

REAPING THE WHIRLWIND.

A NOVEL.

By MARY ELOISE COMBS.

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CHAPTER VII.

As Bell stood in the doorway, her face was partially hid in the shadow, but the light fell strong and full on Jack as he looked toward them. St. Claire saw the dark color suddenly rush to his face, a lurid red light leap into his eyes; but in an instant it died out, and a look of cold disdain hardened his features.

There is nothing so pitiless as a man who thinks himself wronged. And Jack De Guerry knew that Bell was wronging him as no woman should dare to wrong any man who loves her. He was losing not only the hope of his life and the woman of his love, but his high estimate of woman-kind, his old reverential trust and belief in their perfect truth and purity of heart.

Bell was a born coquette. She had been in society for years, had been praised and flattered until the admiration of men seemed a necessity to her happiness. And when Jasper Raymond appeared on the scene, courtly and elegant, the most "eligible" man of the season, she found a new pleasure in eclipsing the girls who were angling for his attentions, and triumphantly bearing off the prize. She had not thought of marriage in connection with the matter any more than she had in a dozen similar cases. Recently she had discovered that her mother desired her to marry this man, and she awoke to the knowledge that, after all, she had a heart, and in it Jasper Raymond had no place. But "love in a cottage" had no charms for her, and Jack was poor. Raymond's millions were a temptation to her, and her mother was "the power behind the throne." Yes, she would marry Raymond. And in position and power she would sink her love. And then, perhaps, she would forget Jack when she did not see him so often. Other men who had slipped out of her life had slipped out of her memory; why wouldn't he? Of course he would.

Women always finish an argument with "of course."

Mrs. De Guerry gave them a smiling welcome as they advanced. St. Claire looked cold and stern, and Jack bowed elaborately, with an icy smile on his lips.

"Isabell, my dear, you have stayed away too long to be polite to our other guests."

"Blame me, madam. It was my fault, and one which I think the gentlemen will be able to excuse."

Raymond spoke with a bright smile toward Bell. Jack answered, viciously:

"Miss De Guerry must have been in a more amiable mood than she was this morning when I called. But then she had her front hair in papers, and I suppose it pulled and made her cross."

"Well, yes," Bell admitted, "it is a rather disagreeable sensation."

Mrs. De Guerry hastened to interpose.

"These gentlemen arrived in advance of any of the ladies, and I assure you they find me dull company."

Both gentlemen hastened to disclaim this fact, and St. Claire added:

"I came early to hear Miss De Guerry sing. It will not be possible for me to remain all evening."

"I regret exceedingly your inability to be present all evening. I do not know that Mr. Raymond would care to hear my daughter sing, when he has heard the best voices in the world."

But Raymond assured her that he could think of nothing that would afford him such infinite pleasure, and insisted on conducting Bell to the piano.

Bell ran her fingers listlessly over the keys, and inquired, formally:

"Well, what shall I sing?"

"Whatever you had intended singing for Mr. St. Claire. I don't think that Mr. De Guerry and myself are particular."

Raymond glanced at Jack, expecting him to affirm his words. But Jack never noticed him in any manner. Bell answered quickly:

"That would hardly be entertaining, as I merely intended to practice a chant to add to my character for the Wycliffe masquerade to-morrow night. Mr. St. Claire is the only one who knows what character I intend to assume, and I do not think he will tell."

"Your confidence is certainly not misplaced. I shall not betray your secret."

"Mr. Raymond, I have heard you say that you could penetrate any disguise. I defy you to distinguish me from the others to-morrow night."

"I shall not attend the masquerade."

"Not attend! Why?"

"I am not invited."

"Not invited?"

Jack spoke up, drawing his words exasperatingly:

"My cousin, I would respectfully suggest that you appear to-morrow night as 'Echo,' a character which you seem singularly qualified to personify."

Bell was embarrassed, and, appealing to Raymond, said:

"I beg your pardon if I seemed impertinent; but I was surprised."

"You were not impertinent in the least. Your

surprise was quite natural. But I am not acquainted with Mrs. Wycliffe."

Raymond spoke as though that ended the subject, and Bell said nothing more.

