

REAPING THE WHIRLWIND.

A NOVEL.

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CHAPTER XXV.

It was a rarely perfect morning, clear, soft and radiant, with a beauty which was felt even in the city of "fashion and famine," where one scarcely notices the weather unless it interferes with either business or pleasure.

St. Claire was sauntering along, utterly unconscious of any new beauty "in the heavens above or the earth beneath." A young girl with a merry, care-free face went tripping past him. He wondered absently what gladness there could be in life to make her step so light and her smile so sweet. Children passed him in groups, laughing in childish glee. He caught himself pitying them for the rough, stony paths their untried feet must tread. A young man whose walk and glance bespoke a firm purpose and a worthy object in living hurried by, unconscious of the look of envy which followed him and the feeling of bitter rebellion against the fate which made their lives so totally unlike. An old man went by, bending under the accumulated weight of poverty and years. St. Claire looked after him with an unacknowledged yearning to change places in life with him. The old man seemed so near the end of the long, tiresome journey, and with him it was only just begun. Just begun! Ah, "who can say when the end cometh?"

St. Claire's attention was arrested by cries of terror, mingled with words of frightened appeal. Turning quickly around, he saw a handsome coal-black horse tearing down the street at full speed. The terror-stricken rider had lost all control, and, free from all restraint, the desperate animal came plunging toward him with nostrils distended and eyes on fire. One glance told St. Claire who that rider was, and with a wild cry of terror he dashed through the tumult and threw himself directly in the course of the frightened horse. As it came nearer, St. Claire drew back a pace to gather strength, then with a quick leap seized the black fury by the bits. But only for a moment did his light weight hold it down; the next he was hurled upward by the rearing animal, that, falling to fling him off, tried to trample him under foot. But St. Claire knew that to loosen his hold was death, and he clung tightly and was dragged on, swaying to and fro, while the hot, blood-stained froth from its torn mouth flew over them both. But its mad career was checked, the fury of its speed broken. Its hoofs became entangled in the man's clothing; blood was dripping through its laced teeth. The strained sinews gave way all at once, and the horse fell with a dull thud upon the earth, crushing beneath his weight the daring hero and hurling the rider from his seat.

There were many willing hands now. The panting, trembling horse was made to rise, and tenderly they lifted the young man, lying still and breathless under the glare of the pitiless sun. The rider, uninjured, but with a face blanched with horror, now pushed his way through the crowd to where they were carrying a mass of torn and dusty garments covered with blood, from which all semblance of life had been so suddenly crushed out, and his voice sounded clear and distinct through the awe-struck crowd.

"Give him to me! Tell me, for God's sake, is he dead?"

It was Wycliffe who asked the question, but none could answer. They drew back respectfully, recognizing his right, as he gently took the boyish figure in his arms.

"A carriage—quick!"

Wycliffe forgot that death had just stared him in the face; forgot his fright at his own peril in his anxiety for the life which had been risked to save his. He took his deliverer to his own home, bore him to a stately chamber, and laid him upon a rich bed, unmindful of the contact with the dust of the street. As soon as he was laid down, the dusky brown eyes opened, and their glance searched the room in an inquiring way. Wycliffe bent over him with a prayer of thankfulness in his heart that the brave young life was spared.

"St. Claire, do you know me?"

"Yes."

The answer was faint, and fainter still came the words:

"I must speak with you alone."

"But, my dear fellow, we must see the doctor first."

St. Claire spoke with renewed energy.

"Oh, no! It is too late. I am nearly gone. I must see you alone!"

At this moment a servant entered with wine. St. Claire nodded, and Wycliffe held it to his lips till he drained the glass. In a little time his eyes brightened and his voice grew stronger.

"Send them away!"

Seeing opposition to be useless, and fearing the result of excitement, Wycliffe ordered all to withdraw. Mrs. Wycliffe lingered a moment, and going toward St. Claire, said softly:

"May I stay?"

"No! Go—leave my sight forever!" Mrs. Wycliffe, with a look of surprise and pain, turned to her husband, who, without speaking a word, took her gently by the hand, led her to the door, opened it, motioned her to pass out, then closed it after her, and returned to the bedside.

"St. Claire, I owe you more than any man living, and love you better, and my wife's love is second only to mine; but if she had done you some deadly injury, you could not treat her worse. Tell me why you hate her."

