

REAPING THE WHIRLWIND

BY CHRISTINE FABER CHAPTER XIII

Such preparations as could be effected hastily were made for Miss Brewer's wedding. The servants received hurried orders, and for a couple of hours the house seemed to be full of bustle. In the midst of it Helen was summoned to the library to meet Mr. Phillips and Mr. Tillotson. There was also another gentleman present whom she had never seen before.

She knew that this was not a summons to the marriage ceremony as that would take place a little later in the parlor; but, for all she was white and cold as an icicle. Tillotson, with true paternal tenderness, hastened to her. "My dearest Helen, your presence here is necessary to complete some little detail of business which Mr. Phillips desires to have attended to before your marriage. For that purpose it is necessary to present to you Mr. Miller, Mr. Phillips' lawyer."

The strange gentleman, who was standing beside a table spread with legal documents, bowed, a courtesy which Helen returned calmly as her violent agitation would allow her to do. Tillotson resumed: "Mr. Phillips will have just been drawn up, and it is entirely in your favor. There is but one condition annexed to it, and to that condition he desires your written assent. That you may read and understand the condition before you sign such an assent is the object of your present summons."

Mr. Miller unfolded a paper and presented it to her. She pretended to read it, but there was a film upon her eyes, and when the film seemed to clear a great blur appeared upon the paper. She could not distinguish a letter of the penmanship, and ashamed to declare the truth lest her singular emotion must arouse again, as it had done already that morning, Mr. Phillips' surprise and displeasure, she feigned to have read it all.

"Are you quite satisfied to sign?" asked Tillotson. She bowed her head. "Quite, Helen?" interposed Phillips; "you have no scruple, no hesitation?"

Again she assented by a motion of her head; her very voice seemed to be frozen within her. The pen was placed in her hand by Miller, and she signed tremblingly. "Helen Brewer." An hour after and the marriage ceremony was performed. In making the responses it seemed to her as if it were not she who made them, but something strangely apart from herself, and when Phillips caught her to him, calling her his bride and kissing her passionately, she lay passive and cold in his arms. But the ardor of his own affection prevented him from attributing her strange demeanor to anything but her modesty, which so charmed him. And as the Tillotsons were to depart after partaking of a collation to which all were immediately summoned, there was little opportunity for either him or Helen to yield exclusively to singular emotions.

The wedding feast was over, the Tillotsons gone, and Miller was still in the library, looking over legal documents, Phillips and his bride were in the great state parlor, from which the latter was about to ascend to change her dress for a drive. As her responses had seemed to her a couple of hours before, so now did her own individuality seem singular and utterly unfamiliar. She wondered at her strange self-possession, more like the apathy that sometimes precedes severe illness, and she mentally asked herself if ever again she would be that Helen who seemed to have gone so suddenly and so completely.

She had turned from the parlor to go to her room, and she had reached the door when her husband called her. He extended his arms. She came towards them slowly, as if leaden weights were attached to her feet, but she reached them at last, and he caught her to him passionately. "You seem cold, my little Helen," he said, looking down into her face as her head lay back upon his arm, "but this day's sudden excitement has taxed you too much. Tomorrow you will be different; then, should I find myself, 'even as I love, loved am I.'"

A slender gold chain glistened above the ruffle at her throat; his finger came into playful contact with it, and in a moment the lockets that were attached to it sprang into sight. She started up, seized the lockets with both hands. "Nay, my little Helen; wives must have no secrets from their husbands, and I must see if it is my picture you guard so preciously."

With difficulty she repressed a shriek, while she clasped the lockets with all her strength. Veiling under a playfulness, that he was now far from feeling, his determination to see the interior of the lockets, he gently, but with a firmness of touch against which her strength availed nothing, disengaged it from her grasp, and while he continued to hold her firmly with one hand, with the other he pressed the spring. It flew open, and revealed Gerald Thurston's face.

With a cry so savage that it rang in her ears for days after, he threw her from him, breaking in the vic-

lence of the act the chain of the locket, and leaving the latter still open in his hand. "What is this man to you?" he thundered. "Speak, woman! and tell how you have come to wear this picture in your bosom!"

