

To the Good Patriot by Ghislain de Diesbach

Translated from the French
by [David Platzer](#) (February 2023)



An Episode From The French Revolution: A Toast, Alexandre Evariste Fragonard

Ghislain de Diesbach, born in 1931 in Le Havre, is best-known in his native France for his acclaimed biographies of Proust,

Chateaubriand, Madame de Stael, Marthe Bbesco, as well his history of the Emigration of French aristocrats during the Revolution and the Napoleonic Era. Nevertheless, his fiction is dearest to his heart. "To the Good Patriot" as "Au bon patriote" is in his collection of short stories, Au bon patriote, published in the original French by Plon, in Paris, 1996.

The year II of the French Republic began badly. If aristocratic heads were falling like hail, the heads of farm animals had become so rare that some butchers were obliged to close their stalls and rent their services to prisons now short of hands. Thus, having abandoned his butcher's shop in the Vieille rue du Temple, Brutus Graillat was now busy slitting throats in the service of the Nation. He enjoyed the work, although he deplored the low wages. The Nation paid badly and there was little to extort from the victims, already stripped of their means before being delivered to him. On their cadavers, he found only objects devoid of commercial value: books of piety, messages of farewell, sometimes a miniature depicting a loved one. Nevertheless, he carried them home with him and sometimes spent agreeable evenings listening to his daughter, Egalité, as she read aloud these letters of 'aristos'. Certain of an intimate, even licentious nature, contained phrases that the executioner's wife, as a virtuous mother, tried to hide from her children's curiosity. Her daughter had discovered this ploy and arranged to read them in secret, strangely agitated by these declarations of passion exaggerated by death's imminence. She envied these unknown lovers and dreamed of receiving letters like these herself. Her lover, a nice boy departed some months earlier with the army of the Rhine, sent her only short letters in which he proclaimed his love of the Republic and swore he would either vanquish its enemies or perish. She would have preferred that instead of wanting to die for the Country, he would have

wanted to live for her.

Egalité, formerly called Charlotte, was so pretty that the committee of the local department had chosen her to incarnate the Goddess Reason in the weekly services of worship held every Décadi in the former Church of the Blancs-Manteaux. Dressed only in a slender tunic, a Phrygian bonnet on her head, she sat in the place of honour on a marble altar, a pike in her hand. The last time she had caught a cold which now confined her to her room.

This 5th Nivose, year II, she was gazing sadly at the house next door's garden, lugubrious at the winter day's end. In the adjacent room, her little brother, Epaminondas, played quietly with his little guillotine. Their mother still hadn't come from the Place de la Révolution where she had gone to see some enemies of the people have their heads cut off. Their father was at Nantes where he was assisting Citizen Carrier. Numbed by the sadness of this dusk to a point where she lacked the courage to get up and light the lamp, Egalité dreamed.

All at once she noticed two legs dangling at the top of the window. Before she understood that they were a man's, she saw the intruder drop onto the balcony. The stranger examined the window, then, thinking the room empty, he broke a windowpane so that he could lift the catch and open one of the shutters. Petrified by this apparition, mute with dread, Egalité could neither move nor scream. Seeing the man enter the room, she abruptly got up to flee. Surprised himself, the stranger hesitated a moment, then knelt before her, joining his hands in an imploring gesture.

'Mademoiselle, have pity on an outlaw,' he said. *'Forgive him for thus violating your house. Seeing no light, I thought the house uninhabited.'*

'You are not a thief?' babbled Egalité, forgetting in her excitement the republican *'thou'* form in favour of the

outmoded, traditional 'you.'

'No, *Mademoiselle*,' he said, 'I am something even worse. I am an aristocrat and my fate depends on you.' As he spoke, he rose from his knees and continued: 'It is two days since I escaped the police and that I have wandered the rooftops with no idea of where I can take refuge. Am I safe here?'

Egalité shuddered. 'Certainly not, Citizen. Leave at once or you are lost. My father is away, but my mother will be back soon. If she finds you here, she will not hesitate to denounce you. Get away while there is still time.'

'Your mother will have no pity on a poor wretch?'

'My mother is a good patriot and she will do her duty.'

'And your father, *Mademoiselle*, your father?'

'My father is an executioner. At this very moment, he is in Nantes, helping Citizen Carrier.'

'Good God! I have fallen into the wolf's mouth,' cried the young man, overwhelmed.

Egalité beat the lighter to light the lamp. The stranger, whose deep voice had deceived her as to his age, she now perceived to be hardly more than twenty. With neither coat nor tie, dressed only in trousers with a ragged shirt and an old waistcoat, he shivered from the cold and looked exhausted as he collapsed onto a chair.

'Leave, citizen!' Egalité said again in a pressing voice. 'Leave before it is too late.' 'What does it matter now?' he sighed. 'I don't know where to go. I have no money. All that is left to me is either to die of hunger on the rooftops or to get myself arrested at the nearest street corner. This house was my last chance. Seeing you, *Mademoiselle*,' he added with more assurance, 'I don't think I made a bad choice.'

'Citizen!' interrupted Egalité in a severe tone of voice.

'Oh, *Mademoiselle*, what I say is what I sincerely believe. Would I have the heart to joke in such a situation? If you are as good as you are beautiful, you will help me hide.'

'You think so? Hide yourself in the house of Citizen Graillat, friend of Robespierre, Saint-Just, Marat and Couthon?'

'What of it? Is it not here that I shall be safest? Who would ever dream of looking for me here?'

'Ah, Citizen, you are unreasonable...'

