

## REAPING THE WHIRLWIND.

A NOVEL.

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## CHAPTER XV.

Helen Langdon stood perfectly motionless, looking at St. Claire half defiantly, yet with a frightened gleam in her eyes. Her bravest efforts could not prevent the blood from forsaking her face and her pale lips from quivering. She totally disregarded the name which he had pronounced with such bitter emphasis, but said, sorrowfully:

"I am unfortunate in resembling a woman that I think you must have hated. I fear that it will prejudice you against me, so that I can never be able to claim you for a friend."

"You can never claim me for a friend, Countess of L'Fevre."

The woman gained courage born of desperation. Thus driven to the wall, she looked up boldly and corrected him.

"Miss Langdon, if you please, sir!"

"Miss Langdon in America; Countess of L'Fevre in Italy."

"It is not possible, Mr. St. Claire, that you think the two persons are identical?"

"No, I do not think they are. I know it."

The woman quailed before his stern, reproving gaze. She saw that equivocation or falsehood would alike be useless; that to deceive him was impossible; and clasping her hands together and half extending them, she breathed one word, in a voice quivering with anguish.

"Pity!"

"Why should I pity you?"

"Because I am a woman 'more sinned against than sinning.'"

"Hush!" he answered, warningly, glancing in the direction of the other occupants of the room; "they will hear you."

"How did you know me?"

"I saw you with your husband in Italy."

"I do not remember you."

"No; probably not. You were pointed out to me as the rich American girl who had married the Count of L'Fevre for his title."

St. Claire's voice was as cold as ice, and his words as cruel as death. The woman trembled under them as if they had been blows which cut her to the heart. She answered, in a voice so low as to be almost indistinguishable:

"That marriage was unfortunate."

"Where is your husband?"

"Dead!"

"Your friends here know nothing of this?"

"Nothing. I was only married a short time when my—when the Count died, and I thought it best to come back under my maiden name."

"It is never best to sail under false colors."

"I see that now, but it is too late. Mr. St. Claire, I beg, I pray that you will keep my secret. It can avail you nothing to disclose it, while to me it will bring utter ruin and desolation."

"Miss Langdon, because you are a woman, and at my mercy, I will remain silent until silence is dangerous."

Not waiting for a reply, St. Claire offered her his arm and led her back to their friends.

Jack had watched them curiously—jealously, Bell thought.

"There is some mystery between them, some secret," he said to Bell, when they both chanced to glance in the same direction.

"Yes; old lovers, I should judge," Bell answered, malleulously.

"Lovers?" echoed Jack. "A person could see, even if half blind, that they hate each other."

He turned to Bell as he spoke, and following her glance, his eyes rested upon Raymond, who was sitting a short distance away conversing with Mrs. De Guerry. In a sudden passion of anger and jealousy he said, rudely:

"Your scheme has worked well. I understand that the question of whether or no you would marry Mr. Raymond has been settled at last."

This was the time for Bell to have told Jack that Raymond was nothing to her but a friend. But his tone and words irritated her, and the black rock of pride on which the happiness of so many is wrecked interposed, and with a grave, peculiar smile she answered, softly:

"Yes; it is settled."

It was true, then; the affair was settled past the possibility of conjecture, and his last hope was wrecked. All anger died out of his face and voice. He spoke in tones of infinite tenderness and compassion, as we bid farewell to loved ones and see them die.

"Bell, my cousin, I wish you joy."

His contempt and reproaches Bell could answer, but the pain in his face and voice she could not bear. Repenting her folly, which was laying stones upon the wall growing up between them, she looked up with sudden penitence, saying, slowly:

"Jack, I must tell you—"

"Oh, no; there is no use. I know that you are delusively happy, and besides, here comes Miss Langdon."

When Miss Langdon went home, Jack accompanied her; not from choice, but because it would be discourteous to allow her to go alone, and because he did not wish to remain there with Raymond. As they were leaving, Bell asked him if

he was going to attend the *musicals* the following day.

"No," Jack answered, decisively. "They are always the same thing over and over. I consider them a tiresome bore."

