

REAPING THE WHIRLWIND

BY CHRISTINE FISHER

CHAPTER XXXIX

Robert Wiley with his quiet simple way, his apparently thorough enjoyment of the company of Mrs. Hogan's little ones and his tact and sympathy in all discussions with honest, impetuous, warm-hearted Dick, had gone quite into the hearts of the simple couple, and both were equally determined on making him, if possible, content to remain with them.

They implicitly believed the brief account he had given of himself, and were utterly unsuspecting, even when his fears, which he could not always control, betrayed him into sudden stertor and haunted expressions. To the other neighbors he had nothing to say, further than a simple salutation when he met them, and the fact that he was a friend of Miss Burchill—which fact Mrs. Hogan had thought it her duty to tell—disposed them all to regard him with kindly interest, and to be equally unsuspecting of any of his antecedents. Hogan had already spoken for him at the shop, and had secured a promise of speedy employment, which Wiley had decided to accept. He could not tear himself from the vicinity of his child, nor from the promise of work in a day or two for which he had seen her, and in all her budding, girlish loveliness. His heart was torn by his yearning for her, and he felt that he would risk death itself rather than be separated from her by a greater distance. It was while he was filled with such thoughts as these that Mildred came to him with her note from Robinson.

"Oh, Miss Burchill, we're right glad to see you," said Mrs. Hogan warmly. "Sara Dick last night got the promise of work in a day or two for Mr. Wiley, and Mr. Wiley seems so glad and thankful himself about it. I'll take you right in to him," and she led the way to the room which had been given up to the stranger.

Wiley met her with a smile that seemed to bring to his face the ingenuous expression it wore in her picture of him. "Tell me," he said, when she had seated herself, "what did Cora think about me the other day? She ran after me to give me money. O God! it was the hardest struggle I ever had to refrain from discovering myself to her."

"She had a very singular feeling about the way you looked at her," replied Mildred, "and she thought you were in need, perhaps. But read this before we talk further." She unfolded the unsealed letter she gave him. He read it, his face growing pale and red by turns, and his hands sometimes trembling so that the letter shook in his grasp.

"How did he discover all that he knows about me?" he asked, looking anxiously, and for a moment, suspiciously at Mildred.

"Never for a moment thinking that he could suspect her betraying him, she met his look confidently as she answered: "I do not know. The first intimation of his knowledge which I received was from his own lips."

Her answer, her look, convinced him that he had wronged her. He leaned his head on his hand for a moment and appeared to be in deep thought. When he raised it even his features were agitated.

"What sort of a person is the lady who delivered me this note to you?" "Lad? No lady gave it to me. I received it from Mr. Thurston."

Wiley rose from his chair: "I gave it to a Mrs. Phillips for you." Mrs. Hogan suggested that, as she would not enter Robinson's place Mrs. Phillips would take it, saying Mrs. Phillips was a frequent visitor at the Castle, and a good friend of yours."

"She is, or used to be a frequent visitor at the Castle, but she is not a friend of mine," and Mildred grew pale with the thoughts, which rushed to her mind.

"What is her character?" demanded Wiley. "Is she a friend of Robinson's? Would her curiosity lead her to tamper with that letter in any way before it reached you?" She could not, she would not, be so base as to tamper with a thing of that kind. "I shall not believe such a thing of her. Mr. Robinson must have gotten his information in some other way."

Wiley shook his head: "Women are sometimes capable of baser things than perhaps enter into your category of their failings. However, even to know how he gained his knowledge would be of no avail now. The question to be considered is this:—a tempting one, I allow. But can I trust him?" "I think you can," she answered; and then she looked at him, wondering why he said nothing of her engagement to Robinson. Could it be that the factory owner had left the announcement of it to her? Though the letter had been given to her unsealed, and was of a purport which she already knew, she had not read it.

Mildred began to be painfully embarrassed. "To marry him!" he repeated at last. "Well, you will have wealth, Mildred; but whether you will have happiness is another question. However, since he is your choice, perhaps you will run no great risk."

