

REAPING THE WHIRLWIND

BY CHRISTINE FABER CHAPTER VII.—CONTINUED

"Phillips," said he, laying his hand on the other's arm, "my hesitation surprises and perhaps displeases you, does it not? But you will understand and believe me when I say that I have all a father's concern for that young creature who has come to us. Her father was one of my dearest friends; but apart from that, her orphan state, her youth, her limited means, all appeal to my instincts as a man and a father, and I have the same interest in her welfare that I would wish any friend of mine to have in that of my daughters were they similarly placed. The accident that threw you and me together three years ago abroad discovered at that time sufficient of your character to win as warm an esteem as perhaps I have ever given to any one outside of my family, and all that I have seen of you subsequently has but increased that regard." Phillips bowed. Tiltotson continued: "That regard was enhanced by the confidence with which you honored me. But—there was a woman's hesitation, during which the speaker's eyes looked searchingly into those of the listener—'are you sure that this marriage which you desire will be for your happiness? Forgive me if I speak very plain. Are you sure that it is because you love Miss Brower you would marry her, and not because you would complete the revenge you have already partially taken?'"

"I shall be as frank with you, Tiltotson, as you have been with me. It is to gratify both passions—love and revenge. I love Miss Brower as I have loved but once before in my life, and I would cut off, by marrying her, the last hope which may dwell in a proud and obdurate heart. He began to be strangely agitated. Tiltotson also became agitated. "Phillips," said he, "have you weighed all the consequences of this unhappy passion, revenge; and have you been even just to the object you would so ruthlessly crush! Have you never gone back to the years that preceded that unhappy event, and been touched and softened by their story of affection! Perhaps it needs but one word from you to break down even now the wall between you."

Phillips rose from his chair. "Tiltotson, would you counsel me to such degradation. Where is your spirit as a man and a father?" "But," said Tiltotson, rising also, and speaking quickly, "there may have been no opportunity for the other party to make overtures, your whereabouts being unknown." Phillips answered, fiercely: "Rodney is always a means of communication. Speak no more, Tiltotson, on this subject; it wrings my heart, and that already has sustained more shocks than it long will be capable of enduring."

He looked rightfully pale as he spoke, and pressed his hand to his side. "My decision is made," he continued. "I shall marry Miss Brower if she will accept my hand and if you, her sole protector, do not interpose, with a smile and a bow, and I shall, even before the marriage rite takes place, make my will in her favor; everything shall be left to her except a few trifling bequests." Tiltotson replied: "Your fortune is so large, will it not be sufficient to settle a magnificent income upon Helen, and reserve the bulk of your wealth for other purposes? You may repent when too late, perhaps, of a decision you are so passionately insisting upon."

"Never!" and there was a fierceness in the tones that betrayed an implacable spirit. "And further, I shall annex a condition to the will that my widow, should my wife become such, is to possess my wealth only so long as she refuses to aid by one cent that—she hesitated as if seeking a word—"other party. The moment that she gives to that person a tithe of my wealth, that moment she ceases to own my fortune. It will revert in that case to your family."

"My family! Phillips, are you mad! My family does not need it." "Let them endow some charitable institution with it if they find it superfluous, but on no pretext is my wife to possess a dollar of it should she disobey my wishes. Do we fully understand each other now! and have I your permission to press my suit for Miss Brower's hand? I do not think that I shall make an unkind husband."

"Nor I, Phillips; and believe me that there is no one to whom I would give her more willingly—no one to whom I would give more willingly Mary or Annette; only, that for your own sake I wish this unpleasantness of the past were wiped out."

