

## **CHAPTER XXVIII.**

The last lines addressed by Carmina to her old nurse were completed on the seventeenth of August, and were posted that night.

The day that followed was memorable to Carmina, and memorable to Mrs. Gallilee. Doctor Benjulia had his reasons also for remembering the eighteenth of August.

Still in search of a means to undermine the confidence which united Ovid and Carmina, and still calling on her invention in vain, Mrs. Gallilee had passed a sleepless night. Her maid, entering the room at the usual hour, was ordered to leave her in bed, and not to return until the bell rang. On ordinary occasions, Mrs. Gallilee was up in time to receive the letters arriving by the first delivery; the correspondence of the other members of the household being sorted by her own hands, before it was distributed by the servant. On this particular morning (after sleeping a little through sheer exhaustion), she entered the empty breakfast-room two hours later than usual. The letters waiting for her were addressed only to herself. She rang for the maid.

"Any other letters this morning?" she asked.

"Two, for my master."

"No more than that!"

"Nothing more, ma'am--except a telegram for Miss Carmina."

"When did it come?"

"Soon after the letters."

"Have you given it to her?"

"Being a telegram, ma'am, I thought I ought to take it to Miss Carmina at once."

"Quite right. You can go."

A telegram for Carmina? Was there some private correspondence going on?

And were the interests involved too important to wait for the ordinary means of communication by post? Considering these questions, Mrs. Gallilee poured out a cup of tea and looked over her letters.

Only one of them especially attracted her notice in her present frame of mind. The writer was Benjulia. He dispensed as usual with the customary forms of address.

"I have had a letter about Ovid, from a friend of mine in Canada. There is an allusion to him of the complimentary sort, which I don't altogether understand. I want to ask you about it--but I can't spare the time to go a-visiting. So much the better for me--I hate conversation, and I like work. You have got your carriage--and your fine friends are out of town. If you want a drive, come to me, and bring your last letters from Ovid with you."

Mrs. Gallilee decided on considering this characteristic proposal later in the day. Her first and foremost interest took her upstairs to her niece's room.

Carmina had left her bed. Robed in her white dressing-gown, she lay on the sofa in the sitting-room. When her aunt came in, she started and shuddered. Those signs of nervous aversion escaped the notice of Mrs. Gallilee. Her attention had been at once attracted by a travelling bag, opened as if in preparation for packing. The telegram lay on Carmina's lap. The significant connection between those two objects asserted itself plainly. But it was exactly the opposite of the connection suspected by Mrs. Gallilee. The telegram had prevented Carmina from leaving the house.

Mrs. Gallilee paved the way for the necessary investigation, by making a few common-place inquiries. How had Carmina passed the night? Had the maid taken care of her at breakfast-time? Was there anything that her aunt could do for her? Carmina replied with a reluctance which she was unable to conceal. Mrs. Gallilee passed over the cold reception accorded to her without remark, and pointed with a bland smile to the telegram.

"No bad news, I hope?"

Carmina handed the telegram silently to her aunt. The change of circumstances which the arrival of the message had produced, made concealment superfluous. Mrs. Gallilee opened the telegram, keeping her suspicions in reserve. It had been sent from Rome by the old foreign woman, named "Teresa," and it contained these words:

"My husband died this morning. Expect me in London from day to day."

"Why is this person coming to London?" Mrs. Gallilee inquired.

Stung by the insolent composure of that question, Carmina answered sharply, "Her name is on the telegram; you ought to know!"

"Indeed?" said Mrs. Gallilee. "Perhaps, she likes London?"

"She hates London! You have had her in the house; you have seen us together. Now she has lost her husband, do you think she can live apart from the one person in the world whom she loves best?"

"My dear, these matters of mere sentiment escape my notice," Mrs. Gallilee rejoined. "It's an expensive journey from Italy to England. What was her husband?"

"Her husband was foreman in a manufactory till his health failed him."

"And then," Mrs. Gallilee concluded, "the money failed him, of course. What did he manufacture?"

"Artists' colours."

"Oh! an artists' colourman? Not a very lucrative business, I should think. Has his widow any resources of her own?"

"My purse is hers!"

"Very generous, I am sure! Even the humblest lodgings are dear in this neighbourhood. However--with your assistance--your old servant may be able to live somewhere near you."

