

Extrait du Hacked by Galack

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# LIKE YOU WOULD

- Midi Matters -



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**Description :**

On buying a house in the Midi

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**Hacked by Galack**

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**If it is possible for two people to buy a house by accident and at the same time by predestination, then we were those two people.**



**A Vendre** A house in Southern France for sale.

If it is possible for two people to buy a house by accident and at the same time by predestination, then we were those two people.

When I first met Himself he announced casually, quite early on in the relationship, that he didn't like France. Well, I thought, this will not do. Either the man must go, or I'll have to change his ways. Being a woman, I found the latter option the more acceptable.

After a little more subtle probing I discovered that there was one place he quite liked, one place he had visited in his wild youth and not found wanting. This place was Capdag - which I had never heard of. I later found out that he meant Le Cap d'Agde.

And so it was that we planned a holiday in that part of the world, and found ourselves renting a house in Pézenas, a busy market town in the Languedoc Roussillon. It was the start of what has been, so far, a 19-year love affair.



Not that it started that way. We hated Pézenas on sight. We arrived on market day, the streets were congested, we got lost, and when we finally arrived at the house, hot, cross, weary and in need of siestas, the exceedingly fierce cleaning lady threw us out again because we were not supposed to turn up till 4 o'clock.

But by the end of the fortnight we were talking tentatively about returning next year. By the middle of the following year's holiday we were saying "When we come back next year&" And by the third consecutive year in Pézenas we were fantasising about having our own house there.

It was never meant to be more than a fantasy. Ever since we had known each other we had been making wild, improbable plans about a bolt hole in the sun. A boat in Greece, the inevitable bar in Spain. A house in Pézenas was just another fun dream, bien sur.

We told the owner of our rented house that if he ever wanted to sell, we would like first refusal (looking back, we must have been mad. It was quite a horrid house). Well, said he, I do know someone who wants to sell a house in the area...

It was one of those typical Midi arrangements. If we went to a certain bar in Pézenas at a certain time and asked for Jerry, this person would take us to the house he was selling. Feeling rather as if we had wandered into a remake of *The Third Man*, we duly presented ourselves at the bar at the stated time and asked for Jerry.

Of course, he never showed up.

Well, no Jerry, hence no house. Or perhaps&? It was then that Himself noticed that the café was directly opposite an estate agency, and said the fatal words "Well, it wouldn't hurt to go and look in the window, would it?"

This was how we came to meet our good friend Robert, the estate agent. Robert was small and friendly with no English but a great determination to find us exactly the house we needed. Suddenly the fantasy began to take on ominous overtones of reality. Were we really going to go house hunting? It seemed we were.

Four long, hot days of trudging round Pézenas ensued, in the course of which our friendship with Robert was cemented over many a cold beer, but no likely property emerged. Pézenas, it seemed, was out of the question. Everything we liked, we couldn't afford. Everything we could afford needed prohibitive work done on it.

Would we, said Robert, consider the villages?

Now this was the time to cry "Fini la comédie." The moment, if ever, to back out gracefully, leaving our fantasy intact but unfulfilled. After all, we had never really meant to buy a house, had we?

Fine, we said. Bring on the villages, we said.

Two more hot and thirsty days later, we had at least firmed up our ideas of what the ideal property would have to offer. "It must," I told Robert, "have a garage, a terrace and a boulangerie."

Robert blinked a bit: he hadn't quite got to grips with the English sense of humour. But he soon cottoned on to the fact that what we needed was shops within walking distance. No rural idylls in the middle of nowhere for us. We were city mice.

House after house was seen and rejected. Nothing came quite up to expectation, and the end of our holiday was drawing closer. Then one evening Robert said "I have two more houses I think you might like. We can go and see them tomorrow."

We managed to wheedle the addresses out of him. This was a great concession, because estate agents live in mortal fear that the potential buyer will do a private deal with the potential seller and cut the agency out. So, as a rule, they are very cagey about giving out addresses.

We promised faithfully that we would do no more than suss out the villages and take a look at the houses from the outside, and we kept our word. Well, almost: we sussed out two villages and looked at one house from the outside. The other house we completely failed to find.

Considering that the village was tiny and the address was in the Rue du Saint Sacrement, this might seem unlikely. Despite our very best endeavours, and despite my cries of "Look for the church!" we never did find the house that evening.

The next morning we drove back to that village, in Robert's little Peugeot. All became clear: we had been looking on the wrong side of the road. Our village is sharply divided between the old and the new, and the road runs between.

Robert duly turned right where we had turned left, drove up a narrow street between ancient houses, turned the corner (by - yes! - the church) and stopped. We got out of the car. On the angle of the church square and a road so narrow you could have spanned with outstretched arms, stood the ugliest house I had ever seen.

It was clearly old, very old. It was clearly cobbled together out of what had been two houses. It rose slab-fronted from the street, acres of decaying, yellowish crépi bisected by sundry phone and electricity cables. A ridiculous stone staircase flanked by a stunted tree rose ungracefully to a pocket-handkerchief front terrace littered with debris and encrusted with bird droppings.

I stopped dead in my tracks. "Ohmigawd" thought Himself to himself (as he told me later), "we've just bought a house."

As it turned out, he was right. Of course, it took a bit longer than that. We did take the precaution of actually viewing

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the house I had so precipitately fallen in love with. The house, I was convinced, that had opened one eye when I walked in and remarked "Well, you took your time getting here."

And we did play the property buying game, disdainingly the derisory amount the seller was asking, and then chewing our fingernails till he came up with a counter-offer (we knew, Robert knew and for all I can say the house knew that we would have bought it at twice the price). But effectively, yes, we bought that house at first sight.

So, having signed our *compromis de vente* and agreed faithfully to have the money ready by October, we reluctantly got on the road and made our way back to England. We hardly dared look at each other. Had we really done it? And how on earth were we going to afford it?

By the time we got back to the UK we had come to terms with the idea. Indeed, we were positively blasé about the whole thing. And when friends asked us if we had had a good holiday, and what had we done while away, we soon learned to reply nonchalantly "Oh, you know. Went to the beach. Had some good meals. Did a spot of sight-seeing. Bought a house."

Like you would.