

REAPING THE WHIRLWIND

BY CHRISTINE FABER
CHAPTER XVIII

The sensational press, that had expected so much from the case of the contested will of the wealthy Mr. Phillips, was disappointed for beyond that first day's proceedings in which Mrs. Phillips had fainted so strangely at the feet of her stepson, there was nothing to feed even the slightest love of sensational gossip; and the claimant to the property through the first will having quietly withdrawn, the second will, duly admitted and proved, placed the beautiful young widow in a dazzling position so far as regarded wealth.

All business pertaining to that contested document being settled at last, Mrs. Phillips was free to go where she would, and to Eastbury, according to her first determination, she intended to go immediately. Miller, in his capacity as her business executor and guardian, since she seemed to be so unprotected, would have journeyed with her all the way to the little village, but she firmly declined his courtesy; she would not even take her maid, faithful Jennie, much to the latter's disappointment and regret. So quite alone, save that the lawyer would accompany her in the carriage to the depot, Mrs. Phillips departed on her journey. She was in heavy weeds, and not once during the long ride did she lift from her face its sombre crape covering. Her thoughts could betray themselves as they would behind that thick screen, and she could not even think of the future without a feeling of gloom and dejection.

She had telegraphed to Miss Balk to meet her at the station and now, as the train stopped at the low wooden structure which served as a depot, Mrs. Phillips was obliged to throw up her veil, for the December day was drawing to a close. Lights were twinkling in the little place, and a couple of country hacks were in waiting. In one of these Helen at once recognized the angular form of Barbara, and she hurried to it. Miss Balk was startled, — so startled that she positively recoiled from the little figure springing lightly into the vehicle.

"Have you no welcome for me, Barbara?" as the driver started his horses in the direction of Eastbury. "Still no answer from Miss Balk, and Mrs. Phillips, throwing herself back on the seat with that ease of position in which she ever indulged, resumed: "One would think I had scared you out of your wits. Did not my letter, telling you all that had happened, reach you last week?"

"It did," replied Barbara, who wanted slow, deep tones; "and I was thinking that you had broken somebody's heart, but it was not your own." "It was too dark to see the working of Mrs. Phillips' countenance, but by the change in her position it would seem as if she half winced under the remark. She said, pettishly: "It is too late for me to be a tanist; have you no feeling for my sufferings since I saw you last?" "Your sufferings!" and Miss Balk laughed, that short, hard, dry laugh which Helen never could hear without feeling as if it would be a relief to gnash her teeth against it.

"Your sufferings!" she repeated. "Why, Helen, your heart is so tough from vanity and selfishness that all the sufferings in the world wouldn't make an impression on it, so long as they didn't hurt just yourself. But you tried to break Gerald Thurston's heart, I have no doubt. Lucky he found you out before he married you; pity his father hadn't found you out too."

"If you say another word like that, Barbara, I'll jump out of the carriage." Barbara was not daunted. "Jump," she retorted; "perhaps you're more successful in breaking your heart than you have had in breaking your heart." "But Mrs. Phillips did not follow the advice; she put her hands over her ears, and, shrinking to the farthest corner of the back, let Miss Balk's tongue wag as caustically as it would; Barbara, finding her companion to continue silent, relapsed into a silence herself, and neither spoke until they arrived at the little country house from which seven months before Helen Browner had gone forth.

The stout country maid of all work, whom Miss Balk in anticipation of Helen's coming had engaged some weeks before, had an inviting supper neatly laid in the small but cozy dining-room, and thither Helen repaired, waiting only to fling off her outer wraps. The lamplight was not sufficiently strong to reveal her as plainly to Miss Balk as the latter seemed to wish by her long companion and searching look, but it was enough to show that though Helen was very pale and looked strangely older than when she left Eastbury, her beauty seemed to be none the less; indeed, there was a softened tone about it from her very pallor that lent to it a new charm and interest. If she still suffered as she said to Barbara that she had suffered, or any remorse or regret mingled with her present feelings, she most skillfully concealed all, and proceeded at once to her supper, she ate with an appetite that at least had not suffered.

