

AUNT ANNE'S DREAMS.

(BY JULIA KAVANAGH, AUTHOR OF "ADRIEN.")

As she spoke thus, the door leading from the shop to the back room opened, and Jean entered.

Jean Giraud was, indeed, as his mother had averred, not so fortunate as to be afflicted with any personal deformity. Far from it. He was tall, well-made and good-looking; and his curly chestnut hair, dark blue eyes, and fresh colour, proclaimed him to belong to the real Frank race of his country. But on this evening a cloud sat on his usually open brow, and notwithstanding his efforts to conceal his feelings, the restless glance of his eye, and the occasional nervous twitching of his lips, betrayed his secret anxiety. Jean Giraud was as much a hero as any of his countrymen; he certainly was not of a timid disposition, and personal apprehension had nothing to do with his present feelings. His only thoughts were for his parents. What were they to do when he was gone? Who was to support them in their present helpless condition? For Antoinette and her sister earned very little, and what the shop brought in was barely sufficient to pay the rent and taxes. Jean's mind brooded on these thoughts until he was well-nigh distracted. Though he loved Marie most tenderly, still it was not the prospect of parting from her that now saddened him; she was eighteen, and he twenty-one; they were both young, and might wait even eight years and yet be happy. But his parents! he strove to think no more of the subject, but in vain.

As he entered the back room where the little family and his betrothed were seated together, Jean, however endeavoured to assume something like cheerfulness. He whistled a tune with even more than usual glee, bade Marie good-evening with a merry joke, and sitting down at the head of his father's bed, declared he had never been so hungry for supper. Antoinette rose silently and, assisted by Marie, began laying the things on the table. The supper was a frugal one, consisting merely of some bread, cheese and wine. They all sat down to it in silence. Jean in vain endeavouring to appear cheerful, in order to induce his mother and aunt to imitate his example. Scarcely was the meal over, when Antoinette, overcome by her feelings, burst into tears.

"Why, maman, what is the matter?" exclaimed her son with astonishment.

"Ah, Jean! what were you whistling?" she sorrowfully replied. Jean started for he had been humming the tune of the *Parisienne*, a favourite military song.

"Ay, ay," said Anne, mystically shaking her head, "tis only another token. I did not turn up the ace of spades for nothing."

"Well, and let us suppose, after all, that he should get a bad number," resolutely observed Marie, he will not die for it—nor shall we, I hope. I know what you are going to say, Jean," she quickly added, noting her betrothed's sorrowful look as it rested on his mother, "but I feel very dull in my room up stairs; what if, when you are gone, I should lodge here? Madame Giraud could take care of my money for me, and I am sure that would be a great relief: for though I do not earn much, still sometimes I don't know what to do with it, little as it is."

"Marie!" exclaimed Jean, in an agitated tone.

"I won't be interrupted," peremptorily said his betrothed; "besides, Monsieur Jean, this does not concern you, for it is all to be while you are away; your only business will be to write us such amusing letters as may make us laugh heartily."

"And if he goes to Algeria?" observed his mother in a faltering tone.

"Well" replied Marie, with a faint attempt to smile, "he will perhaps catch Abd-el-Kader, and become Marshal of France." But unable to control her emotion any longer, she buried her face in her hands, and fairly burst into tears.

"Marie!" cried Jean, reproachfully—but he also could get no further; and leaning his brow upon his hand, he looked very fixedly at the table.

"Well, well," said Marie, after a brief, though sad pause, "all is not desperate yet. God is for the poor as well as for the rich, and perhaps he will leave us Jean."

The next morning was as bright and fair a one as was ever seen in spring, and the sun shone quite merrily into Madame Giraud's shop, where, with Ma tante Anne, Antoinette was engaged in arranging everything, though the thoughts of both were certainly but little engrossed by their mutual occupation.

"Antoinette!" suddenly said Anne, "do you know what I dreamed of last night?"

"No," replied her sister, slightly starting, "What was it about Anne?"

"I dreamed that Jean had a black spot on his forehead."

"Well, and what does that mean?"

"That means that he will have a bad number."

"Heaven have mercy upon us!" sorrowfully observed Antoinette; but perhaps, sister, you are mistaken."

"Mistaken!" echoed Anne, with undisguised wonder; "would indeed I were; but you know Antoinette, I was never mistaken yet in a dream; besides," she muttered to herself, "I shall try the cards by and by, and then we shall know all about it."

"Hush!" said Antoinette, "Here is Jean; it is of no use to sadden the poor fellow."

Jean indeed entered the shop dressed, and as his poor mother declared, with a faint attempt to smile, quite spruce. Though not looking particularly merry, he did not seem to be very sad; he was calm and composed; for if he felt acutely, still his pride would not allow him to betray an unbecoming emotion in the presence of his comrades who were to accompany him to the Mairie. After greeting his mother and aunt, Jean entered the back room, and sat down by his father's bedside. The old man was asleep, but he soon awoke, and taking his son's hand between his own, gazed upon him with melancholy tenderness.

