

## REAPING THE WHIRLWIND.

A NOVEL.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

The night of the masquerade ball came at last. The Wycliffes were famed for the magnificence of their entertainments, so that the anticipated ball was a matter of no little importance in fashionable society. The stately mansion was one blaze of light from attic to basement, and through the floating draperies of the low French windows could be seen graceful forms, fitting to and fro. Carriages rolled up to the entrance and deposited their precious freight upon the carpets spread to receive dainty feet. Police kept at a respectful distance the crowd of outside humanity who were pushing and jostling each other, swaying from side to side, eager to catch a glimpse of Fortune's favored few who pressed in to the enchanted world beyond.

In that vast moving panorama were costumes of every century; celebrated characters of all ages and all countries; famous beauties, whose love-knots brave knights wore upon their casques of steel; dresses of every texture and hue; Jewels from the mine and from the sea, set in every style—all, all was there to dazzle and bewilder. Surely no sin nor sorrow had entered there. It could not be possible that those masks hid faces traced with lines of pain, suffering or anxiety. It could not be possible that costly silks and velvets, linen and broadcloth covered tired bodies and aching hearts.

Amid all the glare and glitter, one figure attracted universal attention—that of a woman, who seemed indeed "a true daughter of the gods, divinely tall and most divinely fair," attired as Ceres, in a heavy, corn-colored silk, trimmed with grasses and ears of wheat. With every movement of her form the diamond dewdrops sparkled and trembled. Emeralds and topazes flashed on her neck, arms and hair, fairly dazzling the beholders with their gleaming lights of many tints. She looked indeed a "goddess of the harvest." She passed slowly from group to group, conversing a few moments with each, and calling some by name, until the curiosity of all was awakened. No one could form an opinion as to who she was. A few ventured to guess, but they were covered with confusion by her speedy proof of their mistake. It was impossible to judge her nationality. A French Marchioness addressed her, and she answered unhesitatingly in the same tongue. A Spanish tambourine girl laughingly challenged her, and again she responded in perfect accent. A gentleman who was standing near addressed her.

"I think that most Spanish ladies add music to their numerous accomplishments. Will you not favor us with a song?"

Ceres hesitated an instant. But those who heard the request begged her compliance, hoping thus to recognize her voice.

She accepted the gentleman's arm, and, seating herself at the piano, played a few opening chords; then her glorious voice, tremulous with its own sweetness, filled the room with a wave of melody. Every footstep was hushed, every voice was silent, listening to that wonderful Spanish love-song:

"Dices que no me quieres,  
Porque no tengo que darte;  
Enseñame a ser cocinera,  
Porque no sé mas que amarte."

As the singer well knew, the gentleman who preferred the request was Mr. Wycliffe. He drew a step nearer, waiting for her to finish. The song was one he had heard Agatha sing a countless number of times; not as this woman sang it, with her whole soul in her voice, but softly and sweetly. How well he remembered the playful way Agatha used to finish it! Unconsciously he went near to her, and stood in the same waiting attitude that he used to assume ten years ago when his wife sang the last words, "Then teach me to hate thee, I pray, for to love thee is all that I know."

She finished, turned around, and, catching the hand that Wycliffe extended toward her, pressed it passionately to her lips; then, throwing it from her, she sprang up, and was soon lost amid the crowd.

A general laugh followed this *dénouement*.

"It's quite evident that they have recognized each other," said several, and the incident was forgotten in the subsequent events of the evening.

Forgotten? One there was who remembered it till the last day of his life. Could the ending have been mere chance? or was it part of the song, whoever might sing it? Over and over again Wycliffe asked himself the questions, and came no nearer a solution the last time than he did the first. He searched every room, every possible retreat, but never again did the magnificent Ceres cross his longing vision.

A black domino forced its way slowly through the crowd, through the long rooms, out into the hallway, and then passed up the stairs, at the head of which it paused a moment and looked around. Here, too, were many persons, although they seemed few compared with the number in the rooms below. Clearly it was impossible to go anywhere in that house that night without being seen. So, merely attempting to avoid inquisitive servants, the figure went boldly down the main hall to the upper end, and halted in the shadow

before the closed door there. Placing a hand upon the knob, it tried to enter, but the door was locked. Evidently the domino had expected this, for without a moment's hesitation it drew a key from the folds of the black garment and fitted it into the lock and tried to turn it. But it resisted stubbornly. The key seemed to be too large. The sound of approaching footsteps counseled flight, and trying to take the key from the lock, it suddenly sprang back and the door creaked open. 'Twas the work of a moment to spring inside and lock the door. The footsteps came nearer, paused, came on to the door, then stopped. The heart of the listener beat heavily as the hand outside tried to open the door. A silence; then the footsteps turned and went back down the hall.