Paralyzed from terror, she was lying as she had fallen when he threw her—prone on the floor. He lifted her to the divan. "Speak!" he thundered again. He seemed transformed, the veins in his forehead swollen from rage, his eyes flaming at her. "Tell me the truth from her: 'I was engaged to him.'"

"Engaged to him when you married me?" "Yes." "Are you woman or devil? Go!" He pointed to the door; then, without waiting for her to obey, he strode to the hall and pulled it violently. She dragged herself up from the divan; her only desire was to hide herself from this infuriated man, to hide from herself if she could, and she tried to hurry from the room; but before she could succeed there was a heavy fall behind her, a hoarse unnatural cry, and she turned to find Phillips in a convulsion on the floor. Her screams hastened the steps of the terrified servant, who was already hastening to answer the bell, and brought Miller from the library.

The struggling man was tenderly borne to bed, physicians summoned, by Miller's directions, who, in the absence of any one else, assumed control, and who gave his orders in a firm, self-possessed manner that did much to quiet the excited servants and to restore something like calm to the bride herself. She had been sobbing hysterically, with neither power nor desire to move from the spot where her husband had fallen, not even to follow him to the apartment to which he had been borne. Miller, seeing that, deemed it best that she should go to her own room. He induced her to accompany her maid, promising to summon her as soon as there was any change in her husband's condition. In her room, Jennie, the kind-hearted maid, could think of no better remedy for her hysterical young mistress than a sleeping cordial, and this she offered, urging respectfully its salutary effects.

Helen took it mechanically, and almost at once fell into a deep slumber. Phillips, under the united efforts of two skilful physicians, recovered from his spasms, and after an hour or more of deathlike unconsciousness, rallied sufficiently to attempt to speak; but he could make only unintelligible sounds. It was to Miller he turned, and to him he seemed to wish to make some communication.

The lawyer interpreted it to mean the presence of Mrs. Phillips, and he mentioned her name, saying he would send for her. But the sick man shook his head, and again mumbled the painfully indistinct utterances. The lawyer was troubled; evidently there was some matter of moment on the patient's mind; even the physicians seemed to think also that, unless his mind could be relieved, his ultimate recovery, of which, as it was, they entertained but slight hope, would be materially retarded. So they assisted Miller's efforts to understand the patient, while he, grown wildly eager to acquire unnatural strength, he raised himself in the bed, and wrote in the air with his finger.

"Give me a pen," said Miller; "he may be able to make some character that will guide me." The sick man's eyes brightened, and he clutched the pen filled with ink which was placed in his hand, not holding it in the customary way, but winding all his fingers about it as one who had never held a pen before might do. The physician supported him, and the lawyer assisted his hand as it moved feebly over the paper. Great scrawls letters appeared and only the words "send for" could be deciphered. In vain Miller tried to construe some name out of the succeeding strange, trembling, twisted characters; he could make nothing of them, and, with a great hopeless sigh, Phillips fell back on his pillow and turned his face to the wall. But the lawyer would not give up; he thought of Phillips' friends, and conceived the idea of repeating the names of each in turn. As if the patient understood the object of the speech at the sound of the first name, he turned to him, and his whole face brightened. But he shook his head—shook it when Tillotson and many more names were mentioned, and the lawyer's list was almost exhausted, and the poor sufferer's eyes, fastened on the lawyer's face, were more painfully eager. As a forlorn hope, he thought of one name—the name of a man who was formerly Phillips' business executor. He mentioned it. There was a cry from the patient, a great glad cry, as if the shock had given power to his paralyzed tongue. He repeated twice: "Send for him."

And then he relapsed into utter unconsciousness, while a messenger was dispatched for the man named. Mrs. Phillips was still heavily slumbering, with faithful Jennie watching by her bedside,—too heavily slumbering to dream even of the dread and exciting events which must forever mark that day in her life. The evening came, and still she slept, while Jennie listened to the unusual sounds which suddenly reached her from below. Every-thing had been so quiet, but now there was the opening and shutting

of doors, and the sound of many low feet hurrying through the marble hall. She started up to hear more distinctly; at that moment her mistress awoke. For an instant she gazed about her in a bewildered way, then her eye fell on the broken chain that still clung from the ruffle of her dress, and raising her hand she felt the unaccustomed pressure of her wedding ring. It all came back. "Oh, that I were dead!"

