Storming of the Bastille July 14, 1789

Characters:
Narrator #1
Narrator #2
Electors’ Delegation
Citizen 1
Citizen 2
Governor De Launay
Davanne
Danain
Officer/Advisor
Lieutenant Deflue
Elie
Hulin
Post Script
Crowd-all students

Narrator #1: Armed with muskets, but virtually no gunpowder, the crowd makes it way to the Bastille. They don’t intend to seize the fortress or free the prisoners. They want the gunpowder stored inside, and while they’re at it, they want the cannons on the battlements withdrawn. Leaderless and inadequately armed, they are besieging a monolithic fortress, with walls 9 feet thick and 80 feet high, protected by 18 cannons and 14 rampart guns.

Narrator #2: Inside the prison, Governor De Launay is beside himself. An indecisive man, he inherited his position from his father. When he heard of the urban unrest two nights ago, he raised the two drawbridges of the fortress and moved his cannons into firing position, pointing them at the surrounding streets and raising the level of fear in the neighborhood. Around 10:00 a.m. he hears the crowd approach.

Crowd: “Withdraw the guns!”... “We want the gunpowder!”

Narrator #1: At this point the crowds are relatively calm and reasonable. A group of negotiators sent by the Electors pushes it way through the crowd.

Electors’ Delegates: “Make way for the Electors’ delegation!”... “Coming through!”

Narrator #2: The crowd lets them through. The first drawbridge is lowered and the delegates pass into the outer courtyard. The drawbridge is raised behind them.

Governor De Launay (speaking to the delegates): “I would be honored if you joined me for lunch in my apartment. I am willing to withdraw the cannons and promise you that the soldiers will only fire if fired upon, but I cannot give you the gunpowder.”

Narrator #1: The luncheon is lengthy and after an hour-and-a-half the citizens outside have heard no news. The crowd grows restless and suspect a trick.
Citizen 1: “Maybe they were captured.”

Citizen 2: “They could have killed them.”

Crowd: “Release our men!” ... “Let them out!”

Narrator #2: These cries mingle with the continued calls for gunpowder and the withdrawal of the cannons. Suddenly the cannons are pulled back, but the delegates have not reappeared.

Citizen 1: “Are the guns being withdrawn or are they being loaded to fire on us?”

Citizen 2: “I fear the worst.”

Crowd: “Out with the troops!” ... “We want the Bastille!”

Narrator #1: Finally the delegates emerge to find an agitated mob instead of the orderly crowd they left earlier. Once the drawbridge is raised behind them the shouting gets louder.

Crowd: “Surrender!” ... “Release the prisoners!”

Davanne: “Danain, let’s go climb to the roof of that perfume shop and onto the outer wall. Maybe we will be able to see what is going on inside the fortress.”

Narrator #2: Davanne and Danain climb onto the perfume shop roof and onto the outer wall. They jump into the inner courtyard, which defended by a single guard, whom they overpower.

Danaíín: “We can use an axe to hack at the chains of the outer drawbridge.”

Narrator #1: The drawbridge crashes down, accidently killing one citizen, and the crowd rushes into the outer courtyard. They believe that Governor De Launay gave in, but then the soldiers high on the fortress wall fire down on the crowd. Citizens fall, some dead, some injured. All in all, some 80 citizens are killed.

Narrator #2: Crushed forward by the surging crowd, people in the courtyard are trapped and exposed to the gunfire from above.

Citizen 1: The governor lowered the bridge to trap us in the courtyard and slaughter us!”

Crowd: “Treachery!” ... “We want De Launay!” ... “Revenge for our fallen brothers and sisters!”

Narrator #1: In the courtyard, the citizens fire harmlessly at the fortress, as the soldiers snipe at them from the towers. To protect themselves, some citizens wheel in a cartload of hay and set it on fire, obscuring the soldiers’ view. At this point, the situation seems hopeless for the besiegers. With no powder for their muskets, they face cannons and 80-foot walls. By 3:30 in the afternoon it is beginning to look as if they must leave empty-handed, that the deaths of their comrades have been in vain.
Narrator #2: Suddenly, a column of about 300 Reinforcements arrives- citizens and deserters from the gardes-francaises. They bring four cannons seized from the Invalides. Most importantly, former officer Hulin and Lieutenant Elie lead the Reinforcements. Instantly, the mob becomes an army.

Narrator #1: Hulin and Elie take charge.

Hulin: “Remove that cart of burning hay and bring forward the cannons.”

Elie: “Aim the cannons at the drawbridge and fire.”

Narrator #2: The tide has turned. It is only a matter of time before the cannons break through the drawbridge.

Narrator #1: Inside the Bastille, De Launay panics.

Officer: “I advise you to surrender. The soldiers sympathize with the citizens and will join the mob if it enters the fortress.”

Lieutenant Deflue (commander of the Swiss Regiment): “I say to continue the fight.”

Narrator #2: Impulsively, De Launay makes a decision. He sends a note out to the crowd through a crack at the edge of the drawbridge, but the mob can’t reach it across the moat. A resourceful person brings a plank, and places it so that it is jutting out above the moat. Two men stand on one end to hold it down, and a brave citizen walks out on the plank to reach out to take the note. He reads it to the crowd:

Elie: “We have 20,000 pounds of powder. We shall blow up the garrison and the entire neighborhood unless you withdraw.”

De Launay (in the Bastille to his advisors): “It is a gamble, but if I am going to be killed I will take the Bastille and its attackers with me.”

Narrator #1: Only those nearest the drawbridge heard the content of the note. The news passes by word of mouth and the level of anger rises as the message spreads. Instead of intimidating the citizens, the ultimatum has enraged them.

Citizen 1: “Revenge!”

Citizen 2: “Give us De Launay!”

Crowd: “No terms!” ... “Lower the drawbridge!”

Narrator #2: Inside the Bastille, De Launay actually grabs a torch and heads for the gunpowder to carry out his threat. His officers restrain him.

Officers (including Deflue): “No, don’t! You must surrender!”
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De Launay: “Fine, send men to the tops of the towers with white handkerchiefs to signal our surrender.”

Narrator #1: Elie and Hulin are able to keep the mob under control.

Hulin: “Arrest, but do not harm the governor or the soldiers of the Bastille.”

Elie: “The bourgeois militia is in charge of protecting the defenders and transporting them to the Hotel de Ville for trials.”

Narrator: #2: The crowd rushes in. They take De Launay and the Bastille soldiers as prisoners. In the final assault, no attackers or defenders are killed. The citizens seize the gunpowder and begin to search the fortress for prisoners. Only seven are found, all either petty criminals or mentally unstable individuals sent to the prison by their own families. But the prisoners are irrelevant. The mighty Bastille, hated symbol of royal oppression, has fallen to the citizens of Paris!”

Crowd: Yea! (whoop and holler)

Post script: The crowd is triumphant and energized. Elie and Hulin are unable to prevent them from beating De Launay and cutting off his head, which they put on a pike and parade across Paris to the Hotel de Ville; the other Swiss Guards make it safely to the city hall. The execution of De Launay by a mob sets a dangerous precedent that will be repeated throughout the Revolution and will lead to the Reign of Terror and the use of the guillotine. The National Assembly is inspired by the people of Paris taking control and they continue to work on the Constitution completed in 1791, and their Declaration of the Rights of Man which will be published in August of 1789.