Barbara declined to break the silence: "You are rich, Mrs. Phillips, I believe."

Mrs. Phillips looked up; accusatory as she was by this time to her

new name, it seemed very odd pronounced by those unfeminine tones: "Yes, Barbara, very rich; worth about—" "Don't trouble yourself to mention the amount," interrupted Barbara; "the New York papers stated that."

Mrs. Phillips started. Her companion continued: "When I received your letter acquainting me with events which had happened some weeks previous, I thought I'd learn the facts as the public had them. I didn't know how much you might have concealed. So I sent for all the New York papers that were likely to contain any information, and I found that, with your usual deceitful propensity, you had not written of your swoon in the court-room. The papers said when Thurston spoke to you, you fainted at his feet. Did he curse you, Helen?"

"The color glowed in Mrs. Phillips' cheeks: "No, he did not curse me; instead, he resigned his claim to the property that I might enjoy it." "The more fool he," ejaculated Barbara, pushing back her chair the better to contemplate her companion. "And what does he intend to do?" she pursued; "complete his madness by remaining in your vicinity?"

"Helen bent her pretty brows together in a scowl: "I don't know what he intends to do, and I don't care. Gerald Thurston is nothing to me now." "Not even as your stepson, not even as the one to whom you are beholden for your immense wealth? You are to be congratulated," Mrs. Phillips on having so completely freed yourself from the shackles of trust, honor, and gratitude; "and Miss Balk's sneering tone was even more provocative of her listener's indignation than were the ironical words.

Mrs. Phillips dashed her cup down so violently that the steaming contents fell on the table and partly over her hand. Angered still more by the pain of the burn she retorted, passionately: "Have a care, Barbara Balk, or I shall be provoked to the length of disobeying my father's wish in reference to you. I feel like saying now," waxing hotter with every word, "that you shall not live with me. I can choose my own abode, and what is to hinder me from living away from you?"

"Nothing, certainly, save the consequences," said Barbara dryly. "And the consequences?" pursued Helen. "What can they be but a series of petty torments from you?" "Your father's threat to curse you from his grave in the event of your separating from me," again in the same dry way. "Oh, was the sneering reply, "since I have parted with such feelings as trust, honor, and gratitude, I may be supposed, reasonably, to be free from such a silly superstition as fear of a dead man's curse."

"In that case I would give to the public everything I know," and Miss Balk leaned back in her chair and smiled triumphantly. "Know! What do you know?" Helen's voice was almost a shriek. "Take the step that you propose, and you and the public shall be enlightened simultaneously." She spoke with imperturbable calmness, her smile assuming the character of mockery.

Helen, too angry to finish her supper, withdrew to attend to her burned hand, and to give vent to her feelings in her own room. The next morning, Miss Balk seemed disposed to renew the attack; she asked in her sharp way where Mrs. Phillips intended to reside. The latter, with a manner as if she had made up her mind to have no quarrel with Barbara, let the latter as tantalizing as she might, answered, laconically: "Here."

Barbara's astonishment betrayed itself by a slight involuntary start. "Here!" she exclaimed. "In this little mean house, with all the money you have now, and with your love for extravagance? Bab, Helen! don't tell me that you have not some deep purpose at the bottom of it all."

But Helen declined to reply; she was surveying the limp muslin curtains of the parlor windows. Barbara resumed: "Do these stylish friends of yours, the Tillotsons, know how you are going to live, and have they approved of it?"

"My stylish friends, the Tillotsons," replied Helen, trying to imitate Mrs. Balk's tones, "have just now too much affliction in the family—Annette, or Mrs. Morgan, having died under the operation necessitated by that accident—to give any thoughts to me. They are going to Europe, not being able to bear an immediate return to New York, which places they left so recently in such happiness."

lous and elegant, and surrounded by well kept and beautiful grounds it, testified rather to his high and sensuous living. The servants described the appointments of his table as princely, but all his sumptuous fare failed to increase the flesh on his spare form, or even to cover the angular leanness of his long, pale, heavily-lined features.