Could he but have looked into her heart, could he but have seen how his tone and words were lacerating every fibre! But he could not look, and he knew nothing more than what she so quietly told him, and he assumed only that girls did not marry save for affection or wealth; and to the latter class possibly belonged this otherwise praiseworthy niece of his. In any event, the marriage would be for his interests, and it was now a strong inducement for him to trust Robinson. He answered:

"I suppose, then, that I ought to congratulate you and myself?" She did not look up; her heart was too full. But he seemed to regard her dropped head as evidence alone of modest embarrassment, and he proceeded: "Do you agree with Robinson in thinking I best for me to go immediately to The Castle?"

"I know of nothing to be gained by delay," she answered, tremulously; then, after a moment's silence, she asked: "What course have you decided upon with regard to Cora? Will you come to us known to her as her father, or only as the man whom she and I met, and for whom Mr. Robinson made a place in the factory?"

"The latter," he answered, firmly. "I would win her esteem, her affection, if possible, before I make myself known to her."

She rose to accompany him to Mrs. Hogan in order to tell her of Mr. Robinson's offer to Wiley, but she did not intend to speak of her own engagement, and she requested her uncle to maintain a like silence on the subject.

Mrs. Hogan was glad and sorry at the news. She had so confidently hoped to have their guest as a member of her own little family; but then, as she said in her cheerful way: "It's the best thing for you, Mr. Wiley. We can't see that you're a real gentleman, and the place in the factory will be better suited to you than Dick's shop. But Dick'll feel bad, though, at losing your company."

"He won't lose my company altogether, Mrs. Hogan, for you will let me come to see you as often as I can, won't you?" "Oh, then, with a thousand welcomes, Mr. Wiley; and it's proud we'll be of your visits, as we always were of Miss Burchill's."

So Mildred took her leave, her uncle promising to follow her in the course of the afternoon. Upon Miss Burchill devolved the task of telling Cora about the expected arrival at The Castle, and the girl's eyes brightened with pleasure when she learned that it was the same apparently poor man whose strange look at herself had so impressed her.

"How did you find him?" was her impatient question. "Why your uncle had learned something about him, and where he was stopping, and he sent me with a letter to him."

"I am so glad," exclaimed the girl, "for it would have been very lonely for me now that Mr. Thurston's gone. Uncle told me at lunch he had gone for good. Do you know, Miss Burchill, I just think your engagement to uncle had everything to do with his going."

"Hush!" and Miss Burchill's hand was fully stopping the mouth of the speaker, while her heart felt as if a cruel weight had been put upon it.

Mildred could not refrain from picturing to herself the meeting between the brothers in law, but all her imagination was not sufficient to depict the emotions by which the meeting was characterized. On one side there was the most intense form of Yankee hardness, accompanied by an exultant triumph in the changes which had made the factory owner the wealthy and powerful, while it left his sister's husband poor and a refugee. On the other side there was a fearlessness, amounting even to defiance which, at the risk of losing all that was at stake, might break into open denunciation and scorn did Robinson assume any of his old demeanor. But Robinson read his man. He saw that the spirit which had censured and repelled him in the past was as little broken by prison discipline and suffering as though it had encountered neither; and fearing that if he yielded at all to the feelings which possessed him he might overshoot his mark, and perhaps even lose that for which all his schemes had been laid, he softened his manner, and even strove to put a semblance of heartiness into his tone as he advanced with outstretched hand to Wiley.

"How do you do, old fellow? I've agreed to let all bygones be buried; so I'm glad to see you, and hope you'll make yourself to him." Wiley took the outstretched hand, but somewhat slowly, while his bright, frank eyes met those of the speaker, as if he would look through them to the very heart of their owner.

