

REAPING THE WHIRLWIND

BY CHRISTINE FABER

CHAPTER LX—CONTINUED

But Robinson had accomplished his aim; he had announced his engagement to Miss Burchill, and that announcement, accompanied by the statement that it had come from his own lips, would be speedily all over Eastbury. Further, now that he intended to resign business, he wanted to popularize himself in his native village. While he had been accumulating money he had neither time nor thought to cultivate the feelings of his neighbors. Their friendship was not necessary to him, and the very fact in which they held him was perhaps an element in his own prosperity; but now that he was boundlessly rich, and also about to possess a wife whose gentleness and charity had long made her popular among those to whom she was known, there came to him a new and strange yearning to be, at least, no longer disliked by his Eastbury neighbors. He wanted to be in circulation about him, stories the chief interest of which lay about his dead child-wife. He wondered sometimes if Mildred had heard them, and if it were due to them that she could never learn to love him. This plan of resuming his visits to the hotel, and treating those whom he found there, had presented itself to him as the first and most feasible mode of winning something of public favor, and though the role was not at all in accord with his feelings, he determined to assume it for a few weeks at least. His first effort convinced him—and the conviction was accompanied by a savage bitterness—that no wealth of his could purchase an iota of that friendship which was so spontaneously given to other men.

The news of the approaching marriage was discussed in almost every home in the village before sunset of the next day, but in none with such doubt and astonishment, the latter feeling amounting almost to dismay, as in the home of the Hogans. Hogan himself at first refused to believe it; but when on going out that evening, he found the rumor confirmed by one who had heard Robinson's announcement the preceding evening, he could no longer doubt, and he returned to his wife as dejected and gloomy as though some calamity had befallen himself.

"I thought Miss Burchill little less than an angel," he said, his brows contracting with the old look which Mrs. Hogan used to dread so in the past. And then he added, bitterly, "I little dreamed she could be so tempted by money. His wife, though full of doubt and sadness also, refused to allow herself to become distrustful. She could not for one inexplicable act on the part of Miss Burchill forget all the lovely traits of character which had endeared the young woman to her, and she answered now, while her eyes ran over with tears she had been trying to repress:

"Don't condemn her like that, Dick; sure it's little we know what feelings may be in her heart." But Dick was not to be turned from his gloomy line of thought. "She's not been here lately," he said, "not since Wiley left here; and when he came the other night he never dropped a word of this affair. They're all alike,—true to the human nature that's in them."

His speech found an echo in his wife's thoughts, but she still tried to defend Miss Burchill, even to the verge of expostulating her embittered husband.

So the news of Robinson's approaching marriage reached even Barbara Bask. She heard it in one of the village stores where she stopped to make a purchase, and she sasharply and suddenly interrogated the shopkeeper, who was retailing the news to another customer, that the man became a little affrighted. He recovered sufficient courage, however, to give her the report as he had heard it.

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Miss Bask, with asperity. "The rumor is just the offshoot of people's crazy imagination. Miss Burchill wouldn't think of marrying such a vulgar, withered old hulk as Robinson."

The man was a little aghast at the spinster's daring denunciation of the powerful factory owner, and he hastened to repeat that the announcement had been made unmistakably by Robinson himself on the previous night.

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Miss Bask, again giving her head a toss that sent her hat awry. "We'll wait and see. Old Robinson mayn't be so sure of his own words sometimes," and she departed, leaving the shopkeeper suffering from the intimidation with which she had inspired him, for half an hour after.

Her thoughts were not the calmest as she pursued her stiff, angular way through the village streets, and she hardly waited to be well in the house before she screamed to Helen, who was just vanishing into the parlor: "Do you know that old Robinson is going to marry Miss Burchill?"

Helen came out of the parlor, and stood facing Barbara with one of her old, set, silvery ripples of laughter. "Didn't you know it?" she said, in her cooing voice. "My poor Barbara! you are quite behind the age; and I'm informed of all that concerns Miss Burchill."

