

THE TRIMARDE

In the Couserans country, the strollers enjoy gazing at the sides of the Pyrénées of Ariège as they refresh their tired feet in the waters of the Couech. Few people remain who remember that the Trimarde travelled on the same paths, a stick in her hand, a wide leather backpack behind. She was old, the Trimarde. One couldn't count her wrinkles, for there were so many on her fading skin. She didn't have much hair left either. But, out of vanity maybe, she hid her baldness under a dull and used shawl. Her bony and arched legs did not shake however as she stepped. She walked. It looked as if this was all she could do. Walk until sunset.

Some say that the Trimarde strode along the roads, bearing in mind a precise goal ; that every night she set off to hunt the young children who, careless, stayed outside too long despite the repeated calls of their parents. Some say she was brisk, that with an arm only she could catch the little one and shoved them in her big backpack. What she was doing with these children, no-one knows. No-one wants to know. Some say she ate them. What is known is that these children were never seen again.

The young Jeanne lived in a village close to Castillons. The elders told her the story of the Trimarde. As all the other children, she feared the old woman. But she wanted to know more. She was asking questions. Nobody knew much. She tried a few evenings to stay out, a bit too long. In vain, the Trimarde was not around. When she grew old enough, Jeanne took her bundle and left. She went all around the Biros, crossed the mountains until she reached Spain, she came down to Saint-Girons. For sixty years, she followed the tracks of the Trimarde, collecting on her way the stories of people, telling her own in exchange of a bowl of soup and a slice of bread. In the whole country people knew Jeanne, laughing discretely Who was mad enough to run after a chimera ? Jeanne believed in her chimera.

One day eventually, she saw ahead the old leather backpack, the bent figure, the shawl attached over a handful of hair. Jeanne quickened her steps. The dark figure out of reach, she ran, as fast as her old legs allowed her to. But nothing changed, the distance remained the same. The Trimarde in sight, Jeanne ran even faster and ran out of breath. She fell, exhausted, in the middle of the track.

The night was falling and Jeanne lit a fire on the side of the way. Her body refusing to set off before long. The fatigue had reached till her bones. Vulnerable, her childhood fears came back. The wolves, the sprites, the ogre, the frightful bestiary appeared to haunt her, led by the Trimarde. Jeanne pulled herself together as she heard the sound of steps coming nearer. A very old woman asked if she could join. She put down her stick, took away her shawl and let the flames warm up her nearly naked head. Jeanne understood. The situation led to a conversation. The two women talked over their memories of travels. Two old women sharing the delightful encounters and the throes... Jeanne knew. The Trimarde didn't kill, she was simply there ; she accompanied in their death the young children who, careless, stayed outside too long despite the repeated calls of their parents.

People in the country don't tell any longer the story of the Trimarde. Jeanne is long gone to remind it. The strollers go by and enjoy a landscape from which a character has silently disappeared.