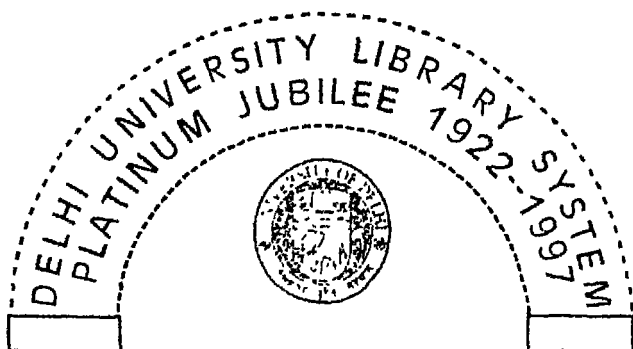




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THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS



THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

The Story of Madame de Sérilly

1762-1799

By

JOAN EVANS

Author of "Time and Chance The Story
of Arthur Evans and his Forebears"

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To
R. M. DE V. C.

WE are apt to think of past history in terms of protagonists; yet then, as now, every citizen of nation was involved in the infinitely complex machinery that nation's drama. It is as false to think of the French Revolution only in terms of Louis XVI and Robespierre it would be to think of the war just ended only in terms of Churchill and Hitler. Yet few of the minor characters of the drama of a nation play speaking parts to the audience of posterity; we think of them either as a posturing crowd who make a confused and angry noise like a hive of frightened bees, or else as a Greek chorus who express general truths with impersonal unanimity.

Historical accident has left enough material to re-create a few of the victims of the French Revolution. I have told the story of Madame de Sérilly from this, with a few gaps filled in from parallel contemporary material. I chose her partly because she is already an individual for those who have paused to admire the bust of her by Houdon in the Wallace Collection; partly because in her life the everyday drama of home and family was interwoven with the greater drama of the French nation, as it must have been in thousands of lives that have left no record behind them and finally, and most cogently, because her life exemplified a peculiar kind of courage that always goes without reward and usually without commemoration.

J.E.

WOTTON UNDER EDGE

1946

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Frontispiece

Bust of Madame de Sérilly
by Houdon (Wallace Collection)

ANNE-MARIE LOUISE THOMAS DE DOMANGEVILLE was born at Paris on August 24th, 1762, the daughter of the Marquis de Domangeville, Major-General in the Royal army. For all his title and rank, he did not belong to the old nobility, but only to the ennobled class. Her mother, Pauline de Rochemonteix de la Roche Vernassal, was a woman of much older family and great connexions in the Auvergne, but a *mésalliance* a few generations back prevented her from being received at Court. Anne-Marie, therefore, belonged to the landed gentry rather than to the true aristocracy; the political privileges of noble birth were hers, but the most brilliant social life in eighteenth-century France was for ever closed to her.

In her early years this position and this family concerned her little. It was at that time no part of the duty of even a moderately great lady to bring up her own daughters, and she saw very little of her mother. Anne-Marie's nurse was the arbiter of her destinies until at five and a half she was sent as a pupil to the great convent of Fontevrault, hidden in a forest in Touraine. It had been founded in the eleventh century as a house of nuns, with a small community of monks alongside it to say Mass and to help in the administration under the Abbess. Now it was a house that drew its sisters from the aristocracy, and occupied them in the education of their young relatives. Some thirty years before, Cardinal de Fleury had sent the four daughters of Louis XV, Madame Victoire, Madame Ade-

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laide, Madame Sophie and Madame Louise, to be educated there as a measure of economy. Madame Victoire might declare that her nerves had been permanently shaken by her having been sent as a penance to pray in the vault where the nuns were buried; Madame Louise might aver that she had only learned the whole of the alphabet after her return from Fontevrault to Versailles: the mere fact of their presence there had made Fontevrault fashionable. The Abbess was a cousin of the Duc de Penthièvre, and enjoyed a revenue of sixty thousand crowns a year; there was nothing common or provincial about education in such a house.

The pupils shivered in a Romanesque church three hundred feet long, made their festival processions round the ancient tombs of Plantagenet kings, played in cloisters of the sixteenth century, and were taught by nuns who might not be very learned, but were of the best blood in France. The children had their cooking lessons in a magnificent kitchen of the twelfth century, with eight hearths built like chapels into its eight sides, and a louvre in the roof to carry off the smoke; and they slept in sixteenth-century dormitories with hooded chimneys where the wind made ghostly noises at night. But for all its mediaeval setting, Fontevrault was a brisk and not uncheerful world; there were many festivals, with no lessons, extra cakes, and very little extra churchgoing; there were great games of stag-hunting, with all the ceremonial of Versailles, in which even the babies' class had active and amusing roles as hounds; and once the babies' class was left, and the nuns' surveillance became less constant, there were occasional midnight feasts of pie and cider in the dormitory.

The very routine of the convent was interesting: the black dresses of the children, with a bright ribbon to show

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the class to which they belonged; the hierarchy of the nuns, each with her appointed office; the legendary dignity of the Abbess in her damask robes. The children, like the nuns, sat in the refectory according to the seniority of their admission. Each newcomer was allowed to ask for a day's holiday for the rest, and her parents paid for a grand collation. At first she called all her schoolmates by their family name, without Mademoiselle or any other title; soon she had friends to call by their Christian names. No false code of austerity and sacrifice was imposed upon the pupils; the nuns' test of a girl was whether the other girls liked her, for in their code to be liked was a social and even a religious duty. The days were long and well filled; they began at seven in the summer and half an hour later in the winter. There were classes at eight, Mass at half-past nine, and lessons from ten till one. Then came dinner and a break till three, then more lessons till five, another break, an hour's music, supper and bed at half-past nine.

The years slipped by; Anne-Marie passed from the babies' class into the intermediate one, where the dunces wore caps shaped like asses' ears, and the liars had red paper tongues pinned to their backs, and thence into the white class, where the pupils were prepared for their first Communion, and it was the fashion to be very serious and good. The climax to this was the first Communion itself, for which the dull black uniform was laid aside, and each little girl was arrayed in white and silver brocade. A week later there was another ceremony, when the girls offered these dresses, folded on great silver trays, to the Abbess enthroned beside the altar, to be made into vestments for the sacristy. After this one was accounted an older girl, and it was the fashion to become the *petite maman* of one of the babies. Hardly was Anne-Marie old enough to play

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at being, at twelve, a *petite maman* in the convent before she found herself one in fact. Both her parents died, and she was left as the eldest of four orphans. But her brothers were hardly known to her, and the family of Fontevrault was more real than the lost parents in Paris.

The death of her parents made her something of an heiress; and to give her an even better start in life than Fontevrault afforded, her aunts resolved to remove her to the yet more fashionable convent of Panthémont in the rue de Bellechasse at Paris. The nuns here were Bernardines, and wore the white habit and black scapulars of the Cistercians; but Cistercian austerity seemed forgotten as one entered their new buildings and saw the gracious courtyard, more like a noble town house than a cloister, and the elegant classical chapel beyond. Each of the elder girls had a set of rooms to herself, with a maid and a duenna.

The aim of the education given was to combine a modicum of religious instruction with the teaching of the ancient and modern history, the mythology, the literature (mostly La Fontaine and Racine) and the languages which a girl would need in polite conversation, and with a deeper study of the music and dancing which were part of the ritual of the great world. The teaching nuns were gracious women of good family, for the most part between twenty-five and forty; women who had been compelled to enter the novitiate at fifteen, and to take final vows at eighteen, in order that their brothers might inherit the patrimony intact. The girls of the senior classes, lessons done, followed their teachers into the various departments of conventual administration to which they were in turn attached, and learned not only to arrange service-books in the church, but also to embroider vestments in the sacristy, to receive visitors in the parlour, to mix medicines in the pharmacy,

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to darn sheets in the linen-room, to cook in the kitchen, to lay tables in the refectory, and to supervise the cleaning of the passages and rooms.

The sisters were free to receive their friends and relations in the parlour, and the day was punctuated by the visitors' bell with its code of sounds to indicate for which sister a visitor had come. Consequently the nuns were far from being cut off from the world, and some of them felt and even expressed a contempt for the microcosm of Panthémont. To their pupils, however, the convent was a world. They might climb up into the attics to see from the dormer windows the roofs of the city spread out before them, with the towers of the innumerable churches rising above them like chess-pieces above the pawns on the board; but of that city, chalky white and slate grey, infinitely varied in its want of colour beneath the luminous sky of the Ile de France, they knew nothing but a few houses, and those the houses of their own families. They could look across the street and see the poor workwomen toiling away at dress-making in the fifth floor of the house opposite; they could admire a pot of carnations growing at the dormer window level with them, and wonder who tended it; they could hear the cries of pedlars passing in the street far below them; but their world lay in the rooms that turned inwards to cloister and garden, and they had no real part in the life of Paris.

Little though they knew of the world, they knew enough to pity those of their number whom family poverty condemned to a life spent in Panthémont. The *prise de voile* was an exciting festival; the postulant was dressed like a bride in white brocade and diamonds, the rue de Belle-chasse was full of carriages and lackeys, the church was hung with tapestries and draperies of white damask fringed

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with gold; a banner with all the quarterings of the girl to be admitted hung in the sanctuary; there were at least one bishop in a violet soutane, a dozen or two of ecclesiastics, and any number of fashionable ladies in the most elegant clothes. Yet for all the stir, the music, the company, it was a painful excitement. Even the fellow pupils of the new nun could be conscious of the tragedy as the drama of admission proceeded. They saw the great wrought-iron gate of the choir open; the Abbess in her trailing damask robes hand over the novice to her guardian; the sponsors, candle in hand, lead her to her *prie-dieu*; and after an incomprehensible interval of prayers and questions and responses, and a sermon that seemed to have little to do with the occasion, they saw the head of her family lead their schoolfellow back to the gate of the choir, they heard it banged behind her, and knew she was lost to them. They heard stories of all the ritual that followed; the doffing of the bridal robes, the cutting of the bright hair, the donning of the familiar white habit, the crowning with white roses, the formal taking of vows, the embraces of the sisters, and the last dreadful rite when the new-made sister was led into the church, a funeral pall laid over her, and the prayers for the dead recited. All that they knew at first hand was that after a few weeks' seclusion their former schoolfellow reappeared, miraculously transformed into a nun and a mistress.

Fortunately the shadow of such a future lay over but few of them; for most the road before them was full of sunshine, so brilliant that it already shone in through the shutters of the nunnery windows. During the carnival there was a ball once a week at the convent for the pupils: a *bal blanc* without men to dance with, but a ball at which uniform was laid aside for the most exquisite clothes. For

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if men were absent, the mothers of sons were there, great ladies who eyed and measured the young dancers as a preliminary to discovering by tactful enquiry what their dowries might be. The potential husbands might not be there, but the parents who made the marriages were present in force. The inspection would be continued at other *bals blancs* in the great houses of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, and then one day some elderly lady would call at the convent to see her girl friend, and have some young son or nephew or grandson or cousin as an escort.

It was always felt to be hard that even for such interviews convent discipline insisted on the girl's going down to the parlour in her black uniform. Even Anne-Marie, who liked to think that elegance depended on more than dress, went to meet her aunts and a visitor with an impatient dislike of her harsh serge. Custom, too, prescribed a modest silence and downcast eyes; but through her lashes Anne-Marie was able to observe the broad, red, open face of her distant cousin, Antoine Jean François Mégret de Sérilly, for whom her aunts destined her. Soon she was given a few days' leave to go to visit her aunts, and returned from it with her engagement to announce to her companions. Accompanied by the especial friend of the moment, she had to go on a round of calls on all the officials of the convent, Abbess, novice mistress, class mistresses, sacristan and the rest, to announce her forthcoming marriage. It was something that she was old enough—almost seventeen—to leave the convent when she married. Sometimes a girl of twelve who had only just been admitted to her first Communion would be married a few weeks later to a man who seemed to her grotesquely old, only to return to the convent on her wedding night with her *corbeille* of gifts and her title of Madame, to

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resume her pupilage until she was old enough to enter the world and to live as the wife of the man whom she had never seen alone.

Anne-Marie had no home, so she was married with great pomp and circumstance from the convent chapel on October 14th, 1779. The hairdresser spent all the morning on her hair, superintended by an excited nun; Anne-Marie felt tired and very hungry, and found it impossible to believe that it was she for whom all these preparations were being made. The ceremony itself passed like a dream; the assemblage of relations that watched it and came to salute her in the sacristy were no more real. There seemed a surprising number of elderly gentlemen whom she had never set eyes on before; apart from them she was conscious of an impression of brocades and laces, feathers and flowers, bows and curtsies, and of a great want of someone human whom she loved. For this ceremony seemed to set as great a barrier between her and her school friends as did any *prise de voile*. She gave a little jewel as a keepsake to each of her classmates, and was hostess at a grand entertainment, with ices for the whole convent, but she was no longer of their number. Then she changed her white brocade for a most elegant travelling dress and a hat from Rose Bertin's, and went off in a postchaise-and-six to Burgundy with her husband.

II

1779-90

ANTOINE MÉGRET DE SÉRILLY was twice her age, a little stout, very unromantic and extremely kind. He enjoyed a good smacking kiss; and though he could put on fine manners with his fine clothes, with his wife he was simple, easy and completely unpretentious. He had held an appointment from the time he was twenty-seven as *Trésorier Adjoint* at the War Office, conjointly with his uncle the Marquis de Pange. The uncle had lately died, and now he held the office alone. He shared a magnificent house in the rue Vieille du Temple with his rather alarming mother and his brother, Monsieur Mégret d'Étigny. It was in the old quarter of the Marais, where one still seemed to live in the age of Louis XIII.