"Jean, my boy," said he, in a low tremulous voice, "think of your poor father while you are away, and of your mother, too; perhaps you will never see them again. Ah! this will be a sore blow to Antoinette," he added, in a mournful tone.

Jean rose, and walked about the room; all this was truly hard to bear.

He found it harder still when he sat down to breakfast between his mother and Marie whose red eyes and pale cheeks testified that she had spent a sleepless night. The meal was a silent one, but it was nearly concluded when Anne entered the room. She was more than usually grave, and shook her head in a most prophetic and Sibyl-like manner. "What is the matter, Anne?" tremulously inquired Antoinette.

"I have just been dealing out the cards in my room."

"Well," anxiously said the poor mother, "what about Jean?"

"I have seen the number he is to get."

"Ah! which is it?" eagerly asked Madame Giraud.

"Jean will get number 27," replied Anne, solemnly.

"A bad number!" faintly echoed Antoinette.

"Maman," almost angrily exclaimed Jean, "can anything so foolish affect you thus?"

"Foolish!" cried Anne, indignantly; "ha! young people don't believe in anything nowadays. I only grieve for you, Jean, that I am in the right; would indeed I were wrong, and that you were not to get that ugly number 27!"

Jean knew his aunt's obstinacy on this head, and, unwilling to irritate her uselessly, he dropped the subject.

When the breakfast was over—and a cheerless one it was—all arose, for it was time for Jean to depart. He first went to his father's bedside. Old Mathieu caused himself to be raised on his couch, and in a low, broken tone muttered a heartfelt benediction over his son, while the weeping Antoinette stood near him. From his parents Jean turned to Aunt Anne, who very affectionately embraced him, but muttered something at the same time about his unfortunate incredulity and number 27. Marie alone seemed collected and calm, and though she was sad, a smile of hope played around her lips.

"Be of good cheer, Jean," said she, giving him her hand; "God is for us all, for the poor and the rich. Be of good cheer; should even the worst happen, we will strive to bear it patiently."

Jean gazed affectionately on his betrothed, and once more embracing his weeping mother, precipitately left the house, not daring to trust himself with a look behind.

We will not endeavor to describe the hours of anxious expectations that followed—hours that actually seemed days, so slowly and tediously did they drag along. Antoinette, under pretence of seeing to the shop, was constantly looking in the street for Jean; while Anne, every quarter of an hour, went up-stairs to her room with a mysterious look, and came down again with a clouded brow and ominous glance. The infection seemed to have caught Marie herself; for though she sat with her work near Mathieu's bed, the old man sadly remarked that her needle often flagged, and, for the first time since many days, that she had no merry song to cheer him. Then there were two or three old neighbours who occasionally peeped in and out with woe begone features holding mysterious conferences with Aunt Anne, and startling her poor sister by dismal tales of many a young and handsome conscript whom they had known, and who had fallen, poor fellow, in his first battle. In short, they were all as comfortably miserable as they could be, when Marie, unable to bear her impatience any longer, left her work, and going to the shop door, looked out into the street. It was vacant, and no token of Jean was to be seen. With a sigh she once more entered the back room; she had scarcely, however, reached the threshold, when she suddenly paused and turned pale; a loud shout had echoed at the furthest end of the street.

"The conscripts!" said Antoinette, in a low tone.

"So soon!" answered Marie, with seeming indifference; "don't you think it may be something else?"

"No, no," replied Antoinette, in a feverish voice, "it is the conscripts; I hear their music."

The merry sounds of a fiddle might indeed, as she spoke, be heard at the end of the street. Supported by Marie, for she was nearly overcome with emotion, and followed by her sister, the poor mother proceeded to the front door, while Mathieu prayed fervently in his bed.

When they looked out, the conscripts still stood somewhat far down in the street. Their hats were ornamented with tri-colored favors, and the number each had drawn, whether good or bad, was fixed in his hat-band, visible even at a distance. But Antoinette and Marie vainly strove to distinguish Jean in the crowd.

"I see him!" at length cried Marie, turning pale.

"Ha? where is he? what is his number?" simultaneously exclaimed the two sisters, less clear-sighted than their young companion,

"There—there beyond; he looks round this way; but I can see nothing of his number."

"Ay, ay, I see him now," eagerly remarked Aunt Anne; "and alas! poor boy, I see his number, too. Ah! I knew it—27!"

"It is not 27," hastily observed Marie; "for see, Aunt Anne, Jean holds up his hat for us to see it; the number begins with a one, and then there is a nought."

"Ay, ten," said Anne; "worse still than 27; I knew it was a bad one."

"No, it is not ten," continued Marie, in a tone tremulous with emotion, "there is another nought—it is a hundred;" and falling down on a chair, she burst into tears, while Jean rushed into the shop, waving his hat with triumph.

We will not endeavor to describe the scene that followed—Old Mathieu's joy. Antoinette's silent raptures, and Marie's bright smiles. Aunt Anne, though greatly delighted, was very much surprised; both her dreams and cards had for once signally failed. As for the dream, it was, she averred, quite her own mistake, for evidently the spot on Jean's forehead meant nothing; it should have been on his hat, to prove at all significant! Then she had