

Historical Note

When actual historical figures appear in the narrative, I used historical fact whenever I could find it, and then added detail which fits with historians' research. The 12th century left little in writing so both fact and interpretation are widely disputed by historians, leaving room for a novelist to explore what might have happened. There is no record of Aliénor visiting Narbonne but it is certainly possible in the dates I have suggested, and it seems likely that she and Ermengarda would have formed an alliance. Also, the notion that Aliénor brought sugar back from the Crusades and made it part of Narbonne's trading goods has some evidential support, linking Aliénor strongly with Narbonne.

Aliénor is of course known in English as Eleanor but I have tried to keep the flavour of the period by retaining French or Occitan names, unless this confuses the narrative. Spelling of names was arbitrary and every other male ruler in Occitania was called Raymond so I have used the different language spellings to try to distinguish between the various Raymonds, who would in fact all have enjoyed every spelling possible at the time.

Although Estela and Dragonetz are completely fictional characters, they live in the real world and events of the 12th century, which I have recreated to the best of my ability. All the lyrics in the book are from existing texts attributed to different troubadours but where the historical troubadours appear in the narrative, such as Marcabru, his lyrics are indeed his own. Again, he could have been in Narbonne at this time. Amazingly, the Prince of Orkney did indeed call at Narbonne and write heroic verse for Ermengarda at roughly this date.

In Occitania (now the south of France and north of Spain) it was a time when Muslims and Jews shared their amazing science, medicine, engineering, technology and even philosophy. Some Christians, like Dragonetz, recognized the future; others preached hellfire and damnation. Among the heathen inventions which drew the wrath of the Church, threatening its coffers and its monopoly on the word, was paper.

The medieval Church was so successful in stamping out the production of paper in Christian Europe that it took 200 years before the knowledge of the 12th century re-appeared, leading to that freedom of thought across time that we call a book.

She woke with a throbbing headache, cramp in her legs and a curious sensation of warmth along her back. The warmth moved against her as she stretched her stiff limbs along the constraints of the ditch. She took her time before opening her eyes, heavy with too little sleep. The sun was already two hours high in the sky and she was waking to painful proof that her choice of sleeping quarters had been forced.

‘I am still alive. I am here. I am no-one,’ she whispered. She remembered that she had a plan but the girl who made that plan was dead. Had to be dead and stay dead. So who was she now? She needed a name.

A groan beside her attracted her attention. The strange warmth along her back, with accompanying thick white fur and the smell of damp wool, was easily identified. The girl pushed against a solid mass of giant dog, which shifted enough to let her get herself out of the ditch, where they had curved together into the sides. She recognized him well enough even though she had no idea when he had joined her in the dirt. A regular scrounger at table with the other curs, all named ‘Out of my way’ or worse. You couldn’t mistake this one though, one of the mountain dogs bred to guard the sheep, his own coat shaggy white with brindled parts on his back and ears. Only he wouldn’t stay with the flock, whatever anyone tried with him. He’d visit the fields happily enough but at the first opportunity he’d be back at the chateau. Perhaps he thought she was heading out to check on the sheep and that he’d tag along to see what he was missing.

‘Useless dog,’ she gave a feeble kick in his general direction. ‘Can’t even do one simple job. They say you’re too fond of people to stay in the field with the sheep. Well, I’ve got news for you about people, you big stupid bastard of a useless dog. Nobody wants you.’ She felt tears pricking and smeared them across her cheeks with an impatient, muddy hand. ‘And if

you've broken this, you'll really feel my boot.' She knelt on the edge of the ditch to retrieve an object completely hidden in a swathe of brocade.

She had counted on having the night to get away but by now there would be a search on. If Gilles had done a good job, they would find her bloody remnants well before there was any risk of them finding her living, angry self. If he had hidden the clues too well, they might keep searching until they really did find her. And if the false trail was found but too obvious, then there would be no let-up, ever. And she would never see Gilles again. She shivered, although the day was already promising the spring warmth typical of the south. She would never see Gilles again anyway, she told herself. He knew the risks as well as she did. And if it had to be done, then she was her mother's daughter and would never – 'Never!' she said aloud – forget that, whoever tried to make her. She was no longer a child but sixteen summers.

All around her, the sun was casting long shadows on the bare vineyards, buds showing on the pruned vine-stumps but no leaves yet. Like rows of wizened cats tortured on wires, the gnarled stumps bided their time. How morbid she had become these last months! Too long a winter and spent in company who considered torture-methods an amusing topic of conversation. Better to look forward. In a matter of weeks, the vines would start to green, and in another two months, the spectacular summer growth would shoot upwards and outwards but for now, all was still wintry grey.

There was no shelter in the April vineyards and the road stretched forward to Narbonne and back towards Carcassonne, pitted with the holes gouged by the severe winter of 1149. Along this road east-west, and the Via Domitia north-south, flowed the life-blood of the region, the trade and treaties, the marriage-parties and the armies, the hired escorts sent by the Viscomtesse de Narbonne and the murderers they were protection against. The girl knew all this and could list fifty fates worse than death, which were not only possible but a likely outcome of a night in a ditch. What she had forgotten was that as

soon as she stood up in this open landscape, in daylight, she could see for miles - and be seen.

She looked back towards Carcassonne and chewed her lip. It was already too late. The most important reason why she should not have slept in a ditch beside the road came back to her along with the growing clatter of a large party of horse and, from the sound of it, wagons. The waking and walking was likely to be even more dangerous than the sleeping and it was upon her already.

The girl stood up straight, brushed down her muddy skirts and clutched her brocade parcel to her breast. She knew that following her instinct to run would serve for nothing against the wild mercenaries or, at best, suspicious merchants, who were surely heading towards her. She was lucky to have passed a tranquil night – or so the night now seemed compared with the bleak prospect in front of her. What a fool to rush from one danger straight into another, forgetting the basic rules of survival on the open road. To run now would make her prey so she searched desperately for another option. In her common habit, bedraggled and dirty, she was as invisible as she could hope to be. No thief would look twice at her, nor think she had a purse to cut, far less a ransom waiting at home. No reason to bother her.

What she could not disguise was that, common or not, she was young, female and alone, and the consequences of that had been beaten into her when she was five years old and followed a cat into the forest. Not, of course, that anything bad happened in the forest, where she had lost sight of the cat but instead seen a rabbit's white scut vanishing behind a tree, as she tried to tell her father when he found her. His hard hand cut off her words, to teach her obedience for her own good, punctuated with a graphic description of the horrors she had escaped. All that had not happened in the dappled light and crackling twigs beneath the canopy of leaves and green needles, visited her nightmares instead, with gashed faces and shuddering laughter as she ran and

hid, always discovered. Until now, she *had* obeyed, and it had not been for her own good. Fool that she had been. But no more. Now she would run and hide, and not be discovered.

