

of losing my balance or stumbling over a loose stone or other object. Behind me came my mute followers, who were risking their lives for mine. The eyes of each were on the man just ahead, and the hopes of all on that small door, which grew in size as we approached.

After an eternity, it seemed to me, we reached it. I put out my hand and pushed it half way open. Ah! then I thought we were surely lost. The rusty hinges creaked, and the sharp grinding sound pierced to the very marrow of my bones.

'What's going on up there?' growled a half-awakened soldier.

I stood motionless, hardly daring to breathe. My followers did the same. Just then a strong gust of wind shook the tower, and a voice replied angrily:

'It's nothing but the wind. Go to sleep, you fool!'

The first soldier listened a moment, but, hearing nothing, settled himself back, and was soon breathing heavily.

The door was only partly open, but there was room to pass through. No one ventured to touch it. You could scarcely imagine the joy of the poor fellows when at last they found themselves in a place where they could have a little repose. They fell on their knees and actually kissed the hem of my dress. One would have thought I had saved them. Alas! the danger was still there, menacing and terrible.

I left them and groped my way back to my apartment, where my companions were anxiously awaiting me. Mme. Marechal, cold and severe, loaded me with reproaches. In her opinion I had done a very foolish act: I had needlessly risked my own life as well as those of the men. It would have been far better to let them go on their way. Mme. Bedouillet defended me. She pressed me to her heart and said I was brave and good.

We sat down before the fire once more, and in low tones discussed the events of the night. Our situation was a critical one. Supposing those hostile forces should clash! What would become of us? Mme. Marechal was in favor of stealing out and going across the fields to Corbeil, leaving the men to 'fight it out themselves.' Mme. Bedouillet and I would not consent to such a course; so we sat there and whispered and dozed and prayed at intervals through the seemingly endless hours.

With the first rays of dawn we thought that our anxiety would soon come to an end; but, instead, a fresh excitement awaited us. We heard down the road the pounding of hoofs, and the sounds grew louder as we listened. A body of horsemen was approaching. What could it mean?

The men drew rein in front of the Abbaye, and soon there was loud rapping at the door. As before, I went to open it. A man, stout and florid, stood there, and with him were some hussars, who had dismounted.

'Are they here, citizeness?' he asked. He was a civil official, and he was out of breath from his unwonted exercise.

I trembled in every limb, but soon recovered my outward composure.

'Here? Who? I replied, apparently surprised. Those dogs of Girondins.'

'There are some soldiers here, quartered in the chapel,' I said, evasively.

'We'll find out,' said the big man.

'Calling a hussar, he bade him hold his horse while he dismounted, which he did most awkwardly. At first sight his face seemed kindly, but a second glance showed that his eyes were crafty and cruel.

He and his companions entered and walked straight into the chapel. Their appearance caused a flurry among the men, who were soon on their feet and accoutred. Their leader came forward and saluted ceremoniously. Evidently the newcomer was a personage of some importance.

From the outside we could not hear what he said, although we strained our ears. After the colloquy

the man came out and began his questioning again. Addressing me, he said:

'The peasants around here told me that a party of Girondins took refuge last night in the Abbaye. Are you sure they are not hereabouts?'

'You can see for yourself who are here,' I said.

He then put the same question to Mme. Marechal, who answered as I did. Mme. Bedouillet hesitated, and I was afraid she was about to betray us. I gave her a stern look, and she stammered out:

'I don't know; I was asleep and didn't hear anything.'

'Remember, your lives are at stake!' said the formidable inquisitor.

We knew that, and it was indeed a terrible moment. It seemed as if the prying eyes around could read our very thoughts.

'I am certain they are here,' added the official, looking around. How I hoped he would not raise his eyes to the half-open door above the chapel! But this is exactly what he did. 'Ah!' he exclaimed. 'There's a door up there. We will see where it leads. Lead the way to it, citizeness.'

There was nothing to do but obey. With faltering steps I mounted the little staircase, followed by the man and two hussars. I had nothing to hope for. Only a miracle to save the Girondins now. But I had struggled thus far, and I resolved to struggle to the end.

I soon reached the portion leading to the door. I started out, followed by the official, who had difficulty in walking along the ledge because of his corpulence. He was evidently ill at ease; but the soldiers below were watching us, and his pride urged him forward. He advanced cautiously, his broad back braced against the wall. He certainly cut a sorry figure; but no one was in the mood for smiling, I can assure you.

I crept along, fearful every moment of seeing the door pushed shut, in a last attempt of desperate men to defend themselves.

We had reached the middle of the distance, when the official halted, looked ahead, and turning to those behind him, exclaimed:

'Spider webs!'

And, in truth, by providential good fortune, a great web, which had been torn apart the night before when we opened the door, had been partially repaired, the threads stretching entirely across the opening.

With evident relief, the official said:

'There's no use in going any further. Surely no one has passed through that door very lately.'

All agreed, and we slowly retraced our steps.

There is little more to tell. The Girondins were saved—for the time being, at least, and we with them. The soldiers left in the course of an hour or so, and the men rested quietly until nightfall. We gave them food, and bade them God-speed.

I never knew their fate, but all my life there has remained with me the memory of—that spider web!

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