The domino removed the key and stuffed a handkerchief in its place. After this precaution, it took matches and candle from the pockets of the disguise, and, lighting the candle, held it up and looked around the room. The sight thus revealed was evidently a painful surprise. There was a low cry, the candle fell upon the floor, and in a second all was dark again. A hand groped helplessly over the carpet till it found the taper, relighted it, carried it to the dresser and placed it in a silver holder. Slowly it pushed back the hood and lifted the mask and laid it upon the table; then turning, the figure again surveyed the room. The countenance was as expressive of wild affright as Macbeth's when viewing the chair on which the specter of the murdered Banquo sat. Had death in its most horrible form stared her in the face, she could not have betrayed more horror.

This and the room adjoining had been the apartments of the former Mrs. Wycliffe, and they had never been opened since the day her husband closed the door and locked it, ten years ago. The rich furniture, the silken curtains, the velvet carpets, were white with dust, festooned with spider-webs, and eaten in holes by the moths. The bed, with its heavy, rich hangings, was standing as it was left, made by hands which have crumbled into dust. The dressing-table, with its toilet articles, was undisturbed. The figure moved toward it, and, taking a key which lay there, unlocked a small case and opened it, revealing the flashing, shimmering jewels in their velvet bed. The lid was closed with a snap, scattering the dust over the black garments.

Nearly an hour the stranger tarried in the room. At length she roused herself with an effort, and, shaking off the lethargy which was creeping over her, crossed the room to the further end, fell upon her knees, and passed her hand repeatedly over the walnut paneling; but the solid boards refused to move. Rising, she went to the door which divided the two rooms, and, bending over, counted each board to the center of the room, and again tried to shift the piece from its place. At length it yielded to the pressure and flew back, disclosing a narrow aperture filled with papers. Inserting a hand, she withdrew them and closed the panel. She carried them to the light and examined them. They were letters, covered with dust and stained with time. She brushed them off, and, without stopping to read them, thrust them in her bosom. Blowing out the candle, she went to the door, drew the handkerchief from the key-hole, and inserted the key. Stealthily she turned the lock and opened the door. The passage was clear. She went safely out and down the stairs; then on, from room to room, eagerly searching for some one. The black domino at length touched lightly the sleeve of "Lord Marmion," and said, softly: "Follow me. I have something of importance for you."

Without answering, Lord Marmion mechanically obeyed, and followed the fluttering black draperies through the rooms, through the hall, and out into the conservatory. But others were there before them. The black mask halted for a moment, then went slowly to a vine-embowered, rustic seat, which was intended for two persons, and, sitting down, motioned Marmion to the vacant place. Again he obeyed, and seated himself beside his mysterious guide.

"Lord Marmion," said a woman's voice, soft and low, "I have brought you a package, which you must keep hidden until you go home. Then open and read it. It contains secrets of great moment to you. But you must promise me, before I give it to you, that when it has served your purpose you will destroy it."

"But, fair lady, is it not possible that you are mistaken in the identity of Lord Marmion? May you not be giving your precious package into wrong hands?"

"No; I am not mistaken. No assumed disguise could hide Jack De Guerry from me."

The erewhile lord started as the woman uttered his name, saying, in tones of unmistakable disgust:

"Is my disguise then so transparent? Does my air display the fact that I am not so the manor born?"

"Neither, my lord; but my eyes are as piercing as my *incognito* is complete."

"Then, indeed, I could not hope to escape detection. But will you not tell me, bright eyes, to whom I am indebted for this package, which contains the secret of my future weal or woe?"

De Guerry spoke lightly, and leaned tenderly toward the figure sitting beside him in an attitude of utter weariness. He had no thought that the package contained sight of value to him. He supposed this a mere ruse, an introduction for a flirtation, and, like all men, he accepted the challenge without knowing or caring who the challenger might be.

The woman rose with a gesture of impatience.

She knew enough of men and of the world to read his thoughts as plainly as spoken words. He had entirely mistaken her intentions. She stood before him holding the package in her hands.

"You can never return this to me. Will you promise to destroy it after you are done with it?"

Jack rose, for he saw that he had misjudged the woman's actions, and answered, respectfully:

"I will give you the required promise, madam, though I fail to see in what manner the package can possibly benefit me."