She drew herself up straight and tall. No, bad idea. Instead, she slumped, as ordinary as she could make herself, and felt through the slit in her dress, just below her right hip, for her other option should a quick tongue fail her. The handle fitted snugly into her hand and her fingers closed round it, reassured. The dagger was safe in its sheath, neatly attached to her under-shift with the calico ties she had laboriously sewn into the fabric in secret candle-light. She had full confidence in its blade, knowing well the meticulous care her brother gave his weapons. As to her capacity to use it, let the occasion be judge. And after that, God would be, one way or another.

By now, the oncoming chink of harness and thud of hooves was so loud that she could hardly hear the low growl beside her. The dog was on his feet, facing the danger. He threw back his head and gave the deep bark of his kind against the wolf. The girl crossed herself and the first horse came into sight.

Dragonetz considered their progress. They had been seven days on the road since Poitiers, and many had objected to the undignified haste. Such a procession of litters, wagons and horse inevitably travelled slowly but they had kept overnight stops as simple as possible, resting at the Abbey and with loyal vassals, strengthening the ties. Apart from Toulouse of course, where Aliénor had insisted on a 'courtesy visit', her smile as polite as a dog baring its teeth. It had taken all his diplomacy to talk her out of instructing her herald to announce 'Comtesse de Toulouse' among her many titles and she had found a thousand other ways to throw her embroidered glove in the young Comte's face. It was no easy matter to be in the service of Aliénor, Queen of France, but he would say this for her; it was never dull. The Lord be thanked

that she had decided to insult Toulouse by the brevity of her stay or he could not answer for the casualties that would have ensued. Two more days of travel should see them in Narbonne and safe with Ermengarda and then he could relax his guard to the usual twenty-four hour check on every movement near Aliénor.

He was aware of the bustle behind him, wheels stopping, voices raised, and he slowed his horse almost to a standstill, anticipating the imperious voice beside him. Aliénor had tired of the litter and, mounted on her favourite palfrey, reined in beside him. He declined his head. ‘My lady.’ Queen of France she might be but like all born in Aquitaine, he had sworn fealty to Aquitaine and its Duchesse, and France came second.

‘Amuse me,’ Aliénor instructed her companion, her pearl ear-rings spinning. The Queen’s idea of dressing down for travelling might have included one less bracelet, a touch less rouge on her exquisitely painted face, and a switch of jeweled circlet, but there was little other compromise. The fur edging her dress could have been traded for a mercenary army. And that was exactly as it should be, she would have told him, had he questioned the wisdom of flaunting her status on the open road. She might have been spoiled as a child but she had been taught that a Lord of Aquitaine commanded respect as much through display and largesse as through a mailed fist, and she had learned the lesson well. In Aquitaine, she was adored. France, however, was a different country and they did things differently there.

‘Once,’ he began, ‘there was a beautiful lady with red-gold hair, riding a white palfrey between Carcassonne and Narbonne, unaware of the danger lurking on the road ahead...’

She laughed. The pearls on her circlet gleamed and the matching ear-rings danced. Some red-gold hair escaped its net and coils under her veil. Everything about Aliénor was impatient for action. ‘We have travelled more dangerous roads than this, my friend.’ She was referring to their trek two years

earlier, when they took the cross and the road to Damascus, the road paved with good intentions and finishing as surely in hell as anything either of them had ever known. A Crusade started in all enthusiasm and finished in shame. Each of them had good reason to bury what they had shared and he said nothing.

She rallied. ‘Wouldn’t you love to deal with monsters, dragons and ogres instead of Toulouse and his wet-nurses?’ Her smile clouded over again. ‘Or the Frankish vultures, flapping their Christian piety over me. Do you know how Paris seems to me? Black, white and grey, the northern skies, the drab clothes, the drab minds. All the colour is being leeches out of my life, month by month and I cannot continue like this.’

‘You must, my Lady. It is your birthright and your birth curse. You know this.’

‘I cannot exercise my birthright when I am relegated to embroidery and garden design. It is insufferable.’

‘Power does not always shout its presence, my Lady, and each of the two hundred men armed behind you on this road represent a thousand more ready to die at your command. Every word you speak has the weight of those men.’

‘Tell that to my husband, the Monk!’ was the bitter reply. Her companion knew better than to reply to treason, especially when it came from a wife’s mouth. ‘Oh to be free of Sackcloth and Ashes, to hear a lute without seeing a pursed mouth or hearing that bony friar Clairvaux invoke God’s punishment on the ways of Satan.’

‘Clairvaux,’ her companion mused, ‘Bernard of Clairvaux, now what was that story about him? No, I mustn’t say, not to a lady.’

‘But you must, my wicked friend, that’s exactly what I need, gossip. The more scurrilous the better.’

‘Scurrilous gossip? About the saintly Clairvaux? How could that be possible? Anyway it’s an old tale so you’ll have heard it before,’ he teased.

‘I want to hear it again,’ she ordered.

‘As my Lady commands. But don’t blame me if you have nightmares.’

‘I already have nightmares. And Clairvaux is the least of it, curse his skinny, goose-pimpled arse.’

‘You’ve stolen the best of my tale, my Lady, for it does indeed concern his skinny, goose-pimpled arse.’

‘Tell anyway.’

‘Once -’

She cut him off. ‘No troubadour tricks. No romancing the rogue. He doesn’t deserve it.’

‘So then, even Bernard was once a young man and his body was supple, muscled, toned, bronzed and - ’

‘For shame!’

‘You prefer I leave out some of the detail of a young man’s body? I’ve only just started.’

‘The only toned bit of that man’s body is his knees, for he is always on them, and it was ever so, whatever age he was. No, I shall have no description of him as a beautiful young man. Next part of the story, if you will.’

‘I have to mention one part of the young man’s anatomy, my Lady, for therein lies the story and the problem, from Bernard’s point of view. He had stopped at an Inn and was served by a beautiful young serving girl, skin transparent as lace, hair golden as - ’

‘Yes, yes, a pretty girl. On!’

‘ - and poor Bernard found that part of his anatomy preferred to follow its own will rather than God’s. Horrified at this inappropriate rectitude

in the only situation where he would rather have been less rigid, he raced out the Inn as one possessed by a Demon, tore off his clothes and jumped into the freezing water of the village fountain, extinguishing all rebellious behavior from his shivering, goose-pimpled body. And so ended the one and only moment when Bernard of Clairvaux wondered what a warm body would be like against his own. From then on, his body was ruled by icy regime.'

