

REAPING THE WHIRLWIND

BY CHRISTINE FABER

CHAPTER XXI

Ten months of Mrs. Phillips' widowhood had passed, and she was still in the deep weeds which proclaimed to the world her loss; her beauty, however, wore no mourning expression; that was brighter, more interesting, more striking than ever. Her mornings she had employed, to Miss Balk's infinite amazement, in study, engaging for the purpose two special instructors from Boston, one in the languages, and other in the general sciences; and Miss Balk's amazement went beyond all expression when Mrs. Phillips added to her studies, lessons in vocal music. Her voice while it was clear and high, lacked sympathy and expression, and for that reason she had never given it much attention; and now that she should devote to it hours daily, and even repair for instruction to the home of the teacher, instead of, as in the case of her other lessons, engage an instructor from Boston, puzzled and annoyed the eccentric spinster. Once she spoke of it in her caustic way; Helen who was about to go forth to her lesson, replied:

"I go to this man's house because he is unable to come to me; and I want to help him, poor fellow, as he has little means, and his health is not good."

"You help him! You doing all this for charity!" exclaimed Miss Balk. "Well, Mrs. Phillips, the prince of the infernal regions might give you the palm for lying."

"You are quite welcome to your opinion, Barbara," was the nonchalant reply. And Mrs. Phillips, drawing her veil over her face, stepped leisurely out.

Miss Balk, however, was not to be baffled. That evening, while Helen was at her own piano practicing the aria which her teacher had so reluctantly taught her, Barbara was on her way to his residence.

She was received with respectful courtesy, and, waving aside the chair placed for her, she introduced at once, in her grim way, the object of her visit.

As the near friend and somewhat protector of Mrs. Phillips, she had come to know what progress that lady was making in her musical studies.

The gentlemanly Frenchman was a good deal surprised and not a little amused. He had supposed Mrs. Phillips, from all that he had heard of her, and she was an object of much curious gossip in the village, — to be entirely her own mistress; certainly accountable to no one for her progress in any study; an opinion which now, judging by the authoritative manner of his visitor, seemed to be quite wrong.

"Are you Mrs. Phillips' mother?" he asked suavely, more to gain time in his indecision as to what he should answer than to elicit any information.

Miss Balk bridled: "I shall submit to no interrogation on my relationship to Mrs. Phillips."

The Frenchman also bridled: "And I, madam, can submit to no questioning about my pupils unless I know the object of the questioner."

"Oh, as to that," was the reply, "knowing the poor quality of her voice, I wondered, since she persists in coming to you for lessons, if you were honest enough to tell her about it, or whether you make her believe she'll be a singer some day for the sake of getting her patronage. In either case it doesn't matter to me; she has plenty of money, and if you can fool her into throwing some of it upon you, so much the better for your pocket;" and Barbara firmly seated herself on the chair which she had at first refused.

"You choose to be insolent, madam," said the now very angry Frenchman; "and I shall resent your insolence by asking you to leave my house. I am not accustomed to secure patronage in the way you mention."

"Oh, keep your temper," answered Miss Balk coolly, and, turning to see herself more comfortably, her eyes fell on an open sheet of music lying on a table near; across the margin of the sheet, in large, plain letters, was written "Miss Burchill." The spinster started, and, turning quickly to the indignant Frenchman, she asked in her slow, grim way, "Is Miss Burchill also a pupil of yours?"

He answered, hotly: "I decline, madam, to answer any of your questions, and I must again request that you leave the house."

For answer, Barbara tried to transfix him with one of her piercing looks, but he was in too much of a passion to see her distinctly. Then she said:

"You have also Mr. Thurston, I presume, on your pupils' list. Happy trio,—Mrs. Phillips, Miss Burchill, and Mr. Thurston. Are your terms very high for the gentlemen?" and Barbara laughed one of her horrid short laughs.

"Parbleu!" exclaimed the Frenchman, hurried by his anger into profanity in his own language. "I have no gentlemen at all on my pupils' list. What do you mean, madam?"

But Miss Balk had risen, and was saying, in her wonted measured tones:

"Then Mr. Thurston is not one of your pupils. I am much indebted to you; you have given me valuable information. Good-evening!"

