

## **CHAPTER XXXIX.**

Mrs. Gallilee's maid looked at her watch, when the carriage left Mr. Mool's house. "We shall be nearly an hour late, before we get home," she said.

"It's my fault, Marceline. Tell your mistress the truth, if she questions you. I shall not think the worse of you for obeying your orders."

"I'd rather lose my place, Miss, than get you into trouble."

The woman spoke truly, Carmina's sweet temper had made her position not only endurable, but delightful: she had been treated like a companion and a friend. But for that circumstance--so keenly had Marceline felt the degradation of being employed as a spy--she would undoubtedly have quitted Mrs. Gallilee's service.

On the way home, instead of talking pleasantly as usual, Carmina was silent and sad. Had this change in her spirits been caused by the visit to Mr. Mool? It was even so. The lawyer had innocently decided her on taking the desperate course which Miss Minerva had proposed.

If Mrs. Gallilee's assertion of her absolute right of authority, as guardian, had been declared by Mr. Mool to be incorrect, Carmina (hopefully forgetful of her aunt's temper) had thought of a compromise.

She would have consented to remain at Mrs. Gallilee's disposal until Ovid returned, on condition of being allowed, when Teresa arrived in London, to live in retirement with her old nurse. This change of abode would prevent any collision between Mrs. Gallilee and Teresa, and would make Carmina's life as peaceful, and even as happy, as she could wish.

But now that the lawyer had confirmed her aunt's statement of the position in which they stood towards one another, instant flight to Ovid's love and protection seemed to be the one choice left--unless Carmina could resign herself to a life of merciless persecution and perpetual suspense.

The arrangements for the flight were already complete.

That momentary view of Mrs. Gallilee's face, reflected in the glass, had confirmed Miss Minerva's resolution to interfere. Closeted with Carmina on the Sunday morning, she had proposed a scheme of escape, which would

even set Mrs. Gallilee's vigilance and cunning at defiance. No pecuniary obstacle stood in the way. The first quarterly payment of Carmina's allowance of five hundred a year had been already made, by Mool's advice. Enough was left--even without the assistance which the nurse's resources would render--to purchase the necessary outfit, and to take the two women to Quebec. On the day after Teresa's arrival (at an hour of the morning while the servants were still in bed) Carmina and her companion could escape from the house on foot--and not leave a trace behind them.

Meanwhile, Fortune befriended Mrs. Gallilee's maid. No questions were put to her; no notice even was taken of the late return.

Five minutes before the carriage drew up at the house, a learned female friend from the country called, by appointment, on Mrs. Gallilee. On the coming Tuesday afternoon, an event of the deepest scientific interest was to take place. A new Professor had undertaken to deliver himself, by means of a lecture, of subversive opinions on "Matter." A general discussion was to follow; and in that discussion (upon certain conditions) Mrs. Gallilee herself proposed to take part.

"If the Professor attempts to account for the mutual action of separate atoms," she said, "I defy him to do it, without assuming the existence of a continuous material medium in space. And this point of view being accepted--follow me here! what is the result? In plain words," cried Mrs. Gallilee, rising excitedly to her feet, "we dispense with the idea of atoms!"

The friend looked infinitely relieved by the prospect of dispensing with atoms.

"Now observe!" Mrs. Gallilee proceeded. "In connection with this part of the subject, I shall wait to see if the Professor adopts Thomson's theory. You are acquainted with Thomson's theory? No? Let me put it briefly. Mere heterogeneity, together with gravitation, is sufficient to explain all the apparently discordant laws of molecular action. You understand? Very well. If the Professor passes over Thomson, then, I rise in the body of the Hall, and take my stand--follow me again!--on these grounds."

While Mrs. Gallilee's grounds were being laid out for the benefit of her friend, the coachman took the carriage back to the stables; the maid went downstairs to tea; and Carmina joined Miss Minerva in the schoolroom--all three being protected from discovery, by Mrs. Gallilee's rehearsal of her performance in the Comedy of Atoms.

The Monday morning brought with it news from Rome--serious news which confirmed Miss Minerva's misgivings.

Carmina received a letter, bearing the Italian postmark, but not addressed to her in Teresa's handwriting. She looked to the signature before she began to read. Her correspondent was the old priest--Father Patrizio. He wrote in these words:

"My dear child,--Our good Teresa leaves us to-day, on her journey to London. She has impatiently submitted to the legal ceremonies, rendered necessary by her husband having died without making a will. He hardly left anything in the way of money, after payment of his burial expenses, and his few little debts. What is of far greater importance--he lived, and died, a good Christian. I was with him in his last moments. Offer your prayers, my dear, for the repose of his soul.

"Teresa left me, declaring her purpose of travelling night and day, so as to reach you the sooner.

"In her headlong haste, she has not even waited to look over her husband's papers; but has taken the case containing them to England--to be examined at leisure, in your beloved company. Strong as this good creature is, I believe she will be obliged to rest on the road for a night at least. Calculating on this, I assume that my letter will get to you first. I have something to say about your old nurse, which it is well that you should know.

"Do not for a moment suppose that I blame you for having told Teresa of the unfriendly reception, which you appear to have met with from your aunt and guardian. Who should you confide in--if not in the excellent woman who has filled the place of a mother to you? Besides, from your earliest years, have I not always instilled into you the reverence of truth? You have told the truth in your letters. My child, I commend you, and feel for you.

"But the impression produced on Teresa is not what you or I could wish. It is one of her merits, that she loves you with the truest devotion; it is one of her defects, that she is fierce and obstinate in resentment. Your aunt has become an object of absolute hatred to her. I have combated successfully, as I hope and believe--this unchristian state of feeling.

"She is now beyond the reach of my influence. My purpose in writing is to beg you to continue the good work that I have begun. Compose this impetuous nature; restrain this fiery spirit. Your gentle influence, Carmina, has a power of its own over those who love you--and who loves you like

Teresa?--of which perhaps you are not yourself aware. Use your power discreetly; and, with the blessing of God and his Saints, I have no fear of the result.

"Write to me, my child, when Teresa arrives--and let me hear that you are happier, and better in health. Tell me also, whether there is any speedy prospect of your marriage. If I may presume to judge from the little I know, your dearest earthly interests depend on the removal of obstacles to this salutary change in your life. I send you my good wishes, and my blessing. If a poor old priest like me can be of any service, do not forget.

"FATHER PATRIZIO."

Any lingering hesitation that Carmina might still have felt, was at an end when she read this letter. Good Father Patrizio, like good Mr. Mool, had innocently urged her to set her guardian's authority at defiance.