The house exactly corresponded with the family's position; it was splendid, but not fashionable; it had a *portecochère*, but had a quiet little man as a porter, who mended shoes in his spare time, instead of a Suisse in an embroidered baldric, with nothing to do but open the door. It was a house in which the old prejudices, the old names, the old poor relations, were all at home; a house in which old Madame de Sérilly entertained alarming dowagers who rouged and wore lilac ribbons in their seventies, pious spinsters and gentle old men, with spiced possets and sponge cakes and out-of-date games of cards.

It was a house of well-bred boredom, in which youth seemed to have no place, and Anne-Marie could not feel at once at home. Yet even so, her days were pleasant. She

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used to read the new books in the morning, while the hair-dresser on his little pair of steps erected a vast composition in hair and powder and pomade and flowers and fashionable ornaments above her head. It was built up over a horschair cushion, and fixed with hairpins seven inches long; no one could call it comfortable, but at least it made Anne-Marie feel mature and elegant. Dress, too, was an amusement; but it was the same for women of all ages and she and her mother-in-law perforce followed the same fashions. The older lady might occasionally go to Mass at Saint-Louis-en-l'Ile in a sedan chair, with a footman to carry her prayer-book in its embroidered bag, and a velvet cushion for her to kneel on, but Anne-Marie did not accompany her. They rarely met before they dined at one, once a week a *dîner de famille* with all the relations, on other days alone or with a few friends. Too often Anne-Marie had to sit afterwards with no more lively occupation than netting or tambour work. She was too young to go into society except under the wing of her mother-in-law, and the old lady's idea of society was to pay calls in the Marais and in the Ile Saint-Louis: to write their names at a dozen doors and to be admitted to three or four; to enter, to curtsy, to sit, to say a few agreeable and unmeaning words, to listen politely and to keep the ball of conversation rolling as impersonally as possible, to rise, to take their leave, to sail out through the doors opened *à deux battants* before them, and to go and do the same thing all over again a few doors off.

The newest arrival had always to sit nearest to the mistress of the house, and had always to cede that place to a newcomer. Consequently there was a constant change of place and little chance of sustained conversation. Fortunately in 1779 it was the fashion to be interested in

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music, and Anne-Marie had learned enough at Panthémont to talk of Gluck and Lulli and Rameau and Piccini with ease, and to defend her own preference for Gluck with conviction. Sometimes, indeed, she had consciously to remember that in the world one must not express one's view too strongly, however clear it was; or dismiss anyone else's, however silly. In other circles it had become the fashion to make goodness of heart, true or assumed, the test of acceptability; in the Marais politeness still ruled, and grace; polish and amiability were all that mattered.

There were few men at these receptions, and these generally elderly and retired, or young and making their entry into the world. French society in the Marais, as at Versailles, was dominated by women: young married women receiving the homage due to their youth and beauty, mature women receiving the tribute due to their wit and their social position, and old women receiving the respect due to their knowledge of the world and its traditions. A man's success in life depended on his capacity for pleasing women of all these ages; a woman's, on her power to establish herself in this ruling class. Here Anne-Marie found no great difficulty; she belonged by birth to the world in which she found herself, Nature had endowed her with beauty and brains, and Panthémont had trained her in the graces and rituals of society.

They had little touch with the world of Versailles; Madame de Fénelon was the only person in the Ile Saint-Louis who went to court. It was impossible to be presented at Court unless the family had already been noble in 1399, and only ninety-four families in all France could prove such ancient nobility. The Mégreys could not even claim the lesser *noblesse de robe* of any very ancient standing; her husband would declare with his fat laugh that he was

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"*assez bon gentilhomme pour n'être pas pendu*," and leave it at that. They belonged to the Marais, and made no vain attempts to rise above it to the Faubourg Saint-Germain. Their distant cousin, the rather insignificant Monsieur de Montmorin, was one of the King's ministers and his daughters were ladies-in-waiting to the Comtesse de Provence and Madame Victoire; but even they were, comparatively speaking, newcomers at Versailles, and not wholly at home there except among the politicians. They brought Anne-Marie news from the wheeling centre of light and gaiety, but she lived in the more diffused and quieter glow just beyond its circumference. The four leagues of road, astonishingly lit by oil lamps, that ran from Paris to Versailles, were for her not a link but a separation.

An occasional three or four hours of nightly gaiety was the only part of her life that could truly be called brilliant; and these were brilliant coldly, like diamonds, for they were chilled by the gracious indifference of a polite society in which she had not yet found a place. One had to be witty, or bored; and she was hardly yet experienced enough for wit. Nothing was taken *au grand sérieux*, unless it were a quadrille; even religion took on the character of a social engagement. In Holy Week, for example, everyone of any pretensions drove out in their finest clothes and their best carriages through the Bois de Boulogne to Longchamps, on the pretext of going to hear *Tenebrae* there.

Older people found in the life of Paris what one of them called "the unbought grace of life"; but Anne-Marie was still a little lonely. She found few who were congenial, and began to think that she would never know anyone intimately. All of the people they knew belonged exactly to

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their own class; the old legal families of the Marais were gloriously insular, and refused to know the lesser legal lights of the Châtelet. Occasionally she found herself in a gayer world in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré or the Faubourg Saint-Germain, in great private houses with a courtyard to divide them from the street and a garden to separate them from their neighbours, set behind immense doors that would open to admit her coach and close with a clang to keep out the passers-by; but here, except for her former fellow pupils, she knew people even less intimately than in the Marais.

When she could secure an escort for the theatre, the performance began at five and ended at nine; she loved to drive back in the darkness through the romantic streets, lit by the moon, or if there were none, by rare lanterns slung aloft, with the footmen with torches riding behind her on the back of the coach and the linkmen escorting the pedestrians home. The accidents of light and shade threw things into a relief that were never seen by daylight, and made Paris seem a city centuries older than it was at noon-day. Panthémont lay in another world; but it was hard to have no gay and friendly house to go to for a final supper-party.

In the early spring of 1780 she found that she was to have a child before the year was out. At once her position in the Mégreys' house was changed; up to now she had seemed a charming and honoured guest; now she became a cherished daughter. Just before Easter they moved, as usual, down to Burgundy, and there the long quiet months of waiting were passed. The Mégreys de Sérilly owned two castles between Villeneuve and Sens, the Château de Passy and the Château de Theil. Theil was an old fortified building, recently restored and redecorated: its chief

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charm was its gardens. Passy, where they stayed that year, was a larger house that had been built with some splendour about a century before. The two estates joined, and a great avenue four leagues long joined the two houses. It was a quiet countryside, full of apple trees and magpies, coloured quietly in browns and madders, with an infinite suavity of line and serenity of atmosphere. The great road from Paris to Lyons ran not far away, but not even its vicinity brought any disturbance. In November the child was born: a boy. When Anne-Marie returned to Paris it was as the mother of the heir, with a different part to play in the family life than had the *pensionnaire* from Panthémont. She was only eighteen, but now she was in everyone's eyes grown up. The time had passed when it was customary to send children out to nurse, and hardly to see them until they were four or five: the Queen herself was expecting a child that year, and babies were in fashion. Anne-Marie occupied herself as assiduously with her little Armand as any bourgeois mother might have done, and found he assured her entry into a world of young mothers whom she found far more congenial than the older generation. The Dauphin was born amid great rejoicings; and when Anne-Marie was brought to bed of a daughter, Aline, in February 1782, she could follow the fashions in *négligées* that Marie Antoinette had set.

The true kingdom of a young married woman of the late eighteenth century was her boudoir: a sacred edifice that no one, not even her husband, entered except by invitation. The house at 122¹ rue Vieille du Temple had only passed to the Sérillys from the Panges three years before Anne-Marie Louise's wedding; it contained no boudoir. Now that her position was ensured she very delicately insisted

¹ Now 106.

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upon one. It was built in an angle of the garden, with wide french windows giving an enchanting view of the pools and lawns and colonnaded pavilions that made its restricted area seem spacious. Within, it was a dream of luxury,¹ with long panels carved with figures of the Seasons, and scrolling ornaments of their flowers and fruit. There was no crudity of gold and white: the background was a pale yellowish grey, the figures imitated bronze, and the flowers and fruit glowed with the colours of Nature. The coved ceiling was painted with Jupiter and his eagles; the lunettes in the arches with figures of the four elements; and the chimney piece sculptured with figures by Clodion in mountings by Gouthière. It was small enough to need nothing but a few chairs and guéridons for its furnishing.

Here young Madame de Sérilly qucenened it at her ease. Her mother-in-law could entertain the ladies of the Marais and the poor relations in the sombre splendour of the salons, but here she could talk at leisure with more interesting guests: personages such as Monsieur de Talleyrand Périgord, the Agent-General of the clergy of France; artists such as Houdon; and a few distinguished foreigners, introduced by Dufort de Chéverny from the Foreign Office. For women friends of her own age outside her family circle she had the two daughters of Madame Pourrat, the wife of a rich banker who had a fine house at Luciennes near Versailles. The elder, Madame Hocquart, was full of grace and intelligence, and the younger, Madame Laurent Lecoulteux, of candour and innocence. Madame de Sérilly might not be able to go to Court, but in Madame Pourrat's salon she met the best of the worlds both of society and of

¹ The interior decoration of the room is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum. It was designed and carved by Rousseau de la Rottière.

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literature. Houdon did a bust of her in those happy days,¹ truthful alike to her mouth—a little large, her nose—a little marked, and to the lovely falling line of her cheek and the air of intelligence and goodwill that were her chief charms. He laughed as he modelled its *maquette*, and declared that her wavy chestnut hair, her long ringlets, her grey eyes (that looked black in most lights), and her clear pale skin were wasted on a sculptor; she should get a painter to immortalize them.

Her most delightful visitor was a cousin, the Chevalier François de Pange, who in his youth had been a ward of Monsieur de Sérilly's. He was almost her own age, but seemed older; he had been admitted as a Knight of Malta at the age of four, and even in early youth had thus had his appointed place in Society. Now, in 1780, he was an orphan and his own master. He was very handsome, tall and thin, with a long pointed face, elegant arched eyebrows and abundant dark hair. He was interested in the history of society and religion, and in every kind of political philosophy; he wrote verse. He was a complete antithesis to her unromantic husband. It was hardly surprising that Anne-Marie Mégret de Sérilly and François de Pange fell in love, and fell in love avowedly and in form. They could discuss each other, poetry and history by the hour in the magical setting of the boudoir, without causing either scandal or surprise. François de Pange not only made love like a poet, but talked remarkably well; a friend said of him that he only said things worth writing, and only wrote things worth doing. It was the fashion just then for a man of the world to explain that he lived like a hermit and spent much of his time making chemical experiments; to make a smile serve the purpose of words, and to be *distrain*

¹ Now in the Wallace Collection (see frontispiece).

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rather than witty. All this he could do to perfection, and, unlike any other man she knew, with sincerity. With him for companion she learned not to talk in superlatives, not to call things delicious or amazing or incomprehensible when she did not mean it; she learned to enjoy sincerity and understatement more deeply than she had ever done pose and exaggeration.

François de Pange would occasionally ask leave to bring one of his friends to see her : friends not of the conventional world of the Marais but of the literary world of Paris, that seemed as remote from her as did Versailles. The most attractive of them was a poet, André Chénier, a man of just the same age as herself. He had been born in Constantinople, and was half a Greek; he had an instinctive sympathy with true classicism, and could reveal even to the unlettered Anne-Marie something of the beauty of Greece. She could not understand it all; it seemed to have no relation with Greek mythology as taught at Fontevault and Panthémont; but he lent her a vision of a world with blue mountains and clear golden air, in which men lived and loved more simply, more nobly, and, it might be, more tragically, than they did in Paris. He read them idylls and bucolics about this dream country, until she felt as if it were not some dead shepherdess but she herself who wandered with François on some thymy hillside. He watched them with half-laughing affection—he had been to school with François—and even dared write of his friend's enjoyment of solitary woods,

Le banquet des amis, et quelquefois, les soirs,

Le baiser jeune et frais d'une blanche aux yeux noirs.

The time soon came when Chénier left Paris to become Secretary to the French Ambassador in London, but

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François de Pange remained. As a relative he used to stay with them in the country at Passy, in a safer seclusion than the boudoir in the rue Vieille du Temple. When the Sérillys went to Burgundy they took their own friends and relations with them; they hunted in their own woods, shot their own game, danced or acted comedies in their own ballroom, and lived, in fact, in an enchanted land isolated from all the troubles of lesser folk.

Sérilly himself was far happier in the country than in Paris. He took an active interest in his property, and fancied himself as a farmer. He did not, however, succeed in making farming pay, for he was in every sphere more generous than prudent. It was not long before he was in serious financial difficulties. A Monsieur de Saint-Victour, who was governor of Tulle, had founded an arms factory for which he was able in virtue of his official position to obtain special privileges. His friends all took shares in it, but at the end of five years their shares had not earned any dividends. Sérilly was kind enough to buy in the shares of his more impecunious friends, such as Dufort de Chéverny, at cost. In this obliging fashion he spent 600,000 livres—about £24,000—on shares that were not worth a penny. Next, Monsieur de Boullongue, one of his colleagues at the *Trésorerie des Guerres*, induced him to join him in various scatter-brained speculations, notably a new system of backing numbers in the National Lottery. As a consequence Boullongue went bankrupt and Sérilly was hard hit. Government influence secured him a large loan to meet his liabilities; but the King suppressed his post, and with it his handsome official income.

