

REAPING THE WHIRLWIND

BY CHRISTINE FABER

CHAPTER XXIV—CONTINUED

"So that's what you were after?" he said, in a hurry to release the fallen old man; "reckon you'll get enough of the pomegranates before you ever get the chance to steal another. Oh, Maida, to the dog who slowly took his fangs out of Burchill's clothing."

Burchill seemed scarcely able to stand. He was not hurt, except his badly cut hand, for the dog's teeth had not penetrated to his flesh, but the shock had in some measure paralyzed him. When he recovered his voice, it was to beg for his release in piteous terms. But the gardener was a man too much after Robinson's own heart to be touched by any appeal that spoke alone to his feelings. Further, the theft was aggravated by the injury to the greenhouse; then his duty to his employer demanded the instant arrest of this aged thief. So to the house, despite every trembling protestation and entreaty, the poor old man was led, and Mr. Robinson left his gay company to repair to his study for a moment and receive the complaint of the gardener. The gardener did not deem it necessary to tell Burchill's pitiful tale of a sick granddaughter, nor did Robinson care either to see the culprit or to learn his name. He was indignant at the theft of his fruit, and simply ordered that such steps be taken as must insure to poor Burchill the full visitation of the law. Instead, therefore of returning to Mildred, the old man was committed to the lockup. The Hogans grew uneasy at his absence, and Dick that night scoured the village before he obtained correct tidings of him.

"Robinson again," he said through his teeth, when he heard at last, and he drew his hat over his face lest the man who had given him the information might see the ferocious scowl which overspread his features; but later when he told his wife and she wrung her hands in grief for the Burchills, tears stood in his own eyes, for his heart with all its surging passions of hatred and revenge, was tender as that of a woman.

"We must keep it from her," said Mrs. Hogan, motioning to the room in which Mildred lay, now being watched by one of the neighbors; they did keep it from her, telling her when in her intervals of consciousness she asked for her grandfather, that he was resting, or not walking, and he hardly recognized the feeble emaciated form. He strove to cheer him, but even the strong man broke down before the touching grief of the poor old creature. Catching Hogan's hands, while the tears coursed down his shriveled cheeks, he said in a low voice so cracked that the tremor which accompanied it made it the more pitiful:

"If they never taken me from Milly, I was never away from her since she was born."

But they continued to keep him from Milly, to keep him for his trial, which in those days followed quicker upon arrest than it sometimes does now; and when he was led into the little court-room murmurs of compassion broke from more than one spectator. The gardener was there to press the complaint in the absence of his master, who had gone to Boston the day before, and the charge, with all its grim array of aggravated facts, was presented to the court.

"But it was for Milly," spoke up the poor old culprit, who, quite ignorant of court proprieties, thought it allowable to press his own plea when he would. "Milly was sick," he continued, "and I stole it for her." He was stopped then, but his own emotion would scarcely have suffered him to proceed. Even into the hard, unfeeling faces about him came an expression which showed how his plea had touched hearts that were rarely won by tender appeals, and the court with great leniency sentenced him lightly. He was to spend three days in prison.

"Three days," he repeated, looking about him with a dazed air, "three days more from Milly. Oh, gentlemen, I couldn't stand that."

But they hurried him away, and Hogan who had left his work to be present at the trial, dashed his sleeve across his eyes as he hurried out. On that very night Mrs. Hogan was obliged to tell Mildred the truth about her grandfather. She snuggled in the bed with seemingly supernatural strength when she heard it.

"Don't, dear," said Mrs. Hogan, trying to keep back her tears; "don't be trying your strength that way. Sure it will only be three days now until he's home to us, and Dick will try to see him between whiles."

But Mildred made no reply. She only continued to sit up in the bed until her exhausted strength compelled her to recline, and when Mrs. Hogan, frightened at the very silence of the young girl, and the evidently stern determination which would recover strength, remonstrated with her, she only shook her head and sighed heavily. That strange determination bore her through. She left her bed the next day, and on the second day, accompanied by Mrs. Hogan, she went to the old man's prison. She was admitted without much question, and there was a strange sympathetic look on the face of the man who conducted them to the little bare room in which Burchill was confined. He opened the

door, and they went in Mildred first. A woman was there, kneeling above some one who seemed to be extended on the floor,—a woman who turned on their entrance and looked up. She had flowers in her hands, and flowers were beside her, as if she had been engaged in an arrangement of them about that which lay beneath her, and then Mildred saw, through a blinding mist of her own overcharged feelings, her grandfather stretched on a low pallet and above him Barbara Balk.

