

elation from the unusual potations he had imbibed, that Dufour's suggestion assumed a sort of drunken likelihood; and he resolved on applying—there could not, he thought, be any wonderful harm, if no good, in that—to the ship-broker. M. Derville was not at home, and the office was closed; but Jeanne Favart, understanding Bertrand to say that he had important business to transact with her master—she supposed by appointment—shewed him into M. Derville's private business-rooms, and left him there. Bertrand seated himself, fell asleep after awhile, woke up about ten o'clock considerably sobered, and quite alive to the absurd inpropriety of the application he had tipsily determined on, was about to leave the place, when M. Derville arrived. The ship-broker's surprise and anger at finding Hector Bertrand in his house were extreme, and his only reply to the intruder's stammering explanation, was a contemptuous order to leave the place immediately. Bertrand slunk away sheepishly enough; and slowly as he sauntered along, had nearly reached home, when M. Derville overtook him. "One word, Monsieur Bertrand," said Derville. "This way, if you please."

Bertrand, greatly surprised, followed the ship-broker to a lane close by—a dark, solitary locality, which suggested an unpleasant misgiving, very pleasantly relieved by Derville's first words.

"Monsieur Bertrand," he said, "I was hasty and ill-tempered just now; but I am not a man to cherish malice, and for the sake of—of Marie—of Mademoiselle de la Tour, I am disposed to assist you, although I should not, as you will easily understand, like to have any public or known dealings with you. Seven or eight hundred francs, I understood you to say, the timber you required would amount to?"

"Certainly not more than that, monsieur," Bertrand contrived to answer, taken away as his breath nearly was by astonishment.

"Here, then, is a note of the Bank of France for one thousand francs."

"Monsieur!—monsieur!" gasped the astounded recipient.

"You will repay me," continued Derville, "when your contract is completed; and you will please to bear strictly in mind, that the condition of any future favor of a like kind is, that you keep this one scrupulously secret." He then hurried off, leaving Bertrand in a state of utter amazement. This feeling, however, slowly subsided, especially after assuring himself, by the aid of his chamber-lamp, that the note was a genuine one, and not, as he had half feared, a valueless deception. "This Monsieur Derville," drowsily mumbled Bertrand as he esconced himself in the bed-clothes, "is a *bon enfant*, after all—a generous, magnanimous prince, if ever there was one. But then, to be sure, he wishes to do Marie a service by secretly assisting her *futur* on in life. *Sacristie!* It is quite simple, after all, this generosity; for undoubtedly Marie is the most charming—charm—cha!"

Hector Bertrand went to Dufour's timber-yard at about noon the next day, selected what he required, and pompously tendered the thousand-franc note in payment. "Whe-e-e-e-w!" whistled Dufour, "the deuce!" at the same time looking with keen scrutiny in his customer's face.

"I received it from Monsieur Mangier in advance," said Hector in hasty reply to that look, blurring out in some degree inadvertently the assertion which he had been thinking would be the most feasible solution of his sudden riches, since he had been so peremptorily forbidden to mention M. Derville's name.

"It is very generous of Monsieur Mangier," said Dufour; "and he is not famous for that virtue either. But let us go to Blaise's bank: I have not sufficient change in the house, and I darsay we shall get silver for it there."

As often happens in France, a daughter of the banker was the cashier of the establishment; and it was with an accent of womanly commiseration that she said, after minutely examining the note: "From whom, Monsieur Bertrand, did you obtain possession of this note?"

Bertrand hesitated. A vague feeling of alarm was beating at his heart, and he confusedly thought him, that it might be better not to repeat the falsehood he had told M. Dufour. Before, however, he could decide what to say, Dufour answered for him: "He says from Monsieur Mangier, just by."

"Strange!" said Mademoiselle Blaise. "A clerk of Monsieur Derville's has been taken in to custody this very morning on suspicion of having stolen this very note."

Poor Bertrand! He felt as if seized with vertigo; and a stunned, chaotic sense of mortal peril shot through his brain, as Marie's solemn warning with respect to Derville rose up like a spectre before him.

"I have heard of that circumstance," said Dufour. And then, as Bertrand did not, or could not speak, he added: "You had better, perhaps, mademoiselle, send for Monsieur Derville."

This proposition elicited a wild, desperate cry from the bewildered young man, who rushed distractedly out of the banking-house, and hastened with frantic speed towards the Rue St. Antoine—for the moment unpursued.

Half an hour afterwards, Dufour and a bank-clerk arrived at Mademoiselle de la Tour's. They found Bertrand and Marie together, and both in a state of high nervous excitement. "Monsieur Derville," said the clerk, "is now at the bank; and Monsieur Blaise requests your presence there, so that whatever misapprehension exists may be cleared up without the intervention of the agents of the public force."

"And pray monsieur," said Marie, in a much firmer tone than, from her pale aspect, one would have expected, "what does Monsieur Derville himself say of this strange affair?"

"That the note in question, mademoiselle, must have been stolen from his desk last evening. He was absent from home from half-past seven till ten, and unfortunately left the key in the lock."

"I was sure he would say so," gasped Bertrand. "He is a demon, and I am lost."

A bright, almost disdainful expression shone in Marie's fine eyes. "Go with these gentlemen, Hector," she said; "I will follow almost immediately; and remember!—What else she said was delivered in a quick, low whisper; and the only words she permitted to be heard were: *Pas*