

Tuesday, April 4

I wake up very sad. The horizon is mute! Can it be that Versailles has been defeated and we are at the mercy of the men of the Commune? Happily I soon hear the sound of machine guns,^o a sound so distant and stifled that I am not sure but that it might be the rattle of the railroad tracks. The sound becomes more distinct and quickly becomes a homicidal discharge of lead.

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On the boulevard the drunken National Guards, who feel a vague anxiety about the morrow, become aggressive toward the passers-by.

Why is it that in civil wars courage increases, and why do the people who would have fled from the Prussians heroically get themselves killed by their fellow citizens? Today we cannot berate that inept National Defense Government enough for not having been able to turn such valor to account.

All day noise of the death machines, which at times seem to show human anger. The omnibuses have their red lanterns turned inward so as not to be winged on the fly in the area near the Quartermaster's Depot.

Friday, April 7

The sixth day of fighting, bombardment, rifle fire, killing. At the Arc de Triomphe de l'Etoile, always a crowd, ambulances, dispatch-riders lying against their horses' bellies, and battalions of National Guards replacing each other in the line. The cannonade is incessant. Mont Valérien is covering Neuilly with shells.

In a corner, groups of motionless, stupefied women say they are waiting for their husbands, who have been forced into service. Among all the lower orders an unreasoning feeling makes Versailles responsible for all the harm the Committee has done—a feeling that it is very difficult to destroy and one that makes these unhappy victims of the revolution look upon the Versailles forces in the same light as Prussians.

People surround individual National Guards as they come back. An irregular with an energetic, powder-blackened face tells with savage grief that Neuilly is untenable under the shells which are falling like hail. Through the open curtain of an ambulance window I see the living or dead head of a wounded man with a fixed stare. Four or five cannons arrive and the rampart begins to answer frenetically. In the sunshine on this avenue which in its sharp ascent looks like a stage set at the old Franconi Circus, beyond the upraised arms of the rampart gate, fog streaked with lightning immerses the trees

on the avenue, the houses on either side, and the barricade in a blue and gold haze—a fog in which the buildings and columns on the horizon are heaped up like a vague Acropolis. A regular effect of apothecosis with the play of light, the luminous transfiguration of objects, the glory of the setting sun, and the gold sky crackling with fireworks.

My contemplation is shattered by a *pif, pan, crac!* A shell has struck the left cornice of the Arc de Triomphe above our heads. Immediately everybody falls flat on his face, while a bursting shell bounces near me with its ugly dull sound. At once everyone is up and away, and so am I.

A poster announces that any citizen not enrolling in the National Guard within twenty-four hours will be disarmed and arrested, if there is occasion. This decree along with the one concerning landowners seems to me to be a pretty preliminary to a reign of terror.

This evening Burty tells me casually: "It's quite likely they will shoot the Archbishop this evening!"⁷ They are indeed capable of plagiarizing 1793 by beginning September all over again.

Saturday, April 8

At Voisin's I ask for the day's special: "There isn't one, nobody's left in Paris," a waiter answers. The only diner today is an old habituée whom I saw all during the siege.

As I leave the restaurant I am struck by how few people I meet. Paris seems like a plague-stricken city. There are really not enough men left to make little groups, and the few faces

⁷ Monsignor Georges Darboy, Archbishop of Paris, was arrested on April 4, was offered in vain to the Versailles authorities in exchange for Blanqui, and was killed on May 24.

of young men that I see are those of foreigners. The only movement, the only life in Paris is the removal of small households' goods, at the hour of twilight, on handcarts pulled along by National Guards. The democratic tenants are hastening to take advantage of the Commune's decrees about housing.

No group under the Opéra lamp post. No group at the corner of the Rue Drouot. I only find a few people gathered together at the entrance of the Rue Montmartre. A curious thing: In the groups into which I make my way people are not talking about the day's events, and what I hear is only about the past, about the siege of Paris and events during the siege, and about the weakness and ineptitude of the defense. You get a very clear impression that the principal strength of the insurrection does not come from stupidity or maladroitness on the part of Versailles, but from what the Trochus and the Favres have failed to try or undertake. And Thiers' great mistake is to have taken into his cabinet men whose incapacity the people look upon as treason.

In the evening they are selling perfume on the boulevard at fifty centimes, to the shouts of newsvendors hawking *Le Soir*, *La Commune*, *La Sociale*, and even *La Montagne*, which this evening, to encourage sales, has announced a republic in Russia.

At Auteuil some people are now buying ropes so that friends can let them down along the fortifications in order to escape the national requisition.

