

REAPING THE WHIRLWIND

BY CHRISTINE FABER CHAPTER XVI—CONTINUED

Anxious to end the interview, the lawyer rang to know if the doctor had arrived; he was at that moment entering the house, and, futile as Helen felt his skill would be in her case, she was forced, for appearance sake, to see him. So preoccupied and wretched were her thoughts, however, that she scarcely heard what he said, and she gave such wrong and confusing answers to his questions that the physician ordered her to bed at once, and the administering of a soothing opiate, or he would not answer for her sanity. Confident that his order would be obeyed, he left to attend to other professional duties. But Mrs. Phillips was in too excited a state, and too madly anxious to seek some opening out of the dreary way she had made for herself, to think of following the doctor's directions. Impatiently repelling all attempts to make her do as he had ordered, she wandered miserably from room to room, now deciding on one course of action, then on another, again on a third, and finally rejecting all.

In the midst of her aimless wanderings a loud sharp ring at the hall door startled her; everything started her now, and she waited with her hands pressed to her heart, while the summons was answered.

In a few minutes a card was brought to her. Her eyes distended as she read the name, and, regardless of those proprieties of which a short time before she was so careful in presence of the servants, she dashed past the man and down to the parlor, where the sender of the card waited.

"Garald, Garald!" She fled to him, kneeling at his feet, and crying as if her heart would burst.

But that stern presence recoiled: "I have called, madam, to know if you have any explanation to make of your heartless conduct."

Could that be the lover she had left five brief months ago—that tall, stern, determined man. His arms were folded upon his breast, as if by that very attitude he would show her how completely she was shut out of his heart. Not a muscle of his face indicated pity or softening.

"When you have heard all," she gasped, "you will forgive me."

But there was no appearance of any feeling save relentless determination in that stern face above her.

Still on her knees, she raised her clasped hands to him, and told him with a voice broken by sobs of the successive steps by which her vanity and her weakness brought her at last to break her troth.

He interrupted her: "And you were so far lost to all womanly honor as to pen me such letters as these—draw from his bosom a packet of her own recent letters, which she too well recognized—at the very moment that you were accepting the attentions of another; so far sunk in the basest of deceit as to conceal from me the fact that you had become a wife and a widow?"

For the instant that he was pronouncing her name his voice changed to a bitter heart cry, and he turned his back to her and walked to the other end of the room. She followed him.

"Oh, Garald, I have wronged you, but I have broken my own heart!"

"Your heart!" He turned to her almost fiercely. "If it were but your own heart you have broken, madam, the loss might not be irreparable; but you have broken my father's heart; your duplicity was the shock which sent him to his grave. Tell me," in his eagerness bending slightly towards her, "what passed between you at the last when he saw that it was my picture you wore?"

Anxious alone to convince Gerald, and deeming a frank avowal of everything to be the best and perhaps the only plan since she was surrounded by such unfortunate circumstances, she told him of those last dreadful moments with her husband; his accidental discovery of the locket, his violence in opening it, his exclamation, and his subsequent treatment of herself.

"And all this occurred when?" Gerald asked.

"Just before he fell in the fit which preceded his death," she answered.

"And yet you testified in court to his affection for you up to the very last moment of his consciousness of your presence. Have you then, madam, added prejury to your deceit?"

She sank again at his feet with a gasping cry:

"Oh, Garald, have pity on me, I am so miserable."

He strode from her, turning to fling the packet of her letters at her feet, he said, with an appalling calmness:

"I have forced myself to do you the justice of hearing your explanation, if you had any to make; that explanation has sunk you deeper in my scorn and loathing. As the widow of my poor deceased father you may enjoy the wealth he has left you; I shall cease to press my claim to it, and may you be as happy, madam, as the memory of the many wrongs you have inflicted upon others will allow you to be."

"Neither shall I press my claim to the property," burst out Helen. "It is yours, Gerald; it shall be yours, whether it comes to me or not."

"You forget. Should it prove to be yours by right of law it will not be of your power to bestow one cent of it on

the person you had named." He turned to depart, but she had fung herself between him and the door:

"Say that you forgive me before you go; say that in the future we may meet as friends."

