

in order to marry a rich tradesman. This early disappointment had left in Hubert Boinville a feeling of bitterness which the successes of life could not wholly efface. The old lady's voice and accent had recalled the past.

Suddenly he returned to his chair, drew Madame Blouet's petition to him and wrote upon it the words, 'Very deserving case.' Then he sent the document to the clerk in charge of the relief fund.

On the day of the official assent to Madame Blouet's petition M. Boinville left his office earlier than usual, for the idea had occurred to him to announce the good news himself to his aged countrywoman.

Three hundred francs. The sum was but a drop in the enormous reservoir of the ministerial fund, but to the poor widow it would be as a beneficent dew.

Although it was December, the weather was mild, so Hubert Boinville walked all the way to the Rue de la Sante. Directed to the Widow Blouet's lodging upstairs, M. Boinville knocked, and great was his surprise when he saw before him a girl of about twenty years, holding up a lighted lamp and looking at him with astonished eyes. She was dressed in black, and had a fair, fresh face; and the lamplight was shining on her wavy chestnut hair, round dimpled cheeks, smiling mouth, and limpid blue eyes.

'Is this where Madame Blouet lives?' asked M. Boinville, after a moment's hesitation, and the girl replied, 'Yes, sir. Be kind enough to walk in. Grandmother, here is a gentleman who wishes to see you.'

'I am coming,' cried a thin, piping voice from the next room, and the next minute the old lady came trotting out, trying to unlite the strings of a blue apron which she wore.

'Holy Mother!' she cried in amazement on recognising the Deputy Governor. 'Is it possible, sir? Excuse my appearance. I was not expecting the honor of a visit from you. Claudette, give M. Boinville a chair. This is my grandchild, sir.'

The gentleman seated himself in an antique arm-chair covered with Utrecht velvet and cast a rapid glance round the room, which evidently served as both parlor and dining-room. Everything was very neat and the place had an old-time air of comfort. M. Boinville explained his visit and the widow exclaimed:

'Oh, thank you, sir! How good you are. It is quite true that pleasant surprises never come singly; my grandchild has passed an examination in telegraphy, and while she is waiting for a position she is doing a little painting for one and another. Only today she has been paid for a large order, and so we made up our minds,' said the grandmother, 'to celebrate the event by having only old home dishes for dinner. A gardener downstairs gave us a cabbage, some turnips and potatoes to make a potée; we bought a Lorraine sausage, and when you came in I had just made a tot-fait.'

'Oh, a tot-fait!' cried Boinville. 'That is a sort of cake made of eggs, milk, and farina; it is twenty years since I heard its name and more than that since I tasted it.'

His face became strangely animated, and the young girl who was watching him curiously, saw a look of actual greediness in his brown eyes. Claudette and her grandmother turned away, and at last the girl whispered:

'I am afraid it would not do.'

'Why not?' returned the old lady. 'I think it would please him.' And then she went toward him, saying:

'M. Boinville, you have already been so kind to us that I am going to ask of you another favor. It is late, and you have a long way to go—we should be so glad if you would stay here and taste our tot-fait, should we not, Claudette?'

'Certainly,' said the girl. 'But M. Boinville will have a plain dinner, and, besides, he is no doubt expected at home.'

'No one is waiting for me,' he answered, thinking of his solitary meals in the restaurant. 'I have no engagement, but—' he hesitated, looking at Claudette's smiling eyes, and suddenly exclaimed:

'I accept, with pleasure.'

'That is right,' said the old lady briskly. 'What did I tell you, Claudette? Quick, set the table and run for the wine, while I go back to my tot-fait.'

Seated between the cheery octogenarian and the smiling girl, Hubert Boinville, the Deputy Governor, did honor to the meal. His manner thawed out rapidly, and he conversed familiarly with his new friends, returning the gay sallies of Claudette and shouting with merriment at the patois words and phrases which the old lady used.

When it was time to go, after thanking the widow warmly for her hospitality and promising to come

again, he extended his hand to Claudette. Their eyes met, and the Deputy Governor's glance was so earnest that the young girl's eyelids drooped suddenly. She accompanied him downstairs, and when they reached the house-door he clasped her hand again, but without knowing what to say to her. And yet his heart was full.

Hubert Boinville continued to give, as he said in official language, 'active and brilliant impulse to the department.' The ministerial machine went on heaping up on his desk the daily grists of reports and papers, and the sittings of the council, audiences, commissions, and other official duties kept him so busy that he could not find a spare hour in which to go to the humble lodgings near the Capuchin convent.

One cloudy afternoon toward the end of December the solemn usher opened the door and announced:

'Madame Blouet, sir.'

Boinville rose eagerly to greet his visitor, and inquired, with a slight blush, for her granddaughter.

'She is very well, sir,' was the answer; 'and your visit brought her luck. She received an appointment yesterday in a telegraph office. I could not think of leaving Paris without again thanking you, sir, for your kindness to us.'

Boinville's heart sank. 'You are to leave Paris? Is this position in the provinces?'

'Yes, in the Vosges. Of course, I shall go with Claudette; we shall never part in this world.'

'Do you go soon?'

'In January. Good-bye, sir; you have been very kind to us, and Claudette begged me to thank you in her name.'

That night he slept badly and the next day was very taciturn with his subordinates. Toward three o'clock he brushed his hat, left the office, jumped into a cab, and half an hour later he knocked tremblingly at Madame Blouet's door. (Claudette answered the knock, and on seeing the Deputy Governor she started and blushed.)

'Grandmother is out,' she said, 'but she will soon be home and will be so glad to see you.'

'I have come to see not your grandmother, but yourself, Mademoiselle Claudette,' he returned.

'Me?' she exclaimed anxiously. And he repeated, 'Yes, you,' in an abrupt tone.

'You are going away next month?' he asked.

The girl nodded assent.

'Are you not sorry to leave Paris?'

'Yes, indeed I am. It grieves me to think of it, but then this position is a fortune to us, and grandmother will be able to live in peace for the rest of her days.'

'Suppose I should offer you the means of remaining in Paris, at the same time assuring comfort to Madame Blouet?'

'Oh, sir!' exclaimed the young girl, her face brightening.

'It is rather a violent remedy,' he said, hesitating again. 'Perhaps you would think it too great an effort.'

'Oh, no; I am very resolute—only tell me what it is.'

He took a long breath and then said quietly, almost harshly, 'Will you marry me?'

'Heavens!' she gasped, in a voice of deep emotion. But although her face expressed the deepest surprise, there was no sign of repugnance or alarm. Her bosom heaved, her lips parted, and her eyes became moist with tender brightness.

Boinville dared not look at her, lest he should read refusal in her face. But at last, alarmed by her long silence, he raised his head, saying, 'You think me too old—you are frightened—'

'Not frightened,' she answered simply, 'but surprised, and—glad. It is too good. I can hardly believe it.'

'My dearest!' he cried, taking both her hands, 'you must believe it. I am the one to be glad, for I love you.'

She was silent, but there was no mistaking the tenderness shining in her eyes, and Hubert Boinville must have read them aright, for he drew her to him.

'Holy Mother!' cried the old lady, appearing on the scene at that instant, and the others turned round, he a little confused, the girl blushing but radiant.

'Do not be shocked, Madame Blouet,' said the Deputy Governor. 'The evening that I dined here I found a wife. The ceremony will take place next month—with your permission.'—Translated from the French of Andre Theuriet.

'The poorest as well as the most dangerous flattery is that which we bestow upon ourselves.'