'Can one be reasonable when one is playing for one's life? What, *Mademoiselle*, would you do in my place?'

'I should wait, confidently, for the Nation's judgement. If you are innocent, you will be acquitted.'

'Do you not know that the Tribunal kills first and judges later? How can your father practice that dreadful profession?'

'One must live, Citizen. My father was a butcher; but since emigrants starved us, there is no more meat. I don't know what would have become of us if my father hadn't found this job.'

'A nice profession!'

'Oh! You know it isn't very well paid and the work is hard. He had many difficult days during the month of September 1792. He came back every evening, dead tired and covered in blood, even more than when he was a butcher. My mother and I spent all our time washing his clothes. The blood wouldn't go away. He ruined several suits. It wasn't fun all the time. There were some very wicked prisoners who broke free. There was even a horrible Swiss who broke his arm. My father couldn't work for two months. But you, what did you do before? Your hands are so white you can't have used them for anything difficult.'

'No, before I became a conspirator, I did nothing. Almost nothing!' the young stranger said modestly. 'I only wrote poetry.'

'O Citizen! I should like it so much if you wrote poetry to me,' cried Egalité. 'I know that you aristocrats can write verse about everything and at any time. Here; here is some paper and a pencil. Write a poem while I go make you something to eat. After that, you must go. If my mother found you here, she might kill you.'

'Aren't you afraid that she might be back soon, now that night has fallen?'

'She won't be back for an hour. There was a very long execution today, three or four tumbrils, and the rain impeded it from going quickly. Last week it rained so much that the blade was rusty. The poor executioner had so much trouble...'

'But to write a poem in your honour, I must know your name. What is it?'

'My name is Egalité. Before it was Charlotte; but after Citizen Corday stabbed our friend Marat, my father no longer wanted me to have the same name as her.'

'Charlotte! What a pretty name! What a pity you've given it up! Listen, it has already inspired me to this quatrain:

*Pour moi, déjà, la guillotine est prête
Si je retombe aux mains des patriotes.
Faudra-t-il donc encor perdre la tête?
Car je l'ai perdue en voyant Charlotte* [\[*\]](#)

'Oh! It's so beautiful! Say it to me again, Citizen!'

'Most gladly:

'For me, already, the guillo—'

He stopped. First a door slammed, then a heavy tread shook the floor. Citizen Graillat came in noisily. She was in an excellent mood, having seen beheaded two marquesses, a duke, three farmer-generals, a number of counts, a mother superior and a dozen nuns, not to mention several persons of lesser rank, delighted at finding themselves in such good company.

Discovering a young man with her daughter, her expression changed.

'Eh! What's this? Thou wicked rascal of a girl! So thou taketh advantage of my absence to receive beaux.'

'I don't know this citizen,' answered Egalité, trembling.

'What dost thou mean thou dost not know him? Dost thou take me for an imbecile? Thou bringest a man up here and thou pretendest thou dost not know him?'

Letting go of a box of vegetables that she had been holding against her vast chest, she threw herself at her daughter, her hand high. But before she could smack Egalité, the stranger prevented her with a gesture.

'*Madame*, your daughter is telling the truth. She did not bring me up here. It was I who came down. I dropped from the rooftop.' He pointed to the window with its broken pane.

'So thou hast dropped from the sky like that?' replied Citizen Graillat whom the appellation of '*Madame*' had already caused to jump. 'Where dost thou come from? Who art thou?'

Risking all to win all, the young man sketched a salute in the air and proclaimed himself. 'I am the Duke of Florigny', he said.

The Citizen Graillat seemed to metamorphasize into a statue of salt. 'The Duke of Florigny?' she mumbled, astonished. 'But I just saw him, guillotined on the Place de la Révolution ...'

'Alas, yes *Madame* Citizen, it was my father. Until today I was only the Marquess of Charlières, but my father's death makes me the sixth Duke of Florigny.'

'The Marquess of Charlières!' Egalité cried. 'But it was you who came back from England to save the Queen!'

'Yes, *Mademoiselle*, but I was unable to succeed. I was denounced, arrested and thrown into prison. And now, here I am!'

'An aristo in my house! A marquess! A duke!' shouted Citizen Graillat. 'And welcomed by my daughter. I am dishonoured! What a shame for us if anyone knew about it...'

'As you witnessed my father's last moments,' the young duke interrupted amiably, 'would you be so kind, *Madame* Citizen, as to retrace them for me? Did he die courageously? Did he speak on the scaffold?'

The Citizen Graillat wrinkled her forehead in an effort at reflexion. 'I don't remember,' she said. 'Oh yes. When he climbed the ladder, the so-called Abbess of Lentillac said to him: "Courage, my friend, look at the heavens!" And he answered: "It is overcast, it will snow tomorrow." Everyone laughed, even the so-called Abbess.'

'My poor father was a simple soul.'

'Thou dost not seem especially bereaved,' Mother Graillat, a little surprised, said. 'These aristos have no heart.'

'My God, he was a distant father. I hardly saw him at all, except during these last days when we were reunited in the dungeon, from which I was able to escape.'

'And why didst not thy father escape too?'

'He was too fat, Citizen, he couldn't get through the tiny opening which I sawed through the windowpane. He needed to slim down and the revolutionary justice didn't give him the time to do it.'

'And thy mother?' Citizen Graillat interrupted severely.

'My mother? I never knew her. She died at my birth. Perhaps even before. I no longer remember.'

'Poor thing,' sighed the shrew, moved. 'Who raised thee?'

