

COMTESSE MARIA  
ECUREUIL DES  
CHENES  
AND THE  
REVOLUTION

**BY**

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**July,** hot, but not yet like August, which often settles with a vengeance, driving heat and humidity. July, is hot, and we still welcome summer, blooms are in full growth, the grass still holds the green of spring, and each day there are new surprises from mother nature. I am spending the early

hours as I often do seeking out new flowers to cross, new parents to coax into producing hopefully exceptional offspring. When looking for good plant parents, one must look carefully and with total disregard for the surroundings, one look for subtleties, for shades of uniqueness, and one tries to match them in

hopes of that one of a kind.

## 1 BACK AGAIN

So there I am, plant after plant, with my pollen dishes, my note books, my tweezers, my little numbered labels, walking about as if I were some artist seeking the next note or the right hue or mixture of oils. When from the top of the fences I hear:

*“Allons enfants de la Patrie  
Le jour de gloire est arrivé  
Contre nous de la tyrannie  
L'étendard sanglant est levé (bis)  
Entendez vous dans les campagnes  
mugir ces féroces soldats  
Ils viennent jusque dans vos bras,  
égorger vos fils, vos compagnes  
Aux armes citoyens !  
Formez vos bataillons!*

*Marchons, marchons, qu'un sang  
impur abreuve nos sillons.”*

I look up and there is Antnee, with a little beret, a red, white and blue tricolor tagged on it and with his arms out stretched and voice at full volume.

I looked up and right at him and responded when he completed his verse:

“What my dear friend are you up to this day?”

He sat atop a ginkgo branch and looked down upon me and said:

“Well good morning to you too Sir, and Happy Bastille Day!”

I suddenly realized that it was July 14<sup>th</sup> as I had already written in my field book. But why this relationship

between Antnee and the French, this I had never heard before. There was that French squirrel with Washington, but he returned if I remember. But as usual I thought it best to let Antnee explain, for it was his way. And so he continued:

“And we remember one of our greatest family members on this day, for she was a true heroine, she placed her life at risk for the people, for her nation, and she was also well loved here as well, for she came here and it here where she rests. A true heroin sir, and an example for us all.”

## 2 COMTESSE MARIA

Antnee now began his tale:

“Sir, I believe you recall the great Jean Pierre Menard Ecureuil Comte des Chenes, who fought with Nathaniel

Squirrel and with General Washington?”

I replied:

“Indeed I do, that really was a wonderful tale. But how does this relate to him?”

Antnee continued:

“Well Sir, you see, after the peace with England, General Lafayette stayed in American for a few years as did Jean Pierre. Then in 1785 they both returned to France and were accorded hero’s welcome wherever they went. After a while they settled down on Lafayette’s estate where Jean Pierre started a family. His eldest was a daughter which he named Maria, actually Maria Martha was her full first name, since he used Martha in recognition of General Washington’s

wonderful wife, Martha, who provided him with warm chestnuts after many a cold night in Morristown. Maria was born in October of 1788.

### 3 FAREWELL TO JEFFERSON

I then asked Antnee if Maria had met any of the great people when in Paris. Well, that was like uncorking a shaken champagne bottle! He began:

“Greats Sir, well let me begin, just who do you think came just after her birth, well Sir, none other than Thomas Jefferson! Yes indeed Sir, for he was Ambassador, and when he heard that Jean Pierre had a daughter, well Sir, he was over in no time at all. You see Lafayette and Jefferson, why Sir they were indeed good friends.”

“unfortunately Jean Pierre became ill in the Spring of 1789, and passed Sir, a

you squirrel, it was a sad day, and as his oldest, Maria became Comtesse, taking title and land, she now had control of all the oaks sirs, a truly powerful but young squirrel. Mr. Jefferson came to call and offered his condolences, she was so happy, for he became like a second father to her, a second father indeed.”

I then interjected:

“Well what did she think of him when in Paris, how was he perceived, I have many questions.”

Antnee looked a bit annoyed but it was his way. He replied:

“Why Sir, Mr. Jefferson was a great man, he loved everyone, and being in France at that time was so stimulating. The salons, the intelligent talk, the

breath of ideas, why Sir so enlightening.”

“But Sir, she loved the Jefferson children, so much fun while Maria herself was so young. Then she would sit and listen to the talk, why Sir, the come and go of so many famous people. And Mr. Jefferson himself, why he had so many books, just like you Sir, and in Paris one could get so many more. And Mr. Jefferson loved the French, unlike many Americans who were more shall we say still English at heart.”

“Then one day Sir , old Gouverneur Morris showed up, he was from New York like you Sir, and a very wise man, he Sir had written the final version of the Constitution, a great man, but unfortunately never was able to be elected, he was a believer in a strong central government, and he and

Jefferson would often not see eye to eye shall we say.”

Then Antnee started giggling to himself. I tried to stop him and asked:

“What is so funny?”

He kept it up but at a lower paces and stutters as he responded:

“Sir, the thought of eye to eye, a figure of speech, why Sir, look at me, just look at me, can any squirrel ever talk eye to eye, no way, we have eyes on the sides of our heads, good for seeing threats but, well Sir, imagine if Morris and Jefferson, well Sir, they could never see eye to eye!”

He then went into another laughing fit. I had never seen a squirrel laugh like this, in fact never seen one laugh at all. I was thinking more of the laughing

and then it hit me too, eye to eye, and I laughed also.

Antnee slowly recovered. I then asked:

“So tell me about Morris, why was he there and what did he do?”

Antnee replied:

“Well Morris was representing American business interests, you see he spoke French, and Sir, he had a wooden leg, they say from jumping from some young lady’s window when her husband returned, well Sir, I gather he was a bit of a ladies man, you know what I mean Sir?”

I replied:

“I gather as much, but what of Maria?”

He continued:

“Well Sir, Maria was young, and many say quite attractive, sort of blonde grey hair, broad of hips, good teeth....”

I stopped him and said:

“Antnee, I do not need a detailed description of the alluring young squirrel, you are wandering again, just tell me of Morris, he sounds of interest.”

