

Louvre

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translation sample by Marjolijn de Jager

Louvre

pp. 30-35

7 :00 pm

A very erratic month of August, the heat has turned into a storm, it's raining furiously. In three hours' time the Cour Carrée has filled with enormous pools, the trucks had to be moved and parked on the sidewalks of the Rue de Rivoli. They're predicting the downpour will continue for at least another twenty-four hours. How can the evacuation take place under these circumstances? Jacques is meeting with the drivers.

‘Good evening, gentlemen. It’s a real deluge. Every available man is covering the vehicles you are to drive tomorrow with a second tarp. I’m asking you to carry the museum’s masterpieces to safety, from the enemy, from the Führer, from the rain. Please, save the artwork.’

‘Monsieur?’

‘Yes, Mr. Richard.’

‘I have great confidence in my guys... in most of my guys, and though these trucks are huge, for sure... they’re not really equipped to go great distances in the rain... They operate around Paris... and then mostly in good weather.’

‘It’s all we have.’

‘I know, I know. We’ve checked the water tightness of the motors of the Citroens and the Peugeots, they should be all right... But the Renaults, I’m worried about their tires, they’re too thin to drive in this rain... the size of the tires, you see, it has a great impact on their ability to shed the water... especially when they’re slick... we need them to be wider.’

‘We were afraid too much sun would hurt the paintings, and now it’s this flood that worries you!’

‘Shut up, Jean.’

‘Mr. Villipert, we’ll put new tires on all the Renaults this very night.’

‘Oh, thank you, Monsieur, that’s very good... As for the Germans...’

‘Germans? Germans. Where?’

‘Paul, be quiet.’

‘The men heard about German planes being sighted in our beautiful French sky ... Small raids, but still... Soon they’ll bust through... So, since we’re here, since we’re talking about the dangers of the weather, the sky, well, the men and I, we were wondering if a discount...’

‘A risk premium.’

‘Yeah, that’s it, a risk premium... Not a refusal, of course... What I mean is, if we deliver all your cargo as we should, well, without any crap and all in one piece...’

‘Psst, and add a little cognac, too, boss.’

‘Yeah, we’re not animals, we’ve got to stay warm.’

‘Everyone has his flask?’

‘We don’t drink while we drive.’

‘Of course not, not while driving, but beforehand.’

‘I’m eager to hit the road.’

‘What we’re carrying is really quite precious, isn’t it?’

‘I heard that even the *Mona Lisa* is part of it.’

‘And who’ll be driving her, the *Mona Lisa*?’

‘Yeah, we really should know what each of us is driving.’

‘That would make us vigilant.’

‘Hey, the *Mona Lisa* or some little artist from Picardy, I drive the same way no matter what: does a surgeon operate differently on a tumor whether it’s a judge or a truck driver?’

‘It’s not the same.’

‘So, no risk premium?’

‘Are you done talking yet? I need to piss.’

‘And there’s Germaine who’s waiting for me at the *Chat Noir*.’

‘Ah, one never ever keeps Germaine waiting.’

‘You’re a chump, she’ll be long gone by the time you drag your ass over there.’

‘And she won’t be alone either!’

‘You know I don’t like to drive if I don’t first...’

‘Don’t be a boor, we’re in the museum after all.’

‘Me, I’d never dare talk in the museum that way.’

‘Yeah? For me, on the other hand, the museum, you’ll excuse me, makes me hot.’

‘You, you’re not a believer, it’s not the same.’

‘Exactly, my man.’

‘I really want to get rolling.’

‘Some people have no education.’

‘It’s my first driving assignment, I’ve never driven outside Paris. Where are we actually going?’

‘Listen to João, he knows what’s going on! We’re going to Chambord.’

‘Chambord-sur-Mer?’

‘The Chateau of Chambord, on the Loire.’

‘Dunno it.’

‘Didn’t you go to school, you?’

‘Did you?’

‘No, but I know my French chateaux.’

‘Good for you.’

‘How long a drive is it?’

‘Keeping in mind the goods, the condition of the roads, I’d say about seven hours.’

‘Here’s the route: Brétigny-sur-Orge, Arpajon, Brières-les Scellés, Angerville, Toury, Poupri, Gidy, Saran, Ingré, Fleury-les-Aubrais, Meung-sur-Loire, Muides-sur-Loire, and then Chambord, the Chateau of Chambord.’

‘We need cognac.’

‘I just wanna get going.’

‘And what time do we leave tomorrow?’

‘Five o’clock.’

‘Damn, that’s late!’

‘In the morning.’

‘Damn, that’s early!’

‘But I’m out dancing tonight! Dédé’s twentieth birthday.’

‘Don’t drink too much.’

“‘Don’t drink too much!’” That’s a good one!’

‘Gérard, my headlights aren’t working.’

‘Mine aren’t either.’

‘Ask Monsieur the Director to have them replaced, the museum is paying, that’s what the boss said.’

‘You’re really stupid.’

‘Why?’

‘Do I have to remind you that with the blackout we aren’t allowed to have our lights on?’

‘I forgot.’

‘I bet that with our headlights off I’ll be going faster than you. 1,000 francs?’

‘Done!’

‘What’ll you wear?’

‘Polished shoes.’

‘In that piece of shit truck of yours?’

‘Ah, Italian paintings, I think.’