"Never!"

It was not easy to mistake the determination of that single, low-spoken word, not easy to misinterpret that resolute attitude as he waited to be allowed to pass out.

"Oh, Gerald! my heart is at your feet; trample on it if you will, only say that you will sometime forgive me; that sometime, even in the distant future, you will be my friend."

"You have trampled on my heart, madam,"—she could not but notice how studiously he avoided calling her by her marriage name,—and while I would advise you to appeal to heaven for forgiveness, for myself I can only say that whenever we meet in future it must be as utter strangers."

He put her aside, regardless of her frantic entreaties to be heard once more, and hurried from the house.

CHAPTER XVII

"You have had an interview with her?"

The speaker was Rodney, the former business executor of the late Mr. Phillips, and the person whom that gentleman had summoned under strange circumstances to his death-bed. The party addressed was Thurston, and the same nervousness which had marked Rodney's manner when speaking to Miller in the house of the Tillotsons characterized him now.

His hands were twitching, and even his feet were shifting themselves to uneasy positions as he spoke.

Thurston, who had been gloomily awaiting Rodney's entrance looked up from the position he had assumed near the mantel, where, with his elbows resting upon it, his face had been buried in his hands.

"Yes," he said quickly, and then his voice changed to a savage bitterness. "I have seen my stepmother."

Rodney approached him.

"And what is the result?" he asked, his hands increasing their restless motions.

"The result? It is this Rodney: a confirmation from her own lips of all that I faint would have believed so false."

"Ah! Then she acknowledged the truth about the last scene with her husband? It was as his dying lips had told me? Then we shall have a clear case in your favor, if it can be proved that your relations were not friendly to the last, and he rubbed his hands more vigorously in his intense satisfaction.

"No," said Gerald, with quiet determination. "I have done with the business now. From the first I was willing to contest my claim only that my father's wealth, if it came to me, might be hers, might give her the enjoyment she craved. Had I but known! Oh, Rodney, it was cruel not to have told me," letting his hands diggle in the utter abandonment of grief.

"Listen Gerald," and in his sympathy the little executor actually ceased his nervous motions for a moment. "I held so strong a hope myself of a complete reconciliation on the part of your father that I could not imbue you with the same hope, and I inclined to think it would have been so had he not met Miss Brower. But even then, had there been one word from you, Gerald, one half expressed wish to be forgiven, I am confident your father's heart would have opened to you again."

"I could not," interposed Gerald, violently agitated. "I could not, remembering his words to me on that last day; and had he half a father's heart he would have recalled those words immediately they were uttered. But he has had his revenge."

He folded his arms and drooped his head moodily forward again.

"You continue to blame me for the course I have pursued," resumed Rodney, "but it seemed under the circumstances to be the best. Disliking the freedom and pertinacity with which I would speak to him of you, he transferred his business to another lawyer, and the first that I knew of his marriage, or even of his intention to marry, was when I was summoned to his death-bed. He would see me alone, to pour into my ear his discovery of the cruel deception which had been practiced upon him by Mrs. Phillips, and in his rage against her he was as anxious to cut her off from his fortune as he had been to disinherit you; then, also a sort of remorse for his treatment of you, and a pity for you because of the deception which he felt must also have been practiced upon you, seemed to mingle with his other emotions. But, feeling that his time was growing short, he bade me make immediate preparations for the annulling of the last will. I summoned the physician, the only witnesses within instant call; your father, however, was too far gone to do more than utter in a disjointed way his wishes with regard to his first will, and when Miller, who had been summoned also, entered the room all was over."

"I told my story to the doctors and to Miller, in order that they might understand upon what excellent grounds the last will could be disputed, but they called it the vagary of a dying man. However, I understood the case better than they did, and, happening to go through the parlor that same day, I found this."

He drew from his breast the locket containing Gerald's picture; with a sickening sense the latter recognized it; it was his first gift to Helen.

"That," resumed Rodney, "confirmed

the communication your father had made to me; he said that he, on seeing whose picture the locket contained, had torn it from her neck."

"I know," interrupted Gerald; "you have told me all this before."

