

CARMELITA.

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(CONTINUED.)



CARMELITA, leaning over the paling, watched the priest, down the road, with a home sick, heavy hearted feeling, as if she had just parted from a dear and familiar friend, so that she did not in the least observe Andrew Rutherford, who came out from his place of concealment and encountered the minister, likewise emerging from a hiding-place. There was a quizzical smile upon the young man's face, which was met by a glance of keen scrutiny from the other.

"I was looking at a very pretty picture," Rutherford said frankly, as the two men went down the village street together.

"And did you ever see a greater bit of play-acting?" said the minister, an angry flush upon his cheek. "You mean the meeting between that young girl and the old priest?" said Rutherford; "to me, that was a most charming incident."

"Indeed, Mr. Rutherford, indeed," said the minister. "Her natural delight" continued Rutherford, "at seeing one associated in her mind with much that was dear and sacred, and here, in such bleakness, was so simply and prettily expressed."

"You are enthusiastic, sir," said the minister, dryly. "It is but rarely that I find anything to excite enthusiasm in these surroundings," said the young man, vexed at the other's tone.

"Andrew Rutherford," said the minister, "will you let me give you an honest piece of advice? You will be in a dangerous way, if ever you put foot inside of yonder gate."

"I!" said Rutherford, with something of indignation, but the minister went on.

"Such a face is a peril to the village, it is a snare devised by the Prince of Evil himself."

"Our way parts here," said Rutherford, sternly, "I shall have to bid you good-day."

The minister looked after him with darkening brow, and Carmelita, unconscious of the storm she had raised in that worthy gentleman's breast, went in to help Hepzibah to peel some vegetables. She began at once coaxing the old woman to take her to church, but upon this point Hepzibah was not to be shaken. She forgave Carmelita her own oddities of belief, so long as they were kept secret, but the honor of the family had to be consulted, the memory of the green grave upon the hill wherein Elder Johnson had been laid to rest, sound to the last in protestant doctrine, had to be respected.

Carmelita should not go to the Romish meeting house, if she could prevent it, and so, for the time being, Hepzibah had her way.

Meantime, an event occurred which sent a flurry of excitement even into the palsied figure on the bed upstairs. Mrs. Rutherford, widow of Squire Rutherford, lately "the biggest man" in the place, came in a solemn old coach to ask after Mrs. Johnson's health and to call upon Carmelita. With her was her son, Mr. Andrew Rutherford, handsome, erect and tall. Carmelita, in a pink print dress, was under the tree in the court-yard when they came. She was feeding a rook which had become tame enough to hop up to her for crumbs.

This old lady, New Englander to the back-bone as she was, was half charmed, half-repelled by the graceful ease, the warm, impulsive courtesy, with which Carmelita received her. When Carmelita would have led them into the house, Andrew Rutherford, by a pleading look at his mother, induced her to second his eagerly expressed desire to remain where they were.