

'No,' quickly, 'I'd rather go alone. You see, I'm over the road every day, and know all its crooks and turns and how to take advantage of things. If I have companions I'm pretty sure to be delayed more or less looking after them, and in this trip I shall need every ounce of strength and every second of time. It will not be child's play. But,' straightening himself to his full height and squaring his shoulders unconsciously, 'it's a sort of thing I rather like. Somehow, it makes one feel like a man. I shall get through all right, you needn't worry about that. And I wouldn't wonder if your horse reaches home to-night. If he's in the drift, I shall release him from the carriage, fasten a robe over him, and start him for home. His instinct will take him to his stable. I've seen that done before. Be sure you leave a place for him to get in.'

Bates never said much about that trip; he was too modest. But one thing and another came out from time to time, and were pieced together, until at length it became a story that was told at winter firesides when the wind whistled and the snow banked up into drifts upon the doorsteps. An old woman whose house was directly upon the road declared she saw him creeping along the top rail of a fence like a cat, because the snow would have been up to his shoulders; and two boys who were daring each other to cross the road confessed they had seen what appeared to be a snow man pushing through a drift up to his waist, and that when he spoke they were so scared they had scurried into the house. And there were other things, too many to repeat, but all of which went toward making up the story.

The liveryman slept in an office in his stable, and that night he was awakened by a weary whinny in which was unmistakable gladness. When he rose and went into the barn, there was the horse Cheesick had taken, with snow still clinging to its body and in its mane. While he was preparing a generous allowance of cut feed and meal he heard his office clock striking twelve.

It was an hour later than that when Lindenwood was awakened by a fumbling at the door nearest the main road. For some time he lay listening, then dressed and went down. When he opened the door two men fell in. Cheesick was the first to speak, and told a rambling story about being carried on the shoulder of a man through big drifts and over fences. It was less than half a mile, but they had been four hours in making it.

Bates slept all that night and most of the next day, then he woke suddenly and rose, declaring he was all right. As soon as he had eaten, he insisted on returning to town. The next day he delivered his mail as usual. By that time it had ceased to snow, and the surface was crusted over hard enough to bear his weight.

A few days later it turned warm again, but it was a week before the lane was sufficiently clear and dry for Mercy to walk out to her box.

Bates always shot a quick glance toward that particular corner as soon as it came in sight. This morning he saw her the very instant his eyes rose over the level of the next hill. But he did not urge his horse forward.

'Good morning,' he said, as he turned his wagon in toward the box and sprang out. 'We are having fine weather again.'

'Yes, indeed,' stepping forward with hands outstretched. 'I want to thank you, Mr. Bates. It was fine.'

He smiled deprecatingly.

'Please don't,' he protested. 'It was only what anybody would have done—or ought to. I was glad to help him to your house. But people talk too much about such things. A dozen have mentioned it already.'

'Oh, it wasn't that I meant,' her eyes snapping. 'I knew you would do such things. It's about the horse trough. I've just heard of it, and the reason why he needed the bath. Papa liked it too, and said it was a good thing.'

Bates started.

'But I—I thought it was all settled between you,' he stammered. 'Cheesick himself told me so this morning, and he said he would renew my note for six months at the double rate of interest I offered.'

Mercy laughed outright. 'Just like him,' she declared. 'He told us he was going to do something handsome for you. And he was right about it being settled between us—it always was so far as I was concerned, only I—I was afraid some of the things he said might be true. I ought to have known better, Harry.'

Not until he had nearly completed his route did Bates remember he had not given Mercy her mail. It was the first mistake of the kind he had ever made. But he took it out to her that evening.—The Guidon.

## A DEPUTY GOVERNOR'S WOOING

'Can you receive Madame Blouet, sir?' asked an attendant, as he opened the door of the Deputy-Governor's office.

Hubert Boinville, the Deputy Governor, was seated with his back to the fireplace at a large mahogany desk littered with deeds and papers. He raised his grave face, which was framed in a brown beard, tinged with a few gray hairs, and his black eyes glanced at the card.

'It is an old lady, sir,' said the attendant. 'Shall I send her away?'

'No; let her come in,' replied the Deputy Governor in a tone of resignation.

The visitor stopped on the threshold and dropped an old-fashioned courtesy. Hubert Boinville half rose from his chair and signed her to a seat. She was a little old lady, dressed in shabby mourning.

'Sir,' she began, in a somewhat breathless voice, 'I am the daughter, sister, and widow of men who served their country. I applied some time ago to the department for help, and I have come to see whether there is any hope.'

The Deputy Governor listened without moving. He had heard so many supplications of this kind.

'Have you ever received any assistance?' he asked coldly.

'No, sir,' she replied. 'I have managed to get on until now without asking. I have a small pension.'

'Ah!' he interrupted in a dry tone. 'In that case I am afraid we can do nothing for you. We have a great many applicants who have no pension to rely upon.'

'Ah, listen, sir!' she cried despairingly. 'I have not explained everything. I had three sons, and they are all dead. The last one taught mathematics, and one winter day, while going from the Pantheon to Chaptal College, he caught a violent cold, which settled on his lungs and carried him off in two weeks. He had supported me and his child by teaching; the expenses of his illness and death used up all our little savings and I had to raise money on my pension. Now I am alone in the world with my grandchild, and we have nothing. I am eighty-two years old, sir.'

Tears had gathered under her wrinkled eyelids as she spoke, and the Deputy Governor was listening more attentively than he had done at first. A peculiar singing intonation of the speaker's voice and the sound of certain provincial expressions seemed to his ears like once familiar music; the old lady's way of speaking had for him a flavor of home.

'You are from Lorraine, I see, madame,' he said at last. 'I suspected it from your accent.'

'Yes, sir, I am from Argonne,' she answered. 'And you recognised my accent? I thought I had long since lost it.'

The Deputy Governor felt his official heart growing softer, and, smiling again, he said:

'I also am from Argonne. I lived near your village for a long time, at Clermant.' And then he added gently, 'Keep up your courage, Madame Blouet; I hope we shall be able to help you. Will you give me your address?'

'No. 12, Rue de la Sante, near the Capuchin convent. Thank you, sir, for your kindness. I am very glad to have found a fellow-countryman,' and, after repeating courtesies, the widow took her departure.

As soon as she was gone M. Boinville rose, and going to the window, stood looking down into the garden with his face against the glass. But he was not looking at the tops of the half-leafless chestnut trees; his dreamy eyes wandered far on toward the east, beyond the plains and the chalky hills of Champagne to a little old town with tile-roofed houses. There his early childhood had been passed, and later his vacations. He had left home in his twenty-first year and had returned only to attend his father's funeral.

Possessing a superior intellect and an iron will, he had risen rapidly, and at thirty-eight years of age was made Deputy Governor. Austere, punctual, reserved, he arrived every morning at exactly 10 o'clock and remained until six, taking work with him when he went home. His heart indeed had once asserted itself, before he had left home, but as he then had neither position nor fortune, the girl he loved had refused him