

CHAPTER LII.

Watching through the night by Carmina's bedside, Teresa found herself thinking of Mr. Le Frank. It was one way of getting through the weary time, to guess at the motive which had led him to become a lodger in the house.

Common probabilities pointed to the inference that he might have reasons for changing his residence, which only concerned himself. But common probabilities--from Teresa's point of view--did not apply to Mr. Le Frank. On meeting him, at the time of her last visit to England, his personal appearance had produced such a disagreeable impression on her, that she had even told Carmina "the music-master looked like a rogue." With her former prejudice against him now revived, and with her serious present reasons for distrusting Mrs. Gallilee, she rejected the idea of his accidental presence under her landlady's roof. To her mind, the business of the new lodger in the house was, in all likelihood, the business of a spy.

While Mr. Le Frank was warily laying his plans for the next day, he had himself become an object of suspicion to the very woman whose secrets he was plotting to surprise.

This was the longest and saddest night which the faithful old nurse had passed at her darling's bedside.

For the first time, Carmina was fretful, and hard to please: patient persuasion was needed to induce her to take her medicine. Even when she was thirsty, she had an irritable objection to being disturbed, if the lemonade was offered to her which she had relished at other times. Once or twice, when she drowsily stirred in her bed, she showed symptoms of delusion. The poor girl supposed it was the eve of her wedding-day, and eagerly asked what Teresa had done with her new dress. A little later, when she had perhaps been dreaming, she fancied that her mother was still alive, and repeated the long-forgotten talk of her childhood. "What have I said to distress you?" she asked wonderingly, when she found Teresa crying.

Soon after sunrise, there came a long interval of repose.

At the later time when Benjulia arrived, she was quiet and uncomplaining. The change for the worse which had induced Teresa to insist on sending for him, was perversely absent. Mr. Null expected to be roughly rebuked for having disturbed the great man by a false alarm. He attempted to explain:

and Teresa attempted to explain. Benjulia paid not the slightest attention to either of them. He made no angry remarks--and he showed, in his own impenetrable way, as gratifying an interest in the case as ever.

"Draw up the blind," he said; "I want to have a good look at her."

Mr. Null waited respectfully, and imposed strict silence on Teresa, while the investigation was going on. It lasted so long that he ventured to say, "Do you see anything particular, sir?"

Benjulia saw his doubts cleared up: time (as he had anticipated) had brought development with it, and had enabled him to arrive at a conclusion. The shock that had struck Carmina had produced complicated hysterical disturbance, which was now beginning to simulate paralysis. Benjulia's profound and practised observation detected a trifling inequality in the size of the pupils of the eyes, and a slightly unequal action on either side of the face--delicately presented in the eyelids, the nostrils, and the lips. Here was no common affection of the brain, which even Mr. Null could understand! Here, at last, was Benjulia's reward for sacrificing the precious hours which might otherwise have been employed in the laboratory! From that day, Carmina was destined to receive unknown honour: she was to take her place, along with the other animals, in his note-book of experiments.

He turned quietly to Mr. Null, and finished the consultation in two words.

"All right!"

"Have you nothing to suggest, sir?" Mr. Null inquired.

"Go on with the treatment--and draw down the blind, if she complains of the light. Good-day!"

"Are you sure he's a great doctor?" said Teresa, when the door had closed on him.

"The greatest we have!" cried Mr. Null with enthusiasm.

"Is he a good man?"

"Why do you ask?"

"I want to know if we can trust him to tell us the truth?"

"Not a doubt of it!" (Who could doubt it, indeed, after he had approved of Mr. Null's medical treatment?)

"There's one thing you have forgotten," Teresa persisted. "You haven't asked him when Carmina can be moved."

"My good woman, if I had put such a question, he would have set me down as a fool! Nobody can say when she will be well enough to be moved."

He took his hat. The nurse followed him out.

"Are you going to Mrs. Gallilee, sir?"

"Not to-day."

"Is she better?"

"She is almost well again."