

SISTER ROSE

By Wilkie Collins



She dragged him by main force to ward on an unoccupied corner of the room. With deathly cheeks and wild eyes she raised herself on tiptoe and put her lips to her husband's ear.

Trudaine called to her, "Rose, if you speak I am lost!"

She stopped at the sound of his voice, dropped her head on her husband's arm and faced her brother, shuddering.

"Rose," he continued, "you have promised, and your promise is sacred. If you prize your honor, if you love me, be silent."

He held out his hand. She ran to him and, laying her head on his breast, burst into a passion of tears.

Danville turned uneasily toward the police agents. "Remove your prisoner," he said. "You have done your duty."

"Only half of it," retorted Lomaque. "Rose Danville!"

"My wife! What about my wife?"

"Rose Danville," continued Lomaque, "you are included in the arrest of Louis Trudaine."

Rose raised her head quickly from her brother's breast. His firmness had deserted him. She heard him whispering to himself: "Rose too! Oh, my God! I was not prepared for that!"

"I am glad of it, Louis. We risked all together. We shall suffer now together. I am glad of it."

Danville looked incredulously at Lomaque. "Impossible!" he exclaimed. "I never denounced my wife. There is some mistake. You have exceeded your orders."

"Silence," retorted Lomaque imperiously. "Silence, citizen, and respect the decree of the republic!"

"You blackguard! Show me the arrest order!" cried Danville. "Who has dared to denounce my wife?"

"You have!" said Lomaque, turning on him, with a grin of contempt. "You! And blackguard back in your teeth! You, in denouncing her brother! Aha,

"You blackguard! Show me the arrest order!" cried Danville.

"We work hard in our office! We don't waste time in calling names. We make discoveries. If Trudaine is guilty, your wife is implicated in his guilt. We know it, and we arrest her."

"I resist the arrest," cried Danville. "I am the authority here. Who opposes me?"

The chief agent made no answer. A noise in the street struck his quick ear. He ran to the window and looked out.

"Who opposes me?" reiterated Danville.

"Listen!" exclaimed Lomaque, raising his hand. The heavy, dull tramp of marching men was heard. Voices humming low and in unison the Marseillaise hymn joined solemnly with the heavy, regular footfalls. The flare of torchlight reddened the sky.

"Do you hear that? Do you see the advancing torchlight? Do you see the torchlight?"

"Respect to the national hymn and to the man who holds in the hollow of his hand the destinies of France! Hat off, Citizen Danville! Robespierre is in the street. His bodyguard, the Hard Hitters, are lighting him on his way to the Jacobin club. Who shall oppose you, did you say? Your master and mine! The man whose signature is at the bottom of this order; the man who with scolding of the pen can send our heads rolling together into the basket of the guillotine. Shall I call him as he passes the house? Shall I tell him that Superintendent Danville resists me in making an arrest? Shall I?"

In his contempt Lomaque seemed to rise in stature as he thrust the arrest order under Danville's eyes and pointed to the signature with the head of his cane.

As Lomaque spoke his last words Rose saw her husband recoil before the signature on the arrest order, as if the guillotine itself had suddenly arisen before him.

"Courage, Rose, courage!" cried Louis. "You have behaved nobly. You must not fail now. No, not a word more. Not a word till I am able to think clearly again and to decide what is best. Courage, level our lives depend on it. Citizen," he continued, addressing himself to Lomaque, "proceed with your duty. We are ready."

Lomaque took Rose's cloak and hood from one of his assistants and helped her on with it. Danville, still pale and trembling, advanced a step when he saw these preparations for departure and addressed a word or two to his wife. He spoke in low tones, and the singing outside drowned his voice. An oath burst from his lips, and in impotent fury he struck his fist on a table near him.

"The seals are on everything in this room and in the bedroom," said Magloire, who nodded and signed to him to bring up the other police agents at the door.

"Ready!" cried Magloire, coming forward with his men and raising his voice to make himself heard. "Where

Robespierre and his Hard Hitters were passing the house as Lomaque answered, "To the prison of St. Lazare!"

CHAPTER VI.

