

REAPING THE WHIRLWIND

BY CHRISTINE FABER

CHAPTER XLVI—CONTINUED

His question aroused anew her pity for the poor dead creature above stairs, and she said, with a burst of tears: "She has just died."

He knew whom she meant, and he became as sorrowful-looking as herself. Somehow, death in most cases levels all anger and animosity, and so softens in its grim light that which had aroused our displeasure that we pity and forgive almost unconsciously.

It was with Gerald. The rancor in his heart for his stepmother seemed to go suddenly out and to leave in its place a sad, pitying feeling that was more akin to tenderness than even to pardon from a sense of duty.

"Will you come with me and look at her? Her last word was your name."

He allowed her to lead him, and in a few moments he stood in the death-chamber beside her bed, and opposite to Robinson. It was across her head form that Robinson extended his hand in welcome, and then both men looked down at her,—she who had held so near and so strange a relation to them both.

The cold, pallid, rigid face bore scarcely a trace of resemblance to the woman he had once loved, and after a brief survey, Gerald turned from her. He had forgiven her, but he was eager to forget her.

Esaubury had another fruitful theme of gossip in the death of Mrs. Robinson, and in conjecturing what sort of a funeral she would have. They were not little surprised when they found that the factory owner seemed determined to pay every respect to the memory of his dead wife.

Servants reported her as lying in a sort of state on a magnificent bier in one of the parlors, and some of them went so far as to give surreptitious views of the corpse to their intimate friends.

Miss Balk, of course, heard of the death, and she immediately took her way to The Castle, asking, when she arrived for Mrs. Robinson.

"Mrs. Robinson is dead, ma'am," said the astonished servant. "I know she's dead," answered Barbara, with grim severity; "if she were living I would not have to come to see her. I have come expressly because she is dead, and I must see her."

The man in much doubt as to whether he should admit her, and yet in too much awe of her to refuse, found his hesitation cut short by Barbara sweeping past him with an angry spoken: "If you don't know where to conduct me, I can find someone who does."

She did not wait for the man's rapid steps behind her, but went on at her very swiftest pace, apparently careless of the part of the house to which her course might lead her. But the domestic overlook her, determining as soon as he should usher her into the presence of the dead to tell Mr. Robinson. He said, when they reached the parlor where the dead woman lay: "She's in this room, ma'am."

At the same time he opened the door very gently, and only opened it sufficient for Barbara to pass in; but she, giving him a look from her black eyes which he swore to his fellow servants was a look of the evil one himself, flung the door wide open and stalked in.

"The room was very large, and on an elevated bier in the centre reposed the remains of the recently made wife. There was no one present, being early in the afternoon, and the custom of the New Englanders to leave no watchers with the dead. So Barbara could act without fear of espionage.

The bier was as elegant as skill and taste could make it, and the poor corpse as fair looking as a costly white shroud could render her. But her face remained the same changed and somewhat repulsive thing it had become a little while after death. Barbara went very close to the corpse.

"You can't answer me now, Helen," she said; "you'll have to do that when you're all I have to face me, and scowl, and fling your pretty sarcastic speeches at me. You're quiet enough, and your words won't break, nor lessen, I mean. Do you hear me? Does my voice reach your soul, that has met its retribution at last? Does your spirit writhe and seel at my words? It is no use, Helen; you will have to listen, for all that, for it is my turn now."

"There was had blood in you, Helen, you had to be what you were; it was in your mother before you, another beautiful devil like yourself. She knew that I was engaged to your father, that the very day had been set for our marriage, and yet, with her beauty and her wiles, she came between us. I didn't blame him, he couldn't help yielding to the temptation, for she ensnared him. I hated her. I could have killed her, and the only way to save myself from doing some desperate thing was to keep out of her sight. But she died when you were a baby, and then your father sent for me. He wanted some one to take care of her child. I loved him still, and so I went to him. After a little he would have repaired the wrong he did, by marrying me, but I, being no such spiritless thing as that, refused him.