The first person Bell saw, on entering the conservatory of music the next morning, was Jack De Guerry, leaning attentively over the chair in which reclined the graceful form of Helen Langdon. How he came to be there, Jack could not have explained clearly, even to himself. Miss Langdon wished to go, and had no escort. (It could not have been that Jack was given the impression that his services would be acceptable.) In some inexplicable manner he found himself at her side. He did not have an opportunity, even if he had the inclination, to explain to Bell, for she never glanced in their direction, or gave any sign that she was aware of their presence.

"She thinks that I have told an untruth," Jack thought to himself. "Well, let her think so. Her entire future life will be one."

So, at cross purposes, they drifted on. Jack was restless and unhappy. It was not agreeable for him to visit at his aunt's now. There was a restraint in his actions and Bell's that made their meetings decidedly uncomfortable. Miss Langdon did not seem to notice his abstraction. She was always charming, always glad to see him; consequently he was there very frequently. She told him that she missed Harry so much; that she had known him so many years that she intended to make a brother of him, if he would accept that vacancy in her affections.

Ah, young men, beware of the girl anxious to adopt you for a brother, unless you intend to marry her! Girls, decline with thanks the brotherly attentions of the man for whom you care nothing, for such friendships usually end disastrously.

One night Mrs. De Guerry invited Miss Langdon to form one of a party in her box at the opera. During the play, some of the stage trappings caught fire and a panic ensued. Jack was standing talking to Bell, and Raymond was sitting by Miss Langdon, when the cries first startled them. In a few moments the fire was extinguished and order restored, but Bell was frightened till she was ill, and rising, she reeled forward a few steps and fell fainting to the floor. As she fell, she caught Jack's coat sleeve, thus preventing him from catching her. Mrs. De Guerry regarded him with stern displeasure.

"Jack, how awkward you are! Mr. Raymond, if you please."

Jack had stooped down, disengaged his sleeve, and partially raised her up, when, in answer to Mrs. De Guerry's summons, Raymond stepped forward to take her. In deep anger and humiliation Jack quietly laid Bell back on the floor, and rising, appropriated the vacant seat by Miss Langdon. When Bell was restored to consciousness, the entire party retired, St. Claire, who was with them, going home with Jack.

"De Guerry," he said, as soon as they were comfortably seated, "do you intend to marry Miss Langdon?"

"No; I certainly do not."

"If you speak the truth, your conduct is unbecoming an honorable gentleman."

Jack sprang to his feet, ejaculating, in astonishment:

"St. Claire!"

"Jack, you know that your name has been linked with that of Helen Langdon as her future husband; and knowing that, you have not discontinued your attentions or ceased your visits to her house. If you had proper respect for that lady, you would not allow her name to be lightly spoken, as it will be if you do not marry her."

Jack walked heavily back and forth across the room, his hands in his pockets, and his brow clouded with surprise and displeasure.

"St. Claire, if I did not think you a sincere friend, I would throw you out the window. I think that you mean to be kind, but you are only cruel. I respect Miss Langdon most thoroughly, but I cannot marry her. She knows that, so we stand on safe ground."

St. Claire arose, went to De Guerry, and laid his hand impressively on his arm.

"No, you do not. It is dangerous to play with fire. As a disinterested friend, Jack, let me warn you. Right about, face!"

Before Jack could reply, St. Claire turned and left the room. Jack stood perfectly still and whistled softly—whistled longer than usual—an entire tune, and repeated the chorus.

"That's the enviable position I occupy, is it? Everybody thinks me a scoundrel, when I'm only a fool. Miss Langdon, we will play 'quits,' and the sooner the better. No one shall say that I refused to accept the advice of my friends."

Jack remembered Mrs. De Guerry's advice to the same effect. But he had not considered her sufficiently disinterested to render her opinion valuable.

Some one has said that the sentiment, "It is more blessed to give than to receive," refers particularly to medicine, kicks, and advice. Of the three, probably the latter is taken the least frequently and with the least favor.