Barbara's thin lips came together with the snap that betokened intense though smothered anger, and she glared, without speaking at the

widow. The widow did not lose a particle of her smiling effrontery. She even affectedly posed, as if to invite a longer look, and resumed as Barbara made no effort to speak:

"My poor Barbara, perhaps you are also in the dark about other things. Do you know that Mr. Thurston has gone from Eastbury, from the factory? Gone for good? Perhaps, in Miss Burchill's mortification at losing Mr. Thurston, she was glad to wheedle Mr. Robinson into her matrimonial net."

Miss Bask found her voice: "Gone for good, is he? My poor Mrs. Phillips, imitating the latter's tones as nearly as she could, 'how have you survived his departure? It must have been the harder since you have failed also in making a conquest of old Robinson, but I suppose Miss Burchill's superior claims to truth and general goodness of character left your paltry charms no chance. Poor Mrs. Phillips!"

The look and tones of the speaker were particularly provocative, and Helen felt for the moment as if she had sufficient strength to crush the spinster. In her temper, which rose with such heat and fierceness that it left her no control, she did not stop for an instant to consider the prudence of her words.

"General goodness of character," she repeated, using no longer the cooling accents in which she had first spoken, but hissing her words out. "She springs from nice stock to have general goodness of character. Her uncle is the notorious escaped convict Chester Horton, and regarding my failure in the way of conquests as you put it, I have not failed at least in getting my revenge. It is I who have come between Gerald and Miss Burchill, if, indeed, he ever intended to marry her." In her ungrateful excitement she was spurring out the words. "I did it. Do you understand, Barbara Bask? And it is I who have been the means of making Miss Burchill consent to marry old Robinson. She will marry him to save her uncle, Chester Horton, to whom Robinson has given a home at The Castle, and employment at the factory, on condition that Miss Burchill will give him her hand. She loathes him! I know she does,—loathes him as I would do if I had to marry him,—and I feel that she loves Gerald. So she will be wretched as I am, and I am staying here in Eastbury to look upon her misery,—to watch her after she has married that horrid old man, and to see in her face tokens of such misery that death would be sweet in comparison. So, spare your pity, Barbara; I have accomplished my aim, and I shall reveal in the future, the charitable, the good,—speaking with mocking emphasis—" "Miss Burchill's wretchedness."

Such a look came into Miss Bask's face as Mrs. Phillips had never seen there before, and it at once somewhat alarmed and subdued her. Without being able to divine what mischief her impetuous words might have done, she would have given worlds to recall them, and she waited in anxious silence for a reply. But not a word came from the tightly set lips of the spinster, nor a look save the one strange expression which conveyed such undefinable fear to the widow.

"Why don't you speak?" exclaimed Helen at last. "Why don't you say some of those caustic things that your nature batters on?"

"Because I don't choose to," answered Barbara dryly, and without another word she took her way past Mrs. Phillips to the stair and up to her own room. There, however, her smile, and once actually laughed outright, while at the same time she busied herself in opening a little old-fashioned trunk and taking therefrom a sealed paper. Then she made other preparations, filling a satchel with such articles as one might require on a journey and changing her dress for a heavier and darker one.

That afternoon, while Mrs. Phillips was secretly visiting Robinson at The Castle, Miss Bask was taking her way to New York.

CHAPTER XLI

Mr. Rodney, more than usually absorbed in intricate legal business, was rather startled from the same by the abrupt and unannounced entrance into his private office of Miss Bask. On learning that the partition of translucent glass was all that separated the lawyer from the clerks in the business chamber without, she had swept by them without even answering their question as to her desire to see Mr. Rodney, or their request to her to wait while they would give information of her presence. They were too bewildered by the suddenness and boldness of her action, as well as by her strange and somewhat awe-inspiring appearance, to attempt to prevent her entrance into the legal sanctum.

"Are you Mr. Rodney?" The little gentleman, somewhat dazed both by the absorbing character of his recent occupation and this apparition—for, with her thin shrewish face and gnomish piling black eyes, she seemed little less,—was perhaps for a moment hardly aware of his own identity, for he answered in a bewildered, uncertain sort of way: "I am."

