

A CELEBRATED CASE.

'How is that?' asked the duke; 'you say you were aware of some point that throws a light on this subject?'

'I cannot enter into details, but the Count de Mornasse might have been on the field that day; and, if he was, he had the papers and journals to which the soldier refers on his person.'

'You amaze me, my dear chanoinesse. Do you remember that family was prescribed and exiled?'

'Certainly. Early in 1745 the degree was passed and signed; but in the May of that year the younger count was still in France.'

'There were but two of the family,' said the duke, 'father and son. The father I know reached England. In all these years I have never heard them mentioned.'

'Was one of them. We recognized each other. Oh! Raoul, that vision that you tried to have me forget; it did not come in vain! It has haunted me for years; it will never come again as a dream. So long as he lives as an outlaw, a slave—those words will ring in my ears—You have destroyed me! I shall never get away from the sound!'

'Adrienne, you must not give to this grief. Something may yet be discovered to clear up this mystery.'

'My darling, what do you mean?' 'Oh! you think I am losing my reason; but I am not. Oh! I wish I could!'

'But tell me, Adrienne, what is troubling you?' 'Can you not understand? This man, whom my father succored on the field—the Count de Mornasse—if he is really dead, then one hope is gone.'

'I see—one that your father trusts to for proving his innocence. Well, 'inquire can at once be commenced.'

'The chanoinesse has promised to undertake them as soon as she reaches Paris, but I know they will be useless—the Count is dead.'

'But Valentine, something troubles you. What is it? I kept no secret from you. No, Adrienne, and I shall keep nothing from you. It is only a suspicion suggested by the curious expression that I saw in her face when her eyes met mine, but I am almost positive that this Count de Mornasse is in some way connected with me.'

'With you, Valentine! Oh, that would be so strange! To think that even on that fearful night our lives became in some mysterious way drawn together!'

'(One thing is very clear to me, Adrienne, and it is this: In going to the assistance of the Count de Mornasse, your father became involved in all this mystery.'

'Why do you say that, Valentine? Surely, it was a good action; another would have done the same thing.'

'Probably. But another would not have been the victim of like circumstances. These papers and jewels were a great responsibility; he felt them to be such; he was near his home, and the idea of leaving them with his wife was his strong motive for going there that night.'

'But the murderer, the robber, would have gone there anyhow, I suppose?'

'Perhaps so. But no suspicion would have rested upon your father in that case. His fatal visit home was the thing that ruined him.'

'Oh, Valentine! you are trying to remove the blame from me; but it is useless. I am still the witness whose evidence destroyed him.'

'And I hold to my opinion. In his zeal to serve another, he sacrificed himself.'

'Did love me, Adrienne! Re-sign my love! What are you saying? He caught her hands.'

'I must say it, Raoul—I must! It is all over! All over? Why, Adrienne, nothing in my life has changed since morning. You have come to the knowledge of a sad secret; what is it to do with my love for you?'

'I think I love you more than ever, for this discovery has proved your sincerity of heart, your depths of feeling, the nobility of your soul! If you will hear it, I will renew my proposal of this morning, not to Mademoiselle d'Aubretot, but to Mademoiselle Adrienne Renaud, the daughter of a brave soldier, now bearing nobly and like a hero the penalties of an unjust sentence. Will you accept my hand, Adrienne? My heart you cannot refuse. Together we will seek the proofs of your father's innocence together—restore him to freedom and happiness!'

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