Slowly the figure on the bed lifted itself higher on the pillows, then, raising one hand to the mouth, removed the silken mustache from the trembling lip, and in a voice of intense agony said: "Do you know now why I hate her?"

Lionel Wycliffe stood like one rooted to the spot, an awful horror, an awful hatred, creeping over his face. He tried to speak, but no sound issued from his stiff lips. He seemed turned to stone.

"Lionel! my husband! forgive me! forgive me!"

He neither moved nor spoke.

"Must I die without one word of forgiveness? O Lionel! my husband! Mercy! I pray, for God's sake, mercy!"

The effort had been too great. With the last words, a small stream of blood trickled over her lips, her hands clasped convulsively, and her head fell back among the pillows.

Wycliffe's trance was broken. He sprang to the bed, raised her in his arms, and called her name wildly.

"Agatha! Agatha!"

But it was too late. She was dead.

In the center of a room, dimly lighted with wax tapers, stood a catafalque heavily draped with black velvet, which swept down in heavy folds, hiding the rich carpet with its waves of gorgeous gloom. Lying there, still and cold, with hands meekly folded as if in prayer, more beautiful in death than she had ever been in life, was Agatha Wycliffe. Standing beside her, with hands clasped together and head bowed in silent, tearless agony, was the man for whom she had yielded up her life, a voluntary sacrifice; the man she had loved with a love which few are capable of experiencing or even understanding; her husband—Lionel Wycliffe. Gazing upon the face, which looked like a piece of faultlessly carved marble, so pure, so white, he wondered dumbly if that last act in life, so unselfish and brave, would not atone for the sin of the past. For the hundredth time since her death, his thoughts wandered back to the long ago when he first knew the beautiful face, now for the first time unheeding his presence. His face grew tender with the memory of the soft, dark eyes now closed in death; the touch of a hand that lies pulseless and cold; the sound of a loving voice that is hushed forever. Through all his grief—no, not that, for he could not grieve that she was dead; but through all his misery—one thought was uppermost, that, for the sake of his family, for the sake of the dead, all knowledge must be kept from the world of who, in reality, "Charlie St. Claire" was. Mrs. Wycliffe and the old family doctor were the only ones who knew. They must be all. Jealously he guarded his secret. There had never been a moment since the hour of her death that either he or his wife had not been with Agatha. People praised them loudly for their remembrance of the noble dead. "Such single-hearted devotion, such gratitude," they said, "was rarely equaled, never excelled."

"Oh, keen-sighted man! Oh, discerning world!"

Standing by the side of the coffin, on the morning before the burial, Wycliffe felt a soft touch upon his arm. Half startled, he turned around and encountered the sad eyes and grief-stricken countenance of a man who was a stranger to him. Before Wycliffe had time to wonder what brought him to that house of mourning, the man spoke in a half-whisper.

"I have come to see her."

Wycliffe drew back, overwhelmed by this new horror. The man saw his undisguised terror, and spoke again.

"Wycliffe, don't you know me? Is it possible that ten years have changed me so much?"

"Joel Strong!"

"Yes. I thought you would know me. I have come to take farewell of the woman I have seen every day from the day of her birth till the day of her death."

"Through all these years you have been with her?"

"Yes."

"Tell me, then, the meaning of this."

As he spoke, he touched the garments, a man's garments, on the silent figure.

"She put those on because only in male attire could she escape the questions of the world and the pursuit of"—the man hesitated—"Jasper Raymond."

Wycliffe turned away his face. In a moment, though, he said:

"How long since she left—Raymond?"

There was dead silence. At length Strong spoke, and although his voice was very low, the words sounded in Wycliffe's ears like the tones of a trumpet.

"She has never been with Raymond."

Wycliffe caught both the man's hands in his own, clutching them in a grip so vice-like that he could have cried out with pain.

"Strong! Strong! Swear it! Swear before God, in the presence of this dead woman, that you speak the truth."

"As I hope for God's mercy on the day of judgment, I am telling you the truth."

Wycliffe dropped his hands, and turning, walked away. When he came back, he spoke quietly.

"Now, tell me all, for I must know."