And she departed in her grim way, leaving the professor in a state of

burning indignation that scarcely subsided until he saw Mrs. Phillips. The account which he gave so affected that lady, though she pretended to treat it lightly, saying that Miss Balk was slightly deranged, that her voice refused to be steady upon any note, and for once she did not insist upon going through the whole repertoire of Miss Burchill's music. At home she opened fire on Barbara.

"How dare you pry into my business in such a manner?" she said, stamping her little foot, and facing Miss Balk with flaming eyes.

"Because I wanted to test the truth of this wonderful charity of yours, and I succeeded; I discovered that it was not charity which made you take these lessons; it was not directly Thurston as I thought at first; it was —" She stopped short, and laughed.

"It was what?" almost shrieked Helen.

"Mildred Burchill," answered Barbara, with another laugh.

"What do you mean by that?" said Mrs. Phillips, growing white as the snowy wall behind her.

"I'm afraid you would bungle the work," was the cool reply; "it is not quite so easy as breaking hearts, or shocking people to death."

Mrs. Phillips could trust herself no farther. She dashed from the room and up to her own apartment, where her thoughts held savage council as to how she could escape from Barbara.

Barbara pursued her thin lips together in a very satisfied manner, and went out for her customary evening walk. In due time she returned, and with such evidence of having added to her store of satisfaction that had Helen met her she must have noticed it. At breakfast the next morning, however, Miss Balk gave vent to her complacency.

"When will you sail for England, Mrs. Phillips," she asked.

Surprise kept the widow silent; she could only stare at the speaker.

"Oh," resumed Barbara, carelessly, "perhaps you have not heard that Gerald Thurston is going to England. He went to New York yesterday for his purpose. I believe; at least, so I understood the conversation among some of the men that I happened to overhear while out for my walk last evening."

If Barbara wanted proof of the effect of her words, she had it in the deathly pallor which overspread the face opposite; but its owner sought to recover herself, and she answered with a hysterical laugh:

Gerald Thurston's movements are nothing to me."

That they were something to her, however, was proved by her unfinished breakfast, though she strove to hide the fact from Barbara, dallying over the meal that Miss Balk might leave the table first; but Miss Balk remained, and at last both sat simply glaring at each other. Then Barbara rose, saying, with her tantalizing laugh:

"I am sure the air of England will be necessary to restore your appetite."

"And I am sure the air of Hades wouldn't be hot enough to punish you," was the passionate retort as Mrs. Phillips dashed from the room.

That afternoon, on the conclusion of her music lesson, Mrs. Phillips, instead of going home, took her way to Mr. Robinson's. She had been often on his elegant grounds before, for the factory owner, contrary to what might be expected from his character, opened his grounds to the public; but he had them carefully watched over that no fruiting tree or shrub might be pilfered. Possibly the reason of his generosity was his delight in the notoriety which his magnificent place thus gained. On this occasion Mrs. Phillips did not linger to admire the cultivated and natural beauties of the scene, but she hurried to the music building, which stood midway in the grounds. A deep warning, together with a short warning bark, told her of the vicinity of dogs, and she paused in some fright. An instant later and her fears became sheer terror; for two large dogs, one a tall greyhound, bounded upon her. They meant no harm, however, and Helen's scream, as the great paws were placed in friendly fashion upon her dress, was followed by a hoarse chuckle of laughter, and a command to the dogs, which the latter obeyed by bounding instantly away from her to the person who had given the order. It was Robinson. His hands full of hot-house plants,—it was his whim to gather such himself,—and his high, wide-brimmed straw hat slung back rakish fashion on his head, gave him a very queer appearance; so queer, that had Helen not been so recently the victim of terror she must have laughed outright.

"Skereed pooty badly, eh?" said Robinson, in his blunt, vulgar fashion; and then as Helen having recovered herself, threw back her veil, he started with astonishment, exclaiming, "Mrs. Phillips!"

She was quite recovered now, and, with her fiery sweetest smile, said:

"Yes, Mr. Robinson, I have ventured to call upon you without the formality of an introduction. I would speak to you on a little private matter with which I feel that I can trust you."

She fastened her eyes upon his face, her beautiful, appealing eyes, while her manner had all the fascination of grace and candor. The hard-fisted factory owner was not impervious. Her beauty, the witchery of her bearing, were having the same effect upon him that had so fatally upon others. He actually, much also to his surprise, found himself striving to soften the abruptness of

his manner, and to appear gracious and gentle.

