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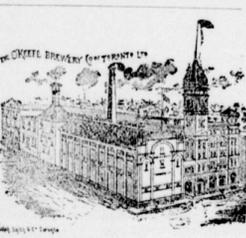
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ARMINIE. BY CHRISTIAN REID.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Egerton did not return that evening; but the next morning, at the earliest hour possible for a visit, he presented himself, asked first for Mlle. d'Antignac, and on learning that she was out gave his card, requesting that it might be taken to Mlle. Duchesne.

"But Mlle. Duchesne is not here, monsieur," said Cesco. "Not here?" said the young man. "I understood from M. d'Antignac yesterday that she would be here in the evening."

The servant could only repeat the fact already stated; she was not here. An apartment had been prepared for her, but she had not yet come to take possession of it.

On arriving at his place of destination he alighted once more, and, in very much what may be supposed to be the frame of mind of a man about to storm a battery, slowly and painfully mounted an aqueduct.

On the stair he met Helene, who was descending. She stopped and shook hands with him warmly, inquiring with interest about his health.

"Do not hesitate to speak freely. You cannot pain me. Pain no longer exists for me, I think. You wish to tell me something about my father?"

"Yes," said Egerton. "When dying M. Duchesne made to me a communication of great importance, adjuring me to deliver it to you without delay."

Then, in the fewest possible words, he repeated Duchesne's relation concerning the marriage of his grandfather.

It was a strange story, as he suddenly thought, for him, a young man, to be detailing to her, a young girl—embarrassing in every way; and he did not look toward her as he spoke until, at a slight exclamation when he first mentioned the name of De Marigny, he could not resist the temptation to observe her face.

effects of the shock, I hope?" she said, looking at him with kind sympathy. "Somewhat," he answered. "But my nerves are very shaky yet. And I confess," he continued with a faint smile, "that I dread the interview before me. You have just left Mlle. Duchesne, I suppose?"

"Yes," she replied, her face taking an expression of gravity as she spoke. "And will she receive me, do you know? You were kind enough, perhaps, to prepare her for my visit?"

"I came so early this morning specially for that purpose," she answered; "for I am ashamed to acknowledge that I forgot to speak of it yesterday. Yes, she will receive you. But—"

"But that, of course, I have not." "Well, I must not detain you longer," she said kindly. "For your own sake, as well as hers, it is best that you should be good morning."

"Good morning," he responded; and they went their separate ways, he envying her in that she was not called upon to perform the task before him; she pitying him, and wishing him God-speed in the same.

He was shown into the salon, and the first object that his eye rested on as he entered was the figure of Arminie. Dressed now in deep black, she was standing motionless in the middle of the floor in an attitude as aimless as that of a lay figure.

Perceiving him, she advanced quietly and extended her hand, which he took without uttering a word; for he could think of no words that seemed fitting—nay, that would not sound to him oppressively commonplace. It was she who first broke the silence.

"I am sorry to see that you are suffering," she said. Turning, she drew forward an easy-chair, motioned him toward it, then seated herself near and fixed her eyes on his expectantly.

All this was so different from anything that he had anticipated that his embarrassment became almost overpowering. He regarded her for an instant; then, making a desperate effort to recover the self-possession that was about to desert him entirely, answered:

"Yes, I am suffering. This is my excuse for not having waited on you before to day, mademoiselle."

"Why should you have been in haste?" she said apathetically. "I was in haste to fulfil a promise I had made," he answered, "and to execute a trust which had been laid on me."

"A trust?" she repeated; and now there was some quickening of attention in her eyes, though her manner was still without emotion. "A trust," he repeated in turn. "I should never have thought of intruding upon you at present, nor conceived the idea of mentioning to you a subject so exquisitely painful as the one of which I have to speak, were I not constrained to do so by the express request of your father."

were a man I might feel it a duty to do so. As it is, I shall not move in the matter; and all that I ask of you is to hold inviolate the secret entrusted to you."

"But, mademoiselle," he cried earnestly, and with mingled surprise and disapproval, "you cannot mean that you do not intend to claim your inheritance!"

