

Copyrighted Material

HILARY
MANTEL

AUTHOR OF
SECOND BLACK

"Riveting... The book
overflows with a natural
storyteller's energy."

—*The New Yorker*

A
PLACE
OF
GREATER

SAFETY
A NOVEL
PICADOR

Copyrighted Material

To Clare Boylan

OceanofPDF.com

Table of Contents

Title Page

PART ONE

CHAPTER 1 - *Life as a Battlefield*

CHAPTER 2 - *Corpse-Candle*

CHAPTER 3 - *At Maître Vinot's*

PART TWO

CHAPTER 1 - *The Theory of Ambition*

CHAPTER 2 - *Rue Condé: Thursday Afternoon*

CHAPTER 3 - *Maximilien: Life and Times*

CHAPTER 4 - *A Wedding, A Riot, A Prince of the Blood*

CHAPTER 5 - *A New Profession*

CHAPTER 6 - *Last Days of Titonville*

CHAPTER 7 - *Killing Time*

PART THREE

CHAPTER 1 - *Virgins*

CHAPTER 2 - *Liberty, Gaiety, royal Democracy*

CHAPTER 3 - *Lady's Pleasure*

CHAPTER 4 - *More Acts of the Apostles*

PART FOUR

CHAPTER 1 - *A Lucky Hand*

CHAPTER 2 - *Danton: His Portrait Made*

CHAPTER 3 - *Three Blades, Two in Reserve*

CHAPTER 4 - *The Tactics of a Bull*

CHAPTER 5 - *Burning the Bodies*

PART FIVE

CHAPTER 1 - *Conspirators*

CHAPTER 2 - *Robespierricide*

CHAPTER 3 - *The Visible Exercise of Power*

CHAPTER 4 - *Blackmail*

CHAPTER 5 - *A Martyr, a King, a Child*

CHAPTER 6 - *A Secret History*

CHAPTER 7 - *Carnivores*

CHAPTER 8 - *Imperfect Contrition*

CHAPTER 9 - *East Indians*

CHAPTER 10 - *The Marquis Calls*

[CHAPTER 11 - *The Old Cordeliers*](#)
[CHAPTER 12 - *Ambivalence*](#)
[CHAPTER 13 - *Conditional Absolution*](#)
[CAST OF CHARACTERS](#)

[AUTHOR'S NOTE](#)

[Also by](#)

[About the Author](#)

[NOTE](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

[OceanofPDF.com](#)

PART ONE

Louis XV is named the Well-Beloved. Ten years pass. The same people believe the Well-Beloved takes baths of human blood Avoiding Paris, ever shut up at Versailles, he finds even there too many people, too much daylight. He wants a shadowy retreat

In a year of scarcity (they were not uncommon then) he was hunting as usual in the Forest of Sénart. He met a peasant carrying a bier and inquired, "Whither he was conveying it?" "To such a place." "For a man or a woman?" "A man." "What did he die of?" "Hunger."

JULES MICHELET

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 1

Life as a Battlefield

Now that the dust has settled, we can begin to look at our situation. Now that the last red tile has been laid on the roof of the New House, now that the marriage contract is four years old. The town smells of summer; not very pleasant, that is, but the same as last year, the same as the years to follow. The New House smells of resin and wax polish; it has the sulphurous odor of family quarrels brewing.

Maître Desmoulins's study is across the courtyard, in the Old House that fronts the street. If you stand in the Place des Armes and look up at the narrow white facade, you can often see him lurking behind the shutters on the first floor. He seems to stare down into the street; but he is miles away, observers say. This is true, and his location is very precise. Mentally, he is back in Paris.

Physically, at this moment, he is on his way upstairs. His three-year-old son is following him. As he expects the child to be under his feet for the next twenty years, it does not profit him to complain about this. Afternoon heat lies over the streets. The babies, Henriette and Elisabeth, are asleep in their cribs. Madeleine is insulting the laundry girl with a fluency and venom that belie her gravid state, her genteel education. He closes the door on them.