He caught himself and continued:

“Well Sir, Maria and Mr. Morris became quite good friends, for several reasons. Mr. Morris has known Maria’s father, and also Maria had befriended many of the young ladies in Paris, and Sir, don’t be harsh, but it was through this acquaintance that Mr. Morris was shall we say introduced into Parisian



Society, and very exclusive Society if I say so myself Sir.”

I responded:

“Oh she set him up with the “hot babes” is that what she did?”

Antnee replied:

“Um, well, yes, if you say so, but remember Sir this is France.”

“Also Sir, this friendship lasted a long while, you see Mr. Morris would return as Ambassador in 1792 and stay until 1794, a very important time Sir, that I shall get to in a bit.”

“You see Sir, Mr. Morris was a very powerful man, very influential, and he would be a great assistance to Maria and her causes, as she would be to Mr. Morris, for Maria was to become a

strong ally of America. Because very shortly after his arrival, the Bastille would fall, a day remembered but also a day feared.”

#### **4 FALL OF THE BASTILLE (JULY 1789)**

Antnee became quite concerned as he approached the discussion of Bastille Day. I said:

“You know my friend, on the one hand you seem to relish in the ceremony of Bastille Day but on the other hand you seem concerned by it.”

Antnee rolled his eyes around, in a way only a squirrel can do, you see their eyes are on the sides of the heads not on the front, and looking at these rolling side mounted eyeballs is a bit disconcerting. He then said:

“Well Sir, we do have fun with the beret and song, and all that stuff, but when we retell Maria’s tale it is not so much filled with anything but fear. You see, Sir, on that day she was in Paris, at the Tuilleries, a fine garden indeed, and she was visiting some friends who lived on the palace grounds. It was a warm July day, you know Sir, Paris is a bit like New York in the summer, hot, and a bit humid, but not too bad if you are in the shade and higher up on a tree. So there she was, when suddenly they hear shouts from a distance. Now Maria was young, even for us squirrels, Sir, so she was inquisitive. She and a couple of her Palace friends went off to see what was happening. They could hear that the noise was from the Bastille area, and when the bounced from roof top to roof top, the got there in just a few

minutes. Then Sir, what they saw was horrific.”

“Maria was watching as the crowd stormed through the Bastille, and they dragged the captain of the guards and six of the guards to the street, where the mob proceeded to execute them. Maria remembers the date well. She was the go between with General Lafayette, for he had been appointed what would be Chief of the Paris Guards. Lafayette sent Maria to see what was happening and when she returned she said to Lafayette”

“General, they have captured the Bastille, the crowd has guns, ammunition, they are wiled, and General they have brutally executed the captain of the guards the six guards with him, they just executed them, no trial, no explanation, why General, it is madness!”

Lafayette responded:

“Maria, calm yourself, the people see this as a symbol of tyranny, as oppression, they are doing what they see necessary, you will see, they will regain their stature.”

Maria responded:

“But General, I have great fear, why they behaved like wild animals, like some creatures seeking blood, not meat, and in fact, worse than wild animals. I am afraid General that your optimism may have no basis in reality.”

She got even more concerned and continued:

“Why General, they beheaded the seven men, cut their heads off, like

some vicious hawk, but not to eat, just to destroy, and then General the crowd put their heads on stakes and they paraded around, they walked about and all cheered as they saw the bloody heads! Why General, a fury has been let loose, you must flee, truly my General, we all must flee!”

Lafayette was silent, but within moments he was approached by cheering members of the crowd that had stormed the Bastille, their leader approached Lafayette and said:

“General, we have for you the key to the Bastille, see to it that it is never used again!”

Lafayette embraced the citizen and said:

“Citizens of France, this is indeed a day for rejoicing, we are free at last

from the scourge of that hellhole. I shall be certain to keep this key from ever being used again.”

At which point they all shouted approval.

Maria turned to Lafayette and whispered:

“General, I fear that you have let loose a viper whose sting shall point many unto death! General, I pray I am wrong, but I can sense that this response is but the first of many which will just result in death after death. This, General, is not the American Revolution, this the letting loose of the monsters from Hell.”

I stopped Antnee and said:

“So it appears that Maria saw what was to happen. Why did Lafayette not see

the same, why did he not listen, why did he accept the key of the Bastille stained in the blood of men who had surrendered, in a sense innocent blood?”

Antnee replied:

“Why Sir, that is a question we ask ourselves again and again. Clearly Washington would never have tolerated that, and Lafayette was beloved by Washington, and clearly Maria recognized it for what it was Sir, the beginning of true evil. Those heads on spikes Sir, they were symbols, and never in the American Revolution did such acts occur, never Sir.”

Antnee was silent, one could see that this was upsetting, I had never seen him that way and he had been through many tales. He continued:

“Maria tried to tell Lafayette, she loved him like a father, but he was one with the moment. She never stopped her love and admiration, but from that moment on she was committed to save lives if she could. For she saw this just getting worse.”

I replied:

“Why Antnee, you have a great point. I wonder what made these people so different?”

Antnee replied:

“A questions for the ages, Sir, a question for the ages.”

Antnee then said:

“Well Sir, by September many were concerned. The Bastille had let loose violence that no one had expected.

Maria had learned much before her father passed but she had not expected the violence. She knew of war, the Revolution and General Washington, but that was between soldiers, this, well Sir, this was changing.”

Antnee continued:

“Well Sir, Mr. Jefferson had to return in late September of 1789, and Maria went to bid him and his children a safe journey. There is a record of their talk, Sir, and it places a dark cloud on what was to come.”

Antnee went on to recall the conversation that Maria had with Jefferson.

“Well Maria and Mr. Jefferson had a few moments of conversation in his small garden. Maria said:”

“Mr. Jefferson, you have lived through a revolution in America, but I fear that what we are starting here may be much more severe. The French, Sir, are not Americans, they have many years of built up resentment, to the nobility, to the clergy, unlike America where the enemy was in a sense a distant king, here we may have those close to us, it becomes hard to distinguish who we are revolting against, my fear Sir is we revolt against each other.”