Sérilly's was a temperament that bore blows easily; a certain want of sensibility protected him like a coat of mail. His wife felt things more acutely, but had the gift

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of turning her feelings into energetic action that at least made the best of the situation, and gave her something else to think about. They had to sell the house in the rue Vieille du Temple; if Anne-Marie wept as she took farewell of her boudoir, her husband did not see her tears. They moved to a smaller and less elegant house in the rue de Grenelle, near the Invalides. They entertained less, though they still had a family dinner party for their relatives and intimate friends every Wednesday. Passy and Theil remained to them, and some 80,000 livres of revenue, considerably mortgaged. With two children and a smaller house in Paris, it was natural to spend more time at Passy. In May 1784 a third child, Amédée, was born there. An artist friend of the family, Danloux, spent most of the summer with them at Passy, and painted a family group: Anne-Marie, tall and elegant, in a flowing dress in the English style; her husband, jolly and fat in a full-skirted red coat; Amédée in the cradle, Armand playing with his puppy, and Aline with her pulcinella doll. Monsieur de Sérilly insisted on their being posed with his wife in his embrace and more or less on his knee: it was just like him. A laughing figure in the background was another member of the family, Mademoiselle de Saint-Redan, a poor cousin and adopted daughter of old Madame de Sérilly. The old lady had a portrait to herself; Danloux painted her looking rather fierce behind an embroidery frame. He probably saw her in no very amiable state of mind, for he was paying his court to Mademoiselle de Saint-Redan, and the old lady did not at all approve of the match. It took him three years to bring her round to consent, and then it was only on condition that he gave up the practice of his profession. He promised to paint only as an amateur, and the immediate consequence was that, after his marriage in

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1787, he painted his wife and all the Sérillys any number of times.

If he had still been a professional, they would hardly have ordered so many portraits, for Monsieur Sérilly was still in financial difficulties. He had not vision enough to see that the political troubles of the time heralded worse things for his class; he was, indeed, sympathetic with the "ideas of 1789." He did not realize that the privileged position of the aristocracy was unlikely to be respected by the National Assembly; his friends might find it prudent to slip away to England, or Switzerland, or Germany, but he belonged to Burgundy and would stay there. He had no direct connexion with the Court, and the horrors and licence of August did not touch him closely.

Yet the confiscation of church property seriously affected his investments, and it was impossible to say what new taxation might not fall upon him. He had now a third son, Victor, born in January 1789, to provide for. Finally, on July 29th, 1791—six weeks after the flight to Varennes—he sold his second château, Theil. Evidently it was important to have a suitable neighbour, when the estates marched and the two houses were joined by an avenue. He was fortunate in finding a purchaser in his distant cousin, Comte Armand-Marie de Montmorin, who in 1787 had succeeded Vergennes as Prime Minister of France. Sérilly got 730,000 livres—over £29,000—for the estate, and once again felt well-off. His indomitable mother died, and Anne-Marie found herself indeed mistress of the household. She had respected the old lady rather than loved her; it was fitting to mourn her with all the ceremonial of *grand deuil*, with flowing black robes and veils, with abstention from powder or rouge (which was enough to make anyone look yellow), rather than with the secret tears of the heart. So

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for six months she and all her household wore nothing but black; the mirrors in their carved gilt frames were veiled; the coach was upholstered in black, and the very harness went into mourning. She took care not to wear her diamonds for the statutory number of days; she saw to it that Antoine's shoe-buckles and sword hilt were suitably dull; she regulated her trimmings in the exact descending degrees of plain hemmed lawn, plain and embroidered gauze, and finally of lace, as the woman she mourned would have wished her, to do, and prepared to enjoy life with a clear conscience.

Part of the dead woman's property was a very fine house at 119 rue des Capucines: a more fashionable quarter than the Marais, and a more modern house than any they had so far occupied. They decided to live in the finest part of it, and to let off the upper floors until the children were older. Anne-Marie de Sérilly celebrated the move by ordering (and paying for) a portrait of François de Pange by Danloux: a portrait that shows him plainly but exquisitely dressed in black, in the English style, seated writing an ode in a wood. Pange was her chief link with the thought and action of the time. Four years before, in 1787, he had seemed suddenly to change from a poetical dilettante into a politician. He was only twenty-three, and his politics were perhaps more generous than wise. He was all for change: the Bourbon idea of benevolent despotism must give place to a more democratic constitution, and he bored Anne-Marie considerably with long discussions whether a constitution on English or American lines would suit France the better. In the end he decided in favour of democratic monarchy (which seemed to Anne-Marie a *contresens*) and became an enthusiast for government of an English type. Everything English,

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indeed, was in fashion; even Anne-Marie gave up silks and brocades for embroidered linen and India muslin, dressed her hair in the simple puffs and ringlets of the English style, and wore wide-brimmed straw hats *à l'anglaise*, that she had to admit were extremely becoming. But Pange went beyond a fashionable anglomania; in 1789 he became democrat enough to join the Club of the Feuillants, and when Chénier returned to Paris in April of 1790 the two friends used to frequent it together. For a time their joint enthusiasm ran high; but in a few months, though Chénier continued to dream of a brave new world, events had disillusioned Pange. He became a reactionary, but an inactive one. He was happier thinking of the ideal state in Anne-Marie's salon or in the woods of Passy than in listening to the debates of the Constituent Assembly.

III

1790-3

BY now even the Sérillys were beginning to realize how serious were the political difficulties that menaced France. The symbols of the old order in Church and State were already vanishing. In June 1790 all the *enseignes de la féodalité* had been barred; the coat-of-arms over the door of their house had been effaced with plaster, that on their coach had been daubed over with black paint, and instead of his armorial signet with the coronet Sérilly now used an ancient intaglio. In July Talleyrand, who for a year had held the see of Autun, had celebrated a *Messe de l'Être Suprême* at the Festival of Pikes in the Champ de Mars, with the Abbé Louis—another *habitué* of the Sérillys' house—to assist him. François de Pange still talked of the English Constitution, but talked of it as a menace to France. As usual, it was Anne-Marie who took the first precautions: in the spring of 1792, when the Austrians had defeated the French Army, she sent her lace to London by a friend, to be sold. A little later, when the mob had invaded the Tuileries, she was anxious to send her two eldest boys, now twelve and ten, to school in England, but M. de Boinville, her brother-in-law, the only friend she had to confide them to, had got so seriously into debt in England that he was unwilling to undertake the charge of the children, and they remained in France.

On August 10th, the siege of the Tuileries and the retreat of the Royal Family to seek the protection of the National Assembly brought the real Revolution. A friend

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of Monsieur de Sérilly's, the Baron de Viomesnil, was wounded in the attack; he escaped first to the Venetian embassy, and then to the Sérillys' house. There he seemed safely hidden, until a sudden domiciliary visit from the police revealed his danger. Madame de Sérilly saved the situation by pretending that the wounded Viomesnil was her husband, in bed with the gout, and that her husband was his attendant. The invalid was hurriedly moved to Sérilly's brother's house, died there, and was buried under a false name. The affair, and the alarm it caused, proved Paris to be a danger-spot. By September they had moved to Passy, together with Madame Danloux and her children.

In August 1792, Monsieur de Montmorin had known that he was doomed; when a friend suggested that he should secure a passport and make his escape from Paris, he answered: "It is a passport for the next world that I shall need; I am certain to be assassinated within three months." He was too marked a man to find obscurity even in the country. His married daughter, Madame de la Luzerne, whose husband was at the embassy in London, had returned to France in 1791 to avoid the confiscation of their estates. She took her two children away to a quiet watering place, and the Montmorins, their son Calixte and their daughter Pauline de Beaumont, who lived separated from her husband and served as lady-in-waiting to the Comtesse de Provence, continued to reside in the big family house in the rue Plumet at Paris.

After August 10th Montmorin and his family found themselves hunted creatures, seeking refuge where they could. His children and their mother found a refuge at Luciennes, with Madame Pourrat; Montmorin himself hid in the lodgings of a friend's servant, where the police discovered him. He was taken before the Assembly and sent

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to the prison of the Abbaye. On September 2nd the mob invaded the prison, overwhelmed him with their blows, and carried him, still living, impaled on a pike to the National Assembly. So, before the legislators of his country, died the last of the Prime Ministers of Louis XVI.

His danger had brought his wife and daughter back to Paris; his death drove them to join Madame de la Luzerne in an obscure lodging at Rouen. Any great town, however, had by this time become a place of danger, and by February they were seeking a quieter refuge. Madame de Sérilly went to Rouen to visit the Montmorins, and to snatch a meeting with François de Pange, who was also hiding there. She had returned to Paris in November for a few days, in the desperate hope of borrowing 12,000 livres; without them she feared that the Paris house might be seized by their creditors. She suggested to the Montmorin family that since Burgundy was in a much quieter state than Rouen, they should seek obscurity in their own house at Theil. They decided to leave the la Luzerne children at Rouen at a school kept by English governesses, and followed her to Burgundy. When the Montmorin party reached their château they found that it had been seized as the property of the attainted minister, and was closed to them. The Sérillys at once offered them asylum at Passy.

There, things were as yet little changed. The house was less magnificent than the hôtel in Paris, but its brocaded walls and simple wainscots made a dignified setting for an ordered life which seemed far removed from the Revolution and its dangers. The park walls defended it even from Rumour. Monsieur de Sérilly was still busy with his farms, his wife and her guests with the four children; the old country servants looked after them as usual, the quiet

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routine of country life was hardly interrupted by the bad news that the mail coach brought from Paris, or by the worse anxiety on the days that the mail failed to run. For a time they all enjoyed the illusion of safety at Passy. It was off the high road; its nearest town, Villeneuve le Roi, was as little stirred by the Revolution as any place in France, and their own tenants and peasants still regarded them with honour and even with affection.

Monsieur de Sérilly, indeed, was no violent reactionary. Immediately after his arrival at Passy, on September 18th, he had had himself enrolled as a member of the National Guard, and had taken the civic oath by which he swore to maintain the Constitution or to die in its defence. In January 1793 the execution of the King made his position difficult; but he was both optimistic and slow to move, and they went on living at Passy as quietly as before. Madame Danloux, who had sold her beds and furniture, came to stay for a few weeks before she prudently emigrated to England to join her husband.

The peace at Passy was rudely disturbed. On Friday, April 5th, 1793, at seven in the evening, a commissary arrived, escorted by a representative from Sens and the municipal officers of the village of Passy itself. Their warrant came from no local tribunal, but from the *Comité de Sûreté Générale* in Paris; it was directed not against Sérilly, but against his wife. They were ordered to go through her papers, arrest her and bring her before the Committee, on account of her brother, Jean Baptiste Thomas de Domangeville, who was suspected of having emigrated. They searched and questioned all that evening, far into the night, and all the next morning. Madame de Sérilly declared that she had nothing to reproach herself with concerning the affairs of the Republic, for she had

never taken any part in them. None the less, she was arrested and taken to the prison at Sens: travelling the familiar road with a strange escort and strange feelings of shock and surprise.

The Committee were well informed; Domangeville had emigrated to England in April 1792, and had then gone to Germany to join the army of the Princes. The interrogatory at Sens was inconclusive; Madame de Sérilly's brain was quick enough to make her a difficult witness. She was sent to Paris, under guard, and detained as a half-prisoner in a cell of a former nunnery until the day came for her appearance before the representative of the Committee of Public Safety. She was taken to the Law Courts, and left to wait in a low dark room, alone. Near the entrance were wicker hampers, that looked oddly familiar and domestic in the rather sinister room. Bored and curious, she lifted the lid of the nearest, and found it full of human hair of every colour. As she looked in amazement and a kind of dull horror, the portress entered and told her that it was here that those condemned to the guillotine had their hair cut off, and that as portress she had the perquisite of selling it. The woman came to tell her the judge was ready to see her, and Anne-Marie followed her considerably shaken by her macabre discovery. Yet her questioner, one of Fouquier-Tinville's twenty-four deputies, was not particularly terrifying: a little fair man who looked hardly twenty, with a freckled skin and blue eyes that not even his red cap and carmagnole of goatskin could make look fierce. Anne-Marie knew that by now her brother had returned to France. If she admitted that he had emigrated, his property would be seized, but if she denied it the search would be continued, his presence would be discovered, his service in the army of the Princes would be revealed and he

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would be condemned to death. She therefore admitted that he had emigrated, without suggesting that he had been mad enough to return to France, and she was freed. She returned to Passy more shaken than she admitted.

Life in the country house continued as apparently peaceful as before. The good-humoured Sérilly seemed popular as ever. He gave the old chapel of the Château to the people of Passy to use as a church, together with a little house near it to serve as a presbytery; the Gallican Church might be disestablished, but any cult was permitted, and everyone in Passy was still a pious Catholic. His sensible speech, declaring all this, and declaring that he and they were friends, as their children should be after them, brought from the parish council a long reply, full of good wishes to him, his family and "*la citoyenne Montmorin*," signed by every one of the inhabitants who knew how to write.

On Saturday, July 13th, Sérilly took the leading part in a yet more important ceremony. He was asked to read aloud to the assembled citizens of the Commune the charter of the Constitution of which all the citizens of France were invited to declare their acceptance. They accepted it with wondering solemnity and sincere joy; it was to make them citizens of a brave new world. Two days later he came before the mayor again in another capacity: this time to hand over as null and void all the grants and title-deeds that had secured his rights to feudal services, feudal dues, and the exemption from taxation that they carried with them.

In the middle of October the mail brought them news of the trial and execution of Marie-Antoinette; it was hard, in quiet Passy, to believe it true. On Sunday, October 26th, the surrendered title-deeds were burned in public, before

all the inhabitants of Passy and some from Villeneuve; and the *ci-devant seigneur* and his family were among those who watched the bonfire.

But the brave new world proved a hungry one, and held more promises than bread. Passy decided to collect a fund for those who had neither flour nor money to buy it, and Sérilly was appointed treasurer. But when the money was collected there was no meal left to be bought, and he had all the trouble of giving the money back again and meeting the small expenses of its collection. He was then named one of the two representatives of Passy who were to go to Sens to demand food from the authorities.

