

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Carmina! are you in the Square?"

"Leave it to me," Ovid whispered. "We will come to you directly," he called back.

Mrs. Gallilee was waiting for them at the gate. Ovid spoke, the moment they were within sight of each other. "You will have no more cause to complain of me," he said cheerfully; "I am going away at the end of the week."

Mrs. Gallilee's answer was addressed to Carmina instead of to her son. "Thank you, my dear," she said, and pressed her niece's hand.

It was too dark to see more of faces than their shadowy outline. The learned lady's tone was the perfection of amiability. She sent Ovid across the road to knock at the house-door, and took Carmina's arm confidentially. "You little goose!" she whispered, "how could you suppose I was angry with you? I can't even regret your mistake, you have written such a charming note."

Ovid was waiting for them in the hall. They went into the library. Mrs. Gallilee enfolded her son in a fervent motherly embrace.

"This completes the enjoyment of a most delightful evening," she said. "First a perfect lecture--and then the relief of overpowering anxiety about my son. I suppose your professional studies, Ovid, have never taken you as high as the Interspatial Regions? We were an immense audience to-night, to hear the Professor on that subject, and I really haven't recovered it yet. Fifty miles above us--only fifty miles--there is an atmosphere of cold that would freeze the whole human family to death in a second of time. Moist matter, in that terrific emptiness, would explode, and become stone; and--listen to this, Carmina--the explosion itself would be frozen, and produce no sound. Think of serious people looking up in that dreadful direction, and talking of going to Heaven. Oh, the insignificance of man, except--I am going to make a joke, Ovid--except when he pleases his old mother by going away for the benefit of his health! And where are you going? Has sensible Carmina advised you? I agree with her beforehand, whatever she has said."

Ovid informed his mother of Benjulia's suggestion, and asked her what she thought of it.

Mrs. Gallilee's overflowing geniality instantly flooded the absent doctor. He was rude, he was ugly; but what an inestimable friend! what admirable advice! In Ovid's state of health he must not write letters; his mother would write and thank the doctor, and ask for introductions to local grandees who occupied a position in colonial society. She seized the newspaper: a steamer for Canada sailed from Liverpool on Saturday. Ovid could secure his cabin the next morning ("amidships, my dear, if you can possibly get it"), and could leave London by Friday's train. In her eagerness to facilitate his departure, she proposed to superintend the shutting up of his house, in his absence, and to arrange the disposal of the servants, if he considered it worth while to keep them. She even thought of the cat. The easiest way to provide for the creature would be of course to have her poisoned; but Ovid was so eccentric in some things, that practical suggestions were thrown away on him. "Sixpence a week for cat's meat isn't much," cried Mrs. Gallilee in an outburst of generosity. "We will receive the cat!"

Ovid made his acknowledgments resignedly. Carmina could see that Mrs. Gallilee's overpowering vitality was beginning to oppress her son.

"I needn't trouble you, mother," he said. "My domestic affairs were all settled when I first felt the necessity of getting rest. My manservant travels with me. My housemaid and kitchenmaid will go to their friends in the country; the cook will look after the house; and her nephew, the little page, is almost as fond of the cat as I am. If you will send for a cab, I think I will go home. Like other people in my wretched state, I feel fatigued towards night-time."

His lips just touched Carmina's delicate little ear, while his mother turned away to ring the bell. "Expect me to-morrow," he whispered. "I love you!--love you!--love you!" He seemed to find the perfection of luxury in the reiteration of those words.

When Ovid had left them, Carmina expected to hear something of her aunt's discovery in the Square.

Mrs. Gallilee's innocence was impenetrable. Not finding her niece in the house, she had thought of the Square. What could be more natural than that the cousins should take an evening walk, in one of the prettiest enclosures in London? Her anticipation of Ovid's recovery, and her admiration of Carmina's powers of persuasion appeared, for the time, to be the only active ideas in that comprehensive mind. When the servant brought in the tray, with the claret and soda-water, she sent for Miss Minerva to join them, and hear the good news; completely ignoring the interruption of their friendly relations, earlier in the evening. She became festive and facetious at

the sight of the soda-water. "Let us imitate the men, Miss Minerva, and drink a toast before we go to bed. Be cheerful, Carmina, and share half a bottle of soda-water with me. A pleasant journey to Ovid, and a safe return!" Cheered by the influences of conviviality, the friend of Professors, the tender nurse of half-developed tadpoles, lapsed into learning again. Mrs. Gallilee improvised an appropriate little lecture on Canada--on the botany of the Dominion; on the geology of the Dominion; on the number of gallons of water wasted every hour by the falls of Niagara. "Science will set it all right, my dears; we shall make that idle water work for us, one of these days. Good-night, Miss Minerva! Dear Carmina, pleasant dreams!"

Safe in the solitude of her bedroom, the governess ominously knitted her heavy eyebrows.

"In all my experience," she thought, "I never saw Mrs. Gallilee in such spirits before. What mischief is she meditating, when she has got rid of her son?"