"If you sincerely mean all that you have said in your letter to me, then I must confess that you are kinder and more generous than I thought it possible for one of your nature ever to be." Robinson laughed: "You thought I was too darned a

Yankee, I suppose, to have any of your English good nature. Well, the fact of Mildred going to be my wife draws us pretty close you know, and makes me kinder soft on any of her relations."

"Yes, I attributed to her engagement to you the spirit which prompted your offer to me."

"Well," answered the factory owner, secretly nettled that he was credited with no disinterestedness, "I gave Cora a home before I'd seen much of Miss Burchill."

Wiley smiled slightly, as if he had read the thoughts of the speaker: "What interested motive led you to give her a home when, in her destitute infancy, you refused to provide for her. I do not care to know. Whatever your motive may have been, I am grateful to you for having given her a home, I am grateful to you, on my own behalf, for what you now offer to do for me; but Robinson, let us understand each other."

"He drew himself up as if he were the master of the situation. 'I come to make my home with you, not as a criminal escaped from justice, and indebted to you for shelter and safety; but as a wronged and innocent man, placed by untoward circumstances in my present position. My services in your employment shall compensate for your present generosity. I expect to receive such treatment from you as one gentleman would give another, and in no way shall I suffer an allusion bearing directly or indirectly upon anything of which you may suppose me to have been guilty.'"

"Oh well, I reckon there won't be anything said to rile your feelings. And now supposing we just drop all this kind of talk? Dinner'll be ready in a few minutes, and as Mildred tells me you don't want to be known to Cora, I suppose I'm to introduce you to her as Mr. Wiley; and I suppose, too, I'd better begin to get used to calling you Robert. Eh?"

Wiley nodded: "Well, I'll ring for some one to show you to your room." He did so, and Wiley departed with the man who answered the bell.

CHAPTER XL

Cora could not sufficiently praise Mr. Wiley. His refined air, at which his long prison sojourn had not deprived him, his perfect gentlemanliness, his quiet attention to herself whenever they met, and above all, the expression of suffering and melancholy which seemed to haunt his eyes, won her warmest interest and sympathy. She loved to talk about him to Mildred, and the latter deemed it well to invite the fullest confidence.

"I feel so often," she said one day to Miss Burchill, when, as usual her conversation drifted almost unconsciously to Wiley, "as if I wanted to ask him what it is that makes him so sad at times. I should so like to comfort him in some way. I tried to get out of uncle what his sorrow might be, for I fancied Mr. Wiley might have told her, and she might have told him to return for his kindness; but uncle said Mr. Wiley would never say a word about himself, and that he guessed he didn't want people to know anything about him. Sometimes I think, perhaps, he's lost a daughter who was like me, and that's the reason he's so attentive to me. Do you think it might be so, Miss Burchill, or do you think that he has even been married?"

"If we wait a little," answered Mildred, evasively, "we may learn all about him. When he knows all better, perhaps he will not be so reticent."

Robinson was becoming impatient for the naming of his wedding day; but as often as he approached the subject, Mildred had requested him to defer it until she could be sure that there was no danger of re-arranging to her uncle, and so each succeeding day seemed to bring and to confirm, in the absence of even the slightest gossip about Wiley further than he was a friend of Miss Burchill, and because of that had been taken into the factory by Robinson, who intended him ultimately to fill Mr. Thurston's place. Rumor had added, though upon what authority it had been based itself was a mystery to both Mildred and her uncle, that Wiley had come quite recently from England, and as no one contradicted the rumor, it gained rapid credence. Even the newspapers seemed to have dropped all interest in the recapture of the convict, for now weeks had glided by, and there was not a paragraph about him.

For the refugee himself, he seemed to like his duties at the factory, and the operatives were fast growing to like him. In view of all these facts, Robinson determined to refer no longer to the wishes of his affianced. The influx of his mid-winter company was due in a fortnight, and since he knew that Mildred would insist on a very quiet ceremony, he was determined that as soon as the visitors had gone—and he intended to shorten the time of their stay—he would have the marriage performed, and immediately when he had so resolved he sent for Mildred and announced to her his determination.