"Let me ask you into the house Mrs. Phillips, he said; "and you can tell me your business there."

He led the way up the broad steps, and through the long, spacious hall to the room that he called his study. Though not very sun-drenched, there was the same blaze of wax lights in the apartment that there had been on the occasion of his interview with Gerald Thurston. The lights seemed all the stranger that the windows admitted the yet un-faded daylight; but Robinson without passing any comment, drew forward a chair for his visitor, and seated himself.

Helen had given a start of surprise at the unusual illumination, but, finding there was to be no explanation of it she affected an indifference to it, and, assuming her most bewitching manner, she began:

"My business is this, Mr. Robinson; you are aware, of course, of my relationship, by my marriage, to your manager, Mr. Thurston."

"You're his stepmother, I believe," answered Robinson; and then he added with a chuckle, "pooty old son for you to have; older than yourself, I guess, by some years."

Mrs. Phillips blushed most becomingly, and resumed:

"And you know also, Mr. Robinson, what an unkind will was made, leaving all to me and nothing to him, and so binding me that I cannot give him one cent."

Robinson nodded.

The fair speaker continued, her voice quivering with the emotion she was across enough to put into it:

"Being a woman, Mr. Robinson, and having a woman's heart, I could not rest under such a state of things. I tried in vain to think how I could do some justice to Mr. Thurston, and at last, as a sort of tranquilizer to my poor sensitive conscience, I resolved to live near him, and spend but as little of my wealth as possible, hoping that some time an opportunity might arise for me to restore to him in some way what ought to be his. Now, however, I hear he has gone to England, and the fear that some misfortune in business may have sent him there has compelled me to come to you. You will help me, Mr. Robinson, to do justice to this poor young man. I feel that you will be my friend; that you will direct me right."

The factory owner's heart was more than penetrated; it was completely thawed. Never had he been in such close contact with so charming a presence; never had he heard such exquisite tones; and so much was he under the spell in which she had bound him that his own voice was a little unsteady when he spoke, and his hand lined face unusually flushed:

Gerald Thurston ain't in no want of means. He's got plenty, and he's gittin' more every day. And it ain't no misfortune in business that sent him to England; it's to fix matters for me,—matters about some new invention in the factory. Being as he's got a pooty good address and heaps of education, it wasn't best that he should stay at home and I go. — So I had to spare him, though it's dreadful inconvenient at the factory; and he's gon' to see the way they do things over there, and I reckon he'll be gone six months."

"And then he'll return and stay with you as usual?" asked Helen, with trembling eagerness.

"I reckon so. He seems to take to the business, and I mean he shall have it whenever I give it up."

"Thank you, Mr. Robinson. You've relieved me of such a weight of care; and now you will not let Mr. Thurston know anything about my interview with you. He is so proud and so sensitive about everything pertaining to his father's will, that I should tremble for the consequences of his anger if he knew that I had spoken to you. Indeed, I wonder at my own boldness; but I am so unhappy."

She put her gossamer handkerchief to her eyes, and sobbed softly.

"Oh, don't cry!" said Robinson, who wanted to say something which should be quite pretty and quite appropriate; but he was unable to think of anything save such a remark of condolence as might be addressed to a grieving child. "Don't now," as the widow's sobs seemed to become more distressing; "it won't do you no good this crying, and it's a pity to waste such pooty tears." Hitting at last on what he thought a pretty speech, and desisting of lengthening it, he continued, "I'm sure you're just like diamond drops; lucky man Gerald is to have such a pooty stepmother crying for him."

Her handkerchief was down in an instant.

"Not for him, he personally, is nothing to me. I cry because I am forced to be a party to the injustice which has been done to him."

"Well, it's all the same; you're a pooty stepmother anyhow, and the right kind of a stepmother for a chap to have. But don't cry any more, Mrs. Phillips," as the handkerchief was again on its way to her eyes, "and I'll keep as mum as you want me to do."

"Thank you again, Mr. Robinson," and the hand which had held the handkerchief to her eyes was now extended to him as she rose to depart.