TWO days after the arrest at Trudaine's lodgings the head turnkey of St. Lazare stood in the outer hall of the prison smoking his morning pipe. Looking toward the courtyard he saw the wicket opened and a privileged man let in whom he soon recognized as the chief agent of the second section of secret police.

"Why, Friend Lomaque," cried the jailer, "what brings you here this morning—business or pleasure?"

"Business this time, citizen. I have an idea how or two to spare for a walk. I find myself passing the prison, and I can't resist calling in to see how my friend the head turnkey is getting on."

Lomaque's eyes were violently winking, but he smiled notwithstanding with an air of cheerfulness.

"How am I getting on?" said the turnkey, shaking his head. "Overworked, friend; overworked. No idle hours in our department. Even the guillotine is getting too slow for us."

"Sent off your batch of prisoners for trial this morning?" asked Lomaque, with an appearance of unconcern.

"No. They're just going," answered the other. "Come and have a look at them." He spoke as if the prisoners were a collection of pictures on show. The turnkey led the way to an inner hall and, pointing lazily with his pipe-stem, said, "Our morning batch, citizen; just ready for the guillotine."

In one corner of the hall were huddled more than thirty men and women of all ranks and ages, some starting in black despair, some laughing and gossiping recklessly. Near them lounged a guard of patriots, smoking and swearing. Between the patriots and the prisoners sat on a rickety stool the second turnkey, a hunchbacked man, with an immense red mustache, finishing his breakfast of beans, which he scooped out of a basin with his knife and washed down with copious drafts of wine. Lomaque's quick eyes deserted Trudaine and his sister standing at the back of the group.

"Now, then, Apollo," cried the head turnkey, addressing his subordinate by a facetious prison nickname. "Don't be all day starting that trumpety batch of yours! I have leave of absence this afternoon, so it will be your duty to read the list for the guillotine and chalk the prisoners' doors before the cart comes tomorrow morning. Beware of the bottle, Apollo, and see that nothing happens to the death list tomorrow."

"Thirsty July weather this—eh, citizen?" said Lomaque, leaving the head turnkey and putting the hunchback on the shoulders. "Why, how you have got your batch huddled this morning! Shall I help you get them into marching order? My time is at your disposal. This is a holiday morning with me."

"Ha, ha, ha! What a jolly dog he is on his holiday morning!" exclaimed the head turnkey as Lomaque began pushing the prisoners into rank, with mock apologies, at which the officials and many of the victims—reckless victims of a reckless tyranny—laughed heartily. Lomaque gave Trudaine a significant look before he seized him by the shoulder like the rest. "Now, then, rear guard," cried Lomaque, pushing Trudaine on, "close the line of march and mind you keep step with your young woman. Pluck up your spirits, citizen! One gets used to everything in this world, even to the guillotine!"

While he spoke he thrust a piece of paper between Trudaine's neck and cravat.

"Courage!" Louis whispered to his sister as he saw her shuddering under the assumed brutality of Lomaque.

Surrounded by the guard, the prisoners slowly moved into the outer courtyard on their way to the revolutionary tribunal, the hunchbacked turnkey bringing up the rear. Lomaque was about to follow when the head turnkey expostulated. "What a hurry you're in! Now that that incorrigible drinker, my second in command, has gone off with his batch I don't mind asking you to step in and have a drop of wine."

"Thank you," answered Lomaque. "I have a fancy for hearing the trial this morning. Suppose I come back afterward? At what time do you go to your section? At 2 o'clock, eh? Good! I shall try if I can't get here soon after 1."

With these words he went out.

When he arrived at the revolutionary tribunal, the trials of the day were about to begin. The principal article of furniture in the hall of justice was a long, clumsy deal table, covered with green baize. At the head of this table sat the president and his court, with a heterogeneous collection of patriots officially connected with the tribunal. Below the front of the table a raised-off space, with a gallery beyond, was appropriated to the general public. The gallery on this occasion was occupied mostly by women, sitting together, knitting, chit-chatting and making baby linen as coolly as if they were at home. Parallel with the side of the table farthest from the main entrance was a low platform, raised off, on which the prisoners, surrounded by their guard, were awaiting their trial. The sun shone brightly through a window, and the hum of countless talking pervaded the hall. Lomaque entered by a private door, so as to pass the prisoners' platform on his way to join the patriots behind the president's chair. Trudaine, standing with his sister, nodded significantly as Lomaque looked up at him for an instant. On his way to the tribunal he got an opportunity of reading the paper which the chief agent had slipped into his cravat. It contained these words:

"I have discovered who the Citizen and Citizenne Dubois are. There is

no chance for you but to confess everything. By that means you may incur a certain clemency in the building authority and may make it his interest to save your own and your sister's life."