'A nurse and, afterwards, tutors. A priest who concerned himself more with chambermaids than with me and ended up getting defrocked; an Italian who only knew how to tell fortunes from the lines of the hand and the grounds in a coffee cup; then a Dutchman who made me bathe in the Seine in darkest winter...'

'It is hardly worth being born a lord to receive so bad an upbringing,' remarked Citizen Graillat. 'That's enough talk. Thou must clear out of here, or else I'll call the neighbours and thou wilt be killed like a rat. Go get thyself hung somewhere else.'

'In truth, Citizen, I've no desire to get myself hung and where do you want me to go without money or suitable clothes? For two days, I have lived on the rooftops, with nothing to eat, drinking water from the gutters. Will you let me go on an empty stomach?'

At this moment, the young Epanimondas edged into the room and sat on his mother's knee.

'What a lovely child!' exclaimed the Duke who would have flattered even the household cat in the hope of not being turned out.

'Yes, a handsome child and a good little patriot,' added the proud mother. 'Show us, Pami. Sing the *Carmagnole* to the Citizen.'

'No,' grumbled the child. 'I'm hungry. I want to eat.'

'It is true,' his mother said. 'It is late. Where is my head?'

'On your shoulders, happily for you,' the Duke sighed. 'I should very much like to be able to say the same next month.'

'I like thee, my boy,' declared Mother Graillat. 'Thou art a sly rascal and I like wily people. Thou art going to eat with us and then we shall see later. I don't want to denounce thee or chase thee away on the same day thy father's head was cut off.'

Egalité cast her mother a grateful look and reddened with pleasure. She hurried to prepare the meal while the duke made a summary toilet. The dinner was gay. Careful to win over his hostess, the Duke used his charm to the utmost while eating enough for four and drinking like a Pole. At the end of each glass, he found a new anecdote, each one more amusing than its predecessor. Each time Citizen Graillat neighed with a laugh that made her breasts shake. When the Duke assured her he had rarely tasted so good a meal, even at Versailles, she looked flattered.

'So, thou hast eaten often with the tyrant?' she asked.

'Yes, as I was page to the Queen.'

'Citizen, tell us about the Queen,' Egalité cried. 'Is it true she had young childrens' throats cut so that she could have bloodbaths to preserve her youth?'

'That is a great exaggeration, beautiful Egalité,' replied the Duke, 'of baths that were so few and so rare that they are hardly worth mentioning.'

'Is it true that when Capet went hunting, he fired on the beaters because they were easier to target than the game?' asked Mother Graillat.

'Only on the elderly ones, Citizen, not on the young or the fathers of families, and only on bachelors. The King was too good to deprive children of their fathers.'

'Ah, this young man,' observed Citizen Graillat, suddenly suspicious. 'Mockst thou us?'

'God forbid!' protested the Duke. 'I have too much esteem for you, but if I deny all the slurs that have been heaped on the heads of those unfortunate sovereigns, you wouldn't believe me and would doubt my good faith. Would you like me to tell the truth? The Queen was simple, amiable and generous, a woman like so many others, a woman honest and just, a good wife and mother: in short a woman like you.'

'Oh Citizen, your enthusiasm leads you astray,' said a smiling Egalité.

'Forgive me, dear *Mademoiselle* Egalité, one ought never to speak of another woman, not even the Queen, in your presence: none can compare with you.'

'No gallant remarks, Citizen,' interrupted Mother Graillat. 'Go on talking about the tyrants and their satellites.'

Florigny, copiously restored by the food, did not need to be asked. He described his exhausting life as a page, and those of courtiers, more exhausted still, to a point where the ladies finished by feeling pity for these galley slaves of the throne. The Citizen Graillat softened to a point where she recalled the marriage of the two sovereigns.

'We liked him so much, Capet, when he was the Dauphin. I was very young, sixteen years old. My young man and I went to join the queue to see him pass with his wife. We cried with all our

hearts: "Long live *Monsieur* the *Dauphin*! Long live *Madame* the *Dauphine*!" We even cried "Long live the King!" when we saw the old king.'

'Shush, citizen, shush, you are going to compromise yourself,' the Duke told her. 'If anyone heard you, you would be guillotined without a trial.'

'Me, guillotined? But I haven't done anything!'

'Yes, you just shouted: "Long live the King!"'

'I didn't shout "Long live the King"! I only said that before we used to shout "Long live the King!"'

'It is enough,' Florigny declared. 'In prison I met two old maids who were guillotined because their parrot cried "Long live the King!" They couldn't get him to say "Long live the Nation!"'

'It is unjust!' exclaimed the two women.

'It is the new justice.'

'Have some more food,' said Mother Graillat, 'since thou findest it good, and thou, Pami, go get another bottle of wine.'

'Truly, dear Citizen,' Florigny observed, 'I abuse your hospitality. But where shall I be tomorrow? One must take advantage of the moment.'

If the wine put the Duke in form, it softened Citizen Graillat. She felt her prejudices against 'aristos' dissipate. This one in particular, she found altogether too good-looking and above all too witty to send to his death or even to throw into the street. Worn out by fatigue, Epaminondas fell asleep, his nose in his plate. Egalité, her eyes glowing with excitement, her face animated, seemed to drink in the words of their guest. Citizen Graillat finished by giving in.

'Listen, Citizen,' she said, 'thou need not worry too much. If my man were here, it would be different—he doesn't joke when it comes to duty—but me, I am a good-hearted woman, fond of young people, and it would rend my heart to think that a handsome lad like thee couldst get his head cut off. I am going to hide thee here while thee get false papers. I have friends in the department and even in the district. I will say that one of my nephews, come to see us from the country, lost his papers on the way ...'