He went on the 18th of Pluviôse, or by the old reckoning February 6th. While he served the interests of his villagers his own fate was being decided in Paris. The Committee of Public Safety were still searching for Monsieur de Viomesnil, to whom Sérilly had given protection when he was a fugitive from the siege of the Tuileries. His shoemaker, who had somehow learned of Viomesnil's short stay at the Sérillys', denounced Sérilly for having sheltered Viomesnil, and accused the family man of business, L'Hoste, for having exported currency on his master's account. Sérilly's brother, Mégret d'Étigny, and several of his friends, were soon implicated in the Viomesnil charge, and orders were given for their arrest, together with that of Viomesnil, whose death remained unrecognized.

While Sérilly was begging bread for his villages at Sens, the papers of his man of business were being searched. Little was found: letters from Madame de Sérilly, asking L'Hoste to arrange for the sale of the furniture she had left in Paris, and telling him that her youngest child had been ill; and a hundred louis d'or and some assignats. These, L'Hoste explained, were the fruit of some transactions of

his own with the Compagnie des Indes. The explanation was not enough; he was arrested as having been Sérilly's agent in traffic in currency, and taken to prison.

Meanwhile one of the most dreaded agents of the Committee, Guesnot, together with two assistants, was on his way to Passy to deal with Sérilly himself. Once more, on February 13th, the party at supper was disturbed by a clatter of sabots in the courtyard. The three police agents, heavily armed, entered the dining-room, with all the villagers, in a state between excitement and dismay, crowding behind them. They set a sentinel at each door and remained there, perfectly silent, enjoying the disquietude that their presence caused. Finally, since neither the Sérillys nor their guests broke the ominous hush, they showed their warrant for the arrest of Sérilly and any suspect found in the house. The ladies were each shut into separate rooms, and these, and the rest of the house were meticulously and fruitlessly searched. Pauline de Beaumont had a miniature of her father with the *cordon bleu* and a few letters from Madame de Staël in Switzerland; her brother had two pistols; and her sister some letters from London and a preparation of verdigris with which, she said, she wished to poison herself. Guesnot had particularly investigated the cellar, and was grossly drunk: but even he could not make much out of these discoveries.

They were all kept apart, in a misery of anxiety, until the next morning, when Guesnot, somewhat recovered, interrogated Monsieur de Sérilly with a mixture of violence and astuteness on his sheltering of Monsieur de Viomesnil. Then he insisted on lunching with the family, and departed for Sens to arrest Monsieur Mégret d'Étigny. He soon returned to bear off Monsieur de Sérilly with his brother to prison, and to refuse to accept an *attestation de civisme* in their favour proffered by the villagers of Passy.

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Madame de Sérilly could not bear to see the good-natured man who was her husband thus carried off like a beast to the butchers. His kindness and good sense, his want of anger against his captors, made his departure only more heartbreaking. Frantically she begged Guesnot to let her go with her husband, but with a false geniality Guesnot, well satisfied with his haul of prisoners, assured her that her husband would soon be back with her at Passy. Guesnot drove off with his prisoners, watched not only by their friends and family, but also by a little crowd of villagers. The women might weep, but Sérilly's peasants and servants were silent; it was one of those enigmas of the Government into which it was better not to enquire too closely. They felt as if they had gone back thirty years and were watching the operation of a *lettre de cachet*, rather than as if it was by their own sovereign will and authority that their benefactors had been arrested.

Madame de Sérilly was expecting François de Pange and his brother; obviously they too must be in great danger of arrest. She contrived to get a warning to them in time, and heard in a day or two that they had succeeded in escaping to Switzerland. It was the only good news to reach her.

In a few days news came that Sérilly was imprisoned in what had been the convent of the English nuns in the rue des Filles Anglaises.¹ His wife at once decided that her place was in Paris near him; and on the 2nd of Ventôse (March) she secured a passport from the municipality that permitted her to travel there. Letters came from him in prison. He wrote to his eldest son, Armand, now thirteen and a half, on March 5th:

I hope, my dear child, that you are looking after your

¹ Now 28 rue des Tanneries.

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mother and taking all the care of her that your age permits. Although I am far away from you all, my only thought is of your dear mother and of you. You are still very young, my dear son, but yet old enough to begin to think about events and to benefit by your thinking. Ask your mother to approve that you should each of you write me a word in the next letter which she gives me the pleasure of writing to me. . . . Kiss her very tenderly on my behalf, and your sister and brothers too. My health is very good.

The letter came when Madame de Sérilly had left for Paris, and François de Pange's brother had come to see if he could do them any service. He found Madame de Montmorin in so nervous a state that the fact that the cricket in her room had ceased to sing became an omen, and Madame de la Luzerne almost unhinged with fear and worry. Only Pauline de Beaumont remained calm, though she looked ill; frail, over-sensitive and melancholy, she yet had hidden reserves of strength. Her hands were full, between quieting her mother and sister and looking after the children.

IV

1793-4

MADAME DE SÉRILLY had only been in Paris a few days, vainly trying to secure an interview with her husband, before Guesnot arrested her. She was at first imprisoned in one of the smaller houses of detention, a convent that had been turned into a prison for women. She had a cell, tiny and dirty, but her own; and the recollection of Fontevrault and Panthémont made her sojourn there just bearable. The ordered convent life had gone, and its exquisite neatness with it; there were no bells to mark the passing of the day, no common prayer or common recreation; but however strange, sordid and solitary the life, the setting at least seemed not wholly unfamiliar. She stayed there, as it seemed, forgotten, until on the 25th of Germinal (April 14th, 1794) she was suddenly transferred to the Conciergerie. It was an infinite refreshment to be outside again, were it only to drive from one prison to another; to smell the freshness of air that was not itself imprisoned, to see the chestnuts in early leaf and the plane trees hanging their tassels over the waters of the Seine, to hear the street cries of Paris, and to see the flower-stalls on the Quays, that not even the Terror could rob of their colour and freshness. She was driven between her warders to the Conciergerie, to realize that she had hardly noticed it in all the times she had driven past it when she was free. Its official architecture seemed intended to be forgotten. The wide court with its regular façades, its great flight of stairs, was created out of formality and

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officialdom; it was a place where one came to sign documents, not a prison. But through this court, and separated from it by an iron grille, was a dark little yard that seemed more ominous.

She had to get out of the cab and enter through a gate in the grille before the eyes of a crowd of women who were seated on the great flight of stairs, waiting to see the day's convoy of tumbrils depart with their victims for the Place Louis XV and the guillotine. As she stepped down and came into view they rose and greeted her with hideous joy. She had only just time to reach the inner court before a shower of cabbage stalks and filthy refuse followed her. Within the yard it was more orderly; there was a crowd, but a crowd of men with official reasons for their presence: soldiers, gaolers, and the clerks that hang round any government department. The chief warder, who took charge of her, did not, for all his clashing keys, look as alarming as most of them. He passed her at once into a dark little room where a man was sitting in an armchair before a filing cabinet and a desk; it smelt as dusty as any government office, with a curious prison staleness added. Beyond the desk a partition of wooden bars divided his office from a room in which men and women sat waiting in a strange quietude. It was only later that she knew that they were men and women who had that day been condemned and were now waiting for execution. On that first morning she only noticed how the man and woman nearest her had their hair cut short and their hands clasped together and thrust a little forward, ready to be bound. She had little leisure to think of them: she must turn all her thoughts upon the man at the desk and the questions he might ask her. They were trivial enough: name, age, date of arrest, and so on: enough to enable him to fill in

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the columns of the register before him. But already any questioning was enough to shake her nerves, and it was in a kind of daze that she followed her gaoler through gate after gate, past a dark cell where a woman was groaning, to the right through a little court and across a passage, and so to another room that opened on to a courtyard paved with cobblestones. It had a low-browed arcade, like a provincial market-square, with stone gutterspouts above the arches. The windows of the room were many-paned, and overshadowed by the arches outside; it took Madame de Sérilly a moment to realize how crowded it was with women: old and young, ladies and peasants; women whom, if she did not recognize, she felt she ought to know; women who might have come from her own estates; women of the streets. Some faces were familiar; some prisoners moved forward to greet her as if they were meeting at a reception. They moved to give place to yet more familiar figures: to her horror, some of the friends she had left at Passy—Madame de Montmorin and her daughter. The elder lady told her that on the 6th of April Guesnot had come again, had once more interrogated them all, and had arrested her, her son and her daughter, but had left Madame de Beaumont at liberty. They had been put on a wagon to be driven to Sens and Paris; Pauline de Beaumont had besought their captors to take her too, but they had refused. The cart had driven off, and they had seen her desperately running after them until she dropped exhausted by the wayside. Before they left many of the rooms of the castle had been sealed. Madame de la Luzerne, who had long seemed strange and not herself, was now obviously deranged; her malady was an added horror.

Horrors, indeed, were not wanting in the Conciergerie; and the extraordinary mixture of the ordinary and the

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strange gave life there a macabre quality of unreality. Things and people were mixed as they might be in a dream; but whereas a dream would have a vague and changing background, here the only things which did not change were the prison walls that held them close.

That April there were seven thousand political prisoners, but they had not driven the ordinary criminals out of the prisons. These were, as usual, fewer on the women's than the men's side of the Conciergerie, but there were enough of them to provide a contrast and an experience for the political prisoners. They, too, were the element that stayed longest in the prison, since there was no political urgency to hasten their trials; and they showed themselves on the whole friendly to the rest, and explained the rules and regulations and told them how to make the best of things, as old inhabitants should. Even the political prisoners were by no means homogeneous: there were ladies of fashion who might arrive with bonnet-boxes and a lapdog, there were aristocratic women from the country, like Madame de Sérilly herself, there were maids from great houses who had been too loyal to their mistresses, there were farmers' wives who had given shelter to fugitives, there were *bourgeoises* and peasants whom some enemy had denounced. The place was horribly crowded; if a prisoner could pay four or five livres a day, she might sleep in a small cell with only one or two companions; otherwise she had to join *les pailleux* in a great single room, where fifty women might have only twenty straw mattresses, and those dirty, to lie on. The women of condition, however sordidly they might have to lie, always tried to make a toilette in the morning, and even, when they could, changed at midday from a negligée into a more formal dress. Gone were their retinues of neat maids in print gowns and white kerchiefs, gone the

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hairdresser with his little pair of steps; but in the centre of the women's courtyard there was a low fountain, and there each morning the prisoners would wash their linen and so keep at least the elegance of freshness. Food was brought in from outside, and dearly charged for, but for those who had the money to pay for it, was not bad. The time passed heavily and anxiously, rather than slowly; only the most flitter-minded of the fine ladies found occasion to be bored, and to regret the interruption in their education of their canary-birds. Most of them, like Madame de Sérilly, found that whenever anxiety left them a moment for freedom they could find a curious intense enjoyment in the smallest weed or tree or bit of summer sky: such sights were isolated, and significant, and none knew how soon they might be deprived of them. For the most dreadful of all the mutabilities of the prison was the swiftness with which its inhabitants passed to their death. Sixty might come in of an evening, and all be dead by the next night. Since February, to hasten business, the Revolutionary Tribunal had instituted the practice of a common trial for prisoners who had nothing to do with each other, and none knew when or with whom they would be tried. The warders used to come with the warrants late at night, and read them aloud by the light of their torches in the middle of the crowded room. Everyone woke in horror at the sound of their harsh voices; the death-warrants of sixty people might thus bring terror to six hundred. No visitors from the outside world were allowed, but the women's prison was next the men's, and they could talk to each other through a grille and through two windows that opened opposite each other, across a small courtyard. On April 23rd Sérilly and the young Montmorin were admitted to the men's side from the prison of the Anglaises, and at

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last husband and wife could speak with one another once more. For all their courage—and but for the dumb mad-woman all the friends were courageous—their talk revealed little to hope for. That night was one of horror on the women's side: fourteen young girls from Verdun were to be tried on the morrow, and from the gaolers' talk all knew that they were doomed. For the guard-room lay within earshot of the great room of the prison, and it was easy to hear the gaolers going through the acts of accusation that condemned to the guillotine on the morrow; sometimes they could even hear them wantonly adding a wife's name to her husband's. If a woman could not bear it longer, she would cry *Vive le Roi!* to secure a quicker condemnation. Sometimes a prisoner would only know that her husband had already died by reading on her death-warrant that she was a widow. The victims were taken off at three in the afternoon, walking through the files of their fellow prisoners. Twenty peasant women from Poitou went together, one with a baby at her breast, quiet, resigned and stupid as beasts at a Poitevin market. Most went silent, dignified and withdrawn, as if going to a new sacrament.

The Sérillys and Montmorins were slow to come to trial; their courage stood, but their health was broken by the strain. On the 26th of April all five were removed to the prison of the Évêché, which was intended to serve as a kind of hospital. There conditions were less crowded, and it was possible once more to write to the children at Passy. Madame de Sérilly wrote:

This letter will be common to all of you, my dear children. Your little brother will not be able to take much share in it; but you will talk to him of me and you will try to see that he does not forget me or his

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father. Keep on doing what you should. Remember sometimes what I have told you, and think of the pleasure I shall have in seeing you again, if I find you as I should wish. I still have a little fever, but do not be anxious, I think it will soon be gone. Good-bye, my dear children. Think sometimes of your mother, who thinks only of you. I kiss you tenderly.

The father added a line :

I join myself to your mother, dear children; I kiss you as I love you, with all my heart.

They had twelve days of comparative peace at the évêché before they were summoned to appear before the Revolutionary Tribunal on May 6th. It was now divided into two sections, sitting simultaneously, each with several judges. They first appeared, but for Madame de la Luzerne, who was too ill to come, on the 6th, before one section, for the formal interrogatory that the law prescribed before the final trial. Montmorin was asked if he had not conspired against the Republic. He replied that he had always loved his country too much to conspire against her or to hold any correspondence with her enemies. Madame de Sérilly was asked the same question; she answered: "Certainly not." The interrogatory was over, before they had realized it had begun.