She turned her face to the pillow, and the couch shook from her sobs. Jennie wept in sympathy, but through her tears attempted to comfort her mistress. There was a hurried knock at the door; it was a servant sent to summon Mrs. Phillips to her husband. She rose, motioning away the woman who would have assisted her, and, waiting only to wrap about her the shawl that had been put over while she slept, she descended to her husband. Miller met her at the door and led her gently in. There seemed to be a group that stood aside to make a respectful way for her, but a group that at the same time seemed to make some strange signal to Miller. He stopped short on perceiving it, and gave a terrified look at the little figure by his side. Then he bent to her, and said, softly: "Your husband is dead, Mrs. Phillips."

"Dead?" she repeated, looking at him, and then she looked at the group of men a step beyond, repeating again, in a vague way, "Dead!" Not a heart there save one, but ached for her; she was so young, so fair, and she seemed so stunned by this great blow. One of the doctors, fearing serious consequences, hastened to her, but she seemed to be calm, and going forward of her own accord, she stood by the great state bed on which reposed the lifeless remains of her husband. Neither death, nor the passions that had so torn his soul prior to the dread visitation, had left one unsightly trace on his handsome features; he looked as calm as though he were but lightly slumbering. And she, his wife, who stood looking down at him with hands locked so tightly together that the nails seemed to be cutting into the flesh, of what were her thoughts? Of him whose death lay at her door? No; but of Gerald Thurston, and with a gasping cry she threw herself forward, and fainted on the corpse.

"Yes, I will go to him," she said; "go to him at once, before he learns from any lips but mine what has happened, and when he knows how I was fascinated into that marriage, and how true my heart was to him all the time, he will forgive me. But why need I tell him until after our marriage? Since he has not learned it yet, I am very careful not to reveal it myself, he need not know until then, and of course he will be as eager for our marriage when we meet as he was when we parted. But Barbara Balk; what if she already knows, or if she should learn about it?"

Her eyes fell on the other letter lying in her lap. She opened it; it was an indignant missive from Barbara. What did Helen mean by omitting her accustomed letter? Only for her promise not to tell Miss Brewer for a year, she would have presented herself at the house of the Tillotsons before now. "Perhaps you will say you were sick," the letter continued; "but an illness made up to free you from your engagement to me shall recoil with such force upon your own head that you'll wish you were in your coffin sooner!"

Mrs. Phillips ground her teeth with suppressed rage. But, after all, the letter assured her of Miss Balk's ignorance of her marriage, and she was confident now of being able, if she returned immediately to Eastbury, to preserve secrecy on that subject until after her marriage to Gerald. Phillips' dead face as she had seen it the first and only time rose before her as if in hastily censure, and she shuddered visibly. In an instant, however, she had forced it back, mentally congratulating herself that she had only seen him once after his death. Did she feel that her conscience was charged with his death? Did she attribute his spasms to the shock which the discovery of her duplicity had given him? If she did, it was overpowered by her thankfulness to the fate which had made her free to wed Gerald Thurston, and she drew forward her writing materials and penned to Gerald a letter of most passionate attachment. Of course she told him of her illness, dwelling upon it in the pathetic fashion which she knew would touch his heart, and ascribing to it her long silence, though at the same time telling him of the letters which she had previously written, and to which she had received no answer. She had not thought him ill, because in that case she supposed Miss Balk would have mentioned it; she did not tell him how innocent of his name were her letters to Miss Balk. And then she assured him of her speedy return; within the week she would be in Eastbury.