'It's not true.' Aliénor was rueful. 'He never took his clothes off.'

'My Lady, how can you doubt my word?'

'Your word as my Knight or your word as a troubadour, teller of outrageous tales?'

'The latter, my Lady,' he concurred sighing. 'But don't you think it makes a satisfying portrait - the shivering, naked monk in the fountain?'

'To the life,' she agreed. 'But I am no Bernard of Clairvaux and there are times, I too wonder what it would be like to hold a warm body against my own.' If this were an invitation, he gave no sign of taking it as such and she returned to the more entertaining subject. 'And did you hear the other one, how he ran into the street shouting that someone was trying to rob him -'

' - and it was some sinner after his virginity!'

'Must have been a blind, desperate sinner!' Aliénor called over her shoulder to the four Ladies-in-waiting keeping a discreet distance. 'Ladies, come join us. We are engaged in character destruction and the more the merrier.' As the other horses were jostled near enough to take turn-about beside the Queen, her companion's attention shifted to the road ahead, where a slight movement stabilized into an unmistakably human figure.

'Sire?' the alert came from one of his men up front.

No longer teasing, he ordered, 'My lady, you must fall back with your women. Keep to the middle. No-one sane walks this road alone and there is likely a trap ahead.' He had already moved ahead, throwing orders behind him as he caught up with his hand-picked vanguard. He glanced over his shoulder,

satisfied that Aliénor was already invisible in the middle of a thick shield of armoured men.

Swords out, reins tight in one hand, they advanced on the lone figure standing at the roadside, who seemed to get smaller as they grew nearer.

‘It’s a woman, Sire!’ his man exclaimed.

‘Be on guard, Danton, a woman can have a band of cut-throats on hand as easily as a man,’ but there was as much chance of hiding men in the open vineyards around them as behind a molehill. He sheathed his sword, and a signal passed back along the line in a wave of relief.

The Commander reined in beside a girl who stood stock-still, a great hound at her side, growling menaces. The entire procession ground to a halt behind its leader and Danton jumped out the saddle, sword unsheathed, eyes on the dog.

‘No!’ came instinctively from the girl, who stepped forward, interposing a reckless arm between Danton’s approaching sword and the growling dog. Her other arm clutched some sort of large bundle close to her chest.

‘No,’ agreed the Commander, looking fixedly at the girl. ‘Danton, I think the puppy would benefit from some space while we decide whether to slit its throat or not.’ Danton backed off but kept his sword ready. It was obvious to all there that his leader was not only referring to the dog. ‘You see,’ he said gently, ‘we can’t be sure that you won’t run across the fields, then get ahead of us and prepare your bandit-friends to slit our throats and steal our valuables. And that just wouldn’t do.’

The girl looked at him, astonished. ‘But I’m on my own!’ Topaz eyes, like those of the hunting leopards in Alexandria, green shadows and muddy depths, sparks where there should have been fear. Topaz eyes and black hair, silky as the tents of the Moorish armies. Olive skin like a slave girl but

smooth, unpitted, ripe. Her clothes spoke of the servant but the fire in her eyes did not.

Even more gently he told her, 'We just can't take the risk. And so that gives us two choices.' She didn't move but he could see the movement of her long throat as she swallowed. 'Either Danton here is allowed to exercise his duty and his sword - ' She neither flinched nor spoke. Interesting. Physical courage combined with the good sense not to provoke him. '- or we must invite you to join our company.' Was that a frown? There was definitely some mystery here.

'What *is* going on?' Aliénor pushed her horse through to stand shoulder to shoulder beside the Commander's. 'Can't we just get on with the journey?'

'We can, my Lady, as soon as you tell me whether I must have this maid run through or packed with the other baggage.'

For a heartbeat he thought he had misjudged his Queen and that finally her wildness had overcome her humanity. Aliénor studied the girl. Then, after a tortuous pause that stabbed a hundred times, 'She has something to hide,' Aliénor stated, in a tone that reminded everyone present why they followed her. 'Muddy servant's clothes, alone by a ditch on the busiest road in Occitania... Who are you and what are you doing here?'

The girl looked down but she said nothing.

'No! Don't hit her,' the Commander and Aliénor spoke as one to prevent Danton showing what he thought of dumb insolence to the Queen. 'If you are told to hit her, you must deal with the dog first, not second, I think you'll find,' the Commander added unnecessarily, as the dog snapped the air where Danton had nearly been.

'Quite,' said Aliénor, her gaze level and merciless on the girl. 'As you see, it is dangerous to ignore me, and suggests guilt. What is in that package?'

'My belongings,' the girl muttered.

‘Well, that wasn’t so hard to say, was it,’ Aliénor’s eyes narrowed. ‘Now open it up,’ she ordered. The girl hesitated and Aliénor’s voice steeled further. ‘Either you open it yourself or Danton kills the dog, which he is very keen to do, and then it is opened by force while you are held very, very roughly by the arms. And then it gets worse, much worse. Am I clear?’

The girl’s answer was to lay the brocade down on the rough stone. As she bent down, her hair swung clear of her neck and the Commander revised his first impression. Her skin was not flawless; a badly healed scar marred the clear skin of her left shoulder. His professional eye judged it to be deliberate, and whip rather than blade. With tenderness, she unwrapped her precious object until it was laid bare on the outspread brocade.

The musical instrument revealed was of reddish wood, so highly polished that the girl’s figure gleamed dully in the deep, pear-shaped bowl. Three circles of cream enamel inlay decorated the wood, each with a design of arabesques and interlaced points. Eight strings, frets, a bent peg-board for tuning.

‘Al-Oud,’ he breathed.

She looked puzzled. ‘It’s a mandora.’

‘And obviously stolen.’ One of Aliénor’s Ladies had edged forward. At first sight, she was no less magnificent than her mistress, but whereas Aliénor’s finery was merely the setting for Aliénor herself, this Lady was diminished by her trappings. Her painted face seemed set as a mask, her fur trimming too broad as if to compensate for lesser quality, her jeweled earrings too glittery, obviously paste to a connoisseur. ‘Cut off her hand and let’s be done with her.’

‘And your reasoning in this?’ Aliénor asked quietly. No-one doubted her willingness to judge and, if that be the judgement, sentence as proposed. No-one questioned that the girl’s hand was forfeit for her theft. Most would have judged this lenient, for such an instrument was a unique treasure. Had

they not been on the road, the girl could be an example to others, could be caged, and tormented by the public before the next phase of a long, slow death. No-one present would have flinched at such a necessity, although some would have enjoyed it more than others. However, they were on the road and there was no time for such deliberation.