Jefferson replied:

“Comtesse, your point is well taken, and I would add the ideas of Rousseau, Voltaire, and the many others; they are the words of those who have not practiced power, they are the words all too often of those seeking to overthrow power. That may have deadly consequences. We had Tories,

loyalists who were remaining with the King, they left and returned to where that political existence worked. For the most part, we are becoming a country of Americans, regional yes, but ultimately Americans.”

Maria replied:

“Mr. Jefferson, I shall keep you informed. I have befriended Gouverneur Morris, and he has agreed to forward my concerns. I am worried about General Lafayette, you see he believes in this Revolution, but he sees it as an incremental change. There are others who I hear, I can go places he cannot, and what I hear is upsetting. I hear the cries of Danton, of Marat, and of others who are arising, men of some education, writers, but not men who have led others to success through trials. My fear is that there is no General Washington, there is no Mr.

Jefferson, Mr. Madison, or Mr. Morris. They are men driven by revenge, by power, and they have no idea where they want to go, no true vision.”

Jefferson replied:

“Comtesse, you are quite correct, but let us pray that this process does not cost lives.”

She replied:

“My fear Mr. Jefferson, is that little men can cause great flows of blood. I truly fear for France, and I fear for General Lafayette and his family. Have a safe journey back, and please send my best wishes to General Washington and his wonderful wife, my namesake.”

The two hugged and Jefferson returned to America. Maria was left with a deep sense of dread.

## 5 MEETING ROBESPIERRE

Antnee was now on a roll. He continued the history with the flight of Louis XVI. He said:

“Well Sir, in June of 1791, King Louis tried to escape, driven by the wife of his, that Austrian woman. I gather from my knowledge that these Austrian can be rather stubborn and strong willed. Louis you see Sir, well he was somewhat what you call wimpy, and she drove him to leave but under circumstance which would lead to capture.”

“Maria, Sir, was spending more time around the Palace, trying to gather information. By this time she had almost a hundred other friends, yes squirrels, who assisted her, she had a wonderful network, trying to

understand where this was going. Why Sir she was becoming a veritable Mata Hari! Imagine, she had access to almost all the private suites, she was confidants to many, and she was more aware than any of the deadly dangerous game which was being played out in all France. You see Sir, her “agents” if we can call them that Sir, were providing information from all over the country, from Normandy to Marseille, from Lyons to Bordeaux. Why Sir, the Revolution was spreading, people saw land, they saw wealth, they saw freedom but not what was seen in America, it was freedom at the expense of those in power! Sir, I believe it is safe to say that Maria was clearly the first to recognize the evils from this Revolution.”

“In August of 1791 she is told that she should meet one Robespierre, who just moved to Rue Saint Honore, just a

short distance from the Tuilleries. Why Sir her, shall we call them “friends” Sir, well her friends had been tracking him amongst many others. So she investigates, she climbs up and outside his rooms, she sees a well-dressed man, short of stature, intense, crisp looks, never smiling, always working on speeches, and with people coming and going. He was not Marat, the man of the bloody pen, not the rather rotund Danton, that lawyers turned radical who lived across the Seine, this man had a look of true evil, Sir, true evil. Maria could tell at first glance, and she felt the tension.”

## **6 KING ATTEMPTS ESCAPE (JUNE 20, 1791)**

Antnee now turned to other issues. I could tell by his pacing about, waving his arms. I had seen this before. He continued:



“Why Sir, the dumbest thing happened when the King and Queen decide to escape, June 1791, if I recall, for until then there was a chance to keep a monarchy, but alas, the poor King, driven by his Austrian wife, load all their goods in a gaudy carriage and accompanied in a manner which could only be seen as an affront to his subjects, sets out to escape France. Not that he got very far. But alas Sir this was the turning moment.

## **7 CONVERSATION WITH TOM PAINE (SEPTEMBER 1791)**

I then asked what other people Maria had met. He replied:

“Sir, many people indeed, in Paris at that time there were many coming and going, seeing what was happening with this Revolution. But one who came and

looked particularly for Maria was Thomas Paine, that very same Thomas Paine who wrote Common Sense, who met and befriended Jean Pierre, in fact the two were old friends. Indeed Sir, Mr. Paine was a fine man, a bit impractical Sir, but a fine man. You see Sir he had just finished writing the Rights of Man in London and the King’s men were after him, so where does he go, frying pan to fire, but Mr. Paine did not see it that way. He arrived in Paris in April 1791 I believe and who does he see first, well Maria, Sir, yes indeed, for he was such a fine friend of her father.”

Then Antnee continued:

“Mr. Paine, Sir, why he was an idealist, a man who saw things a pure extremes, never saw the grey, the shadows, the in between. Why I recall a

conversation Maria had with him after he write the Rights of Man, and the bad words by Burke in London regarding that work. Why Maria said:

“Mr. Paine, I have read your book, it is in many ways like Rousseau, a book of ideals, but Sir, the reality of life is often not so clear.”

Paine was always one for an argument, and especially with friends, so he took no umbrage from her comment but saw it as an opportunity to expound his ideas even further. He replied:

“Ah my young friend, we must set out standards of freedom, men have rights, and the state, such as this very state here in France with a King, distorts those rights, each man has his own rights, and together as a government of equals we can govern ourselves best.”

Maria said:

“Mr. Paine you have written, if I may quote you, as follows:

*“The more perfect civilization is, the less occasion has it for government, because the more does it regulate its own affairs, and govern itself; but so contrary is the practice of old governments to the reason of the case, that the expenses of them increase in the proportion they ought to diminish. It is but few general laws that civilized life requires, and those of such common usefulness, that whether they are enforced by the forms of government or not, the effect will be nearly the same. If we consider what the principles are that first condense men into society, and what are the motives that regulate their mutual intercourse afterwards, we shall find, by the time we arrive at what is called government,*

*that nearly the whole of the business is performed by the natural operation of the parts upon each other.*

*Man, with respect to all those matters, is more a creature of consistency than he is aware, or than governments would wish him to believe. All the great laws of society are laws of nature. Those of trade and commerce, whether with respect to the intercourse of individuals or of nations, are laws of mutual and reciprocal interest. They are followed and obeyed, because it is the interest of the parties so to do, and not on account of any formal laws their governments may impose or interpose. But how often is the natural propensity to society disturbed or destroyed by the operations of government! When the latter, instead of being ingrafted on the principles of the former, assumes to exist for itself, and acts by partialities of favor and oppression, it becomes the*

*cause of the mischiefs it ought to prevent.”*

She continued:

“So Mr. Paine, you seem to be in favor of little if any government, and further that you feel that there are shall we say natural laws, laws of nature, which come to play in human interactions of all kinds, including even commerce, and that what is best is to let them flow.”

