

In the Rue Monge

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Title: In the Rue Monge
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* A Project Gutenberg of Australia eBook *
eBook No.: 0602931h.html
Edition: 1
Language: English
Character set encoding: Latin-1(ISO-8859-1)-8 bit
Date first posted: July 2006
Date most recently updated: July 2006

This eBook was produced by: Richard Scott

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In the Rue Monge

Emmuska Orczy

The Professor swung himself round on the high stool on which he was sitting, and blinked tired, watery eyes at his interlocutor.

"You were saying, milor'?" he asked in his shaky, high-pitched voice.

And the other resumed with exemplary patience:

"I was trying to explain to you, my friend, that no one is safe these days, and that at any moment one of those devils on the Committee of Public Safety might set your name down on the list of the suspects. Now, I promised your daughter over in England that my friends and I would look after you; but even without such a promise. . ."

He paused, for obviously the little man was not really listening. He had begun by trying to be attentive, by trying to understand the import of what his friend was saying; but his attention was already wandering and his pale, tired eyes were turned longingly in the direction of his test-tubes, his microscopes and other scientific paraphernalia which littered his table. Now, when his friend ceased speaking, he again tried to appear interested.

"Yes, yes, my daughter!" he murmured vaguely. "Pretty girl, she was. Married that nice man Tessan; a prosperous farmer he was. They were on their honeymoon in England when this awful revolution fell upon us here. Lucky for them! They were never able to return to France."

He continued to ramble on in this vague, inconsequent way; his friend listened to him with undivided attention. They were such a strange contrast, these two: the powerfully-built Englishman, dressed simply but with scrupulous care, a man with finely-moulded hands and lazy,

grey eyes that had at times marvellous flashes in them of enthusiasm and command--a leader of men, obviously, a fearless sportsman and daring adventurer--and his learned friend, a man with wizened body and spine prematurely bent, with noble, thoughtful forehead and timid, quivering mouth. A worse-assorted pair could not easily be found. But they were friends, nevertheless. It was a friendship based on mutual respect, even though there was on the one side a strong element of protective affection and on the other a timid, almost childlike trust.

"I would like to go to England with you some day, milor'," the professor went on with a yearning little sigh. "I believe I could do great things in England. I could meet your famous Jenner and show him some of my own experiments in the field of vaccine. These are not altogether to be despised," he added, with a quaint chuckle of self-satisfaction. "And, believe me, my friend, this Revolutionary government is not made up of asses. They have a certain respect for science, especially for the curative sciences; they know that sickness stalks abroad in spite of all their decrees and their talk of a millennium, and they are not likely to molest those of us who work for the better health conditions of the people."

The Englishman said nothing for a moment or two. He regarded his ingenuous little friend with a kindly, gently-mocking glance. At last he said:

"You really believe that, do you, my good Rollin?"

"Yes, yes, I believe it. I had the assurance lately of no less a personage than the great Couthon, Robespierre's bosom friend, that the Committee of Public Safety will never touch me while I carry on such important experiments."

"You could carry them on so much better in England, my friend. The

sense of safety would add zest to your work and you would spare your daughter who loves you a cruel anxiety."

"Ah, yes, yes," Rollin murmured in a somewhat querulous tone. "Poor little Marguerite! She was such a pretty girl! But I will come with you, milor'! Be sure that I will come Only, just now--you understand--I have this great work in hand--a work that would even interest the great Jenner. Therefore," he added, with a bashful little smile, "I will even ask you, milor', to excuse me. The light is growing dim, and I."

The Englishman rose, smothering a half-impatient sigh.

"You want me to go?"

"No, on no!" the other hastened to add. "Only, the daylight is--"

"More precious in this case than life," the other broke in, with his engaging smile.

He stood up in the narrow, bare room, a giant in height and strength, looking down with that kindly, all-understanding glance of his on this tiny, wizened form of his friend.

"Do you know," he said lightly, "that I could pick you up now and carry you in my waistcoat pocket straight to your daughter's arms?"

For the first time a look of terror crept into the Professor's eyes.