Florigny got up, put his hand on his heart and gave her a slight, ceremonious bow:

'Citizen, I shall reward that! If one day the King returns ... I will present you at court.'

'And me?' asked Egalité.

'You too, of course! I remember those who help me.'

'Of course! I do hope so,' said Citizen Graillat. 'Admit it, my girl, that would be funny! Canst thou see thy mother at Versailles, curtseying: "Eh, hullo, Madame the Queen..." "Do get up; my dear Mme Graillat and come sit next to me, so we can chat a little ..." Ha, ha! I shouldn't be the least embarrassed chatting to the Queen. The proof is that I chat so well with thee, a duke ... A duke, all the same! When I think that I have eaten with a duke! The Revolution has its good side! From now on, I can eat with a duke! Long live the Republic!'

'Oh! Mamma,' cried Egalité, shocked, 'not before Monsieur.'

Woken up by this cry, Epanimondas wanted to go to bed. The dwelling not being vast, Citizen Graillat decided that the Duke should take Egalité's bed, while Egalité, who shared a room with her brother, would sleep with her in the matrimonial bed. Epanimondas disappeared after embracing his sister, his mother and even the Duke. The latter seized the opportunity. He turned to Egalité, a smile on his lips and asked her:

'Dear Egalité, may I take the liberty of giving you the kiss of fraternity?'

Citizen Graillat, passably tipsy, laughed so good-heartedly that he had to kiss her too, even though she reeked of garlic and wine. Affection was in command: everyone swore to never part. They even went so far as to make plans for the future.

The next day, Florigny was woken up in the early morning by cries of joy. Epaminondas, jolly as a chaffinch, his head between the bars of his little bed, was looking at him while calling his mother. 'Mamma,' he squealed, 'there is a citizen in Egalité's bed.' To shut him up, Florigny had to get up and play with him. A little later, Citizen Graillat discovered them busily playing with the little guillotine offered Epanimondas by his father. Despite her republican convictions, she had a more sensitive heart than her rough manner might lead one to believe. She quickly confiscated this toy which seemed to her to be in bad taste. As the boy was crying, Florigny, to console him, gave him the only object he still possessed, a lidded snuff-box decorated with a feminine profile.

After eating, the Duke and his benefactresses held a meeting. Citizen Graillat said once more that she would hide him until she procured him valid papers, as well, perhaps, as a passport permitting him to go abroad. These steps took more time than she thought, so Florigny installed himself with the Graillats, not daring to go out. He had adjusted fairly well to this family life, though fearing all the time an unexpected return on the father's part. But then an event interrupted this calm existence, thwarted Citizen Graillat's plans and altered all their destinies.

Epaminondas, whose mother had made him swear not to reveal the young aristocrat's presence by telling him that it would cost

them their lives, could not resist showing his friends the snuff-box. Bombarded with questions, he soon confessed that he had got it from a handsome citizen who lived with his family and could not go out for fear of soldiers. The rumour of this unusual presence began to circulate in the neighbourhood, eventually reaching the ears of Citizen Champignoux, a former Oratorian who had thrown away his soutane in favour of the Revolution, the better to make his career. Supplanted by Brutus Graillat several times in his search for municipal honours, he was only waiting for the hour of his revenge. He ran straight away to the Department Committee to recount what he had heard. At first he was laughed at: Citizen Graillat and his family's public-spiritedness were known and tested. Champignoux insisted, remarking that Graillat had been gone several weeks and in his absence, his wife was able to hide someone there. 'Women are capable of everything,' he added in the tones of a man with whom women had never been capable of anything. 'Remember, Citizens, that the truth springs from the mouths of babes!'

Shaken by his arguments, the Department President charged him to visit the household. One hour later, assisted by a police superintendant and three members of the National Guard, Champignoux knocked at the Graillats' door, ordering it opened in the name of the Republic

'Enter, Citizens,' said Citizen Graillat, 'but less noise. Is it an hour to disturb honest folk? That's no way to behave!'

'Excuse us, citizen. We have orders to search all the houses in the neighbourhood.'

'You are looking for a criminal?'

'Yes, a traitor to the country, an aristo whose presence in the neighbourhood has been reported to us.'

'Well,' said Citizen Graillat grumpily and not ceding an inch of ground, 'go look upstairs and don't dirty my floor with

your muddy boots. It is not at the house of Citizen Graillat, member of the Jacobins Club, Committee executioner and friend of Robespierre that you will find this outlaw.'

'Ha, ha, Citizen,' said the ex-Oratorian sniggering. 'That is obvious. All the same I am going to make a little search.'

Lively as a ferret, he wormed his way between the door and Citizen Graillat who tried vainly to stop him. He penetrated inside the room where Florigny, giving a lesson to Egalité, got up on seeing him. Hearing the noise made by the soldiers' intrusion, he had wanted to open the window and escape onto the roof, but Egalité stopped him, assuring him that her mother would know how to get them out of this mess. Nevertheless she trembled in all her limbs and it was he who exerted himself to calm her.

'So,' Champignoux said in a triumphant cry. 'Was I not right? Who is this interesting young man?'

At first glance, Florigny recognized his former tutor. Was this his salvation, Florigny wondered, or his ruin? He remained silent, leaving Citizen Graillat to act on his behalf. 'This boy,' she roared in the voice of a lioness from whom someone was trying to wrench her cub, 'this boy is my son-in-law!'

'Thy son-in-law? But thy daughter is not married, as far as I know.'