With one cry she was beside him, his dear old head in her arms, and her lips to his, but there was no response to her cry, and the lips she pressed were marble cold. Her grandfather was dead and the flowers were strewn about him.

CHAPTER XXV

Every day Mrs. Hogan sent or journeyed herself to the factory, to learn if Thurston had returned, the rumor among the factory hands being that he was expected daily. It was not for herself, poor warm-hearted creature, that she was anxious, but for Mildred. Overcome by the shock of her grandfather's death, and prostrated by the reaction which set in after so violent a use of her suddenly acquired strength, she was obliged to take to her bed again. She became wildly delirious, and the fever that she had been fighting for days, returned with increased force. She knew no one, but her ravings were constantly of her grandfather, and while she called so piteously for him his interment took place from the home of the Hogans. While he lay "waiting," Mrs. Hogan was astonished to receive a call from Miss Balk. Refusing to pass the threshold, she placed a little packet in Mrs. Hogan's hands, with the request that its contents might be used for the old man's burial; then she stalked grimly away. On opening the little parcel money enough was found to defray amply all expenses. The woman looked at her husband.

"What does it mean?" she said. "But I think I understand it. She was with him when he died. The man in the jail told me how she came there that morning, and after staying with him an hour, was back in the afternoon in time to see him die. Well, God bless her! Quiser as people say she is, she has some soft spot in her heart—an opinion in which her husband fully concurred."

Thurston returned at last. He was at his old place in the office of the factory, and in answer to Mrs. Hogan's message desired her to be shown to his presence at once. He evidently expected some doleful account of her husband, but how was she startled to find that it concerned Miss Burchill. And such a tale so full of grief and want; for the good woman concealed nothing that she knew of the poverty and sufferings of Mildred.

"Good God!" exclaimed Gerald, his face settling into that expression of sympathy which in a man gives evidence of rarely tender feelings.

"I was longing to tell you, Mr. Thurston," she resumed, "for it seems so hard to have the poor young creature wasting the way she is. She's just able to sit up now, but she eats nothing and she droops so that it would go to anybody's heart. She needs better care and nursing than I am able to give her, and I thought that by seeing you, you might think of some way to help her."

Gerald did not answer for a moment; he seemed to be in deep thought. When he did speak, his voice had the troubled tone of one who is unhappily disturbed:

"Do what you can for her, Mrs. Hogan, and do not fear to call upon me for any money you may need, drawing his wallet from his pocket as he spoke, and taking from it a considerable amount. Then he continued, "I shall see today what further can be done."

"God bless you, Mr. Thurston! Sure the poor had always a friend in you," and she went away with her eyes and her heart full.

That evening found Gerald recounting to Robinson, with some bitterness, the sad story he had heard.

"The poor old man's theft might have been excused," he said. "It was brutal to make it a jail offense in his case."

Robinson's small, greenish eyes had dimmed, and even his large, ill-shaped mouth partially opened in his surprise, so that his yellow, tusk-like teeth were somewhat revealed.

"It's the first I heard of its being Miss Burchill's grandfather," he answered; "and anyhow, I didn't know nuthin' about the case until the gardener told me of the greenhouse bin smashed in; that made me pooty mad arter all the privileges I gives the public on the grounds. Besides, Miss Burchill needn't have wanted for something to do if she'd come to me, as I told her mother a good spell ago. But an idea has just popped into my head. There's my niece, Cora, pining for the same woman folk to live with her, and studying all the books she brought with her from Boston. Why couldn't Miss Burchill come here and teach her? She could live here; the house is so big that a part of it could be set aside just for her and Cora. She needn't see anybody else, even at meals, if she's squeamish about meeting us men folks. What do you say to that, Gerald?"