"You grew like your mother,—like her in looks, like her in that appar-

ent amiability that used to make me feel like clawing her into some sort of temper; but I meant to be just to you until your intolerable vanity and tricky disposition made me hate you as I had hated her. I hated everybody who seemed to be won by your beauty or your manners; for that sole cause I hated Thurston.

"Your father must have known something of my feelings, for I took little pains to conceal them, but he was so broken down by secret guilt and remorse of his own that he did not pay much attention to them. When he was dying he told me the dreadful crimes he had committed, but I wasn't to tell them until your death, should I live longer, unless the telling of them should be necessary to prevent the commission of any further great wrong.

"A further great wrong was about to be committed. Poor fool! Out of your own mouth came the admission that through you Mildred Bur-chill was to be forced into a marriage with that old hulk, Robinson. Then was my time and my turn. I told your father's secrets, and you have met your deserts.

"That is all, Helen. I am going now. I wanted to have a last interview with you, just to tell you these things, and I didn't come before, because they said you were mad, and I knew you wouldn't understand me. But I guess your spirit hears and understands me now, and I wonder what it thinks of your beauty now? Poor, wretched beauty! It's all gone, Helen, and you are lying there as ugly looking as I am."

She wheeled from the corpse as abruptly as she had advanced to it, and she was taking her rapid way out of the room when she was met by Miss Burchill.

The astonished and somewhat intimidated domestic, unsuccessful in his search for Robinson, had as a last resource, told Mildred, and she, suspecting the identity of the strange visitor, had hurried to see her.

"Miss Balk," she exclaimed in a tone of pleased surprise at the same time extending her hand. But Barbara folded her hands more closely in her mantle, answering: "There is nothing to give your hand to me for, Miss Burchill."

Somehow pained by this repulse, though at the same time determining not to yield to it, since she knew the eccentric character of the speaker, she said again, very gently: "I think there is, Miss Balk; from Mr. Rodney I have learned that it is to you I owe my release from my promise to marry Mr. Robinson."

"Events just shaped themselves that way," answered Barbara, in her severe tones. "Still," resumed Mildred, "I owe you not a little gratitude; not alone for my present happiness but for your kindness in the past to my poor old grandfather. I have never forgotten it; I shall never forget it, and for I pray daily that Heaven may ever bless you."

For one instant the hard, deeply lined face, looking so steadfastly at Miss Burchill, perceptibly softened; then she gathered her mantle to her, and answered, in her usual tones: "Memories of kind acts don't stay in most people's minds. It's the memories of things which rankle and burn that stay, and when you're tempted to be set up by any happiness that comes to you, just think of that poor wretch, taking her hand from her mantle with a jerk and pointing to the bier. 'She was set up too once, and what has she come to?' A miserable croud."

Without even an adieu she had passed Mildred, and was out in the hall before the young woman could recover from her astonishment sufficiently to see that she was properly conducted to the door.

CHAPTER XLVII

"Ashes to ashes, dust to dust." The minister who had performed the marriage ceremony performed the funeral rite, and all that was mortal of the once exquisite beauty was laid away one fair afternoon in one of the lovely resting spots in Mount Auburn. Robinson seemed strangely unlike himself. A peculiar and very unusual restlessness marked his whole demeanor, while frequently strange, abrupt starts and long, strained looks into vacancy would seem to betoken a mind not wholly rational. He evinced no grief for his dead wife beyond a solemn visage and the depth of the crease on his brow, but at the minister's prayer he bowed his head, and was even seen to move his lips, whether in accompaniment to the petition no one could tell. Was it that this unhappy death had stirred his callous soul and awakened fears for his own end? People who saw him were full of conjectures. Indeed they were far more curious about him—he who had been so long regarded as without the pale of all religious influence—than about the details of the costly funeral.

On the return to The Castle, all except Robinson himself, were surprised to meet Rodney. He had taken his departure but a couple of days before, and without intimating any speedy return.

"I have come on business that interests you all," he smilingly answered, "and right after dinner I want to hold a conference."

The conference was held, but without the factory owner.

