

Literature.

A CELEBRATED CASE.

CHAPTER I.

THE EVE OF THE BATTLE.

On the morning of the 10th of May, 1745, the cottagers in the vicinity of the village of Antoin, in the Province of Flanders, France, were startled by the booming of heavy cannon, the sounds, apparently, coming from the direction of Fontenoy. The men in the fields left their work, and collected in little groups to discuss the possible results of the impending conflict. The women, grasping their little ones, rushed to the doors and windows of their houses, and gazed into the distance, as if the omen of victory or defeat would appear in the clear blue sky above them.

Growing braver as they became accustomed to these unworldly noises, several ventured down the road toward a pretty cottage, at the door of which stood a tall handsome woman, holding in her arms a delicate little girl.

"Well, Madeleine, they are very near us," said Marie Meyer. "You always feel sure of our side winning, but I—"

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every one in the village would know that she owned a costly necklace, and kept it in the house. She grew nervous, and soon forgot her fears, and began preparing dinner for her child and herself.

The soup was smoking on the table and the embers of a fire were glowing brightly, when a cry from Adrienne drew her attention to the child.

Kneeling on the window seat, Adrienne's eyes were fixed on the figure of a man coming slowly up the road. For a minute Madeleine's heart ceased to beat; the next she knew that the figure was not tall enough for her husband; but he was dressed in the well-known uniform of the French Guards, and she realized that her husband was in the vicinity, perhaps he had been injured, and that this man was bringing her news. With the return of power to move came also self-control. Madeleine left the cottage with Adrienne holding her skirt, and going to the gate awaited the man's approach.

He was wounded, that she perceived at once, and his whole appearance showed that he had been through a fierce struggle. Madeleine opened the gate and motioned to him to enter.

"You belong to the French Guards?" she cried. "Tell me, do you know Jean Renaud?"

"I do well. He is my husband? Do not worry; I saw him safe and well not an hour ago. The worst is over for today. What to-morrow will bring, Heaven knows! I have lost my way, but I am too exhausted to retrace my steps without resting. You see I am slightly hurt."

"Come in and take dinner with us," said Madeleine, her kind voice attracting a peculiarly fine gaze from a pair of blue eyes, protected by long lashes and the heaviest eye-brows she thought that she had ever seen.

"Yes come and dine with us," said Adrienne, in her childish, light voice. "Papa wears a coat like that!"

"Yes, and wears it nobly, little one! You are both too kind, but I'll not forget your kindness. Jacques Renaud never forgets either a kindness or an injury."

The force and the gestures with which these words were pronounced made Adrienne start back and run toward the house.

"She is easily frightened," said Madeleine, keeping pace with the soldier's slow steps. "Every member of my husband's regiment has a claim on my hospitality."

Jacques Renaud ate as only hungry men can. Madeleine made coffee for him, and having satisfied his hunger, she brought water and linen and bathed and bandaged his wounded leg.

All the time she was conscious that the man watched her with intense interest which bordered on admiration.

"You do not belong here," he said, at last. "You come from Paris."

"Countess who?"

"Countess d'Aubertot. She is my father's sister. Is the count with the regiment?"

"Yes, and his wife was preparing to leave Paris when we started."

"Then she is coming here to the chateau?" cried Madeleine, clasping her hands in her delight. "To-morrow, Adrienne, we must go to the chateau and welcome her!"

"Butter not leave the house to-morrow," said Jacques Renaud. "The whole neighborhood will be full of soldiers and camp followers, and you and the little one are safest here; besides, the countess cannot have arrived here yet. We cannot be in a hurry. The king and the dauphin are at Fontenoy, and so is our marshal. Heaven bless him!"

"Just her, Adrienne! His majesty and our good dauphin! How I would like to see them!"

"Do not think of such a thing until after to-morrow; and now I must get back to camp. Little one, will you kiss me once before I go? Perhaps we shall never meet again; but if we do, I shall not forget this day's goodness."

He put out his arms. Adrienne at first drew back; then, on second thoughts, let the great soldier kiss her hands and cheeks.

"Should you see Jean, you will tell him that we are well, and send our love and blessing!" said Madeleine, trying to hide her tears. "I wonder—I wonder he did not come only for a moment."

"He does not leave now; my being here is an accident. Farewell, and remember, should you or Adrienne ever need a friend, you have only to call on me, Jacques Renaud."

So saying, Jacques Renaud adjusted his sword, took his gun, and raising his hat, as a parting salutation, tried to walk gallily down the road.

