

NAPOLEON'S MERCY.

Napoleon was conversing with Josephine, when one of his officers entered and announced a young woman from Lyons.—“What is her business with me?”

“Some petition,” answered de Merville, the officer.

“Show her into our presence,” said Napoleon.

The officer reappeared with the lady leaning on his arm, whose face, as could be discerned through the thick veil, was very beautiful. She trembled as she approached the door.

“Mademoiselle,” whispered the guide kindly pressing her hand, “take courage, but answer promptly whatever questions the Emperor proposes, he detests hesitation.” Then ushering her into a spacious apartment, he bowed and retired.

The trembling girl, perceiving Napoleon, on whom her fondest hopes depended, forgot herself and her timidity: she thought only of Napoleon, exclaimed, in a voice choked with emotion,—“Mercy, sire! I ask for mercy and pardon.”—She could articulate no more. Josephine stepped from her partial concealment, and then approaching the group, contributed by her sympathizing words of encouragement, to restore the courage of the young petitioner as she bade her rise.

“Your petition, Mademoiselle,” said he.

Henrietta Armond (for that was her name,) looked imploringly at the Emperor, and exclaimed—

“Ah, sire, I ask pardon for Louis Delmarre, who is condemned to be shot to-morrow. Oh, grant him your most royal pardon.”

A cloud gathered on the brow of Napoleon as he interrupted her with—

“A deserter, madam, he has twice deserted,—No, he must be an example for the rest of the regiment.”

“But the cause of his desertion,” cried Henrietta in agony: “he was compelled to join the army against his will.”

“What were the causes of his desertion,” interrupted Napoleon.

“Two weeks since,” answered Henrietta, “he received the news that an only parent, a mother, sire, was on her death bed, and longed, day and night, to behold her son again. Louis knew that relief or release was impossible. His mind was filled with one thought—that she might close her eyes forever, ere they rested on a son she loved so fondly.”

“Did she die,” asked the Empress with interest.

“No, Madame,” replied Henrietta, “she at length recovered. But hardly had Louis received her blessing, being followed in her arms, ere he was torn from her grasp by the officers of justice, who dragged him hither. O! must he die? Mercy, sire, I beseech you.”

“Mademoiselle,” said Napoleon, apparently softened, “this was the second offence—name the first—you omitted that.”

“It was,” said Henrietta, hesitating and coloring, “it was—that he heard that I was to marry Conrad Forani, whom I detest as much as he does.”

“Are you his sister, that he feels so great an interest in your fate?” asked the Emperor.

“O, no, sire,” said Henrietta, her lovely cheek assuming still deeper the hue of the rose, “I am only his cousin.”

“Ah! only his cousin,” repeated Napoleon, glancing at Josephine with a half suppressed smile.

“Oh, sire,” cried Henrietta, “think only of the anguish of his widowed mother, when she reflects that the affection for her is the cause of his death. What,” she continued, “can I do to save?” and the poor girl forgetting the presence of royalty, burst into tears.—The kind-hearted Josephine glanced at the Emperor, with eyes expressive of sympathy. “She noticed the workings of his face, and felt at once it would be very uncertain whether Louis Delmarre was to be shot the next morning.”

Napoleon approached the weeping girl. She hastily looked up and dried her tears. “Mademoiselle,” said he, “would you give your life to save his? would you die, could Louis Delmarre be restored to life, liberty, and his mother?”

Henrietta started back, deadly pale, looking fixedly at the Emperor for a moment, then turning away, she buried her face in her hands.

After a silence of some minutes, Henrietta looked up, an air of fixed determination resting upon her face. “I am willing,” she said in a low voice.

Napoleon looked at her in surprise, as if he had not anticipated so ready an answer to his proposal.

“I will see you again,” said he: “in the meantime accept such apartments for your accommodation as I shall direct.”

As soon as the door closed upon the fair petitioner, Napoleon walked to the window, against which Josephine was leaning, and said: “I see how it is: Louis Delmarre is the lover of this young girl. True to woman's nature she has bravely difficulty to beg for his release.”

“How strong must be the love she bears for him,” said the Empress.

“Ah!” responded he, “I have a mind to subject that same love to a severer test. Much do I doubt whether she will give her life for his. Nevertheless, I will see.”

“Sire,” cried Josephine, “you are not

erious, Louis can be pardoned without death of Henrietta.”