Paine replied:

“Yes Mademoiselle, you are correct. Every time we get large governments, especially hereditary ones, we have chaos.”

Maria continued:

“Then Mr. Paine, I suspect that you believe that this Revolution in France will end well, yet I tell you, having seen the blood in the eyes of the people at the Bastille, men and women, I saw a savage animal, one large savage animal, arise, and Sir I have seen such animals in all guise, perhaps your views may lack an understanding of that savagery, that you focus too much on eliminating the wealth of those who inherit, and not looking closely at the evils of the masses.”

Paine did not know how best to answer. He saw in Burke a defender of the king, but in Maria there was a voice of reason for the calamity of the crowd. He had not been in France when the Bastille fell, he spoke no French, yet he felt the Revolution was a worthy cause as was the Revolution in America. He focused on royalty, he

did not focus on who was to take their place.

Maria and he spoke at length, many days, many times, and as she learned more of what was happening, and as Paine was seduced by the positions and praise he obtained, she saw him lured into the trap of this ever more evil crowd, a naive man drawn into a trap.

## **8 MEETING WITH NAPOLEON (AUGUST 1792)**

Antnee was now at a heightened level of intensity. He continued:

“The Terror Sir, the Terror had begun.”

I stopped him and asked:

“Antnee, just what was this Terror?”

He replied:

“Why Sir, they began executions, the guillotine Sir, the cutting off of the heads! How cruel humans can be at times. If you were in any way suspect Sir, off with your head, a word, a look, a twist of the phrase Sir, all made you suspect. Then off with your head! There is a tale Sir of Maria in the Tuilleries, I believe it is August of 1792, and Sir, you would never guess. Let me tell the tale”

Antnee then continued the tale. Maria was in the Tuilleries, sitting atop a bench, when up came a young but quite short Captain, in a somewhat ruffled and worn uniform. He sat down upon the bench, and in a Corsican accent said to Maria:

“Mon petit, you look so sad, what is it that disturbs you?”

Maria was surprised, and then he laid out some pecans, which she loved, and down she came and ate two and then turned to the Capitan and said:

“Captain, it is this Terror, this time of decapitating men and women, for what reason, for what purpose? The King just sits, he does nothing, and death is a daily event. What is your name Captain, you sound as if you are from Corsica?”

The dark skinned young man responded:

“I am Captain Napoleon Bonaparte, and I too wonder where all this will lead. I wonder who will gain power in the end?”

Maria said:

“I suspect that power will always be gained at the end of a gun, that the guillotine is a distraction, brutal, but a distraction. It will be men like you Captain who will eventually gain power, men of arms.”

Napoleon turned and replied:

“Young friend, I suspect you speak with great wisdom. From where do you come?”

They then spoke at length, of Lafayette, of Maria’s father and Washington. Then Napoleon said:

“You see, General Washington proves your theory, a leader, who got where he is by victories, victories at the end of a gun.”

Maria was somewhat startled by not what she heard but the way it was

stated, she saw a man who saw means and power but not purpose, other than sole aggrandizement. She turned and said:

“Captain Napoleon, General Washington is a great man because he did not want power, he was asked, and he will relinquish it when he has served his time. Power Captain can be a disease, if used for a purpose and for a time it can be positive, if however sought for and used solely for personal returns, it is a malignant disease which ultimately kills the holder. So good Captain, beware such absolute power, it has within it its own seeds of destruction.”

Napoleon replied:

“So pessimistic, when there is such tumult, there is opportunity. I must go, it was a pleasure to talk.”

Maris often wondered what would become of a man like Napoleon.

It was now mid-August 1792, the heat was upon Paris, and the crowds went from day to day. Danton, Marat, Robespierre, and others argued back and forth. The Assembly met day after day. They were purging all those whom they disliked.

When Maria heard that the Assembly was to order Lafayette to relinquish his command on the next day, she knew that she must do something, and do it immediately. She first went to Adrienne and told her and then she knew she must get to Lafayette. For on the morrow, August 17, 1792, he would be commanded to be arrested and brought back to Paris, and Maria knew the result would be execution. She was in her own terror.

Thus off she went, hundreds of miles, over tree tops, hour after hour, making 20 to 25 miles an hour, stretching every muscle, stopping only for water to keep here going. Towards the Belgian border, Austrian controlled territory, always well ahead of the couriers from the Assembly in Paris with the orders, the sun coming up, now beating down, the hot August heat, as she ran, no flew from tree to tree, her muscles sore from lack of oxygen, they were working too hard, but she kept flying despite the searing muscles, the penetrating heat, the thirst, time was short, she must get there before the authorities!

I could see that Antnee was wrapped with this part of the tale, he was waving his small hands in the air, he was salivating in tune with the tension he was describing, the poor little

squirrel trying to beat the men of death to the good General!

Then Antnee slowed and he said:

“Then Sir she reached Lafayette, and scrambled atop the table around which he and his staff sat. She said:”

“general, General, the Assembly, it sets out this very day to arrest you, your men, to bring all back to Paris, to Paris and death, gentlemen, you are meant to be beheaded, upon return, you must flee, forward, for there you would be imprisoned, have a chance, but backwards, death, only death!”

Lafayette and his men were stunned. They had heard of the Terror but they had been at war. But what had they done. Then he recalled what Maria had told him when the Bastille fell, the evil in men’s hearts, and he knew what he

must do. He turned to his men and said:

“I believe Lady Maria has spoken well, we have no other chance if we want to see France recover than move forward and trust the Austrians. Death is certain if we stay and return, death without dignity, death without justice.”

