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Song at Dawn

Jean Gill

Winner of the Global Ebooks Award for Best Historical Fiction - a medieval thriller/romance

Book 1 in the Troubadours Series

1150 in Provence, where love and marriage are as divided as Christian and Muslim.

A historical thriller set in Narbonne just after the Second Crusade. On the run from abuse, Estela wakes in a ditch with only her lute, her amazing voice, and a dagger hidden in her petticoats.

Her talent finds a patron in Alienor of Aquitaine and more than a music tutor in the Queen's finest troubadour and Commander of the Guard, Dragonetz los Pros.

Weary of war, Dragonetz uses Jewish money and Moorish expertise to build that most modern of inventions, a papermill, arousing the wrath of the Church. Their enemies gather, ready to light the political and religious powder-keg of medieval Narbonne.

Watch the trailer [youtube.com/watch?v=XZvFmOkD6Pc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XZvFmOkD6Pc)

About the Author

Prize-winning author Jean Gill, with 17 books to her credit, is known for the quality and variety of genres in which she writes; including historical fiction, contemporary novels, memoir and dog books. Underlying all her books are years of research and experience. Her website www.jeangill.com was awarded a Silver IPPY award for Best Author Website 2015

A Welsh writer and photographer, Jean now lives in the south of France with a big white dog, a scruffy black dog, a Nikon D750 and a man. Many of her books have been traditionally published but she now self-publishes via the registered imprint 'The 13th Sign'.

For many years, Jean taught English in Wales and was the first woman to be a secondary headteacher in Carmarthenshire. She is mother or stepmother to five children so life has been hectic.

www.jeangill.com

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Kindle Edition

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.

Chapter 1.

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 leached 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 ear-rings 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.

Jean Gill's previous publications

Novels

Bladesong (*lulu*) 2012

Song at Dawn (*lulu*) 2011

Someone to Look Up To (*lulu*) 2011

San Fairy Anne (*lulu*) 2010

Crystal Balls (*lulu*) 2010

On the Other Hand (*Dinas*) 2005

Snake on Saturdays (*Gomer*) 2001

Non-fiction

How Blue is my Valley (*lulu*) 2010

A Small Cheese in Provence (*lulu*) 2009

Faithful through Hard Times (*lulu*) 2008

4.5 Years - war memoir by David Taylor (*lulu*) 2008

Poetry

From Bed-time On (*National Poetry Foundation*) 1996

With Double Blade (*National Poetry Foundation*) 1988

Translation (from French)

The Last Love of Edith Piaf – Christie Laume (*Archipel*) 2014

A Pup in Your Life - Michel Hasbrouck 2008

Gentle Dog Training - Michel Hasbrouck (*Souvenir Press*) 2007