

gently, "have you made any plans yet?"

She raised her eyes, and he saw a frightened look in them.

"Not yet; I—I have not had time."

"Because I have something to suggest to you—something which might perhaps suit you."

Madame Manche looked up sharply.

"Mademoiselle Lacour does not leave me until I am satisfied with her prospects," she said.

Génie gave her a grateful look.

"If I can find any occupation—any work within my powers," she said.

"Would you read this letter?" said André. "But first let me explain. The lady who writes is my aunt, Madame Féraudy. She has heard about you. She lives altogether in the country; she has means, she is even rich, and she is a widow. But read; this morning she sent me this letter which I am to give to you. Mademoiselle, she is very good, and when you have overcome a little outward stiffness she is kindness itself. I ought to know, for she brought me up, and she never let me miss my mother."

Génie sat down and opened the letter, and André walked up to the window and looked out, so as to leave her to read it undisturbed.

At first it did not seem very legible, for it was written in very pale ink on transparent paper, but Génie's eyes grew accustomed to the sharp sloping handwriting, and she read—

"DEAR MADEMOISELLE,

"I have heard much about you from my nephew André, and of the devoted way in which you have for so long nursed your amiable and greatly lamented father. I have also heard that you have not fixed upon your future home: therefore I wish to make a proposition to you. I will explain. The house which I inhabit faces the south, having several rooms looking on the sea, both bedrooms and sitting-rooms. On the side which I myself prefer, the rooms face the east and look on my *basse-cour*, beyond which lie the stables, the coach-houses, and the cow-houses. In the *basse-cour* I have quite a farm—cows, horses, a pig, goats, rabbits, hens, chickens, turkeys, pigeons. Quite close to my house is a cottage inhabited by a good couple and three children, all in my service. As for my household, I have only with me at this moment a cook, or rather a *bonne-à-tout-faire*, brought up in the village, who, in addition to her housework, devotes her time to the garden, gathers fruit and vegetables, and takes care of the flowers.

"For myself, mademoiselle, I have an ambition, and that is to be a good farmer. I am up at five o'clock, downstairs at six to see the milking of the cows and goats, measure the milk, see and feed the chickens, hens, turkeys. All this amuses me, and without it I should not care to remain in the country.

"But let me come to the point. I confess that I suffer both in health and spirits for want of a fellow-creature—a second self. For many years, by an amiable attention of Providence, I possessed this blessing in a dear friend

and companion, but she was taken from me, and now I miss it all the more. I am much: I am seventy years old. I feel that a little interruption in my many occupations, say a holiday on Thursdays, the possibility of rising sometimes as late as seven o'clock with the knowledge that a second self is looking after things in my place. This would do me good and give me pleasure.

"The property is very large. It is all I can do to walk round the meadow which stretches between my house and the coast of the sea. It measures without including the garden more than one hectare. The whole comprises thirty-one hectares of sea-shore, meadow, wood, and garden. At the end of the garden there is a charming harbour looking seawards, and having a good view of the statue of St. Anne—an exquisite figure erected on the cliff which can be seen from far out at sea.

"The town of Quinton is about six miles distant by road and four by foot-path. By a bridge across a splendid ravine I am only ten minutes' walk from a village called Poinville, where we have a Protestant temple dating from great antiquity.

"You will understand that the fact of your belonging to a long persecuted faith gives you in my opinion a claim on my care and affection, which I beg of you to remember. Now, shall we understand each other? Mademoiselle, I listen to my own presentiments, which tell me that you could be happy with me in this quiet busy life. May I, however, confess to you that I am afflicted with a shyness and reserve which may lead you to believe me to be unsympathetic? If by the simplicity and frankness of your character you can overlook this defect, we shall soon know each other well.

"This is a very long history. Will you tell me when you are disposed to come to me? I will do my utmost to make you happy. You see from this account that I am a great worker. Indeed, my object is to imitate the wise woman of Scripture. This need not prevent hours devoted to reading and innocent amusements, but you will readily perceive that I am not in a position to act as a great *châtelaine* and receive visitors who care only to amuse themselves and watch me working. Adieu. Receive, dear mademoiselle, the assurance of my kindest sentiments.

"LAURE FÉRAUDY."

Génie put down the letter and looked up at Dr. André with a smile. He came back to her with a glad look in his eyes.

"It is frank, is it not?" he said. "She is rather original, but the kindest creature in the world when you understand her ways."

"May I show it to Madame Manche?" said Génie.

He nodded and took it to the good landlady in the window.

Dr. André stood drumming his fingers lightly on the table. He was so anxious that his kind scheme for poor little Génie's future should be successful that he was impatient.

Madame Manche put down the letter

a little stiffly; she was far too business-like to appreciate its quaint kindness.

"There is no mention of a salary," she said; "and as I gather from the letter that mademoiselle will be expected to be a kind of superior *femme-de-charge*—"

"Madame!" exclaimed Génie, "indeed I am not worth any salary until—"

But Doctor André interrupted hastily.

"You are quite right," he said, "but I was coming to that. The salary would be four hundred francs a year, and, far from being a *femme-de-charge*, mademoiselle would be as a dear daughter to my aunt."

"I accept without a moment's hesitation," cried Génie. "I accept the home and the kindness, but not the salary, until I feel myself useful enough to earn it. The letter delights me. The country, the flowers, the sea, the kindness above all!" and the tears rushed into her grey eyes.

"Poor child!" said Madame Manche, softened both by the four hundred francs and the emotion in Génie's sweet face.

Doctor André was intensely glad and thankful. Génie was quickly herself again and eager to settle everything without delay.

"How soon can I start?" she said. "This week? I shall have very little to buy, some aprons with large pockets to hold the chickens' food, a large sun-bonnet also."

"Will this do?" said Dr. André with some hesitation, for he did not know what the landlady would say. "On Friday next I am going down to Féraudy for a few hours. If mademoiselle would allow me to have the honour of escorting her there, I could introduce her to my aunt and take care of her on the journey."

Génie glanced doubtfully at Madame Manche; the arrangement would take from her all the pain and dread of facing a new life without one friend by her side. To her great relief, the good lady accepted the proposal with alacrity.

"An excellent plan," she said, "and one that will relieve me of all anxiety. I am very glad," she added, rising and putting away her knitting. "This whole plan has been arranged by Heaven. It will provide you with a home, my dear young demoiselle, and lift from my shoulders a responsibility which I must confess that I dreaded."

Génie turned to Dr. André and held out her hands impulsively.

"The good God will reward you," she said. "He only knows how lonely I am. How can I repay you?"

"By becoming a good *intendante* to the aunt of this our friend," said Madame Manche a little sharply. "After all, my dear, it is wonderful how much money can be saved by wise economies and close supervision. It will be in your power to do much."

"I will do my utmost," said Génie earnestly.

They settled that Dr. André was to call for Génie at eight o'clock on the following Friday, and he went away, running through the streets as fast as he could run to save the time he had spent in the Rue St. Hilaire.

(To be continued.)