Mrs. De Guerry sat during this conversation utterly transfixed with horror. This was a contretemps of which she had never dreamed. But to Jack it afforded absolute satisfaction.

Raymond selected the music and Bell sang till Jack could endure the sight no longer; so he sauntered carelessly over to the piano, leaned on it, and said to Bell:

"You do not honor me by requesting me to select something for you to sing?"

The girl replied without taking her eyes off of her rapidly gliding fingers.

"I did not suppose that you were sufficiently interested to care."

"Care to hear you sing? I don't. But then, if you intend to keep it up, I have some choice."

As he spoke, he commenced shifting the music, as if in search of some particular piece. Raymond left them and crossed the room to Mrs. De Guerry and St. Claire. Bell looked after him. She would have preferred having him remain to being left alone with Jack.

Jack saw her uneasiness, and resented it. He found the piece of music and placed it on the rack.

Bell looked at it thoughtfully, but her unruffled face was no index of the tumult within.

Men are so utterly blind. They expect to read a woman's thoughts in her face or in her acts. Jack thought Bell perfectly indifferent as she sang the words through without a tremor in her voice or the quiver of an eyelid. The music was soft and sweet, giving a new meaning to the words:

"Drifting away from each other,
Silently drifting apart;
Nothing between but the world's cold scorn,
Nothing to lose—but a heart.

"Drifting away from each other,
Tides ebb, and women change;
There's nothing here that is worth a tear;
One love less—nothing strange."

Jack repeated one line over after her musingly.

"Tides ebb, and women change." That is a mistake. Women do not change. They are the same cold-blooded, heartless beings all through life. There is no change whatever.

"Jack, why don't Mr. Raymond go to the ball?"

She snubbed his comment on the song. Jack longed to shake her till she cried for mercy; but instead he answered, provokingly:

"Because he is not invited."

"Yes; but why isn't he invited?"

"He gave a reason."

"A reason, yes; but not the reason."

"Shall I go to him and demand a truthful answer?"

"Jack, do you know why he is not invited?"

"Because he is not acquainted with—"

"Oh, never mind, Mr. Jack. You needn't strain after the truth in that style. I will find out without any of your assistance."

Jack offered a mental prayer for her success in her attempt to discover the secret that his promise to her mother forbade him to disclose.

Bell knew, from former experiences, that even if her mother knew it would be worse than useless to ask her. She was determined now to know at all hazards. Perhaps St. Claire would tell her. She would try. At the worst she could only fail.

"Jack, will you say to Mr. St. Claire that I wish to speak to him?"

"Now?"

"Yes; now."

"Mr. Raymond, you mean?"

"I said Mr. St. Claire."

Jack walked sulkily away, and in a moment St. Claire was by her side, wondering somewhat at the summons.

"You wished to speak with me, Miss De Guerry?"

Bell replied directly, striking at the root of the matter.

"Yes, Mr. St. Claire. I wished you to tell me why Mr. Raymond is not invited to Wycliffe's."

St. Claire hesitated. He was almost persuaded to tell her the truth and brave her mother's anger. And yet—something whispered to him that the time had not come. He must wait.

"You hesitate, Mr. St. Claire. Tell me the exact truth, or do not answer me at all."

"The exact truth is not always to be told, Miss De Guerry. I refer you to your mother for an answer to your question."

"My mother can answer it, then?"

"Your mother can answer it."

They were interrupted now by the entrance of other guests, and in a short time St. Claire and Jack De Guerry excused themselves and retired. When they had gained the street, St. Claire told Jack of the conversation, and asked him why he did not tell Bell the truth. And, after waiting a moment, Jack concluded to tell St. Claire the story, thinking that perhaps he might possess some knowledge which would be of value in what seemed to be a fruitless search.

Unconscious that it was the second story to which St. Claire had listened, Jack commenced at the first, as far back as he could remember—the time of his father's death, and of his uncle's kindness in taking him home and treating him like an own son; then of how he grew up, loving Bell far better than a cousin; of Mrs. De Guerry's worldliness, and her determination that Bell should marry Raymond; and, lastly, of her promise that if he could produce proof of the disgraceful story of Raymond's past life that Bell should never marry him, on condition that he should

never mention the report to Bell until he could demonstrate its truth past the possibility of doubt.