‘My Lady, how would a servant come by such a thing, except dishonestly – and servant she clearly is, by her clothes. And I can think of only one thing a woman might be doing alone on this road! My guess is that she has stolen this instrument and fled, offering her legs in the air, until she can sell her other goods at market. She couldn’t even tell you her name, my Lady! What more proof of guilt do you need!’

The girl’s eyes blazed but she just picked up the mandora and clutched it to her. Aliénor’s eyes met those of her Commander as the fingers of the girl’s left hand found their habitual place on the frets and she cradled the instrument in the position they had seen a thousand times, in every banquet hall of the civilized world.

‘The proof is easy,’ Aliénor declared. ‘If the instrument is yours, play for us, girl.’

Amid the jangles and snorts of restless horses, the mutterings of people impatient to get on, and the birdsong of amorous April, the girl closed her eyes. She thrummed the strings, adjusted the pegs and cleared her throat. Then she sang a scale. The sweetness of the simple ut re mi fa so la already held promise and when she opened her eyes and wound her voice round the strings in perfect harmony, the company around her hushed. The well-known words of the Aubade, the Dawn Song, floated like apple blossom on the breeze and the dog lay down, silent, beside the singer.

‘A-bed beside his lady-love,

Her own true knight stopped kissing.

‘My sweet, my own, what shall we do?’

*Day is nigh and night is over
We must be parted, my self missing
All the day away from you.'*

*If only day would never come
If only night could spare the pain
Of each new parting, little Death
That leaves enough to die again.*

*The Watchman calls the hour of Dawning
Bids me stand and face the day,
Exiles me to constant Morning
Grieving that I must away.*

*Know that whereso'er I wander
Never shall I find true rest
Without the circle of your kisses
And may you love your Night the best.*

*'My sweet, my own, what shall we do?
Day is nigh and night is over
We must be parted, my self missing
All the day away from you.'*

The last notes of the mandora hung plaintive in the air as Danton sheathed his sword.

'You have answered the charge of theft and we find you innocent,' Aliénor's measured voice broke the spell. 'What have you to say, that you refuse to give your name to me?'

‘I do have a name to give you, my Lady. My songster’s name is Estela de Matin.’

‘Then Estela de Matin it shall be and such a musician is always welcome at my court, whether man or woman. If you would like to join us, we can explore the mysteries surrounding you at our leisure.’

If the girl saw the mailed fist in the glove of this ‘invitation’ she gave no sign but curtsied acceptance and wrapped up her instrument again in its brocade.

‘What do you think?’ Aliénor asked her Commander.

‘A sweet voice but empty,’ was the verdict. ‘It lacks the maturity the song needs.’

‘What made you choose that one, of all the songs?’ Aliénor asked the girl, who had looked down, hiding her flushed face, but now raised her eyes to meet the Commander’s.

‘I love the song,’ she said simply. ‘It is the work of a Master and it seemed right to me and I thought everyone would know the song...’ she tailed off.

‘You chose well,’ Aliénor told her. ‘And yes, we know the song, don’t we.’

‘Too well, my Lady.’ The Commander excused himself and rode back down the line.

A bulky man, with wild black hair and beard, pushed his horse to the front. ‘My Lady, I am sent for the girl.’

‘Take her, Raoulf and see that she is comfortable.’ Raoulf dismounted, took a step toward Estela and the dog half-rose. ‘No, dog,’ she told him. ‘Go! You are not my dog! I don’t want you. Go away!’ The dog watched but made no move as she went towards Raoulf. He lifted her onto his saddle, with her mandora, as easily as if she were a puppet, then he jumped up behind her. A dainty boot lashed out at Estela’s shins as she passed, with a

murmured ‘So sorry,’ that dripped poison and smelled strongly of musk. Estela would remember the smell but for now she was beyond caring. There was just one question to resolve before she gave in to an overwhelming weariness, of body and spirit.

‘Who is your Commander?’ she asked Raoulf.

‘You’re not going to pretend you don’t know,’ was the strange reply.

‘Truly,’ she pressed.

‘Dragonetz los Pros, of course,’ he stated, as if it was obvious. And it should have been.

‘I thought he would be older,’ she said. Dragonetz, Aliénor’s knight, who had earned his title ‘los Pros’, ‘the Brave’, as a Crusader, when so many had come home with titles like ‘Brown-britches.’ Dragonetz, the Master Troubadour, the writer of the song she had presumed to sing in front of him. And the inanities she had come out with! He would think it deliberate! Her cheeks burned and she was only too pleased to be unloaded like a sack of corn onto a simple mattress in a wagon. When Raoulf pulled a coverlet over her with his calloused hands, and told her to rest now, she responded automatically, ‘Thank you, Gilles,’ and drifted with the bump bump rhythm of the wagon into deepest sleep.

Ermengarda, Viscomtesse of Narbonne, glanced idly through the narrow window, over the city wall to the River Aude, swollen with winter rain and snow melt flowing down from the mountains. Another few weeks and it would be time for the sheep to go back up from the plains to the heights for summer grazing. The reckoning from the harsh winter was being tallied daily in the ledgers of the clerks, who reported conscientiously to their mistress. They had no option as Ermengarda knew every last solidus in her coffers, and if Narbonne was the richest city in Occitania, it was in no small measure due to its ruler.

Today, however, Ermengarda had more pressing and personal concerns. Within the next day, few days, week, depending on how the journey went, she was expecting the Duchesse d'Aquitaine with a full entourage of Ladies and men-at-arms. The Palace had been preparing for weeks, storing grain, wine, hams; sweeping and strewing herbs in bedchambers; laying straw and placing troughs by empty stables. No detail was too small, from the Narbonne coat of arms on the heavy fabric newly draping the windows of Aliénor's chambers, to the phials of oriental perfume by the bathing tubs.

Like the ducks. Ermengarda watched as a group of mallards seemed to float along with the current while their little legs were paddling for all they were worth. And the paddling would continue for as long as Aliénor honoured Narbonne with her presence and with the requirement that Narbonne feed, quarter and entertain four hundred personnel. Ermengarda sighed. The timing was not good. Apart from the disastrous winter, her people were suffering in the wake of the great failure known as the Second Crusade. Also considered by some, more specifically, as Aliénor's great failure.

