

## CHAPTER XIV.

In the meantime, Zo had become the innocent cause of a difference of opinion between two no less dissimilar personages than Maria and the duenna.

Having her mind full of the sick monkey, the child felt a natural curiosity to see the other monkeys who were well. Amiable Miss Minerva consulted her young friend from Italy before she complied with Zo's wishes. Would Miss Carmina like to visit the monkey-house? Ovid's cousin, remembering Ovid's promise, looked towards the end of the walk. He was not returning to her-- he was not even in sight. Carmina resigned herself to circumstances, with a little air of pique which was duly registered in Miss Minerva's memory.

Arriving at the monkey-house, Teresa appeared in a new character. She surprised her companions by showing an interest in natural history.

"Are they all monkeys in that big place?" she asked. "I don't know much about foreign beasts. How do they like it, I wonder?"

This comprehensive inquiry was addressed to the governess, as the most learned person present. Miss Minerva referred to her elder pupil with an encouraging smile. "Maria will inform you," she said. "Her studies in natural history have made her well acquainted with the habits of monkeys."

Thus authorised to exhibit her learning, even the discreet Maria actually blushed with pleasure. It was that young lady's most highly-prized reward to display her knowledge (in imitation of her governess's method of instruction) for the benefit of unfortunate persons of the lower rank, whose education had been imperfectly carried out. The tone of amiable patronage with which she now imparted useful information to a woman old enough to be her grandmother, would have made the hands of the bygone generation burn to box her ears.

"The monkeys are kept in large and airy cages," Maria began; "and the temperature is regulated with the utmost care. I shall be happy to point out to you the difference between the monkey and the ape. You are not perhaps aware that the members of the latter family are called 'Simiadae,' and are without tails and cheek-pouches?"

Listening so far in dumb amazement, Teresa checked the flow of information

at tails and cheek-pouches.

"What gibberish is this child talking to me?" she asked. "I want to know how the monkeys amuse themselves in that large house?"

Maria's perfect training condescended to enlighten even this state of mind.

"They have ropes to swing on," she answered sweetly; "and visitors feed them through the wires of the cage. Branches of trees are also placed for their diversion; reminding many of them no doubt of the vast tropical forests in which, as we learn from travellers, they pass in flocks from tree to tree."

Teresa held up her hand as a signal to stop. "A little of You, my young lady, goes a long way," she said. "Consider how much I can hold, before you cram me at this rate."

Maria was bewildered, but not daunted yet. "Pardon me," she pleaded; "I fear I don't quite understand you."

"Then there are two of us puzzled," the duenna remarked. "I don't understand you. I shan't go into that house. A Christian can't be expected to care about beasts--but right is right all the world over. Because a monkey is a nasty creature (as I have heard, not even good to eat when he's dead), that's no reason for taking him out of his own country and putting him into a cage. If we are to see creatures in prison, let's see creatures who have deserved it--men and women, rogues and sluts. The monkeys haven't deserved it. Go in--I'll wait for you at the door."

Setting her bitterest emphasis on this protest, which expressed inveterate hostility to Maria (using compassion for caged animals as the readiest means at hand), Teresa seated herself in triumph on the nearest bench.

A young person, possessed of no more than ordinary knowledge, might have left the old woman to enjoy the privilege of saying the last word. Miss Minerva's pupil, exuding information as it were at every pore in her skin, had been rudely dried up at a moment's notice. Even earthly perfection has its weak places within reach. Maria lost her temper.

"You will allow me to remind you," she said, "that intelligent curiosity leads us to study the habits of animals that are new to us. We place them in a cage--"

Teresa lost her temper.

"You're an animal that's new to me," cried the irate duenna. "I never in all my life met with such a child before. If you please, madam governess, put this girl into a cage. My intelligent curiosity wants to study a monkey that's new to me."

It was fortunate for Teresa that she was Carmina's favourite and friend, and, as such, a person to be carefully handled. Miss Minerva stopped the growing quarrel with the readiest discretion and good-feeling. She patted Teresa on the shoulder, and looked at Carmina with a pleasant smile. "Worthy old creature! how full of humour she is! The energy of the people, Miss Carmina. I often remark the quaint force with which they express their ideas. No--not a word of apology, I beg and pray. Maria, my dear, take your sister's hand, and we will follow." She put her arm in Carmina's arm with the happiest mixture of familiarity and respect, and she nodded to Carmina's old companion with the cordiality of a good-humoured friend.

Teresa was not further irritated by being kept waiting for any length of time. In a few minutes Carmina joined her on the bench.

"Tired of the beasts already, my pretty one?"

"Worse than tired--driven away by the smell! Dear old Teresa, why did you speak so roughly to Miss Minerva and Maria?"

"Because I hate them! because I hate the family! Was your poor father demented in his last moments, when he trusted you among these detestable people?"

