

Brandeis Madeline

Little Jeanne of France



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Madeline Brandeis

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PREFACE

When I began to write these stories about children of all lands I had just returned from Europe whither I journeyed with Marie and Ref. Maybe you don't know Marie and Ref. I'll introduce them: Please meet Marie, my very little daughter, and Ref, my very big reflex camera.

These two are my helpers. Marie helps by being a little girl who knows what other little girls like and by telling me; and Ref helps by snapping pictures of everything interesting that Marie and I see on our travels. I couldn't get along without them.

Several years have gone by since we started our work together and Marie is a bigger girl – but Ref hasn't changed one bit. Ref hasn't changed any more than my interest in writing these books for you. And I hope that *you* hope that I'll never change, because I want to keep on writing until we'll have no more countries to write about – unless, of course, some one discovers a new country.

Even if a new country isn't discovered, we'll find foreign children to talk about – maybe the children in Mars! Who knows? Nobody. Not even Marie – and Marie usually knows

about most things. That's the reason why, you see, though I sign myself

I am really only

Marie's Mother.

DEDICATION

To every child of every land,
Little sister, little brother,
As in this book your lives unfold,
May you learn to love each other.

CHAPTER I

MADAME VILLARD

"The baby is a dear little dark-haired girl, Madame Villard (vĕ-lär´)," said the nurse.

Madame Villard came forward, and her face expressed the joy in her heart.

It was the twilight hour. Paris was busily honking and tooting outside the broad windows of Madame Villard's apartment.

The apartment looked out upon one of Paris' finest avenues. And Paris has many fine avenues. This had been Madame Villard's home for many years.

It was here she had raised her family – her boy and her girl. It was the same girl whose "dear little, dark-haired baby" had just come into the world.

"May I – may I see her?" asked Madame Villard softly.

The nurse led her into the room, and the grandmother looked with tear-dimmed eyes upon this first grandchild.

Baby Margot (mär´-gō) was Madame's first grandchild. At least, that is what Madame thought. Little did Madame Villard know that at this same moment another grandchild of hers was opening wondering brown eyes upon the same world!

The same world and the same country, France! Yet how different was this other grandchild's world from the world of little

Margot!

Little soft, comfy Margot in her billowy pink and lace down! Little soft, cuddly Margot, whom Grandmother took into her arms that day! All the while, she did not know about the other grandchild.

That other grandchild did not have soft billowy pink and lace pillows on which to rest her head. That other grandchild did not have a grandmother's loving arms into which she could cuddle down.

That other grandchild – but I must not talk of her. I must talk of Margot. For Margot was all that Grandmother Villard could talk about or even think of that day.

Her own little daughter's daughter! It was so wonderful to think of Margot's being here. So wonderful for poor Madame Villard, whose only son Paul was fighting at the front in the Great War.

When the war had started, Paul had gone to fight for France. Now it was many months since Madame had heard from her soldier boy.

Soon after Paul had joined the army, he had met and married Jeanne (jēn) in a tiny village of France. Paul had written to his mother in Paris, telling her of his marriage.

"You will love Jeanne," wrote Paul. "When this war is over, I shall bring her to Paris."

But the war was not over, and Jeanne had never been brought to Paris. Madame Villard did not hear from her boy again.

She did not know that on this happy day, while she held her little grandchild Margot in her arms, Paul's little girl was opening her brown eyes upon a different-looking world.

In a sad, war-stricken, bleak little village far from Paris, this other grandchild was born.

CHAPTER II

PAUL

Jeanne's baby was as beautiful as little Margot, though she did not lie upon lacy pillows in a Paris apartment.

Jeanne held the child tightly in her arms, as she rocked back and forth on a broken chair, and as she rocked she looked out upon the poor, little village street. Jeanne was a troubled young mother.

Paul had been at the front for many weeks now. He did not even know that little Jeanne was born. If only Paul would come back to the village!

There was talk of an invasion. Many small towns of France were being invaded and burned by the enemy. Would this little town be next?

Each day the villagers asked themselves this question and lived in terror. Many had already started to tramp toward Paris. Many were deserting the village.

But Jeanne could not go. There was little Jeanne now. And even if she could have gone, she would never have left until her Paul had come back.

Each day a letter went to Paul at the front. Each day Jeanne trembled at the postman's footsteps outside her door.