"You would not do that, my friend," he ejaculated fervently; "not until my experiments--"

"Nothing to do with your experiments, my good Rollin," the Englishman replied. He went to the window and stood for a few seconds looking down on the street below. Then he beckoned to the little man, who, compelled somewhat against his will, stepped down

from his high stool, very much like a lean, long-legged stork getting off its perch. The Englishman was pointing to a group of men in the street and Rollin obediently looked down, too. The men wore tattered military tunics and ragged breeches. Their bare feet were thrust into shoes stuffed up with straw; they wore the regulation caps adorned with soiled tri-colour cockades. Two or three of them were leaning against the wall of the house opposite, the others stood desultorily about.

"They are always there," the little Professor remarked. "That is because Citoyen Couthon lives next door. He is a great man, is Citoyen Couthon, and these men are, I think, his bodyguard."

"Perhaps," the Englishman remarked drily. "But, anyway, they would search my waistcoat pocket if they saw it bulging with you in it."

He gave a light laugh and then a sigh. Obviously there was nothing more to be said. The old scientist was like a bewildered rabbit, anxious to get back to its burrow. But there was astonishing courage in that feeble body with a quiet philosophy which so gallant a sportsman as Sir Percy Blakeney could not fail to admire.

With a final hasty good-bye he left Professor Rollin to his tubes and retorts, and with a quick, firm step made his way out of the laboratory and then down several flights of stairs to a dark and disused cellar situated in the basement of the house.

The house itself was one of those vast tenements, which for the past century and more had sprung up all over Paris. It had its inevitable square courtyard, with a well in the centre and rows of iron balconies overlooking it from every floor. Hundreds of lodgers in various stages of poverty, mostly abject, dwelt in the tenements. Families of three or four, or sometimes as many as seven, were herded in single rooms. At each of the four angles of the courtyard there was a staircase,

dark, dank and unspeakably dirty, since it was no one's business to keep them clean.

It was out of this rabbit warren that, an hour or two later, there stepped into the street an ugly, misshapen creature in ragged shirt and tattered breeches, wearing a knitted cap over a mop of unkempt and mouse-coloured hair. He hobbled along on one leg and a wooden stump, which he banged against the stairs as he came up from the basement where were situated the most squalid of all the apartments, some of them little more than unlit, unventilated cellars.

The group of men whom Professor Rollin had described as Couthon's bodyguard scarcely glance at him. Their attention appeared to be mostly taken up with a window on one of the upper floors, through which could be perceived the wizened figure of Professor Rollin, busy with his test-tubes and microscope.

The commissariat of police of the English Section was a low, narrow building sandwiched between a couple of taller houses in the narrow, ill-lit Rue Monge. It was not one of the busy commissariats of the city, because, being situated in so poor and squalid a quarter, there was not a great number of bourgeois and aristocrats to be hauled up before the commissary in the course of the day. True that once or twice proscribed aristos had been discovered lurking perdu in one of other of the tenement houses where only the poor congregate but, on the whole, the citizen commissary, by name Bossut, had mostly to deal with malefactors, night birds and suchlike, not bad enough to send to the guillotine, and thus obtain commendation for his zeal, or even promotion such as came in the way of colleagues who were able to make successful hauls of suspects and traitors.

Indeed, the citizen commissary felt distinctly depressed on this evening. He had sent a couple of pilferers to gaol, three young ruffians to the whipping-post and arrested a stupid old man named Rollin, who styled himself professor and spent his time playing about with glass tubes and instruments and all sorts of poisonous concoctions. A harmless fool enough, but Bossut happened to catch a rumour that this Rollin had a daughter married to an emigré—a rich man, seemingly, who had lived all these years in luxury in England, the arch-enemy of France. Now a man who had a son-in-law of that type was clearly a traitor himself and Bossut, in ordering the arrest of the Professor, had vague hopes that something out of the common would come of it—a sensational trial, perhaps, that would bring in its train that commendation from his superiors, or even that promotion which was the dream of the obscure commissary.

But, alas, nothing so far had come of this arrest. Of course, the old

fool would be sent to the guillotine--that was a foregone conclusion--but strive as he might, Bossut could not discover anything in the Professor's dossier that would turn his trial into a sensation.