"Yes; and I should have told you what is to follow," said the lawyer, "only you were too excited to listen to me, and too eager to have an interview yourself with Mrs. Phillips."

"Because her conduct seemed too horrible," said the young man, "and I hoped against hope that there might have been something which would still leave her guiltless in my eyes; but there was nothing, nothing."

Again he buried his face in his hands.

Rodney resumed: "I sought you, Gerald, at once; you were too ill to be seen. I could do no more than leave an urgent request to be apprised when I could see you. When such word came, I hastened to Eastbury, it was only to be informed by your physician that you were most careful not to excite you by any communication. In that case I was afraid to tell you even of your father's death, and so I made it appear that, because of ill health, he was on the point of relenting towards you. How happy that news made you, you yourself can tell. The necessity becoming urgent for the immediate legal steps in regard to the annulling of Mr. Phillips' last will, it made it necessary that I should tell you something of the truth, as your presence speedily would be required in court. So at length I informed you of your father's marriage and subsequent death; but having learned from your own confidences how madly infatuated you were with Miss Brower, I feared the effect upon you should you know that your father's widow and your affianced were the same. In the face of your wild love and your still weak condition I continued to defer the communication, being careful even to refrain from mentioning that your father was a guest of the Tillotsons, and being not a little relieved that you, absorbed in your attachment to Miss Brower seemed to forget to ask even the maiden name of your father's widow."

"Matters thus continued until the very day of your appearance in the court room. I meant to tell you upon that morning, to prepare you for the appearance of Mrs. Phillips on the witness stand; but your arrival was late, you remember, and I had no opportunity to whisper a word to you. You heard her evidence; how carefully she concealed the facts of that last scene with her husband; in a word, how she perjured herself."

Thurston groaned; but Rodney, now wrought upon by his own indignant feelings at the memory of Mrs. Phillips' infamous conduct, continued:

"Indeed I'm not sure but that her fainting at your feet was a very pretty piece of acting, all of a part with the rest of her nefarious doings. And yet all that you saw and heard in the court room, was not enough to convince you of her treachery. You acted like a madman, refusing to listen when I would have explained why I had concealed the true facts of the case, until you should have had an interview with Mrs. Phillips. You have had that interview, and you are not much more sane than you were a few hours ago. Be a man, Gerald, and throw this jade of a widow to the devil!"

The little lawyer's excited feelings had hurried him into profanity. A part, at least, of the counsel seemed to be adopted, for Thurston, standing suddenly erect, said, with a calmness that surprised his listener:

"You mistake me, Rodney, if you think that any woman could have power to blight my manhood. I should scorn myself were I not above such weakness."

"Ah! that is like yourself; you have your father's spirit," said the lawyer, with joyful vivacity; "and when you come into possession of your father's property—"

"Hold!" interrupted Gerald. "I have already told you I shall withdraw my claim to that; let my stepmother possess the wealth for which she sold herself. My present business gives me a salary adequate to all my wants, and besides it affords occupation for my mind, which is the best thing for me now. So, Rodney, by the friendship you bear me, let me hear no more of disputing my father's last will; since he could be so unfaithful as in the first place to will everything away from me, let it remain so. I promise you to forget that I ever knew the woman who now bears my father's name."

But the lawyer was still unwilling and dissatisfied.

"I swear," he said hotly; "but it is too devilish bad that mind should have what is yours by right. Why, do you know how rich she will be?"

"Do you know how rich I shall be?" interrupted Gerald. "Rich in that which no money could ever purchase,—my own independence and fortitude to bear and rise above all the wrongs which come to us from poor, weak human nature."

"And how are you going to manage this forgetting his money to the poor?" "Sure, yer Riverence," I answers him, "didn't I do it—who's poorer than yer own self?" And I was right—"

"Yes, Michael, you're always right." It was the voice of Father Ladden, and he smiled as he grasped Father Ewing's hand. "I suppose Michael's been telling you about what he terms a 'miracle.' He's all up in the air about it," and there was the suspicion of a twinkle in his blue eyes.

Michael betook himself to the culinary department, determined to prepare a dinner that would do justice to

for an instant on Gerald's pale, thin features:

"Well, I certainly shall not be disposed to trust any of them; and you may rest assured of one thing, Rodney: that I never again shall occupy a position in which it will be necessary for me to trust any of them."