But no news. Only whispers and more whispers of invasion –

invasion!

Oh, if Paul would only come back!

Jeanne rocked her baby.

The invasion came. It was one of the last invasions before the Great War came to an end. The enemy burned the little town to the ground.

The great march of the refugees had started. The roads to Paris were alive with homeless people – struggling, homeless humanity, with only the hope of reaching Paris alive.

The village – Paul's village – was a desolate place. As the troop of French soldiers returned after the invasion and marched into it, there was not a soul to be seen. Among those marching French soldiers came Paul.

To the scene of his home he ran. Everything – everything was in ruins! His house! Gone! His wife!

"Jeanne! Jeanne!" Paul's voice was a shriek.

"Look, my son, in the cellar. Many of them hid in cellars for days before." It was a kind-faced old man speaking.

The distracted Paul dashed into the underground stone cave and called again, "Jeanne, oh, Jeanne!"

A little sound came from a corner in the dark, damp cellar. The soldier stopped suddenly, and his ears became those of a forest animal, so sharp, so alert was he.

"My little one! Jeanne!" he called.

He struck a match. His heart nearly stopped. His Jeanne was not there. But something moved in the corner – something small

and white.

"A baby!" Paul gasped.

His voice had dropped to a husky whisper. He lifted the small, white bundle. It was a baby – a tiny young baby!

The soldier carried the child out into the light. The little one touched his cheek with a pink hand.

"A baby!" breathed Paul, as he held this bit of humanity close in his arms. "And my Jeanne! We were to have had one like this soon."

Then Paul noticed something around the baby's neck. A small locket had been tied around her neck with a piece of faded ribbon.

With trembling fingers, Paul opened the locket. The soldier brushed his hand across his eyes, for he could not believe what he saw. Inside the locket was his picture!

CHAPTER III

TO THE FRONT!

Paul sat there and rocked the baby – his baby! He sat and rocked little Jeanne, much as his wife had rocked her before that terrible invasion.

Now his wife was gone. Little Jeanne's mother had not been able to escape as had many of the other villagers. She was dead. Weak and undernourished, the poor woman had been unable to withstand hardships and suffering in a cold, damp cellar.

The invasion had killed little Jeanne's mother. Paul alone now remained to care for this helpless mite.

Paul was a troubled, frantic soldier. He would be called back to the front at any moment. What would he do with the baby?

Just then he heard the bugle and the call to arms: "To the front."

A scurrying soldier passed him and called out, "Make haste. To the front!"

Paul could not move. The baby was asleep in his arms. Little, trusting baby – his baby! The soldier dropped his head in the folds of little Jeanne's dress and sobbed.

A slight tap upon his shoulder brought Paul's head erect. Bending over him was the same old man. It was the kind-faced little peasant who had spoken to him at the cellar door.

"Come, my son," he said, "You are a soldier of France! Would that my old body could fight in your place! But it is you who must go. France needs you, my son."

He slowly helped the soldier to his feet, as the baby in his arms slept on.

Paul saw the light of goodness shining out of the old eyes. With a surge of joy in his heart, he held out his child.

"Oh, my friend," he cried, "if you will take my baby, I can go. I can then go and fight for France. But never, never could I leave her alone, even for France! Take her, friend, and guard her with your life."

The old peasant's eyes grew troubled. For he knew not what he, a poverty-stricken, weakened old man might do with an infant, here in this smoldering ruin of a village. But he held out his arms.

"Yes, I shall take care of her," he promised.

"With your life, my friend," repeated Paul. "Here," he added, as he pulled from his pockets handfuls of small coins. "All I have. Take it. Take her to Paris – to my mother. Wait!"

And Paul then wrote a note – a scrawled, jumbled note – to his mother, Madame Villard, in Paris.

"I am telling her you are coming with my baby – with little Jeanne," he said. "Take her to the address I write on this paper. See! I pin it to her little skirt. Hurry, my friend. Take her. Take her. Adieu, adieu, my little Jeanne!"

The last words were heard afar off, as the father of little Jeanne

joined his regiment. Then he marched to the front, into the face of a cruel battle.

The old man stood still and watched the soldier disappearing. He and this baby were the only remaining inhabitants in this town.

The rest were marching, marching, on their way to Paris. He, too, must march to Paris.

An old man with a baby!

It was a long way, but he had given his word to a soldier of France. Did this not make of him a soldier, too?