"Since it cannot be, we shall forget it. And now, Tiltotson, do you think that Helen—Miss Brower—should she favor my suit, could be induced to have the ceremony performed soon—in fact, on the very day of that of your own daughters? You know my reason for wishing to hasten it; indeed, my premonitions are very sharp sometimes, and again he pressed his hand upon his side. Tiltotson shook his head. "I fear to give you my opinion upon that point it is such a delicate one, particularly at this time when she is mourning the loss of her father; he is not dead six months yet."

said Phillips, "if only to secure my own peace of mind." He placed his arm through that of Tiltotson, and together they left the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

Mildred Burchill came home from school one afternoon in a much more thoughtful mood than usual, and with strange abstraction, instead of immediately seeking her mother, as it was her habit to do, she entered the parlor and, seating herself on the first convenient chair, covered her face with her hand and appeared to be deeply thinking. She had evidently supposed the room to be unoccupied, and a first cursory sight would justify her supposition; but a second and more careful look would have revealed Barbara Balk's skimpily-dressed form in a corner reading, and almost entirely hidden by the half of the curtain and casement, which, opening into the room, stood as a sort of shield before her. She looked up from her book on the entrance of Mildred, and watched the latter with the glance of a basilisk.

Suddenly there were quick little steps on the piazza, and a fat, round, freckled face surrounded by an uncombed mass of thick red hair, thrust itself in at the casement beside which Miss Balk sat. She started up in some dismay, and the dirty, fattened child to whom the freckled face belonged, equally frightened at finding a live being where she expected nothing but the open casement, fell inward, striking against Barbara's toes, and putting a rent in Barbara's silk dress.

"You filthy, nasty little brat! how dare you come into any person's house that way?" And Barbara's shrill and angry tones would have given fear to a stouter heart than the poor, little, dirty mite, who had picked herself up and was saying, with her fists in her eyes: "Please, ma'am, I didn't go for to do it. I—"

But Miss Balk's wrath would suffer no explanation. "Don't tell me that, you good-for-nothing imp. Don't—!" This time she was interrupted by Mildred, who comprehending the scene at last darted forward and caught the child's hand.

"Were you looking for me, Maggie?" "Yes, ma'am,"—sobbing as if her heart would break—"Mamma sent me for you. Poppy's home from the factory, and there's awful times there. Come right away, please, Miss Burchill," and both little chubby, dirty fists were clinging to the friendly hand of Mildred.

You see, Miss Balk, the child really meant no harm. She saw me through the casement, I suppose, and thought it the surest and quickest way to reach me. I am sorry she has torn your dress, but you will surely not continue to hold anger against my little friend for that."

All this from Miss Burchill while her frank eyes looked full into the flaming eyes before her. "Your friends,"—with a sarcastic accent on the latter word—"I presume, are too sure of their privileges to care about my anger."

This from Barbara, while, with one hand covering the rent made in her dress, she stalked from the room stiffer and grimmer than ever. Mildred was indignant and more annoyed than she cared to acknowledge even to herself. The emphasis on the word friends, and the hidden meaning evidently implied in the whole sentence, made her feel as if she had received some bitter insult; but for the sake of her mother, who seemed really foolishly afraid of offending Miss Balk, she would endure it. Besides, two months of Barbara's stay had expired, and in four months more her sojourn with them would end.

Having informed her mother of the summons which had come for her, Miss Burchill accompanied little Maggie to a part of the village which comprised the poor, and, in many cases, dirty abodes of the poorest people of Eastbury; people who lived from hand to mouth, and who, to purchase brief oblivion of their condition, frequently spent on liquor that which should have given food to their families. The dwellings in many cases were rude shanties, and in some of these a broken window, or a door half off its hinges, or the neglected state of the little plot of ground surrounding, told the story of drunken indolence.

Into one of these shanties Maggie conducted Mildred, though it was evident from Mildred's manner the place was not unfamiliar to her. As she entered a woman with a baby in her arms started up from a low seat in a corner of the room. Though poor and plain, well-nigh to the last degree of poverty, the apartment was very clean, and the poor, hollow-eyed creature who met the girl bore evidence of neatness in her dress.

"May God reward you, Miss Burchill, for coming. I'm in sore distress this time." The sleeping baby in her arms was stirring, and she paused to kiss and soothe it.