Having settled the question of Teresa's life in London in this way, Mrs. Gallilee returned to the prime object of her suspicion--she took possession of the travelling bag.

Carmina looked at her with the submission of utter bewilderment. Teresa had been the companion of her life; Teresa had been received as her attendant, when she was first established under her aunt's roof. She had assumed that her nurse would become a member of the household again, as a matter of course. With Teresa to encourage her, she had summoned the resolution to live with Ovid's mother, until Ovid came back. And now she had been informed, in words too plain to be mistaken, that Teresa must find

a home for herself when she returned to London! Surprise, disappointment, indignation held Carmina speechless.

"This thing," Mrs. Gallilee proceeded, holding up the bag, "will only be in your way here. I will have it put with our own bags and boxes, in the lumber-room. And, by-the-bye, I fancy you don't quite understand (naturally enough, at your age) our relative positions in this house. My child, the authority of your late father is the authority which your guardian holds over you. I hope never to be obliged to exercise it--especially, if you will be good enough to remember two things. I expect you to consult me in your choice of companions; and to wait for my approval before you make arrangements which--well! let us say, which require the bag to be removed from the lumber-room."

Without waiting for a reply, she turned to the door. After opening it, she paused--and looked back into the room.

"Have you thought of what I told you, last night?" she asked.

Sorely as they had been tried, Carmina's energies rallied at this. "I have done my best to forget it!" she answered.

"At Miss Minerva's request?"

Carmina took no notice of the question.

Mrs. Gallilee persisted. "Have you had any communication with that person?"

There was still no reply. Preserving her temper, Mrs. Gallilee stepped out on the landing, and called to Miss Minerva. The governess answered from the upper floor.

"Please come down here," said Mrs. Galilee.

Miss Minerva obeyed. Her face was paler than usual; her eyes had lost something of their piercing brightness. She stopped outside Carmina's door. Mrs. Gallilee requested her to enter the room.

After an instant--only an instant--of hesitation, Miss Minerva crossed the threshold. She cast one quick glance at Carmina, and lowered her eyes before the look could be returned. Mrs. Gallilee discovered no mute signs of an understanding between them. She turned to the governess.

"Have you been here already this morning?" she inquired.

"No."

"Is there some coolness between you and my niece?"

"None, madam, that I know of."

"Then, why don't you speak to her when you come into the room?"

"Miss Carmina has been ill. I see her resting on the sofa--and I am unwilling to disturb her."

"Not even by saying good-morning?"

"Not even that!"

"You are exceedingly careful, Miss Minerva."

"I have had some experience of sick people, and I have learnt to be careful. May I ask if you have any particular reason for calling me downstairs?"

Mrs. Gallilee prepared to put her niece and her governess to the final test.

"I wish you to suspend the children's lesson for an hour or two," she answered.

"Certainly. Shall I tell them?"

"No; I will tell them myself."

"What do you wish me to do?" said Miss Minerva.

"I wish you to remain here with my niece."

If Mrs. Gallilee, after answering in those terms, had looked at her niece, instead of looking at her governess, she would have seen Carmina--distrustful of her own self-control--move on the sofa so as to turn her face to the wall. As it was, Miss Minerva's attitude and look silently claimed some explanation.

Mrs. Gallilee addressed her in a whisper. "Let me say a word to you at the

door."

Miss Minerva followed her to the landing outside. Carmina turned again, listening anxiously.

"I am not at all satisfied with her looks, this morning," Mrs. Gallilee proceeded; "and I don't think it right she should be left alone. My household duties must be attended to. Will you take my place at the sofa, until Mr. Null comes?" ("Now," she thought, "if there is jealousy between them, I shall see it!")

She saw nothing: the governess quietly bowed to her, and went back to Carmina. She heard nothing: although the half-closed door gave her opportunities for listening. Ignorant, she had entered the room. Ignorant, she left it.

Carmina lay still and silent. With noiseless step, Miss Minerva approached the sofa, and stood by it, waiting. Neither of them lifted her eyes, the one to the other. The woman suffered her torture in secret. The girl's sweet eyes filled slowly with tears. One by one the minutes of the morning passed--not many in number, before there was a change. In silence, Carmina held out her hand. In silence, Miss Minerva took it and kissed it.