He clasped it as she rose as if it were glass and might break beneath his pressure, and then he accompanied her to the door, and was even thinking something of escorting her to the extremity of the grounds when she prevented him by saying a hurried "Goodnight!" and speeding down the steps.

Miss Balk had finished her supper when Helen entered the little dining-

room, but she chose to remain at the table. Mrs. Phillips' heightened color and her somewhat nervous manner (she never could help being nervous when Barbara's eyes were upon her as they were now) excited Miss Balk's curiosity.

"Have you ascertained the precise part of England to which we shall go?" she asked.

"It will not be necessary to go to England," she answered quietly, and without lifting her eyes.

"Ah!" said Barbara. "You have heard something," a remark which Mrs. Phillips did not deign to answer.

TO BE CONTINUED HER HUNDRED DOLLARS

There was something fascinating about the little old woman who sat near me in the restaurant. It was her eyes that attracted me. They were blue-grey Irish eyes, strangely youthful looking considering her years, which must have been seventy. They were bright with a hint of suppressed excitement—eyes that held you by the power of their beauty despite the telltale wrinkles surrounding them, and the cheeks that had been a hint of their once apple-bloom freshness.

She was shabbily dressed. A black bonnet in the last stage of wear surmounted silvery hair that once perhaps had been the color of ripe corn. The hair was a fitting frame to the sweet old face, softening the harsh outlines of advancing years, and peeping out in wavy little tendrils from beneath the bonnet. A pair of black cloth gloves lay beside her on the table as if emphasizing her claim to gentility. In direct contradiction to this her hands were toil-worn; but they were clean, and her nails looked cared for. Evidently she was a person of refinement.

Another thing, she was amazingly alert; her every movement bespoke decision as she exchanged speech with the waitress attending her table. Her eyes spoke, her hands spoke, her very gloves seemed to speak as she moved them to make way for her cup of coffee. Character was written all over her. She prized me to such an extent that I determined to have speech with her. Some people possess magnetism—the kind that draws you irresistibly towards them. This little old woman was one of them.

With a pretence that the light was too strong for my eyes where I was seated—the sun was really shining in blinding bars of light—I moved over to her table, and now with the exercise of a little tact we were chatting freely. It was the slack hour, and only a few trimly clad waitresses were around. We were virtually alone. In a short time I had gained her confidence so far that she confided that she was suffering from a nervous strain, the effects of an accident that had occurred a short time previously. The hand that held the cup was trembling as she spoke.

"I am seventy-eight years old," she said. "When one reaches that age things are harder to bear than when one is young and strong. Besides, when one has to make one's living it is harder still."

"You are seventy-eight years old and work for a living?" I cried in amazement.

"Yes," she answered, evidently enjoying my surprise. "I make six dollars a week in a big office downtown where there are a number of girls employed. I see to their comfort, take care of their lockers, and help in many ways. My needle and thread are always handy. The girls call me 'Mother.' I love my work, and I am proud that I am able to do it. She gave her head a little expressive toss, as if to say, "Seventy-eight is not so old, after all—I'm quite young, when you come to think of it."

"But I must tell you about my accident," she continued eagerly.

"Two weeks ago I was knocked down by a trolley-car, and escaped death by a miracle. Every one who saw the accident thought I was a dead woman. But she went on with sublime faith. "God was with me and I escaped without a scratch. I walk with God," she shedded reverently. At the time the accident happened; I was this,—she unbuttoned her coat at the throat and displayed a Sacred Heart badge pinned to her dress.

"But perhaps you are not a Catholic, and so cannot understand?" She looked at me anxiously.

Her face lighted up as I assured her I was of the Faith.

"I had an idea that you were," she said shyly. "Don't you think that one can always tell?"

"I agreed that there was a mental telepathy between Catholics that was extraordinary in its spiritual significance.

"But to go on with my story—how the accident happened. A big policeman was guiding me across Broad way when we were both I walked down. I lost consciousness when the trolley struck me. It must have been for only a few seconds, for when I opened my eyes and saw him sprawling beside me, instead of thinking of my danger—I laughed! That was the Irish in me. My sense of humor got the better of me. Glory be to God, it's a poor thing I can't get a laugh out of. Then I suddenly realized my escape, and remembered that I wore two badges that morning—usually I wear but one. I was bringing the other to one of the girls. It was the second badge saved him," she added solemnly.