Narbonne relied on trade, and trade relied on trust and security. The sea-captains needed to set sail from their safe harbour without fear of being

attacked by Genoese pirates when they'd barely left the bay, and in the certainty of re-victualing and repairing boat damage while they bought Moorish goods in the spice ports of *Oltra mar*. In addition to the sea-ways, overland routes had to be safe from thieves and brigands. And now look at the state of things! Every day her captains and merchants brought Ermengarda new problems; news of peaceful traders imprisoned, tortured and disfigured in deliberate reprisals against any Christians; news of safe routes barred by weather and wreckers. Everywhere, the balance for which she worked so hard shifted into insanity. Soon the trading season would begin in earnest and she must use all of her connections to repair the damage as best she could.

So, how did she feel about Aliénor coming? They had last met before the Crusade, Aliénor blazing with the passion of her adventure and Ermengarda full of misgivings, like a spectre at a wedding, a crone spreading ill-will and evil omens with her caution and reservations. Having been right gave her no pleasure now and she was slow to judge Aliénor as harshly as much of the world judged her. This elegant woman, her senior by ten years, had dazzled fourteen-year old Ermengarda with her intellect and exquisite taste, had shared her inside knowledge of the most powerful men in the land along with her secret recipes for cheek rouge, had called her a friend – and still did.

But even at fourteen, Ermengarda had her own hard-earned understanding of powerful men – and women – and she never forgot that Aliénor's authority, over however great a realm, was harnessed in uneasy pairing with the King of France, Louis, while she, Ermengarda, *was* Narbonne. There was no doubt that Aquitaine was Aliénor's but to what extent did Aliénor belong to Aquitaine? Her eye had roamed to France and rumour said she was still not satisfied.

Rumours. Ermengarda collected rumours along with the daily reckoning of accounts. It was impossible that Aliénor could have carried out

half that she was credited or blamed for *Oltra mar*, overseas, but even so she had played a part that ran to twenty verses in the latest songs, some versions of which had been banned for the coming visit. Although Aliénor might be amused by the stories of herself riding bare-breasted with her Amazons to hack down the Infidels, Ermengarda did not think that a kind hostess would encourage the singing of ‘the whore of Antioch’ in which Aliénor’s trips to her uncle’s bed became increasingly lewd. Whether she had actually made those trips to her uncle’s bed was one of the many little details that might become clearer after Ermengarda saw Aliénor again. Could it have happened? It seemed more likely to Ermengarda than the tale of the Amazon army. It was important to know what you were called behind your back and Ermengarda knew perfectly well that she was ‘the shopkeeper’ and Aliénor ‘the whore’. To some extent she *would* always be a shopkeeper, Ermengarda acknowledged.

Her thoughts flowed downstream with the Aude. The ducks’ apparent serenity had been short-lived and five male mallards were attacking each other viciously in their attempt to mate the one female. Ermengarda watched as two males, still fighting each other, held the female underwater in their mating frenzy and drowned her. *Be careful, Aliénor, be very careful. Not all lovers go down on their knees.*

A respectful knock called her attention. Time to attend to the shop window and make sure that Narbonne looked every inch the jewel of the Mediterranean. She hoped Aliénor would have the good sense to send riders ahead that would give her at least one day’s warning of the onslaught. But of course. She smiled. That charming Dragonetz would be the one to send ahead. And he would be sure to remember the sort of courtesy that put her in a good mood.

‘Rabbi Abraham ben Isaac, you may enter,’ she instructed. *To business.*

‘Have you sent ahead to warn the Lady Ermengarda?’ Dragonetz asked Raoulf, as they checked wagons and horses on the grazing land outside the castle of Douzens. Only a select few humans and animals would pass the night inside the security of the walls and Dragonetz clearly wanted to be sure that the party outside was as well-protected as possible.

‘Michels the Weasel and Gervais went this afternoon with your message, Sire. Tonight we halt at Douzens, tomorrow night with the white friars at Fontfroide and we should reach Narbonne after noon on Wednesday.’

‘Good man. Let’s hope the road continues trouble-free. And the girl? What do you make of her?’

Raoulf pursed his lips, considering. ‘I can fetch her for you if you have time for a tumble...’ He felt a point of pressure at his back, a tease of steel suggesting he’d said enough. But he hadn’t said nearly enough. ‘You’re a man, you can’t carry on like this.’ The pressure made its point a fraction clearer and Raoulf was careful not to move. ‘Take that damn thing away from me, Dragonetz, unless you’re really going to knife someone who knew you when you were a mewling puppy.’

‘You really shouldn’t test my temper with your cesspit wisdom. You’re too slow to stop me leaving a lesson across your clothing if not your skin.’ Dragonetz returned his dagger to wherever he secreted it. ‘My mewling days. Thank you for reminding me. Unless of course, you are referring to my more recent behavior?’

Raoulf would by far have preferred the dagger to the jagged words. ‘Enough, Dragonetz! Leave it behind. What happened, happened. People die in a war and you can’t punish yourself forever.’ *Mistake*, he thought, the moment he spoke. He had been wrong in thinking the tone could not chill further.

‘Thank you for that reminder too. And as I’ve made clear enough I think, I always appreciate opinions on my conduct.’ Raoulf knew better than

to interrupt the silence. Amid the clanking of harness and metal, creaking of wheel wood, human bustle, a clear soprano voice lilted a song over to the camp from somewhere near the river.

Raoulf nodded approval or gave curt instructions as they rounded each wagon. He gestured at empty buckets and men scurried to refill the water for the horses. One look from Dragonetz was enough to correct anyone mistaking this stop for journey's end. 'And?' Dragonetz prompted, his jaw setting in even more severe lines.

'And, Sire?' Raoulf countered.

'I believe I asked you a question.'

'The girl.'

'Quite. And it's a military question not a man's.'

'Your loss,' Raoulf couldn't resist but carried on quickly. 'I don't think she's playing a game of bait and rob but she's not telling the truth either. I'm sure she's alone – good, that means no cut-throats round the next bend. But there again, she's alone – bad. Why is she alone? Her hands say she's no servant. I'd say that all she knows of the world came to her by songs and travelers to wherever she lived. I don't think she's ever left there before. Seems innocent, sheltered, behind that air of know-all. Didn't even know you. And the way she sings says she's no ordinary girl. She was exhausted when I laid her in the wagon and when I covered her up, she called me Gilles.'

'A lover, a husband...' Dragonetz wondered. 'Someone who'll come looking for her, someone who'll want recompense for his damaged goods.'

'She's not damaged by me! Yet!' Raoulf retorted. 'I was waiting for your word first but if you don't want her -'

'And neither do you. Nor any of the men.' It was an order. 'If she's not what she seems, we should be all the more careful that she *isn't* damaged by any of us. I want her chaperoned by the Ladies.'

'Purely as a military consideration?'

‘Purely. I’ll have enough problems caused by Lady Aliénor amusing herself politically without adding some enraged Castellan from the back woods chasing my hide.’