On May 9th the gaoler came late to tell them that their trial was fixed for the next day. It was a slower process than the interrogatory. The court sat in the old Great Hall of the Parlement, the very room where Louis XIV had once declared "*L'état, c'est moi*." The enthusiasts of the Revolution had ironically rechristened

it Salle de la Liberté. It was reached from the prison by a labyrinth of passages and stairs: a tall bare room, lit by four windows opening to the right on to a courtyard. The President sat beneath busts of Brutus, Marat and Lepeletier; below them, between two oil lamps, hung the Tables of the Law. Fouquier-Tinville, the Public Prosecutor, sat on his left and the three judges on his right, all in their official dress, black frock coats, plumed hats, and medallions on tricolor ribbons round their necks. A clerk sat at a table below, between two long tables set parallel, elegant tables with winged sphinxes for supports, that held water-bottles and glasses. Behind one of them were six rows of benches for the accused, and opposite the President there were more benches for the public.

The formulas of justice were observed; there was even a jury. But the jury was packed, the judges made no pretence of impartiality, and Fouquier-Tinville was determined to get it all through as quickly as possible. So soon as the prisoners had been brought in they realized that their last hope was gone: it was a collective trial, and at their head was Madame Elisabeth, the King's sister. She was a doomed woman, and they would all perish with her.

The clerk read the act of accusation; there was nothing definite against most of them, but they were all accused with Madame Elisabeth of participation in some unspecified plot. Fouquier-Tinville, the Public Prosecutor, was quickly revealed as the protagonist of the sorry drama. He was a man of nearly fifty, large-framed and loud-voiced, yet tired: he seemed bent beneath his task like an ox beneath a yoke. He found in Madame Elisabeth an easy victim. Asked her name, she replied: "I am called Elisabeth Marie of France, sister of Louis XVI, aunt of Louis XVII, your King." Fouquier-Tinville retorted:

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"Of what then can she complain, Elisabeth of France? Have we not formed to-day a court of aristocrats worthy of her? Nothing will prevent her from thinking herself still in the salons of Versailles when she finds herself, at the foot of the guillotine, surrounded by all this faithful nobility. . . . It is to the family of Capet that the French people owe all the ills under whose weight they have groaned for so many centuries." The Prosecutor hardly paused to enumerate some of the especial crimes of "Messalina-Antoinette" before continuing, "Elisabeth has shared in all these crimes." That was enough. "Mégret de Sérilly and his wife must be numbered among the accomplices of Capet and his wife. . . . Mégret de Sérilly and Mégret d'Etigny were certainly aware of all the objects of the conspiracy." L'Hoste, their man of business, was their agent in sending money to emigrés. Madame de Montmorin had been her husband's accomplice in all his infamous crimes; her son had been at the Tuilleries on August 10th; her daughter had kept up a constant correspondence with her husband in England. It was as easy to find charges against the Loménies, Mademoiselle de Canisy, and the rest of their fellow prisoners. No cross-examination, no witnesses, no speech for the defence was needed; all were condemned together.

They were taken back to the Conciergerie to await execution; already it had become a strange place from which most of their acquaintances had gone. The people who were there naturally concerned themselves with Madame Elisabeth, and the others felt curiously alone. Little time was allowed them for farewells; they were hurriedly herded into the room partitioned off from the office where, as usual, the clerk was questioning new arrivals and entering them upon his register. A kind of

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inertia had descended on most of them. They submitted quietly to having their hair cut off and their hands bound; but Madame de Sérilly still had force enough to wish to live, were it only for a time. She could do nothing to save the others, but she could save herself. Existence itself was a thing worth fighting for; and beyond the actual fact of living she still felt she had something to live for: children, and friends, and the hope of saving a few familiar things from ruin and a few moments of exhilaration from the grey hands of Time.

A clause of the civil code laid down: "If a woman condemned to death declares, and it is confirmed, that she is pregnant, she shall endure the penalty only after the child has been delivered." Talking through the wooden bars, talking louder than politeness admitted to draw the clerk's attention, clamouring, shouting almost, Madame de Sérilly declared that she was pregnant, and must see one of her judges at once. The clerk laughed at her, listened to her, argued with her, at last was persuaded. Coffinal was brought to the guard-room, and questioned her. She was six weeks gone, she declared; she must be instantly examined by a doctor, for the turnbrils were waiting. (She had been separated from her husband for three months, but in the Conciergerie no one had time for dates and details.) The prison doctor and a midwife recognized by the Tribunal were hurriedly summoned, and declared themselves in doubt. Madame de Sérilly's execution was postponed.

She remained safe in the Conciergerie with no time left for farewells. She heard the turnbrils drive away, she could follow them in thought on that dreadful journey through streets that once had been friendly and familiar, by the Pont Neuf, past the Monnaie, over the bridge, up the rue Saint-Honoré to the scaffold in the Place Louis XV.

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She could imagine them driving through the streets : her husband with a look of puzzled incredulity, but still with the air of bluff good humour with which he had used to drive to market at Sens; Madame Elisabeth and Madame de Montmorin with the straight backs and reserve of ladies of the court; L'Hoste, with his anonymous air of the retainer of a good family; Calixte de Montmorin, with the dashing bravery of youth : it could not be that they were really driving to an ignominious death. They were so strong : life ran so vigorously in their veins; even the old lady was tough and vital. She *could* not think of them as dead. She heard, or thought she heard, the angry murmur of the crowd at the execution, muffled by distance until it sounded like a groan. It was a night of unbelievable horror; life could not be like this. She could not even know the courage that saved the scene from sordidness : how young Calixte de Montmorin, himself, but for Madame Elisabeth, the last to die, cried "*Vive le Roi!*" nineteen times as the guillotine fell on nineteen victims, and only faltered and was silent at the twentieth, his mother; how he went to his own death with a ribbon of Madame Hocquart's pressed to his lips; how Madame Elisabeth followed him, and faced death with the same calm and piety with which she had faced life. Unseen, it remained unbelievable, and she found herself searching for their familiar faces among the flitting crowds of the prison. She would go mad; and madder because the speed and recklessness of the Revolution seemed to have entered the prison, and the accused and the condemned seemed resolved to live the few days or hours of life that remained to them as feverishly as they could.

Hope only dawned when on May 15th she was taken back to the Hospice de l'Évêché. The people there might be ill and dying, but they were not taking part in so violent

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a Dance of Death as the prisoners of the Conciergerie. She could not dare to consider herself safe; just before she entered the hospital seven out of eight women who had declared themselves pregnant had been sentenced as impostors and executed. But the hospital represented, at the least, a respite. Bayard, the doctor who was in charge, was kind and considerate; the bursar was not unfriendly, and Quinquet the dispenser was far more interested in his patent lamps than in politics. There were other officers of the true revolutionary stamp, in open conflict with Bayard and his friends, but their conflicts, though they might make administration even more difficult than it was in the unsuitable old buildings, did not imperil the prisoners. Anne-Marie did what she could for Madame de la Luzerne, but she had now sunk into grave physical illness, and died after weeks of unconsciousness on July 8th.

At the Conciergerie Madame de Sérilly had seemed altogether shut off from the world outside its walls; here a little news crept in. Occasionally she could snatch a glance at an old *Moniteur*: she saw her own death recorded with that of the others on May 10th, and her brother's a fortnight later. But she had been able to tell Pauline and her children at Passy that she still lived, and a maid was allowed to send her in occasional supplies of clean linen and provisions. With them came little ill-spelt notes, written in sympathetic ink over the laundry list, which was in ordinary ink. The creditors were growing restive: "*la tante n'est pas encore faite à Passy, vos enfants non pas encore de tuteur. Adieu—portez-vous bien.*" In the middle of July she was allowed to send the children a letter to say that Dufosse, her man of business, was to go to Passy to bring back to Paris the two elder children, Armand who was now fifteen, and Aline who was twelve.

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You, my son, you will be with an honest man, who will give you an example of virtue and the education which will enable you to make an honourable living, if you apply yourself. . . . You will find when you get to Paris a letter from me which will contain all the advice that my love for you shall dictate to me. You, Aline, will be in a boarding-school where you will be loved and well treated, if you bring to it the gentleness that befits a girl. Forget your former position; tell yourself plainly, my child, that you have nothing, and that when you lost the estate you might have anticipated, you also lost a much more precious possession, your parents. My child, goodness of heart has always been needful, and never more than to you now. . . . Do not leave your cousin without thanking her for her kindness. . . . I wish I could cover you all with my kisses; it would be with my tears, if I could again have the happiness of seeing you. Think of me who love you so tenderly. Farewell; I embrace you.

When she wrote, it seemed as if it must soon be evident to everyone that her pregnancy was feigned; and when that happened, nothing stood between her and the guillotine. If Bayard had not had some humanity left, she might well have been sent there already. But the children were still travelling towards Paris when on the 9th of Thermidor, July 29th, 1794, Robespierre fell. The next day he and his associates perished on the scaffold to which they had condemned so many others.

THE Terror was over, but it was long before the prisoners of Paris dared to dream that there was no longer the nightly roll of death-warrants to be read, or the daily procession of victims to watch or to join. For though Robespierre might be dead, the prisons emptied slowly. Gradually the nightmare lifted. Armand de Sérilly was not allowed to see his mother, but he could come to the prison from his school in the rue de la Calende, and leave her washing at the lodge, with a note hidden on the back of the list; and receive the packet in return, with a note of love and tender enquiry from his mother folded between the clothes.

By the 17th of Thermidor, a week after Robespierre's death, hope had come once more to Madame de Sérilly. Even when it was found that she was not with child, it might no longer necessarily send her to the guillotine. That day she ventured to write to the *Comité de Sûreté Générale* to appeal from a sentence which, she declared, by sending those who were innocent to their death, bereaved her children of any protectors. They no longer had a father; she appealed to the Committee to restore to them at least a mother. She was allowed to write more often and more freely to her children. On September 3rd she wrote to Aline :

I hope, my dear Aline, that you are growing used to your school. Try to profit by the kindness of the cito-

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yenne Thomas, to whom I am writing to commend you. They say that I may hope one day to see you again; what joy I shall have, my dear child, to press you to my heart! Do not disturb this joy by forcing me to reproach you; I hope that, far from that, there will only be praise for me to give you. If your mistress tells me, dear Aline, that you give your mind to your lessons, that you work well, and above all that you are good, nothing will be lacking to my contentment. Be sure, my child, that goodness and gentleness can serve instead of wit, or beauty, or fortune. One can do without anything if one has these qualities, for one has all those around one for friends; but when these qualities are lacking, nothing can take their place; and all the wit and all the talents in the world cannot preserve one from the dislike that is given to cruel souls and even to those who are not sensitive to the sufferings of others. Without a doubt you wish to be loved; for that, my darling, one must be lovable; and the best way, the most certain, is to be kind and good.

She finds Aline's last letter better spelt, though there are still some mistakes; and hopes she will be able to work a little at history and geography, and keep up her English. And what about her arithmetic? Aline is to read a history book and write to her mother about it.

Imagine that I know no history at all, that I have never heard tell of any; you read something that interests you and want to tell me about it; but you cannot copy it out; you write me what you remember as you go along.

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She writes more tenderly, if with more grumbles, to Armand :

You do well, my dear, to tell me that the citizen Jumel is pleased with your writing; for, to judge by that of your note, I should not have guessed it. You may perhaps think me severe; I should be less so, my friend, did I not love you so much.

Poor Aline was slow and lazy, and did less than her mother asked, and did not confess it; but Madame de Sérilly knew her daughter, and wrote and scolded her gently. If she did not learn to work now that she was twelve, she would never be educated; she must remember that lost time was lost for ever, and that the only measure of living was how much one had done. Madame de Sérilly was still near enough to death to write these truths with freshness and simplicity. Armand sent her his translation from Latin, and she corrected it, and criticized its style, and preached him an excellent sermon on the matter.

It is not enough to translate literally; you must translate with grace, with elegance; you will thus find the double advantage of learning Latin and of forming your style; and this second you will only learn by practice. One must write much to know how to express one's thoughts. You have not much to do, so write about everything. When any idea comes to you, write it down. Re-read it afterwards, and see if you cannot say the same thing in fewer words, or if your expressions are indeed those best fitted to what you want to say. Send me all your scribbles, and I will tell you what I think . . .

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By September 1794, there were still five thousand prisoners in Paris, but hope yet lived. On the 17th the Convention decreed, on the motion of Pons de Verdun, that there should be a second reprieve for Madame de Sérilly and her companions in the Évêché. The next day she could write to Aline: "At last, I can no longer fear that I shall not have the happiness of embracing you!" (Even so, she remembered to correct Aline's spelling faults). On the 24th a legislative committee which had been charged with the investigation of the question, asked the President of the Revolutionary Tribunal to give them access to his files. Madame Pourrat contrived to get the news to the prisoner, and Madame de Sérilly at once began to write an account of her arrest, interrogatory and trial, for the benefit of the Committee.

At the Évêché the possibility of hope made the days drag. Rumours came that Pons de Verdun had given the matter up; that he was still pressing it; that a new Terror was beginning; that the old was indeed over. Madame de Sérilly was on tenterhooks; her only outlet was to complete the account of her trial, and to write a long letter, that she never dared to send, to Pons de Verdun.

By the 7th of October, Madame Pourrat, who was in close touch with Pons de Verdun, could report that all was well; there might be delays, but the issue was certain. Madame de Sérilly wrote to her children:

I feel at once pain and pleasure to know you so near and not to be able to embrace you. I hope that this torture will soon cease; everything leads us to think that at last I draw near to the moment of my freedom. I shall enjoy it for your sakes, my children. . . . But it will be impossible that our contentment should not be

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greatly lessened when we think of him who made our happiness, whom we shall not see again. This thought poisons all my joy.

