



# *Echo Year*

by  
Casper Silk

**“After an orgy of music, slaughter.”**

From *Souvenirs Entomologiques*  
Jean-Henri Fabré



## Lionel Passes the Empty Chateau

The Crown chateau sold last week to a Spanish horse breeder, old money, who intends to hide his mistress there. A pair of Paso Finos have preceded her, tethered on the summit where David Crown once planted a pair of date palms, gone now. From a distance the horses appear mythical, fiery, yet their presence gives no pleasure. Already the Spaniard's peons have begun construction on the stables.

I have seen a hundred foreigners come and go from Beautemps, hurling forget-me-nots and curses, their trash bins heaped with imported whiskey. Their names escape me—all but David's. The one memorable character, both by nature and circumstance.

It is customary for new arrivals to pay a visit to my office, so I was not surprised when David Crown appeared there one afternoon in early April. The Englishman presented himself at the *mairie* wearing a clean, ironed shirt and polished shoes; an act unremarkable in itself, yet in contrast to the average drop-in a seal of distinction. My expectations of new residents have contracted in recent years: they might have money—as evidenced in the ambitious renovations they undertake and fortunes they sink in hot tubs and lap pools—but their taste tends increasingly toward kitsch, their etiquette toward anarchy. Amid this mass devolution David arrived in Beautemps and purchased its finest remaining *grande maison*.

“I wanted to introduce myself, Monsieur Olivier—am I intruding?”

“*Pas du tout.*” I had, in fact, been about to leave for home. After a proper handshake and exchange of bona fides, “So, you have bought the widow Fabré’s *terroir*? I suppose the estate agent told you it was a Mansard?”

“Why yes”—

“A lie. Don’t let the roof mislead you. The house was built in 1722 by the Duke’s heir, the Duke having died abroad of the *mal Anglais*. True, it was spared the frills of rococo, but look closely at the façade: the stones aren’t from here. Beautemp’s own quarry had been depleted by then; the stones had to have been hauled in on muleback. They have a golden cast.”

“I thought it was the light.”

“No, *monsieur*, the stone itself is *dorée*. You have been marked.”

The Englishman, visibly delighted by the revelation, nonetheless deflected its glory. “Marked for a spell of hard work. The interior is in ruins.”

“The house has character, yes,” I had to concur. “You will wish to change its name, I suppose?”

“I didn’t know it had one.”

“It has always been called the *Vie Dorée*.”

“The golden life,” he translated with a sort of reverence. “No, I shan’t change the name. The *Vie Dorée* it stays.”

“It will be a summer residence?” A forgone conclusion: the village’s foreign population fled each autumn at the first sign of frost, except for one oddball, a farmer—something David clearly was not.

“Actually, I plan to live in Beautemps year-round, to settle here.”

“You are retired then?”

Once again David had surprised me. “Work will take some sorting out. First, the house. The restoration will absorb me for some time. I’m committed to keeping the details authentic. I want to see the chateau *come alive*.”

And then I surprised myself: “Do you play chess?”

The games quickly became part of my routine—I looked forward to them—and David Crown became a frequent guest, crafty at the board, amusing over a pastis, and popular with my wife, who saw in his mildness and sense of duty the underpinnings of chivalry.