They all agreed. Then Lafayette turned to Maria and said:

“Return to Paris, warn Adrienne, my children, especially George, they must be safe! We shall see one another again. My deepest thanks.”

They hugged, and Maria watched as under a white flag Lafayette and his officers walked across to the Austrian lines. It was an uncertain future.

I turned to Antnee and said:



“But Lafayette was arrested if I remember, held for years?”

Antnee replied:

“Indeed he was, but he lived.”

## 9 JACOBINS VS GIRONDINS, SANS CULOTTES AND SOCIETY

Antnee was now to tell me of details, I also recognized this didactic stance, details which were to him important, but which had less to do with his prime character. I shall relate a few, but for the most part what is worth the read is his interpretation of what we may have learned in history ourselves. What I am learning as I hear these tales, is that the telling shapes the facts more than I ever thought, and the perspective of the teller is even more critical.

Antnee turned to somewhat of a lecturer:

“you see Sir, there were the Jacobins, named after the church of Saint Jacques, James to us, where they assembled, that was Robespierre, then the Girodins, another group who hated Robespierre and he got revenge in 1793 by executing them, a bold move but it set up his own overthrow, then the Moutains, those who set high up in the Assembly and of course the san culottes, those who were common men and had straight legged pants as you wear sir, without culottes, leggings.”

“All of these small but powerful groups, and in fact many more. That was why the Revolution exploded into the terror. There was no true leader, no way to reach compromise. These men were driven by ideals, abstract

ideas which had a difficult time being implemented. Maria watched them, and she remembered her father's words, how the team of men, each a separate and distinct individual, could come together for a common deed and then go apart again, there being the need for the group but the respect and sanctity of the individual. The French Revolution never had that insight, that experience."

I sat for a bit and thought. For I had read many works explaining the Revolution, but Antnee had an observation somewhat different. It was not class warfare, it had no Marxist bent, it was not economic revolution, it was more children never having been taught manners. And this from a squirrel!

## **10 THE TERROR BEGINS (JULY 1792)**

Antnee sat back and an almost tearful look on his face. He continued:

"The Terror was a monumental evil. We blame Robespierre and Danton, but Marat and his poison pen were just as much to blame. These men were not Washington, Madison, Adams, Jefferson, they were base and I believe evil men, truly evil. Let me tell you what happened. Well starting in July of 1792, they began slowly but relentlessly to eliminate people, not just opponents but almost anyone. The guillotine, the guillotine. And Maria was there."

Antnee was again on a tear:

"And then, January 1793, they bring the King to trial and he is to be executed! Why? Maria was devastated. She had met the King once, not a very bright man, even for Kings,

something about the inbreeding Sir, you know, that was the problem of royalty, Mr. Paine was right but for the wrong reason, I guess he had to wait for Darwin and Mendel Sir. But it was a cold day, January in Paris is always cold, the King was thrown into a cart, driven to the guillotine, dragged up the steps, half clothed, shivering, his head bare, his belly jutting out from his trousers, and then thrown down onto the wooden guillotine block, still fresh with blood from a dozen before him, his head locked, and Sir, gruesome, truly gruesome, and poor Maria watched from the roof top, and for her this was the final turning point, she must get Lafayette's family free and out of France!"

## **11 DEATH OF ROBESPIERRE (JULY 1794)**

I then asked Antnee:

"This sounds like an unstable plot of madmen. Robespierre seemed to be collapsing. Danton dead, Marat killed, thousands guillotined, Antnee, how did it end?"

Antnee again sat back for his exposition, and as he did so his beret fell to the ground, and he failed to notice it. He said:

"Well Sir, Comtesse Maria play a great part. You see, she had been observing Robespierre, and she saw the he was, shall we say losing it, he was falling apart, the man they called the Incorruptible, he was not corrupted, he was insane, Sir, what we now call paranoid, he saw enemies in every shadow. Thus did Maria see a way to end the bloodshed."

I stopped him and said:

“What could she have done? How could she bring an end to this?”

Antnee replied:

“Very simply, you see we can creep about, through small openings, and we can remove things that perhaps you seek to keep from others. That Sir she did.”

He continued:

“You see he had spoken at length with Mr. Paine after she had him released, for he was truly at death’s door Sir, truly at death’s door, and Paine and she agree<sup>43d</sup> that Robespierre must be stopped. The tale goes this way Sir:”

Maria says to Paine:

“Mr. Paine, this blood shed must stop, and stop now, how can we effect this good Sir?”

Paine replied:

“We must good lady expose the man, expose Robespierre to those who fear him, and then do so before he can strike them, we must give his enemies to tools to eliminate him.”

Paine continued:

“I know now that he sees all as enemies, and he will try to kill off everyone who he even thinks opposes him. We also know that he sits and plans this in the secrecy of his quarters, he places these plans in writing. Thus my Lady, we must get those plans and given them to those he threatens before he acts. Then we will neutralize this evil.”

Maria replied:

“Then Sir what shall I do?”

Paine replied:

“Good Lady, you must go to his rooms, secure your way in un-noticed, examine in detail his writings, and bring to me what we can use to show he has his evil intentions on those who can eliminate him. This may take a while, but I am certain this man will expose his evil ways.”

Antnee was now at full pitch. He came close with that long wet black nose, the whiskers just shaking, and the eyes, those side looking eyes now forcefully trained directly at me and said:

“Then Maria went off, to Robespierre’s rooms, and Sir, there was great danger, great danger Sir, for Robespierre had a dog, a vicious animal named Brount, a true beast Sir, a true beast!”

I replied:

“You know Antnee, when I lived in Paris I always saw women with dogs, not men, strange that he should have one, sounds like something an Englishman would do.”