Gerald seized upon the idea also; it would be a complete change, not alone of scene but of life, for Miss Burchill, and affording the seclusion that Mr. Robinson offered, he felt that there was nothing in the proposition which could be repulsive to Mildred.

So on the instant, he wrote to Mildred, prefacing his note by a few most delicately couched expressions of sympathy for her recent bereavement, and then in a very simple manner he stated Mr. Robinson's proposition, after which the note continued:

"Your charge of this little girl would be, I think, from my brief observation of her, a higher work than that of the mere teacher. She is an orphan, and from her face has a disposition for great good. Mr. Robinson will give her quite up to your care, and in the moral training of little motherless Cora Horton, you may find, dear Miss Burchill, something to alleviate your own heavy sorrows and to compensate you for the charge you are asked to assume. It is Mr. Robinson's wish that you should take all the time you may deem necessary to come to a decision, immediately after which we shall expect to hear from you.

Yours sincerely,
"GERALD THURSTON."

Mildred was in Mrs. Hogan's little sitting-room trying to make some child's garment, when that letter came. The work had fallen from her weak fingers, and she had been obliged to recline frequently; but when the kind woman remonstrated with her, and faint would have removed the work, she said with such a touching smile:

"Please let me do it. I won't think quite so much while I'm trying to be busy."

She read the letter with a suffocating emotion of surprise until she came to the little girl's name; then it fell from her hand, and she exclaimed to herself, while her eyes filled:

"Oh, if it would be, and that it became my task to teach her! Oh, mother! perhaps your prayers in heaven are bringing this about."

She resumed the letter, a vivid flush dyeing her face as she felt more and more the delicacy and true kindness which inspired the writer. She read it for Mrs. Hogan, exclaiming when she had concluded:

"How did he know so much about me?"

The woman's guilty-looking countenance betrayed her.

"You have told him," she exclaimed, reproachfully.

"Don't blame me, dear, I couldn't help it; and see what it's brought about,—a nice pretty home for you, such as you ought to have; you will go, of course, Miss Burchill, as soon as you're strong enough."

Miss Burchill's own heart inclined her to the proposition for more than one reason, and the next day Mr. Thurston had an answer of acceptance in simple terms her deep sense of gratitude.

Having the prospect of this new life before her she seemed to recover more rapidly, and in a week she was able to leave the house. But her first journey was not to Mr. Robinson's; it turned in the direction of Mrs. Phillips' dwelling. With a wildly beating heart she lifted the knocker, and to her request to see Miss Balk, she was shown into one of the little rooms that opened from the hall. Though neatly and nicely furnished, it was evidently not the parlor, for the open room across the hall, and of which Mildred had a full view from where she sat, was much more elegantly furnished. While she waited she heard a rustling sound as if some one were entering the parlor from another direction; in a moment Mrs. Phillips, resplendent in heavy black silk appeared. Seeing Mildred, she came hastily forward.

"You are Miss Burchill?" she said quickly.

Mildred bowed.

"And you wish to see me?" she asked, her voice trembling in her eagerness.

"No, Miss Balk."

"Miss Balk!" repeated Helen, betrayed by her surprise into an exclamation and look of singular astonishment.

At that moment Barbara was coming through the hall, and Mrs. Phillips hastily retired, not, however, without encountering Barbara. Each passed the other with a look of contempt. Mildred arose:

"I came, Miss Balk, to thank you in person for your kindness to my poor grandfather. I have been told that you were with him when he died," her voice began to tremble,—

"and Mrs. Hogan has told me of your generous gift after his death." Her tears, now uncontrollable, suffused her eyes.

"It wasn't necessary for you to come and thank me," answered Barbara, in the same slow, cold tones she always used.

"I want to see the old man when I heard he was in prison, because he once tried in his own way to be kind to me. I have a wonderful memory, Miss Burchill," there was a peculiar significance in her last words,—a memory for good turns and a memory for bad turns; I never forget either."

"Will you tell me how he died?" Mildred ventured to ask,—whether he died realizing all his sad surroundings, or—

She was obliged to stop because of the sob which came into her throat.

There was a slight softening of the unfeminine tones, and a slight, very slight, tremor about the rigid mouth, as Barbara answered:

"He died easy enough; a little raving, I take it; but, for the rest, he wanted you."