"Softly, my boy, softly; I have heard jilted lovers rant at petticoats before, and yet they found other fish in the sea as good as that they had lost, and—"

But Gerald had turned impatiently away.

Rodney resumed his serious tone: "Suppose this little wild thought take it into her head to return to Eastbury; she will have means enough to buy out the whole village and live as sumptuously as she chooses."

"That would make not the least difference to me," was the reply. "In my interview with her I told her that in the event of any meeting in the future, it must be as strangers. I tell you, Rodney, she is nothing to me now."

He was not excited, though he had spoken a little warmly, and as the lawyer marked the lines which from mental suffering already indented his face, in rank than parish priest, he was late, you remember, and I had no opportunity to whisper a word to you. You heard her evidence; how carefully she concealed the facts of that last scene with her husband; in a word, how she perjured herself."

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his skill, even though it did not happen to be Saturday, the regular day for Father Ladden's big feast. He was ambitious that "His Grace" should realize that there was no one in "His Grace's" establishment to be compared to the cook that Father Robert Ladden possessed.

Father Ladden rescued his friend from the chair. "I see he's put you in stocks again," he laughed. "Well, that chair was one of the instruments of torture he bought with the money he was so busily telling you about when I came, and in of course there's no two ways about it, a visitor as distinguished as 'Your Grace' would have to grace it! But come, let's go to the living room, the splendor of this room stifles me."

Monsignor Ewing laughed heartily as he followed his host into the living room; then he looked around at the shabby place. "It's not," and the Monsignor eyed it critically, "exactly what the Cure of Ars might have had but then, as Michael would have told me if you'd given him half a chance, its none too good for Father Ladden."

"Well, I suppose Michael's told you that the Cure of Ars has no longer the place he used to have, and if I hadn't interrupted him he might have told you that Don Bosco is quite the rage at the rectory of St. Bernardine of Sienna."

Then Father Ladden told him of his plans; that the old church of St. Bernardine must go and a new one, an edifice more worthy of the Old King, arise in its stead. He told him about the novena to Saint Joseph, and about Bob Leonard's gift making another novena for five thousand more, and so on until you get your thirty or fifty thousand; only I suppose that as your novenas succeed your taste will improve, until you'll finally wind up with a cathedral in this district—one that will make that of the Holy Name nothing more than a squalid heap of stone?"

"No," Father Ladden assured him, "the idea is not to put up a cathedral. You know that for sometimes I have known that real work would be with men—well, to be brief—with soldiers, and that is the reason that the parish must be in shape before I can even think of taking the matter up with the Bishop. I figure that in about six months, if I get the new church up, I could enlist as a chaplain with a machine gun outfit somewhere on the western front, and I know that there's many a poor soldier there who would be glad because of my ministrations. And anyhow, in time of war a man's place is with the army—especially if he's a young man," he hastened to add with a thought of his guest.

Monsignor Ewing held a ring of smoke towards the ceiling. "Suppose," he ventured, "that peace should be declared before that time?"

"Oh, there's little danger of that," Father Ladden assured him. "I was just talking to a returned soldier the other day and he said to me: 'Father, some folks think the war'll be over in a few years, but I'm here to tell you that it won't be over in twenty years.' And peace-loving Father Ladden heaved a sign of satisfaction."

"That must have been such a consolation," murmured Monsignor, flicking off the ashes of his cigar, "it would be nice if it waited for you to get into it," and the ghost of a smile danced around a rather firmly set pair of lips. "It would be nice," he repeated, "but it should happen that peace is declared before the allotted twenty years, but I'm here to tell you that peace come into being, don't get discouraged, one can always find something to quarrel about at home if they are in earnest for a skirmish."

Father Ladden laughed. "Oh, well, you won't take me seriously, but when I call on you in a chaplain's outfit, you'll remember this chaffing that you gave me and how graciously I accepted it."

Then Monsignor put down his cigar. "I've something very important to speak to you about," he said. "You know I've great confidence in your prayers—"

"So have I," interrupted Father Ladden, with clerical candor. "Confidence in prayer, to my mind, is simply taking the Lord at His Word. It's a question of asking and receiving; just as He said."