Magloire and Picard were waiting among the assembled patriot officials to give their evidence. Beyond them, leaning against the wall, stood Superintendent Danville. Doubt and suspense were written on his features. Perspiration gathered thick and fast on his face.

"Silence!" cried the usher of the court for the time being, a hoarse-voiced man in topknot, with huge saber buckled to his side and a bludgeon in his hand. "Silence for the citizen president!" striking his bludgeon on the table.

The president proclaimed that the sitting of the day had begun. The momentary silence which followed was interrupted by confusion among the prisoners on the platform and a scream from some of the female prisoners, then another dead silence, broken by one of the guards who walked across the hall with a bloody knife in his hand and laid it on the table. "Citizen president," he said, "I have to report that one of the prisoners has stabbed himself."

"Is that all?" said the women spectators as they resumed their work. Suicide at the bar of justice was a common occurrence under the Reign of Terror.

"Name?" asked the president. "Martine," answered the hunchbacked turnkey.

"Description?"

"Exquisite coachmaker to the tyrant Capet."

"Accusation?"

"Conspiracy in prison."

The president entered in the book: "Martine, coachmaker. Accused of conspiracy in prison. Anticipated course of law by suicide. Action accepted as sufficient confession of guilt. Goods confiscated 1st Thermidor, year 2 of the republic."

"Any special cases this morning?" resumed the president.

"There is one," said Lomaque, making his way to the back of the official chair. "Will it be convenient for you, citizen, to take the case of Louis Trudaine and Rose Danville first? Two of my men are detained here as witnesses, and their time is valuable to the republic."

The president marked a list of names before him and handed it to the clerk or usher. The figures 1 and 2 were against Louis Trudaine and Rose Danville.

While Lomaque was returning to his place behind the chair Danville whispered to him: "There is a rumor that secret information has reached you about the Citizen and Citizenne Dubois. Is it true? Do you know who they are?"

"Yes; but I have superior orders to keep the information to myself at present."

"Louis Trudaine! Rose Danville!" shouted the clerk, rapping again with his bludgeon.

The two came forward. Rose hid her face on her brother's shoulder. She felt his heart throbbing. She knew his fear was all for her.

"Denounced by whom?" asked the president.

Magloire and Picard stepped forward. The first answered, "By Citizen Superintendent Danville."

"Accused of what?"

"The male prisoner of conspiracy against the republic, the female prisoner of criminal knowledge of the same."

"Produce your proof in answer to this order."

Magloire read the same particulars which had formerly been read to Lomaque in the secret police office.

"Good!" said the president. "We need trouble ourselves with nothing more than the identifying of the Citizen and Citizenne Dubois. Have you heard the evidence, prisoners? Do you wish to say anything? If you do, remember that the time of this tribunal is precious."

"I demand permission to speak for myself and for my sister," answered Trudaine. "My object is to save the time of the tribunal by making a confession."

The faint whispering audible among the women spectators a moment before he spoke ceased as he pronounced the word confession. In the breathless silence his low, quiet tones penetrated to the remotest corners of the hall.

"I confess my secret visits to the house in the Rue de Cler. I confess that the persons whom I went to see are the persons pointed at in the evidence. I confess that my object in communicating with them as I did was to supply them with the means of leaving France. If I had acted from political motives, I admit that I should be guilty of that conspiracy against the republic with which I am charged. But no political purpose animated me in performing the action which has brought me to the bar of this tribunal. The persons whom I aided in leaving France were without political influence or connections. I acted solely from private motives of humanity toward them and others—motives which a good republican may feel and yet not turn traitor to the welfare of his country."

"Are you ready to inform the court who the man and woman Dubois really are?" inquired the president.

"I am ready; but first I desire to say a word in reference to my sister, charged here at the bar with me."

Rose lifted her face from his shoulder and looked up at him.