"Robinson will not join us until he knows the result of our meeting," explained the lawyer, and then, laughing aloud as he looked from one to the other of their astonished faces, he began as soon as he had composed himself: "Providence works strangely, and justice, when it seems farthest removed, is often nearest to us. Here

is this wealthy Robinson—this hard, shrewd Yankee as he is—carrying with him for years a childish and incredible fear of ghosts, or 'spooks,' as he calls them. He insists that for years he has never failed to see them, mostly at a certain hour every evening, and to help ward off the dreadful fear in which they put him he has numerous lights ablaze in his study, and even in his bed-chamber, for sometimes they visit him there.

That was the reason he required Miss Horton's company every evening, though whether she saw the spooks or not I am unable to tell."

He addressed himself with a smile to Cora, who flushed deeply and answered: "I never saw anything, but uncle used to get into dreadful states, and at first he told me it was only nervousness; afterwards he accidentally revealed that he saw strange things."

"That was also the reason," resumed the lawyer, "that he wanted to marry. He felt, somehow, that his burden of fear might be lessened if he had a wife to help him to carry it, and now, however, that he has obtained a wife only to lose her so speedily, he is in greater dread than ever of these ghostly visitations and he would throw himself upon the mercy of you, his friends, and relatives, to bear him company—at least, during these trying times. That you can only do so by consenting, all of you, to remain at The Castle. He is aware that Miss Burchill and Mr. Thurston are only waiting for the day of their marriage, which is at hand, to take their final departure from Eastbury; that Mr. Thurston desires to engage in business in New York, and that Miss Burchill, or as she will be called, Mrs. Thurston, will accompany him. In order to obviate this necessity, Mr. Robinson has already taken the necessary legal steps for putting Mr. Thurston into possession of the wealth which he is convinced the late Mr. Phillips desired to leave to his son, and not to the lady who married him while she was bound by a promise of marriage to another. Rich as Mr. Thurston speedily will be, there will remain no necessity for him to engage in any business. It is also Mr. Robinson's desire that The Castle be enlarged and improved in accordance with the wish of any of its present occupants. That is all, and I now wait your answer to this poor, fear-stricken old man."

It was a minute or more before any one could speak. Then the warmest congratulations came to Gerald from every voice, and while he answered them he was secretly thinking of the beneficent and inscrutable ways of a loving Providence.

"Now, what shall I say to Robinson?" asked Rodney, rising. "All eyes turned to Gerald, but he looked at Mildred.

"Which shall it be?" he asked softly. "The Castle or New York?" "And she, with humid eyes, answered, without a moment's hesitation: 'The Castle.'"

The factory owner seemed the most anxious for the wedding, taking almost a childish interest in the simple preparations, for Mildred would have no display. One of her first acts was a magnificent present to Mrs. Hogan, and a cordial invitation to her to visit The Castle. But Mrs. Hogan answered: "You'll forgive me, dear, if I refuse; somehow, I can't bring myself to set foot in Robinson's place. I know he's changed, and the people talk of him as being softer in his ways, but I have a feeling for him here"—putting her hand to her breast—"that while it wouldn't harm him, still won't let me think of him much. So you'll forgive me, dear, and may the blessing of Heaven be on your marriage and on your whole life after."

The wedding took place, a very quiet ceremony, followed by a delicious little homelike repast, and the departure of the bridal couple on a week's tour, Robinson having begged them not to make it longer. He counted the days from the moment that they started, and his face wore a strangely woe begone expression until the morning of their expected return. On that day he rose jubilant, and towards evening, when it lacked but an hour of the arrival of the train on which they were expected, he determined to drive to meet them. By some strange chance the horse which on one occasion put Thurston's life in jeopardy was harnessed to the wagon, instead of the animal the factory owner usually drove. But as the beast had lost much of its viciousness, and Robinson was too impatient to wait to have him changed, he drove on. They went fairly enough until a curve in the road made it necessary to wheel about somewhat. Then the animal's old mettle, which always rebelled at any curb, rose, and in a moment he was beyond Robinson's control. In his nervousness, he dropped a rein; he stooped forward to seize it, but the lurches of the horse drove him, head first, over the dash-board. He fell, his head out-gird, so that it escaped the hoofs of the beast; but his foot had become entangled in the hanging rein, and he was dragged along, his body bumping with sickening thuds on the road.