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TO BE CONTINUED DOROTHEA She stood under the flickering shadows of the vine-wreathed porch holding the letter in a frail little hand that trembled with excitement. Two, three times—she re-read—the shaken lines, before she could quite compass their full meaning, then letting the crutch on which she had been leaning slip from her arms, she sank down upon the bench behind her, breathless, bewildered—a light like that of a new day dawn kindling her pale young face. A thousand dollars! The check was in her grasp, a thousand dollars left to her by her old grandmother to go and be cured. For this eighteen year old Dorothea had been a cripple from early childhood, hurt in a rough game with her sturdy young brother. They had been the motherless children of a dreamy, studious father who, anxious to give his helpless little girl a woman's care had married again, a plain, practical wife—altogether different from the "first love" who had closed her sweet eyes when Dorothea—the "gift of God"—as with her dying breath she named her babe, was born. The second Mrs. Foster was kind and wise according to her lights, but other children had come claiming her mother's care, the family income was scarcely large enough for their growing needs. Harold, the older son, had gone forth unprepared to make his own living. Dorothea was opening like a day lily into waxen bloom, amid shadows which she accepted unquestioningly. Her father had done his best for her, with the limited means within his reach. There was hope for her, he had been told, but it would mean long months of treatment under the care of a distinguished surgeon in a distant city at a cost he had never been able to afford.

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He could not on illness, she was being so weak from illness, she was permitted to sit up only a brief while each day. He would not tell her until they met what had been the cause of his illness. "But oh, Helen!" the letter ran, "sharper than all my bodily suffering is the thought that you have not written to me once during my illness. Mrs. Burchill said no letters came for me. If your affection for me was such as mine is for you, my very silence during all these weeks would have brought you to me. You know that I would not be silent unless my fingers were rendered powerless by sickness or death. But perhaps you too were ill, my darling; I cannot believe that anything else would keep you silent. But come to me now, Helen; my soul is crying for you. Come, Come!"

She sobbed over the letter, much to her maid's surprise, and yet much also to her delight, for she felt that her young mistress would be relieved by this outburst of emotion. Her mistress wanting to be alone, bade her leave the room for a little; then she kissed the letter, and put it into her bosom, where Gerald's picture used to repose. "Yes, I will go to him," she said; "go to him at once, before he learns from any lips but mine what has happened, and when he knows how I was fascinated into that marriage, and how true my heart was to him all the time, he will forgive me. But why need I tell him until after our marriage? Since he has not learned it yet, I am very careful not to reveal it myself, he need not know until then, and of course he will be as eager for our marriage when we meet as he was when we parted. But Barbara Balk; what if she already knows, or if she should learn about it?"

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TO BE CONTINUED DOROTHEA She stood under the flickering shadows of the vine-wreathed porch holding the letter in a frail little hand that trembled with excitement. Two, three times—she re-read—the shaken lines, before she could quite compass their full meaning, then letting the crutch on which she had been leaning slip from her arms, she sank down upon the bench behind her, breathless, bewildered—a light like that of a new day dawn kindling her pale young face. A thousand dollars! The check was in her grasp, a thousand dollars left to her by her old grandmother to go and be cured. For this eighteen year old Dorothea had been a cripple from early childhood, hurt in a rough game with her sturdy young brother. They had been the motherless children of a dreamy, studious father who, anxious to give his helpless little girl a woman's care had married again, a plain, practical wife—altogether different from the "first love" who had closed her sweet eyes when Dorothea—the "gift of God"—as with her dying breath she named her babe, was born. The second Mrs. Foster was kind and wise according to her lights, but other children had come claiming her mother's care, the family income was scarcely large enough for their growing needs. Harold, the older son, had gone forth unprepared to make his own living. Dorothea was opening like a day lily into waxen bloom, amid shadows which she accepted unquestioningly. Her father had done his best for her, with the limited means within his reach. There was hope for her, he had been told, but it would mean long months of treatment under the care of a distinguished surgeon in a distant city at a cost he had never been able to afford.

And now—now—"I would have sent it to you long ago," ran the old grandmother's shaking lines, "but it would have put me in the poorhouse, child. Now—now—little Dorothea, gift of God, take it, go and be cured!" "Go and be cured!"—a strange thrill went through the girl's slender frame. Be cured. It was something of which she had never dreamed, for which she had never hoped. The pale young face, delicate in feature save that of her beautiful young mother, had settled into a sweet patient peace, the violet eyes were deep and shadowy as unclouded pools, the lips had pathos even in their smile. Life had stretched a dull, dim twilight way before Dorothea, and she was learning to tread it with gaze uplifted to the stars; but now—oh, what would her father, mother, sisters—oh, above all, what would Harold—Harold, the nearest and dearest to her loving young heart—say to this?

