

# DEATH OF MARAT

Jacques René Hébert (1757–1794)

*La Père Duchesne*, 15 July 1793

The great sorrow of Père Duchesne at the death of Marat,<sup>1</sup> assassinated with a knife by a Calvados grace directed by Bishop Fauchet.<sup>2</sup> His good advice to the brave sans-culottes to be always on their guard since there are in Paris thousands of the shaved of the Vendée<sup>3</sup> with their paws greased to cut the throats of all good citizens.

Marat lives no more, *foutre*.<sup>4</sup> People groan, weep for your best friend. He dies a martyr for liberty. It was Calvados that vomited the monster beneath whose blows he has just died. A young girl, or rather a fury armed by the priests, and—they say—confessed by the hypocrite Fauchet, leaves Caen to commit this horrible attack. She arrives in Paris and, having bought a large knife at the Palace which I shall still call Royal since it is the rendezvous of all the earth's scoundrels, she knocks three days consecutively at Marat's door and asks to see him.

The poor fellow, tired out with work, could not see or speak to anyone. Nevertheless a woman's plaintive voice reaches his ear; he believes she is an unfortunate come to implore for his help. Let her in, he says. The scoundrel appears with a sorrowful air and approaches his bath where he then was. "Citizen," she says, "you are the father of the unhappy, the defender of the oppressed; I turn to you with confidence to obtain justice. My father, an unfortunate old man and a good patriot, groans in chains."

"An old man, a father of a family, a good citizen is in chains," replies Marat, "re-assure yourself, young citizen, I will avenge him. To bring me the occasion of helping in so touching a case is to oblige me. Where is your home?"

"Caen."

"Caen!"

"Yes, citizen Marat, I come from there."

"Well then, is your Department always to be in the wrong? Are these Normans whom they threaten us with really marching on Paris? You see how tranquil Paris is. You can yourself judge the scoundrels who seek to kindle civil war. They told you that here everything was blood and fire and the Convention was no more, yet order and peace reign and the Convention was never so great or more respected. From everywhere it receives blessings for having made a constitution entirely republican and popular...."

"Friend of the people, in my turn let me ask you some questions. What do you yourself think of the deputies who have retired to our Department; what will happen to them?"

"What will happen to them? France shall know of their criminal plots. Soon they will have no refuge and in a little while the guillotine...."

At that word, the ape takes from her bosom the knife she had hidden there and buries it in Marat's throat. "Help! To me!" he cried. These words were his last. Two women ran up; they see the blood spurting from the wound, they try to stop the *grace* who has committed the crime, but she fights and gets to the door. Neighbors run up at the noise and seize the scoundrel. The guard runs up, quickly all the Marseille section with its arms surrounds the house.

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Paul Marat (1743–1793), assassinated in his bathtub by Charlotte Corday (1768–1793)

<sup>2</sup> Claude Fauchet (1744–1793), Bishop of Calvados (1791–1793), accused of aiding Charlotte Corday

<sup>3</sup> Non-juring clergy

<sup>4</sup> *foutre*—a vulgarity roughly equivalent to *f—* in English

The fatal news is soon spread about all Paris. The aristocrats are in the seventh heaven of delight; good citizens in despair come to weep on the bed of their true friend. I was not the last to go there, *foutre*, and I was there when the scoundrel was examined. She has the gentleness of a cat who sheathes her claws to scratch better; she seemed no more troubled than she would have been if she had done a good deed. The Commissary asks her name; she answers that it is Charlotte Corday, daughter of a sometime gentleman. She tranquilly tells her beads and admits that she had come to Paris only to kill Marat, whom she regarded as the country's enemy and was glad to have killed. "I expect death," she said, "but I have chosen my part long ago; alone I formed this project; so fine did it seem to me that I told no one, so as to have alone the glory."

If I had believed this, I would have made this tigress into cat's meat. "What has Marat done to you?" I ask her. "You lied when you defended yourself by saying that you regarded him as the country's enemy. You yourself recognized him for a good citizen and a fine fellow, since, in order to see him, you sought to excite his pity."

She does not answer this question. She is searched, her pockets are well-lined with heavy *écus* and forged assignats. She always replies with assurance and goes to prison as tranquilly as to a ball. This blow is not the last our enemies will deal the patriots. The same young *foutres* who have so often stirred up looting have now no other method of turning Paris upside down except by murdering good citizens in detail. Robespierre, Pache,<sup>5</sup> Chaumette,<sup>6</sup> and I are on their lists. Every day I receive love letters in which I am told I am to be massacred, hung, blown up, burnt on a slow fire; others inform me that they will eat my heart in paper, others that they will drink my blood, others that they will split my skull and drink from it to the King's health.

*Fe me fous*<sup>7</sup> of these threats, they will not prevent me from telling the truth; while I have a breath left I will defend the rights of the people and my Republic, *foutre*. My life is not mine, but my country's, and I should be only too happy if my death could be of use to the sans-culottes, who in spite of assassins and poisoners will always be the stronger. Anyhow, if I die, it will be at the last possible moment and I'll have an answer to the scoundrels who attack me. I invite good citizens to be on their guard and protect the true friends of the people. Unfortunately, they are few. Remember, sans-culottes, that if Marat and Robespierre had never existed, you would have no more liberty than the palm of my hand.

I should hope, *foutre*, that our brothers in the Departments who have been Buzot-ised<sup>8</sup> will retrieve their error. They will see which side the knives are on. Already two deputies have been murdered by the Brissotins and the Brissotins still live. Not one has received a single slap. Yet I expect that Priest Fauchet and his comrade Duperret,<sup>9</sup> accomplices of the Calvados grace, who are in jail with her, will pay the penalty of their mis-deeds. Let a tomb be raised to the Friend of the People; let his precious remains there be shown to the citizens. In the same place and fronting the tomb let a gallows be erected for Brissot, Duperret, Fauchet, and the Norman woman. On one side the people's tears will show its gratitude, on the other, curses will precede its vengeance. But the guillotine is not enough with which to punish the traitors; a new punishment is needed, more terrible and degrading, equal to the crime itself if that is possible. *Foutre*.

R.W. Postgate, *Revolution from 1789 to 1906* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1921):48–50.

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<sup>5</sup> Jean-Nicolas Pache (1746–1823), Minister of War (1792–1794)

<sup>6</sup> Pierre Gaspard Chaumette (1763–1794), President of the Paris Commune (1792–1794)

<sup>7</sup> I don't give a d—

<sup>8</sup> François Buzot (1760–1794), member of the National Convention. After his June 1793 condemnation by that body, he fled to Calvados, and began an insurrection.

<sup>9</sup> Claude-Romain Lauze-Duperret (1747–1793), Girondin Deputy in the National Convention