Miss Burchill waited with that expression of tender sympathy in her face which is of itself more sometimes than a gift would be. "Mr. Robinson, you see, has been cutting down the wages again, and Dick got into one of his tantrums, and said he'd stand it no longer. He said he was flesh and blood, and not a stone to be stepped on that way; that he wouldn't have stood it so long only for Mr. Thurston. And so he's been stirring up the other hands with his speeches, and yesterday Mr. Robinson discharged Dick, and sure we'll starve all together now—"

She paused to let her tears have way, and they trickled on the face of the sleeping babe.

"That was all when he had the drop in," she resumed. "If he had kept sober he wouldn't have gone to the extremes he did; but it was the drink that fired him to it, and he's so reckless since his discharge that he thinks of nothing but making the hands agree to a strike, and I'm afraid he'll do it, for they're to have a meeting tonight at Roney's Hall, and perhaps it will all bring bad work."

She stopped again to soothe the half-wakened baby, and Mildred gravely reflected on what she had heard. "I sent for you, Miss Burchill, thinking that, as Mr. Thurston boarded in your house, you might speak a word to him for Dick," and the tearful eyes were fastened with resistless entreaty on the face of her listener.

"Everybody knows that Mr. Thurston is everything with Robinson, and I think Dick would be content to go back even at the reduction, for he knows we'll starve if he don't; and he cried himself last night when he was sober and we were all talking the matter over together. Will you speak for him, Miss Burchill?"

"Certainly, if you think it will do any good. But the fact that Mr. Thurston boards with us gives me no right to ask a favor from him; indeed, I seldom speak for him."

"No matter for that, dear; but ask him." And Mildred, on her homeward way, was full of the thought as to how she would approach Mr. Thurston. After supper she found or rather made, an opportunity. Way-laying him in the little passage, much as Miss Balk had done on a former occasion, she asked his permission to speak to him, then she led the way to the parlor, secretly thankful that Miss Balk was on the piazza, where, if she saw them, she must do through the open casement should she turn her head, she was at least far enough away not to hear their conversation. In a low tone, and in her own brief, simple, candid way she stated the facts.

Gerald looked very grave. "This man for whom you are interceding," he said, in as low a tone as she had used, "is really a very formidable character to us in the factory just now, because of the influence which he exerts over his fellow-workmen both by his generous disposition and his talents as a speaker; almost without education he can stir men up by his uncouth eloquence as many cultivated orators are unable to do, and for these reasons it is safer to have him out of the factory. I allow that the reduction in the men's wages was hard; God knows, their pay was scanty enough before; but their master is a close one, and heggars, you know, can't be choosers."

There had succeeded to the look of pity which came into his eyes when he spoke of the men's wages a half-playful expression, but it only lasted an instant; he was saying, as gravely as before: "You have given me valuable information, Miss Burchill. I felt that the hands would take some concerted action, but I did not know how soon nor where would be their place of meeting. 'Roney's Hall' you say? I shall be there; and now you may assure this poor Mrs. Hogan that I shall do all in my power to have her husband reinstated."

"Thank you," and one fair slender hand was extended to him, while the glow of pleasure on Miss Burchill's face showed how earnest was her gratitude. They turned to leave the room, and were met by Miss Balk's spare form standing in the open casement. Gerald could have shot himself for starting as he did; but, to the shame of his manhood he spoke, the sight of Barbara always gave him a shiver, and Mildred was very angry with herself for coloring so violently; but Barbara, with a haughty, scornful glance at both, as if they were unworthy of any but her contemptuous attention, passed into the room, where were kept the choice books of the household.

CHAPTER IX.

Phillips sought Helen at the close of his interview with Tiltotson; she felt his presence even before she saw him, and stopping suddenly in some vicious remark to Annette, she blushed and trembled visibly. But the amused Annette only smiled the more significantly; she fancied she understood Miss Brower's emotion, she had impulsively repeated Mr. Phillips' last remark to herself, and though during the whole evening the young lady thought Helen strangely agitated, she was not disposed to question or criticize her emotion. Through Helen's mind wild thoughts of immediate flight were speeding, but Mr. Phillips had reached her, and while Annette gracefully withdrew, he was saying: "Miss Brower, will you accord me a few minutes now in the library?"