Carmina listened in astonishment. "You said just the contrary of the family," she exclaimed, "only yesterday!"

Teresa hung her head in confusion. Her well-meant attempt to reconcile Carmina to the new life on which she had entered was now revealed as a sham, thanks to her own outbreak of temper. The one honest alternative left was to own the truth, and put Carmina on her guard without alarming her, if possible.

"I'll never tell a lie again, as long as I live," Teresa declared. "You see I didn't like to discourage you. After all, I dare say I'm more wrong than right in my opinion. But it is my opinion, for all that. I hate those women, mistress and governess, both alike. There! now it's out. Are you angry with me?"

"I am never angry with you, my old friend; I am only a little vexed. Don't say you hate people, after only knowing them for a day or two! I am sure Miss Minerva has been very kind--to me, as well as to you. I feel ashamed of myself already for having begun by disliking her."

Teresa took her young mistress's hand, and patted it compassionately. "Poor innocent, if you only had my experience to help you! There are good ones and bad ones among all creatures. I say to you the Gallilees are bad ones! Even their music-master (I saw him this morning) looks like a rogue. You will tell me the poor old gentleman is harmless, surely. I shall not contradict that--I shall only ask, what is the use of a man who is as weak as water? Oh, I like him, but I distinguish! I also like Zo. But what is a child--especially when that beastly governess has muddled her unfortunate little head with learning? No, my angel, there's but one person among these people who comforts me, when I think of the day that will part us. Ha! do I see a little colour coming into your cheeks? You sly girl! you know who it is. There is what I call a Man! If I was as young as you are, and as pretty as you are--"

A warning gesture from Carmina closed Teresa's lips. Ovid was rapidly approaching them.

He looked a little annoyed, and he made his apologies without mentioning the doctor's name. His cousin was interested enough in him already to ask herself what this meant. Did he really dislike Benjulia, and had there been some disagreement between them?

"Was the tall doctor so very interesting?" she ventured to inquire.

"Not in the least!" He answered as if the subject was disagreeable to him--and yet he returned to it. "By-the-by, did you ever hear Benjulia's name mentioned, at home in Italy?"

"Never! Did he know my father and mother?"

"He says so."

"Oh, do introduce me to him!"

"We must wait a little. He prefers being introduced to the monkey to-day. Where are Miss Minerva and the children?"

Teresa replied. She pointed to the monkey-house, and then drew Ovid aside.

"Take her to see some more birds, and trust me to keep the governess out of your way," whispered the good creature. "Make love--hot love to her, doctor!"

In a minute more the cousins were out of sight. How are you to make love to a young girl, after an acquaintance of a day or two? The question would have been easily answered by some men. It thoroughly puzzled Ovid.

"I am so glad to get back to you!" he said, honestly opening his mind to her. "Were you half as glad when you saw me return?"

He knew nothing of the devious and serpentine paths by which love finds the way to its ends. It had not occurred to him to approach her with those secret tones and stolen looks which speak for themselves. She answered with the straightforward directness of which he had set the example.

"I hope you don't think me insensible to your kindness," she said. "I am more pleased and more proud than I can tell you."

"Proud!" Ovid repeated, not immediately understanding her.

"Why not?" she asked. "My poor father used to say you would be an honour to the family. Ought I not to be proud, when I find such a man taking so much notice of me?"

She looked up at him shyly. At that moment, he would have resigned all his prospects of celebrity for the privilege of kissing her. He made another attempt to bring her--in spirit--a little nearer to him.

"Carmina, do you remember where you first saw me?"

"How can you ask?--it was in the concert-room. When I saw you there, I remembered passing you in the large Square. It seems a strange coincidence that you should have gone to the very concert that Teresa and I went to by accident."

Ovid ran the risk, and made his confession. "It was no coincidence," he said. "After our meeting in the Square I followed you to the concert."

This bold avowal would have confused a less innocent girl. It only took Carmina by surprise.

"What made you follow us?" she asked.

Us? Did she suppose he had followed the old woman? Ovid lost no time in setting her right. "I didn't even see Teresa," he said. "I followed You."

She was silent. What did her silence mean? Was she confused, or was she still at a loss to understand him? That morbid sensitiveness, which was one of the most serious signs of his failing health, was by this time sufficiently irritated to hurry him into extremities. "Did you ever hear," he asked, "of such a thing as love at first sight?"

She started. Surprise, confusion, doubt, succeeded each other in rapid changes on her mobile and delicate face. Still silent, she roused her courage, and looked at him.

If he had returned the look, he would have told the story of his first love without another word to help him. But his shattered nerves unmanned him, at the moment of all others when it was his interest to be bold. The fear that he might have allowed himself to speak too freely--a weakness which would never have misled him in his days of health and strength--kept his eyes on the ground. She looked away again with a quick flush of shame. When such a man as Ovid spoke of love at first sight, what an instance of her own vanity it was to have thought that his mind was dwelling on her! He had kindly lowered himself to the level of a girl's intelligence, and had been trying to interest her by talking the language of romance. She was so dissatisfied with herself that she made a movement to turn back.