"You will understand when you have read it." With this reply, the woman placed the packet in his hands, and then left him swiftly and noiselessly.

Jack slipped her gift into his breast pocket, and went back to the gay world once more. But its beauty was gone, its charm had fled. And, after wandering around aimlessly for a while, he determined to go home and solve the mystery of the black domino. He had failed to distinguish Bell in the motley throng, and jealousy prompted the thought that probably she had remained at home to entertain Raymond.

Thoroughly disgusted with the entire world and the human beings who peopled it, Jack went home, changed his attire for more suitable and more comfortable garments, and seated himself before the glowing fire to examine the contents of the strange package. To his surprise, they proved to be letters, old and yellow, but still perfectly clear. They were written in a bold, masculine hand, and addressed to—Mrs. Agatha Wycliffe! He separated one from the others, opened it, and looked at the signature. It was—Jasper Raymond!

Jack laid the letter down unread. He knew what it contained; but what right had he to steal its contents? To whom could he give them? Not to Raymond. Certainly not to Wycliffe. Who was the black domino? He could think of no one except St. Claire that would know that these letters would be of any use to him. Could it have been St. Claire who gave them to him? If so, where did he get them? Pshaw! How absurd! He could have sworn that it was a woman's voice that spoke to him; and a very soft, sweet voice it was, too. Could it have been Bell? Had she heard of her mother's promise, and taken this means to defeat her? Banish the thought! He would have known Bell under any disguise. All that he knew for a certainty was that the letters were now in his possession, without the employment on his part of any foul means. The proof he had coveted was within his reach, yet he hesitated to avail himself of it.

After much deliberation and reasoning, Jack determined "to take the good the gods provide," and use the means thus afforded to accomplish the downfall of Raymond. He sorted them out according to their dates, and read them carefully one by one. Not a link was missing in the chain of evidence of Raymond's guilt. They were not many, nor long, but they were enough to answer his purpose. There was nothing in them to implicate the woman; nothing to prove that she had ever cared for him; no reference to a word or act on her part to encourage him; nothing to betoken that he had ever received a written line from her in answer to the mad, passionate letters that he sent to her. Against the woman there only remained the fact that she allowed, if she did not encourage him, to write her such sentiments.

Jack gathered them up and carefully re-tied them. He wondered how it would be possible for him to employ the intervening time before he could present himself before Mrs. De Guerry with the letters and demand the fulfillment of her promise. He reflected. It was then two o'clock. He could not make the proposed visit before eleven. Nine hours! It seemed like nine years. He would go to bed; perhaps he could forget the lapse of time in sleep. So, clutching the precious letters tight in his fingers, he laid down to rest.

At the earliest possible moment, Jack went to Mrs. De Guerry's. They had just finished breakfast and were in the morning room. Jack went in, and found his aunt and cousin deeply interested in a discussion of the ball. Bell greeted him, and inquired, in the same breath:

"Jack De Guerry, why didn't you go to the ball?"

"I did go," answered Jack, briefly.

"In what character?"

"Lord Marmion."

"I wondered who that stiff-kneed, spider-legged individual was. Why did you leave before unmasking?"

"I was tired, and I had lost interest."

"How many did you know?"

Jack enumerated several whom he had recognized. Then Bell mentioned characters as she saw them unmasked, and he guessed who personated them.

"Did you know Mr. St. Claire?"

"No," answered Jack, with evident interest.

"He was 'Nemesis.' I don't understand why he should have taken that character, though he did dress it most elegantly."

They were interrupted by the entrance of a servant, bearing Mr. Raymond's card.

"Shall he come in here, mamma?" inquired Bell.

Mrs. De Guerry was about to answer in the affirmative, when Jack's voice interposed.

"Take him somewhere else, Bell. I wish to speak with your mother a few minutes."

Bell acquiesced, though she looked surprised, and left the room.

Jack turned to Mrs. De Guerry and commenced, without any preface:

"You asked me for proof of the story of the sin of Raymond's past life. I have brought it."

As he spoke, he took the letters from his pocket and laid them on a table which stood beside her.

Had a bomb-shell suddenly exploded in her presence, had a thunderbolt fallen at her feet, Mrs. De Guerry could not have been more horrified. Bereft of the power of speech and action, she could only glare at him in awful silence.

"Will you read these, madam? They are letters written by Jasper Raymond to Agatha Wycliffe."