"Yes, you must know. I promised her years

ago that if I lived to see her dead, I would clear her memory. There is but little to tell—nothing except that she never saw Raymond until she met him about a year ago here in New York. He begged her to marry him, but she scorned his offer. He then threatened to follow her. She feared and hated him, so she assumed this disguise. The rest—the history of this last year—you know better than I can relate."

Wycliffe's brow was clouded, and a sorrow such as her death did not create was stamped on his face.

"To think, to know," he cried out in despair, "that I cannot proclaim to the whole world her innocence! She will rest forever under that shame."

"Not forever. God is just."

The words sounded like a rebuke to Wycliffe's wild raving, but he heeded them not.

"Aye, God is just. May that man suffer endless torment!"

Strong lifted his head, and gazing full at Wycliffe, repeated slowly and sternly:

"Forgive us our sins as we forgive them that sin against us."

"No, Strong; not yet. The time may come when I can say that, but not now. Looking at that dead face, I can only curse the man who came between us. Strong, why did she leave me?"

"Because she was jealous of the woman you have since made your wife. Raymond told her things which goaded her to madness."

Wycliffe was dumb with astonishment. Slowly he comprehended the truth.

"Jealous of a woman I had no second thought for! True, she is my loved and honored wife now; but then—then I never thought of the possibility of loving her."

Strong pointed to the black-robed figure, so beautiful in its last sleep.

"Yet she died believing to the last that you had always loved the other woman."

Wycliffe groaned aloud in intolerable agony.

"And her last words were a prayer for forgiveness!—a prayer I refused to answer! Oh, Agatha, my poor wronged wife—"

He hushed in terror. He suddenly remembered that another woman wore that name now. He looked up guiltily to hear what Strong would say in reproof, but Strong was gone and he was alone with his sorrow. No, not alone; for a servant entered wearing a badge of mourning, and went softly to Wycliffe, and with a half-frightened glance toward the black object in the center of the room, said, with bated breath:

"A man, a footman in livery, is in the hall. He has a letter for you, which he says he was told to give into no other hands."

Wycliffe silently went into the hall, without a word took the letter from the man's hands, and returned to his post of duty. For a long time he held the letter in his fingers without a thought or care for the writer, till it fell from his nerveless grasp and roused him. Picking it up, he glanced at the address. Something in the bold, strong lines seemed strangely familiar, and with a foreboding of evil he tore it open. It was dated an hour previous, and as he read, the words seemed burning themselves into his brain in letters of fire.

Lionel Wycliffe—Sir:—It is not because I take pleasure in writing to you, nor because you will experience pleasure in hearing from me, that I send you this letter. Nor do I ask or desire your forgiveness, for before your hand breaks this seal, I shall be where your love or hatred will be of no avail. It is simply an act of justice to the memory of the purest of women—one who has played such an important part in both our lives; the woman you loved for a day; the woman for whose love I staked all—and lost. How well I loved her, you could never understand. It was the cause of every sin I have ever committed. I commenced by breaking the commandment, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife," and I have gone through the whole catalogue of sin, till I shall stand to-night, before the bar of the great Judge, to answer "guilty" to the charge of self-destruction. Ten years ago I made your wife believe that you were false to her, and by every art that Satan could devise I endeavored to persuade her that you had never cared for her. Circumstantial evidence is strong sometimes. It was strong enough to convict you before her. She at length promised to meet me in England, and something that is called fate came between us. I have followed her through life; I shall follow into death. Standing on the brink of Eternity, I say that if my life was to live over again, and I should meet her, as I met her before, another man's wife, I would not change my course the breadth of a hair. My story is finished. That it may bring you as much relief to read it as it brings me humiliation to write it, is all that I can pray. JASPER RAYMOND.

Dead! Both dead! Gone to meet Him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." As

Wycliffe read the letter, all the old spirit of bitterness and anger died out of his heart and a great pity filled his soul. Once—many years ago—he had almost prayed for this man's death. He had cursed him in his agony and desolation, and now— He turned and saw Joel Strong standing with arms folded and his head upon his breast beside the open casket which held the dead. Going to him, Wycliffe put the letter in his hand.

"Read it. And may God forgive us our sins as we forgive them that sin against us."