When it became clear that their prisoners were indeed eventually to be released, the authorities of the Évêché could relax the rigour of their discipline. Madame de Sérilly was at last allowed to see her children; the third, Amédée, had been brought to Paris, and the baby was in safe hands near Passy. It was strange to see them again after the seven months that had seemed like a lifetime, and to find them so little changed: Armand still with something of her own grace and fire, a little glazed over with ordinariness after his time in a *petit-bourgeois* school; Aline still plain and clumsy like her father; and Amédée grown, but least changed of all of them by his quiet sojourn at Passy under Pauline's care. When they had gone, it seemed as if she had said nothing, least of all the things she ought to have said about their father. In a day or two she made good the omissions in a long letter:

I cannot express to you, my dear children, what was my joy at seeing you; and yet I experienced a feeling of great sorrow. My heart still bleeds from the blows it has received; and the frightful manner by which I lost your father will never be absent from my memory. My children, he did not stop thinking of you up to his last moments; his only thoughts were of you and me. He groaned over you, and mourned for you. Weep for him, my children, weep. Whatever hope you may have to-day of emerging from the gulf of misfortune into which you have fallen, you can never make good the loss you suffered in him. A good father and a man of

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honour—and you will know one day even better than now how much your father was this—can never be replaced. Recall his lessons often, try to do what he would like if he could see you, and you may be certain you are doing well. If the hope that they give me to-day, my dear children, is not vain, and I shall indeed clasp you once more in my arms, I will try to make you worthy of him. It is only for you that I wish to live; I have suffered too much to be attached to life, had I not the hope of one day seeing you happy and of rejoicing in your happiness. . . . Good-bye, my dear good children; I commend you to each other; try not to waste your time altogether, and think of a mother who lives and breathes only for you.

VI

1794-6

At last, on the 12th of October, 1794, the three committees of legislature, *Salut Public* and *Sûreté Générale* that were charged with Madame de Sérilly's and similar cases, ordered that the prisoners should be released, the seals removed from the sequestered property, and the judgments of the Revolutionary Tribunal reversed.

On the 13th Madame Pourrat came to the Évêché at two to meet her friend as she once more came out into the world. The formalities were long, but the older woman contrived to send a note in to the prisoner to keep up her spirits. .

I am here, dear angel. I came to kiss you and find you, to take you home to my house with your dear children. But they tell me that the order for your release will not come before four o'clock. Therefore I must return home, or they will be anxious at so long a delay. But Le Coulteux, [her son-in-law] his wife and I beg you to come to stay with us. You shall do just what you like and be entirely free. We shall be so happy to have you that you cannot refuse to do us this favour. Do not return to rooms where you have been so unhappy. Come instead to the arms of your friends, to make up to them for all that you have suffered and that they have so profoundly shared.

Such an invitation could not be refused; Madame de

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Sérilly thankfully took refuge in the friendly peace of the house in the rue Basse du Rampart. Yet it was difficult to grow used once more to ordinary life; difficult to nerve herself to tell the painful necessary things to Madame Hocquart, who had loved Calixte de Montmorin; difficult even to receive sympathy for her own loss, however delicately offered. Her world had disappeared. Of her immediate family, no one remained but the children; of her friends, none but the Pourrats and Pauline de Beaumont. Chénier had been guillotined four days before the Terror ended; Pange she might hope still lived, but she had no news of him or of the Danloux. Paris itself seemed changed; all that was familiar in it had aged. It was like seeing a loved face again after a long absence, subtly disfigured by time. Famine walked the streets, and with famine, cold. To be outside prison gave her a strange sense of helplessness; the world, and a dangerous and unfriendly world, was at her door, and there was nothing and no one to protect her from it.

She was not sorry when the urgency of saving some of her property summoned her to Burgundy. A poster had already been issued to advertise the sale of the furniture of the *ci-devant* Château de Passy, the property of the condemned Sérilly, on the 28th of Vendémiaire, less than a week after her release. That sale had been cancelled by the reversal of the sentence, at least in so far as her share of the property was concerned, but unless she was there to protest and to secure her rights, anything might happen.

Yet to return to Passy, and to return alone, was in itself heartrending. She found the little boy well, but Pauline de Beaumont the shadow of herself. She had lived for a time in the half-sealed château, tending and teaching the children; then, when they left and the château was closed, she

had been given shelter in the cottage of Dominique Paquercau, an elderly man, half farrier and half vine-dresser. There the news of the death of all her remaining family had reached her. Dominique and his wife had been kind, but there had been no one to whom she could speak freely of her grief, and her very soul seemed scared by unwept tears. Even when Madame de Sérilly came there was so much for her to do that she had little time for her cousin: the cousin so much more gentle, passive, thoughtful and ethereal than herself.

By November 8th Madame de Sérilly was at Auxerre, to defend her rights against the departmental authorities. By November 23rd she was back at Passy, and thankfully realizing that Armand at least had shown himself worthy of his father. She wrote to him:

I cannot end without speaking to you of how you acted here during my absence; I owe you much praise. Without a doubt you have been, as befitted you, honourable and good; I judge of it by the friendly feelings people have for you. They love you and want to see you again. Keep this good disposition, my friend; it is sweet to feel that people see one with pleasure. It is the reward of a good heart; and be sure, my dear, that without this inner content there is no lasting happiness.

Madame de Sérilly soon decided to return to Paris, but tried in vain to persuade Pauline to follow her. The winter was phenomenally cold, and the castle had been shut long enough to be damp and icy; it would have taken months of fires to warm it. Madame de Sérilly was thankful to return to Paris, and Pauline de Beaumont to go back to Paquercau's cottage.

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She did not leave it for Madame Pourrat's until the very end of the year 1794, when all the countryside was under snow. Meanwhile her cousin and the baby Victor were with Madame Pourrat and her daughters, and he was keeping them all amused. On January 11th Anne-Marie wrote to Pauline :

Victor is well. He lets me have no sleep; but except for this he is a love. Yesterday he had one of those bursts of gaiety that you know; it is impossible to be funnier than he was. The ladies never tire of looking at him and making him chatter. We are taking a lot of trouble to pronounce *trois* and *froid* : I hope he will manage them some day! . . . He pretends that he is learning English because he has picked up *yes*, *good-bye* and a few words of the kind; I am sure he would learn it very easily.

When Pauline came to Paris she and her cousin looked for a time for an apartment in Paris that they might share, but Madame de Sérilly soon realized that she must for some time make her home at Passy, if she was to secure her children's patrimony. She returned, taking Armand and leaving the younger children with her friends in Paris, and spent most of the next few weeks between Passy, Auxerre and Sens, in the uncomfortable task of interviewing the revolutionary authorities and retrieving her property from their clutches. On February 14th she reached Sens in time to save all the silver from being sent to the Mint to be melted; and the same experience was constantly being repeated on a smaller scale. She collected Pauline de Beaumont's belongings from Paquereau's cottage, and by the end of February had rooms ready for

her and the children at the château. François de Pange, who had been with Danloux in England, reached Switzerland through Germany, and got a letter through to her, in answer to one she had written immediately upon her release; and this, more than anything, gave her hope for the future, for he said that he was returning to France. Yet not even the hope of happiness could cure her exhaustion; never had she felt so great a need for sleep. Sleep she did, for all the irruptions of servants and children, and gradually recovered from her weariness. || 69065

Pauline rejoined her at the middle of March, coughing and delicate, and without the courage to hope for happiness. Hardly had she got there before she announced that she must move on; a restless misery drove her, and she could find no peace. She was to leave on March 30th; the Friday before she had a visitor, the first to appear at Passy but for lawyers and men of business. It was a *bourgeois* of Villeneuve, Joseph Joubert, who had befriended her when she was at the Paquereaus. He had been suffering miseries from colds and earaches, and arrived in sabots and his best nightcap. Madame de Sérilly looked at the odd figure with politely concealed amazement, but once he began to talk, found that he was indeed a gentleman, if one of modest pretensions, and a philosopher into the bargain. They liked each other; he had so delicate a respect for her and her sufferings, so pretty a turn in talk, that she was glad to invite him to come to see her when Madame de Beaumont should be gone and the weather better.

Madame de Sérilly's busy seclusion in Burgundy was interrupted by a dramatically unexpected summons to Paris. Fouquier-Tinville, the Public Prosecutor who had sent her and her fellow prisoners to death, had fallen with Robespierre, and had spent the winter in the prison to

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which he had condemned so many. Now the Tribunal was revived in order to try him for the irregularities and injustices of his procedure, and Madame de Sérilly was summoned to be a witness against him. The trial began on March 27th; she was the ninety-second witness on the list, and the first part of the trial was for her a time of weary waiting in painful surroundings. For by poetic justice the trial of Fouquier-Tinville was in its setting exactly like those of his victims. He too was charged with a crowd of others, twenty-nine members of the former Revolutionary Tribunal, and nine officers of the police. The evidence against him was harrowing; not only had he shown a callous indifference in trying those accused, but he had not even tried to preserve the forms of justice. People waiting to be questioned had heard the warrant for their execution being drawn up, even before the interrogatory, or had found on the margins of their summons before the court the note: "*tête à guillotiner sans rémission.*" Even identity had not always been proved; a father had suffered for his son, and the Duchesse de Biron had been executed on a warrant intended for her man of affairs.

None of the evidence was more moving than Madame de Sérilly's. She appeared bearing her own death-warrant, signed by the man who was now the accused. Her evidence was brief and to the point. "On the 21st Floréal, my husband and I and twenty other persons were condemned to death. It was said in the warrant that my husband and I had been involved in the conspiracies of the 28th of February, the 20th of June and the 10th of August. They only asked us our names, our ages and descriptions. These were the only arguments that took place at our trial. Dumas cut short the accused whenever they tried to speak; not one of us was heard. I only kept my

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life because I declared that I was with child, and the surgeons confirmed it. I saw my husband standing there: to-day I see his assassins and his executioners. Here is my death certificate; it is dated the 21st Floréal, the day we were condemned to death; it was issued to me by the administrative police of Paris."

Fouquier-Tinville used every art to defend himself. He was seated on the first step of the Tribunal from which he had condemned so many: a round-headed black-haired man, with the narrow forehead and small brilliant eyes of a fanatic, the full and ugly cheek of a voluptuary, and a glance that was slanting until it suddenly became direct and menacing. Sometimes he would feign detachment, and write busily on the two thick boxes which served him as a desk; sometimes, with the passionless detachment of a jurist, he would bring forward some legal argument in his own favour; sometimes, when all else failed, he would try to deflect an accusation with the roar of fury with which he had been wont to drown the pleas of those charged before him. His stare could abash anyone, his frown and his voice, with its sudden grate of harshness, make anyone flinch: but they were weapons more effective in offence than in defence. When the time came, on May 6th, for the Public Prosecutor to sum up, the accused man pretended to sleep; and in truth he could not face that damning summary. He and fourteen of his fellow prisoners were condemned to death, and guillotined on the 7th on the Place de Grève. Fouquier-Tinville was executed last: the last man to be guillotined by order of the Revolutionary Tribunal. On May 31st, 1795, all trials, even for treason, were delivered over to the ordinary courts, and France began to breathe again.

The trial did much to hinder Madame de Sérilly's return

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to normal life. Its forced reliving of the past had had a nightmare quality; it made her go back once more to the time of horror, to which she began to feel that she must perforce return again and again.

The trial might be a nightmare, but it was not enough to keep Madame de Sérilly from looking after the education of her children. She removed Aline from the bourgeois *pension* of the citoyenne Thomas to the school which Madame Campan, once woman of the bedchamber to Marie Antoinette, had just opened at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, where she would be with children of her own class. The times had changed since Anne-Marie had gone to Panthémont; now, education was intended less to prepare a child for the world than for the home. Madame Campan declared that all her pupils should be well enough educated to teach their own children when the time came for it. On May 19th Madame de Sérilly wrote to Aline :

I send you your trunk, my darling, but it is not as full as it ought to be, because your chemises and stockings have the most urgent need of darning. You shall get them immediately . . . and the books which you need.

. . . Tell Madame Campan that I had meant to write to her when I sent your little luggage; but I was taken by surprise, as the cart should not have come until to-morrow. To-day I have company and am in a hurry. Give her my compliments. Good-bye, dear child, I embrace you; make good use of the time intended for your education.

Once more Anne-Marie was recalled to the present, and to a present in which happiness was still possible. François de Pange had crept back to France, and though she had

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not yet met him, she knew him nearer. Back at Passy, she once more caught at the skirts of the old happiness. She wrote to Pauline :

I see as well as anyone the defects of this place : it is dry, the trees are not beautiful, and the walks dull. And yet, when I got here, my first care was to run everywhere; I was surprised to find myself looking at every leaf with interest and enchanted to feel that I was here. This comes no doubt from that happy disposition you know in me, of wishing with all my strength to catch hold of happiness.

Poor woman! Joubert was writing in his philosopher's notebook that the most beautiful courage of all was the courage to be happy; and in this, above all others, was Madame de Sérilly brave.

She had learned by now to face even the past. When she went to Sens she collected the pamphlets that had been written in praise or blame of Guesnot, and stories of how finally he had been marched through Sens in a chain-gang on his way to the galleys.