Napoleon drew nearer the window; they conversed in a low tone.

Henrietta stood alone in a magnificent apartment. Hours unobserved, so intensely was she absorbed in reverie; a small folded paper was tightly grasped in her hand. On it were traced these words: “A deserter is condemned by the laws of the army to suffer death. If you wish Delmarre restored to liberty, the means are in your power. Ere the day dawns, he may be on his way to join his mother, whom he so much loves.”

“Ah! do not I love him him, too?” murmured the young Henrietta. Pressing her hands upon her heart, as if to still its tumultuous beating, she paced the apartment. The door opened, and the Chevalier de Merville entered. He passed ere he articulated “Mademoiselle.”

“I am ready,” replied Henrietta, “my decision is made.”

De Merville appeared to comprehend the import of her words. He looked upon her in reverence as well as admiration, as she stood with the high resolve impressed upon her beautiful brow.

“Follow me, Mademoiselle,” said he. They traversed long corridors, and numerous suites of superb apartments, and descending a staircase, quickly reached an outer court communicating with the guard house. Entering this, Henrietta was ushered by her guide into a small apartment, where she was soon left to herself.

On the chair was flung a uniform of the regiment to which Louis belonged. On the table, lay a large plated cap. Henrietta comprehended it in a moment. Quickly habiting herself in the uniform, she stood before the mirror, gathered up her beautiful brown tresses in a knot, and placed the cap upon her head. She almost uttered a cry of joy at the success of her transformation; she knew that she was to be led to the fatal ground at the morning's dawn. The bullet which was to have struck Louis to the heart, but she shrank not back. Love triumphed over timid woman's nature. “Louis's mother will bless me in her heart,” she whispered. “Louis himself will never forget me. Ah, often has he sworn that he loved me better than all things else.” Drawing a lock of his raven hair from her bosom she pressed it to her lips, and then she breathed a prayer to Heaven.

Morning dawned. The sound of footmen aroused Henrietta. She started up—grasped the band of hair, awaiting her summons. The door opened and two soldiers entered, repeating the name of Louis Delmarre; they suddenly led her forth to die. The soldiers, whose bullets were to pierce the heart of Louis, had taken their stand and only awaited the word of command from the Emperor, who was stationed at the window, commanding a view of the whole scene.

“Oh!” cried Josephine, who stood by him, but concealed by the window drapery from the view of those below. “O'sire, I can endure it no longer, it seems so much like a dreadful reality. Mark the devoted girl. No shrinking back—She, she seems calmly awaiting the dreadful moment.”

“Stop,” cried Napoleon, from the window “Louis Delmarre is pardoned. I revoke the sentence.”

A loud burst of applause from the lips of the soldiers followed this announcement. No one of them but loved and respected his comrade.

The next moment, ere they could press around to congratulate the supposed Louis, de Merville had eagerly drawn the bewildered Henrietta through the crowd, back to the cell whence she emerged but a few moments before.

“Resume your dress again, Mademoiselle,” hurriedly whispered he, “lose no time. The Emperor wishes to see you, I will return very soon.”

Henrietta was like one in a dream, but a gleam of delicious hope thrilled her soul, she felt the dawning of happiness break upon her heart. Soon again resuming her pretty rustic habiliments, De Merville re-appeared; once again she trod the audience room of the Emperor. Lifting her eyes from the ground, as the lofty door swung open, she beheld Louis. An exclamation of joy burst from the lips of both, as regardless of others, they rushed in each other's arms.

Napoleon stepped forward, “Louis Delmarre, you have heard from my lips the tale of this lovely girl's devotion and courage. Do you love her as she deserves?” “I could die for her,” answered Louis, proudly.

“Well, well,” cried the Emperor, “this severe test of love will suffice. So dutiful a son, so faithful a lover, will doubtless make the best husband.”

“You, Lieutenant Delmarre, are discharged from your regiment. Return to your native valley, with Henrietta as your bride.”

“Here,” said the benevolent Josephine emerging from the recessed window, “there are one hundred louis d'ors, as thy marriage dowry, Henrietta.”

A charming blush suffused the face of the beautiful girl, as she received the purse from the hand of the empress.

“Long live Napoleon,” exclaimed Louis, as with a heart too full of grateful emotion for further utterance, he took the hand of Henrietta, and making a grateful obeisance, left the apartment.

“Sire,” cried Josephine, “you are not



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