The old body stiffened, and he stood erect. His hand slowly saluted the departing troops. He, too, was a soldier.

He looked at the address which Paul had pinned to the skirt of little Jeanne: Madame Villard, Avenue Champs Elysées (shān 'zā-lē-zā'), Paris.

Paris? Why, yes; he could walk to Paris. He was a soldier! Marching refugees from other villages were constantly passing. The old man joined the peasant procession.

On his lips were the words, "On, on, on to Paris! On, on, on!"
And little Jeanne thought it was a lullaby and slept.

CHAPTER IV

ON TO PARIS

On trudged the old man. In his arms slept little Jeanne. She was as happy as Margot that day. Margot lay among the sweet-smelling cushions of her baby carriage and was rolled along the smooth walks of Paris parks.

But little Jeanne's "carriage" was not so soft, nor did it roll along. Indeed the old man's gait grew more and more jerky with every step. He watched the rest of the refugees passing him by.

There were families with many children. There were men and women carrying mattresses and clothing, pots and pans. There were dogs running along and barking.

They all passed the old man. Each one had another with whom to walk. But the old man walked alone.

It grew very hard – this walking. He rested often, and each time it was harder to rise and to start the walk again. Only his promise to a soldier of France kept his old body going. At last he dropped heavily at the side of the road.

Jeanne was asleep. The thud awoke her. The old man could go no farther.

Jeanne did not cry. She was happy and satisfied. She had been well cared for. When they had passed farms with cows, little Jeanne had been fed.

The old man looked at her and touched the little soft cheek with his horny hand.

"Little one, I am finished," he whispered. "I have tried so hard, but Paris is too far – too far. It is too far to the front."

With that, the old man slept. Jeanne lay in his arms and blew bubbles to the sky. She watched the trees as they swayed back and forth.

"This world is a pleasant place," it would seem the tiny girl was thinking.

For a long time the old man slept. He was awakened by the sound of a clear voice. He looked into the sad face of a young woman in a black shawl. She was holding Jeanne's two little hands in her fingers.

"Is this your baby?" she asked.

"No, no, my child. I am taking her to Paris to – ."

He tried to lift himself but fell back again.

"You are spent. You must not carry this child any farther. Come; give her to me," said the woman.

She took little Jeanne in her arms. The old man's eyes searched her face to try to fathom it. He tried to find there what he hoped to see: kindness. But all he saw was sadness.

Suzanne Moreau (mō-rō) was one of the many refugees who had fled from her invaded village. She was one of the few in that long line who marched alone. Suzanne had always lived alone, as long as she could remember. Her life had been a lonely one. She had been a dressmaker in the small town where she had lived.

Everyone there had known her as Auntie Sue. She was Auntie Sue to children and grown-ups alike.

The old man tried to fathom Suzanne as he looked deep into her eyes and watched her wrap little Jeanne carefully in her shawl.

"I am quite alone," she said. "I am strong and shall make the march easily. Do not fear."

She gave her hand to the old man and he kissed it.

"God bless you," he breathed. Then he reminded her, "Remember: Avenue Champs Elysées, Madame Villard."

She nodded her head. She smiled at him and was off.

CHAPTER V

SUZANNE

It was a month since the day when Madame Villard had received two letters. Just a month had passed since the silver-haired lady and her daughter had pored over two such different letters.

One was a scrawl – Paul's. He wrote that his baby was on her way to Paris to her grandmother. It was a dirty, scrawly note, but full of hope to the two who read it.

The next letter, neat and precise, was from the government. Before they opened it, the two women knew: Paul's little one was now an orphan. For a month, how that mother and sister waited!

With Madame Villard lived her daughter and her daughter's husband. They were the parents of Baby Margot.

Margot's father had come back from the war. But though he had returned to his dear ones, he would never again be able to walk. He would be an invalid for life. So Margot's mother had two helpless ones to care for. And one of those was Margot's father.

Grandmother had taken care of little Margot from the day of her birth. Starry-eyed Baby Margot was Grandmother Villard's charge – and a joyous charge to the old lady. But despite the happiness of her Margot, the heart of Madame Villard yearned

for that other wee one – her son's little orphaned daughter.

She waited longingly for Paul's child to be brought to her. She waited until she could wait no longer. Then she went out in search of little Jeanne.

Madame Villard traveled to many villages in her search. She even asked the government to help her.