As soon as he sits down at his desk, a stray Paris thought slides around his mind. This happens often. He indulges himself a little: places himself on the steps of the Châtelet court with a hard-wrung acquittal and a knot of congratulatory colleagues. He gives his colleagues names and faces. Where is Perrin this afternoon? And Vinot? Now he goes up twice a year, and Vinot—who used to discuss his Life Plan with him when they were students—had walked right past him in the Place Dauphine not knowing him at all.

That was last year, and now it is August, in the year of Grace 1763. It is Guise, Picardy; he is thirty-three years old, husband, father, advocate, town councillor, official of the bailiwick, a man with a large bill for a new roof.

He takes out his account books. It is only two months ago that Madeleine's family came up with the final installment of the dowry. They pretended—knowing that he could hardly disabuse them—that it was a kind of flattering oversight; that a man in his position, with steady work coming in, would hardly notice the last few hundred.

This was a typical de Viefville trick, and he could do nothing about it. They hammered him to the family mast while, quivering with embarrassment, he handed them the nails. He'd come home from Paris at their behest, to set things up for Madeleine. He hadn't known that she'd be turned thirty before her family considered his situation even halfway satisfactory.

What de Viefvilles do, they run things: small towns, large legal practices. There are cousins all over the Laon district, all over Picardy: a bunch of nerveless crooks, always talking. One de Viefville is Mayor of Guise, another is a member of that august judicial body, the Parlement of Paris. De Viefvilles generally marry Godards; Madeleine is a Godard, on her father's side. The Godards' name lacks the coveted particle of nobility; for all that, they tend to get on in life, and when you attend in Guise and environs a musical evening or a funeral or a Bar Association dinner, there is always one present to whom you can genuflect.

The ladies of the family believe in annual production, and Madeleine's late start hardly deters her. Hence the New House.

This child was his eldest, who now crossed the room and scrambled into the window seat. His first reaction, when the newborn was presented: this is not mine. The explanation came at the christening, from the grinning uncles and cradle-witch aunts: aren't you a little Godard then, isn't he a little Godard to his fingertips? Three wishes, Jean-Nicolas thought sourly: become an alderman, marry your cousin, prosper like a pig in clover.

The child had a whole string of names, because the godparents could not agree. Jean-Nicolas spoke up with his own preference, whereupon the family united: you can call him Lucien if you like, but We shall call him Camille.

It seemed to Desmoulins that with the birth of this first child he had become like a man floundering around in a sucking swamp, with no glimmering of rescue. It was not that he was unwilling to assume responsibilities; he was simply overwhelmed by the perplexities of life, paralyzed by the certainty that there was nothing constructive to be done in any given situation. The child particularly presented an insoluble problem. It seemed inaccessible to the processes of legal reasoning. He smiled at it, and it learned to smile back: not with the amicable toothless grin of most infants, but with what he took to be a flicker of amusement. Then again, he had always understood that the eyes of small babies did not focus properly,

but this one—and no doubt it was entirely his imagination—seemed to look him over rather coolly. This made him uneasy. He feared, in his secret heart, that one day in company the baby would sit up and speak; that it would engage his eyes, appraise him and say, “You prick.”

Standing on the window seat now, his son leans out over the square, and gives him a commentary on who comes and goes. There is the cure, there is M. Saulce. Now comes a rat. Now comes M. Saulce’s dog; oh, poor rat.

“Camille,” he says, “get down from there, if you drop out onto the cobbles and damage your brain you will never make an alderman. Though you might, at that; who would notice?”

Now, while he adds up the tradesmen’s bills, his son leans out of the window as far as he can, looking for further carnage. The cure recrosses the square, the dog falls asleep in the sun. A boy comes with a collar and chain, subdues the dog and leads it home. At last Jean-Nicolas looks up. “When I have paid for the roof,” he says, “I shall be flat broke. Are you listening to me? While your uncles continue to withhold from me all but the dregs of the district’s legal work, I cannot get by from month to month without making inroads into your mother’s dowry, which is supposed to pay for your education. The girls will be all right, they can do needlework, perhaps people will marry them for their personal charms. We can hardly expect you to get on in the same way.”

“Now comes the dog again,” his son says.

“Do as I tell you and come in from the window. And do not be childish.”

“Why not?” Camille says. “I’m a child, aren’t I?”