When I say my son-in-law,' she admitted, 'I mean by that my future son-in-law. These children have known each other since childhood and he has just come from Normandy to marry Egalité. The marriage will take place on my husband's return.'

'Ah, so this is thy intended,' said an astonished Champignoux, turning towards Egalité. 'I hope at least that he is a legitimate fiancé and that he has his papers.'

Florigny decided that he must intervene. Regarding his former tutor straight in the eyes, he declared that when arriving at Paris, a little time before passing through the tollgate, he had been robbed by highwaymen who had taken his papers as well as his savings. A market gardener saw him, lying unconscious at the side of the road and carried him into Paris on his barrow. Listening to this explanation, Champignoux, although desirous to get his revenge on Citizen Graillat, was moved by this unexpected reminder of his own youth and beginnings. Suddenly a Machiavellian idea came to him, one that could neatly reconcile the two contrasting sentiments working in him. The inquisitor would make himself a benefactor. While Citizen Graillat repeated that the marriage would be solemnized as soon as her husband returned, he proposed that they not wait for that. 'Such an attractive, well-matched young couple! It is a crime to retard a union to which they both aspire and have waited for ... They must be married today.'

'But, Citizen, thou canst not be serious!' objected Citizen Graillat, caught in her own trap. 'My husband would never forgive me if this ceremony, which would give him such joy, took place without him. We must wait for his return.'

'No,' Champignoux answered firmly. 'The Republic will not wait. She needs young couples to provide her with children born free and regenerated. Dost thou not know that the country is in danger, that a state of siege has been proclaimed, that emergency laws have been voted?'

'Really, citizen, there are no emergency laws concerning marriages!'

'What ill-will on thy part, citizen, when thou art asked to fulfil a civic duty and make thy daughter's happiness...Look at her there. She is all bothered and in tears, because thou refusest to satisfy her legitimate impatience.'

In truth, poor Egalité, overwhelmed by this scene and hoping for an unexpected happiness, but fearing a tragic end for the Duke, or at least his arrest, was weeping warm tears. As for Epaminondas, he had never found himself at such a party and was admiring the National Guardsmen's sabres. Champignoux, now master of the situation, resumed it in these terms: 'This lad has no papers, but thou vouchest for him, Citizen, and thou wantest him for thy son-in-law. So, I am going to get him a valid card and tomorrow we shall marry him to Egalité before the municipal officer; but before that, I wish to assure myself of their reciprocal consent...In fact, what ist thy name?'

Florigny, who had already chosen a most plebeian name for the papers that Citizen Graillat promised to obtain for him, wanted to make his former tutor understand that he was joining in his game. He chose the name of one of the characters of *Faublas*, which the Abbé Champignoux had once made his breviary. 'Frédéric Duportail in the old style, now Anaxagoras Duportail.'

'Good,' said Champignoux. 'And thou, Egalité Graillat, dost thou take as husband Citizen Anaxagoras Duportail, here present?'

Egalité began weeping most beautifully and remained silent. 'It is emotion,' her mother said, herself dumbfounded and not knowing how to escape this trap in which all three found themselves in. 'It is her emotion,' she repeated, 'so rapid a joy...Speak, my girl, it is our bliss that thou assurest!'

The young girl uttered a feeble 'yes' while the so-called Anaxagoras Duportail replied to the same question in a firm voice. Champignoux raised his right hand and in an unctuous voice, blessed them while pronouncing the sacramental formula: *Ego conjugo vos in matrimonium, in nomine Patris, et Filii et Spiritus Sancti ... Amen.* Then he burst into laughter.

'What is so funny?' asked Citizen Graillat.

'Joke? Is it thus that thou speakest of holy things? I was God's servant before I became the Nation's. Since this lad comes from the country where obscurantism reigns, I wished to ease his conscience by first marrying him in a religious ceremony. Our guardsmen have served as witnesses. He may sleep in tranquillity with thy daughter in her bed, without waiting for the nuptial ceremony at the Town Hall tomorrow or the day after. I am going to take care of it. See thee soon, Citizen ...'

The commissaire and the soldiers went out first, then Citizen Graillat, who accompanied Champignoux up to the threshold of her lodging and retained him so that she could say her peace: 'Citizen, thou art a wretch!'

'Rather than insult me,' Champignoux replied calmly, 'thou wouldst do better to thank me. Without me, all three of you would have slept in prison this night.'

'What art thou trying to say?'

'Have no fear, I shall not betray thee, but thank God, the Supreme Being or the Goddess Reason, as thou preferest, that I have more sense of humour than my colleagues. Without that, thou wouldst be in serious trouble. *Tricoteuse* that thou art, thou wouldst mount the scaffold as an aristos's accomplice. Thy son-in-law is none other than the former Marquess of Charlières, whose tutor I once was. I recognized him immediately, just as he recognized me. It is a good farce and I will arrange things later with Graillat. If he lets me get elected to the Department Presidency in his place, I will keep my silence. Still I can't help laughing as I imagine the face of that excellent Brutus when he returns from Nantes to find his daughter married to the so-called Marquess of Charlières!'

'Duke, Citizen, Duke of Florigny.'

'What?'

'Yes,' said the mother with a hint of vanity, 'the Duke of Florigny was guillotined eight days ago. I was there, I saw it, and now his son is the Duke of Florigny.'

'The Duke of Florigny, Still better!' exclaimed Champignoux. 'The beautiful Egalité, a duchess! I myself was a priest...one sees many strange things these days!'

Just then, the new Duke, disturbed by this discussion at the door, rejoined them.