It was hard luck. And now that the lamp was lighted and sent its black, sooty smoke up to the ceiling, without shedding much light into the room, Citizen Bossut felt that there was nothing else to do but to drown his melancholy in a bottle of wine, the best that could be got these hard times. He was just beginning to feel comfortably drowsy, and sat stretched out in a rickety armchair in front of the iron stove, toasting his legs, when his lieutenant, Citizen Grisar, came to announce that a man, who wouldn't give his name, desired to speak with the citizen commissary.

"What does he want?" the latter asked between two prodigious yawns.

"He wouldn't say, citizen," the lieutenant replied.

"Then tell him to go to the devil!"

"Yes, citizen."

Grisar slouched out of the room and the worthy commissary once more tried to compose himself to sleep; but the next moment he was rudely brought to his feet by the sound of loud altercation, much shouting and swearing, and finally by the door of his own sanctum being violently thrown open and a raucous voice shouting hoarsely:

"Ah ça! What kind of a sacré aristo is the citizen commissary, that honest patriots are denied access to his grandeur?"

An ugly, misshapen creature stood in the doorway, still hurling anathemas over his shoulder at the unfortunate Grisar, whom he had

sent sprawling across the room with a vigorous play of his elbow. Now he hobbled forward on one leg and a wooden stump, with which he banged the floor until it shivered and shook, as without further ceremony he entered the inner sanctum of Citizen Commissary Bossut.

Grisar had in the meanwhile sufficiently recovered his balance to call for assistance from the men on duty, when the newcomer once more raised his raucous voice. But this time he neither sore nor stormed. His ugly face became distorted with an ugly leer; he put a grimy finger up to his very red nose and winked--yes, winked at the commissary himself.

"Do not let those fellows touch me, citizen," he said, "for, if you do, you'll never know what I have come here on purpose to tell you. And," he added, with another knowing wink, "there'll never be another chance of promotion for you as long as you live."

The word promotion acted like magic on Bossut's temper. It was the very breath of life to him: he thought of it all day, he dreamed of it by night. He ordered Grisar and the men out of the room, sat down at his desk, and demanded curtly:

"Well, what is it?"

These being the glorious days of fraternity and equality, the miserable caitiff was not going to allow any commissary to order him about. First, he made himself at home; sat down opposite the commissary; poured out a glass of wine, which he drank down at a gulp. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, leaving a wide, sooty streak right across his nose and chin. Finally, he disposed his wooden leg as comfortably as he could, then only was he prepared to speak.

Bossut smothered his wrath, resolved not to lose his temper with a man who had used the magic word, promotion.

"You see, citizen commissary," the man began at last, "it's like this. The Committees have their spies, as you know, and I am one of them. But they are hard task-masters, worse than any tyrant, and you may take it from me that, all in good time, they will be sent to the guillotine. Every one of them--Danton, Hébert, Robespierre--they'll all go presently because--"

"Yes, yes! Never mind about that," the commissary broke in impatiently. "My time is short. Get on with what you have to say."

"All right, all right! I'm coming to it. What I wanted to say was that the Committees demand a lot of work and pay very little for it. I have often brought them information worth the weight of a man's head in gold. You think they would have given me something extra for my pains. Raised my wages. Not a bit of it! I am sick of them. Sick, I tell you. And, what's more, I told them--I told citizen Chauvelin--"

"No wonder that he wouldn't listen to you, my man, you talk too much," Bossut put in, in exasperation.

"He would have liked to know, though, what I alone can tell him about the English spy, the Scarlet Pimpernel."

"What?"

Bossut had jumped to his feet. In a moment his excitement was at fever point. The English spy! The Scarlet Pimpernel! There was no ambitious height to which a man could not reach if he helped in the capture of that poisonous enemy of the Republic.

The cripple contemplated him with a leer upon his ugly face, while

Bossut paced up and down the room in order work off his agitation. At last he sat down again, put his elbows on the desk and gazed with concentrated attention on the misshapen creature before him.

"Tell me!" he commanded.

But the other only grinned.

"What'll you pay me for the information?" he asked.

"One half of the reward offered for the capture of the English spy--if I get him."

The caitiff nodded.