Mr. and Mrs. Hogan were returning together from some errand. The strange sounds behind them made them turn.

"O my God! It's Robinson," screamed the affrighted woman, as the rapidly drawn vehicle, with its now bloody and dirt covered human appendage, came near enough to discern it plainly. "Save him, Dick!" she cried, urging forward her husband; but he needed no bidding.

In an instant, utterly regardless of his own life or limb, he was at the head of the horse, holding him with all his strength. But the beast would still have dashed on, perhaps even flinging to his death Hogan, who so courageously and desperately kept his hold, had not other passers by come to his assistance.

Robinson breathed, but no more. And it was Mrs. Hogan who pilloved his bruised and bloody head upon her bosom, and shed down upon it scalding tears of commiseration.

In a little while all the village seemed to know of the accident, and, with such tender care as could be hastily provided, the factory owner was borne back to The Castle. His return was simultaneous with that of the bridal couple, and the ghastly, unconscious face which met them was the only welcome he could give.

The doctor said he might live until morning, and Mr. and Mrs. Thurston, together with Horton and Cors, watched tenderly by his bedside. Every heart had softened to him since some time ago, now his helpless condition roused their sympathies anew. Both Mildred and Cora hung tearful above his pillow, each wishing for one lucid moment in which to whisper some tender words. At midnight, though the doctors had given little hope that such would be the case, consciousness returned to him. He opened his eyes wide, and turned them at once to Mildred.

"I want to speak to her," he said, with difficulty; "go away, the rest of you."

"They obeyed him. 'I am dying, ain't I?' he asked, looking fixedly at her. She told him gently, what the doctors had said.

"Then kneel here," indicating a position quite close to his face; "my breath's failing me, and I want to tell you something." He gasped, and his voice sunk to a whisper. "Bring your ear close. If I whisper, my strength will hold out."

She put her ear close to his mouth. "When I married my young cousin long ago, and brought her back to Eastbury dead, people said I killed her. She took sick while we were away, and the doctor gave me medicine for her, and at the same time he gave me an application for my head—I used to have stunning headaches then—that looked dreadful like her medicine, but it was poison. I loved her, she was so gentle and childlike, but I wanted her money. I wanted the money that was so fixed upon her that I couldn't get it until after her death, and I used to think what if by chance these two medicines got mixed; and so I got to looking at them and handling them, and they did get mixed, and I couldn't tell which was which, and the nurse gave her the wrong one. She died, and then I began to have dreadful feelings,—feelings that wouldn't give me no rest nights, and that made me think of her always as she looked when she was dying, with a look that seemed to her that I couldn't get what I had done."

"So I came at last to her sealer every evening, and to see her dead father pointing his bony finger at me. And when Mrs. Hogan cursed me that night, wishing that I might be always haunted, I thought I'd have dropped, for it seemed to be a sort of guarantee that I'd never be free from the spooks any more. I got to going to the hotel nights about the time that I expected the spooks, and sometimes I fancied I cheated them that way; for though I felt them with me out on the road, I didn't see 'em, and when I got back to The Castle they didn't seem able to show themselves for more than a second. I used to think that they had only that hour to come to me, but once in a while they came to me up here while I lay in bed. That's the reason I got all the lights in my study and here. Somehow, I didn't feel so skereed when all the lights was round."

He seemed to be getting stronger, or was it the last and desperate effort of a will which would not yield until he had said all that lay upon his guilty soul? He had even strength to put out his hand and seize the shoulder of Mildred, as if he would brace himself, while he continued: "That's the reason I had so much company. The racket they kept up sort of quieted my fears, and made me sort of stronger to meet the spooks. Then I asked Gerald to live with me. I had an idea of getting him to spend that hour in the study with me that the spooks came; but, somehow, I was ashamed to ask him. So when my sister asked me to care for her little girl I thought that was a good chance of having a companion. I brought Cora here, and had her come to the study every evening. I was afraid at first I'd skere her, so that she'd never come again, but she seemed to believe what I told her about my nerves."

