That weekly trip was their only contact with civilisation; it was the time when they collected the State pension and used their earnings to purchase necessary items in the local small Huit à Huit grocery store.

When the farmer had tended the animals that morning as he had every morning since he began farming, he set off into one of the small fields carrying his scythe and spade, and steadily cut down the small shrubs and thistles that constantly encroached on the thin grassland, that was the trouble with the garrigue if you didn't keep it under control it soon took over and all the grass disappeared. While he was out in the fields his wife worked on the vegetable plot and made sure their remaining vegetables were safe from the depredations of the many wild animals that lived on the hills. After an hour's heavy labour that