"Put that down in writing, citizen commissary," he said, "and the spy is yours. My name's Goujon," he went on--"Amédé Goujon, in the service of the Committees. Put it down in writing, citizen commissary, that you will give me one half of the reward offered for the capture of the Scarlet Pimpernel."

While Bossut, with a hand that shook visibly, put the promise down in writing, signed it and strewed sand over it, the cripple continued to mutter under his breath:

"It'll want pluck. The Englishman is powerful--a giant, what? And cunning! Sacré nom, but he has slipped through Citizen Chauvelin's fingers more than once--just like an eel. Here to-day, gone to-morrow. But there's one man knows just where and how he can be found."

"Tell me!" Bossut commanded.

"Over a bottle of wine, comrade," Goujon declared with a loud guffaw. "Dash it, my friend, my throat is dry. How can I speak?"

Bossut sore, but he went to his locker, produced a fresh bottle of wine with a second mug, and set the wine on the table.

"Now then," he said peremptorily.

"That old fool in the Rue des Pipots," Goujon said in a hoarse whisper, leaning his grimy arms on the table and eagerly watching the commissary as he filled the two mugs with wine, "he who plays about with glass tubes and instruments, eh?"

"Rollin?"

"That's the man."

"But how do you know that Rollin-"

Bossut was so agitated that he could hardly speak.

"I have seen the old fool standing at his window in conversation with the Englishman," Goujon asserted. "Have him arrested, I tell you."

"But I've got him," Bossut exclaimed. "He is in La Roche since this morning."

"Send for him, then," the cripple retorted laconically. "Make him tell you. He knows."

The order was at once given. Grisar and two men were dispatched to the prison of La Roche, not very far distant, with orders to bring along the prisoner, Rollin. Bossut by now was in a state bordering on frenzy, pacing up and down the room like a feline waiting for its food. Goujon, on the other hand, appeared entirely serene. His misshapen body was sprawling on a rickety chair which threatened to break down with every movement of his ungainly body; his wooden leg was stretched out in front of him and he was snorting like a winded nag.

while he read through, most carefully, the precious paper which the commissary had given him. Satisfied that it was duly dated and signed, he folded it and slipped it into the pocket of his tattered coat, after which he gave himself over to the delight of finishing the commissary's excellent bottle of red wine. He smacked his lips in token of great appreciation.

"Ah!" he said. "It is not often a poor man gets such good wine these days."

Half-an-hour later, Grisar and a couple of men returned with Professor Rollin, who looked more like a scared rabbit than ever. Bossut had resumed his seat behind the desk and Goujon was sprawling between the desk and the prisoner.

"Now then, citizen," the commissary began in his most official tone, "as I told you this morning, you are accused of trafficking with the enemy, notably with your daughter, who is the wife of a traitor and an émigré to boot. What is your answer to that charge?"

"Marguerite," the old man murmured vaguely, blinking his eyes, "my daughter. Yes--a pretty girl But she is not here--and I do not write letters--"

"That is as it may be," the commissary retorted. "But I also happen to know that you traffic not only with an émigré over in England but with the most poisonous enemy of our glorious Revolution, the English spy who is known to our patriotic committees as the Scarlet Pimpernel."

Professor Rollin looked completely bewildered this time. He murmured "Ah," and then again "Ah," and gazed at the commissary over his horn-rimmed spectacles.

"Tell him," Bossut commanded, turning to the crippled loon--"tell him

what you saw, Citizen Goujon."

Goujon had drunk a good deal of wine; his speech by now was not very clear.

"I said," he mumbled, "that I saw this old scarecrow at his window in the Rue des Pipots, in conversation with an Englishman who, I say, is none other than that accursed spy who is known as the Scarlet Pimpernel."

"What have you to say to that?" the commissary demanded.

The little Professor had nothing very enlightening to say. He had never heard of the Scarlet Pimpernel and, if he had been seen in conversation with an Englishman, well, that was as it may be. But he certainly didn't know where that Englishman was now. Whereupon Goujon mumbled: "My belief is that if you searched the old scarecrow's nest you would find that cursed spy hidden among the glass tubes."