"When I first saw you, you looked so much like my dead wife that you kind of skereed me, and when you came here to live I got to like you, and wanted to marry you, because I thought if I was good to you I might kind of appease my dead wife's ghost some way. But when I couldn't get you, I made Mrs. Phillips marry me so as to have a wife anyway. She would have to take her turn with these spooks; at least, as my wife, she'd have to stay with me whenever they came to me. The night I married her, the hour for the spooks to come was when I was out on the road driving for Parson Tabor. And the spooks were with me. I could feel 'em, feel their breath on my face, and feel as if they was sitting there in the wagon with me. I didn't mind that so much, so long as I didn't see 'em, and I was hoping that they wouldn't come to me no more that night. They didn't come until after our marriage. I was upstairs with Helen, trying to bring her out of that

faint. She came out of it, and just as she stood up and looked at me, right beside her stood the two spooks,—my dead wife and her father. Helen didn't see 'em; she only saw the dreadful terror they put me in, and I reckon that was the shock that sent her out of her mind, for in a minute she had dashed the lights about, and flung herself on me in the way I told you before. By that time the spooks were gone and the things was as if she was dead."

"I ain't seen Helen's spook yet, and I reckon I won't till I git to the other side. It's a gitting awful dark, Mildred; give me your hand." He took his own hand from her shoulder, and groped in the empty air for the hand she extended to him.

"Dark!" he repeated. "Dark! Dark!" With the last words his spirit went forth, and the darkness of death settled upon his mortal eyes.

THE END

GEORGES DE BARABON ACTOR

When Georges de Barabon died, France mourned the loss of the best actor of the day. He was honored by a public funeral from the Cathedral of Notre Dame, in Paris, with all the rites and ceremonies of the Church—a fact which excited no attention, save on the part of those who knew de Barabon well. They were mystified by the church funeral—for during the greater part of his life de Barabon was an avowed atheist, and a member of the forbidden Masonic societies.

The Queen of the Belgians, who delighted in theatricals, and whom he had often entertained with his art, had remonstrated with him once, and had begged him to return to the Church which he had abandoned. He had bowed low, and thanked Her Royal Majesty for the interest she had shown in him, and answered that he could not play the hypocrite, even though he was an actor—that he simply could not believe. He confessed, with a shrug of his shoulders, a pleading gesture that he had lost his faith.

The general public which thronged the great Cathedral on the occasion of the funeral Mass was quite ignorant of the irreligious character of de Barabon—but those who knew him well were scandalized.

Some cynics said: "Pooh! The Church gave him a public funeral because he had friends at court—because he was the favorite of royalty—because the Belgian ambassador interceded with His Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris." But the well-instructed Catholic realized that the Church has one law for all men; not easily set aside for kings' favorites—or for kings themselves.

Georges de Barabon was born near Paris of middle-class parents. After he had failed to take his degree at the University of Paris he had drifted to the stage. He had played many leading roles, and had been decorated by royalty, although of all his honors, for it seemed to be a sort of guarantee that I'd never be free from the spooks any more. I got to going to the hotel nights about the time that I expected the spooks, and sometimes I fancied I cheated them that way; for though I felt them with me out on the road, I didn't see 'em, and when I got back to The Castle they didn't seem able to show themselves for more than a second. I used to think that they had only that hour to come to me, but once in a while they came to me up here while I lay in bed. That's the reason I got all the lights in my study and here. Somehow, I didn't feel so skereed when all the lights was round."

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"It is the custom," evaded the Dom, "for every one who visits us to sign in the guest-book. You have seen that it is filled with the names of visitors—and many of them are not Catholics. We do not ask a man his religion or his politics before we allow him to register. Ever your name, before you leave us, will be written as a remembrance of your visit. The brother will see to that. He is very proud of the book which has so many distinguished names."