The morning after Mr. Wycliffe received the letter from Raymond, the papers were filled with a long account of a "fatal accident." They told in heart-rending phrases of the tragic death of "Mr. Jasper Raymond, a gentleman widely known and universally respected; of high social position and great wealth. He had called at the house of a friend, and was engaged with him in a game of billiards, when he spoke of a pistol that he had recently purchased, and drew the beautiful but dangerous toy from his pocket to exhibit to his friend, when in some inexplicable manner it became entangled in his sleeve and was discharged. The ball passed straight through the heart of the

unfortunate man, who fell to the floor and expired without a word." The papers further stated that his friends who witnessed the awful catastrophe were plunged in the deepest grief at his deplorable fate, and that everyone remarked the strange fate which had overtaken two men, who but a few hours before had rejoiced in the pride of their strength and the vigor of their manhood, and borne them hence to their final reward.

Many persons liked Raymond and missed him, but not a genuine mourner followed him to his last resting-place; not a tear was shed over the grave, which in a few years was neglected and forgotten.

St. Claire's death left a void in the heart of more than one that was never filled. Over the spot where he was laid to sleep until God, more merciful than man, should call him forth to judgment, was raised a pure white shaft bearing these words:

"Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for a friend."

[THE END.]

THE FLU TIDE DANCE.—The idea to be conveyed is that of a tide gradually rising on a reef, till at length there remains only a little coral isle, round which the angry breakers rage, flinging their white foam on every side. At first the dancers form in long lines and approach silently, to represent the quiet advance of the waves. After a while the lines break up in smaller companies, which advance with outspread hands and bodies bent forward to represent rippling wavelets, the tiniest waves being represented by children. Quicker and quicker they come on, advancing, now retreating, yet, like true waves, steadily progressing and gradually closing on every side of the imaginary islet round which they play or battle after the manner of breakers, springing high in mid-air and flinging their arms above their heads to represent the action of spray. As they leap and toss their heads the soft white *maui* or native cloth, which for greater effect they wear as turbans with long streamers, and also wear round the waist, whence it floats in long scarf-like ends, trembles and flutters in the breeze. The whole effect is most artistic, and the orchestra do their part by imitating the roar of the surf on the reef, a sound which to them has been a never-ceasing lullaby from the hour of their birth.

BACK FROM A VACATION.—"Hello! Is that you?"

"Yes."

"Been away?"

"Yes."

"Been off on a vacation?"

"Yes."

"Feel better?"

"No."

"Gain any flesh?"

"No."

"Tent out?"

"No."

"Go fishing?"

"No."

"Did you sail or row?"

"No."

"Nice at the hotel?"

"No."

"Go in swimming?"

"No."

"What did you do?"

"Nothing."

"What did you go for?"

"I dunno."—Free Press.

The New York Tribune takes half a column in which to describe the bathing dresses worn by little girls at Long Branch. The bathing dresses worn by little boys in Oregon are not so complicated. They consist mainly of a sunburnt back, a pair of untanned buckskin drawers worn from infancy and a stone bruise on each heel.

Smith, who went into amateur farming this year, says he planted his bean poles two months ago and has watered them regularly, and for all that they haven't grown an inch, and show not the faintest sign of blossoming yet. He begins to fear that they will bear no beans this year.—Boston Transcript.

When any office-hunter puts himself into the hands of his friends, and his friends don't set him down before a wood pile and a saw-buck, they are not doing their duty—not by a long shot.

Old proverb: "The darkey's hour is just before the dawn," remarked Sambo when he started out before daybreak to steal a young chicken for breakfast.—New Orleans Times.

It takes 800 full-blown roses to make a table-spoonful of perfume, while ten cents' worth of cooked onions will scent a whole neighborhood.

Ruth, although of a retiring disposition, succeeded as a gleaner in getting as good a Boaz any of them.

Mothers! Mothers!! Mothers!!!

Are you disturbed at night and broken of your rest by a sick child suffering and crying with the excruciating pain of cutting teeth? If so, go at once and get a bottle of MRS. WINSLOW'S SOOTHING SYRUP. It will relieve the poor little sufferer immediately—depend upon it; there is no mistake about it. There is not a mother on earth who has ever used it who will not tell you at once that it will regulate the bowels, and give rest to the mother and relief and health to the child, operating like magic. It is perfectly safe to use in all cases, and pleasant to the taste, and is the prescription of one of the oldest and best women physicians and nurses in the United States. Sold everywhere. Twenty-five cents a bottle.

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