"And so, you see, the game is up. You know the story is true, St. Claire, as well as I do; but the man might be a saint, for all I can prove to the contrary."

"And Miss De Guerry?"

"Has never heard it, or she would not receive him in her home."

"Perhaps she would. Women are very charitable sometimes. Raymond's sin might look very different to her from the woman's."

"It is because you are so slightly acquainted with Bell that you can say that. You do her injustice. You may depend that she would hate Raymond, and treat him the same as she would the woman if she should chance to meet her."

"If there were more women like Miss De Guerry, there would be fewer men like Raymond."

"Yes, I suppose so," assented Jack, rather doubtfully. "But, you know, one woman cannot afford to render herself conspicuous by refusing to countenance a man who has the social position that Raymond has."

"But that is exactly what I am talking about. What right has Raymond to any social position which a lady will be obliged to recognize?"

"That is true enough; but it is impossible to make such distinctions. Men give him the position. You see, the majority of them are 'in the same boat;' and 'people who live in glass houses' have been repeatedly warned of the danger resulting from throwing stones."

"Yet, if women were united in their efforts, they could banish, to a great extent, this monstrous evil."

"If they were united, perhaps they might; but, as it is, no woman dares to take the lead in this movement. She would only succeed in making herself ridiculous. The business men, the solid men of our country, the ones who wink at this sin, are the only ones who can effectually crush it. Let the time ever come when some man's life is so pure that he can say without fear, 'I will not employ you, I will not admit you in my business, I will not receive you in my home, because you are not an honorable man,' and the time that hears those words will see a reform."

"God hasten the day!"

The two men walked on in silence for a few moments; then Jack spoke again.

"If this story about Raymond is true, and I guess that no one ever doubted it, the woman was certainly the most to blame. A wife, honored and trusted—what could have induced her to take that fatal step?"

"She was jealous of her husband."

"Did she suppose that it would mend affairs for her to leave him?"

"A jealous person does not stop to reason. Her object, of course, was simply to go where he could not find her."

"She met with most flattering success. If I could only know that she was alive, I would search the world over till I found her. There must be some way to unravel this mystery, if I only knew where to begin. I can only think of two ways. One is to go to England and try to find some trace of the woman. The other is to go to Raymond and ask him."

They both laughed in disgust at the mention of the latter proposition, and St. Claire added, gravely:

"The other way is almost as hopeless."

"Yes, it is utterly hopeless. I wish that I had never made that rash promise to Mrs. De Guerry, but had told Bell when I first heard of it."

"That would probably have been better. What length of time are you to have to get the proofs?"

"There was nothing said about that. I suppose till Bell is married. I could have no interest in the matter after that."

"De Guerry, I know of but one way in which I could help you. That is to tell the story to your cousin myself."

But Jack shook his head disconsolately.

"No, thank you, St. Claire. That would be breaking my promise, if not in letter, at least in spirit. It would be the same to have a friend tell Bell as to do it myself."

"You are right, De Guerry; and, while I regret the necessity, I honor the motive which prompts your actions."

As he finished speaking, they reached the steps leading into the club-room, and, as Jack was going in, they halted a moment.

"Are you coming in any time to-night?"

"Probably not. If I do, it will be late. Before I leave you, I wish to say that if ever, in any way, I can assist you in this matter, you have only to command me."

St. Claire spoke heartily, and extended his hand, which De Guerry accepted in the same spirit in which it was offered, promising that if the time ever came in which he needed a friend he would let him know.

With this pledge of mutual esteem, the two men parted, St. Claire walking rapidly down the street, and Jack going into the elegant, brilliantly lighted room, the especial property of the masculine gender of the "upper tens."

Occupying the most comfortable chair in the room, lazily pretending to read, was an egotistical, overbearing young Englishman, known by the name of George Ingoldsby, who insisted on being called "Sir George," although he never assigned any very definite reason why he should claim that title. He looked up as Jack came in, yawned extensively, and inquired, with his patronizing air:

"I say, De Guerry, 'ave you seen anything of Raymond to-day?"

"Yes, I saw him a short time ago."