"That is what I mean," she answered. "Impossible!" he exclaimed. "All other considerations apart, you will not, I am sure, disregard the imperative intention of your father to secure you against an evil of which you are no doubt ignorant as yet—one of the worst evils, if not the very worst, that beset any life, but especially that of a woman—the curse of poverty."

"I am in no danger of suffering from poverty," she replied. "My mother's fortune—which was not large, but is quite sufficient for my wants—was secured to me."

"But, mademoiselle," Egerton again eagerly began, when she interrupted him. "I am the representative of my father," she said in a tone half interrogative, half asserting.

"Assuredly," he answered. "The sole representative." "Yes." "It rests with me, then, to act or not in this affair; and I shall not act."

Again Egerton strove to speak, and again was stopped. "It is altogether useless to discuss the subject," she said decidedly. "I mean what I have said. I shall not move in the matter."

"Not claim even your name?" "Of course not, since to do that would be to proclaim the whole."

Egerton was silent a moment before he asked in a somewhat constrained tone: "Do you mean, mademoiselle, that not even the Vicomte de Marigny is to be informed of this discovery?"

"Yes, monsieur, I mean that," she replied. "What was Egerton to do? He was not inclined for the controversy in which he so unexpectedly found himself engaged, but a sense of loyalty to the trust of the dead man made him feel bound to use every argument in his power; and, though he had not intended in this interview to press the claims of humanity on Arminie's filial conscience, he now felt driven to this."

"Permit me, mademoiselle," he said firmly but deferentially, "to remind you that the wishes of your father—I may, indeed, say his command—ought to have weight with you, and will, I am sure, when you have deliberately considered the subject, compel you to change your decision. I have still a direct message to deliver to you—"

He paused as Arminie rose from her seat. Extending her hand with the motion of putting the whole question aside, she said: "I will hear no more. Monsieur, I thank you for—for all." Coming to his side—she, too, had risen—she put out her hand and grasped his, holding it as she went on: "Do not think me ungrateful. You have been a true and noble friend to my father. You have faithfully discharged the trust he placed in you. Is it not enough that you have done this? It is all that you can do."

It was not until he was leaving the cafe half an hour later that a thought came to him like an inspiration. He would go to D'Antignac, ask his advice, and enlist his influence with Arminie.

Fortunately for him it was one of D'Antignac's best days, and he was admitted at once. "I have come to you for advice," he said, after answering very briefly D'Antignac's inquiries about his health. "I find myself in a most perplexing position about this business of poor Duchesne's. Will you let me tell you the story, which is a strange one, and then give me your opinion as to what you think I ought to do?"

"Tell me, by all means," said the other cordially. My opinion and advice shall be heartily at your service; and, moreover, I will not quarrel with you if you do not take either after they are given," he added with a smile.

"Thank you," said Egerton; and he proceeded in the first place to repeat the relation which Duchesne when dying had made to him. D'Antignac listened in silence, his expressive countenance indicating the strongest interest.

Egerton looked a little startled. "I see," he said, "that I have acted prematurely in speaking to her. Yes you are right. I ought to have investigated the matter before saying a word to her about it. Duchesne may have been deceived, though I think not. He was too sagacious a man to permit himself to be misled either by his own hopes or the plausible representations of another."

"In the most extraordinary way, it seems to me," answered Egerton; and he described at length the scene with her. "Whether such unaccountable conduct is attributable to her present state of mind I do not know. She is certainly very unlike in manner what she has heretofore seemed. I was amazed at the change I found in her; I was even shocked!"

"My sister tells me that she is greatly changed," said D'Antignac. "Which is not surprising," he added, "considering all that she must have suffered lately."

"But the alteration is greater than even the shock and horror of her father's death might be supposed to cause. In fact, I was appalled at the marvellous dissimilarity to her former self which she exhibited. It has left a singular impression on my mind; I cannot connect her as she was when I saw her last with her as she looked and spoke this morning. Two different individuals could not be more unlike."

D'Antignac looked grave, almost anxious. "Helene tells me the same thing," he said. "Poor child! she must have suffered indescribably."