"Are you the Lawyer Rodney that figured in the case of Mr. Phillips' contested will, counsel for Mr. Thurston in that case?" And Barbara's tones, slightly raised in her eagerness, were very shrill. Rodney was recovering himself and beginning to be quite sure of his identity: "I am, madam."

her little old-fashioned trunk in Eastbury. He took it and turned it to find the superscription. There was none. "It is sealed, madam," he said, "What right have I to open it?" "The right which I give you. It was I who sealed it long ago." Her tones sank and trembled a little. He opened the paper. The penmanship was in a large, legible, manly hand, and covered a page or more; but before he had half read it his face flushed and paled, and his hands shook so that he could scarcely steady the paper sufficiently to read it. When he had finished, a single exclamation escaped him, "Good God!" Then he looked at Barbara. Her eyes were flaming, and the shadow of a smile seemed to play about her thin, compressed lips. "Is this true?"

The lawyer leaned toward her in his eagerness, and spoke in a husky whisper. "Is not there a notary's name appended on the other side?" she answered. And then she continued, as she put her finger on the name of which she spoke. "That notary was summoned and requested to sign his name, not as a witness to the document itself that he could certify to its contents, for he never knew them,—he was not permitted to read them,—but simply to testify that he had heard from the writer's own lips that he, the said writer, did draw up and write that document."

"Where is this notary now?" "Living in Salem. I have never lost sight of him, not knowing when he might be needed." And Miss Bask's shadow of a smile became a real one, expressive of immense satisfaction.

"But the date of this," resumed the lawyer, glancing again at the paper, "is thirteen years ago. Why have you not brought it forward before?"

"Because it didn't suit me to do so," answered Barbara, with an expression of face and asperity of tone which warned the lawyer that he must probe no farther in that direction.

She drew another paper from an old-fashioned bag on her arm, and placed it open before the lawyer: "Here are all the facts you require. I wrote them down to save myself the time of giving them to you by word of mouth. You'll find there all the addresses you need, and also something else that I thought had better be told." Then she prepared herself for departure. "We understand each other now, Mr. Rodney, and I shall say good-by."

"Good-by, Miss Bask," having learned her name from one of the documents; and if I should need you, where am I to look for you?" "Anybody in Eastbury will tell you."

She had gone before he could even summon a clerk to attend her out, and he turned to the mysterious documents as if for proof that the recent scene was not an hallucination. But another perusal of the papers convinced him of the real character of their contents, and also of the necessity which existed on his part for prompt and rapid action. Other business was put aside, and the remainder of the day spent not alone in the desk labor entailed by those strange documents, but in visits to many of the civic authorities. When night came he was on the road to Salem, and the evening of the fourth day from that of his interview with Miss Bask saw him signaling for entrance to The Castle.

TO BE CONTINUED

ROSE OF A BROTHER'S LOVE

Basil Martieau's fine young face was drawn in tense anxiety as he stood within the shadow of the portico of the Church of La Madelaine in Paris. He peered expectantly into the purple veil of the twilight surging and rippling and he prayed again and again: "God grant that Oreste may not fall me tonight."

The time dragged away and Basil became sick with tedious waiting. At last he thought he recognized Oreste dodging between the cabs that swarmed like buzzing flies. With quickening heart throbs he watched the youth's approach from the direction of the Place de la Concorde. Welcome relief caused Basil to close his tired eyes while quivering soul exclaimed: "Thank God, Oreste comes!"

A moment later Oreste, a youth just out of college, stepped doggedly into the portico, and greeted his brother with assumed indifference. At sight of his brother's bloodshot eyes and bloated face an icy chill swept over Basil and he whispered chokingly: "I'm so glad you're here. I asked you to come because I wanted to say good bye. I've given up my share in father's estate."

"Why? Do you imagine that that helps me wipe away the bitterness of father's disowning and disinheriting me? You are a fool, Basil!"

"No!" "Explain yourself, then," pleaded Oreste, curious and sobered by Basil's decisive tone.

"I want to help you all I can, and since every other effort to persuade you has failed to draw you from the downhill path—" "You preach to me!" "I leave tomorrow to enter a monastery. I shall spend my days there praying God to save you—" Basil's voice wavered and broke gurgingly; his hand trembled on his brother's arm. Oreste jerked backward, stunned.

and hope that his prayer would be answered lived steadily in his heart. He persevered unflatteringly in trustful patience with ever a whispering in his inmost soul, "He will come, God only bids His time for the miracle of grace."