"No, no!" the Professor hastened to assert. "I assure you, citizen commissary, that you wouldn't find anybody in my laboratory. And--and--I have most valuable instruments there for my experiments. No one must be allowed to touch them--"

"There, now!" Goujon exclaimed triumphantly. "What did I tell you? On the face of it the old fool is lying, as I myself saw the Englishman go into the house in the Rue des Pipots, just before I came on here."

"Why in the devil's name did you not tell me that before?" Bossut exclaimed, bringing a heavy fist crashing down upon the table and nearly upsetting the precious bottle of red wine.

"I did," Goujon asserted imperturbably, "but you were so excited, you

did not listen."

The commissary had once more jumped to his feet.

"Citizen Grisar," he demanded, "how many men have we on duty here?"

"Half-a-dozen, citizen."

"Very well. Let these two here remain with the prisoner, and you take the others with you to Number Seventeen, Rue des Pipots, where you were this morning. Search the house through and through. Every apartment, every room, you understand? Make every man, woman and child inside the house show you his card of citizenship, failing which, bring them along here. And do not forget that not only for me, your superior, but for you all there will be a handsome reward if you lay hands on the English spy."

Grisar was keen enough. Indeed, he was only one of many corporals of the National Guard who had seen visions of promotion and good money for the capture of the mysterious Scarlet Pimpernel. The two men who had been ordered to remain on guard over the old scarecrow looked glum, for they were longing to join in the chase. Grisar, on the other hand, had already assembled his small squad and soon they were heard to leave the dingy little building, and their measured tread rang out on the cobblestones of the Rue Monge.

Bossut, who was making vigorous efforts to control his excitement and thus preserving a semblance of dignity before his underlings, resumed his seat and made pretence to busy himself with some papers. From time to time he threw a glance on the prisoner, who stood with long lean hands crossed before him and watery eyes blinking behind his spectacles, his thoughts obviously detached from his surroundings. The two men of the National Guard stood one on

each side of him, stolid and unperturbed. Bossut, whose nerves were exacerbated by the constant shifting of their feet upon the creaking floor, curtly ordered the three of them to sit down.

"One more glass, citizen commissary," the cripple said jovially. He had filled the two mugs and drained the bottle of wine to its last drop. Bossut drank, then sat down again to his papers. The air in the narrow room had become overwhelmingly close, with the iron stove roaring and the ceiling lamp sending forth its puffs of evil-smelling odours. Above Bossut's head a white-faced clock ticked with exasperating monotony. But little noise came from outside, only the furtive footsteps of belated passers-by. These were days when it was not good to be abroad after dark. The streets were ill-lighted and Government spies lurked round every corner, stalking likely prey; and one never knew, any chance word lightly uttered might mean summary arrest, with its inevitable awful consequences.

Thus silence and the stuffy atmosphere were equally oppressive. Bossut, despite his excitement, was feeling drowsy. He had great difficulty in keeping his eyes open and his head erect. Now and then he looked up at the clock and then sighed wearily. The cripple was frankly snoring and even the men guarding the prisoner nodded from time to time. Nothing happened, and the minutes passed by leaden-footed. At one moment there was loud noise of altercation in the street. Raucous voices shouting and swearing. Bossut ordered the two soldiers to go and see what it was.

When they returned a few moments later they reported that two street rowdies had come to blows just outside the commissariat, but had already taken to their heels. The commissary himself had, during their short absence, fallen half asleep. They found him still sitting at his desk, but with his head buried in his outstretched arms. He raised his head wearily when the men entered, and cast a bleary glance heavy

with sleep upon them. He asked them a question or two in a thick, halting voice, and the next moment his head once more fell on his outstretched arms. Goujon was snoring. Still unperturbed and stolid, the men sat down again on the wooden bench, each side of the prisoner. Indeed, the latter was the only man here who appeared wide awake and alert. His spectacles had slipped down his nose and from over them his pale, watery eyes wandered from one face to the other with a kind of vaguely-scared expression.

