

CHAPTER LVII.

Mr. Mool was in attendance at Fairfield Gardens, when his old friend arrived from Scotland, to tell him what the cautiously expressed message in the telegram really meant.

But one idea seemed to be impressed on Mr. Gallilee's mind--the idea of reconciliation. He insisted on seeing his wife. It was in vain to tell him that she was utterly incapable of reciprocating or even of understanding his wishes. Absolute resistance was the one alternative left--and it was followed by distressing results. The kind-hearted old man burst into a fit of crying, which even shook the resolution of the doctors. One of them went upstairs to warn the nurses. The other said, "Let him see her."

The instant he showed himself in the room, Mrs. Gallilee recognised him with a shriek of fury. The nurses held her back--while Mr. Mool dragged him out again, and shut the door. The object of the doctors had been gained. His own eyes had convinced him of the terrible necessity of placing his wife under restraint. She was removed to a private asylum.

Maria and Zo had been left in Scotland--as perfectly happy as girls could be, in the society of their cousins, and under the affectionate care of their aunt. Mr. Gallilee remained in London; but he was not left alone in the deserted house. The good lawyer had a spare room at his disposal; and Mrs. Mool and her daughters received him with true sympathy. Coming events helped to steady his mind. He was comforted in the anticipation of Ovid's return, and interested in hearing of the generous motive which had led Miss Minerva to meet his stepson.

"I never agreed with the others when they used to abuse our governess," he said. "She might have been quick-tempered, and she might have been ugly--I suppose I saw her in some other light myself." He had truly seen her under another light. In his simple affectionate nature, there had been instinctive recognition of that great heart.

He was allowed to see Carmina, in the hope that pleasant associations connected with him might have a favourable influence. She smiled faintly, and gave him her hand when she saw him at the bedside--but that was all.

Too deeply distressed to ask to see her again, he made his inquiries for the future at the door. Day after day, the answer was always the same.

Before she left London, Miss Minerva had taken it on herself to engage the vacant rooms, on the ground floor of the lodging-house, for Ovid. She knew his heart, as she knew her own heart. Once under the same roof with Carmina, he would leave it no more--until life gave her back to him, or death took her away. Hearing of what had been done, Mr. Gallilee removed to Ovid's rooms the writing-desk and the books, the favourite music and the faded flowers, left by Carmina at Fairfield Gardens. "Anything that belongs to her," he thought, "will surely be welcome to the poor fellow when he comes back."

On one afternoon--never afterwards to be forgotten--he had only begun to make his daily inquiry, when the door on the ground floor was opened, and Miss Minerva beckoned to him.

Her face daunted Mr. Gallilee: he asked in a whisper, if Ovid had returned.

She pointed upwards, and answered, "He is with her now."

"How did he bear it?"

"We don't know; we were afraid to follow him into the room."

She turned towards the window as she spoke. Teresa was sitting there--vacantly looking out. Mr. Gallilee spoke to her kindly: she made no answer; she never even moved. "Worn out!" Miss Minerva whispered to him. "When she thinks of Carmina now, she thinks without hope."

He shuddered. The expression of his own fear was in those words--and he shrank from it. Miss Minerva took his hand, and led him to a chair. "Ovid will know best," she reminded him; "let us wait for what Ovid will say."

"Did you meet him on board the vessel?" Mr. Gallilee asked.

"Yes."

"How did he look?"

"So well and so strong that you would hardly have known him again--till he asked about Carmina. Then he turned pale. I knew that I must tell him the truth--but I was afraid to take it entirely on myself. Something Mr. Null said to me, before I left London, suggested that I might help Ovid to understand me if I took the prescriptions to Queenstown. I had not noticed that they

were signed by Doctor Benjulia, as well as by Mr. Null. Don't ask me what effect the discovery had on him! I bore it at the time--I can't speak of it now."

"You good creature! you dear good creature! Forgive me if I have distressed you; I didn't meant it."

"You have not distressed me. Is there anything else I can tell you?"

Mr. Gallilee hesitated. "There is one thing more," he said. "It isn't about Carmina this time--"

He hesitated again. Miss Minerva understood. "Yes," she answered; "I spoke to Ovid of his mother. In mercy to himself and to me, he would hear no details. 'I know enough,' he said, 'if I know that she is the person to blame. I was prepared to hear it. My mother's silence could only be accounted for in one way, when I had read Zo's letter.'--Don't you know, Mr. Gallilee, that the child wrote to Ovid?"

The surprise and delight of Zo's fond old father, when he heard the story of the letter, forced a smile from Miss Minerva, even at that time of doubt and sorrow. He declared that he would have returned to his daughter by the mail train of that night, but for two considerations. He must see his stepson before he went back to Scotland; and he must search all the toy-shops in London for the most magnificent present that could be offered to a young person of ten years old. "Tell Ovid, with my love, I'll call again to-morrow," he said, looking at his watch. "I have just time to write to Zo by to-day's post." He went to his club, for the first time since he had returned to London. Miss Minerva thought of bygone days, and wondered if he would enjoy his champagne.

A little later Mr. Null called--anxious to know if Ovid had arrived.

Other women, in the position of Miss Minerva and Teresa, might have hesitated to keep the patient's room closed to the doctor. These two were resolved. They refused to disturb Ovid, even by sending up a message. Mr. Null took offence. "Understand, both of you," he said, "when I call to-morrow morning, I shall insist on going upstairs--and if I find this incivility repeated, I shall throw up the case." He left the room, triumphing in his fool's paradise of aggressive self-conceit.

They waited for some time longer--and still no message reached them from upstairs. "We may be wrong in staying here," Miss Minerva suggested; "he may want to be alone when he leaves her--let us go."

She rose to return to the house of her new employers. They respected her, and felt for her: while Carmina's illness continued, she had the entire disposal of her time. The nurse accompanied her to the door; resigned to take refuge in the landlady's room. "I'm afraid to be by myself," Teresa said. "Even that woman's chatter is better for me than my own thoughts."

Before parting for the night they waited in the hall, looking towards the stairs, and listening anxiously. Not a sound disturbed the melancholy silence.