One evening at sunset when the snow-capped mountain was purpling in the golden light, Brother Uriel heard a strange flapping against the windows of the corridor. Looking out, he saw a great flock of migrating swallows terrified by signs of a swift gathering storm. He lost no time in opening a casement to admit them to shelter, and lo, a white swallow led the flock!

"What may this strange bird portend or symbolize?" Uriel asked himself. To his religious mind it was surely a mystic thing. And now the angry wind whirled round and round, up the yawning chasms and over the mountain crests, dashing frozen spray over its tortuous path. Indoors, Brother Uriel paced his cell, telling his beads for safety of the travelers among the mountains, till, during a sudden lull in the tempest, he heard Rex's familiar bark announcing his arrival with a rescued wayfarer.

Brother Uriel hastened to open the door to the dog. The animal, covered with a coat of tiny icicles, stood panting and exhausted with a limp human burden half clinging about his neck. Other monks hurried to help in reviving the half-frozen man, and in response to their efficient treatment, strengthened by the hot soup and wine, he gradually flickered back to consciousness.

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It was long journey and of the struggles and hardships in his mountain climb. "At last!—at last!—the heights!" he gasped. "Tell my brother—I've reached the heights!"

"Who may your brother be?" trembled Benedict, a saintly old monk. "Basil—Don't you know Basil?"

There was no reply, for the good Brothers had forgotten the name long years before, but they listened in wonder as Uriel bent over the stranger, so changed by stress of time and struggle that he did not recognize him at first. Uriel clutched his brother's feverish hand murmuring as he caressed it reverently: "The miracle of grace! Deo Gratias!"

"Deo Gratias!" echoed the stranger with a sigh. Brother Benedict understood and he led the others silently away. He knew that Uriel's gentle ministering would soon completely restore the wayfarer's strength and gain his confidence.

"You've had a hard climb, poor man," said Brother Uriel as mother-like he stroked the white, damp forehead. "Yes, a hard climb—a desperate struggle—but 'tis nothing, for I came to find my good brother. He gave everything for me—most unworthy that I am!"

Brother Uriel stroked the cold perspiring brow of the self-denier soothingly, but tears he could not keep back, trickled down his own seared and pallid face. "The world has never seen the like of Basil's heroism," the stranger declared; then stopped suddenly to listen, for the chanting of the Monks in chapel reverberated through the corridor: "Laudate pueri Dominum; laudate nomen Domini!"

Let us praise God, our Father too. Praise Him for the gift of grace and of brotherly love, Oreste," pleaded Uriel, bending over him. "Basil!" exclaimed Oreste in sudden recognition. He locked his arms about his brother's neck, buried his head on Uriel's breast and sobbed. Finally he looked up into Basil's glorified face which radiated a benign smile that was a real benediction.

"How I've yearned for this hour! yearned for it during the long, lonely years of struggle. Tell me, Basil, did you long ago despair my coming?" "Never, Oreste, never! God knows that I did not."

"I dreamed of you often, Basil, dreamed of your love and your heroic sacrifice for me." For a few moments he seemed lost in flooding memories, then continued: "Once I had a most beautiful, never to be forgotten dream. I think it was a vision."

"Tell it to me, Oreste," Brother Uriel entreated. "I dreamed that my spirit went to Heaven and saw there myriads of fragrant blossoms before the throne of God. Every time a good deed was performed on earth a new flower burst forth radiantly into bloom. The peculiar beauty and fragrance of each typified the deed for which it blossomed."

"Most beautiful and fragrant of all, and nearest to the throne was a white rose, as fragrant and as beautiful as ten thousand white swallows hovered over it, but my spirit sank into the heart of the rose, all molten gold besprikled with liquid diamonds. 'What good deed, sweet rose, I pray you, caused you to bloom in Paradise?' I whispered softly."

"The rose, trembling with ecstasy, murmured: 'I am Brotherly Love, who ministered to a despised sinner fallen by the wayside. I lifted him up, guided him from the highway, past many pitfalls where grim Temptation lurked, back to the narrow path of righteousness.'"

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