François de Pange had now reached Paris; but instead of joining him she had to go to Auvergne in an attempt to save some of the property of her brother who had been executed for having emigrated. The Convention had on April 20th restored to the kinsfolk of executed *émigrés* their rights of inheritance, on the motion of Doucet de Pontécoulant; the horrible saying of the revolutionaries, "*Nous battons monnaie sur les échafauds*," was no longer true. Her husband had left her lands encumbered with debts; it was essential that she should recover what she could of her own patrimony. It involved her in endless

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discussions, endless formalities and endless travel; she was forever producing her own certificate of residence in France, forever finding that important title-deeds had been lost or destroyed, forever being told that some man who alone had known about the details of the property had emigrated or been executed. There were plate and jewels and documents to be retrieved from government offices, when each office she went to referred her to another some twenty miles off, or back again to the one before last; there was the price of goods sold when under confiscation to be retrieved from the Treasury; there were farmers and *métayers* who had enjoyed a year or two without a landlord and had no wish for an enquiry into their hedging and ditching, their mowing and harvesting, their unchecked exploitation of woodland and forest. At the end she had recovered something, if by no means all, but she was a tired woman.

She returned to Passy to begin all over again in the attempt to recover the property of her brother-in-law, Mégret d'Étigny, which marched with the Passy estate. Pauline wrote from Paris to report Pange tired and ill, and altogether dispirited; Anne-Marie hastened to invite him to Passy to recuperate, but as yet he was not free to come. For her part, she was busier than ever, getting everything cleaned and polished, replacing the statuary and pictures that had been removed, mending the furniture, and making everything, so far as lay in her power, as if the Revolution had never been.

When she clutched at happiness, it was necessarily at such happiness as she had once known. Her humble neighbours were still her friends; Dominique Paquereau came up one morning to ask after Madame de Beaumont, and to offer dried beans and a great loaf of home-made bread

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in case she were short of provisions; others came on like errands, for her sake or Pauline's. With the visitors of her own class she felt less at ease. She was conscious that she herself had travelled to the very edge of death; that her fellow travellers had gone on into its void; yet, now that she had come back to the world, even people who had known her from childhood hardly asked what she had been doing, so busy were they in telling her the minutest details of their own interrogatories, or how their houses had been searched and the best silver stolen.

François de Pange was arrested in October, but was only held for a few days. With his release his presence in France could be openly acknowledged, but he had not yet come to Passy, though he wrote to give her wise advice about the children's education. Instead Madame de Sérilly had two frequent callers; a welcome one in Joubert, who used to walk over from Villeneuve, talk excellently, and go home again, having left her with something to think about until his next visit; and an unwelcome one in a country neighbour, Monsieur Tronc, who called only too often and showed every sign of wishing to pay her his addresses. She grew so exasperated with him that once she wrote about him to Joubert while her clumsy suitor was still there :

He is at this moment near the table at which I am writing, turning over the leaves of a book which he does not understand, reading me, with a great air of *finesse*, a few chance phrases, which he praises or blames, so as to seem to have taste; for, sir, he has pretensions; I have been convinced for a long time that that was what was wrong. If the poor man would only consent to be stupid, he would be no more stupid than many men who

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are bearable enough; but his whim of having wit and grace—yes, sir, grace—in despite of his nature, makes him very boring.

Joubert came in once as the suitor was going out, and declared that it would be impossible to be bored by a man who looked so fresh and healthy. Madame de Sérilly revenged herself by declaring that Joubert's own ailments, which were numerous and engrossing, were really the vapours.

On the 10th of July she undertook what had become a great enterprise: a dinner party. Neither she nor the Montmorins' old servant, Germain Coubaillon, who was with her, could remember how much it took to feed a party of twelve; there was hardly enough to eat, and the table was too small. But it was a beginning; and though she and Germain were both dead tired at the end of it, it meant that social life had started again. Two days later she gave another party. She wrote that night to describe it to Pauline.

I would bet you a thousand to one that you would never guess what I did to-day . . . I had Mesdames de Voves and de Vaumorin to dinner, with Messieurs Joubert and Chomorceau. The whole party arrived early. Before dinner, I took them for a walk. I hardly knew what to do with the ladies afterwards. . . . I asked M. Joubert to have a look at some books he wants; the ladies wished to see them too; they turned over and examined everything; there was still an hour and a half to fill. Someone wished to see my room. Ah! there is a piano; Madame de Vaumorin *must* play us something. I insist. . . . She sings a first air prettily enough. and

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accompanies herself all wrong. Applause; insistence on a second. It is sung. So far, nothing very astonishing. But I have a piano: doubtless it is for my use. It is open, several pieces are still on the music-stand, and I cannot refuse to be as obliging as Madame de Vaumorin. I refuse, indeed, but they insist; in the end, remembering my audience's inclination to applause, I make up my mind and accompany her in a first, a second air. One must sing, and I sing. In the end, dear friend, trembling at first and only gradually reassured, I passed a good three-quarters of an hour at the piano in the presence of witnesses, I who scarcely dared hum before you. Admit that it was shameless!

"Le plus beau courage de tous les courages: le courage d'être heureux." So Joubert had written in his silly little green notebook; can he have had Madame de Sérilly in mind? For it must have taken no little courage to sing and be happy in the room which little more than a year before had been the scene of the first questioning of that party of friends of whom she alone still lived.

She went to Paris at the end of July; the Terror might be over, but it was still a city of tragedy. There was a great shortage of food and clothing, and for once buyers were more eager than sellers and rose before them to wait in dismal queues before the shops. Indeed, everyone rose earlier than usual out of sheer anxiety, and women who had once spent the whole morning in a dressing-gown behind the ruffled curtains of a boudoir were now out by seven in all weathers to wait outside the butchers or the bakers and—without daring to ask it—to hear the news. At the street corners, on the bridges and the quays, there were knots of wretched people in rags, eating rotten her-

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rings and dubious meats while some blind violinist or street singer tried to cheer them with patriotic and revolutionary airs. Everyone talked of *assignats* and of what they would and would not buy; Madame de Sérilly was conscious of a silent thankfulness that much of what she and her children held was in land, that could not depreciate or be devalued or cancelled. The prevailing misery was driving people to seek solace once more in religion and drama; she found many a quiet Mass being celebrated at altars that a year before had been ruined, and crowds like those of her youth, if devoid of elegance, waiting outside the doors of the theatres. Soon after the theatres shut, about half-past nine, darkness and quiet descended upon the city that had once seemed so gay.

The victory over the royalist invaders at Quiberon brought new hope to the revolutionaries and new despair to Anne-Marie and her friends. It was won because the English commanders were stupid, and if the royalists had only stupid allies what success could they hope for? Such deeper anxieties were echoed by a thousand minor irritations. She had always driven in Paris; now she had to walk, and she did not always know the way. If she stopped a passer-by to ask him the way to the rue Saint-Jacques, for instance, he might look her up and down, call her an aristocrat, and depart grumbling against the Papists who were so certain that old James was in Paradise; if she were driven to ask in the adjoining shop for the rue Jacques, she might be told with equal indignation that St. James had been a saint before she was born and would be one after she had been hanged. Life was, in a thousand ways, unnecessarily difficult. The only obvious source of amusement was the solemn deliberations of the Committees of the Convention as to their official dress: whether a scarlet

mantle was Jacobin or smacked of Francis I; whether the official waistcoat and white breeches would look well in statuary, or, in combination with the said mantle, suggest Pantaloon; whether the long white robes of the Council of Five would—as was intended—look Greek, or—as happened—look like particularly voluminous nightshirts.

Anne-Marie found Pauline de Beaumont both sad and ill. She scolded her and tended her, and tried to make her laugh, but with little result. In the middle of August Anne-Marie had to leave for the Auvergne, and stayed there until the end of December, facing heat and cold, mist and mud, bad roads and worse inns, bad horses and no chaises at all; going to Le Puy to argue with the authorities, to Meyronne and Vernassal to inspect the properties she claimed, finding time and temper to enjoy the varied scenery and to describe the changing colours of the hills for the benefit of Pauline in Paris. The country was still unsettled, and the Terror still lurked in the hills; Paris was rumoured to be no less disturbed, and Pange might well be in danger from political enemies, as well as from Madame de Staël, who had fallen in love with him and made no secret of it. Madame de Sérilly was thankful to have news of him from Pauline, early in September, and wrote in reply:

I can imagine the delight of your talk with François, and thank you for making me share in it. This tête-à-tête ought to have done you both good. You both need, like all sensitive people, moments when you can pour out your souls as one only can with intimates. It is impossible to be expansive with everyone; one needs more than a social relation, one must be able to count upon a certain relation in the way one thinks, and this link you

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and François have. Why wasn't I there to be a third in your talk?

It was, indeed, very lonely in the Auvergne, and letters were slow in coming and irregular in arrival. But only on October 14th, the anniversary of her marriage and of her release from prison, did she permit herself regrets. She passed the day alone in Brioude, under the wide autumnal sky. Walking through the crooked streets of close ill-built houses, where the sun never seemed to shine, sitting under the high romanesque vault of Saint-Julien, she thought of the cycle of years between those two dates: marriage, love, birth, danger, death and perilous escape; and for once let herself wish that she could blot them out of her life.

When winter made the Auvergnat roads altogether impassable she returned to Paris. There she found Pauline, more sad and more ill than ever: and the secret spring of all her own budding hope, François de Pange. If she were to snatch at happiness, it must be happiness such as she had already known. He had been her lover; he was to be her husband. They were married at the end of January.

Aline was at school at Madame Campan's, at Saint-Germain; the boys were at Passy with a tutor, Monsieur Och. Their mother wrote to Armand that she expected to get there on February 3rd; and they must not call François de Pange their cousin any longer, but remember he loved them like a father. They did not reach Passy so early as they had hoped; they only left on the 22nd. The Chevalier de Pange was ill, and even his wife's vitality was clouded by a bad cold. At Lieusaint, only a stage out of Paris, Pange felt so weak and ill that they had to break the journey. The next day the wind was too cold for Madame de Pange to venture out, and they only reached

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Passy on the 24th. Once there, they felt better; and the children, cheerful and rosy after their stay in the country, made Passy seem a happy place. It was delightful to have no worse trouble to write about to Pauline than the fact that the seven-year-old Victor was a little spoilt.

It is very difficult *not* to spoil him. He gives orders with great facility; and the habit has so grown upon him that I greatly fear to be forced to have recourse to punishments. Unluckily his ways are so funny that I laugh, and then good-bye to scolding. Yesterday he was eating an egg, and M. Och gave him some salt. Victor found he had given too much, and with the gravest of airs and the loudest of voices, for he has a habit of shouting, declared: "But you always give me too much salt. I shall have someone else give it me instead." How do you find that for a threat? I scolded him, but as I laughed at the same time, it did not have much effect.

They soon were receiving their neighbours: a shy and friendly Joubert, and a sheepish but no less friendly Tronc. The children's show of affection to their stepfather was at first, perhaps, a little forced, but their mother hoped that it would soon be real enough. Joubert and Pange made friends; Pange talked excellently, and hardly noticed that Joubert figured little in the conversation except as a listener. He, indeed, appreciated the austerity and force of Pange's thought, if he found it a little lacking in the nuances his own intellect understood so well. Pauline de Beaumont arrived on April 19th, and she and Joubert could talk in as happy a harmony as a duet between 'cello and violin.

VII

1796-9

ANNE-MARIE LOUISE had caught the flying skirts of happiness; she knew now that they were tearing in her grasp. She loved Pange too tenderly and knew him too well to find any disappointment in their marriage; they had the confidence and understanding of fifteen years of love. His dogmatism and his arbitrary manner had grown familiar to her; she had even schooled herself to accept the fact that Pange set intellect above emotion, and rated her mind at a far lower level than his own. Fate attacked her in more brutal fashion: Pange was dying of some obscure consumption. He declared: "I *must* not die: I know that I was not born to leave nothing behind me"; but slowly and inevitably life slipped away. He had found happiness at last: a happiness of peace and quiet love, of an early passion that had never died but had ripened into tenderness. He knew it was a miracle, and accepted it as simply (he said) as the Israelites accepted the manna that fell in the wilderness. Fate would not have it so. Anne-Marie Louise came to know how strangely merciful was the Revolutionary Tribunal, that set execution within an hour or two of sentence.

On the 9th of July she wrote to Aline at school:

Your papa is very ill. . . . He causes me the greatest anxiety. It is impossible to think of leaving him in the state he is. You will get, I hope, at the same time as this letter some linen to make you a dress. If I have the

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happiness of seeing your papa in better health, I shall come and fetch you myself. . . . You will see your brothers here. I should like you to have many pleasures while you are here, but unfortunately Monsieur de Pange's health will make it difficult. . . . But at all events, you will share in my happiness if your papa is better, and in my sadness if his present state of health endures. I shall see you, and that will be a consolation for me. Good-bye, my child.

In five days François de Pange was dead, aged only thirty-two: after five months of happiness, however clouded by apprehension, Anne-Marie Louise was once more alone. Not even the ceremonial of religion was permitted to help her. She remembered the *grand deuil* for her mother-in-law, the great bells tolling, the catafalque under the shimmer of pyramids of candles, the church draped in black, the absolutions and benedictions of the priests: now one buried one's dead in another fashion. Antoine de Sérilly's mangled body had been thrust into a cart and carried to a common and unhallowed grave; and now François de Pange must follow him with little more outward honour. The old priest of Villeneuve who was in hiding the other side of the river came secretly and absolved the corpse, and then it was buried with no ceremonial but her tears in the once-consecrated ground by the chapel that Antoine had given to the village.

Life might seem altogether empty, but there were still the children. Madame de Pange was writing to Aline a fortnight later, to say that she was coming to Paris the next day to fetch her.

Only bring white things, as you are in mourning; I

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will get some clothes for you here. . . . I was very much touched by the loving words you sent me about the awful loss I have just endured. My children would have done wrong to regard it with indifference; Monsieur de Pange loved them and would have lost no opportunity to prove his love.