'Citizen,' Champignoux told him, 'I haven't forgotten that at thy house the food was good and that not too much was asked of the poor devil I then was. I will make up thy papers tomorrow, but be careful.'

'Citizen, I owe you my life,' the young man exclaimed with warmth.

'It is true,' said Champignoux, 'and I will know how to remind thee of it when the moment comes.'

'How can I thank you?'

'Ah, does one ever know? Sometimes fortune's wheel can turn; perhaps one day we shall find ourselves in reversed positions...often, I used to tell my flock: *make yourselves friends of iniquity*. You see I haven't forgotten everything of our holy religion.'

'Well, citizen,' Egalité's husband joyfully concluded, 'if times become bad, at least for you, be assured that you can always find a post as chaplain in my house!'

The newlyweds were still sleeping one morning, less than a week after their marriage, when a voice, strong, raucous and

scolding, woke them from their rest.

'Heavens!' said Egalité, snuggling up to her husband, 'it is my father!'

They pricked up their ears anxiously and heard the opening of a household row. Citizen Graillat seemed to be trying to inform her husband with tact of the singular events that had occurred in his absence. The discussion grew more heated and the door of their room opened brusquely to reveal Citizen Graillat in his travelling clothes and as untidy as a drunk despite the morning hour.

'So, thou wretched girl! What is it that I have just heard? Thou art married! Well, I am going to cure thee of this taste for marriage, right now!'

Moved by this outburst, Egalité straightened herself a little so she could offer her cheek to a paternal kiss, but instead, she received only a vigorous slap that sent her flying, panting, to her husband's side. The latter interposed himself. 'Forgive, citizen, the enthusiasm of a lover too rapidly conquered by your daughter's charms...'

Graillat looked at him with contempt. 'Who is this ladies' man? An aristo, I wager!'

'Anaxagoras is as good a republican as thou,' Egalité moaned. 'If thou lovest me a little bit, papa, thou wilt consider him as a son.'

'My son? This whippersnapper? Thou mockest me? A boy who has a girl's arms and could not easily cut the throat of a priest or an aristo!' With a brusque gesture, he pulled off the blankets and sheets.

'Papa!' the distraught young woman cried, retrieving a sheet to cover herself while Florigny offered to explain everything man to man.

'I'll fight with thee!' Graillat sniggered. 'Come here, little bird, and I'll crush thee like a bug.'

He took off his overcoat, his *carmagnole*, and rolled up his sleeves, revealing two enormous arms with bulging muscles. The young Duke bounded out of bed, jumped over a pair of trousers Graillat recognized as one of his, and, with a movement so quick that the fat man could not stop it, threw Graillat a quick punch that sent him reeling. Then, without leaving Graillat the time to gather his strength, Florigny dealt him a hail of blows that the poor wretch tried in vain to match. To the cries of their husband and father, the two women threw themselves between the two men to separate them. A smile on his lips and hardly out of breath, Florigny observed that if he lacked the size to cut a vile aristocrat's throat, he could at least knock a good republican senseless. He had not learned English boxing for nothing while exiled in London.

Brutus Graillat was not so bad a chap as he seemed. His son-in-law's vigour, his daughter's tears, his wife's remonstrances, rendered him more conciliatory. 'All right, my boy, all right,' he grumbled, as he fell heavily onto the bed.

'*Ca ira, ca ira,*' the Duke hummed cheerfully.

'Thou art part of the family because the little lass wants it, but it is quite a surprise ...'

'In truth, papa,' Egalité interrupted, just to change the subject. 'why hast thou come back so soon from Nantes?'

'Ah, little strumpet, thou didst not expect to see thy father unexpectedly. To tell thee everything, things did not work out in Nantes with Citizen Carrier. One cannot get on with a citizen like him, one might say he is ashamed to perform his profession! Rather than guillotine in broad daylight, on the square, he shuts the condemned in big boats and waits for night to drop them in the middle of the river.'

A murmur of reprobation greeted this news.

'For myself, I like to kill properly,' he continued. 'Death without bloodshed is no good and sets a bad example for enemies of the Republic. Neither seen nor known in a boat and come what may! It is not work...By the way,' he said to Florigny, returning to his main preoccupation at that moment, 'what is thy profession?'

'My profession?' repeated the young man, embarrassed, guessing that Citizen Graillat had not had the time to explain fully the situation to her husband. It would be necessary to use tact in revealing it to him, little by little, so as not to give him a stroke. He thought of Citizen Champignoux's role in their earlier acquaintance and threw himself bravely into his answer. 'I have lost my profession' he said. 'I was tutor in a formerly titled family. Ah! Those beastly children never stopped tormenting me, but I had to earn my bread and that of my poor mother, widowed so young! When my masters emigrated, I found myself in the street. Times are hard and it is not easy to get a post, unless one is recommended by an influential patriot...like you.'

'I will recommend thee,' Graillat cried, 'but I understand what thou hast just said, that thou knowest not how to do anything useful. Books, music and good manners do not feed a man and we have no more need of all that. Thou needest a serious profession. Starting tomorrow, thou art going to tour the workshops instead of lounging in bed.'

Florigny promised to look for work, but although now provided with valid papers, he could not risk being seen in the street, fearing that his bearing and speech would betray him. Graillat finished by noticing this reluctance and showed his anger in plain language. He called him an idler and reproached him his bread and lodging. Every evening after drinking his bottle, he lost his temper and threatened to enlist his son-in-law in the Republic's armies. Egalité wept, her mother too, Epanimondas

also, because his father gave him a little more than his usual ration of clouts.

