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THE FAITH THAT REMOVES MOUNTAINS

(Continued from page 15.)

staggered from weakness and exposure. The road was deep with mud, and the bridal dress was no longer white; she had fallen so often. The flowing veil, although sodden and heavy, still afforded excellent sport for the boisterous wind, which tossed it about her head and face in the most fantastic manner. Long since the covetous mud had snatched from her feet the little kid shoes, of which she had been so proud. Her reason had now entirely gone, and she babbled incessantly.

"I hope the priest who is to marry us will wait till I come," she fretted; "I did not mean to be late. How funny that they should now call Ovide No. 317, instead of his right name." She attempted to laugh, but no sound reached her lips.

"If I could only walk faster," she whispered. Her strength was well-nigh spent and the penitentiary was yet a mile away. Her feet were so heavy that she could hardly drag them along; the mud had clung to them so that they looked strangely huge and out of proportion.

As she neared the end of her journey, the road grew worse, the puddles deeper and wider. At first the poor girl had not fallen very often, but now the frequent dull splashes told a pitiful tale. Yet the rain fell none the less persistently, nor did the wind grow less aggressive.

At length the grey dawn struggled through the clouds, which still doggedly hugged the earth, and drove away the gloomy shadows which enveloped the high unpicturesque walls of the penitentiary. The rain had ceased falling; its faint whispering could now scarcely be heard.

As the clouds rose slowly above the walls of the penitentiary, the ghastly pinched face of Marie was revealed. She was on her hands and knees, climbing up the heap of stones which the convicts had broken and banked against the great walls. Around her face and shoulders streamed the tresses of her dark wet hair, while the fragment of veil which still remained trailed raggedly after her. As she crawled over higher, the stones' jagged edges cut her hands and knees, but she did not feel the wounds; she was too far exhausted. When near the summit, she stopped abruptly; a shudder ran through her slight frame. For a few moments her hands clutched at the sharp stones, then she sprang to her feet, her body rigid, her eyes wild and staring. The end had come. "Ovide, I am here!" she gasped, and then fell heavily backward, rolling down the pile of stones into the hole near the wall, which the carters had made. The weary eyes were wide open and turned toward the sky, but they no longer comprehended; the disordered brain no longer conjured up fantastic scenes, nor gave birth to diseased thoughts; the rest she had so long needed had come to her at last, and she slept—slept that deep, dreamless sleep from which, not even he, for whom she had sacrificed so much, could wake her.

As the light grew more distinct, there stood revealed on the top of the walls, four sentry boxes. At short intervals, through the mist, the forms of the sentries could be seen, as they slowly paced to and fro, with rifles resting on their shoulders.

The thick air was suddenly pierced by the penitentiary clock discordantly striking the hour of five. Hardly had its echoes died away when the clanking of chains and the decisive voices of the guards could be heard, issuing from the great stone building in the centre of the yard. Half an hour later the heavily-barred doors of the penitentiary swung open, and the convicts surrounded by guards, filed slowly out into the courtyard. Before the men were taken to the various places of labor, they were ranged in single

file, and their numbers called out.

Nearly all the prisoners responded in sullen, rebellious tones. But the voice that answered to No. 317 was full of contrition and hopelessness. Six months before, the young convict who bore this number was known as Ovide Domereau, nephew of Little Mother Soulard. The day that had just expired was to have been his wedding-day, and little Marie Ethier, whom he had played with when a child, was to have been his wife. All night long, as he tossed about in his cell, he had been thinking of her and of his two old aunts who had taken him to their meagre home when his parents died, and had watched over and cared for him with the love of a mother. They had believed in him—although, alas! his guilt was so glaringly apparent—even when the whole world had forsaken him. So, because of all these things, his heart, on this gloomy morning, was almost breaking; little wonder that his voice nearly failed as he answered to the number that now stood for his name.

The file of convicts was broken up into gangs; "317" belonged to the stone-breaking gang, and worked outside the frowning walls. As they slowly passed out of the gate to the road, the sentries unawung their rifles—many successful attempts to escape had been made by convicts in the past.

Slowly the men were marched along the road, till they came to the great mound of stones, heaped against the walls, where they were put to work. Watchfully the guards stood near by, while the sentries, equally alert, paced the high walls.

Scarcely had the hammers begun their monotonous chorus, when the tragedy occurred. Convict 317 was seen to let his hammer suddenly fall, and gaze with terrified eyes into the hole near by. "Marie! Marie!" he shouted, in a voice charged with fear. Just as he reached the edge of the incline, and was about to jump down and clasp in his arms the dear, bedraggled figure, clad in the torn bridal robes, the sentry near the gate brought his rifle to his shoulder, and in a warning voice called out to the fleeing convict; but the latter failed to hear the warning. There was a puff of smoke, a sharp report, and convict 317 was seen to throw up his arms and fall.

When the guards reached the spot where they thought he had fallen, he was nowhere to be seen. They took a few steps forward and looked down the incline; there he was at the bottom with his head resting on the bosom of a young girl, in strange array.

They sprang down and raised him—he would never occupy his cell again!

As the guards stooped wonderingly over the form of the girl, they failed to see in the distance the rapid approach of a carriage, which had passed the gate and was close upon them. Just as they were about to summon the convicts to carry the bodies into the yard, the carriage stopped, and she who had prayed so fervently for the lifeless ones, and had tried so hard to believe, sprang out and ran to where they were lying. Clapping her arms about them, she wept, and kissed them passionately.

"I am too late, too late!" she moaned in an agony of grief.

The Little Mother had instinctively known the road Marie had taken, and the moment consciousness returned to her in the bedroom, she had called a carriage and set out at once after her. The driver had driven furiously; his horse was covered with foam, but to no avail; Marie was near her sad journey's end when they started.

At first the guards were inclined to push the old creature away, but when they understood from her grief, what relation the quiet forms bore to her, and heard snatches of their pitiful history fall, incoherently, from her lips, they drew back, and let her pour out her deep grief

over them. With sympathizing hearts, at length they made a sign, and the convicts took up the bodies and bore them into the courtyard.

The Little Mother seemed too stunned to notice what they had done, and still sat sobbing and talking to herself.

The driver grew weary of waiting, and going to her side said softly, as he laid his hand on her shoulder: "Let me take you home; it is cold and you are shivering."

She only crouched closer to the spot where they had lain and talked on. Thinking she was speaking to him, the man bent his head to listen. "It is all my fault," he heard her say, "because I had not faith—not the right faith—not the faith that Father Benoit meant—the faith that can remove mountains!"

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