‘His cousin Dédé, isn’t that the one with the crablike hips and soft tits?’

‘You’re thinking of Jéjé.’

‘Dédé is the flat-chested one with a mouth sweet as a cherry, I have fun with her every Thursday.’

‘Shit, you guys, really, we’re in the museum after all. A little respect.’

‘And Leonardo da Vinci?’

‘Too valuable. They put it in Flavien’s truck, he’s a champion driver.’

‘But the *Mona Lisa*? Doesn’t Lulu have her?’

‘Ask him.’

‘Lulu, are you the one who’ll drive the *Mona Lisa*?’

‘Mind your own damn business!’

‘No, it isn’t Lulu.’

‘Painting in a box, especially the Italian one, that really gets him excited, that sleaze ball.’

‘Fuck, you guys, we’re in the museum!’

‘Argh, I really want to get on the road.’

The Diary of Jeanne Boitel

Paris, Winter 1942

Tuesday, 10 November

It's happening tomorrow.

Wednesday, 11 November

7:00 pm and still bleeding, very dark blood, and I have a fever, almost 104. Rose insists on spending the night with me.

We started at 10:00 o'clock. I lay down. She already had her gloves on when she asked me: 'Are you quite sure?' I didn't answer so pushed in the needle, an umbrella rib she'd heated till it was white hot. Once the amniotic sac was punctured I fainted as soon as the evacuation began. When I woke up at 4 pm the hardwood floor the sheets and my thighs had been washed.

She's been wiping my forehead and listening to the radio.

‘The Germans, they invaded the free zone today. There we are, all of France is occupied. One sorrow chases away another, right, Madame Boitel?’

She figures that the bleeding will stop during the night.

Saturday, 14 November

Haven’t left the bed for four days. My fever is over 104. I sleep alone at night. But Rose comes by in the mornings. This place bothers me. If only I were at home, I’m really eager to see Firmin again. Rose brings me nettle soup, I need it so I won’t become anemic. In any case that’s all there is to eat, I have no more ration cards, and with her four children she can’t very well give me any. Still, she promised me a bit of steak, her cousin in Montmartre is a butcher. In the morning the bleeding is heavy, dark brown, Rose is worried. Her children are gathering chestnuts in the street, she’ll bring me a bowl. It’s hard to find any soap.

Tuesday, 17 November

I can’t stand bleeding while I’m lying down anymore so at noon today I left the apartment. It was cold, put on shawl and hat. In the Jardin des Plantes the

bougainvillea are still blooming in the late fall, I wanted to take a walk there. Went down the Rue du Petit-Musc then the Rue Lacépède, but in front of the Natural History Museum I could feel the sweat dripping down my back, then pains in my belly, I collapsed on the ground. A German officer helped me up and laid me down on a bench. He was tall, had a mustache. He held my hand, telling me things in his language, humming and smiling at me. A doctor who'd been notified—a veterinarian from the Museum actually—arrived. The officer asked in French: 'What sickness the lady has?' I grew scared. I looked at the doctor sideways, asking him to let me go. He had me sit up, seemed to understand, answered: 'You know, Parisian women are romantics, this one must have been lovesick, that's all.' The officer suggested taking me home! I said no. I went home, I slept. When I woke up the abdominal pains returned.

Wednesday, 18 November

The steak did me good, she even brought me a few grains of pepper in her pocket. And then Rose also found me soap, together we did a wash. I'm doing better. Still very weak but, except for a rare moment, the bleeding has stopped. She's even going to find me some blush for my cheeks. Now her youngest one, Leon, who is 3, has the flu, over 104. She's depressed. She tells me a new

law has been passed. Abortionists are now considered to be ‘assassins of the fatherland’, they commit a crime against national security and the domestic safety of the State. She’ll try to stop by again, but she must hide. Maybe she’ll come back Sunday. I hope I’ll be gone from this building by then.

Thursday, 19 November

Bach sent me a message, he wants to see me Saturday. The meeting places change, he tells me to go to Madame Arnoux’s, not far from my place, where we met almost two years ago. However, we must not meet at the same place twice, that’s his rule. So why? It’s on the Right Bank, two steps from the Louvre, at Rue Saint-Honoré, no. 5. Even if I’m doing better, will I be able to walk that distance? I have no more metro tickets it’ll take at least an hour.

First day without any bleeding. Well, a little but not so brown and not so heavy. No more temperature. I remember what Henri said: ‘Fever is the body’s work of art.’

If Bach wants to see me, it’s about giving me a mission. I will accept. I won’t talk about my condition to him, or to anyone, ever. This removal is done, won’t

mention it again, not even in this diary. Starting today, I must even forget what it is she took out of me.

Friday, 20 November

Walked on the Boulevard Henri-IV this morning. I saw a Jewish lady in a telephone booth. She was trembling as she spoke into the receiver, she was perspiring she was panic-stricken. A soldier arrived. He grabbed her by the hair and dragged her onto the sidewalk as he insulted her. He stomped on her face, several times, then spat and left. Another woman passing by and I helped her up, she was bleeding from one eye, her nose was broken. We cleaned up her wounds as best we could and asked her where she lived but she fled.

The other woman explained to me that a new Vichy law now forbids Jews to be in museums, libraries, fortified castles, or telephone booths.