

The Friend of the People
L'Ami du Peuple
(1789-1794)

Journal One

June 20 1789; 9:22am

"I'd rather be dead."

"*Oh*, I am absolutely *delighted* that you feel that way."

She strides forward, her footfalls crash in rhythm to the pounding of her heart, her fist clenching and unclenching around the handle of the rusted knife.

What then follows is a scream.

June 15; 10:31pm

"Do you think he'll tell you anything?"

The table rocks and the glass of wine teeters, drops of wine smatter the surface. Her tongue clicks on the roof of her mouth, the annoyed mutter moving its way through the boxy pantry.

"Yes."

The elderly woman bristles at the short answer and prods with the question of, *how do you know?*

"He doesn't have much of a choice."

"I hope you're not planning on doing anything drastic, Charlotte."

Charlotte whirls her head around and stares at the woman bustling around the pantry. And stares. And stares.

She stares until the elderly woman can't stand the intensity of her dark eyes any longer.

"Why do you have to do *that?*"

Her face glowing from soft yellow light of the candle, her left eyebrow raised as she says, *What?*

"Stare at me like-well- like *that.*"

The fabric of her long dark coat rustles as she shifts to stand, her face morphing into a scowl and she snatches the briefcase into her hand that's now stained with spots of red wine. Her shoe scrapes against the rough wood of the table and she plans on leaving, her feet goes *thump thump* across the floor until-

"Charlotte, *please.*"

She stops, her hand shying away from the door handle as she mutters, "Drastic is what needs to be done, mother."

Footsteps are heard once more and the elderly woman stands in the doorway, tired dark eyes staring at her daughter's retreating figure. She stands even after there is no one in the hallway, imprinting the figure of the shadow into her brain.

She stands until the room becomes dark like night.

June 20; 9:04am

The minute he enters the room, he senses the crackle of tension that bounces off everyone's person.

He doesn't really like people so he chooses to take the company of the breeze that wanders around the curtains on the far left side of the room. Men scramble and push to get in, to then stumble on the tennis rackets left behind. A makeshift platform is assembled and the crowd quietens down almost instantly.

"Attention, friends! Now that we have found an alternate meeting area, I believe Sieyès has drafted a constitution for us."

The man behind the speaker nods excitedly at the mention of his name and motions for the audience to place their right arm on their heart.

"We, the National Assembly pledge to..."

Charles doesn't listen to the rest, he's written the pledge. *Sieyes was easy to manipulate.*

No, he's here for something else. His eyes dart around looking, scanning for a face.

Tufts of white hair and bushy eyebrows. His eyes flutter to the right. *There?* No.

"...The National assembly also pledges to assemble whenever required, to never separate."

The left? No.

But then it's as if the breeze whispers a name behind him, *Jacques.*

“...This will be thenceforth known as the Constitution of France.” And once Sieyes finishes, he whips around to find the blotchy red face of Jacques-Louis David.

There.

July 16; 11:13pm

Charlotte opens the newspaper under a melting candle, she squints at the neatly written article. Her dirty hand holds the ice cube to the scorched skin of her right eyelid and her vision blurs and strains in the lack of light. The headline reads, *The Storming of the Bastille* and she smirks when as she reads the little imprint of *Written by: Charles Bel.*

The bastille, as of July 15th has been attacked by an angry and aggressive mob. As they lighted a fire in the chaos, the mob announced themselves the National Assembly-

The candle wax drips on her hand and she hisses. Her hand moving the cool ice to the burnt skin of her knuckle and reads on.

The men who lead the mob were Georges Danton, Maximilien Robespierre-

Her lips quirk up the slightest as she reads the third name, *Jean-Paul Marat.*

Now he'll have to come after me.

Journal Two

July 23; 5:16pm

She bustles her way to the pantry once more because she can't help but hope Charlotte's back. She's not going to admit she's checked every three hours for the past two days, *she won't*, she won't. She takes the handle in her hand and releases a shuddering breath, she doesn't think she can survive an empty chair.