"To return to my own part of the business," said Egerton. "I think that I shall go to Dinan to-morrow, look into the matter—that is, obtain the necessary documents to establish the validity of the marriage."

"If they are to be obtained," interposed D'Antignac, with a smile. "That of course," said Egerton; "and if they are not to be obtained I shall be quite reconciled to the fact, since Mlle. Duchesne takes the affair as she does. On my return—saying that I am successful in my search—I shall once more present the subject to her consideration; and I hope for your influence to induce her to listen more reasonably than she did this time. If she still persists in her present resolution, her obstinacy will lay an exceedingly disagreeable duty upon me. I promised Duchesne solemnly that I would do my utmost to secure his daughter's rights to her, and that promise I intend to keep. If the proofs are forthcoming—and I shall spare no pains to secure them—I will lay the matter before the Vicomte de Marigny. Don't you agree with me that this is what I ought to do?"

"Yes, that certainly is your proper course," answered D'Antignac. "But you spoke of going to Dinan to-morrow. Surely you are not in a condition to travel! Take my advice—you asked it, you know—and wait until you can at least move without pain, which I see you cannot do now."

"I am afraid that it is more my impatience to rid myself of the responsibility I feel than any special necessity for haste which urges me to action," replied Egerton. "However, there is, as you say, no reason why I should hurry myself beyond my strength; and so I may wait a few days before undertaking the expedition to Dinan, and to Marigny to look up the witness Duchesne spoke of. Meanwhile, I must not fatigue you longer"—he rose at the last word—"but I may come and tell you the result of my quest, may I not?"

"I was going to beg that you would," said D'Antignac, extending his hand in parting salutation. "To me, as you are no doubt aware, there is a double interest involved."

ONE MORE

Jeff Was Small and Believed There Would Be Room for Him in Heaven.

"You're sure! quite sure 'at there's room for one more!" "Quite sure, dear lad."

The light was fading, but a transient ray had quivered into the ward and lingered tenderly on the divine head and the childish, upturned faces in a picture representing the Redeemer surrounded by little children.

"The boy in the cot by the door studied them wistfully. In the days he had lain there these heavenly children had become very dear to him, but the Christ with His halo of light and ineffably beautiful countenance awed him, filling his childish soul with vague hope and fear. Though his starved heart cried out for love, his brief experience of life had made him distrustful of even divine charity.

"Poor Jeff, poor little lad." "Then they tried ter git me inter the orfin's home, but the boss sez as big life, we can't possibly take another boy, there ain't standin' room fer one more."

"There was no reproach in the waif's voice. His pitiful statement of facts was made with the childish desire to excuse his doubt. "Why, even at the newsboys' blow-out when the hall got so crammed 'at it wouldn't hold one more, I was the feller 'at got left."

"Because you gave your ticket to somebody else?" "The pale face flushed with color. "Pshaw, teacher, give over guessin', you don't wriggle nothin' out'n me. I shan't try, dear boy; you're going to tell me all of your free will."

"Now you're coaxin'," he declared, with an indulgent smile for such feminine tactics, "but there ain't much more ter tell. It was allus the same story, there was never no room for me. I was allus crowded out, that's how I come ter git off the platform 'an' under the wheels, 'an' then they brought me here. Don't," roughly, as a tear splashed on his hand, "don't do that agin; it burns worse'n the pain."

"Oh, Jeff! you dear little lad, you brave little hero!" "Stow that! do you want ter make a feller cry fer hisself?" Then, more gently, "I ain't forgot 'at you was good ter me; you took me in. You're filled up, sez the prin'suppal; 'guss you can't accommodate this little man.' Oh, but I must have him. He's a frisky rollickin' lookin' lad. I must make room for him, if I have ter keep him in a cage in the winder."

Both laughed at the memory, but the teacher's eyes shone with fun, the waif's were bright with tears. "Wearied with talking and pain, the child rested quietly for a few moments, but presently spoke again, a little ripple of amusement blending oddly with a faltering penitent expression. "You know Covey's old knife 'at he was raisin' Cain about?" The girl nodded assent. "It's under the platform. I hid it there ter rattle Timmie. It was allus sich fun ter see him fly off the handle."