She bowed assent, she could not speak if she had tried—and she turned and followed him. In the library he drew forward for her a chair so recently occupied by Tiltotson, and standing before her told in a rapid, impassioned way his love, and his desire for a speedy marriage.

His vehemence produced a strange awe in her; she shivered as if with an ague, and her eyes, which were fastened upon his face, had the terrified stare of some hunted animal; he perceived it and became concerned and remorseful. Bending to her, he

took her hand; it was like marble in his hot grasp.

"Forgive me, Helen. I have frightened you by my impetuosity; but when a man's heart is stirred as mine is, his feelings too easily carry him away. And I have suffered so keenly in the past; one day perhaps you shall know, and then you will understand and pity me."

A low cry broke from her blanched lips, and she snatched her hand from him and covered her face with it, for not quite three months ago had not Gerald Thurston spoken those very words to her?

Phillips, utterly unsuspecting, and only chiding himself for being too abrupt with one so sensitive, was saying, in an agony of remorse: "My darling, I shall say no more to cause you such agitation; only look up, and tell me that you forgive me; in my haste I forgot how delicately sensitive you are."

He had drawn her hand from her face, and, waiting a moment as if to be sure that her agitation would take no worse form than the intense pallor that rather added to than detracted from her beauty, he resumed: "I have been proceeding, Helen, like an insane man. I do not yet know that you will accept my hand, and yet I have built my hopes alone on the encouragement which you have given me. Your manner certainly evinced that my attentions were agreeable to you; were they not, you would have made me understand that fact before this late moment. As an honorable woman you must have done so."

The last impulse to act honorably on Helen's part died at these words. How could she tell that stern and yet impetuous man that she who had permitted and received his attentions was all the time the betrothed of another? She could not meet the scorn and wrath which she felt would be sure to follow such an avowal; so she thrust back the earnest, manly face that rose to upbraid her, and sat up rigidly to hear the remainder of that passionate declaration.

Phillips continued: "Once before, Helen, have I loved, but not with the strength of affection which I seem to have for you. Of course, you are aware that I am a widower,—a childless widower. There was a slightly perceptible accent of bitterness on the next to the last word, but the fair listener did not perceive it. "Though so much older than you, as to be more father than husband, I shall be both. Helen. All my wealth shall be yours, and your life shall be replete with every gratification that my love or my means can procure for you. Do you accept, Helen? Will you be mine?" His eyes were burning into hers, his hot, hard-drawn breath fanning her face.

For answer she placed her hands in his, and then she bowed her head, and sought desperately to shut out the vision of Thurston's face. Phillips circled her with his arm. "My darling, my own! And now there is but one thing more,—the naming of the day. You will allow our marriage to take place with that of Mary and Annette?"

"I could not! Oh please don't ask me that, I could not marry so soon; indeed I could not." A flood of tears accompanied her last words.

"My poor affectionate child," said Phillips, "you hesitate, I suppose, on account of the recent death of your father. I do not blame you; indeed, it but enhances my regard for you. But, my little Helen, I am too impetuous a lover to defer for very long my claim to you even in consideration to your filial affection, and I think your father, could he speak from his grave, would not object to see his little girl provided for even so soon as six months after his death. Since, however, you feel it so keenly, I shall give you the grace of an additional three months, allowing nine months to elapse from the death of your father. Will that suffice?"

Her tears ceased. "Thank you, Mr. Phillips; that will do." In her mind were all sorts of whirlings thoughts about this three months' respite. Something might happen, something must happen, to prevent the consummation of her horrible treachery to Gerald.

He led her from the library directly to Mrs. Tiltotson, and in an intimately quiet and graceful way made the good lady acquainted with the relation which he now held to her young guest. Then, leaving the latter to be folded in an embrace so tender that tears of remorse for the deceitful part she was acting sprang to her eyes, he sought Mr. Tiltotson. Mrs. Tiltotson said to the fair girl she was holding so closely to her breast: "I congratulate you my dear girl. You will have a husband worthy of you, and one who will place you in a position you are so well fitted to adorn."