"Yes, I know; that's why I have so much confidence in your prayers,—because you realize it and act accordingly."

The Monsignor was very much in earnest, and it he thought Father Ladden lacked humility by the avowal of his confidence in his own powers of persuasion with the heavenly Court he took great care not to show it. "When you pray for something," he continued, "you really expect it, and when you pray for money and get five thousand dollars why it's a blow to you that it isn't thirty thousand you receive—that's the reason I want you to do some praying for an intention of mine—some tall praying too—for a soul. He's one of my parishioners."

Monsignor lit the dead stump of his cigar and threw the match on the table.

Of course it's not his fault that he's one of my parishioners, nor is it his fault either. It's just my lot

He's a millionaire, over on the Drive. He lost his health and his faith gaining his money, and now he'd be willing to lose his money to regain his health; but it's a bargain that won't work both ways. He has a cancer, and well, to make a long story short, he's dying impenitent—not the ghost of sorrow for any of the things that are attributed to him. You know there's little consolation unless a miracle takes place?"

"Is that all?" queried Father Ladden. "Well, haven't you prayed for it?"

"Remember him daily at Mass since I've made his acquaintance, but as far as I can judge the Lord has not yet granted my prayer, and so I want you to pray for it. And believe if you do, and put your whole heart into it, we'll get him."

"Have you recommended him to the Poor Clares?" asked Father Ladden. "I rarely bother storming Heaven for the conversion of a sinner until I've handed him over to the Poor Clares and let them plague the Lord first."

No, Father Ewing admitted that he had not troubled the Poor Clares about him; perhaps he thought they had trouble enough living their austere lives without any outside cares on their shoulders. He had asked a few prayers from his penitents, but beyond that he had not gone.

Father Ladden promised him that he would pray for him and get prayers for him, and also that he would have a little chat with Saint Anthony, the restorer of lost things who, if he condescended to find so un-Franciscan a thing as money would surely work hand-in-glove with him in restoring so precious a treasure as Faith. Monsignor departed; and for the time Father Ladden's primary and secondary intentions, of going to France and building the church, were usurped by the all-important one of obtaining the grace of repentance for that rich poor man.

When Father Ladden made his evening visit to the Blessed Sacrament he felt that he had a real subject of a conversation with the Lord. He laid the case before the Eucharistic Heart, and waited for an inspiration. Then he pleaded: "It's for Your greater glory that I ask his conversion," he insisted.

"You will be the loser if he be not saved. Your glory will be robbed. I ask in Your name for the conversion of this man." And, as was his wont, he turned to the Eternal Father: "I ask it of You in the name of Jesus and for the love of Jesus." Then he placed the affair in the hands of the Immaculate One, and breathed a prayer to Saint Anthony to plead for the favor. "Obtain it," he pleaded, "obtain it."

There was no light in the dusty old church, save the one that shone brilliantly before the Hidden Guest. Ever and anon the boards would creak and groan beneath the weight of their many years, but still Father Ladden prayed on. "I have not the slightest intention of going to bed until You assure me my prayer is answered, dearest Lord," he breathed, "and if You have eternity on Your side, I have time on mine. I can plague You into granting it, even if You do know that I don't deserve it."

There was silence, that sweet, strong silence wherein Jesus and the soul are one. It was then that Father Ladden knew that sacrifice—some sacrifice was required of him. "Name it," he begged. "Speak Lord, for Thy servant heareth."

And with a groan he listened as he realized the sacrifice that must be made. "That poor sinner's miserly deeds must be expiated; the robbing of widows and orphans must be atoned for before Grace would touch his heart. But even so, Father Ladden knelt low and kissed the dusty carpet. Then he passed on into the house and wrote a letter to a friend of his who, "while he rested," as he put it, worked for foreign missions.

"Enclosed," he wrote, "please find a check for \$5,000. I wish this money sent to some Bishop in China for five bursees for the education of young men to the priesthood. The bursees are to be in honor of and named: Eucharistic Heart of Jesus Burse; Blessed Sacrament Burse; Immaculate Heart of Mary Burse; Saint Joseph Burse and Saint Teresa Burse. These bursees are donated in expiation of the sins of a certain person in whose soul I am interested, and I beg you, Father, to say a prayer for the salvation of his soul."

