

## The October Days (1789)

In the fall of 1789, speeches filled the air in Versailles, and a river of pamphlets and newspapers flooded Paris; however, grain remained in short supply. On 5 October, several hundred women staged a protest against the high price of bread at the City Hall. Just as in July, this traditional form of grievance took on a new meaning against the background of political events—in this case, the news that royal soldiers at Versailles had desecrated the tricolored cockade to show their contempt for the National Assembly. As the crowd grew to approximately 10,000 women, a decision was made to march to Versailles and present their grievances to the assembly and to the King. Fearing what might happen (or perhaps simply not wanting to be left out of the action), units of the national guard, led by the Marquis de La Fayette, followed them. Overnight, with help from some of the national guardsmen, the crowd of women broke into the royal palace and demanded that the royal family return to Paris to ensure a continuing supply of food. A nobleman, the Marquis de Ferrières, recorded his observations. Although a moderate, he was openly hostile to the demonstration, which he saw as chaotic and violent.

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At six o'clock in the morning, a crowd of women and armed men assembled in the square summoned by the beating of drums. Shouts of rage against the royal bodyguards were heard. One of these columns marched up to the Royal Gate, but found it locked. Another got through by the gate of the chapel, which was open. One of the National Guards of the Versailles Militia led the way up the King's staircase. . . . some of the Bodyguard ran up: "My friends, you love your King and yet you even come into his palace to disturb him." No one answered. The column continued to advance. The Bodyguard mustered in their hall. The doors were soon broken down, and they were forced to evacuate it. The conspirators approached the Queen's apartments crying, "We are going to cut off her head, tear out her heart, fry her liver and that won't be the end of it." Miomandre flew to the door of the first anteroom, opened it hurriedly and called to a lady whom he saw: "Save the Queen, they mean to kill her. I am alone facing two thousand tigers. My comrades have been obliged to quit their hall." After these few words Miomandre shut the door and bravely waited for the conspirators. One of them tried to stab him with his pike: he parried the blow. Another taking the pike by the head, struck him a blow with the butt which felled him to the ground. "Stand back," said the National Guardsman who led the column. The crowd made room for him. Then measuring the butt of his musket against Miomandre's head, he struck him with all his force so that the trigger penetrated his skull. Miomandre, streaming with blood was left for dead.

The conspirators poured into the great hall. Meanwhile, the Duke of Orléans in a grey frock-coat and a round hat, with a riding whip in his hand, was walking cheerfully about among the groups, who filled the parade ground and the courtyards of the Chateau. He smiled at some and talked in a free and easy manner with others. All round him the air resounded with cries of "Our father is with us: Long live King Orléans." Encouraged by these striking tributes to his popularity, the Duke marched for a while with this group, but on reaching the top of the stairway, he did not dare to traverse that redoubtable gap which, in the definition of crime, separates intention from execution. He contented himself with pointing towards the Queen's apartment and, turning towards the King's quarters, disappeared.

Meantime, Mme Auger, first Lady of the Bedchamber, got the Queen into a petticoat and threw a cloak over her shoulders. The Queen then ran up the private staircase leading to the King's apartment and knocked at the door of the ante-chamber. In the noise and confusion her knocks were not heard and she waited for a few moments in fearful anxiety. At last the door was opened. The Queen entered and burst into tears calling, "Save me, my friends, my dear friends."

The conspirators now in possession of the hall of the bodyguard broke down the doors leading to the Queen's apartment and burst into her bedroom. Approaching the bed they stabbed it with their pikes. The men of the Bodyguard who had barricaded themselves behind tables and stools could not hold out for long. The tops of the tables were being knocked to pieces by repeated blows. The Duke was going to enjoy the fruit of his crimes. Then the

Grenadiers of the old French Guards rushed up and, putting the conspirators to flight, occupied the inner posts. . . .

The whole Chateau presented a picture of the deepest consternation. The Queen and the Royal Family had retired to the private apartments. The Queen standing at an open window had on her right Madame Elisabeth and on her left Madame Royale, while standing on a chair in front of her was the Dauphin, who, as he ruffled his sister's hair, kept saying, "Mama, I'm so hungry." The Queen, with tears in her eyes, told him he must be patient and wait till the turmoil was over. . . . "They're going to kill my son," cried the Queen, carried away by an involuntary spasm of fear. She took the Dauphin in her arms and got up hastily. Then someone came to tell her that the people were calling for her. She hesitated a moment. La Fayette explained that she had to show herself in order to calm the people. "In that case," she said with spirit, "I'll do it, even if it costs me my life." Then, holding the hands of her two children, she advanced to the balcony. "No children !" cried a man in the crowd, so the Queen handed over the Dauphin and Madame Royale to Mme de Tourzel and advanced on to the balcony alone. One of the conspirators aimed his piece at her, but, shocked at the enormity of the crime he had planned, he did not dare to consummate it.

Several persons insisted that the King should come and live in Paris and the mob repeated loudly "We want the King in Paris." La Fayette remarked that the only way to calm the disorder was for the King to agree to the wish of the people to see him residing in the Capital. The King accordingly promised to go to Paris on the same day on condition of being accompanied by the Queen and his family. He begged the people to spare the lives of his Bodyguard. La Fayette added his entreaty to that of the King. The members of the Bodyguard showed themselves on the balcony in the midst of a group of Grenadiers belonging to the Paris militia. They threw their bandoliers down to the people, gave their hats to the Grenadiers and borrowing forage-caps from the latter, put them on their heads. The people applauded crying, "Long live the Bodyguard!" Rapturous joy succeeded the intoxication of fury. Peace was solemnly proclaimed. Frequent salvoes of artillery and musketry announced the victory of the people of Paris and the King's departure. . . .

The King left at noon. The heads of M. des Hutes and M. de Varicourt on two pikes led the procession. Following them were forty to fifty members of the Bodyguard on foot and unarmed, escorted by a body of men armed with sabres and pikes. After that came two of the Bodyguard, wearing high boots, with neck wounds, blood-stained shirts and torn garments, each held by two men in the national uniform with drawn swords in their hands. Further back one could see a group of the Bodyguard mounted on horses some riding pillion and others in the saddle with a member of the National Guard riding behind them.

They were surrounded by men and women who compelled them to shout *Vive la Nation* and to eat and drink with them. A mixed multitude of pikemen, Swiss Guards, soldiers of the Flanders Regiment, women plastered with cockades and carrying poplar branches and other women sitting astride on the guns, preceded and followed the King's coach. Every musket was wreathed in oak leaves in token of the victory and there was a continual discharge of musketry, while the people cried, "We are bringing the baker, Mrs. Baker and the baker's boy," a slogan interlarded with gross insults to the Queen and threats against the priests and the nobles. Such was the procession, barbarous and blackguardly, in the midst of which the King, the Queen and the Royal Family arrived at the Hôtel de Ville after a drive lasting more than six hours.