She had no reasonable excuse to oppose him longer, and yet to consent to so speedy a commencement of her bitter sacrifice was like signing her own execution. She looked at him as he stood before her, tall and spare, and with all the ungalvanic vigor of his limbs and vulgar habits, while his thin, elongated, wrinkled face looked down upon her with scarcely more expression than if it were a piece of yellow

parchment. Her very soul sickened at the thought of marrying him, and it seemed to her that never before had she realized all the horror of that to which she had bound herself. She fell on her knees, and while the tears gushed from her eyes she implored him to release her from her promise.

"I will minister to your comfort in any way that I can do," she said, "but do not ask me to become your wife."

He laughed, the malicious laugh of heartlessness and triumph. It told her doom at once, and she sank closer to the floor, and sobbed in all the bitter abandonment of woe:

"You've got to be my wife, Miss Burchill, there ain't no question about that. I ain't going to release you, and I'm going to shove to my part of the contract if you don't keep yours. You just refuse to marry me, and I'll tell you I'll have Chester Horton with the handcuffs on quicker'n it takes to tell you this. So you just better leave off them tears of yours and tell me what you mean to do. I must know now, right away, if you marry me on the day I've named?"

She arose and looked at him, her face pale, her mouth quivering, and the tears still upon her cheeks. "Since you wring the consent from me in this manner, you have it; but remember, Mr. Robinson, you are taking a wife who, as such, will loathe and detest you." She turned quickly and left the room.

The factory owner chuckled as he saw the door close. "Them feelin's of her'n'll change arter I get her," he said to himself, "and when she takes her turn with you," shaking his fist at the corner of the room to which he always looked when under the influence of his strange terror, "she'll be tame enough, I reckon." He rubbed his skinny hands together, and continued to chuckle. Then he began to take slow, lengthy strides through the apartment, while his mind was rapidly recasting the attendant circumstances of the wedding.

That night, for the first time since Thurston had taken his residence at The Castle, Robinson resumed his old custom of visiting the village hotel. His visit, marked by the same apparently aimless saunter through bar room and parlor which characterized it in the past, excited much curiosity and secret comment.

Feared as he was, because of his hard cast of character, he was at the same time, because of the odd and mysterious stories circulated about him, an object of strange and absorbing interest. Men looked up now from their tumbler as he passed them, and forgot for a while to drink their contents, in their curiosity respecting him. Chance acquaintances—made such through business alone—Robinson courted no East-bury friends—but were deterred from the impassable expression of his face, an object of strange and absorbing interest. Men looked up now from their tumbler as he passed them, and forgot for a while to drink their contents, in their curiosity respecting him.

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THE NEWS IN THE MORNING PAPER

Mr. Cassidy was a man of few words and no explanations. Forty years of observation had taught his wife to know him too well to be in need of either, so when, after a pleasant "good morning," and a jesting remark about the heat, he became absorbed in the morning paper to the neglect of his breakfast, she understood that it contained news of unusual interest. Ordinarily he glanced at the headlines on the first page and laid it aside, to be enjoyed at leisure.

Five minutes passed and he did not stir. Mrs. Cassidy glanced toward him several times, but his face was hidden by the paper. At last, her curiosity getting beyond control, she said, in a cheery, playful, and entirely uninterested tone, "Do begin your breakfast, John! There can't be anything in the paper so thrilling to wait for, and your coffee is getting cold."

Mr. Cassidy laid the paper aside, then, and without a word began to sip his coffee and to toy with a biscuit. To her amazement, Mrs. Cassidy saw that his face was ashy white. Curious, and intensely anxious, but too wise to ask any questions, she began to talk of other matters in detail after another, more interestedly or coherently, it is true, but that did not matter, for it was evident that Mr. Cassidy paid no heed.