And all at once it seemed as if a tornado had burst into the room for, with a crash of broken glass, the lamp was suddenly extinguished. There was a bang and a groan, and then a call: "A moi!" followed by quick, light footsteps hurrying into the room from outside. The soldiers had jumped to their feet, grasping their muskets. But the place was now in pitch darkness and, before the two of them could even in a small measure collect their senses together, heavy cloths were thrown over their heads and wound tightly over their mouths and eyes. The muskets were taken out of their hands, their arms were tied behind their backs and their legs pinioned with cords to the wooden bench on which they were forced to sit down--all in the space of three minutes. Through the cloth over their heads they heard muffled sounds of words they did not understand, but which one of them afterwards declared was English. Then there was more tramping of feet, and finally silence. The men could not move. They could hardly breathe. Soon they lost consciousness.

When, an hour or so later, Grisar and his small squad returned from their long and fruitless errand, after they had scoured the house in the Rue des Pipots from attic to cellar and found no trace of any English spy, they were appalled at the sight which met their gaze. To begin with, the two rooms of the commissariat were in complete darkness. That was astonishing enough, and a light was soon struck. But it was the sight of the commissary's inner sanctum that was so appalling.

The commissary himself was sprawling across his desk in an obvious state of collapse. To the wooden bench facing the desk the two soldiers of the National Guard, comrades of Grisar, were securely tied with ropes, their heads muffled in clothes, their hands tied behind their backs. Bits of glass littered the desk and the floor, a chair was overturned, and the ceiling lamp hung crooked from a single chain, the others being broken. But the strangest sight of all was that a wooden stump, such as were used by indigent cripples who had lost a leg, was lying on the floor, with its leather straps cut, and in a confused mass of rags and cloth of every description.

What in the world had happened? Grisar set his men to free their comrades, to get them water and wine and generally to try to restore them to consciousness, while he himself busied himself with the person of his chief. After a time, all three came to, but when questioned, not one of them knew exactly what had happened. Bossut was not yet free of his drugged sleep, during which, apparently, he had been hit violently on the head, which ached furiously. He knew nothing save that a cripple named Goujon had visited him and had induced him to send his subordinate and a small squad to search a certain house in the Rue des Pipots, where the prisoner, Rollin, was supposed to have held converse with the noted English spy known as the Scarlet Pimpernel. By the way, where in the devil's name was the prisoner, Rollin? Bossut remembered seeing him sitting quietly on the wooden bench between the guard, and giving no trouble. He also remembered the guard leaving the premises in order to ascertain what the noise of an altercation in the street was about. But after that, complete oblivion clouded his brain. Nor could the soldiers give any more lucid explanation of the mysterious affair. One or two facts that certainly were strange they did recall, namely, that after they had been out in the street and seen the street rowdies take to their heels, they had noticed that the light in the room was very dim and that the citizen commissary seemed to be

in an extraordinary state of somnolence. The breaking of the lamp and the attack made on them in the dark had been so sudden that their impression of it all was of the vaguest.

The matter had to be left at that for the moment. All six men who had more or less suffered through the affair remained convinced that the English spy was in one manner or other responsible for it. Although, as he and his henchmen were known to be real aristos of imposing mien and luxuriously dressed, it was difficult to determine what rôle the crippled caitiff, Goujon, played in the drama, and why he had been so cruelly deprived of his wooden leg.

Since neither the English spies nor the prisoner, Rollin, were possessed of identity papers, it would be impossible for them to leave Paris, and their recapture was only a matter of time.



It was some three or four days later that the guard at the north-west gate challenged a carrier who, in addition to two passengers, had three large crates under the hood of his cart. The crates were labelled "candles" and the bill of lading which the carrier presented declared the goods to have been manufactured by the firm of Turandot, of Paris. The passports and identity of the three men appeared to be in perfect order, signed and countersigned by the Commissary of the section and the chief commissary of the district, but as Citizen Lebrun had been specially warned--along with the guard of every gate in Paris--to be on the look-out for three fugitives of enemy nationality and an escaped prisoner named Rollin, all of whom would presumably be armed with forged passports, he had for the past three days been more than usually careful in examining all identity papers presented to him. Although the carrier and his two companions appeared harmless enough, he was none the less careful this time. He took their papers from them and ordered the three men to alight. Moreover, he ordered the three crates to be taken down from the cart and opened so that he might satisfy himself that no escaped prisoner was hidden among the candles.

