

DOCTOR ANDRÉ.

By LADY MARGARET MAJENDIE.

CHAPTER III.



GÉNIE was awake by five o'clock the next morning, and as already the opening and shutting of doors and active footsteps announced that the house was astir, she rose hastily, made her toilette and went down. She looked exceedingly pretty, with a large newapron over her black gown and her soft, fluffy, golden hair crowning her delicate little face.

Génie found Madame Féraudy in the hall dressed in a short black petticoat, a large linen jacket loosely tied round the waist, and a cap with vast frills.

"That is right, my child," she exclaimed. "I am delighted to see that you are an early riser. Come! I will show you the *basse-cour*!"

She led the way through sundry passages and kitchens, and out into the large court-yard at the back of the house. It was enclosed by grand old brick walls with wide stone copings—walls rich in colour, covered with orange and grey lichens which harmonised with the sun-burnt hue of the old brick-work.

The *basse-cour* was partly paved and partly filled with tall rough grass. At the apparition of Madame Féraudy, who carried a huge bowl of food in her hands, from every corner rushed a swarm of creatures—fat ducks bustled out of the grass, hens and chickens tumbled over each other, a flight of pigeons whirled out of space and alighted, bowing and cooing on the ground, a mighty cochin-china cock leapt clumsily on to a barrel, uttering a hoarse roar.

Génie burst out laughing; she could not help it. To the town-bred girl the sight of this hurrying, eager, hungry flock was immensely funny, and glancing round she saw long, low hutches out of which eager eyes and twitching noses looked anxiously.

"There! I knew how it would be!" exclaimed Madame Féraudy. "Evil beast! Génie! Génie! see what that villainous hen has done! Catch her! catch her at once, I say!"

Madame Féraudy stooped down and picked up the body of a poor little puff-ball chicken, which the heavy foot of its careless mother had flattened out on the ground.

"See!" she exclaimed angrily to Génie. "She has killed it! and it was her only chick. Catch her, Génie!"

But Génie failed utterly. In vain she

flew after the shrieking hen, her very hands upon it, it vanished from between them, and the audacious bird evading her with piercing cries, rushed round and round, snatching up large portions of its breakfast as it went, in spite of every effort.

Génie gave it up at last and came up to Madame Féraudy ruefully. "What shall we do, madame?" she said. "Ah! the poor, dear little chick—is it quite dead?"

"It is flat as a collapsed india-rubber ball," said Madame Féraudy.

"Perhaps its little bones are not broken," said Génie. "Do you think, madame, you could blow it up again?"

Madame Féraudy smiled. "We will try the experiment," she said. Very tenderly she opened its beak and blew into it, and by degrees the little body resumed its puff-ball shape. Génie looked on with a kind of horrified interest as Madame Féraudy put the chick into the bosom of her white linen jacket and left it safely there while she resumed her task of feeding the poultry.

"It is a bad sight, Génie," she said with a sigh. "This absence of self-control, these ugly passions, this greed which makes a mother trample flat her own child in order to get first to her meal."

"It is bad, very bad," said Génie. "And is that hen to go unpunished?"

"Catch her, my love," said Madame Féraudy drily.

"And if I succeed in catching her, what then?" said Génie anxiously.

"You shall wring her neck. We will have her for the first chicken boiled with white sauce for Madame Canière, our *locataire*."

Génie clasped her hands; she turned very pale.

"Dear madame," she said, "I will do anything. I will feed the pigs. I will sweep and scrub and *frotter* the floors, but I could not kill anything! not even a fly!"

"I never thought you could," said Madame Féraudy. "But when you demanded the punishment of that evil-minded mother, why, then I thought I would put you to the test!"

"Aha!" cried Génie laughing. "But that also would be an evil passion! a wish for revenge!"

"There is my good Jeanne! Jeanne, *ma bonne*! See! just look at this! That ill brought-up hen has trodden on her last chick! Just look, I say!"

She drew the chick out of her gown and placed its body on the ground.

"I do not see much amiss, madame," said Jeanne smiling broadly, for the little chick shook itself and dashed away at full speed crying shrilly for its mother.

"*Ciel!*" exclaimed Madame Féraudy, while Génie sat down on the

nearest rabbit-hutch and laughed till she cried.

Jeanne looked at her a little anxiously. Madame Féraudy was sometimes very stern. Would she be angry with the pretty girl who, by her looks and smiles, had already won the heart of the kindly Bretonne. But no! she was reassured, for her mistress only smiled indulgently, and looked even with amusement at the laughing girl.

"What time does madame expect the *locataires*?" said Jeanne presently. "Madame must tell me how we are to manage."

"We must have help," said Madame Féraudy thoughtfully. "There will be more cooking. Josephine will have to attend to her kitchen and—"

"But, madame!" exclaimed Génie, "surely, surely you will let me help. I can do a great deal indeed."

"Mademoiselle will be of more use in the house than in the *basse-cour*," said Jeanne. "She could perhaps dust the rooms, make the coffee and the salads, and help me with the beds."

"Yes, yes," cried Génie. "I can do all that and more also. Oh, let me work! It is the only way in which I can repay you for giving me this happy home."

Madame Féraudy gave an odd little grunt of assent. "You shall do as you like, my child," she said. "If I had had a daughter she would have worked, you shall do the same, yes. And now come, we must visit the dairy and tell Maturin what vegetables we require, and then we must get the blue rooms ready. They come at five o'clock. The five train from Paris, *ma bonne*."

"What do they call themselves, please, madame?" said Jeanne.

"Madame Canière and Monsieur Canière her son; she is a widow. He is an *avocat* on his summer holiday. She eats boiled chickens only—*apropos*—Jeanne! that murdering hen."

"Ah, bah! we cannot spare her. She did not mean it, and see how amiable she is now with her *poussin*! No, madame, the next to go is that white cockerel with a tuft on his head! He is nice and plump!"

"Oh, save him!" cried Génie. "The prettiest of them all! No, that one cannot be sacrificed!"

"But he is plump. He is just ready, and he is an expensive bird to keep. He eats for two."

"He is a beauty. He enjoys his life, he loves his beautiful *basse-cour*. Madame, madame, say that he shall not die."

"Madame has two to choose from—either the white cockerel, or that speckled pullet, but madame must please choose quickly—*cric-crac*, before mademoiselle can plead."

"You shall choose, *mignonne*," said Madame Féraudy smiling. "Either the white one with the tuft or the little speckled pullet."