Jack determined that Miss Langdon should understand at once that only as a friend could she regard him now and in the future. With the intention of putting his new-found resolution into effect, he called on Miss Langdon the following evening. She inquired, with polite interest, concerning the health of his cousin Bell, and then asked:

"Is her marriage to take place soon?"

"Of that I know no more than you do, Miss Langdon."

She looked surprised, then said, confidentially: "Do you know, I was very much surprised when I was abroad to hear that you were married."

"Why were you surprised?"

"Because I did not think that you would ever marry."

"Again I must ask, why?"

"For the reason that persons who enjoy flirting as well as you do rarely care to marry."

"Miss Langdon, I deny the charge. I do not flirt."

"Mr. De Guerry, I reiterate the assertion. You do flirt."

"To prove that you are mistaken, Miss Langdon, I will tell you the reason that I never married. Long ago I loved a girl who cared nothing for me, and I shall never do any other woman the injustice to offer my hand where my heart can never go."

There was perfect silence for a moment. De Guerry had said this, not because he wished to make a confidant of Helen Langdon, but because St. Claire's words aroused and alarmed him, and he thought to show her their exact relations to each other. But it was a most lamentable failure. She raised her beautiful eyes, suffused with tears, and in a voice trembling with emotion—which sounded very real—she said, softly:

"There is no reason why I should affect to misunderstand you, Mr. De Guerry. But you were mistaken. The girl you loved long ago loved you in return, and for your sake has remained single all these years."

She dropped her face into her hands, and the sound of low, half-suppressed sobbing filled the room.

Jack sat stupefied. Gods! how the girl had misunderstood him! He would explain. But how? Her sweet voice sounded through her tears.

"Do not think that I am sorry, Jack. I am crying for joy."

He would certainly die. His collar was choking him, a war drum was beating in his ears, and his own voice sounded far-off and jarring as he commenced, desperately:

"Miss Langdon—"

"Call me Helen, now," she interrupted, looking up and smiling encouragingly.

"Helen, I think that you are mistaken—"

"Mistaken! Mistaken in thinking that I love you? Nay, Jack, I have loved you too long and too well for that."

Jack groaned. He wished that the earth would open and swallow him; that a merciful tornado would bear him away. Anything, anywhere, was better than to sit there and tell that loving, confiding girl that he could not marry her. It would have been easier if he could have blotted out the memory of that Summer in the old farmhouse, if he could have forgotten moonlight walks and day-light rambles; but now—

"Harry will be so glad. Harry always liked you, Jack."

"Yes; but—"

"Do you remember when we first became acquainted—when Harry brought you home?"

Yes, he remembered; and he sat there and listened while she talked and dragged him on to destruction. Jack never knew exactly what was said or how it happened, but when he went home that night, he was Helen Langdon's betrothed husband. In mute despair, in silent, hopeless misery, he saw his false position. He was too depressed to whistle, and he regarded a cigar with absolute abhorrence. Yes, Jack was almost dangerous. He deserved sincere commiseration when he could not express his feelings by whistling and a cigar had lost its charms.

"A question of honor," men and women call it. And for the sake of honor—a word usually twisted and distorted into a false meaning—they wrong themselves and each other by fulfilling a promise rashly given or sincerely repented. It is far more honorable to confess that the bond has grown irksome and the fetters too heavy. Such an obligation is more honored in the breach than in the observance. A broken engagement is better than a broken marriage.

And Miss Langdon? After Jack left her, she sat with folded hands and smiling lips, looking triumphant rather than happy. If a prayer had ever passed her lips, she would have uttered one then—a prayer of thankfulness. A cloud—perhaps not larger than a man's hand, but still a cloud—darkened the sky of her future. If Jack should hear of her life in Italy, all would be lost. St. Claire's cruel, unrelenting face rose before her, and she remembered that he was Jack's friend. Perhaps this "coming event cast its shadow before" when he promised her to keep her secret until silence was dangerous. Poor Jack! She had heard him say a hundred times that he would never marry a widow. He hated a widow! She concluded that if Jack pleaded for an early wedding day she would not refuse his request.