In his boyhood he had been comparatively poor, working in the factory which was then owned by his uncle, and living with his uncle who proved as hard a task-master to his nephew as he did to every one else subject to him. The only person to whom the old man was kind was his daughter, a pretty, gentle girl, who seemed as unlike her hard, grasping father as if she bore no relation to him.

Old Caleb Robinson died suddenly, and the property, willed entirely to the daughter, fell under the management of the nephew. It was reported in the village that the nephew managed so well in his own interest as to make the girl marry him. They went away on their honeymoon, and young Mrs. Robinson came back in her coffin.

"Hasty decline," her husband said, was the cause of her death, but the people in the village had their own and very different thoughts upon the subject. Young Robinson came in for all the property, and his wealth gave him influence enough to set at defiance every evil report. He lived at first in strange seclusion, devoting all his energies to the factory, and enlivening the solitude of his home hours by repasts the sumptuousness of which being described by the servants, formed a frequent theme of gossip among his poorer neighbors.

He was never known to assist a charity; indeed, those who were interested in any benevolent scheme had long since ceased to subject themselves to the humiliating repulse which was sure to follow an appeal to him. He had not entered a church since he was a boy, and he was accustomed to pass such, of whatever denomination, with haughty stride and contemptuous look. While he laughed at the notion of hell, he firmly believed that each of the lower animals possessed a soul, and to any one who was bold enough to argue religion with him he flung long passages of the Bible, proving that he knew much of the book by heart, but every passage was so interlarded with profane speeches and shocking oaths, that the party starting the argument not only generally, retired from the contest but retired with the feeling of being badly worsted. It was the only time that he was known to use profane language, and some said he did it in order to escape arguments on a subject so distasteful to him.

His hard, grinding measures with the employees began from the first day of his control of the factory; and, hard as the poor operatives had thought of the deceased Robinson, they were aghast at the heartlessness of this young man who seemed to forget that he had ever worked among them.

After two years of his seclusion, Robinson made frequent trips to Boston, where some of his kin resided, and after that, two seasons of every year, midsummer and midwinter, brought a large party of men and women to his Eastbury house. He even went to the extent of having the house so much enlarged that it looked commodious enough for three mansions, and he called it "The Castle" by which name it speedily came to be known among the villagers.

His company generally remained a month, and the sumptuous fare with which the eccentric widower regaled himself was lavishly spread before them. He was parsimonious only to the poor, whom he abhorred with all the strength of his little, mean, contemptible soul. He shrank from every contact with them, but until Thurston came he was obliged to do violence to this antipathy; and this feeling made him seek at length for some one who, capable of assisting him in the management of his lucrative business, might relieve him from all contact with his employee. It was at this juncture that Thurston presented himself with a letter of introduction procured for him by Rodney from one of Robinson's Boston relatives. The young man's gentlemanly air impressed the factory owner; he gave him a position of minor trust and watched him. The vigilance convinced him of Thurston's sterling character, ready tact, and business capacity. He immediately assigned him to a more important position in the factory and speedily Gerald came to be second only to Robinson, and most essential to his employer in a business concern.

Such was the character of the man who now stood in a room of his own house talking to Thurston. Never before having betrayed the least interest in the latter's affairs, Gerald was somewhat surprised to find himself subjected to quite a catechism. It was his first opportunity for a conference upon anything save business since his return to the factory after his illness, and this evening it was at Robinson's own request that he had called upon him. The room in which they sat was a spacious, deeply wainscoted apartment, with dark paneled walls and innumerable gilded sconces, in every one of which blazed a wax candle. Robinson had a fancy for wax candles, and while the rest of the house was illuminated by gas, his own bedchamber and the room which he called his study

—though the name seemed a misnomer, there being not a book in the apartment—were lit by a profusion of wax candles. The light was quite bright, though given by wax, and it softened off distinct view the rich antique furniture, while the fire glowing in the wide grate added picturesquely to the effect.

