

REAPING THE WHIRLWIND

BY CHRISTINE FAHER

CHAPTER XLIII

Mr. Robinson was in a most cordial spirit. The satisfactory progression of affairs in and about The Castle con-

Went, then, were his emotions of surprise and delight when Rodney's name was announced! He supposed that gentleman bore some message from Gerald; perhaps even to the effect that Gerald would yet visit The Castle in time for the wedding; and of all the inconsistent and self-contradictory wishes of the Castle owner, there was none which he had not secretly entertained, that of having Thurston present at his marriage was foremost. Consequently, his greeting of the lawyer was so unpretentious that the latter was momentarily dumbfounded. He recovered himself, however, and returned the welcome in his own quick, gracious way, at the same time resisting all Robinson's efforts to make him join the guests at dinner.

"Why, what's the matter?" he said a little testily, when he found his good nature so persistently repulsed. "You've come to stay a spell, haven't you, and to give me word about Gerald?"

"I have come upon the strangest piece of business in which it has ever been my lot to engage."

And then he stopped short, and steadied his twinkling eyes sufficiently to look very significantly into the factory owner's gleaming eyes. Robinson began to feel slightly uncomfortable. His glow of good nature subsided, and the hard look returned to his face, and the grim coldness to his manner, as he asked: "What is it?"

"Take a chair then, Mr. Robinson; the story is a little lengthy, and it may try you somewhat before it is quite told."

He seated himself as he spoke. Robinson sat down as he was requested to do, not only on the edge of the chair, and in such a bolt upright position that he looked as if he anticipated some bodily harm, and was prepared to start up in instant defence of himself.

"Twenty years ago," began Rodney, in his rapid way, and accompanying his words by twinkling glances that seemed to go in several directions at once, "a young man came to this country from England. By intelligence, fact, and ability he became, after the lapse of a few years, the confidential head clerk of a prosperous banking firm. To him was intrusted not alone all the important charges but the partners themselves often came to him for information and counsel. One partner, more than the others, made a trusted adviser of the young clerk, and in his kindness frequently insisted upon helping him to keep the books. In this way they became very fast friends."

"One morning the clerk went to the bank. The hour was an early one for bank officers, but early hours in business was a habit with this young man. He opened his private office as usual, and turned to the safe in which the books were kept. That he also opened. The books were as he had left them, but a roll of checks dropped out. He took them up somewhat puzzled, knowing that he had not recently placed any checks in the safe. They were checks drawn upon the firm for various sums of money, and signed and indorsed with his own name. He stared aghast. His pen had never touched such checks, yet the handwriting was an exact imitation of his own. More and more bewildered, he drew forth the books. Once opened, they gave every evidence of having been handled since he had put them away. Leaves were crumpled, turned down at the corners and in several instances wholly torn out. Now convinced that gross mischief had been done, he turned to the safe where the money was kept. That was untouched. Gold, silver, and notes lay in the same careful piles in which he had last placed them."

"He turned in a bewildered way to the large office table, which stood in a shaded part of the room, and as he did so his foot came in contact with a soft yielding substance. He looked down and beheld a man's foot protruding from beneath the table. He dashed aside the table, and saw the dead body of the senior partner of the firm, the same gentleman who had called to consult him on a matter of business in that very room just at the conclusion of banking hours on the day before. A white pocket-handkerchief, stained with dried blood, lay on the breast of the dead man; but, too horrified to make any further examination, the young clerk fled to summon others to the scene. The dreadful news circulated quickly, and what was the clerk's amazement and horror to find himself apprehended as the guilty party? Everything told against him. The senior partner was seen to go into the clerk's private office. He had even told another partner, whom he met while on his way to the office, that he was then going to speak to the clerk upon some matter about which he himself was troubled."

"Nobody saw him come out of the private office; in fact nobody saw him at all after that interview with the clerk. An examination of the books revealed changes to large amounts in the clerk's own account with the bank, which fact, in addition to the checks drawn in the clerk's name, seemed to be undoubted proofs of guilt. In some of the books whole

pages were torn out, as if to destroy other proofs of the tampering with the figures. Then, no one possessed any keys to the safe or to the clerk's office, save the clerk himself. But the most damning proof of all was the discovery of the clerk's own name on the handkerchief found upon the body of the dead man."