Adrienne and Madeleine strained their eyes watching, the blue coat as it gradually became indistinct in the distance.

"And now," said Adrienne, sitting herself in the window-seat, "I must watch for papa."

It was an echo of Madeleine's own thought. Surely, Jean would come. Only a few miles separated him from wife and child; the distance was no obstacle. Nervous and excited, as the hope of seeing him increased in her breast, Madeleine went unceasing from room to room in the cottage, trying, by dint of occupation to keep herself calm and light-hearted. Every now and then she would return to Adrienne's post, across the child for a few minutes, and again busy herself with domestic cares.

She would prepare Jean's favorite supper, then, if he came, hungry no doubt and exhausted, after the long march and the morning's skirmish she would enjoy the old satisfaction of seeing him eat and hearing him praise her nice food.

Madeleine's cottage was built like the majority of French cottages of the period in a manner called picturesque; that is of clay compressed and hardened, out in blocks and laid in mortar, like stones. There are sometimes three stories high, and have window frames of stone. Madeleine's upper floors were seldom used; she and Adrienne slept in a pretty little room to the right of the large, middle apartment, or "grande chambre," as it is called. On the left was the kitchen; both rooms being shut off by strong wooden doors from the main one. The back windows of the "best room" were wide and low, opening on a small patch of ground used as a kitchen-garden. View, especially toward the front, was bright with early spring flowers.

Madeleine had brought from the garden of the Chateau.

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them, the garland; but Adrienne was not attracted. For months her father's return had been the grand topic of conversation, and now, at this minute, his tall form might come up the road, and Adrienne wanted to run and meet him.

However, the long afternoon passed away, twilight was creeping like a haze over the landscape, and Adrienne began to lose hope. Madeleine, in her low seat, tried in vain to fix her thoughts on her every-day employments. They would wander off to the days of her courtship, and the stormy period that had constantly separated her and Jean since their marriage. Campaign after campaign had left home to follow Count d'Aubertot's fortunes in the field, and Jean Renaud was considered one of the bravest men in the Guards. Tall and powerfully built, the stories of prowess and daring seemed almost fabulous; but Madeleine never tired of hearing his praises, no matter by whom they were sung. This very natural and feminine weakness has caused the only cloud in their short married life. Madeleine's beauty and intelligence had won her many admirers, both in Antoin and in Paris; but Jean also belonged in Antoin, and Madeleine had known him always, and cared only for him. But when his companions in arms sat down to dine on his deeds, Madeleine listened with delight, and Jean, mistaking her pleasure for that of gratified vanity, often grew furiously jealous, and being quick-tempered, was apt to express his anger in loud tones. Poor Madeleine had nothing to meet his torrents of passionate jealousy but her girlish innocence of wrong and her love, which was the heart of a lioness.

"I am in no danger," said Jean kindly; "perhaps I can serve you in some way; to move you again would only be to hasten—"

"I know, I know. Who are you?"

"A faint smile passed over the dying man's features, his eyes brightened with a gleam of satisfaction.

"You are an honest man, then, I can trust you. Oh! for a little strength to tell you all that you should know, for my sake, my Valentine, but moments are precious now. You will not forget?"

"Trust me," said Jean.

"My child is with the cannons, her aunt, at Arras. You will see that these papers reach her as soon as possible. Her mothers diamonds are in the box. I intended to visit her, and leave them with her, lest this campaign should be my last. Take them; never mind you do hurt me; it is a relief to know that they are safe in a good man's hand; it is what every soldier expects to die for his country. I wanted to see to-morrow's fight. It will be a glorious day for France! Victory is certain; you will share the danger and the glory! Your hand, comrade; my strength is fast going. Think of yourself your duties. I do not fear death; I can meet it here alone; but take with you the last word and wishes of a friend. I wanted to see to-morrow's fight. It will be a glorious day for France! Victory is certain; you will share the danger and the glory! Your hand, comrade; my strength is fast going. Think of yourself your duties. I do not fear death; I can meet it here alone; but take with you the last word and wishes of a friend."

"A long sigh and the Count de Mornasse fainted with exhaustion.

Jean did not like to leave him, but he knew that his own absence would be noticed, and he felt that to stay was useless. Having placed the count's head in the most comfortable position possible, Jean glanced again at the long, regular features, still as if already rigid in death and turned away with a heavy heart. It was not the first time he had been forced to leave a dying man, but he had never before done so so reluctantly.

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