"Mum".

She has to blink one, two, three times to believe that the dark figure limping in front of her is not a mirage, that she's come back. That she's not dead. Her brain registers the thought and she feels like crying and laughing, and it's crazy, because she knows, *she knows* there's every chance of her daughter dying tomorrow but it's now that counts.

Tears outline the rim of her eyes and they gloss over, She forgets herself and her arms spread into an embrace but then she sees the skin that isn't shielded by the fabric of her heavy black coat. *No. No. Nonono.* She yanks the cuff of the coat away from her daughter's arm, and then all she sees are bruises and gauze. Bruises and gauze, and as if time goes too fast, Charlotte sways in her mother's arms to fall to the floor unconscious.

July 23; 11:57pm

"Why?"

"Why-" Charlotte clears her blood coated throat and the table receives a smatter of red from her mouth as she spits, "Why what?"

Her mother's nose wrinkles, eyes flash and twitch. She turns to get a rag from the kitchen table but even from behind, the anger radiates off of her. Charlotte can see her fingernails leaving small bloody crescents in the palm of her hand as she clutches them too tightly. *This has gone on for far too long, she's always getting hurt, she's always getting hurt, alwaysgettinghurt.*

And then *finally*, she explodes.

"Why do you always come back here, *bloody* and broken?"

She explodes because she hates that her daughter has to look like this.

"Where do you *go*, every few weeks? Who does this to you?"

"Mum, stop, pleas-"

“-Why do you always feel the need to avenge yourself? I gave you a choice to leave all of this behind! Why didn’t you *take* it?”

“*Because-*“

“We could have gone away, out of all this *deceit*. *No more Girondists and Jacobins*. *You didn’t have to do this.*”

And then all of a sudden, Charlotte’s dull brown eyes sparked - a lethal storm ready to be released.

“Who else will! People *die*, and what is one death compared to a million more saved.” The words lodge in her throat but she pushes this forward because she’s tired of holding it in for so long. “He lines people up to be executed, families are separated because of him! He decided to go against the Girondists, against *us!*”

They are now both on opposites sides’ of the table and Charlotte flinches in pain with every movement she makes. She is afraid the argument will drain her out, that her mum will persist and she will not have the will to fight anymore. She can’t let that happen. She will not let that happen.

“Marat deserves to be killed, he *needs* to be killed. For the country’s greater good.”

“You’ll be sent to the *guillotine* for the murder, this is not some fantasy where actions don’t have consequences!”

“I have a plan!”

The rag she holds in her hand cracks down onto her palm in frustration and Charlotte can hear every strained syllable when she says, “No plan can get you out of this murder!”

They stare at each other for an hour, *two hours*, daring the other to retort back and then all that is left is unbearable silence.

July 27; 2:03am

“I needed to interrogate him, that’s why I looked all uh- broken and broken.”

She doesn’t get an answer, but continues wrapping the gauze around her neck like she doesn’t care if there’s silence.

“Who?”

“That Jacques, the painter, he goes to the Jacobin meetings frequently, I figured he knows Marat’s whereabouts and it was the easiest way to get answers.”

“Did he attack you?”

“Complications arose.”

“So he didn’t attack you?”

She huffs in disbelief and irritation as she sees a hint of a smile on the corner of her mother’s face. Teasing doesn’t really sit well with Charlotte, but it’s her mum, so she relents.

“*Fine*, yes, I wasn’t very stealthy, but I got the information I needed and more leads.”

“When?”

“I got the information when the mob took over the bastille, it was when I asked him questi-”

“*No*, I mean when will you be back home?”

“Oh.” Her eyes dart around her mum’s face and she thinks that the hint of a smile never existed in the first place.

I don’t know when I’ll be back.” But she hopes and prays *it will be soon*.

October 5; 11:11 am

“We will not stop until we get equal privileges!”

“No more taxes!” Pitchforks are raised and the cheering grows louder.