‘Not lover, if you want my opinion, nor husband, this Gilles person. She might have been tired but she still knew it was me, or rather someone like me, serving her I’d have said. Yes, someone like me.’

‘Is there another one like you?’ Dragonetz was sardonic. ‘Then God help us all.’

‘Thank you, Sire.’

‘Raoulf, don’t you ever get tired of people under-estimating you? The big black bear lumbering after young Dragonetz?’

‘Have you seen a bear catch a fish, Sire? The slower people think me, the more I can find out and the easier I can catch them.’ He hesitated. ‘There’s something I’ve been meaning to say to you - ‘

‘What, still more? Thank the Lord the journey will be over soon if it ferments so many thoughts. Well, go on. You might as well spit it out man, now you’ve started.’

Raoulf was conscious of the need to choose his words carefully but finally he came out with, ‘You know Lady Fortune and her wheel?’ Dragonetz nodded impatiently. ‘Well, it doesn’t do to bind yourself to the Lady on the way up or she won’t let you go on the fall. So if you’re bound, now is the time to loose the ties.’

The bustle was dying down around the camp as men settled to chew the fat round camp-fires in the waning light. Pink rays from the setting sun glinted off abandoned armour and swords. An assailant would have to be foolish or very strong to chance his arm against two hundred fighting men and a Templar stronghold, even in a surprise attack. The Watch was sound, no sign of danger anywhere. Dragonetz sighed.

‘You care about me, Raoulf, don’t you.’

Although it was expressed as a statement, Raoulf answered all the same, his matted black hair blowing back from his face as he looked down at Dragonetz, eyes tinged blood-red from the sun. ‘I swore an oath, Sire.’

The two men held each other’s gaze and it was Raoulf who dropped his first. ‘You take second watch,’ Dragonetz ordered. They both knew that if trouble was coming, that’s when it was most likely. ‘I’d better oil my charm for dinner with our hosts.’

‘No harm will come, Sire.’

‘That you still believe so, Raoulf, is only one of the differences between us. Until tomorrow.’

‘Sire.’

Dragonetz watched the broad back retreating, heard Raoulf’s coarse remark and the laughter in response as he mingled with the other soldiers. It was a pity but Raoulf would have to go. He had become a liability. Dragonetz refused to be loved by anyone, man, woman or child. Never again. He would indeed loose the ties, all the ties, including those with the Lady whom Raoulf designated Fortune. But first he had business to conclude.

So she must think of herself as Estela now. She splashed her face in the stream, which was already losing the warmth of the afternoon sunshine. Downstream, men were taking their horses to drink, easing into the routines of setting up camp. The usual pack of dogs that hung round human dwellings was scrounging for scraps round the cook-fires. If there was a flash of white fur among the blacks and browns, Estela didn’t notice. Beside her, other women were dabbling feet and arms, gossiping about laundry and kisses; no time for either until they reached Narbonne and then it seemed that they would catch up on both. Guillelma paid her no attention as she chatted to her friends but the girl knew that however sympathetic the raw-boned servant had been, she was also her prisoner-warder. Not that Estela had anywhere to run to, nor

that she even wanted to run. It was soothing to flow with the river, follow Guillelma to do ‘what we women do’, be given bread to eat and water to drink. Perhaps she would be a servant after all, she mused. Laundry and kisses.

Was it possible to begin life at sixteen? It had to be. ‘Estela de Matin’, the Morning Star, could be whoever she wanted to be. She wouldn’t be the first troubadour to hide behind her chosen name. Forget the laundry. She would be famous like Cercamon, ‘Seek the world’, and no-one would care what she had been before. Cercamon’s childhood was buried with him. Whether he had been a pot-boy or a Castellan’s son, no-one knew or cared but everyone sang his songs and his name would live forever.

Estela sang the Cercamon opening ‘Ab lo pascor m'es bel qu'eu chan’, ‘At Easter time ’tis joy to sing,’ and flushed as she realized the chat had stopped and she was the centre of attention.

‘I told you so,’ Guillelma informed the others, as if she’d won a wager. ‘Don’t stop, pet, it’s lovely. A real breath of spring, you are.’

‘You carry on,’ encouraged a woman whose body seemed about to explode from her coarse burnet gown at any moment. As the sun burnished the distant hills, the women were gilded statues, sitting by the rose-gold water, listening to the unaccompanied, plaintive solo. Inevitably the song darkened, turned to infidelity and loss and when Estela reached the lines

‘Miels li fora ja non nasqes

Enans qe'l failliment fezes

Don er parlat tro en peitau’

the sun dipped and Guillelma shivered.

‘Very nice but we’d best be getting dry and warm,’ she interrupted Estela, who stopped on a false note that jarred her entire body. She blinked, still lost in the world of the song. Guillelma took her by the arm and led her back to the wagon that seemed to contain whatever meagre possessions the

woman had. Satisfied that they were alone, Guillelma shook her head and glared at Estela. ‘You’ll get yourself killed, you will!’

Estela just looked at her wide-eyed.

‘And you really don’t know why, do you!’ Guillelma whispered. ‘Singing about her being better off not born than sinful,’ Estela still looked blank, ‘and that people were talking about it all the way to Poitiers. Who do you think the song’s about! And what do you think she’d do if she heard you singing it!’

Understanding dawned and Estela wished it hadn’t. Poitiers, the capital of Aquitaine. ‘But I didn’t!’ Estela exclaimed.

‘Well, that’s fine then. You didn’t.’ Her voice was its usual matter of fact tone. ‘And we’ll all keep it like that. You didn’t. And we didn’t hear you. And hope to God it stays like that! But I won’t be there with you this evening so just keep your mouth shut and learn everything you can, quickly. ‘

‘What do you mean?’

‘The Lady Aliénor has taken into her head that you should eat with your betters in the keep this evening, at the bottom table of course, but I’ve been asked to make you respectable all the same.’ She frowned and studied Estela. ‘Silk purse and sow’s ear come to mind but we’ll do what we can.’

‘You know how to make me ... respectable?’ Estela didn’t know how to put the question tactfully.

Guillelma threw back her head and laughed without restraint. ‘You mean how can a peasant like me fit you up as more of a lady?’ Estela flushed. ‘Because, my dear, this peasant looks after the Queen’s wardrobe and when we’re not on the blessed road for weeks on end, this peasant dresses herself up a bit too. But yes, it’s my needle not my good looks that got me where I am.’

‘I’m sorry,’ Estela couldn’t meet the other woman’s eyes.