Miss Burchill sobbed outright, and Miss Balk waited. The former recovered herself and said, while the tears glistened on her eyes and cheeks:

"I also, Miss Balk, never forget a kindness. Your charity, soothing as it did the last hours of a poor, friendless, imprisoned old man, has won my lasting gratitude. If, during your stay at my mother's house, there was anything on my part to cause you annoyance or displeasure, I beg your pardon for it. I am going to a new home to-morrow to enter upon new duties, and I felt that God would bless me more if I came first and discharged this debt of obligation to you."

A moisture seemed to come into Miss Balk's eyes, but it was tears she disappeared too rapidly to allow one to be certain, and, instead of replying to Miss Burchill's speech, she asked:

"Where are you going?"

"To Mr. Robinson's to teach his niece."

A most peculiar expression broke over Barbara's countenance, one in which wonder and triumph mingled.

"To Mr. Robinson's?" she repeated, in her usual tones. "Well, Miss Burchill, you needn't charge yourself with any gratitude to me. And now, good day."

She did not extend her hand in any adieu, and she left Miss Burchill to find her own way out. What Mildred's sensations were as she made her exit, unattended by even the servant to the door, she was hardly able herself to describe. Certainly her regard for Miss Balk was not increased, but she kept repeating to herself:

"She was kind in his last hours to poor, old, lonely grandfather."

Barbara sought Mrs. Phillips:

"Did you know that Mr. Robinson had hired a governess for his niece?"

"No; has he?" in a tone of quiet indifference.

But her next remark was not so indifferently spoken when Barbara said:

"Did Miss Burchill give you this information?"

"Yes; she came to secure my good will before entering upon her new duties; perhaps to ask my blessing; if I'd given her any encouragement; no danger of her getting your blessing, is there, Helen?"

And Miss Balk laughed her old, hard, malicious laugh, while Helen only looked; but it was a look which told how all the worst passions in her nature were roused, and a look that turned to a glare as Barbara resumed:

"Pleasant prospect for your plans, Helen; the pretty, modest, and no doubt truthful,—with a significant emphasis on the last word—Mildred Burchill under the same roof with Gerald Thurston. Of what avail will be your wiles when he has her before him?" And again Barbara laughed.

"I could kill you or kill myself!" shrieked Helen, her face wearing an expression that not alone robbed it of all its loveliness, but lent to it a horrible expression.

"I have no doubt of it," replied Barbara, with provoking calmness. "But I would advise you to step out of the world yourself; for, in the event of my going, there are documents to make certain exposures. Indeed, I don't know but it might be well, since you have so frankly expressed your murderous desire, to confide in Miss Burchill, she seems to be so amiable and so grateful." And without waiting for the burst of passion which threatened in Mrs. Phillips' eyes, she left the room.

TO BE CONTINUED

A CHANCE ACQUAINTANCE

The third day's ride was almost over, and at eight o'clock the following morning the long journey from Chicago to San Francisco would be ended. The twenty passengers who had lived together for many hours, exchanging pleasant greetings, and in some cases becoming very friendly would some separate, to meet no more.

As the sun set and twilight fell, Father Borice was thinking this,—thinking it regretfully; for among the passengers there was a young man who from the hour that the train pulled out of the Chicago station, had been the centre of every group, the life of every game, and on intimate terms with every one else in the car. Father Borice had shyly spoken to him only once or twice; but had heard him say that his name was Frank Seymour, and that he was twenty-five years old, and a Catholic; this was all that he learned. But, having watched him as he talked to the other passengers and passed, nearly always humming or singing, up and down the aisle, he was longing to learn more, because he had grown almost fond of him.

As darkness closed in upon the last day of the journey, Mr. Seymour was riding backward, that he might talk with a pretty woman and her prettier daughter; and while the three fastively watched the young man's face and tried to overhear his merry talk, all the while amazed at himself for feeling sore at heart because it was for the last time. Soon Mr. Seymour rose, intending to go back to his own section. He took a few steps down the aisle, turned back for another word with his friends, and was passing Father Borice's seat when the car lurched

sharply as it turned a curve, throwing him to one side and making him strike Father Borice with his elbow.