Weary of hearing himself insulted by a father-in-law who grew more irascible each day, Florigny told Egalité of an idea that had come to him. 'As your father has told me, there is no longer any question of teaching people good manners; so why not teach them bad ones?' he said.

'What do you mean, darling?' his wife asked him anxiously.

'It's very simple. There exist still in Paris aristocrats, members of the upper middle class, priests, old rich who still have a little money, but who hide in their houses, afraid to go out for fear of being recognized and denounced as suspect. Horrified by the new manners, they refuse to change theirs and are incapable of adapting themselves to the modes of the day. Our role would be to teach them to imitate the true patriots. What a service we should provide them! Transform these dowagers into *tricoteuses*, these gentlemen into *sans-culottes*! Teach them to sing the *Carmagnole* and *Ca ira*, accustom them to kissing Marat's bust with fervour and to drink without shame with the local Jacobins!'

Egalité looked at her husband with admiration: 'No one but you comes up with such ideas! It's inspired ...'

When he was informed of this project, Citizen Graillat pulled it apart a little, then finished by approving it, seeing in it a means of regeneration useful to the Republic. His wife triumphantly applauded it. 'Have I not told thee that lad was a clever one?' she said.

One month later in the Veille rue du Temple, at the place where Brutus Graillat once sold meat, his daughter and son-in-law opened, under the sign of the *Good Patriot*, a school of civic comportment and republican manners. Florigny had written a prospectus that Epaminondas, let loose in Paris, slid under doorways. The first days went by without pupils other than a

poor girl, frantic at the thought that that anyone could ask her to drink a glass of blood to save her father who had just been arrested. They killed a chicken, and Egalité made her drink its blood in gulps, mouthful by mouthful, while lavishing words of almost maternal encouragement on her. As the poor creature seemed to be starving, she made her a present of fowl for which she refused payment. This good deed bought them luck, for soon the clients began flowing in.

At the beginning it was necessary to show their pupils an angelic patience. Never before had pupils showing so little aptitude been seen. The Duchess of Buzenval's granddaughters took more than a month to learn how to dance correctly the *Carmagnole* and to eat with a knife. The young Baron de Marsupiaux, rendered orphan by the scaffold, sung the *Marseillaise* so lugubriously as to deceive no one with regard to his sentiments. The republican catechism entered with difficulty these reluctant brains, already taxed by having to remember the new calender. Young girls and women made up the *Good Patriot's* principal clientele; but they did not abandon the principles of upbringing they had received without pain and regret. Florigny and his wife took every kind of trouble to reform these scatterbrains who, five minutes after their lessons, forgot three quarters of what they had learned.

'Let us see some vulgarity, Citizen Rassignac!' Florigny repeated without respite to one of the least gifted. 'We are not at Versailles. Thou must not be so stiff! Laugh without restraint when someone tells thee a daring joke! No, no, no, don't cover thy mouth when thou yawnest ... That is not done anymore: thou hast to yawn openly and loudly ... Thou hast beautiful teeth: here is thy chance to show them ... Eh! over there, Citizen Arnouville, thou holdest thyself so badly! Fists on thy hips, please, like this ... Stand firmly on thy feet and recite those ugly, coarse words and oaths that my father-in-law taught thee yesterday ...'

'Oh citizen, it is unseemly,' protested the poor woman,

blushing.

'Nothing is unseemly for a true republican. Come on, a little effort of memory ... The voice throatier, thou must roll the *r*'s less ... And thou, citizen Morency, the tone of voice higher and the legs too! Bare the left breast a little and the right fist on the hip ... No, not like that, as if thou wert about to dance the minuet ... There, there, a little more awkwardness in thy gestures and fall harder on the floor rather than seeming as if thou wert about to take flight ... Thou must laugh a little, Citizen Serquignolles: good patriots are always jolly even on empty stomachs ... Fear not, at four o'clock thou wilt be served a light meal that will revive thy strength...Good, good, Citizen Blérancourt, thou hast ability. If thou continuest like that, thou willst be able to appear with success at the Vegetables Feast ... And thou, Citizen Goujonnet, remember that thy grandfather was Marshal Richelieu's cook before making his fortune and buying a marquissate: recapture thy ancestor's frank and simple manners!'

The old were the stubbornest pupils; often it was necessary to give them private lessons that the majority were unable to afford, asking for delays in settlement. They remained deaf to Florigny's exhortations urging them to make efforts to adapt themselves to new ideas. 'It is impossible for us to change our habits and manners,' they complained.

'I know' Florigny said. 'It is for that that you are here. Education is a second nature and nature an absence of education. One must forget everything!'

'Forgetting everything is too hard!' groaned an old couple whom Florigny advised to renounce the *Good Patriot* and go visit the Zoo. 'Look at the monkeys,' he said, 'observe them well and do what they do. Monkeys are perfect citizens because they are close to nature.'

'But we are not monkeys!' exclaimed the indignant old couple.

'No, but you must begin, in looking at them, by simple things. For example, learn to scratch yourselves.'

'Scratch ourselves?'

'Yes, that appears easy and yet I am sure neither of you knows how to scratch yourselves in a truly republican manner. Before you go to see how the monkeys do it, I am going to ask my father-in-law to show you how to scratch yourselves, and also how to drink and wipe your mouths with the back of your hands and then emit a sigh of pleasure ...'

Brutus Graillat took responsibility for teaching the men the correct way to smoke a pipe, blowing the smoke into their neighbours' noses, drinking great glassfuls of wine and throwing the last drops on the floor, and also tapping the table vigorously to make a point. His wife taught ladies of a certain age the fishwife's vocabulary; the more skilful she instructed in fine points of knitting so that they could bring their work to the *Tricoteuses'* Club.