The house was silent. All had gone off on a picnic to the hillside that Dorothea could not climb, but her best, truest, wisest friend was not far. Dear old Father Fabian, how he would rejoice with her at this wonderful news. How he would thank God. She must go tell Father Fabian at once. She caught up the crutches on which she had learned to move swiftly and lightly, and sped across the shaded road to the little village church of which Father

faithless to the living, and who was now so insensible to the dead. Brain fever, however, did not ensue, and a week after her husband's funeral Mrs. Phillips was sufficiently recovered to reason in her own way upon the eventual turns which her life had taken. The husband whom she had not loved was quietly in his grave, his vast fortune her own,—had she not an assurance on the day of her wedding that she herself was as free as ever to love Gerald. But would Gerald continue to love her when he knew what had happened? Would all the wealth with which she intended to enrich him cover in his eyes what she had done,—he who had such love for truth and honor? Her white cheeks became whiter still, and her head began to throb. She loved him more passionately than she had ever done, and she would gladly have yielded all her worldly acquired, and it may be added, ill-gotten wealth, to be again fortuneless Helen Brewer. Her maid entered with letters for her; she grasped them tremblingly, giving a little glad cry when she recognized Gerald's penmanship in the superscription of one; it had been so long since a letter came from him.

He could not on illness, she was being so weak from illness, she was permitted to sit up only a brief while each day. He would not tell her until they met what had been the cause of his illness. "But oh, Helen!" the letter ran, "sharper than all my bodily suffering is the thought that you have not written to me once during my illness. Mrs. Burchill said no letters came for me. If your affection for me was such as mine is for you, my very silence during all these weeks would have brought you to me. You know that I would not be silent unless my fingers were rendered powerless by sickness or death. But perhaps you too were ill, my darling; I cannot believe that anything else would keep you silent. But come to me now, Helen; my soul is crying for you. Come, Come!"

She sobbed over the letter, much to her maid's surprise, and yet much also to her delight, for she felt that her young mistress would be relieved by this outburst of emotion. Her mistress wanting to be alone, bade her leave the room for a little; then she kissed the letter, and put it into her bosom, where Gerald's picture used to repose. "Yes, I will go to him," she said; "go to him at once, before he learns from any lips but mine what has happened, and when he knows how I was fascinated into that marriage, and how true my heart was to him all the time, he will forgive me. But why need I tell him until after our marriage? Since he has not learned it yet, I am very careful not to reveal it myself, he need not know until then, and of course he will be as eager for our marriage when we meet as he was when we parted. But Barbara Balk; what if she already knows, or if she should learn about it?"

Her eyes fell on the other letter lying in her lap. She opened it; it was an indignant missive from Barbara. What did Helen mean by omitting her accustomed letter? Only for her promise not to tell Miss Brewer for a year, she would have presented herself at the house of the Tillotsons before now. "Perhaps you will say you were sick," the letter continued; "but an illness made up to free you from your engagement to me shall recoil with such force upon your own head that you'll wish you were in your coffin sooner!"

Mrs. Phillips ground her teeth with suppressed rage. But, after all, the letter assured her of Miss Balk's ignorance of her marriage, and she was confident now of being able, if she returned immediately to Eastbury, to preserve secrecy on that subject until after her marriage to Gerald. Phillips' dead face as she had seen it the first and only time rose before her as if in hastily censure, and she shuddered visibly. In an instant, however, she had forced it back, mentally congratulating herself that she had only seen him once after his death. Did she feel that her conscience was charged with his death? Did she attribute his spasms to the shock which the discovery of her duplicity had given him? If she did, it was overpowered by her thankfulness to the fate which had made her free to wed Gerald Thurston, and she drew forward her writing materials and penned to Gerald a letter of most passionate attachment. Of course she told him of her illness, dwelling upon it in the pathetic fashion which she knew would touch his heart, and ascribing to it her long silence, though at the same time telling him of the letters which she had previously written, and to which she had received no answer. She had not thought him ill, because in that case she supposed Miss Balk would have mentioned it; she did not tell him how innocent of his name were her letters to Miss Balk. And then she assured him of her speedy return; within the week she would be in Eastbury.