"I implore the tribunal to consider my sister as innocent of all active participation in what is charged against me as a crime. Having spoken with candor about myself, I assert the right to be believed when I claim that she did not help me. If there be blame, it is mine only; if punishment, it is I alone who should suffer."

Rose again raised her face from his shoulder and whispered to him.

"No, no, Louis! Not that sacrifice, after all the other—not that, though you should force me into speaking myself."

A hum of curiosity broke from the women of the audience. Some rose eagerly from the benches and cried:

"Listen, listen! She is going to speak!"

"My lord the president!"—she began. Her next words were drowned in a volley of hisses from the women.

"Ah! Aristocrat, aristocrat! None of your accused titles here!" they cried.

She would have spoken again despite the uproar and execration, but her brother's voice overpowered her.

"Citizen president, I have not concluded. I demand leave to conclude my confession. I implore the tribunal to attach no importance to what my sister may say!"

"Let her speak! Let her speak!" exclaimed the women as Rose without looking at her brother, without seeming to have heard what he said, made another attempt to address her judges.

"Silence!" shouted the man with the bludgeon. "The citizen president is going to speak!"

"The prisoner Trudaine has the ear of the court," said the president, "and may continue his confession. If the female prisoner wishes to speak, she may be heard afterward. I command

Rose hid her face on her brother's shoulder.

silence among the audience, and if I am not obeyed I will clear the hall. Now, prisoner, proceed. No more about your sister. Let her speak for herself. Our business is with the man and woman Dubois now. Are you ready to tell the court who they are?"

"I repeat that I am ready," answered Trudaine. "The citizen Dubois is a servant. The woman Dubois is the mother of the man who denounced me, Superintendent Danville."

Hundreds of spectators, all speaking at the same moment, followed the answer. No officer of the court attempted to control the outburst of astonishment. It spread to the persons on the platform, to the clerk, even to the judges of the tribunal. A man then shouted from the throng behind the president's chair:

"Clear the way! Superintendent Danville is taken ill!"

Danville suddenly appeared at the table of the president, and every one stretched forward to hear what he would say. His lips moved, but his words were heard by few. Then he left the table, supported by a police agent, who led him out into the air. Addressing himself partly to Trudaine and partly to the audience, the president said:

"The Citizen Superintendent Danville has been overcome by the heat in the court. He has retired, by my desire, under the care of a police agent, to recover in the open air, pledging himself to me to come back and throw a new light on the extraordinary statement which the prisoner has just made. In the return of Citizen Danville I order the accused to suspend any further acknowledgment of complicity which he may desire to address to me. This matter must be cleared up before others are entered on. Meanwhile, in order that the time of the tribunal may not be wasted, I authorize the female prisoner to take this opportunity of making any statement concerning herself which she may wish to address to the judges."

"Silence him!" "Gag him!" "Guillotine him!" These cries were directed at Trudaine, who had made a last desperate effort to persuade his sister to keep silence.

"If the prisoner speaks another word to his sister remove him," said the president, addressing the guard. "Rose Danville, the court is waiting to hear you."

CHAPTER VII.

AMID the noise and confusion of the last few minutes Rose had stood in the same fixed attitude. "I wish to follow my brother's example and make my confession, as he has made his. I would rather he had spoken for me, but he is too generous to say any words except such as he thinks may save me from shedding his punishment. I refuse to be saved unless he is saved with me. Where he goes when he leaves this place I desire to go. What he suffers I am willing to suffer. If he is to die, I believe God will grant me the strength to die resignedly with him."

"This is what I now wish to say as to my share in the offense charged against my brother: Some time ago he told me that he had seen my husband's mother in Paris disguised as a poor woman; that he had spoken to her and forced her to acknowledge her identity. Up to this time we thought that she had left France, because she held old-fashioned opinions, which are dangerous to hold now—had left France before we came to Paris. She told my brother that she had indeed gone, with an old tried servant of the family to help and protect her, as far as Marseilles and that, finding difficulty there in getting farther, she had taken it as a warning from Providence not to desert her son, of whom she was passionately fond and from whom she had been most unwilling to depart. Instead of waiting in exile for quieter times she determined to hide in Paris, knowing her son was going there too. She assumed the name of her old and faithful servant, who declined to the last to leave her unprotected. She supposed to live in the strictest secrecy and retirement, watching the career of her son and ready to join him when the settlement of public affairs would permit it."