“And no waiting around for bread!”

It’s so loud that everyone rushes towards the ruckus of the women marching up the streets, it’s so loud that the ground shakes from the steps of the mob.

In the dark alleyway, the two heavily cloaked figures do not even get a second glance.

“Will this work?”

“If it wouldn’t, why would I have *suggested* it? Don’t be daft, now take the job offering, assist in journalism, *take* it, Marat’s the lead.”

“Why should I trust you?”

“Well you’ve come all this way, might as well.”

She pulls off his cloak’s hood in a swift motion of her arm and the face that she saw just yesterday on the front page of the newspaper appears before her eyes, it’s Robespierre.

Journal Three

October 12 1792; 3:03pm

There's a wafting of vinegar that slithers around him. Waiting at the door of the polished porch, Charles is ready. His head is hung, looking at his shoes, he's lost in thought. *I'm ready to learn as much as possible. I'm ready to avenge. I'm ready to be finally free. And all I have to do is take the job-*

"Who are you?" He's sharp and coarse, Charles flinches and snaps his head up to meet the eyes of a very ugly man.

The ridges of his skin resemble miles of the Sahara desert, it seems as if no light or water has reached the surface. Cracked, broken, rough, *damaged*. He stands with his chest jutting and limbs stretched out, as if he's trying to give the impression that he's a force to be reckoned with. Maybe he is, but his stance fools no one, he's frail. He seems as if he's a dead flower in the midst of a winter storm, being slapped by the cold force of the of the icy wind. He wears a white cotton towel like a turban on his head, all strands of hair pulled back tightly which draws attention to the irregular sag of his face. Almost as if there aren't any bones left to hold the flesh up.

He doesn't really see *this* man killing hundreds of people. His physique betrays his reputation, the tales of Marat being a skilled politician and speaker fizzles away with one look at him.

He doesn't think he could have done anything else in this situation, so he just stares and blinks, and stares some more.

"Well?"

"Pardonnez-moi monsieur, I am here to apply to assist in the making of L'Ami du Peuple?"

"I require no help."

"But—"

"I said that is final."

"But someone sent me—"

"I don't give a damn who sent you, go away!"

Burgundy red fills his field of vision and he feels a sharp thwack on his forehead. He would have fallen over from the force of the door if his shoe wasn't wedged in the corner, giving enough time for one final comment—

"Robespierre sent me!"

“Oh-“ He sounds surprised which should have been Charles’ first hint, “Well, in that case, come on in-“

“Really?” Charles doesn’t understand why he’s suddenly said yes, it’s almost as if it’s-

“No you fool! Get out of my house!”

-it’s almost as if it’s too good to be true-

And this time he falls over.

November 19; 11:43am

“I can’t believe I found you in the sewers.”

Snickers of joy are emitted from Charles’ mouth and he probably isn’t in the position to laugh but it’s Charles and he doesn’t really listen to anyone. He can’t help but voice out his amusement when he sees the frail hands of the irritated man shift the towel on his head with such *sass*.

He’s almost done laughing. He swears, he’s shouldn’t be doing this, it could get him fired-

And then the reptilian whips his head away from Charles and sniffs pretentiously.

Charles loses it.

“Will you just *shut* up, just get some information on the Girondists will you, and try not to let them know it’s for me, else we *both* will be hiding in the sewers.”

November 24; 10:16pm

They’re at the table again. She explains that she’s found a way but she’ll likely be dead after it’s done. And instead of telling her daughter not to go through with the plan, Madeleine just says, *Why do you have to dress up as a man?* And Charlotte just laughs, with a breathy reply of *Marat wouldn’t take help from a woman.*

She cherishes this moment with her mother for she knows - it’s the calm before the storm.

July 13 1793; 8:04am

“The reign has only just begun, Charles! I’ve been issuing hundreds of Girondist members to the guillotine, isn’t it just perfect!”

Charles is there standing right beside the tub. Plunge the knife, snap his neck.