The Dom laughed, as he finished; but there was the least bit of uneasiness in the laugh, and I returned to the point with American pertinacity. I could see that he was evading my question.

"I can understand how the names of theological students, priests, literary men, artists, or tourists interested in things religious might be found on the register of a Benedictine abbey—but why the name of Georges de Barabon? Why did he come to Maredsous? There was nothing for him to see there. I don't suppose that his Catholic devotion brought him."

Dom Maurice looked pained at my flippant remark, and rebuked me gently. "He is dead. Therefore, do not speak uncharitably of him. May he rest in peace! He died a good Catholic, even though he did not always live as one."

"I beg your pardon, Father, I said humbly, 'I was indiscreet, and I should not have questioned you at all about a matter which does not concern me, and which is probably a secret.'"

"No it is no secret," answered Dom Maurice hesitatingly. "His conversion is a well-known fact. I had to attest to it myself to satisfy the ecclesiastical authorities of Paris, at the time of his death. The way he was converted, however, is not so well known. It shows the marvelous mercy of God and the working of grace. Christ called Lazarus, and the son of the widow of Naim, forth from the dead—and we call these miracles. They are wonderful, but they are not more wonderful than the work of Christ every day in the world. 'Thy sins are forgiven'—and a soul, which was dead, not for a few hours, or three days, but for years, sprang into life! To me, this is more marvellous, even than the raising up of the dead body."

"I know it," I answered, "but still you would not call it a miracle, because, I went on dogmatically, 'a miracle must be something visible to the eye. Now, a soul may be brought back from the death of sin to the life of grace, so that it mirrors the living image of God; but there is no external sign, and it is only according to the ordinary laws of the spiritual world that a miracle, after all, is something extraordinary.'"

The Benedictine was silent a moment. He plucked a flower which blossomed by the wayside, and held it up, as he observed: "Here is a symbol of the resurrection. In the fall, the plant dies, and the snows come, and blot all trace of it from the earth. It is dead and buried. Then spring comes, and with it, the resurrection. I never see the first blades of grass shooting forth, or the first buds on the trees, without experiencing the thrill of the first triumphant Easter."

"And in every sunrise, or rainfall, or in snow, or hail, or fire, in everything that springs into life or action, I feel the force of the fiat of creation. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God. In Him was Life, and the Life was the Light of man. I see the power of God's fiat equally in the resurrection of Lazarus, the resurrection of nature, and the resurrection of the soul of a sinner."

"And so the famous Georges de Barabon visited Maredsous!" I interposed.

"Yes, and in the soul of de Barabon I saw the fiat of creation, the fiat of resurrection,—and I was the blind instrument used by Providence."

"Like the saints," I laughed.

"No—like the sinners," he answered. "You forget your Scripture and your history. The sinners, even the wicked and the impious, are as clay in the hands of the potter—and have served very often to work out the divine plans. So, I was merely the instrument of Providence in the conversion of Georges de Barabon. When he came to Maredsous I did not even recognize him. I had heard his name mentioned, but I had taken no interest in his career—for he lived in the stage world, about which I knew nothing."

"But I noticed the distinguished stranger, for he was tall and handsome; a man of powerful personality. What attracted me to him, however, was the appearance of suffering on his drawn face. I knew that mere sickness had not caused that look in his eyes, nor those lines upon his countenance. I had never seen a sick man, who was also a Christian, so dejected."

"The man whose soul bears the image of Christ is easily distinguished from the man whose soul is void and empty. No matter how much the Christian suffers, there is a look of resignation in his eyes, a ray of hope on his face. His body may suffer, but his soul is at peace. In the eyes of de Barabon there was no peace; on his face no hope. He was a man who had fought a battle and had lost. If I ever saw a living man possessing a dead soul, that man was Georges de Barabon."

"You spoke to him?" I asked, thinking of St. Philip, and how he could read the souls of men.

"Certainly," he answered. "Our divine Lord has told us to seek out the lost sheep. I tried to be very prudent, however St. Ignatius, I

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