Antnee became quite serious and replied:

“Why Sir, it was protection, Brount was known amongst many and a true protector of Robespierre, and for Maria to enter his rooms and search, why Sir that would expose her to great harm Sir, great harm. So off she went, and up the walls to the roof across from

Robespierre, and fortune shown on her, no Robespierre, but that monster Bront, alas he was there guarding the desk. She thought, how to get him away. She looked about and spied her friend Jacques Squirrel, sleeping in a nest on the chimney across from where she was. She jumped from two roof tops and scampered up to Jacque and said:

“Jacques! Jacques! C’est moi, Maria, c’est tres important, tres important!”

“Jacques rolled over Sir, still quite sleepy, you see Sir we are much like you, we sleep at night, and most squirrels do not like being disturbed but Jacques recognized Maria and awoke. He said:”

“Maria, why so much noise, cannot you not see that I am sleeping!”

She replied:

“Jacques, it is an emergency, I need help, I have to get into Robespierre’s room but we must get rid of Bront, that ugly dog of his, I need help now, please!”

Jacques replied:

“No problem, let me get a few friends, we can get him out.”

Jacques went off in and about five minutes came back with thirty squirrel friends, all somewhat sleepy, but all anxious to help. Jacques turned to Maria and said:

“Now what is the plan?”

She proceed to explain that the dog must be removed. To do that he must be taunted, distracted, and removed

from the room. That would take about ten of the group to lure him from the room, down the stairs, then another ten to make him run in all directions, and the remaining would be guards.

So off they went, a dozen squirrels went scampering up the side of the house, like an attack of killer ants, up gutters, stairs, vines, while ten remained on the ready, once Brout came chasing them, and another ten went through the attics to guard the hall way. Maria went with the first group, leading them towards the apartment, then she jumped to the top of the open window, and waited.

Jacques was the first to tease Brout, he jumped on the window sill, and ran to take a cookies left on the night stand making sure to knock a glass down. The dog jumped up, saw Jacques and began his assault, but by

that time three others went after the fruit on the bed stand, and Brout turned abruptly and went after them, smashing down the very stand he was to protect, and then three more sat at the window facing outwards, tails all aflutter, and off Brout went, through the window, down what could have been a fire escape and after the squirrels, one by one groups of three detoured him through the streets of Paris!

Alas, Maria had the chance to go through Robespierre's desk, paper after paper, Paine had said to look for incriminating documents, then in a brief second she saw his personal note book, opened it, and there on the very first page was what she needed, the list he had compiled to execute the remaining members of the Assembly! In his own hand, a writing well known to all. She grabbed it in her mouth,

then jumped up through the roof, saw Jacques, he smiled, and off she went into the Paris night, to the home of the first on his list, to his bedroom, his night stand, and sat there paper in hand letting her tail knock his water glass to the floor! He awoke, saw the list read it and immediately went in the early morning assembled all the others on the list. This would be Robespierre's last stand. He was now doomed.

In just a few days Robespierre was tried and executed, as he had executed so many, the date July 28, 1794. The Terror had burned out, and yet no one ever knew how the list got circulated. There were many rumors. Almost immediately the executions stopped, everyone took a breath, and waited. Adrienne was now safe thanks to Morris, who intervened time and again,

yet she was not totally free yet. Maria had more work to do.

## **12END OF REVOLUTION (JULY 1795)**

Adrienne and the girls were still imprisoned and George, Lafayette's son, he too must be saved. Maria had been working with Ambassador Morris, and they had managed to keep them from the guillotine, but poor Adrienne's sister had not been so lucky. For no reason, just because they were related to Lafayette, death and its stench lay across all of France. It was a sickness that Maria was truly detesting, her French heritage was no longer her pride, it became her shame, she thought more and more of America. She admired Morris, with his wooden leg, his foibles, yet he was a strong man, he terrified the leaders of the Revolution, why even Robespierre was fearful. Jefferson had no such



effect, and even memories of Franklin were of a kind man. Morris was what they called a New Yorker, hard spoken, blunt, abrupt, threatening when necessary, and yet he could do what many others could not. And Maria had a good friend in him.

### 13ESCAPE FROM FRANCE (AUGUST 1795)

Antnee sat back and was showing signs of exhaustion. He continued:

“Well Sir, after all the heads rolling, and General Lafayette in custody with the Austrians, and the good Lady Adrienne off to see him, there was young George Lafayette, or George Montier as he was to call himself, using his family name. Adrienne wanted him safe, he was to carry on the family name, and there was but

one place Sir, one safe harbor, back in America.”

“So Sir, Adrienne got passports for him from Gouverneur Morris, and she spoke with Maria, to help him north to Cherbourg, and to depart from there, a safe port. Maria and George then secretly left Paris, and with Maria watching the path, she and young George went from village to village, he on horse, and she from tree to tree, and tiresome journey, making 30 miles a day!”

I stopped him and asked:

“But Antnee, why Cherbourg, why not just north to Le Havre? Cherbourg is such a long journey, and across Normandy and Brittany.”

He replied:

“Good question Sir, well thought, for you see the tyrants running the Revolution were watching Le Havre, for it was at the mouth of the Seine. In Cherbourg he was safe, it was obscure, and Ambassador Morris had arranged for an American frigate to meet them there, it was all so secret Sir, quite secret.”

“It was a total of 210 miles, and took them most of a week, Sir, across the hedge row paths of Normandy and then out to the tip of the peninsula in northern Brittany to Cherbourg. It was August, but it was cool, for a French August, and Maria could see from tree to tree, assuring a clear and safe path for a mile at a time. They arrive at Cherbourg, and they saw the American frigate, it had guns and it look like a fast ship. But you see Sir, one must be careful, even when one suspects that there is little danger, always be aware.

So Maria went ahead and she scampered along the wharf, from rope-to-rope, being watched amusingly by some of the seamen, but she just played the role of a plain squirrel, a good advantage from time to time Sir. But you see Sir she was exposed, and she feared that any crazy seaman may want to try his musket on her, so she watched all about as she jumped.”

“She reached the American ship, and saw the captain on the bridge, he went inside to his cabin, so she swung about and down the ropes, as the crew laughed at what they thought were her antics, and then through the open window to land somewhat unceremoniously on the Captain’s table!”