"I am convinced it was," I said

gravely. "I have heard of many wonderful escapes from death or disaster through wearing the insignia of the Sacred Heart."

"When my girls heard the news," she continued, "nothing would be doing them but that I should have a lawyer, and they sent one to me. I never would have thought of it myself, for, you see, I wasn't hurt, and went to work the next day—though I did feel a little battered and nervous —"

"You want to work the next day!" I echoed incredulously. I was dumbfounded. It was almost unbelievable to think that this little old frail creature, seventy-eight years old, could hold a position at all. What a lesson to the idle! Again I looked at her in amazement and approval. Something in my gaze must have pleased her, for she smiled happily.

"What did the lawyer say to you?" I asked a little abruptly. There was a tightening at my throat, as I listened, and thought of the brave spirit concealed in her frail body.

"He said that it was plainly evident that I was suffering from shock—that I had a good case—that it was negligence on the part of the driver and that the company was liable."

She repeated this in unconscious imitation of the lawyer. "But glory be to God, I told him I wasn't hurt. But he wouldn't listen to me. You don't know the extent of your injuries," he said. "Your system had received a shock that may cause your death eventually."

As she spoke, she looked as if a breath might blow her away. A red flush had mounted to her cheeks, and her eyes were painfully bright.

"And you actually went back to your work the next day?" I asked.

"Yes, thanks be to God, I was able. I was only stunned from the fall. But I lost my specs," she added ruefully. "It's hard doing without my specs. I can't see good. The lawyer is asking a hundred dollars of that company. If I get that I shall get a new pair. He says I'll get it. If I do, I shall be a rich woman."

"The hundred dollars is spent already," she went on gleefully. "I'll get new specs, and gloves, and —" she added with an almost fearful joy, "I might get a new bonnet and suit for Easter. In the old country I had always a new bonnet for Easter. Father Tom at home used to say that the collars put too much store on their bonnets, and too little on their prayers. All the same, we knew he liked to see us look prosperous. It's a long way to Limerick—the city of the Broken Treacle," she said wistfully, "where the River Shannon flows." She lifted the air in a sweet old voice.

"Have you ever been back?" I asked softly.

"A look of sadness crossed her face. "We never go back," she said; there was a plaintive note in her voice.

"We have so little at home that the poorest existence here seems rich in comparison. The only thing I have missed is the mountain air, and the smell of wild-flowers. I always had a few growing in the patch of ground at home. It is many years since I left Ireland—I was a slip of a girl when, blinded like the rest against staying at home, I came here, and married myself in America. He's dead thirty years, and the children are dead, and I am all alone—no, not alone," she added hastily. "I am never really alone, for I walk with God."

Her mood changed suddenly; from retrospection she came back to the present. "Do you think I shall get that hundred dollars?" she asked anxiously. "You see, I have spent it every day since, and have enjoyed it, too. So, I have got something out of it, even if it doesn't come true."

She laughed softly.

Her laugh was infectious. It had a touch of youth in it. The laughter was reflected in my own eyes, though the tears were not far off. Her brave spirit was symbolical of her race. Of such spirit were the saints and martyrs of Ireland. Come rain or shine, this little old woman with the blue-grey eyes like the skies of her native land would always meet you with joy and sorrow with hope.

"It was a legacy of her people, sent from God to enable them to withstand the desolation of the centuries that stood between them and the heaven of their desire—freedom."

"What is the secret of your contentment?" I asked suddenly.

"Trying to do God's will," she answered quietly, the smile fading from her face and a serious look taking its place. "I learned the lessons early from a good mother, and all my life I have practised it. The road has often been rugged and dark. When my husband died I had not a penny to bury him. Did I give up to despair? Did not I leave everything in God's hands, and He helped me through that terrible time."

"Most unexpectedly kind friends came to my assistance and gave him a decent funeral and left me with some money to start again. It would take too long to tell you the story of my life. What has helped me to bear every trial was my faith in God. He has never deserted me and never will. But don't think that I haven't had my share of joy. All my life it has been bubbling in me. The laugh is never far from my lips, thanks be to God! My girls in the office tell me that I am the cheeriest old lady in New York. I guess I am," she said quaintly.