Soon he abandoned all pretense of eating, and pushing a chair close to one of the windows, unfolded his paper and spent some minutes over it before he rose and left the room, murmuring something about going to work in his garden. Three years before Mr. Cassidy had retired, rich according to a modest standard of his own, and glad to rest after a weary struggle, which had begun when, at seventeen, he turned his back on his father's farm, a penniless, untutored, overgrown boy.

Mrs. Cassidy was leaving the dining-room by another door and she did not catch what her husband said, but a few minutes afterward, from a kitchen window, she saw him go down the path that led to the garden, having absent-mindedly provided himself with scissors and a screw-driver. At once she went back to the dining-room to see the paper. Mr. Cassidy was accustomed to leave it on the window-sill for her to read, although she did not glance at it one morning in seven. It was not there; neither was it on the table or any of the chairs. She had been uneasy; now she was greatly alarmed, realizing that he had hidden it because he dreaded to have her know what he had found on its first page.

Mrs. Cassidy searched the dining-room, the library, the hall, and found the paper, at last, tucked out of sight under some cushions in the little-used parlor. Five minutes later she understood. The Henderson Manufacturing Company, in which their hard-earned money was invested, had gone into bankruptcy. What would they do? What could they do?

She was still sitting motionless in a corner of the parlor, with the paper on her lap and her hands pressed tightly together, when her husband came back to the house. Hearing him, she thrust the tell-tale paper back into its hiding place among the cushions, and slipping into the dining-room began to dust some painted plates.

Mr. Cassidy, passing through the room in silence, went into the hall and paced the length of it two or three times before he warily climbed the stairs; a few moments afterward his wife heard him moving restlessly about in his own room. Ten minutes later he came back to the dining-room. Mrs. Cassidy, having finished dusting, began to rearrange the few pieces of silver proudly displayed upon the sideboard. Her husband was so very quiet after a time she stole a glance across the room. He was standing before the fireplace, his back toward her, and with a folded handkerchief was drying first one eye and then the other. He thrust the handkerchief into his pocket, and while she still watched took it out and wiped his eyes again.

Mrs. Cassidy lifted across the room and put her two wrinkled old hands over one of his. "John, dear, I saw the paper," she said. "For a moment he neither spoke nor moved; then he put his arm about her and held her close. He said nothing until she tried to comfort him. "We're old, Mary—too old to begin again," he answered sadly, hopelessly.

"But we have each other," she whispered. "We have—thank God!" he murmured in assent. She made him sit beside her at the window, with his left hand in both of hers, while she talked encouragingly in a low, soft voice. "And, besides, we own this house," she concluded, having forgotten the fact, until that moment.

Yes, own it to pay taxes on and to keep it paid! he retorted bitterly. Still she smiled bravely. "And your little garden provides all the vegetables we can eat, and plain old people like ourselves don't need many clothes or many pleasures, and—"

He allowed her to talk on without interruption, until at last, as he seemed to pay no attention, she asked, with a little quaver, mastering her resolutely cheerful voice, "Father, was all we had invested in the Henderson Manufacturing Company?" "Every penny," he told her.

After a long silence, she ventured timidly, "Father, Jack—perhaps, Jack—"

He cut her short. "Whatever comes we'll ask nothing of Jack!" he said hotly. "We haven't a line

from the ungrateful fellow for six months. We weren't fashionable enough for him before, and now—"

Mrs. Cassidy had no answer ready, and they had been sitting in silence for some minutes when Hannah, the maid-of-all-work, came to the door with a great bunch of asters in her hand. "Mrs. Allison sent these," she said. She told me to give you her love, and Jerry's come to scrub the steps. It's Saturday, you know."

Mrs. Cassidy took the flowers and examined them admiringly. "How kind of Mrs. Allison! She never sent me flowers before. No doubt—" She realized suddenly that every one had read the morning paper by that time, and that all their friends, and even acquaintances, knew of their interest in the Henderson Manufacturing Company. "It was kind of Mrs. Allison," she repeated slowly and thoughtfully.