I stopped him and said:

“Now wait a minute, did this Captain expect a squirrel to well just plop out of the clear air onto his table, these guys are somewhat strong willed.”

He replied:

“Ah Sir, I see your concern, the Captain you see Sir had orders, Ambassador Morris had told the Navy to expect such an occurrence, and you know Navy men, orders are orders.”

I then asked:

“So what happened, were they waiting for him, what did they know of Maria?”

Antnee wiggled his nose in that way he does when he gets a bit annoyed and replied:

“Sir, I am about to tell you all Sir, now just a little patience if we can, Sir. So

Maria looks up and there is the good Captain, in his blue coat looking all prim and proper, and he jumps back still surprised, and then Maria states:”

“Captain, I am Maria, well for you Americans, just Maria Squirrel, daughter of Captain Jean Pierre Squirrel, who fought with President Washington, you have been informed, n'est pas?”

The Captain as is often the case taken back by first that she is a squirrel, and then by her bluntness. Maria it seems is always short on words. The Captain recovered and replied:

“Mademoiselle Maria, I had orders to expect something out of the ordinary, directly from General, I mean President Washington, and you my fair young thing, are well out of the ordinary.”

Marian in her blunt and direct style replied:

“Captain, keep to the point, I have George de Lafayette out there at the end of the wharf, bedding some barrels, and I want to get your men to bring him aboard. I want it done in secret and now, do you understand.”

The Captain was taken aback, first a squirrel, and second a woman squirrel, giving a Captain of a ship of the line orders on his own vessel, but alas it was under command from Washington. So he responded:

“Yes Mademoiselle, and what do you suggest?”

Antnee stopped and looked up:

“Sir, you see, President Washington was well respected and his orders had

great weight Sir, great weight. And here was Maria, in charge of George, and he must be brought aboard this ship immediately, well Sir before he was discovered. Cherbourg was remote but this was an American man of war, a deadly frigate just a few dozen miles off the English coast as well.”

“So the plan was hatched, Sir, with Maria giving orders. You see Sir she had it all put together, she would provide a distraction, as well as surveillance, and three shipmen would go down to where the barrels were, with an empty one of their own, there they would get George in the barrel, and bring it back to the ship, roll it aboard, and then off they would go.”

“So Sir, plant in motion, Maria set out to the rigging and she hopped from ship to ship, with a great show of dexterity Sir, and veritable ballerina of

the rigging if you will, with all the men watching and laughing at her jumping, and they all tried to knock her down with apples, stones, clubs, and she got ever so close to get them to focus that at time Sir, she was in true peril, true peril indeed, but while she did this the three men got the barrel to George, got him in, rolled it up the plank to the ship, and when done, over jumped Maria, up went the walk, and to sea they went, the fastest time ever!”

“So out in the Channel and heading towards the Atlantic, George and Maria and the Captain, on the bridge, watched as the reached clear ocean and westward the went.”

After three weeks, and some difficult storms, they reached Boston, and George and Maria went across the Charles River to Cambridge and stayed with some family friends.

I asked Antnee what was Cambridge like in 1795. He replied:

“Well Sir, no MIT you know, but Harvard, yes it was there behind the walls, small, safe, secure, and back to teaching, ministers and some small number of men who studied a mix of things. Maria like the yard, great trees, and she appreciated being back again. George stayed in a home just off the yard, up what is now Brattle Street, they stayed there for a month, then they went on to New York, George was to meet Mr. Hamilton.”

I asked:

“You mean Alexander Hamilton, yes Sir, the very same, for he was a good friend of the General and he agreed to help George, and Mr. Hamilton was as you remember good friends with

Nathaniel, for he had passed already, and he knew Jean Pierre as well and was very anxious to meet them both. So off they went. They took a small ship, from Boston to New York, in those days a few days journey, around the cape, stopping in Provincetown, then across the waters of Long Island Sound, stopping at New Haven, then to New York, down the East River and landing, well Sir, if we remember correctly it was where the Seaport is now, there were many docks there. Mr. Hamilton was waiting the ships arrival.”

Antnee then recalled:

“Maria was amazed at New York, it was not Paris with the palaces and royal buildings, it was not the small town of Boston with surrounding swamps, or the forested Cambridge with dirt roads and carriage paths, it was smoke,

smells, docks, ships of all kinds, people down to the water’s edge, and this was on both sides of the widening river, and as the ship pulled in to its docking places, there were hundreds on the wooden dock, some working, some waiting, but everyone doing something, to Maria this was a city of doing things, it was a bit disheveled, but ever busy, pushing, pulling, lifting, and then the plank went down. She jumped over to George who was a bit fearful of all this chaos and said:

“George, we are in New York, look how much it moves, how it breathes, this is the future George, this is the future, remember this moment George, and when we return, bring this back. This is what your father saw George, this is what excited him! I will find Mr. Hamilton, get the things, meet me down on the dock.”

Maria then jumped to the rigging, swing herself across the loading rigs, down the wooden lifts, and onto the dock, somewhat surprising those waiting, and she saw Mr. Hamilton, remembering what Mr. Morris had told her, and she ran up to him.

“Mr. Hamilton, Sir, it is Maria, daughter of Jean Pierre, your old friend.”

Hamilton picked her up and gave her a hug and replied:

“My, my, you have your father’s looks, I am sad to hear of his passing, and I hear you have had a harrowing adventure. Where is George?”

She replied:

“There Sir, on the top of the walk, he has bags.”

Hamilton then yelled out to George:”  
“George, George, je suis ici, avec Maria, George.”

George saw Mr. Hamilton and ran down the plank, baggage in hand, and he approached:

“Mr. Hamilton, I am so glad to meet you Sir, I hope my English is good enough, Maria and I have been practicing, how are things?”

Hamilton replied:

“George, I am so glad you are safe, and we must than Mr. Morris and of course Maria, how is your mother, I hear she is well?”

George replied:

“Yes Sir, well as can be as are my sisters, and how is General Washington?”

Hamilton replied:

“Well we call him President Washington now, and he is well, busy in Philadelphia, we moved out of New York five years ago, I never thought New York was good, business and politics never mix, and we agreed to land on the Potomac in Maryland, just up river from Mount Vernon. George you will love that as well.”