To Miss Balk also, she penned an epistle detailing her illness, and promising a speedy return, in anticipation of which she wished Barbara to have the little country house that had been their home somewhat renovated. But Mrs. Phillips was not to return to Eastbury as speedily as she wished to do. Miller, on being informed of her determination, told her of some details of business necessary to be settled before she could be put into

possession of any of the vast fortune left to her by her husband, and of the necessity of her presence in order to effect such a settlement; consequently, he advised a postponement of her return to Eastbury for the present. She knew too little of business to wonder at such a statement, and she felt too confident of her husband's arrangements in her behalf to feel the slightest alarm or doubt. She did not even divine from Mr. Miller's somewhat hesitating and uncertain manner that he was seeking to conceal from her the actual truth. Being a tender-hearted man and an affectionate father, the lawyer could not bear yet to distress Mrs. Phillips with the fact that her husband's will was about to be contested, and that she herself would have to appear in court. He suggested that some of her Eastbury friends be summoned to bear her company; but she shook her head in an aimless way, assuring him that none of them could come; then he advised the presence of some of the women friends of the Tillotsons, with whom Helen had become quite well acquainted during her stay in the city; but again Mrs. Phillips shook her head, and said that she could not bear the thought of any companion just yet. She was sufficiently cared for by her maid and the housekeeper, and indeed, all the servants had shown an unexpected solicitude for her.

Fabian's small three roomed rectory formed a wing. He was seated at his door, under the shade of a great oak that towered his little homp, an old man, who after long years of toil in God's vineyard, had been sent to St. Anne's to rest. "Ah, my little bird," he said looking up with a smile, "as Dorothea swung up with the path. You seem to fly faster each day. You will out-reach us all on your wings." But she flung them down with a sudden impatience and dropped on the bench at his side. "Oh, Father, no, no,—I will be soon done with them forever, forever. I have had such news, such wonderful news. My dear old godmother, Madame Meredith, has left me money, a thousand dollars, Father, to go and be cured—be cured!" The words came breathlessly Dorothea's pale cheeks were flushed, the violet eyes shining.

Father Fabian looked at his little bird in bewilderment. "To be cured, Dorothea, can you be cured, my child?" "Oh yes, yes, the doctor said so long ago, only it would cost so much and we never never had it I knew. Now—now—oh Father, I can scarcely believe it. To think of being straight and well, of walking, riding, dancing, doing like other girls, or living—Father Fabian—living my own life!" "Living your own life," repeated the old priest softly.

"Oh yes, yes, you know how it has been Father. I have been so weak and helpless—so—so shut in." Dorothea drew a long breath as if one choking for air—"I could do nothing for myself—nothing for anyone." "How about the sewing—and the teaching and the singing in the church?" asked Father Fabian smiling. "How about helping mother with the little ones—and the altar linen, and the altar lace those busy little fingers fashion so deftly. How about your first Communion class, Dorothea?"

"Oh, Father, you are so good to count little things like these—but I am weak, helpless, worthless, as you know—I would have been a burden all my life; a burden to father, mother, Harold, everyone. Now—now I will be free, free and strong to go where I please, to work for a place in life all my own. Poor crippled thing I am now—even the nuns wouldn't take me in the convent, as you know, Father."

"Perhaps not," said Father Fabian gently, "and yet, yet—our Lord has His cloister for such little broken-winged birds, Dorothea. He teaches them to fly in a way all His own. And I have thought—" the old priest looked at the flushed, eager young face for a moment, and left his thought unspoken. "But since He has sent you this great blessing, dear child, we must accept it with grateful heart. Let us go into the church and make a thanksgiving. And, rising, Father Fabian led the way through the little sacristy into the church, where they knelt together before the altar that had been this little broken-winged bird's sweetest care. With the younger sister's help she had kept the vases filled, the candles trimmed and the snowy linen spotless. Every morning had found her kneeling there with a radiance on the pale, pure face that was not of earth. But today—today it