‘Like I said, you’ll get yourself killed. But you might as well have some fun before then.’ She motioned Estela into the wagon and the girl could

now see open boxes piled with bodices, shoes, furs, head-dresses. Guillelma seemed to see order in this chaos and almost disappeared into a trunk, muttering ‘gold, yellow... scarlet too ostentatious... pretty but not standing out too much... impossible...’ When she came up for air, Guillelma was holding three gowns, which she placed on top of a pile while she searched for shift and bodice. Then five pairs of soft leather boots were added to the pile after a calculated glance to estimate Estela’s shoe size. While her own clothes fell at her feet, accompanied with clucks and mutters of ‘a tuck there, no flesh on the girl, none at all,’ Estela wondered what was going to be expected of her. And what more she could get wrong.

‘And if I get asked to sing?’ Estela stammered. ‘What shall I do?’

‘Sing,’ was the short answer then Guillelma relented. ‘If you want advice from a peasant,’ she looked up from lacing a boot, ‘don’t take your instrument and do make yourself invisible. And if the worst comes to the worst, you already know two songs not to sing, so I should try a third one. Who knows, even you might be third time lucky.’

Oh, Lord. She had forgotten Dragonetz and he would be there too. And Aliénor and their Templar hosts. Dear God, were there any problems with ‘Assatz es or’ oimai q’eu cha,’ ‘Now it’s time to sing?’ She checked the lyrics mentally. One reference to Saint John. That would be all right in front of the knights, wouldn’t it? Well, it would just have to be! Singing never used to be this complicated.

April evenings were still cool enough for the heat from the blazing logs in the great fireplace to be more than welcome. Shadows flickered on the stone walls from the torches lit at intervals in the sconces round the Hall. The Commanderie at Douzens was less than twenty years old but of basic military construction and rarely saw guests of this rank. Luckily, the well-stocked cellars, the well-staffed kitchens, and the tables laden with fresh bread and

hams, richly confirmed the Templars' reputation for hospitality. From the High Table, Aliénor scanned her company.

Her gaze travelled below the salt, where she noted and approved her little protégée, black hair gleaming against a tawny gown, sitting quietly among the lower household personnel. To one side of her, was the distinctive headgear of a dark-skinned Moor, no doubt brought back from the last Crusade. Estela's eyes were cast down, showing no preference for one companion over another. There would be no music tonight but Aliénor was not impatient to launch her new star. Dragonetz could refine the youngster first. And then there would be the pleasure of watching Ermengarda's face when she heard that voice. It was surely fate that had brought such a jewel to her and she intended to set it off to advantage.

She continued her appraisal of the gathering. Various knights of the Brotherhood, and some minor landholders attached to the Commanderie, with their wives or sisters. At the High Table, the Master, Peter Radels, red-faced and sweating from exertion or wine, or both; the joint commanders, Isarn of Moleria and Bernard of Roquefort; another powerful Brother, Bernard of the Casul Revull; two of her Ladies, Philippa and Sancha, the latter in a teeth-grinding glitter of blue beads and scarlet satin that clashed not only in itself but also with the brilliant red of Aliénor's own garb; and then, of course, there was Dragonetz.

Aliénor's knight was the model of courtesy, bending his head as he passed two words in exchange with one lady, three words in exchange with the other, then in an animated lengthy conversation with the Master. Aliénor smiled. There was little doubt where Dragonetz' interest lay and she guessed from the few words she could overhear that he was drilling for information on water power and mills, light relief to him, no doubt.

‘My Lady, we cannot leave Damascus and Edessa in the hands of Infidel.’ Isarn was waiting for her response and Aliénor returned to her duty. There would be no light relief for her.

‘That is why I took the Cross,’ she replied. ‘And we have not forgotten our lands Oltra mar, however hard the last lesson we took there. It must steady our hand and thought for a more successful venture.’

‘My thoughts, exactly, my Lady. Perhaps you can convey some of our suggestions to King Louis.’ If Aliénor flinched at being taken for a mere messenger, she gave no sign, but continued in her discovery and analysis of the strengths and loyalties of the knights of Solomon

The Master leaned confidentially towards Dragonetz, who poured him another cup of wine – good, local red wine from the Corbières, fruity and warming. ‘You should join us, Dragonetz.’

‘I did consider it. Last time I was asked.’

‘You should,’ Radels persisted.

‘The vow of poverty concerned me a little.’ Dragonetz swirled the wine in his silver goblet, mischief in his eyes.

Radels just laughed. ‘We should have had a whole Kingdom when Alfonso died but as it is, we’ve not done too badly.’

Dragonetz was well aware of the fiasco sixteen years earlier when Alfonso el Batallador, King of Aragon and Navarre had died heirless, leaving his entire estate to the knights Templar. In such a manner did a rich man buy his welcome to the next world, while alienating the people he left behind in this one. Wisely, the knights had negotiated their way out of their inheritance, avoiding decades of bloody warfare and adding to their already legendary treasure store. And, according to an increasingly loose-tongued Radels, Douzens had gained its share of the booty, including some very interesting vassals, who were next on Dragonetz’ conversational list, after just one or two

more questions for the Master while there was still some chance of a lucid response.

‘And I’m sure you will continue to do well, with such a head for business,’ Dragonetz assured the other man, whose head was thrown back more and more frequently in the business of his cups. ‘Perhaps you can enlighten me on one such business matter. Let us suppose that a man had a promissory note from the Brothers of Antioch, and he wished to purchase land in this region, would such a note be acceptable to the vendor?’

The glint in Radels’ eyes suggested that he was not too far gone to understand the situation. So much the better. ‘A note of some value, I take it?’

‘Indeed.’

‘Then that would depend on whether the vendor is a Brother, an associate or completely other. ‘

‘Suppose that any of the three is a possibility.’

‘If, for example you – sorry, I mean, such a man – were to buy, for instance, a stretch of the Aude where a mill might be built,’ Dragonetz acknowledged the hit and wondered just how much wine it took to blunt this particular brain. More, evidently. He topped up both their cups and beckoned a servant to refill the pitcher. ‘and if this man were to buy his land from the Brethren, the note would be as good as gold from al-Andalus.’ Dragonetz nodded, concentrating. ‘And if this man were to approach our neighbouring brethren at the Abbey, who might also have such land for sale,’ Dragonetz took a thoughtful sip. Now he was getting somewhere! ‘then they might be willing to accept the note if it were accompanied by a personal signature, say, of a local Commander, making it even more flexible as currency, but they will of course fleece this man to his naked hide in the name of God and the Abbey.’

So the wine was having some effect. ‘And in the name of God and the Commanderie, this man might get a bargain?’ Dragonetz queried smoothly.

‘Indeed.’