"My brother thought this plan full of danger to herself and her son and the honest old man who was risking his head for his mistress's sake. I thought so, too, and in an evil hour I said to Louis, 'Will you try in secret to get my husband's mother away and see that her faithful servant makes her really leave France this time?'

I wrongly asked my brother to do this for a selfish reason of my own—connected with my unhappy married life. I did not succeed in gaining my

husband's affection, and he treated me unkindly. My brother, who has always loved me far more dearly than I deserve, increased his kindness to me as my husband's diminished. This made all blood between them. My thought was that if we succeeded in saving my husband's mother without danger to him we should appear to my husband in a new and better light. I should have shown how well I deserved his love, and Louis would have shown how well he deserved his brother-in-law's gratitude, and so we should have made home happy at last and all three have lived together affectionately. My brother had so used me to accept sacrifices for my happiness that I let him endeavor himself to help me in my selfish plan. I repeat this bitterly now. I ask his pardon with my whole heart. If he is acquitted, I will try to show myself worthy of his love. If he is found guilty, I, too, will go to the scaffold and die with my brother, who risked his life for my sake."

She ceased as quietly as she had begun and turned to her brother. Louis leaned his elbow on the rail before him, covered his face with his hand and wept. The audience had heard Rose in silence—a rare tribute to a prisoner from the people of the Reign of Terror.

"This statement of the female prisoner complicates the matter," said the president. "Is there anybody in court who knows where the mother of the Superintendent Danville and the servant are now?"

Lomaque came forward. "Why, citizen agent, are you overcome with the heat too?"

"The it seemed to take him, citizen president, when the female prisoner had made an end of her statement," explained Magloire, pressing forward officiously.

Lomaque gave his subordinate a look which sent the man back to the official group and said, in lower tones than were customary with him:

"I have received information relative to the mother of Superintendent Danville and the servant and am ready to answer any questions that may be put to me."

"Where are they now?"

"She and the servant are known to have crossed the frontier and are supposed to be on their way to Cologne. But since they have entered Germany their whereabouts are necessarily a matter of uncertainty."

"Have you any reason to believe that Superintendent Danville was privy to his mother's first attempt at escaping from France?"

"If her it from what the female prisoner has said and for other reasons which it would be irregular to detail before the tribunal. The proofs can no doubt be obtained if I am allowed time to communicate with the authorities at Lyons and Marseilles."

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"The female prisoner has made a statement, referring actually to herself and brother, but indirectly mentioning a previous attempt on your mother's part to break existing laws by emigrating from France. This portion of the confession contains in it some elements of suspicion which seriously affect you."

"They will be suspicious no longer! I will change them to certainties!" exclaimed Danville, extending his arm theatrically and looking up for the first time. "Citizen president, I avow it with the fearless frankness of a good patriot. I was privy to my mother's first attempt at escaping from France."

Hisses followed the admission.

"Citizens, you have heard the confession of my fault," he resumed, turning with desperate assurance toward the audience. "Now hear the statement I have made for it at the altar of my country. In those times of glory and trial for France, what are all citizens most severely bound to do? To formulate their deepest private affections and interests before their public duties! On the first attempt of my mother to violate the laws against emigration I failed in making the heroic sacrifice which miserable patriotism demanded of me. My situation was more terrible than that of Brutus sitting in judgment of his own sons. I had not the Roman fortitude to rise equal to it. I cried, 'Citizens, heed as Coriolanus did when his august mother pleaded with him for the safety of Rome! For that error I desired to be purged out of the republican community, but I escaped my merited punishment—may I never rise to the honor of holding an office under the government. Time passed, and again my mother attempted an escape from France. Again inevitable fate brought my civic virtue to the test. How did I meet this second trial? By an attempt for good weeks, terrible as the trial itself! Citizens, remember the evidence given at the meeting of this case. You stand the enemy of my country; who intrigued to help my mother to escape. Here stands the patriot son, whose value was the first to denounce him for the crime!"

[TO BE CONTINUED]

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