Maria said:

“Mr. Hamilton, this is a marvelous city, so unlike those I have seen in Europe, can we get a tour?”

Hamilton replied:

“Certainly, get aboard my carriage, I can show you about, and we can have something to eat later.”

Maria asked as they rode along:

“Mr. Hamilton, you are no longer in the Government, you are back here in New York, that is so unlike France where once in Government one found reasons to stay. How is it that there is such a difference?”

Hamilton spoke as they crossed over Canal Street to Broadway and then down to the southern tip of the island. He said:

“Well American is made of citizen patriots, people who come from business and the land, we serve and then return, keeping afresh the ideas which made us great. I fear a permanent political class, for if we



ever have one we will create the seeds of our own demise, for those who rule must return to those who are ruled and they must sense that return so that they rule wisely. I dread the permanent politician, as does President Washington.”

They travelled across the island, and returned to Mr. Hamilton’s home, a wonderful house, with trees and a garden, and George and Maria spent many weeks exploring and understanding New York.

Antnee then recalled the many conversations amongst the three of them. Hamilton recalled their parents, the War, and then they discussed the Revolution in France. Hamilton said:

“It is my view that religion is at the heart of this Revolution, a battle

between the church and its powers and the people.”

George was listening but Maria did respond:

“Mr. Hamilton, I believe that there will be ages of debate as to what led to the Terror, but that I believe should be set aside from the Revolution. In England a century and a half ago the king was also beheaded, and Cromwell went after many and resulting in their death. However, Cromwell did his evil deeds in the shadows on England, whereas Robespierre did his did in the light of current day Paris, with observers from many nations recording every death. Thus I see little difference. Whereas here in America, well, there was war, there was death, but there was no open killing.”

Hamilton replied:

“Point well taken. Then what I hear from what you say Lady Maria is that it is the people, their character and nature?”

Maria replied:

“Mr. Hamilton, I believe it is more complex than that, somehow when power is concentrated, there are times when good people get it and do good things and there are times when bad people get it and then we have the evils we are discussing. It is akin to your comment about politicians, and staying too long.”

They talked well into the night, with George absorbing every comment.

## **14SETTLING IN AMERICA**

Antnee clearly was tiring on this tale but he was determined to continue. As with so many I never really knew at what point he would reach a conclusion and what type of conclusion he would reach.

I then said:

“Well, did they go to Washington’s home in Mount Vernon?”

Antnee, now quite tired, looked pensive, and then said:

“No, there was a parting. When they were close to leaving, Maria went to Hamilton and said:”

“Mr. Hamilton, I have a curiosity of my father’s friend, and his family, Major Nathaniel. I see we are but a day’s journey or less from Morristown, may I go and see if they are there still.”

Hamilton smiled a warm smile. He replied:

“That is a fine idea Lady Maria, that will be good for George as well. I am free so we shall leave at dawn on the morrow.”

Thus at dawn, they set out to the Hudson River, and there they took the ferry across, a broad and strong river to Hoboken, then by carriage they rode over the bumpy roads, hour after hour, going through the ever dense country side, until by later in the day they approached Morristown, and the house that they used when Washington was headquartered there. The big white mansion stood proud and in repair.

Hamilton went from the carriage and with George and Maria introduced himself, and they were invited for

dinner. After as the sun was setting the strolled amongst the oaks in the back, when Maria met another George, the son of Nathaniel, for he was at home in the large oak.

George jumped down and said:

“Well what have we here? A damsel if ever I saw one!”

Maria was ataken back, and young George and Mr. Hamilton was surprised. For to this point their discussions had had an air of formality. Who was this country squirrel?

Hamilton asked:

“Who are you my country friend?”

George replied:

“I am George Squirrel, son of Nathaniel Squirrel, friend of George Washington, and who Sir are you?”

The three of them were sent back, how could they have been so fortunate to meet George at their first stop. Hamilton said:

“George, I am Alexander Hamilton, longtime friend of President Washington and friend of your father, and this is George Lafayette, son of General Lafayette and this is Lady Maria, daughter of your father old friend Jean Paul. Surprise!”

Well, was George Squirrel knocked off his tail, ego shot, surprised, without words, he just sat there eyes rolling about, mouth open, tail lying flat, and hands just flapping like broken twigs.

He then said:

“Wow!”

To which Maria replied:

“Wow, what is wow?”

George then replied:

“Wow is wow, like I had never expected this, especially seeing such a beautiful lady from France, Lady Maria.”

To which Maria smiled, and George, she, Hamilton and young Lafayette spent well into the night talking of the past, the present and the future.

They stayed for three days, looking at the old winter quarters, speaking with friends they had known. Upon the night of the third day at dinner, Maria asked George Lafayette and Hamilton to speak in private. She said:

“I really like being here. It is where my father found true friends, where there is joy and peace. George, I believe that you can go on to Mount Vernon without me. Mr. Hamilton, if that is fine with you, then I shall stay.”

They spoke a bit but soon they all agreed. Maria would stay at Morristown.

## 15 CONCLUSION

I saw this as a great conclusion. I then asked:

“Well did things work out well for Maria?”

Antnee now smiled like I had never seen him smile before, a huge squirrel grin. He said:

“I would say so Sir, for Maria married George, and from that came eventually my mother!”

I asked a bit shocked:

“You mean Antnee that you are descended from Maria?”

He smiled that smile that only an outwitting squirrel can and said:

“You didn’t know Sir, I am surprised, deeply surprised!”

I laughed, he got me again! Then he said:

“Yes Sir, on my mother’s side, straight down a few generations of course, but Maria is one of my ancestors. You know Sir, we too may be related if we go back far enough!”

I replied:

“Antnee, I bet that you could probably show that you and I have a common ancestor!”

I burst out laughing, imagine a common ancestor with a squirrel. Then I looked at him and he was not laughing. He turned and said with great seriousness:

“Well Sir, that shall be a tale for another day, and Sir, you will be quite surprised, cousin!”