

"Gaston, the sweep. He closed his eyes at six this morning, and a good riddance too for his wife and children!"

The door burst open and a wild-looking little figure rushed in. Fifine's eyes were bright and sparkling as jet, her thick black hair escaped in elf-locks from under the little cap tied down over it; her frock was tattered and patched till little of the original stuff remained. In her arms she hugged a ragged grey cat.

"The doctor is awake!" she exclaimed. "I have given him his letters; he has put on his coat; he goes out again at once. He had saved a little milk from his coffee for *Miau-miau*. See, she grows fat!"

"I will go up and see him before he goes out!" said the *pasteur* hastily.

He could not help it, he was desperately afraid of this wild imp, never sure what her next antics would be. He went upstairs again with a double-quick tread.

Father Nicholas knocked at the door, but receiving no answer, he pushed it open and went in.

The young doctor was seated in front of the table on which lay an open letter; his face was hidden, bowed down upon his arms.

"André, my boy, my dear fellow!" exclaimed the good *pasteur*, going in hastily and putting a kind hand on the thick, stubborn hair.

André raised his head and looked up, his dark eyes met those of Father Nicholas with a look of pathos which went to his heart; they were dim with pain.

"Tell me what it is," he said gently; "you have had bad news? Tell your old friend; sometimes things are not so black as they are painted."

"I do not know that I ought to call it bad news," Dr. André said heavily. "But you shall read for yourself!"

He rose, brought forward his wicker arm-chair, and placed the *pasteur* in it. Father Nicholas slowly read Madame Féraudy's letter.

André went to the little window and stood looking out over the roofs of the sordid houses around him. Above him the sky was intensely blue, one or two white pigeons wheeled restlessly round the chimneys. André was very tired and nearly fasting, and it seemed to him an eternity before Father Nicholas finished Madame Féraudy's letter, and yet it was not long.

"MY DEAREST NEPHEW,

"This afternoon Madame Canière paid me a state visit, and in due form asked me for the hand of our Génie for Jean Canière. You, who received her dead father's last sigh, are more her guardian than myself. Can you come to me at once and settle what is to be done.

"Your devoted aunt
"LAURE FÉRAUDY."

"My friend," said Father Nicholas gently, "is this so much to you? It is not settled, you have a first voice in the matter, it seems. If the right of decision rests with you, why are you like this?"

André had mastered himself now; he came and sat down, leaning his brow on his hand.

"It is for this reason," he said; "I can never marry. My life is cut out for me here. Is this a place to which one could bring a delicately-nurtured girl? No—no, Nicholas! I chose my path and I must abide in it."

"But, my boy—"

"Let me tell you. It is my own choice, that is, if one can call it choice when the path of duty is so clear. When I left the college I had two good posts offered me—one of them I was about to accept when I came across an over-worked doctor who wanted a real rest, and while waiting I took his work. Imagine my astonishment when I found myself in a quarter of Protestants in the heart of Paris, a remnant of old Huguenot days—a handful that had escaped. I myself am a southerner; I come from the sunny slopes of the Orthez hills, from a little town called Sauveterre. The Gave rushes down its leafy valley. Through a break in the hills the mighty Pic du Midi breaks the sky-line and loses his eternal snow in the clouds. Ah, I dream!"

"I am listening with the deepest interest," murmured Father Nicholas.

"These streets of Protestants were poor. You know how terribly poor; work was scarce; they were cut off from many of the fine charities of Paris. In spite of misery and squalor, in spite of much evil and vile sin, I grew fond of the wretched people, absorbed in the work of looking after their sordid lives. Well, it ended in my refusing those appointments; one of them was given to my predecessor here who loathed this work and, you know it well, neglected the poor. Well, I had money of my own then, a good deal. You know the little Convalescent Home at Dieppe to which we send our sick and the children. That was my investment and I have made its future safe; what I had was just enough to endow it."

"The Hospice is yours? Your own, André?"

"Yes. I only tell you because I want you to understand that I have nothing left—nothing. I live on my professional earnings, and they are enough for me to live upon but no more, in this poor quarter."

"Did I not hear of the offer of another appointment this spring?"

"Yes," said André slowly. "I am ashamed to say it tempted me greatly. It was in Orléans, a quiet, old-fashioned happy place, and at that time I had become acquainted with a dying painter. You knew his name in the *Salon*? Rotraud Lacour and his daughter. I—well, I saw a great deal of them. She was in great distress. In his last moments he went back to the old faith, and of course they took possession of him. You have seen it in such cases. Père Etienne came to him; I managed that. He was very kind, but of course the trial for her was great; but I got her to thank God at last, for the man had lost all faith. I had some strange talks with him. Then, it was so beautiful! They offered her a home; she was to teach little children in the Convent of the Nativity. The nuns are kind, gentle little ladies; they often ask me to see

their poor. There was nothing else open to Eugénie Lacour; she was quite alone in the world and without money, but the usual condition was attached—she must join the Church of Rome. Little Génie, delicate, fragile, golden-haired child! Ah, it is not for nothing that we trace our descent to those few strong ones of the earth who kept the faith and died for that which they held more dear than life itself. The undeviating strength of truth possessed her, and she refused all, believing that the alternative was starvation! Who would not love so noble, so glorious a soul! I loved her, my friend, yes, I love her, and she herself has taught me to live and give myself, my all, my happiness to God's work."

"My boy," said the *pasteur*, deeply moved, "my poor boy, tell me what followed?"

"I found her a home with my dear and kind old aunt, Madame Féraudy, to whom she has become a daughter indeed."

"And you refused Orléans?"

"Could I do otherwise? Giles Brunet would have taken my place."

"Ah, I understand."

"And," André went on dreamily, "all this time the thought of her has been to me like a guiding star, whose gentle light shone on all my life and made it good, and now—now—"

"Well, my friend, now?"

"You read the letter; Jean Canière is just the man to whom tender parents would confide the happiness of a daughter. He can give her a peaceful home, a sheltered nest, and I—what have I to give? I know myself, if I turned from this hard path of sordid duty, my life would be darkened by unavailing remorse. So you see, *pasteur*," he said, looking up with a smile more sad than tears, "such happiness is not for me."

"God bless you, André. You are too good for this world," said Father Nicholas with a full heart.

"And now," said Dr. André suddenly, "tell me, father, what brought you here this morning? What have you to tell me?"

"Just this, my boy; fever has broken out in St. Eustache. I met Doctor Baux this morning. He says it will be in our quarter to-morrow."

"Then I will go down to Féraudy this afternoon and talk over this business with my aunt," said André alertly. "Thank God, Gaston is dead; he died this morning at six o'clock. That was a horrible death-bed, father, horrible, hopeless! Well, this is the last free day we shall have till the fight is over; it will spread like wild-fire at this season. Where did Baux say the first cases are?"

"Rue Pellier—Rue St. Eustache."

"So near! Well, adieu. I shall be back by the train which arrives at three o'clock in the afternoon to-morrow."

The *pasteur* held out both his hands and clasped André's with the firm grip of a heart too full for speech; then he turned away, and the young doctor, thrusting a few necessities into a hand-bag, walked off to the station.

(To be continued.)