Within months, the *Good Patriot* experienced a vogue, that transcended its founders' hopes. Pupils came from every part of Paris to learn the new manners and acquire the new language. Imperceptibly the *Good Patriot* developed from being a school into a club and even an assembly hall after Graillat, scenting the opportunity, rented the next house, confiscated as an emigrant's property, for purposes of enlargement. On the top floor, he installed former nuns who made cockades and Phrygian bonnets, while in the cellars, the more fortunate clients were served copious meals, accompanied by plenty of wine, after which the diners saw the future in less sombre colours. Rather than quarrel, Graillat and Champignoux abandoned their municipal rivalries to exploit jointly the goldmine discovered by the astute young man to whom Graillat would have given all his daughters, had he any others. The ex-Oratorian looked after the establishment's accounts, keeping a severe watch on the exact payment of lessons, only granting

extensions to the prettiest clients, according them a notable mercy on occasion, by accepting a payment in kind. Graillat marvelled at the dexterity with which he extracted silver and above all gold from the most recalcitrant. A main source of profit, as clandestine as the dining table in the cellars, was the awarding of certificates of civics and often of false papers, giving the *Good Patriot's* clients a better chance of survival than could be had merely by adopting the tone of the day.

This service explained the success of the *Good Patriot*. But, in addition, it was also the last salon where one could enjoy conversation. Pretty women, prominent men's mistresses, made appointments to exchange news and sometimes lovers. Some asked ladies of the old order for advice with regard to personal appearance or on how to keep a lover or keep away a husband. The Graillats were one of the establishment's main attractions, truer than nature and inimitable in their natural vulgarity. The former butcher's wild, illuminated appearance, as he exhibited his build and let clients feel his muscles, roused raptures. Pupils pushed him to drink and recount his exploits; his rusticity amused; there were many requests to him for imitations of his colleagues, an art where he revealed an unsuspected talent as a mimic. Constantly brushing past so many pretty women made his eyes bulge, putting him in a state approaching apoplexy. His wife was the delight of a swarm of young bloods who made the *Good Patriot* their headquarters and spent their days and sometimes their nights there. They laughed when she reproached them their idleness, they flew into her arms when she threatened to throw them out, they told her their affairs of the heart, wept on her breast, soliciting her advice and taking advantage of her good heart to get money out of her. She grumbled, half-touched, half-annoyed, by these frolicsome and demonstrative young people who knew so well how to cajole her. Ought she not to be their mother, considering that most of them had theirs in prison?

Thus, little by little, the *Good Patriot*, officially a school of instructions in Jacobinism, became the meeting place for Paris's Royalists who, while covering the Graillats with protestations of love, boldly plotted against the republican regime. Too much was said in the school in too mysterious an air for the Committee of Public Safety not to be warned by a sneak of the singular things going on there. Robespierre's fall and execution saved the *Good Patriot's* tenants from arrest. The Graillats never knew that they had risked their heads and the Widow's blade through implication in a Royalist conspiracy.

Following the 9 Thermidor, the busts of Robespierre and Marat were broken, the patriotic engravings disappeared and the Graillats, survivors of an interesting but now bygone epoch, were encouraged to make themselves more discreet in their attire no less than in their remarks. Soon they were relegated to a comfortable flat where, together with their friend Champignoux, they busied themselves with the provisions and the accounts. Florigny engaged an Italian, inventor of a special sorbet which made the *Good Patriot* rival the *Frascati* and the *Tivoli*.

At the beginning of the Consulate, Florigny, richer than he had ever been under the *Ancien Regime*, decided that the moment had come for a change of occupation. He closed the *Good Patriot* and reopened the family residence on the rue de Grenelle-Saint-Germain. He installed himself there, at first modestly, then in a certain splendour. Spending so much time each day with survivors of the Court, Egalité had acquired such good manners that she revealed herself perfectly apt at maintaining her new rank. For her, her parents that was now a source of embarrassment. One morning, the Duke, now auditor of the State Council, proposed them an honourable retirement. He had just bought a large amount of land in Burgundy and he offered to settle them there, together with Epanimondas, now Charlot once more. As they hesitated to move to their country,

having never before ventured beyond the Marais, Florigny patiently enumerated all the charms they would find in their new rural setting: domestic servants, carriages, horses, grooms, gardeners, good food and calm.

‘But what shall I find to do there, if I can no longer run my household?’ objected the ex-citizen, now Madame Graillat.

To help her accept, he advised her to invite some of her old friends from the *Tricoteuses*’ Club, widows without resources, who could serve her as companions. As for his father-in-law, he advised him to take some of his unemployed colleagues with whom he could reminisce about the old days while drinking the excellent local wine. The key to the cellar decided Graillat. But still he wondered. ‘Flunkeys and carriages, being called *Monsieur* and *Madame*,’ he shuddered, ‘what an idea ...’

‘Bah!’ replied his wife, philosophically, ‘we have seen so much. It will be hard at the beginning, but we’ll get used to it ...’

[*]For me, already, the guillotine is ready
If I fall again into the hands of the patriots.
What matters it if I lose my head again?
For I’ve already lost it to Charlotte...

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David Platzer is a belated Twenties Dandy-Aesthete with a strong satirical turn, a disciple of Harold Acton and the Sitwells whose writing has appeared in the *New Criterion*, the *British Art Journal*, the *Catholic Herald*, *Apollo*, and more.

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