The last words quieted Helen's emotion, for they brought up the old fondly indulged-in visions of wealth, elegant dress, fashionable society, and all the luxuries which her inconstant heart so craved. She looked up from the bosom where she had buried her face, and that still retained traces of her recent remorseful tears, and assumed a manner so expressive of happiness, and at the same time so modest, that during the rest of the evening, when congratulations from the different members of the family warmly poured upon her, and Phillips after he had announced his engagement to Tiltotson, seemed unable to remain a moment from her side, she charmed more than ever those who had taken her so unsuspectingly to their hearts.

Later however, in her own room, there came fiercely enough to her the torturing thoughts which flattering attention and music and mirth had kept at bay so successfully during the earlier part of the evening; regardless now of what Jennie might think at being dismissed so soon, she sent her from the room, and cried more unhappy and bitter tears than she had shed in her whole life.

"Mr. Phillips forced me into this engagement," she said aloud, in answer to the sharp upbraiding of conscience, "and I shall not be false to Gerald. I'll run away; I'll do something before I'll marry Mr. Phillips. Poor Gerald! I'll write to him this very night, and he'll think I'm wonderfully good to write again so soon; it is only two days since I wrote to him before. But then my letters have been shamefully short. Well, I'll make up for them by writing him a good long loving one now."

She rose to get her writing materials, pausing on the way to draw from her bosom a slender chain to which would have swung a small gold heart; a light touch opened it and revealed the manly face of Thurston.

She pressed it to her lips, and when she was seated at her desk she unclasped the chain from her neck, and placed the open locket where she could look at it from time to time while she wrote.

And all this she told to Gerald in her letter,—how his picture looked up to her while she penned passionate words of affection which she would have sworn came from her heart, and page after page was filled with a nervous rapidity that astonished herself. But the bulky packet when at last it lay sealed and addressed, was as innocent of Mr. Phillips' name as had been all her previous letters.

TO BE CONTINUED

ROGER'S BIT

The man in the crumpled chair outside the library window let the paper drop from his hands on to the flagged terrace. It was dated August 5, 1914, and in it he had been reading the official announcement of England's declaration of war on Germany the preceding day—a declaration he had known to be a foregone conclusion from the moment the Germans had crossed the Belgian frontier.

Roger Bethune was alone. For the moment there was no necessity to school his face in its habitual cheery optimism, and it grew strained and white as with haggard eyes he gazed out over the gardens and park—the boundaries of which for many a long day had not been crossed by him.

Five years previously, Cyril, his younger and only brother, had willfully insisted, against his father's strict injunctions, on riding to house on a nervous and excitable mare, and he would undoubtedly on that day have ended his short and no means irreproachable career at the bottom of a chalk-pit but for the prompt action of Roger Bethune, who with fine, if reckless, horsemanship had in the very nick of time jockeyed the runaway horse out of its course and all but lost his own life in the ghastly fall from which he had saved his brother.

He had been a keen and promising young soldier, but six months later he had perforce to send in his papers, for when surgery and science had both done their utmost he was still left entirely dependent on crutches and the service of others.

His father, a delicate man whose every ambition had been centered in his eldest son, never recovered from the shock of the tragedy and died within a year; so the duty of managing through an agent a large estate, of comforting a broken-hearted mother, and of acting for the space of four years as guardian to a wild and headstrong brother all devolved on the man tortured by physical and mental suffering, who in the eyes of the world, at least, had lost everything which could make life worth the living.

A tall, white-haired woman stepped out of the library window. "Cyril has just telegraphed that he has got leave to run down for a few hours to say good-bye," she said, in a dull, level voice.

Roger made no answer. Stooping, she picked up the paper, and sitting down in a chair near him began absently to fold and refold it. "Down-hearted, mother mine?" he asked at last.

"Perhaps a little, dear," she answered, "but if I am, it is for you and not for myself."

"What a Spartan it is!" he said, smiling, "not content with parting with one son, she is grieving as being obliged to keep the other!"