His father crosses the room and scoops him up, prizing his fingers away from the window frame to which he clings. His eyes widen in astonishment at being carried off by this superior strength. Everything astonishes him: his father’s diatribes, the speckles on an eggshell, women’s hats, ducks on the pond.

Jean-Nicolas carries him across the room. When you are thirty, he thinks, you will sit at this desk and, turning from your account books to the piffling local business on which you are employed, you will draft, for perhaps the tenth time in your career, a deed of mortgage on the manor house at Wiège; and that will wipe the look of surprise off your face. When you are forty, and graying, and worried sick about your eldest son, I shall be

seventy. I shall sit in the sunshine and watch the pears ripen on the wall, and M. Saulce and the cure will go by and touch their hats to me.

What do we think about fathers? Important, or not? Here is what Rousseau says:

The oldest of all societies, and the only natural one, is that of the family, yet children remain tied to their father by nature only as long as they need him for their preservation The family may perhaps be seen as the first model of political society. The head of the state bears the image of the father, the people the image of his children.

So here are some more family stories.

M. Danton had four daughters: younger than these, one son. He had no attitude to this child, except perhaps relief at its gender. Aged forty, M. Danton died. His widow was pregnant, but lost the child.

In later life, the child Georges-Jacques thought he remembered his father. In his family the dead were much discussed. He absorbed the content of these conversations and transmuted them into what passed for memory. This serves the purpose. The dead don't come back, to quibble or correct.

M. Danton had been clerk to one of the local courts. There was a little money, some houses, some land. Madame found herself coping. She was a bossy little woman who approached life with her elbows out. Her sisters' husbands came by every Sunday, and gave her advice.

Subsequently, the children ran wild. They broke people's fences and chased sheep and committed various other rural nuisances. When accosted, they talked back. Children of other families they threw in the river.

"That girls should be like that!" said M. Camus, Madame's brother.

"It isn't the girls," Madame said. "It's Georges-Jacques. But look, they have to survive."

"But this is not some jungle," M. Camus said. "It is not Patagonia. It is Arcis-sur-Aube."

Arcis is green; the land around is flat and yellow. Life goes on at a steady pace. M. Camus eyes the child, where outside the window he throws

stones at the bam.

“The boy is savage and quite unnecessarily large,” he says. “Why has he got a bandage round his head?”

“Why should I tell you? You’ll only bad-mouth him.”

Two days ago, one of the girls had brought him home in the early warm dusk. They had been in the bull’s field, she said, playing at Early Christians. This was perhaps the pious gloss Anne-Madeleine put on the matter; it was possible of course that not all the Church’s martyrs agreed to be gored, and that some, like Georges-Jacques, went armed with pointed sticks. Half his face was ripped up from the bull’s horn. Panic-stricken, his mother had taken his head in her hands and shoved the flesh together and hoped against hope it would stick. She bandaged it tightly and put another bandage around his head to cover the bumps and cuts on his forehead. For two days, with a helmeted, aggressive air, he stayed in the house and moped. He complained that he had a headache. This was the third day.

Twenty-four hours after M. Camus had taken his leave, Mme. Danton stood at the same window and watched—as if in a dazed, dreadful repeating dream—while her son’s remains were manhandled across the fields. A farm laborer carried the heavy body in his arms; she could see how his knees bent under the deadweight. There were two dogs running after him with their tails between their legs; trailing behind came Anne-Madeleine, bawling with rage and despair.

When she reached them she saw that the man had tears in his eyes. “That bloody bull will have to be slaughtered,” he said. They went into the kitchen. There was blood everywhere. It was all over the man’s shirt, the dogs’ fur, Anne-Madeleine’s apron and even her hair. It went all over the floor. She cast around for something—a blanket, a clean cloth—on which to lay the corpse of her only son. The laborer, exhausted, swayed against the wall, marking the plaster with a long rust-colored streak.

“Put him on the floor,” she said.

When his cheek touched the cold tiles of the floor, the child moaned softly; only then did she realize he wasn’t dead. Anne-Madeleine was repeating the *De profundis* in a monotone: “*From the morning watch even until night: let Israel hope in the Lord.*” Her mother hit her across the ear to shut her up. Then a chicken flew in at the door and got on her foot.

“Don’t strike the girl,” the laborer said. “She pulled him out from under its feet.”