

'Mr. O'Brien writes to say he will only have a couple of hours here to-morrow, and he hopes he may have the pleasure of seeing you. He is obliged to return to Paris by the 6 o'clock train. Jeanne, tell me—' She broke off abruptly. 'What do you mean to say to him?'

'Isn't the question a little premature, maman?' Jeanne said, avoiding her mother's keen scrutiny. 'You know, you have really no reason for believing Mr. O'Brien wishes to ask me to be his wife.'

'In my opinion, we have every reason, petite, but I shall not worry you about it. You will see him yourself to-morrow; only—be kind to him.'

Jeanne smiled. 'I am going to visit Madame Blanc to-morrow,' she remarked.

'But you will be back for tea, chérie?' Madame Conway looked at her interrogatively.

'Who knows? Madame Blanc is so delightful it is a pleasure to stay there. But no. I am only teasing you. For the sake of old times, it is my duty to meet Mr. O'Brien.'

'He would think it strange if you were away,' was the reply, in a relieved tone of voice. 'But come, Mignonne, tea is ready,' and a moment later the question of love, courtship, and marriage had been put aside, as Mr. Conway joined his wife and daughter, and discussed other topics over the pretty little tea-table.

Jeanne's visit to Madame Blanc was soon over. She was too engrossed with the thought of Kevin to stay long in the pretty little town where her friend lived, six miles from Mermont. The walk home was always a pleasant one, but the way through the woods was still more charming, and, what was more to the point on this particular occasion, much quicker. With a light heart, Jeanne set off, and the dusty road was soon far behind her.

'Qu'il est bon, le bon Dieu!' she murmured to herself, as she tripped merrily along by the side of the stream, unconsciously echoing the words of Blessed Mere Julie. Her life had always been full of happiness, and now Kevin had come to complete it. He was clever, handsome, manly, a devout Catholic. What more could the most exacting woman want? It was quite sufficient to satisfy Jeanne.

Her path through the woods was a lonely one, passing only one human habitation, the low-roofed cottage of old Henri, who had lived there for many years, and who acted as gamekeeper for the owner of the land. Jeanne had a warm corner in her heart for him, but he was also a source of sorrow to her. For over twenty years Henri had never been near a church. He was now seventy, and his health at the best of times was not good. In vain had the Cure pleaded with him. In vain, so it seemed, were the prayers offered for him by the people of Mermont—he remained hard and untouched.

If anyone could soften him, the villagers said, it was surely Mlle. Jeanne. His coldness seemed to fade away when she tearfully begged him to make his peace with God. He would look uneasy, and turn the conversation, but Jeanne knew that her words had left an impression, which she hoped and prayed would deepen into something more.

'Henri!' she cried, as she approached the cottage, 'how are you to-day?' The old man loved his garden, and cultivated it with commendable care, but to-day there was no sign of him, and Jeanne tapped at the door. The afternoon was hot, and a glass of Henri's light wine would be more than welcome.

To her surprise, there was no answer. Opening the door, she looked in, and her face went white with fear. On the couch near the wall lay Henri, gasping for breath. His lips were tinged with blue, his hands trembling. Jeanne's first thought was one of terror, but recovering her self-control, she rushed to the cupboard, seized a bottle of wine, poured some out in a glass, and, raising the old man, pressed it to his lips. The wine seemed to revive him, but, inexperienced as she was, Jeanne realised by Henri's looks that he was very, very ill—apparently near death.

'Mlle. Jeanne,' he whispered feebly, when the attack had passed off, and he had been propped up with pillows, 'there is no time to be lost. I know it—my

days are nearly done. Of your charity, beg M. le Cure to—' he paused, and his breath came quickly and heavily. The effort of speaking had been almost too much for him.

'I understand, Henri,' said Jeanne, gently, still holding his hand. 'I will run as quickly as ever I can for him. But make an act of contrition with me first,' she said anxiously. The old man made a sign for her to repeat the solemn words, but it was more than he could do himself. Jeanne rose from her knees with a mental prayer for help, and, leaving some brandy at Henri's side, she closed the door and hurried away.

Suddenly she stopped, and an exclamation of dismay escaped her lips. She remembered, with a feeling of despair, that Pere Bardet had told her he was lunching with the Cure of Vivet that very day—and Vivet was a town five or six miles, at least, from the spot where she stood. He would certainly not be home again before dusk. And for the first time since her discovery of poor Henri's plight, Jeanne thought of Kevin. It was now almost 3 o'clock—it would be impossible to fetch Pere Bardet, and be home in time to catch Kevin. Standing as she was, in the middle of the woods, far from a living creature, there was no one she could send. What would Kevin think if she were not there? What would her parents think? They would come to the conclusion that she wished to avoid the young Irishman, that she wished to be spared the pain of refusing his offer of marriage. Both her mother and father feared she cared nothing. How easy for them to give him this impression! He would go away broken-hearted, and two lives might be ruined.

'Surely Henri will live till I reach Mermont, and send someone for the cure,' she tried to persuade herself, still hesitating. 'He has shown every sign of contrition—surely this is enough.' And then her cheeks colored with a feeling of shame. Henri was dying—it was evident that he had only a few hours to live. He had asked for the priest. It was terrible to think that he might die without Viaticum—through her fault. Would she not be held responsible if Henri died unshriven?

'No! No!' she cried out, tearfully, 'I must go for Pere Bardet—it is the least I can do.'

The struggle had been sharp, but it was soon over. Fortunately, the training and instincts of a lifetime do not desert us at critical moments. Jeanne had not been taught in vain the worth of a human soul, and she tried, poor girl, to forget her own suffering, in the fulfilment of what was obviously her duty—to help old Henri.

Running as fast as her feet would carry her through the thick woods, she made for Vivet. The distance seemed interminable, but she knew that if she followed the path to the right, it would bring her out close to the little town.

She persevered bravely, in spite of her increasing fatigue, and at last she arrived at the outskirts of the village, in a state of pitiable exhaustion. If she delayed, however, she knew it might be too late to help the dying man, and she went on breathlessly till she reached the presbytery door, and rang the bell.

'Mlle. Jeanne, whatever is the matter?' gasped Marie, the loquacious housekeeper, as she opened the door. 'Why, you are ill, chérie! Come in, and let me give you something.' As she spoke, she took hold of the girl's hand and drew her into the house.

Jeanne suffered the old woman to refresh her with wine, and then she said, still hot and panting, 'It is a case for the Last Sacraments. Marie, please tell Pere Bardet. He is here, I know. It is old Henri—oh! do be quick,' she added impatiently, as Marie stared at her open-mouthed. 'He is dying, I tell you!' She sank back in her chair, while Marie left the room, muttering words of astonishment on her way.

A moment later, Pere Bardet and his host appeared on the scene.

'Jeanne, my child, is this really true?' said the Cure, in an anxious voice, as he came forward.

'Only too true, Father: he is dying. I will tell you about it after, but there is no time to be lost now.'