"The money was intended for some other purpose; but man proposes and God disposes. Anyhow, I justify myself in sending it because helping the missions in the field afar has lately become one of my favorite tricks."

"Sincerely your friend, ROBERT J. LADDEN."

Early the next morning the telephone rang. Father Ladden grasped the receiver before Michael had a chance to get near it.

"Hello," said the voice at the other end. "This is Father Ewing. The intention has been granted. I called there—in fact was called there late last night. The man wanted me suddenly around 11 o'clock, and he's recovered in the fullest sense of the word."

"Thank God!" Father Ladden shouted, "thank God!"

"And say," continued the voice at the other end, "are you sure that it was only for his soul you prayed? I think you must have tried some of your art on his pocketbook too, for right in my presence he made an amendment to his will. He feels that he wants to do something in expiation of the past, and so he's left a hundred thousand in my care and

FATHER LADDEN DOES HIS BIT

Monsignor Ewing called on Father Ladden, an informal call, but Michael insisted upon ushering him into the parlor and sitting down for a preliminary visit with him before deigning to inform the pastor of the arrival of his guest.

"And how is yer Grace today?" asked Michael. Anyone a degree higher in rank than parish priest, as in Michael's mind, entitled to be addressed as "Yer Grace," nor would His Holiness at Rome find himself an exception to this sweeping rule if Michael had the honor of meeting him.

Father Ewing smiled: "My Grace is well, and how is His Lordship?"

"Oh, ye mean Father Ladden? Well, he's well, but of course he's rather up in the air, so to speak, over the miracle we've had."

Monsignor Ewing placed his hat on the crocheted centerpiece. "With yer permission, Michael," he added, as he laid his walking stick beside it and sank into a chair. But it was not the chair for any guest, not to mention so distinguished a one as Monsignor, and Michael lost no time in getting his reverend visitor out of the comfortable seat into one which he, Michael, considered more comely, even though the comfort might be lacking.

"And so you've had a miracle? Well, I don't know why Father Ladden should be 'up in the air' as you say, over it. I always had an idea that miracles were simply the breath of the air to him. I thought that miracles for breakfast, dinner and supper were only the ordinary bill of fare for the Cure of Ars and his disciples."

"That's just it, yer Grace," he breathed, "that's just it. Ye mind when the Cure of Ars was the whole thing in this rectory? Sure I remember when everything was so swell for us—the old rags of furniture that we had when we started here—and yer Grace can see that—save for the chair yer're sitting on—and a few other sticks of furniture—that things haven't improved much since. As I was saying before yer Grace interrupted me, that everything was too good for us. 'Sure, his Riverence would be saying, 'the Cure of Ars, Michael, me lad, never had anything like this. When he was tired he'd sit on the floor; and when he was sleepy he'd lay on the floor, and he became a saint, Michael, not through having a lot of furniture that belongs to the poor, or piling up fat bank accounts, but through the getting rid of them, and with that he ordered me to sell everything extra—and the house like a barracks—and give the money to the poor.' And a smile stole over the wrinkled old face of Michael."

"And you did it?" suggested the Monsignor, who had heard the tale so often that he knew it by heart but who humored Michael into telling it every time he saw him.

"I did, yer Grace, I sold it. I took the whole outfit to Casey, the Boss of the Ward, and I says to him: 'His Riverence wants to get rid of this furniture, and he thought it possible that ye, in the goodness of yer heart might want to give him a donation for it. And in yer turn, ye can give the furniture to the poor.'"

"Well, sir, he did give us a donation for it, and a good one at that, and I took the money and got a decent cook stove to cook his meals,—and the finest gas range in the district,—and I got a good bed for Father Ladden. Well, he was up in the air, so to speak, yer Grace, when he learned where the money came from."

"Michael," he says, real strict-like 'didn't I tell ye to give the money to the poor?' Sure, yer Riverence, I answers him, 'didn't I do it—who's poorer than yer own self?' And I was right—"

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