"But I must be going." She rose to her feet and gave her bonnet a little poke to straighten it while glancing sideways at her reflection in a mirror. "I won't know myself in a new bonnet and suit." She glanced downward; her coat was greenish

black and her skirt was worn thread-bare. "Besides, I intend to buy presents for the girls, and a new pair of shoes for the son of a neighbor, and a doll for a little girl who never had one, and a top for another child. My!" she said with another happy laugh. "When I think of all the things I am going to do with that hundred dollars it makes me dizzy. It's all spent already," she added gaily, as with a pleasant smile she turned with quick, alert steps towards the entrance door and disappeared in a Broadway crowd.

Some weeks later I saw her again. This time it was on a Sunday morning at church. I had gone to early Mass and had not been long in the edifice when I noticed her coming down the aisle from the Communion rail. Her little old hands were folded devoutly, and a rosary was between her fingers. Her face wore a rapt look, as if heaven had opened to her. She had on a new dress and bonnet. There was a little bit of white about her throat, and on the lapel of her coat was a Sacred Heart badge. She knelt down a few seats in front of me and her head drooped in silent adoration.

Something of her happiness came to me as I watched her. I could imagine her innocent joy as she displayed the new bonnet and suit to admiring friends and neighbors, and the excitement of the girls in the office. I could almost see her in the midst of them as she turned slowly round to show to advantage the perfection of her purchase. Then the ceremony involved in the unwrapping of certain little packages containing gifts for each of them! The climax of her happiness must have been reached this morning when she received her Lord dressed in his best, her soul burning with love and satisfied desire. I could imagine no greater joy—joy in which the spiritual and material blended perfectly, making her soul and body a tabernacle for her Beloved. Such moments come seldom in a lifetime.

I knelt on. The people left the church as the Mass ended. My little old lady seemed in no hurry to go. The people were coming in for another Mass; still she did not move. I waited also, wanting to have speech with her and to carry away with me some of the sweetness that enveloped her. It is a wonderful atmosphere that surrounds souls in communion with God; its sweetness cannot be defined, for it is of the spirit.

At last impatience got the better of me. The church was filling rapidly. I went up and gently touched her on the shoulder. She looked up with a little bewildered glance, then smiled. "Glory be to God, it's you!" she said softly.

"Yes," I answered, smiling back. "I have been waiting for you quite a long time."

"Glory be to God!" she said again. Suddenly a blanched look overspread the sweet old face as she rose a little unsteadily to her feet, then swayed and fell back in the seat.

In a second I had my arms around her.

"I'm all right," she murmured faintly—all right. Her eyes wandered towards the altar. At once they seemed to look past it and a glorified expression crept into them. They shone with a spiritual light as if some vision were vouchsafed her of the eternal home awaiting her. With a little contented sigh she murmured, "Glory be to God! It's good to rest with God," and closing her frail old hands on her breast, closed her eyes and died. And invisible angels must have echoed, "Glory be to God!"—Shiela Mahon, in Rosary Magazine.

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BOLSHEVISM IN ART AND LITERATURE

European art and literature, says Alfred Noyes in a recent issue of the Saturday Evening Post, have grown increasingly Bolshevistic during the last thirty years. Nor is the mark of the beast wanting in our own American productions. "Vicious literature has been common in every age; but it has been reserved for our own to produce a literature that deliberately crosses the 'not' from every law of God or man and proceeds to preach a creed of immorality as the gospel of the future." It is in this perversion, as he says, that Bolshevism is rooted:

"We hear Bolshevism described, for instance, as a terrible menace to our political systems. But we seldom hear it attacked on the real fundamental ground that it substitutes 'Thou shalt steal,' and 'Thou shalt commit murder,' for the old laws of God. It is far more than a political problem. It is a religious problem affecting the whole conduct of human life. If our leaders had a little more courage they would fight this evil at the source and at the foundations, instead of meeting it with the weapons of the political opportunist."

"It must not be supposed that the spirit of this evil, which we have called Bolshevism in Russia, is an isolated phenomenon. It is active everywhere. It has been active in art and literature for more than a quarter of a century, and it has gone far toward viciously perverting the whole reading public. The standards of art and thought and conduct can be met by one power and one only—the power of religion. In fact, the literal meaning of the word 'religion' provides the full answer to the disintegrating and dissipating process of the modern world."