"And Jerry is here," Hannah reminded her. "Oh, yes; he'll want his money if—" Mrs. Cassidy glanced at her husband. His head was bowed and he was staring frowningly at the rug. "I'll speak to Jerry," she said.

Going to the kitchen she found there the fat old dandy who for twenty years had kept their porch and yard in what he indulgently called order. He was leaning lazily against the sink while he filled a small bucket with warm water. "Jerry, I have bad news for you," she said. "We have lost—that is, we're in trouble, and I'm afraid—"

She laughed in spite of herself and not at all mournfully, at the surprised and aggrieved face that he turned toward her. "I'm afraid that henceforth the porch will have to scrub itself—and the leaves blow off the walk."

Jerry stiffened; his manner became dignified. "You don't mean you're discharging me, do you, Mrs. Cassidy?" he gasped incredulously. "Me that's worked for you for twenty years and more, and kept things around here that all the neighbors around here, they say to me, 'Jerry,' they say, 'Jerry, you sure do keep Mrs. Cassidy's place spick and span.' That's what they say time and again."

"It isn't that we're not satisfied, Jerry, but we have very little money now—almost none, so—"

Jerry's face had become as serious as possible. "Not much money, you and Mr. Cassidy! And you was both mighty good when my old woman was sick, and I ain't forgot them handsome flowers you sent to the funeral. And—and somehow I ain't got a dollar saved, but if I ever do have and you and Mr. Cassidy wants it, just say the word and it's yours as sure as I'm Jerry Thomas." He straightened himself proudly as he made this handsome offer.

Ten minutes later Mrs. Cassidy heard unaccountable sounds coming from the direction of the porch, and peering between the parlor curtains she saw Jerry on his knees scrubbing the porch with such energy and thoroughness as he had never displayed in all his service.

Friends of Mr. Cassidy's soon began to come; lawyers and business men, two directors of a nearby bank, and a broker whom he had befriended as a boy. The bewildered old man talked to one after another in a dazed and hopeless way, touched by their kindness, but not helped by their suggestions or consoled by their prediction that stockholders in the Henderson Manufacturing Company would get a little out of the wreck. Mrs. Cassidy sat beside him, confused by the talk, but far more cheerful than he. About eleven o'clock a shy, gentle tender-hearted maiden lady who lived across the street sent a basket of pears, coming to the door a few minutes afterward to explain to Mrs. Cassidy that her cousin had sent two bushels from his farm—far more than she could use—and she thought that Mrs. Cassidy might like to can some. Mrs. Cassidy understood quite well that her neighbor had seen the morning paper and was grieving over their trouble, so she kissed her gratefully by way of thanks.

Thus the morning wore away; and after a dinner which was hardly tasted, and a nap during which both Mr. and Mrs. Cassidy closed their eyes as usual, only to try to form some sort of plans, one old friend after another came, even some whom they had not seen for years. Through out the afternoon consultation between them, or even much said thought, was out of the question, but the visitors, however kind, could help the lady's feeling about the heart that trouble caused.

Evening came; the last caller hurried away. The two old people were alone at last. They sat side by side in the dusk, no word passing between them. The room grew dark; one by one the noises in the street were hushed, and then the sound of Hannah's singing as she worked. "They had not forgotten the kindness of their friends, and of many whom they had hardly counted upon as friends, but neither could they forget that winter was at hand, and coal and food high in price; that Mr. Cassidy must have a new overcoat and Mrs. Cassidy new shoes; that Hannah's wages must be paid week after week; that there must be money for car-fare and laundry and sodality dues and a hundred other little needs."

The clock struck seven—eight—and still not a word was spoken. "I have a nice coat, and as many dresses as I'll want for years to come. I'll not need another if I live to be a hundred," Mrs. Cassidy said at last, in her cheery way.

Mr. Cassidy's answer was to take her hand in his and hold it fast. Perhaps he would have said something, but a moment after an automobile stopped at their gate and some one

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