Mrs. De Guerry sat there perfectly rigid; but Jack met her freezing looks with stern determination in face and voice. Seeing that he intended to wait for a reply, she inquired, hoarsely:

"Pray how did you come in possession of a private correspondence of that nature?"

"Pardon me, madam, if I say that it can make but little difference to you how I obtained them. You can hardly doubt their genuineness."

Jack pushed the package toward her as he finished speaking, but she recoiled as if the letters had contained dynamite and her hand a lighted match.

"Will you not examine them?"

"Yes, I will. I have no doubt that they are forgeries. Leave them here, and I will send for you when I have read them and judged of their authorship."

The angry blood burned in Jack's face at the gratuitous insult. If she had been a man, he would have struck the sneering lips that uttered it. As she was a woman, he bowed silently and left her alone—alone with her shattered hopes and defeated ambition.

[To be continued.]

## GROSS SUPERSTITIONS.

In my grandfather's family, the old cook was accustomed to bake cakes in large rounds, which she cut into fours with a sharp knife, each quarter being put to bake by itself. She was most careful that during baking the pointed end of each of these quarters should not be broken, otherwise a death might shortly be expected. Even the slipping of a piece of soap from a person's hands when washing has been construed to mean that the death of some relative is imminent, as, indeed, is also the persistent burning of a fire on one side only of the grate. Every one knows that to dream of losing teeth means that some calamity may be looked for. If the eyes of a corpse are difficult to close, they are said to be looking for a successor; and if the limbs do not become quickly stiff, it is supposed that some one of the family will be soon also among the dead. If the house-door is closed upon the corpse before the friends have come out to take their places in the carriage, Sheffield people say another death will happen before many days; and if at a funeral where the mourners walked, the procession went in a scattered or straggling manner, this was thought in the west of Scotland to betoken the same misfortune. Even if the mourners walk quickly, the omen was bad. To walk under a ladder betokens misfortune, if not hanging, as it does in Holland. To meet a funeral when going to or coming from a marriage was considered very unlucky in Lanarkshire; for if the funeral was that of a woman, the newly-made wife would not live long, and if it was that of a man, the fate of the bridegroom was sealed. If one heard a tingling in his ears, it was the "deid bells," and news of the death of a friend or neighbor might soon be expected. If knocks were heard at the door of a patient's room, and no person was found there when the door was opened, there was little chance of recovery; and if a man caught a glimpse of a person he knew, and found, on looking out, that he was nowhere to be seen, this was, says Mr. Napier, a sign of the approaching death of the person seen.—*A Contributor to Belgravia.*

FATHER PURCELL'S KINDNESS.—A Cincinnati dispatch of March 10th reads: "A singular story of disinterestedness was developed in a case decided against the plaintiff in the Superior Court this afternoon. It was the suit of Eliza Conahan to recover \$70,000 of Archbishop J. B. Purcell, the late Father Edward Purcell, and J. B. Mannix, assignee. On his death-bed, Charles Conahan confessed to Father Edward Purcell that he was insolvent. This confession was kept in sacred confidence. Father Edward assumed the debts, paid them, maintained the widow and family, bid in the stock at the settlement of the estate, and kept up his kind services until his assignment. The testimony in the trial was the first revelation, made to the widow or the outside world, that Mr. Charles Conahan was insolvent. Father Edward managed to remit the widow money through Mr. Woods, a large shareholder of the stock company in which Mr. Conahan did business, so that she thought it came from her husband's estate."

Since 1827—half a century we may call it—ten of England's Prime Ministers have died. George Canning, Lord Ripon (for a few months), the Duke of Wellington, Earl Grey, Lord Melbourne, Sir Robert Peel, Earl Russell, Lord Derby, Lord Palmerston, and now Lord Beaconsfield. Of these, the only one who accepted the visit of a clergyman in his closing hours was Lord Grey. The Duke of Wellington, to whom all the world was a drill, doubtless would have had one, as a matter of regimental duty, had he not been suddenly taken away, and Sir Robert Peel may have a similar excuse. But the others, though all (save Palmerston and Melbourne) loud declaimers about the Church through their political life, did not avail themselves of its consolations at its close.

It is remarkable what little bites a woman takes when eating in the presence of her sweetheart. What a little mouth she has then! She nibbles with her little white teeth like some dainty squirrel eating a hickory nut. But wait until wash-day comes! Watch her when she goes to hanging out clothes and gets in a hurry. By the time that she gets the big ends of fifteen clothes-pins hid in that mouth, you will begin to think that it is a pretty good-sized, hearty mouth after all.—*Bloomington Eye.*