

CHAPTER XXXV.

The solitude of her own room was no welcome refuge to Carmina, in her present state of mind. She went on to the schoolroom.

Miss Minerva was alone. The two girls, in obedience to domestic regulations, were making their midday toilet before dinner. Carmina described her interview with Mrs. Gallilee, and her meeting with Mr. Le Frank. "Don't scold me," she said; "I make no excuse for my folly."

"If Mr. Le Frank had left the house, after you spoke to him," Miss Minerva answered, "I should not have felt the anxiety which troubles me now. I don't like his going to Mrs. Gallilee afterwards--especially when you tell me of that change in her manner towards you. Yours is a vivid imagination, Carmina. Are you sure that it has not been playing you any tricks?"

"Perfectly sure."

Miss Minerva was not quite satisfied. "Will you help me to feel as certain about it as you do?" she asked. "Mrs. Gallilee generally looks in for a few minutes, while the children are at dinner. Stay here, and say something to her in my presence. I want to judge for myself."

The girls came in. Maria's perfect toilet, reflected Maria's perfect character. She performed the duties of politeness with her usual happy choice of words. "Dear Carmina, it is indeed a pleasure to see you again in our schoolroom. We are naturally anxious about your health. This lovely weather is no doubt in your favour; and papa thinks Mr. Null a remarkably clever man." Zo stood by frowning, while these smooth conventionalities trickled over her sister's lips. Carmina asked what was the matter. Zo looked gloomily at the dog on the rug. "I wish I was Tinker," she said. Maria smiled sweetly. "Dear Zoe, what a very strange wish! What would you do, if you were Tinker?" The dog, hearing his name, rose and shook himself. Zo pointed to him, with an appearance of the deepest interest. "He hasn't got to brush his hair, before he goes out for a walk; his nails don't took black when they're dirty. And, I say!" (she whispered the next words in Carmina's ear) "he hasn't got a governess."

The dinner made its appearance; and Mrs. Gallilee followed the dinner. Maria said grace. Zo, always ravenous at meals, forgot to say Amen. Carmina, standing behind her chair, prompted her. Zo said "Amen; oh,

bother!" the first word at the top of her voice, and the last two in a whisper. Mrs. Gallilee looked at Carmina as she might have looked at an obtrusive person who had stepped in from the street. "You had better dress before luncheon," she suggested, "or you will keep the carriage waiting." Hearing this, Zo laid down her knife and fork, and looked over her shoulder. "Ask if I may go with you," she said. Carmina made the request. "No," Mrs. Gallilee answered, "the children must walk. My maid will accompany you." Carmina glanced at Miss Minerva on leaving the room. The governess replied by a look. She too had seen the change in Mrs. Gallilee's manner, and was at a loss to understand it.

Mrs. Gallilee's maid Marceline belonged to a quick-tempered race: she was a Jersey woman. It is not easy to say which of the two felt most oppressed by their enforced companionship in the carriage.

The maid was perhaps the most to be pitied. Secretly drawn towards Carmina like the other servants in the house, she was forced by her mistress's private instruction, to play the part of a spy. "If the young lady changes the route which the coachman has my orders to take, or if she communicates with any person while your are out, you are to report it to me." Mrs. Gallilee had not forgotten the discovery of the travelling bag; and Mr. Mool's exposition of the law had informed her, that the superintendence of Carmina was as much a matter of serious pecuniary interest as ever.

But recent events had, in one respect at least, improved the prospect.

If Ovid (as his mother actually ventured to hope!) broke off his engagement, when he heard the scandalous story of Carmina's birth, there was surely a chance that she, like other girls of her sensitive temperament, might feel the calamity that had fallen on her so acutely as to condemn herself to a single life. Misled, partly by the hope of relief from her own vile anxieties; partly by the heartless incapability of appreciating generous feeling in others, developed by the pursuits of her later life, Mrs. Gallilee seriously contemplated her son's future decision as a matter of reasonable doubt.

In the meanwhile, this detestable child of adultery--this living obstacle in the way of the magnificent prospects which otherwise awaited Maria and Zoe, to say nothing of their mother--must remain in the house, submitted to her guardian's authority, watched by her guardian's vigilance. The hateful creature was still entitled to medical attendance when she was ill, and must still be supplied with every remedy that the doctor's ingenuity could suggest. A liberal allowance was paid for the care of her; and the trustees were bound to interfere if it was not fairly earned.

Looking after the carriage as it drove away--Marceline on the front seat presenting the picture of discomfort; and Carmina opposite to her, unendurably pretty and interesting, with the last new poem on her lap--Mrs. Gallilee's reflections took their own bitter course. "Accidents happen to other carriages, with other girls in them. Not to my carriage, with that girl in it! Nothing will frighten my horses to-day; and, fat as he is, my coachman will not have a fit on the box!"

It was only too true. At the appointed hour the carriage appeared again--and (to complete the disappointment) Marceline had no report to make.

Miss Minerva had not forgotten her promise. When she returned from her walk with the children, the rooms had been taken. Teresa's London lodging was within five minutes' walk of the house.

That evening, Carmina sent a telegram to Rome, on the chance that the nurse might not yet have begun her journey. The message (deferring other explanations until they met) merely informed her that her rooms were ready, adding the address and the landlady's name. Guessing in the dark, Carmina and the governess had ignorantly attributed the sinister alteration in Mrs. Gallilee's manner to the prospect of Teresa's unwelcome return. "While you have the means in your power," Miss Minerva advised, "it may be as well to let your old friend know that there is a home for her when she reaches London."