She tried so hard to speed the little one's arrival. But she could not. The child was never brought to her.

And now, to-day, a month having elapsed, Madame Villard was again preparing to motor through the country to search. She intended to stop at a little graveyard in the Argonne (är-gõn') and pray.

And while Madame Villard waited thus for little Jeanne, Suzanne Moreau was bringing the baby to Paris.

On the tramp Suzanne had found the child a sweet and tender thing. Little Jeanne had hardly ever cried. She was satisfied and sleepy, or gurgling and gay.

Her life had been a rough one and her feedings irregular and sometimes insufficient. Still the baby had seemed happy, and Suzanne had smiled a great deal more than she had ever before smiled in her life.

Before the march was over, little Jeanne was the only child Suzanne had ever kissed.

For a long time after reaching Paris, Suzanne Moreau's only thought was to tend this baby for whom she had promised to care.

She expected to take the baby to the home where it belonged.

But her first thought was to give the child a few days' good care and food before giving her up.

It was a thought which Suzanne would never have admitted was selfish. But the truth was that little Jeanne's baby fingers had so tenderly wound themselves about the heart of Suzanne Moreau that already the thought of parting with her was unbearable. A few days passed. Then a week, and then more days.

"I should. I should," sighed Suzanne, as she watched the little girl sucking contentedly on her bottle.

Then when the bottle was emptied, Baby Jeanne lifted her two pink hands.

In her arms Suzanne rocked the baby back and forth and murmured, "No, no, my little one, ma chérie (mä shër-ē', which means "my dear" in French), I cannot give you up. Not yet."

This went on for some time. At last one night Suzanne determined to go to that address on the Avenue Champs Elysées. She went alone. She left the child in the care of a woman with whom she boarded.

Before the tall stone building, Suzanne stood and marveled. It seemed a palace to the little village dressmaker. How could she keep this child from a home like that? To-morrow, yes, to-morrow, she would take Jeanne to her rightful home.

As she turned to leave, a big motor car drew up at the curb, and a black figure stepped out. Madame Villard had returned from another unsuccessful search. She was returning to her daughter and to little Margot, discouraged, disappointed, and heart-sick.

Little did she know that the slight figure turning the corner was Suzanne Moreau. Little did she dream that this woman turning the corner was hurrying back to her own grandchild, who slept in a poor little Paris boarding house.

Suzanne began to arrange the few little clothes she had bought for Jeanne. She made a bundle. Then she took from her drawer the locket which the child had worn about her neck. She opened it.

Paul's face seemed to be smiling at her. Often before she had opened this locket, but never had the soldier face seemed so happy as now. Suzanne knew why. It was because she was going to take Jeanne to her place – her rightful home.

Her heart was fluttering and her hands were shaking as she put the locket about the child's neck. Then she sat by the little cradle. Before she knew it, the tears were falling down her cheeks.

Why did she care this way? Suzanne asked herself. She had lived alone for many years. For many years she had had nothing to love. Why could she not go on?

Why must this tiny bit of life, sleeping so sweetly before her, make all this difference and make her cry?

Jeanne stirred. The little pink hands went up. It was a gesture Suzanne had come to love, to wait for, to thrill at. Slowly she raised Jeanne from the cradle and held her.

The baby's hands gently touched her cheeks. One little hand was patting a wet, wet cheek.

Then it stopped, and a soft head slowly sank upon Suzanne's

breast. Jeanne was asleep.

Suzanne sat staring ahead of her. The baby had made a decision for Suzanne.

Cruelly and unfairly, in her mind Suzanne blamed little Jeanne for the decision she made that night. But her torn heart could not have stood the blame. She knew and felt only one thing.

To the sleeping child she cried, "I cannot, cannot give you up, my little Jeanne. Never, never!"

The locket with the soldier's picture was put away under lock and key. And Madame Villard continued to wait for her grandchild.

CHAPTER VI

JEANNE

Jeanne grew under the loving and tender care of Suzanne. Never once did Suzanne approach the stately apartment house on the Avenue Champs Elysées. Never once did she allow Jeanne to go in that direction.

Several years passed. Jeanne was now a tall girl. But still Auntie Sue had a terrible feeling about that apartment house.

Suzanne was still known as Auntie Sue. And between the poor little dressmaker and Jeanne, Auntie Sue's Shop had grown up in Paris.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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