Robinson, like Miss Balk, had learned from the papers the events in which his young manager had so prominently figured, and in reference to those events he was now saying with something like an attempt at jocularity, but which attempt was more like the grim effort of a death's head: "Guess you didn't reckon on such a shabby trick, Josin' your fortune by your father marryin' agin. It struck me all of a heap to read in the papers that the lady was Miss Browner, of our own place here; that duced pooty girl that I used to meet—once in a while out walkin' with her father. Didn't it give you a pooty nice upsettin' when you found out she was the widow or maybe you knowed her pooty well livin' here near her so long."

"I know her," answered Gerald briefly, thankful that Robinson's slight intercourse with the people of the village kept him from ascertaining how well he had known Miss Browner, and hoping that the factory owner would not pursue his questions.

Robinson resumed: "The matter ain't yet clear to my mind. I can't fix how you've come to give up your claim; wouldn't it stand?" "I hardly think it would," said Gerald nervously. "Well, I'll tell you what to do. Make up to the widow, Gerald; you're pooty good-lookin', and—" but Gerald had risen from his chair, and with a face so pale it looked ghastly in the light of the candles, he was saying: "I must beg, Mr. Robinson, that you will not jest upon such a subject as my father's death, and the unpleasant circumstances connected with it, are too recent for me even to bear to speak about them."

The small, keen, greenish eyes looked sharply at the young man, though he answered lightly: "Poot! You'll get over all that squeamishness; such feelings are well enough in women folk, but a man don't want to be shocked by them; as you'd rather be let alone, we won't say any more about it. And now, I reckon, I'd better tell you what I wanted you over here for this evening: I want you to come here and live with me."

"Yes; board with me, if you'd rather have it put that way; but I want you here, anyhow. It's deuced lonesome when the company goes." So far as Gerald's choice of an abode was concerned, now that his mind since the great shock it had sustained was completely indifferent to outward surroundings, it mattered little; he felt that he could live equally well among South Sea Islanders, or Esquimaux. His only regret would have been the pecuniary loss his change might inflict upon Mrs. Burchill, but on that very morning the good woman had told him of her intended change. Owing to her failing health, she meant to resign the arduous charge of a boarding house, trusting that the little sum which she had accumulated, together with that which her daughter might command in some position, would be sufficient to support them in a quiet way.

"What's the matter? Going to get married? or anything else in the way?" said Robinson, getting impatient under Gerald's prolonged silence. "There's nothing in the way," was the quiet answer, "but your company; you will not expect me to meet them if I live here with you."

Robinson chuckled; his laugh at its heartiest never announced to more. "You needn't meet 'em if you don't want to, but I reckon you'll git a cavity for society some time, the same as I was to when I lived here the year through. Methusala! the very shadows became specks after a while, so I had to have lights to banish them,—lights like these,—indicating with a sweep of his hand the numerous blazing candles. Gerald thought the allusion to specks very singular from such a hard, practical man as the factory owner, but his own thoughts so absorbed him that he instantly forgot the impression.

"Well, Mr. Robinson, I'll come." "When? Couldn't you stay to-night?" There was a strange eagerness in his voice, but Gerald seemed still too abstracted to notice it: "No; not to-night; to-morrow evening." And then in seeming haste he departed, directing his steps to the poor dwelling of Mrs. Hogan, who owed her entire subsistence to his and Mildred Burchill's generosity. Her husband had been tried during Robinson's illness, when the latter was powerless to use any influence he might have had in his behalf. He was sentenced to three months in jail on the strength of Robinson's charge, Robinson going so far as to cause to be raked up against the poor outcast on offence for which he had been amenable to the law years before, when he did not work in the factory, and the punishment for which he had escaped through some technicality. But Gerald since his recovery had been the steady friend

of the poor wife and her little ones, and it was his promise to obtain some employment—not, however, in the factory—for Dick on his release, that kept the poor creature at all hopeful.