Mr. Seymour began to apologize; but Father Borice laughed good-naturedly, saying that he was not hurt. Mr. Seymour then laughed with him; and in a moment everyone in the car was laughing, too. As the gale of merriment subsided, Father Borice, the shyest of men when he was with strangers, somehow found courage to say:

"Won't you—won't you sit down here for a few minutes?"

"I'd be delighted to, Father," Mr. Seymour replied, evidently pleased at being asked. "I have often wondered if I might talk to you. You were always reading or saying your Office or looking out the window, and I thought you wouldn't want to be bothered with a young fellow like me. I've been particularly anxious to know you, because the conductor told me that you had been in China and are going back."

Father Borice's face beamed.

"You are interested in China," he exclaimed. He had long before learned that few people are.

"Interested in it? I love it? My father was one of the Standard Oil Company's agents in China, and I spent three years there when I was a boy, and two years just after I left Fordham; and now I'm going back on business—business, with a fine time thrown in."

"I can well believe that you will have a good time," Father Borice agreed, telling his approbation of the young fellow's light-heartedness.

Mr. Seymour laughed; and after some further conversation asked eagerly:

"Are you, too, going to sail to-morrow on the 'San Juan'?" Plainly he hoped that they were to be fellow-passengers for the long journey to the Orient.

"No, not on the 'San Juan,'" Father Borice replied. "My old mother lives in San Francisco, and I am to spend two weeks with her. I do not expect to sail before the twenty-seventh, and even then shall not go directly to China. I am to stop in the Philippines. I have business with the Archbishop of Manila. It will be late in July when I reach Peking, and August before I get back to my mission."

"Do tell me about your mission?" Father and I used to hear Mass from time to time in little, out-of-the-way mission chapels. I never could help laughing at the funny singing and the boy's queer surplises; but all the people seemed to be very much in earnest; and the priests—oh, everyone knows that you missionaries are all saints!"

Father Borice laughed heartily.

"I know one missionary who is not," he contradicted; and added, after a moment's silence: "You don't realize what you are doing when you ask me about my mission. When I begin to talk about it I never, never stop. I am in charge of a district, many miles west of Peking. Most of my villages are small and all are poor; but my people—there's no doubt they're the best in the world; so devoted and so docile, so grateful for—nothing at all!"

"How long have you been away from your mission?" Mr. Seymour asked when Father Borice paused.

"For three months. I came to the United States on business for my Bishop. It might have been arranged almost as satisfactory by letter; but, although I had not worked very hard, he imagined that I needed rest and a change, and he knew that my feeble old mother lives in San Francisco; so—here I am!" He laughed again, suddenly and without apparent cause; then hastened to explain: "I believed that Americans are made of money; that they have so much they don't know what to do with it. We all think so in the East. I planned to take home with me enough dollars to improve my church and to build a school, and to pay a catechist for some years to come. I have two catechists now, but they are not stationed in Nam Po, my own village. When I can afford another, he is, to help me at home."

"So you live alone?" Mr. Seymour explained. To him it seemed unaccountably dreary to be the only white man in a small inland village, poorly housed and of course ill fed.

"Live alone," Father Borice echoed. "Oh, no! I have my people. If I am ever lonely it's my own fault."

Mr. Seymour stared out the window, and Father Borice scanned his face, which was far more serious than he had yet seen it.

"And you didn't get money enough to build your school—and to do the other things?" Mr. Seymour said, after a time.

"No." And Father Borice laughed again. "I got a hundred dollars in all. I say I'm a poor beggar—in more senses than one. I have no money and no chapel (they're rotting away for need of paint) or to lay the foundation of my school, or to engage a catechist for a few months, and trust to Providence that he'll work for love and live on air after the hundred dollars are gone. All three things are essential, so what am I going to do?"

And in his care-free way he laughed again; then went on to tell Mr. Seymour of the goodness of his people, and of the happiness of his life—a life of incessant hard work, hardship, endless privation, and nothing else, so far as Mr. Seymour could see. He humorously described his improvised school,—a field opposite his church, in which he gathered the children when the weather was

good, and his own house into which they crowded by relays whenever it was cold or rainy. "I'll be at home by the middle of August,—away only two months longer," he concluded longingly.