Jack arose the next morning with spirits considerably lightened. After a good sleep—Jack would have slept the night before his execution—the dilemma did not seem so perplexing. The tangled skein seemed easier to unravel. He had resolved to go to Miss Langdon and tell her the truth, even at the risk of incurring her everlasting displeasure. She would know some day, and it was far better that he should tell her now than for her to discover it after she was his wife. His wife? Never!

On his way to Miss Langdon's, Jack passed the house of his Aunt De Guerry. Glancing up, he

saw her standing by an upper window. At the same moment she saw him, and that he was going past, so she motioned for him to enter. Surprised at the unusual summons, he obeyed. Mrs. De Guerry was beaming with smiles, and greeted him rapturously.

"Jack, dear Jack, were you not going to stop and tell me this welcome news?"

"What news?" gasped Jack, heartsick with apprehension.

"Ah, you sly boy, you do not care for the congratulations of your only aunt, your nearest living relative."

"Aunt Ann, you speak in riddles."

"Riddles not hard to read. Helen was here this morning, Jack, and a prouder, happier girl I never saw."

Something that would have been an oath if it had passed his lips flashed through Jack's mind; but he stood perfectly silent, staring at his aunt in stony horror. Mrs. De Guerry probably thought that he was too gratified for his thoughts to find utterance, for, without waiting for him to acknowledge her outburst of enthusiasm, she turned to Bell, who had not yet spoken.

"Isabel, will you not offer your congratulations to your cousin?"

"I shall never congratulate anyone, much less my cousin, on a prospective marriage with Helen Langdon."

"Isabel, my daughter, remember that the lady of whom you speak is Jack's future wife."

These words aroused Jack. He would speak now, and explain his mortifying position.

"Aunt Ann—"

There was a light knock, the door opened softly, and a bird-like voice floated into the room.

"May I come in?" it queried, and without waiting for a reply Helen Langdon entered the room, arrayed in a most bewitching morning toilet. She blushed divinely when she saw Jack, which of course was the first intimation she had received of his presence in the house. Her arrival seemed inopportune, for silence followed her entrance.

"I seem to be one too many," she said, with a childish pout, which had cost her several hours of tiresome practice.

"Never one too many in my house, Helen," answered Mrs. De Guerry, effusively.

Miss Langdon replied with a pretty look of gratitude, and going to Bell, whom she had not seen during her visit earlier in the day, she slipped her arms around her waist, and dropping her head upon her shoulder, said, in a soft, cooing voice:

"We will be friends now, Bell, for Jack's sake—Jack, who loves us both."

With her free arm Bell dashed the woman from her as if her touch had been poisonous.

"Friends? Never! Don't dare to touch me, you viper!"

[To be continued.]

A Chicago drummer is in limbo in a Wisconsin jail for hitting a hotel landlord with twenty-one out of a possible twenty-three codfish balls.

The Philadelphia *Chronicle* is anxiously waiting to see if the Revised Testament will press Autumn leaves as good as the other edition.

## Rescued from Death.

The following statement of William J. Coughlin, of Somerville, Mass., is so remarkable that we beg to ask for it the attention of our readers. He says: "In the Fall of 1876 I was taken with a violent bleeding of the lungs, followed by a severe cough. I soon began to lose my appetite and flesh. I was so weak at one time that I could not leave my bed. In the Summer of 1877 I was admitted to the City Hospital. While there the doctors said I had a hole in my left lung as big as a half dollar. I expended over \$100 in doctors and medicines. I was so far gone at one time that a report went around that I was dead. I gave up hope, but a friend told me of Dr. Wm. Hall's Balsam for the Lungs. I laughed at my friends, thinking that my case was incurable; but I got a bottle to satisfy them, when to my surprise and gratification I commenced to feel better. My hope, once dead, began to revive, and to-day I feel in better spirits than I have for the past three years. I write this hoping you will publish it, so that every one afflicted with diseased lungs will be induced to take Dr. Wm. Hall's Balsam for the Lungs, and be convinced that consumption can be cured. I have taken two bottles, and can positively say that it has done more good than all the other medicines I have taken since my sickness. My cough has almost entirely disappeared, and I shall soon be able to go to work."—Sold by druggists.

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