"God bless you, and God will bless you, Mr. Thurston," she said, as he left in her hand an earnest of his intention to continue to help her; "if it was not for you and Miss Burchill, I don't know what I'd do at all. She was here to-day, not only attending to me, but nursing a little lone sick thing upstairs that its mother had to leave while she went out to work."

But Gerald scarcely heard her; he was thinking of so many other things. TO BE CONTINUED

I LOVE YOU

It was growing dusk in the big shining kitchen where Alice Shelton had worked steadily since daylight, making fluffy custard pies, golden brown loaves of bread, pans of rolls that were a rhythm in arrangement, and pats of butter that were truly poems. But Alice Shelton had no thought of rhythm or poem as she worked. Hers was a practical nature. When she had chosen James Shelton for her husband twenty-five years ago her reasons were practical ones. James was a good man, and rich. That she loved her, she knew; but that was not her reason for marrying him. She had been too busy making quilts and rugs and basting quilts and pillow-slips and embroidering lingerie to stop to think much about love in her girlhood. Since her marriage the endless succession of tasks which she faithfully performed gave her little time for thoughts that did not bear directly upon the practical side of home life.

She had dreamed a little over Jean's coming. But even then there was such a multitude of things to be done against the event, and a still greater multitude to be done afterwards. Now Jean was twenty-one, and engaged to Robert Pearson, a young man as good and as rich as her father, James Shelton. After their marriage, they were to live with Robert's folks.

Jean, get those lilacs in water as soon as you can, and go down to the gate again, and see if you can see anything of your father." "Jean stopped her soft whistling, and stood back from the little table where she had just placed a foamy mass of white and purple lilacs in a jar. "Oh, they're so sweet!" she whispered. "And father loves them," she added; then spoke petulantly: "Well, mother, I'll go down to the gate for the fiftieth time this week and look, but you know father isn't coming back today or he'd be here before this."

Mrs. Shelton shook her head and pressed her lips together tightly. "I can't imagine what's got into him. In the twenty-five years of our married life he never left me alone till this spring. And then just to go galivantin' off without sayin' a word to anybody and stay till he gets ready to come back, and be as close-mouthed as a lawyer about where he's been,—it does beat all! Sarah Beckley says her husband has done that way for years, but Beckley drinks, and that accounts for his doin'. If ever James Shelton took a drink of anything that he couldn't come into the house with, I've got it to find out."

Most of her speech was unheard except by herself, for Jean had spun down the path to the gate to look along the road. She stood a few minutes in the gathering dusk before she discerned a figure coming briskly toward her. Opening the gate, she went to meet him, her heart in a happy glow. "I'm so glad to see you Robert," she spoke softly. "Mother's awfully worried about father. And I am, too, though I don't dare to let her know I am. Where do you suppose he is when he stays away like this?"

"Haven't the least idea, Jean. He must walk to some town. I've inquired at the depot in Newton, and at every place that he could possibly be, and he isn't to be located. But don't worry, he'll turn up alright. He did the other time you know." "Yes, but he never used to do this way. Do you suppose he could be—losing his mind?"

"Well, don't worry. Let's forget about it now, as long as we can't help it. When he comes back this time, I'm going to see if I can get the secret out of him. Let's walk over into the old yard." They had wandered far down the road and now they turned into a tangle of clover, already touched with dew, and reached a leeked walk bordered with blue flag. The walk led up to a cottage whose tidy porch was shadowy with cucumber vine. This was the old house, which had been "home" before the new big house across the broad meadows was built last fall. There was a stir amid the vine-tangle.

"Robins built there last year, and I suppose it's time for them now," said Jean. "It seems a long time till Jane," sighed Robert. "Why did you make it so far off when I've wanted you so long, Jean?" "Jean laughed. "It's only a little while—not nearly long enough for me to get all my things ready in. But the tenth of June is father's and mother's wedding anniversary, and father thought

it would be nice to have our wedding at that time, as I told you."