"The middle of August! Before that I shall have finished my work in Peking and be on my way to Hongkong. I'm going to have a fine time. They're giving me a splendid salary, and they're generous about expense money, so I'll live in style. And the work isn't going to be exacting. I can arrange it as I like, and go everywhere, and see everything; and it will be delightful. I can talk Chinese a little, so I'm a treasure to the Company. That's why I'm treated like Mr. Standard Oil's own son and heir. Have you ever been to Hongkong?"

"No; it doesn't lay in my way," Father Borice laughed.

"To Canton?"

"Nor there either."

"That's too bad! Both are most interesting, and the country places are horrid. How much time have you spent in China?"

"Ten years, but I've seen only Peking and my own villages."

"Only Peking, and that unattractive, dull part of the country! It's too bad!" Mr. Seymour sympathized; and, very happy over his own prospects, he added rapturously:

"If I succeed, I think the Company will make me its agent for all China; then I'll take a house in Peking or Hongkong. There are always Americans and Europeans living in both places,—in the legations, and so on; finer intelligent men, with friendly wives and lovely children. And the dinners those fellows give! China is certainly the place for delicious fruit and fine fish and heaven-sent cooks."

For a few moments there was silence between them. Holy priest though he was, Father Borice was human and he was comparatively young, and the contrast between the life to which he was returning and the prospects that Mr. Seymour so enthusiastically described was great indeed.

"You will be sure to have a pleasant life of it," he said lamely, realizing at last that the silence had grown long. "And you are to sail to-morrow?"

"Tomorrow, on the 'San Juan.'" Mr. Seymour replied very quietly.

His mood had changed as swiftly and completely as Father Borice's; and, after a few rather lifeless remarks, he suddenly hurried back to his place; and, except when he came to say goodnight, Father Borice saw no more of him.

It was quite two months later that Father Borice reached Peking, to spend a few days there with his Bishop. Very unsatisfactory days they were. Somehow, his lot had seemed hard and uninteresting ever since his conversation with Mr. Seymour; and it had been with a heavy heart and a grim determination not to "give up the ship" that he had sailed from San Francisco, and with a heavier heart that he had set foot on Chinese soil. All would be well he believed, after he had a good talk with the Bishop. But he found his Lordship very busy, not very well, and apparently without special interest in the problems of Father Borice's corner of the vineyard. When he broached the subject of a school, the Bishop laughed a little, and protested that he had not a cent to spare; and as to a catechist, he explained that it was impossible for him to contribute anything toward the support of one for Nam Po. When he heard of the hundred dollars, most laboriously collected, he chuckled and said (hard-heartedly, Father Borice thought) that the money would provide some picnics for the children.

Although he was not inclined to imagine himself slighted, Father Borice was feeling hurt, as well as discouraged and disgruntled, when he began his long, wearisome journey inland. He traveled for two days in a dirty, slow-moving boat, and in a cart for two days more. As the hours wore away he tried to think of his prayers and his Office and of the lovely country through which he passed,—all to no purpose. Again and again there came before his mind's eye a picture of his hut, dusty and musty after being long unoccupied. He could not rid himself of a realization of the havoc, temporal—and spiritual, which his six months' absence was certain to have wrought among his flock; and it was with something like aversion that he thought of his simple, honest but hard-headed people, and pictured to himself the expression of their stolid faces when they saw his cart come into the village. They would be neither glad nor sorry to see him, who had thought of them every hour on land and sea.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when the driver, turning a sharp curve in a valley adjacent to his own, met an over-joyed Father Borice's choir boys, who instead of returning his hearty greeting, scampered homeward as fast as he could. Father Borice sighed, and then he sighed again.

A quarter of an hour later the cart rattled into the wooded valley of Tung Wang, in whose centre Nam Po struggled beside a muddy stream. Father Borice never had a clear idea of what happened or of what he said and did during the minutes that followed. He knew, however, that the village head was stationed near the first cabin, and began to play unearthly music as soon as he was seen; that the streets wore gay with flowers and green boughs and grotesque decorations; that children lined the way; and cheered and sung as the old cart lumbered by; that every shop was closed and the fields

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