He was too bitterly disappointed, on his side, to attempt to prolong the interview. A deadly sense of weakness was beginning to overpower him. It was the inevitable result of his utter want of care for himself. After a sleepless night, he had taken a long walk before breakfast; and to these demands on his failing reserves of strength, he had now added the fatigue of dawdling about a garden. Physically and mentally he had no energy left.

"I didn't mean it," he said to Carmina sadly; "I am afraid I have offended you."

"Oh, how little you know me," she cried, "if you think that!"

This time their eyes met. The truth dawned on her--and he saw it.

He took her hand. The clammy coldness of his grasp startled her. "Do you still wonder why I followed you?" he asked. The words were so faintly uttered that she could barely hear them. Heavy drops of perspiration stood on his forehead; his face faded to a gray and ghastly whiteness--he staggered, and

tried desperately to catch at the branch of a tree near them. She threw her arms round him. With all her little strength she tried to hold him up. Her utmost effort only availed to drag him to the grass plot by their side, and to soften his fall. Even as the cry for help passed her lips, she saw help coming. A tall man was approaching her--not running, even when he saw what had happened; only stalking with long strides. He was followed by one of the keepers of the gardens. Doctor Benjulia had his sick monkey to take care of. He kept the creature sheltered under his long frock-coat.

"Don't do that, if you please," was all the doctor said, as Carmina tried to lift Ovid's head from the grass. He spoke with his customary composure, and laid his hand on the heart of the fainting man, as coolly as if it had been the heart of a stranger. "Which of you two can run the fastest?" he asked, looking backwards and forwards between Carmina and the keeper. "I want some brandy."

The refreshment room was within sight. Before the keeper quite understood what was required of him, Carmina was speeding over the grass like Atalanta herself.

Benjulia looked after her, with his usual grave attention. "That wench can run," he said to himself, and turned once more to Ovid. "In his state of health, he's been fool enough to over-exert himself." So he disposed of the case in his own mind. Having done that, he remembered the monkey, deposited for the time being on the grass. "Too cold for him," he remarked, with more appearance of interest than he had shown yet. "Here, keeper! Pick up the monkey till I'm ready to take him again." The man hesitated.

"He might bite me, sir."

"Pick him up!" the doctor reiterated; "he can't bite anybody, after what I've done to him." The monkey was indeed in a state of stupor. The keeper obeyed his instructions, looking half stupefied himself: he seemed to be even more afraid of the doctor than of the monkey. "Do you think I'm the Devil?" Benjulia asked with dismal irony. The man looked as if he would say "Yes," if he dared.

Carmina came running back with the brandy. The doctor smelt it first, and then took notice of her. "Out of breath?" he said.

"Why don't you give him the brandy?" she answered impatiently.

"Strong lungs," Benjulia proceeded, sitting down cross-legged by Ovid, and

administering the stimulant without hurrying himself. "Some girls would not have been able to speak, after such a run as you have had. I didn't think much of you or your lungs when you were a baby."

"Is he coming to himself?" Carmina asked.

"Do you know what a pump is?" Benjulia rejoined. "Very well; a pump sometimes gets out of order. Give the carpenter time, and he'll put it right again." He let his mighty hand drop on Ovid's breast. "This pump is out of order; and I'm the carpenter. Give me time, and I'll set it right again. You're not a bit like your mother."

Watching eagerly for the slightest signs of recovery in Ovid's face, Carmina detected a faint return of colour. She was so relieved that she was able to listen to the doctor's oddly discursive talk, and even to join in it. "Some of our friends used to think I was like my father," she answered.

"Did they?" said Benjulia--and shut his thin-lipped mouth as if he was determined to drop the subject for ever.

Ovid stirred feebly, and half opened his eyes.

Benjulia got up. "You don't want me any longer," he said. "Now, Mr. Keeper, give me back the monkey." He dismissed the man, and tucked the monkey under one arm as if it had been a bundle. "There are your friends," he resumed, pointing to the end of the walk. "Good-day!"

Carmina stopped him. Too anxious to stand on ceremony, she laid her hand on his arm. He shook it off--not angrily: just brushing it away, as he might have brushed away the ash of his cigar or a splash of mud in the street.

"What does this fainting fit mean?" she asked timidly. "Is Ovid going to be ill?"

"Seriously ill--unless you do the right thing with him, and do it at once." He walked away. She followed him, humbly and yet resolutely. "Tell me, if you please," she said, "what we are to do."

He looked back over his shoulder. "Send him away."

She returned, and knelt down by Ovid--still slowly reviving. With a fond and gentle hand, she wiped the moisture from his forehead.



"Just as we were beginning to understand each other!" she said to herself, with a sad little sigh.