‘And the third situation? Of purchase from one without connections to the Brotherhood?’

Radels purse his lips. ‘More tricky. Some men of affairs understand the benefits of our notes, particularly if they can read. Others stay behind the times and prefer oxen and fishing rights. Believe me, Dragonetz, the day will come when promissory parchment will be current, universally.’

‘But meanwhile?’

‘Meanwhile, the note promises to pay the bearer the sum stated and any Commanderie will honour that note in solidi, so if this man needs to pay in weight of silver he would need to present me with the note in proper manner.’

Dragonetz had been through the options a hundred times during the journey and needed only the facts he had gleaned from Radels to come to a decision. He knew what he wanted, he knew who had it and he knew how to get it, and in return he had given away only what he intended to – not a bad evening’s work. He stretched his long legs under the table and eased muscles a little weary from saddle and wooden bench.

‘A personal note from a Commander would indeed be a great favour.’

Radels’ eyes gleamed, ‘That could be arranged.’

‘And of course, as a little thank you to the Commander we could conclude the other purchase of which we spoke. My word on that and let’s forget this dreary subject.’

‘You will not regret it. Send the note to me and I will issue a new one for the reduced sum, with my personal guarantee for the note.’

‘So be it. Now, tell me where this excellent wine is produced and how we convince my Lady to stay here instead of invading Narbonne, where embroidery and dress fashions will surely numb my brain. And for God’s sake, no Crusader’s tales, if you wish me to stay awake.’

Radels laughed and needed no more encouragement to vaunt the gustatory pleasures of his domain. Long after he'd agreed that the wine was a perfect combination with the strange salty taste of a blue cheese from the caves of Roquefort, which Radels insisted was a local treasure, Dragonetz excused himself and joined the increasingly free movement round the Hall, as the meal over, people sought particular conversations. Making brief obeisance to Aliénor, Dragonetz told her, 'I shall make your wishes known to the girl, my Lady, then please excuse me. I would check the camp before taking whatever sleep this night gives me.' She waved and smiled her approval, as relaxed as if they were alone, both of them knowing that every gesture was marked and analysed.

Estela couldn't be unaware of Dragonetz' approach. He was unhurried and polite but somehow there was never anyone in his way, and the conversation beside her stopped as smoothly as he did.

'My Lady,' he greeted her. She flushed. 'May I?' He waited for her assent and then took a place that became magically vacant on the bench beside her. Almost gently, he continued, 'That's better. I see no reason for you to crick your neck looking up at me. The Lady Aliénor wishes me to tutor you in music. We will reach Narbonne the day after next and can begin then but if you wish to ride with me tomorrow, we can make arrangements. You ride?'

'Yes.'

His voice was even gentler and lower. 'Al-Hisba al-Andalus.' She looked at him, startled, then realised that he was no longer speaking to her but to the Moor, although he barely turned towards him.

'Sire,' the man responded.

'You know who I am?'

'Yes.'

‘It seems I have bought you.’ The man’s face remained expressionless, his sharp cheekbones, hooked nose and firm lips slashes of deep gold in the flickering torchlight. ‘There is only one problem,’ Dragonetz continued. ‘I don’t have your consent.’

‘You don’t need it.’ The reply was a fact, stated like any other.

‘But I do, you see.’ Dragonetz kept his voice low, smiled and looked at Estela. Anyone watching would think his conversation with her. She was mesmerised, like a deer startled in the woods. ‘I will not have you, unwilling.’ His eyes were still on Estela and she shivered, the small hairs on the back of her neck prickling.

‘If I say no, I will be punished.’ Even Estela knew what that meant and that this choice was no choice, like her own she thought. Between the Devil and the deep sea.

But the Devil spoke again. ‘If you say no, I shall tell them I miscalculated, that I cannot afford a new man as well as another little matter that I have in hand - no blame on you.’

The whites of the Moor’s eyes shone and met the unreadable black in the other man’s. ‘If it is Allah’s will, so be it.’

‘Be ready to leave tomorrow morning after Tierce. Al-Hisba al-Andalus,’ he mused, ‘the man from Andalusia. What is your given name?’

‘That, you have not bought, my Lord.’ Estela held her breath. There could only be one reaction to such insolence.

Dragonetz breathed out hard. Then he laughed. ‘Be there, tomorrow,’ he said, his eyes still on Estela as he stood abruptly, moved further down the table and spoke to some of the men attached to the Commanderie, tenants and small land-owners.

By the time Estela worked out what she should have said, Dragonetz had left the Hall. As had the Moor.

Historical Characters appearing in the novel

Aliénor of Aquitaine/ Eleanor of Aquitaine - Duchess of Aquitaine and Queen of France

Abraham ben Isaac/ Raavad II - Jewish leader and famed interpreter of the Torah, father of *Abraham ben David*, a Jewish leader in Nîmes

Alphonse nicknamed '*Jourdain/ 'Jordan'*', *Comte de Toulouse*, father of Raymond, killed by poison in Caeserea in 1148

Alphonso, King of Castile, Emperor of Spain - died in 1144 leaving his estate to the Templars

Archbishop of Narbonne, Pierre d'Anduze, brother of Ermengarda's husband

Archbishop Suger - royal prelate in Paris, Adviser to King Louis

Bèatrix, the future *Comtesssa de Dia/Comtesse de Die* and famous troubairitz

Bernard of Clairvaux - influential Abbot leading and reforming the Cistercian order, whose preaching helped launch and bless the disastrous 2nd Crusade

Bernard d'Anduze - Ermengarda's titular husband, brother of the Archbishop of Narbonne

Ermengarda/Ermengard/Ermengarda, Viscomtesse of Narbonne from four years old

Jarl Rognvaldr Kali Kolsson, Prince of Orkney

Louis VI - King of France, married to Aliénor

Pope Eugene III

Raimon Trencavel, brother to Roger and Comte de Carcassonne on his brother's death in 1150

Ramon Berenguer, Comte de Barcelone, Prince of Aragan and Overlord of Provence

Raymond V, Comte de Toulouse

Raymon of Antioch, Aliénor's uncle and rumoured lover, killed by Saracen troops in 1148

Raymond and Stephanie of les Baux, rulers of Provence

Roger Trencavel, Comte de Carcassonne, died in 1150

Sicard de Llautrec, ally of Toulouse

Troubadors - *Marcabru, Cercamon, Peire Rogier from the auvergne*,

Raimbaut d'Aurenja/Raymon of Orange, Guiraut de Bornelh

In charge of the Templar Commandery at Douzens - *Peter Radels, Master; Isarn of Molaria and Bernard of Roquefort, joint commanders*