

DOCTOR ANDRÉ.

By LADY MARGARET MAJENDIE.

CHAPTER VII.



N the next day Madame Canière sent a message to Madame Féraudy to ask if she would receive her. Madame Féraudy could not help guessing what was coming, and she answered the message with a deep sigh. She would receive her guest with great pleasure at three o'clock.

The next thing was to send Génie out of the way, and she despatched her with Jeanne for her escort, to pay a visit to Madame Lamotte, the *pasteur's* wife, at Poinville.

At three o'clock precisely Madame Canière arrived, dressed in her smartest Paris gown, and with an exquisite bonnet of old lace and sequins on her head. Her gloves and shoes, all were new; it was evident that the visit was one of great ceremony.

Madame Féraudy received her with a curtsey of the most admirable dignity, and the two ladies sat opposite to each other both as white as they could be.

Madame Canière broke the ice by saying: "I have to thank you, dear madame, for your goodness in allowing your young lady to come sometimes to cheer up my loneliness and give me the happiness of young companionship. I can assure you that I envy you the possession of her."

"She is very dear to me," said Madame Féraudy simply. "But you, madame, are greatly blest in your son."

"Ah, apropos of my son, dear madame, I should like to talk to you of him. He is the best son that ever lived. No one ever had a better son, more gentle, more tender, more trustworthy, and people say that good sons make the best husbands."

"There is no doubt about that," said Madame Féraudy with a stiff little bow.

"I should like to tell you more," said the mother feverishly. "My son is in an excellent position. His father left him a nice private fortune of about four hundred pounds a year. He is very successful in his profession and is in partnership with a first-rate firm. We have a charming house in Paris, and at my death all that I possess will go to him, including a very pretty farm near Orleans, which is let to an admirable tenant. Now, dear madame, in most

cases a man who has such advantages to offer will naturally look for some equal advantages on the lady's side; but not so my son. He is in a position which enables him to think only of the dictates of his heart, and, let me confess it, his heart is given away."

Madame Féraudy shivered; it was coming. What should she say? Deep down in her heart was the longing that Génie should become the wife of her beloved André. She was as dear to her now as if she had been her own daughter, and the longing of her life was to see André happy. She knew the self-sacrifice of his whole life—she knew that all his private fortune had been spent, and that all his professional earnings went in the same way—a large, wise, but all-absorbing charity—and the painful doubt assailed her as to whether it was not her duty to persuade Génie to accept the fate offered to her, in all ways a happy and even brilliant one, and in doing so to forget the ideal she had set before her in Dr. André. She said nothing while Madame Canière paused with her sharp black eyes trying to read her thoughts.

Madame Canière began to speak again with a little embarrassed laugh.

"Perhaps, madame, you may think that I myself am wanting in worldly wisdom in not opposing my son's wishes, but no, I care for nothing but his happiness, and whatever I can do to further that, I am eager to do. Tell me, madame, do you think that a young wife would put up with me in the house?" her voice had a pathetic sound in it as she went on: "You see, I am irritable and nervous. I often say and do what is perhaps unkind, but possibly she would excuse it, for though people think that I am a *malade imaginaire*—and I let them think so—it is not true. I suffer much, and I conceal it as much as I can. It cannot last very long, for it will kill me, and I should die quite happy if my Jean had his wife to comfort him."

The hard, black eyes were softened with unsheared tears. Madame Féraudy was touched.

"Your son's young wife will love you and be like your own child," she said. "Do not doubt that. I feel sure that so good a man will choose wisely."

"He has chosen," said the mother leaning back; her lips were quivering, she struggled nervously to draw off her gloves. "His choice has fallen on one whom I could love, whom I do love already, and I have come to you, madame, to ask for my son the hand of your charming adopted daughter."

Madame Féraudy rose to her feet in irrepressible agitation, walked up and down once or twice, and then returned to her chair.

"Madame," she said, "I am very much honoured and also very much touched by the preference of monsieur your son for my little Génie, but—but—"

"Do not say but!" exclaimed the other eagerly. "There can be no hesitation! Surely, dear madame, it is

not only your wish but your duty to marry this young girl, to find for her, husband, home and future. The responsibility of these young lives is very great. We elders cannot live for ever, and where can you find a suitor for her hand so steady, so good, so all that can be desired?"

"All that you say is quite true, madame; indeed, I feel the honour you have done us, and deeply appreciate all that you offer, and more especially as you say that monsieur your son cares for my Génie."

"He loves her, madame. We will make her so happy if you will give her to us."

Madame Féraudy almost wrung her hands.

"What can I say?" she said. "Dear madame, do not think me ungrateful, but I can say nothing at present. I must have time to consult my nephew. He knew her father and was with him on his death-bed. He is in a way her guardian. I can do nothing without his consent. I will write at once and ask him to come here."

"Ah, perhaps that will be best," said Madame Canière, trying to conceal her disappointment. "Then we must wait. You are sure, madame, that it is wise to consult so young a guardian? That he will not be biased by other motives than her advantage? When one is young, you know!"

"I know, but I can do nothing without him, and in a week's time we will re-open this question."

"And until then, madame, will you not give me hope, some little encouragement for my anxious boy?"

"He sees my Génie every day. What hope he may have he must glean from her gentle ways with him. Madame, I can say no more."

"Then let it be so," said Madame Canière rising. "I know you will not keep us longer in suspense than you can help. *Au revoir*, dear madame."

Madame Féraudy looked at her anxiously; she looked so white and shaken. At the door she turned round suddenly and held out her hands.

"Dear madame," she said, "let me feel that we have your good wishes. Indeed, indeed we would make her happy. People say that much love in itself constitutes happiness, and that we can promise your child."

"I would give her to you with every confidence," said Madame Féraudy, then her voice faltered. "But I must have time; there are other lives, other hopes—"

"I know, I thought so; forgive me, dear madame, I am only a mother pleading for her boy's happiness."

Madame Féraudy could not answer; she bent forward and kissed the anxious face gently.

A moment later she heard Jean Canière come in from the garden, put his arm round his mother, and tenderly support her up the stairs.

With a heavy heart she sat down to write to André.

(To be continued.)