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that lead them, ought to command an obedience that is not given to science, knowledge, study, or reflection. That is saying that the most stupid people are the most intelligent.

Friday, April 14

I am awakened to bursting shells and the following piece of news, given me by Pélagie. A notice commands all men of whatever age to march against the Versailles troops. And there is terrified talk at Auteuil of a house-to-house search for those evading service.

Basically I cannot conceal from myself the fact that things are going very slowly, if not badly. There have been two or three unsuccessful attacks on Vanves and Issy; and the Federals seem to be passing from the defensive to the offensive around Asnières.

A quiet day, only a few isolated cannon shots here and there.

Saturday, April 15

I was working in the garden this morning. I hear the whine of several shells. Two or three explosions very close. A shout from within the villa: "Everybody to the cellars." And there we are, like our neighbors, in the cellar. Terrible explosions all around the house. Mont Valérien is sending us a shell a minute. At every cannon burst you are caught up by a disagreeable feeling of anxiety, which lasts for the few seconds of the trajectory, fearing that it will fall on your house, on you.

Suddenly there is a terrible explosion. Pélagie, who, with one knee on the ground, is making bundles of kindling, is thrown over on her behind by the shaking of the house. We fearfully wait for a fall, a tumbling down of stones. Nothing!

Thursday, April 20

At eleven in the morning the boulevard from the Rue Montmartre to the Bastille looks like the main street of a sleepy provincial town where people used to take a turn in

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former days as they waited for a change of horses for the stagecoach.

Calm and emptiness on the Place de la Bastille. At the top of the column, the Spirit of Liberty brandishes a red flag. At its feet merchants sell fried potatoes and café au lait in the midst of a display of iron scrap. Beginnings of barricades, old style, at the head of the Rue Saint Antoine, where the entire left-hand sidewalk is an outdoor market for everything under the sun. In that street you see National Guards returning the worse for wear or departing with their provisions in handkerchiefs attached to their bayonets. Companies full of old men with white hair and young men who look like children. One of them carrying a long rifle has a boyish face which makes the passers-by turn their heads in a gesture of pity. In front of the Hôtel de Ville the shining new brass of thirty cannons or so.

Always lies and reports of victories, signed by all those foreign names who to me are as suspect as would be Prussian generals given to France so that we might tear ourselves to pieces and finish ourselves off.

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Tuesday, April 25

Today there is a truce to permit evacuation of the inhabitants of Neuilly. I push on as far as the ramparts.

Up to the Etoile barrier nothing but broken street lights and a few scars on the stone houses. Beyond, it's something else again. The Etoile barrier is marked all over with blackened, rayed bursts; in the bas-relief of *Invasion*, a shell has taken off an arm of the child carried on his mother's shoulder. Below, there are blocks of granite broken into fragments the size of a lump of sugar.

The real devastation begins on the Avenue de la Grande Armée and follows it clear to the ramparts on the Rue Presbourg, Rue Rude, and Rue Pergolèse side. There is nothing but gaping holes where destruction has burst out—broken angles of windows, broken pilasters, balconies torn away, drain pipes cut in five or six places, shop windows with twisted, torn ironwork. You see nothing but glassless windows, with shreds of tulle curtains floating out. Beside the twisted urinals you walk on the dust of bricks, glass, and slate covering the sidewalk. When you go into a building you pass

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the concierge's lodge protected by mattresses piled on ladders, and you find the fourth story lying in the courtyard.

I see two frightful examples of the destruction a shell can cause inside a building. One is at a hairdresser's; all that is left of the furniture of the shop is a piece of molten stove-metal and half a clockface without hands. The other is at a bakery; a shell which hit a wood partition made it into a sort of matting with broken fibers.

Everyone is running away. Everyone is moving. A distracted woman is throwing drawers from some shop or other on a cart; and the porte-cochère steps are covered with brides' bouquets under glass ready for transport into Paris. Survivors of the bombardment and continuous threat of death seem stupefied, asleep. Many seem to have a fatalistic resignation.

The crowd roaming this destruction is angry. And before this spectacle of devastation a little old man with eyes like gas jets talks of frightful torture to inflict on Thiers, using his assassin hands to make strangling motions in front of him.

At the moment Voisin's café is the place where the headquarters personnel from the Place Vendôme come to have coffee with their *brothers and friends*. It is curious to hear these gentlemen and to be present in one's shadowy corner at such a savage parley.

Today the destruction of the Vendôme Column leads them to talk about the Cluny Museum. One of them, bursting out against *false antique stuff*, emits the idea that the money devoted to such stupid purchases is diverted from ends that are useful and profitable to the people, and he urges sale of these knick-knacks for the profit of the nation.