She could not bear Passy at the moment; but in time, she knew, if she could not have happiness she would at least have the memory of happiness that was gone. Before she left she ordered the carpenter to set up seats at certain spots that memory endeared to her, so that even when the trees had grown up or died, she should remember: in the grove; near the chapel; by the great cluster of honeysuckle; in the other plantation, opposite the cornfield, under a lilac by a bush of broom (there Pange had sat for the last time, and watched the sunlight on the broom); another place in the same grove, where the lilac bushes made a kind of arch through which one saw the corn. The marks of their chairs were still visible in the soft ground; almost she could believe the grass still showed where she had sat at his feet. And he was dead.

By the end of the year she had courage enough to return to Passy, with Pauline to bear her company. Joubert was too much of an invalid to climb the hill to call upon them, and so they announced their firm intention of calling upon him instead. The modest house was fluttered at the prospect; Joubert might have become a habitué of the château, but his wife was not, and her mother, who was now an invalid, was yet hardly an excuse for leaving him to entertain them alone.

The visit, however, was a great success. The Jouberts' two-year-old son broke the ice for everyone, and learned

to say Madame de Pange's name; and Madame Joubert soon thawed before the gracious simplicity of the two great ladies. They begged for soapwort for some delicate washing, and left, friends with all the household. The visit was not repeated as they promised, for the old lady died suddenly, and the house at Villeneuve was in mourning. Not till February did they go there again, to eat a superlative turkey stuffed with truffles from Joubert's native Perigord.

Madame de Pange returned to Paris to a rather dark and dreary apartment at 12 rue Chabanaïs, near the Bibliothèque Nationale. Madame de Beaumont had gone to her château at Theil, but before long she was back in Paris, and the two of them were inviting Joubert to stay. He remained determinedly in Burgundy, and Pauline had soon to go to Theil for the summer.

Autumn brought her back again, and the two cousins once more faced a Paris disturbed and anxious. The Revolution of the 18th Fructidor destroyed the hopes of the royalists, and wholesale sentences of banishment made them dread exile and separation as once they had dreaded the guillotine. Yet the Revolution cleared the air, and made it necessary for some who had waited in uncertainty to come to a decision. The cousins in Paris, who had so lately needed shelter themselves, were able to offer it to an old friend, Madame Suard. She and her husband had emigrated earlier, now she had come back alone, since for him France was still too dangerous, to see what she could save. She found their rooms all sealed and her caretaker and portress terrified. Amélie Suard was small, foolish and hero-worshipping, with the charms of beauty and of a simple admiration for those who were wiser than herself. The two cousins did everything they could for her, for she could do little for herself, and succeeded in recovering the

money, furniture and other possessions which would make life in exile possible for Amélie and the practical husband she admired so much. Yet her hopes and her foolishness and her inefficiency were yet another weariness to the woman who helped her faithfully; it annoyed Anne-Marie that she should still feel small annoyances so much.

Madame Danloux was back, rejoicing in the companionship of the little son she had had to leave behind when she went to England. Her husband was still painting in London, and she too was glad to spend much of her time at her cousin's. To her, Anne-Marie could speak of her time in prison and even of the guillotine. It hurt more to speak of François de Pange, yet to so old a friend she could allow herself to seem less withdrawn than she had, in self-defence, to appear to the world.

Joubert soon wrote that he was coming to Paris on purpose to see them; but he would endure politics only from the lips of Madame de Pange, for she made them sound as clear and simple as a fairy tale. He came, and the early winter passed the quicker for his quiet companionship.

Early in 1798 Madame de Pange had to go to Passy on business: it was a sad, colourless winter, with only Armand to bear her company. She was busy buying back Theil from her cousin; whatever her children had lost, she was resolved that they should have their patrimony, and resolved to the point when she was prepared to drive a hard bargain even with the gentle Pauline. Joubert was hurt to find her so competent; and Pauline retired into a dignified reserve. They did not realize that she was of a temperament to be generous in happiness or misery, but to try vainly to cheat loneliness by material possessions.

Madame de Pange was restless, lonely and plunged into a multitude of affairs that were not turning out as well as

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she had hoped. She had put too much money into the unsatisfactory acquisition of Theil: and her creditors were pressing her as usual. She returned to Paris, and stayed to pull all the strings she could, while Armand was sent to hold the fort at Villeneuve. She wrote to him a letter of advice on how to treat one of their peasants, Vaudoux, with whom they were having difficulties:

I don't doubt that Vaudoux is inviting you to dinner, to luncheon, perhaps to dance. As to dinner, refuse it absolutely, with politeness and affability. You are too old to allow too much familiarity to establish itself. If there is dancing, drop in when everyone else is there, eat a mouthful of *galette* if there is any, dance a country dance or two if it amuses you, and go away with the rest of the world. These details, which seem so silly, are more essential than you think, in your position and the circumstances. Ten years ago you might have dined, supped, and passed the whole day there without it mattering; but after the storms that have shaken us, we must be very careful to unite civility to self-respect, and to repulse familiarity, without pride.

Paris once more held the nucleus of a society: a society decimated by death, meeting not under the chandeliers of great saloons but by the light of a single lamp in attics and entresols; but still a company who were united by old ties of birth, upbringing, and a code of manners, as well as by the new comradeship of shared danger. Among them Madame de Fange found herself meeting more and more often a certain Marquis de Montesquiou Fézensac, a man of fifty-seven, twenty-three years older than herself. She had known him in the old days, but only as an acquaint-

tance; now she found herself gradually accepting him as a friend. He had been brought up with Louis XVI and his brothers, and had been *Premier écuyer de Monsieur*. Elected to the States-General of 1789 by the nobles of Paris, he had become infected by liberal ideas, and had sat instead with the third estate. He had presided over the Committee of Finance, and, it was said, made money by dealing in currency. He was a soldier by profession, and in 1792 had been given command of the Army of the South, which under his leadership had conquered Savoy. After the flight to Varennes he had altogether broken with the court, but was none the less accused by the Jacobins of royalist leanings. He had to take refuge in Switzerland, but in 1795 his name had, after a stormy session of the Convention, been erased from the list of émigrés and he had been allowed to return to Paris. Here he had first found a lodging on a fifth floor of the rue de la Révolution, and then, regaining possession of a great town house he had built in the rue Plumet, he had modestly installed himself in the entresol and had used to show the great salons of the first floor to possible tenants, as if he had always meant to let them, and had never dreamed of living there himself. With the conquest of Savoy and an official recognition behind him, and some at least of his great patrimony restored, he could help Madame de Pange as could few of her friends of the *ancien régime*. When her creditors became so pressing as to threaten distraint upon her furniture, he met and pacified them.

On August 27th she wrote to tell her son at Passy how kind and sympathetic he had been :

My poor child, my life is a succession of misfortunes. If I had only you and your brothers to count upon to

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soften and console my old age, I should certainly never reach it. I know not if Nature destines me to, but I know that the way I must tread to reach it, is very painful. Monsieur de Montesquiou is toiling away too; if zeal were enough, he would certainly pull me through.

Montesquiou was a man of supple mind, with a gift for political intrigue and a pretty wit that helped to isolate him from the ignoble side of politics. He contrived to have a literary reputation, and even to be a member of the Académie Française, on the strength of a couple of comedies and a few official reports. He never permitted himself a word of regret for the *ancien régime* in which he had played a brilliant part; he passed his time instead in reading novels. When he wept over a sentimental one, as often happened, he declared it must be a masterpiece. For all this, he was a balanced and steady person on whom one could depend. He had been married before, and had a son only two years younger than Madame de Sérilly, and a grandson of ten, both living quietly in the country, to whom he had ceded most of his surviving wealth.

Monsieur de Montesquiou's only available property was now a life interest, and the value of this he now proceeded to realize on her behalf. Two days later she wrote again to her son.

I told you, my dear, that if zeal could save me, Monsieur de Montesquiou would do it; I have found him full of more than zeal, I am overwhelmed with gratitude and indeed with pain at causing my friends to make such sacrifices; yet I cannot but feel how sweet it is to be thus loved.

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She was growing more and more impatient with Pauline's gentle melancholy.

Have you seen your cousin? [the letter goes on]. What sort of face is she pulling? Does she groan much at giving up Theil, at *my* troubles which don't keep *her* from sleep, at her destiny, her divorce, in fact at all the possible causes for groaning? What a sad part she has chosen to play in this world : indolent misfortune.

Three more days passed, and she was writing to her son to come to Paris at once; she had real need of him.

She had decided to marry Monsieur de Montesquiou. Pauline and her more sentimental friends were shocked. They did not realize that she must have happiness, and happiness of a kind she had already known. Death had cheated her of love with François de Pange; now, in her new husband, she was trying to find a successor for Antoine Mégret de Sérilly, sensible and calm and able to protect her as he had done. They were married in Paris, on September 3rd.

Anne-Marie Louise knew that her friends would not understand; she hardly understood herself. She wrote to Joubert, not to explain, but to ask him to suspend judgment.

I have not written to you, sir, since you left, and I reproach myself; yet you know what has prevented me. It is a sudden step that I have taken; it must have surprised you, but you are too just to have blamed it irrevocably. I do not, however, hide from myself that without knowledge of Monsieur de Montesquiou and of all the motives which determined me, this marriage

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must appear strange, though here in Paris I found more people to approve me than I expected; but they are for the most part people who care little for me, and I care as little for their opinion. This is not the case with you, sir; I mind what you and Madame Joubert think, and I am proud enough to believe that you have thought that I should not have come to such a decision without sufficient and even imperious motives, and that at my age [she was barely thirty-six] I should not do anything flighty.

She lauded the goodness, sense and even temper of her husband, and hoped that Joubert would soon judge of them for himself, for they hoped to arrive at Passy in a fortnight.

Joubert, living in a countryside that hummed with gossip and conjecture, was filled with a great compassion, but it was an intuitive feeling that left him with little to say to his neighbours. He replied to Madame de Montesquiou :

What can I say to you, madam? Monsieur de Pange was a man of great merit, Monsieur de Montesquiou is a man of great reputation as well. I want you to be happy : I think that you have failed to be, and I think that you will be. In short, I am determined by an insurmountable inclination to approve what you do and everything that you may have done. So I can only offer you, on this great occasion, an approval which is neither dispassionate nor blind. I loved the man you loved; I loved him on his own account, and above all, on yours; he is still living in my thoughts. I will respect his memory, and cherish his remembrance. I will give

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fidelity to the past, but honour to your future. Monsieur de Montesquiou (to judge by his renown and your own testimony) is perhaps, of all men, he who, at any time, would have suited you best. I regret that he has come late; I am grateful to him for having come. . . . Become once more happy enough to forget all your losses, and lose all your griefs without forgetting their noble causes! All my wishes will be satisfied, and all my feelings in sympathy with yours.

With such friends, surely she could still hope for happiness, if for happiness clad in soberer raiment than she had used to wear. Anne-Marie did up her new apartment, 752 rue Brest, *ci-devant* Monsieur, effectively and economically, with mirrors and decorations that had to be removed from Theil early in the morning, before Pauline, who still lingered there, was risen. Money was still scarce, and she had to decide with tears to cut down the avenue of elms at Theil and the poplars by the lake. Once more she had to encourage her children to like a stepfather; and once more try to edge the gently obstinate Pauline de Beaumont out of a Theil that no longer was hers. She was about to descend upon her and force her to go, when the bankruptcy of Pauline's man of business made it impossible to take so violent a step. The Montesquiou stayed on in Paris, until Pauline should make up her mind to depart. But on the 17th December Madame de Montesquiou had once more to write to her son, to say that her husband was ill.

It only needs that to torment me. They thought at first that it was nothing, but it is certain that it is an illness. He has been ill for six days. . . . Good-bye, my

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child; I write to you from his bedside, and hope that the illness will not be serious; but I am anxious about it.

She had reason to be: it was the black smallpox. In a few days Monsieur de Montesquiou was nothing more than a horrible purple hulk, in which, yet more horribly, a human soul and a human intellect still lived. On the last day of 1798, less than four months after their marriage, he died; and she could only be thankful.

Anne-Marie, although she had never had the disease, although it was a repulsive malady and she was still beautiful, had nursed him devotedly. She had not lived through the Conciergerie and the Fyêché only to fear a fever. He died, and was buried; and she lived on in a strange no-man's-land, for she had lost the dead, and by reason of the infection had still no contact with the living. The gardener at Passy sent her flat baskets of herbs, that arrived half-dead and strangely pungent. She burned them in the empty rooms, to fumigate them; their smoke dimmed the great mirrors from Theil so that they reflected the present as if it were grey as memory. She would not see Pauline, or any of her friends; she needed solitude, and knew that they must come to her in dread. She would spend long hours wandering round the apartment, studying every detail in it: things from Passy, that reminded her of the first years of her married life; a chair or two that came from her famous boudoir, that Pange and André Chénier had sat on; and a host of things of Montesquiou's of which she had to guess the history. Those engravings he must have framed as a boy; that sketch of trees in a park must be by his mother; this work-table of inlaid wood must have been his first wife's. To find a history for everything passed the time, and gave her the company of ghosts. Her

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children were at Passy, and wrote to her; but there seemed to be a great barrier between them. Her thoughts were never of them as they were now, but were either recollections of them as babies and little children, or anxieties about what they would be like in maturity. The weeks slipped by; the time of her quarantine was over, yet still she wished to see no one. She was infinitely tired. Gradually she realized that her feeling of malaise was more than grief and weariness; it was the slow approach of the disease. It seized upon her like a beast of prey, it destroyed her strength, it ravaged her looks, it clouded her mind, it dimmed her eyes, but it would neither kill her nor let her go.

It was not until the 17th of April that she sank into the merciful quietude of death. For twenty years she had gambled with Fate as her adversary and happiness for stakes. Sometimes she had won, and the golden days had been piled like bright coins before her; now luck had run against her for too long. Fate had won at last.

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