"Where?"

"At the house of a friend."

"Ah! I think I could guess whose house. Wonder if I shall be invited to the wedding?"

"What wedding?"

"By George! that's too bad, you know."

Ingoldsby always swore by himself, probably because he considered himself the most important person of his acquaintance.

"You would not introduce me to your stately cousin, because you knew she would fall in love with me and my title at once. But it seems, in spite of that, that you are going to lose her."

A soft, low melody, a bar from the last opera, floated on the air. It was Jack whistling.

"Is Raymond coming here to-night?"

"I don't know; didn't ask him."

"A letter was sent here for him this morning, and, as he was not in, it was left in my care. I am going out now. I will leave it with you. Even if he don't come in, you will be more likely to see him than I will."

And before Jack could remonstrate, Ingoldsby laid the letter on a table before him and left the room.

Jack picked it up and unconsciously glanced at the superscription. It was directed in a delicate, scrawling hand, that Jack at once recognized as the writing of his cousin Bell. He dropped it as if it had burned him. The blood rushed in torrents to his face, then surged back to his heart with such force that it left him faint, while his lips tightened and his brow darkened. He would have been surprised at the contents of the note. It was only a formal invitation to spend the evening with a few friends at her home. Raymond had missed the invitation, but had chanced to go there.

Jack rung the bell for a messenger, and, when he appeared, gave him the letter, with instructions to take it to Mrs. De Guerry's. He supposed Raymond was still there; but, if he was not, Bell would get it, so that he would not have the care of it. This done, Jack took up a paper, and thought he was reading; but the words before him made no impression on his mind. He only saw another man's name, written in a flowing, wavy hand, passing back and forth over the page. A hand was laid on his shoulder. He looked up, to see St. Claire and Wycliffe standing beside him.

"Why, St. Claire, I did not expect to see you so soon."

"Nor did I expect to be here so soon; but the man I promised to meet failed to put in an appearance, and I run across Wycliffe, who brought me here."

The gentlemen found seats, and the conversation became general. At length Wycliffe turned to Jack, saying, half laughingly:

"I have the oddest fancy. It seems to me that Meg, the little girl who has charge of our baby, bears a very strong resemblance to your lady cousin, Miss De Guerry. Have you ever seen her—Meg, I mean?"

"I never have."

"Probably you would not notice it. I know the features are not the same, the expression is not the same, yet there is an indefinable something which makes them alike. It must be attributable to the same cause which always makes me feel in St. Claire's presence that I have been acquainted with him before."

"Am I to believe that you have faith in metempsychosis?"

"That sounds like it. I wonder what I was in some previous state of existence."

Jack assured him that he was too polite to express his opinion, and St. Claire changed the subject by inquiring about Mena. A strange attachment had grown up between these two; for, although St. Claire rarely went to the house to see her, he met her very frequently with her father. When Wycliffe first became acquainted with St. Claire, he not only invited but urged him to visit at his home. But upon one pretext or another, St. Claire almost invariably declined, until finally Wycliffe became convinced that he objected to meeting his wife, and, although he asked no questions, he ceased his importunities.

[To be continued.]

American women have far more beauty, Mrs. Scott-Siddons thinks, than those of England. "Boston and Philadelphia," she says, "are the places where I have seen the greatest amount of beauty in a short time—especially very young women. It is rare that you see a beautiful face in England, and I think that is why they make such a fuss over those that they have now hold of. I prefer the Canadian very much to English women, because they have much greater ease of manner, for one thing. There is an absence of that stiffness which spoils young English women in society. Australian ladies are more like English women than Canadians; they are generally much paler, and almost always very tall. They are freer than English women, and not so free as Americans—a happy medium."

A London paper says: "The latest fashionable idiosyncrasy in England is what is known as the 'baby stare.' It is affected by young ladies, and consists in opening the eye as widely as possible without raising the brows, and slightly turning the corners of the mouth upward. The necessary position of the mouth is obtained by many repetitions of the word 'mouse.'"

"The wittiest remark we have seen lately," says the *Turners Falls Reporter*, "was that many people regard religion as they regard small-pox; they desire to have it as light as possible, and are very careful that it does not reach them."