"Roger," she asked presently, in a low voice, "will he make good?" For a moment the man frowned and did not answer, then "Of course he will make good," he said, sturdily.

But Cyril's colonel was an old friend of Mrs. Bethune's, and both mother and son knew that the boy had only lately been warned that he had presumed overmuch. "He is charming and lovable," Mrs. Bethune went on, "but he has no character—and I'm afraid that morally he is a coward."

"But not physically," his brother put in hastily. Yet even as he said the words, the memory of a panic-stricken face on the edge of a chalk-pit flashed before his mind's eye—and belied the words. Mrs. Bethune got up and stood for a moment with her hand on her son's shoulder: "Roger," she said, "I

know how rightly diffident you are about trespassing in other people's spiritual recesses, and," she added sadly, "I do not even know if Cyril possesses any. But talk to him today—let him see a little of the sorrow of your heart, a sorrow you try to hide even from your mother—and then—appeal to his affection, to his gratitude. Ask him, in your place, to make good the opportunities you have sacrificed to him."

Roger shook his head: "Cyril is no longer a boy, mother, and I cannot suggest gratitude to me as a motive for his doing his duty."

"It would be wiser," she replied gravely, "than appealing to qualities he at present does not possess. Don't fail him now, Roger, through pride!"

And so it came about that late that afternoon, when Mrs. Bethune had left the brothers alone for a last talk, Cyril gained a clearer knowledge of the price at which his life had been prolonged.

"It's rotten luck," he had been saying moodily, "that England should have been dragged into this war, and between you and me, it's ten to one that we shall get a good licking for our pains. A fellow in my regiment spent long spells in Germany when his brother was attached in Berlin. What he doesn't know about their army the Germans don't know themselves, and he says it just gives him cold feet when he thinks of its efficiency and extraordinary organization."

"I don't for a moment allow the possibility of our going under," his brother replied, "but even if we do, it's better to persevere our honor in defeat than to lose it through an ignoble peace. Wouldn't you rather die for your country than live to be ashamed of it?"

"Oh, that's a copy-book platitude!" Cyril replied irritably. "Anyway, it's easy for you to talk!" Then, in a horrified voice, as his brother flushed hotly, "Good Lord, Roger, don't misunderstand me. The fact is I'm desperately in love, and I don't seem to make much headway—so it's hard to go away and leave the field open to a possible rival. That's what I meant!"

"That I have never had to turn my back on love!" Roger said. "Well, Cyril, I have had to, and not for a time only, but for always."

For a moment there was silence, then Cyril spoke: "It seems," he said bitterly, "that I succeeded even more completely than I imagined in wrecking your life."

"No one can do that for one except one's self," his brother replied, "and even if I am a bit handicapped, you can make it up to me, old man, if you will."

"I will!" "Well," Roger continued, and though his voice was light, his face was grave, "just remember me glued to my chair, and do a bit for me, by associating me with all your hardships and with . . . all heroic deeds."

Cyril got up. "There's the car," he said and his voice shook a little. "I must go and say good-bye to the mater. Remember me at Mass," he added. "I'll do my best, old chap, and . . . I'll be there in mind."

An enemy attack, in the early hours of the morning, had isolated from their company in a foremost position a platoon sergeant and a young officer.

Wounded all, with the exception of the officer, they had fought desperately until the latter had given the signal of surrender; then, taken prisoners and dragged far back to the rear, they were placed in a dug out under ground.

"We're a lot of skunks" the sergeant cried furiously "to have parleyed with the swine,—that's what we are!"

"I've got it in the neck," a Tommy said, trying to staunch the blood, "but I'd rather have got it through my heart—that I would!"

"We hadn't the ghost of a chance," the young officer said sullenly. "We were hopelessly outnumbered."

"Well, we shan't have a ghost of a chance when the show's over," for when the sergeant remarked grimly, "for when our boys get a bit of their own back, and the Huns start running, they'll make short shrift of us."

"Cheer-o," cried a Tommy with a shattered leg. "I'm game! I've no one to miss me, and I'd as soon be dead as a blooming cripple all my life!"

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