"Your father's a funny man," observed Robert. "Father's a dear man," answered Jean. "That's why I can't understand his treating mother this way. I've always thought that it was father who loved mother most. Not that mother doesn't love him, for of course she does or she wouldn't do everything for him as she does; but mother is different. Father—well, father is the kind of person you put flowers in the house for, and speak of the pretty sunsets to, and put your arm around when Mendelssohn's 'Spring Song' is played. Mother isn't."

Robert pressed the hand he held to show that he understood. Jean's heart beat gladly because Robert was such a man as her father.

"We must go back to the house now; or mother'll be getting worried over us." Everything shone in the new house, with its polished hardwood floors and its newly painted walls. Bright new rugs and some new pieces of furniture had displaced the articles used in the old cottage, many of which had never been removed from their setting. Alice looked with pride the ponderous glossy leather rockers, the highly-colored pictures in gilt frames, and the immaculate white curtains, before sitting down in the living room with her knitting.

"Hello, Robert!" she greeted. "Nothing of father? I do declare! You can sit in the dining room if its too cool in here for you. The heat from the hitchhiker range warms the dining room pretty well; but it does not get in as far as here. I didn't like to start the furnace, no colder than it's been today."

Left to herself, Alice did not knit, but sat looking up at the picture of a young man with tender eyes, but strong, bold features. For the first time she was trying to "make out" the man she had married. He had always been—just James Shelton, good, and rich. She had thought she knew him. Now she looked inquiringly at his picture, which Jean had enlarged. For years Alice had dusted it. She had never studied it.

This was the way he had looked when she married him. He had set the time—in June—because he wanted the roses to be blooming about the cottage where he brought his bride. "There'll be bushes of roses, Allie," he had said, "the climbing pink one, and the little low white one, and rich red, and sweet smelling yellow, and cinnamon-rose, and blue—"

"I don't care for blue roses, they are so pale," she had remarked hastily; "and they're nearly always worm eaten."

"These ain't," said James. "I've tended 'em." Her mind travelled rapidly over the early years of their life together, and in her unusual mood, fleeting glimpses came to her of James training the vines over the porch to form a green seclusion; of James raising a riot of old-fashioned flowers beside her neat vegetable garden; of his tying firmly into place a careless robin's nest amid the front porch vines; of his scattering rain and dew over her clean-scrubbed kitchen floor from immense bunches of blossoms with which he decorated the house.

"Jamie" she said, softly. She did not think of it, but James could be heard her, she had not murmured his boy name in such a tone since the day he held their new little daughter, his strong lips shaken by his uncontrollable happiness.

The next day James returned, letting himself in at the basement door before daylight. Alice tried in a straightforward way, Jean tried in a tender way that almost touched the spring of confidence, Robert tried in a covert way, but no one succeeded in getting the secret of his mysterious disappearances. A few days before Jean's wedding-day he disappeared again. The big house was in shining quiet—the kind of quiet which seems to wait. Jean and her mother caught themselves moving about the rooms with caution lest they disarrange the perfect arrangement of cushions, curtains, chairs and rugs.

"It's all just perfect," sighed Alice. "Yes, it's bright—it's lovely," agreed Jean. "But I'll be glad when it's over. It makes me nervous to try to keep everything just so. I wish—" She stopped and Alice asked: "What is it you wish, daughter?" Jean laughed as she replied, while ascending the stairs: "Well, I was going to say I wished father would come lumbering in with a lot of wet flowers or something, just to hear you reprimand him. I want something out of harmony."

Alice went into the mahogany-furnished bedroom adjoining the living room. The day's work had made her very tired, but the snowy bed promised no rest. The bright light seemed to vex her aching eyes, so she shut it out, and sat looking at the wide line of moonlight which lay across the floor, her heart searching back into the past or into the soul of the present for a justification of her husband's behavior. How had she failed to make him happy? "I love you, I love you,"—his strong, yet tender tones came ringing out of the past into the troubled present.

For the first time in her life, Alice was heart-hungry. She was losing her daughter. Had she lost her husband?

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