Marat doesn't seem to mind, he's accustomed to Charles working for him, they've made the newspaper reach new heights along with their *friendship*. They've gotten so close that, that Charles bids Marat "adieu, L'Ami du Peuple" after every meeting.

Murky, grey water swirls in the tub as Marat shifts to complete the document on the makeshift table and then he stops.

Charles faces toward the window and stares, *plunge the knife, snap his neck*. And Charles becomes Charlotte when she lays her wig next to the window. They both turn slowly toward each other and one look at Marat's face convinces her that he knows. And it's over for him and his stupid little newspaper.

There's fear in his eyes and it burns in it's intensity. it seems as if he's pleading, asking for mercy but his smug position tells Charles a different story, he has enough pride to last a lifetime. *That's why he deserves to be killed*. The blade of the knife glints in the flame of the candle that illuminates the work table and Charlotte lets it breathe when she juts it out of her coat to stand by the bathtub once more.

Plunge the knife, snap his neck.

There's a drag of the knife through several layers of skin with an echo of scream that resembles a tortured animal. Charlotte releases her hand from the oddly cold handle of the knife and admires her art, *he thrashes and there's a stream of tears and blood that coat his face, with the force of gravity dripping the blood down from the knife to fall like raindrops of death into the bathwater, which then swirl with the grey as the resisting continues*.

He howls in anguish and a feeling of joy that erupts in her heart and spreads through her body. Thousands will be saved and she will be the one that saves them. *She does this, not him, she's their friend, she's their savior*.

A laugh bubbles from her throat. She shifts the knife further in, moving her hand swiftly in slashes and stabs, all while covering herself in the red. It's over everything. It's on her hands and clothes and she breathes in deep to smell the metallic scent through the air.

She doesn't stop. She doesn't think she can.

He releases a wail and she can see him strain to get a sound out from his moving lips. One, two and three gurgling wheezes after, he yells, "Aidez, ma chère amie!"

And as if she doesn't hear him, she continues to twist the blade in further. All she hears as the blood roars in her ears is-

Plunge the knife, snap his neck. Again and Again. Until the pleads of mercy die away.

She should leave. They'll find her. But she doesn't. The blood froths from his mouth and the lifeless white stare never shifts from her face as she stares back and spits out, "I helped the people, I am L'Ami du Peuple."

Journal Four

September 3, 1779; 2:08pm

"père, who's at the door?"

The men walk in and without a word grab her father by the arms, she doesn't understand. They move him roughly and he struggles to move away and all she can't understand what the men are saying.

Her father stumbles back and tries to slam his fist into the man on the right when the other one slams her father's body into the wall. All she understands are two words, "Girondist" and "Marat" and she never sees her father again.

January 1, 1788; 4:02am

"I can't get a job."

"Have you tried the line for the rations, you're bound to get a job there--"

"I don't want to do something like that, mère, I want to do something useful with my life. Do something great."

"Well join the lawyers, you are quite good at refuting others."

"No one will except me, Marat put me on the list of Girondists and since everyone listens to him, no one is taking me in."

"He found you because of papa?"

"Yes."

July 14 1793; 5:01pm

She steps on the plank, her eyes dart upward and her heart feels like it's going to jump out of and out of her ribs.

"The directory sentences Charlotte Corday for the assassination of our beloved immortalized Jacobin leader Jean Paul Marat--"

The man echoes his sentence, and Charlotte spits in disgust, then reaches back to bite the executioner's hand. Pain shoots from the small of her back to the bottom of her skull, and she almost cries out as he slams his hand down on her back to keep her steady for the blade.

The man snarls, "Why did you make it hard for yourself? You should have stayed a poor, filthy woman. You did not deserve to be anything else."

She takes the saliva in her mouth and pushes back with all her might to spit a wad in his face, the anger pulsing off of her is frightening and her voice is an ice cold chill as she says,

"I'd rather be dead."

And he replies with a smile, "Oh, I am absolutely delighted that you feel that way."

fin.