The carrier protested as vigorously as he dared. He and his two sons, he declared, were honest citizens and would know how to avenge this insult that was being put upon them. As for the candles, they were a consignment which he had to deliver to a grocer at Meaux.

Lebrun, undaunted by threats, stood by with the papers in his hand, superintending the opening of the crates, when there came riding from the city a mounted squad of the National Guard, with an officer in command. Lebrun was quite thankful to see them. The officer could

but commend him for his zeal and relieve him of ultimate responsibility.

The small squad drew rein and the officer, in response to Sergeant Lebrun's salute, asked him the meaning of the empty cart, the broken crates and the three wildly-gesticulating citizens.

"You have done well, citizen sergeant," the officer said as soon as Lebrun had put him in possession of the facts, "and the authorities shall hear of your zeal. Let's have a look at those papers," he went on, "and also at this mysterious cart."

Lebrun handed him the papers and could not help noting that he frowned in obvious doubt and suspicion while he scanned the signatures upon them.

"You had better write out your report at once and I myself will take it to the proper quarters. This is a very curious and a serious case Silence!" he thundered, for the carrier and his two sons had again begun to protest vigorously. "Citizen sergeant, have them taken into the guardroom with you. I want to have a closer look at this mysterious cart."

Lebrun then turned into the guardroom, taking the three civilians and one or two of his men with him. The broken crates remained out in the road, as did the cart, round which the mounted squad had now assembled. The guard of the gate stood by at attention.

And suddenly there was a quick word of command, "En avant! *Bride abattue!*" which means, "Hell for leather!" and the whole squad, led by their officer, thundered past the bewildered guard through the gate and up the country road which leads straight as an arrow to the north.

The noise had brought Sergeant Lebrun out of the guardroom. Half-a-

dozen excited and confused voices told him what had happened.

"They seemed to be examining the cart--"

"And then suddenly--"

"They were gone--"

"It was like a thunder-clap--"

"And a flash of lightning--"

"Stay!" Lebrun thundered loudly through the din. "Was the gate open?"

"Why, yes, citizen sergeant," one of the men said. "It was opened at nine o'clock, as usual. You were there when--"

"Did nothing happen just before they rode away?"

"Nothing, citizen sergeant. They were all round the cart and suddenly they rode away."

"Well, I suppose," Lebrun said slowly, "that they had their orders."

He felt bewildered and was vaguely anxious. He had heard tales--but no, no, of course it could not be!--tales of English spies--surely they were old wives' tales!

"I suppose they really were troopers of the National Guard?" one of the men suggested.

"Name of a dog!" remarked another. "I remember now--"

"What?" Lebrun demanded shakily.

"That one of the troopers had another riding pillion behind him."

"A smallish man," he added. "I didn't see his face, but he didn't look at home in the saddle. I thought he was a recruit--or a deserter, may be, poor devil. One often sees them these days. A youngster, probably, for he was small and thin. And, anyway, it was not my place to ask questions."

Lebrun by now was in a state of collapse. What the whole thing meant he couldn't say; what he should do now was more bewildering still. It took time before his men had reported at headquarters and a squad of genuine National Guard got to horse and went in pursuit. But of the other squad who had a smallish man with them riding pillion behind one of the troopers there was no longer a trace upon the great north road which runs straight to the sea.

Vatour, the carrier, and his two sons always declared that the episode was a punishment on Sergeant Lebrun for the insult which he had put on those three honest patriots.

As for professor Rollin, he never knew exactly what happened to him after he found himself summarily lifted off the wooden bench in the dingy room of the commissariat of police. For three days he had lived in a dank and disused cellar, waited on by his English friend. Then there were days when he was hoisted into a saddle and ordered to cling to the rider in front of him, which he did with a strength born of despair; days which he spent in the open, in forest or cavern; an awful day when he was very seasick on an English ship; and finally there was the happy day when he was delivered like a limp bundle of goods into the arms of his loving daughter in London. Bruised in body, but not in spirit, he returned with zest to his experiments, and, I believe it to be a fact that in due time he had a personal interview with the great Jenner himself.

THE END



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