

DOCTOR ANDRÉ.

By LADY MARGARET MAJENDIE.

CHAPTER VI.



URING the weeks that followed, Génie saw a good deal of the tenants upstairs. The invalid took a violent fancy for her, and Génie, whose heart was very tender, grew fond of the exacting lady, and by her constant kindness and attention to her won the intense gratitude of her son who was devoted to his mother.

One Sunday evening, a message came to Génie while she was eating her cold supper with Madame Féraudy—

"Madame Canière's compliments, and would she do her the honour of visiting her this evening, she was feeling far from well."

Génie was tired from her walk to church; like the majority of French girls she was not much of a pedestrian, but she could not refuse. She went upstairs rather slowly.

On the landing on the top of the staircase Monsieur Canière was waiting for her. He looked wistful, and the fresh colour had somewhat faded from his face.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "forgive my having asked you to come up, but my mother is restless and ill, and whenever you come you always do her so much good that I ventured to do so."

Génie looked and felt astonished. The last time that she had come to see Madame Canière she had scarcely spoken to her, had left all the conversation to her son, and had only sat staring at her with her uncanny, bead-like eyes.

She thought Monsieur Canière looking anxious, she believed that his life with his delicate and fanciful mother was a difficult one, and already she had learnt something of the patience and tenderness with which he always bore everything from her. So Génie only nodded kindly to him, accepted the pretty bouquet of wild ferns he offered her, and went in.

He did not follow; he was rather tired and dejected and he ran hastily downstairs, thinking that he would have time for a soothing cigarette before his mother wanted him again.

Génie came into the blue *salon*. Madame Canière was lying back in a large arm-chair by the table. She was a delicate-looking woman, who had evidently been once very elegant, and the elaborate arrangement of her dress, covered with lace and grey satin ribbons, betrayed that she still remembered the time when she had been a beautiful woman. Her face was very drawn and colourless now, and her abundant soft white hair was dressed and curled in the height of the fashion.

She would have retained much of her former attraction had not her face been marred by an expression of pain and languor, and the sharp nervous glances of her black eyes.

"So you came! I did not think you would!" she exclaimed as Génie came forward and seated herself by her. "I do not see what attraction an invalid like myself could have to induce anyone young and gay to come near her."

"I want no attraction, madame," said Génie gently. "It is enough that you want me. I am glad to come."

"They say Protestants always tell the truth. My husband's family are all Protestants, and so is Jean; they never interfered with me. Is it the case? Do you think that they are so fond of truth?"

"At all events it is a noble reputation to have!" said Génie proudly. "There is nothing so strong, so precious as a friend whom you can absolutely trust, who is clear and true as fine crystal."

"Have you such a friend?" said Madame Canière quickly.

"Yes, I have two such friends."

"One is your Madame Féraudy, doubtless," said the invalid impatiently. "Who is the other?"

"The other is her nephew, Dr. André Féraudy," said Génie. "I cannot tell you what I owe to him."

"I have heard my son speak of him. He is much older, is he not? Doubtless almost as a father to you?" said Madame Canière.

"Oh no, Dr. André is quite young. Have you never seen him, madame? He is so clever, so wonderfully clever; they say he passed all the highest examinations that there are to pass, and might have any appointment he liked, but he devotes all his time and thoughts to the poor. I wish you could consult him. I think he might do you a great deal of good, and no doctor in Paris can compare with him in cleverness."

Madame Canière moved restlessly. "What is he like in appearance—this paragon?" she asked. "I cannot bear ugly people."

"But he is not ugly, madame. He is—perhaps not exactly handsome—but he is better than handsome. There is something about him that makes him beautiful."

"But what is he like?" said Madame Canière.

"He is tall and slight and active as a bird. He has thick dark hair cut short and standing up like a brush, and a black moustache, and a very thin young face with large, rather hollow eyes."

"Humph! that sounds half-starved. I suppose he has no fortune, this fine gentleman?"

"I do not know," said Génie. "I remember that Madame Manche (our landlady in the Rue St. Hilaire) once told me that he would be quite rich if

he chose, but he gives all away—all—all to his poor."

"You say he is clever?"

"Indeed there is no one like him, madame, everyone says so."

"I wonder whether he could do me any good! Does he ever come here, Eugénie?" she said wearily.

"Yes, he comes sometimes to see his aunt. He will be coming again soon for a day."

"After all, a story like that generally means that a man has failed to secure a good practice and must do what he can with the poor. But I forgot! this gentleman is one of your crystal friends!"

"I believe in him as I believe in my Bible," said Génie earnestly.

"Well, well, we will see. I did not mean to say anything against him. Eugénie dear, I am becoming very fond of you," she went on plaintively. "I should like to have a daughter like you, but I never had a daughter, no blessings ever came to me."

"And yet, madame," said Génie indignantly, "the devotion of monsieur, your son, excites everyone's admiration."

"He is very good, my son," exclaimed Madame Canière. "I do not know what I should do without him. I think he is faultless."

"Then you cannot say that you have no blessings."

"No, no, but it does one good to grumble now and then. My son is very clever, he does very well in his profession; he makes a large income, he has a charming house in Paris. I tell him that there is only one thing wanting to him, and that is a wife."

"But, dear madame, what more can he want, when he has you?"

"What?" exclaimed Madame Canière starting upright and speaking shrilly. "What do you mean, child? Will you dare to say that I must be dead and buried before my son can marry?"

"You make a mistake, madame," exclaimed Génie boldly, though her heart beat fast. "I said nothing of the sort. I merely meant to observe that monsieur, your son, had enough happiness in you."

Madame Canière sank back; she looked faint. "Did I speak crossly, dear child. I am sorry. I did not mean it. I am faint to-day from starvation. I have had nothing to eat. I cannot touch cold meat, and these Protestants will not allow any cooking."

"Dear madame," exclaimed Génie. "You have really eaten nothing? This shall never happen again! I will fly downstairs and make you an omelet at once. Yes, yes, an *omelette au jambon*. I am shocked!"

"But the rules, Eugénie! I knew them before we came."

"Rules always relax for illness," said Génie decidedly.