"To all these proofs the clerk could offer alone his utter ignorance of the checks, and of the condition of the books. The books were quite correct when he left them the evening before, and as to his interview with the senior partner, it had been rather brief, owing to the fact that the latter decided to defer mentioning what troubled him until he should have further proof that his fears were well founded. But even that statement increased the weight of evidence against the accused, for it was confidently supposed that the senior partner had received outside information which reflected upon his trusted clerk, but, owing to his natural goodness of heart he had refrained from taxing him with it just then."

"In relation to the handkerchief, the clerk also innocently told how by the merest accident during that troubled night he happened to lay their handkerchiefs down in close vicinity; each in returning the article to his pocket took not his own but his companion's, which change the clerk discovered only when he reached home."

"The partner who had manifested so much friendship for the young man continued to do so still, and it was owing to his efforts that the young fellow, when he found the fullness of every effort to prove his innocence, effected his escape. But he was recaptured, and on circumstantial evidence, he was convicted and sentenced to a life imprisonment. The affairs of the bank were found to be in a ruinous condition, large sums of money had been mysteriously paid out, and no record of the transaction, owing to the missing leaves of the clerk's books, could be found. So the remaining partners became bankrupt, and the young man who had been so warm a friend of the convicted clerk was obliged to retire to a life of comparative poverty. His family consisted of one daughter and one other relative. From the time of the bank failure his health and spirits declined, and while he retained sufficient of both to give to his daughter all the advantages of education and culture which he himself possessed, he himself was never happy. In fact, the decline in his health seemed owing entirely to the decline in his spirits. When attacked by his last illness he called to her bedside his relative, and told her the secret which had undermined his health,—the secret which I shall now tell you."

"Thus far the factory owner had not made a motion; indeed, he scarcely seemed to wink as his eyes continued to fasten themselves on Rodney's face. Nor did he now move; his attention and interest were so intense that he hardly seemed to breathe. "This lawyer disinterested partner," the lawyer resumed, "had ingratiated himself with the clerk, and had so kindly insisted on keeping certain of the books, regardless of the time and labor which it cost him, only that he might have opportunities of himself robbing the bank. He had been tempted into speculations which failed, and to save his child from poverty he drew sums which were not his and falsified the accounts in the book. He could not tamper with books, but he watched for and found an opportunity of taking impressions from the office and safe keys. From these impressions his own set of keys were made, and he was in the habit of secreting himself in the bank until late at night hours, when, having access to the books, he could do what he would with those of which he had charge; and he contrived to have charge of such as recorded his own accounts with the bank. The clerk never thought of questioning or examining in any way the books which the partner kept; and so things went on until that eventful night. But the senior partner had accidentally heard something which aroused in his own mind a secret suspicion of his colleague in the firm. Being a man of the old fashioned goodness, more disposed to accuse a delinquent in his face than to inquire into his misdoings behind his back, he at once secretly spoke to his partner. The partner appeared to explain everything, but he could see that the doubt of his integrity which had been raised was not quite dispelled, and he determined to stay that very night in the bank and destroy all proofs of his guilt, making it appear as if a burglar had been committed."

"Meanwhile, the senior partner had sought an interview with the clerk, possibly to mention to him in confidence what troubled him, and perhaps, to inspect the books where-in were kept his partner's accounts. He did not do either, however, possibly owing to his hesitation to believe in his doubt, and he left the clerk, not to go home according to his wont, but to retire to his own room in the bank to cogitate still further on what yet continued to trouble him. The clerk, however, shortly after went home, and the partner, beyond trying to alter the books, and assuming that he was alone in the bank, hastily repaired to the clerk's private office. In his haste and entire confidence that he was quite alone he did not even lock the door of the office, but proceeded to rummaging a leaf, then turning down pages, and, where his own accounts and those of another partner's stood, tearing out whole

leaves. In his shrewdness divining that, if his accounts alone were torn out, suspicion of some sort must rest upon him. In the midst of his labor there was a light knock at the door, before the guilty man could recover from his astonishment the door opened, and the senior partner entered. The senior partner's solitary cogitations had taken such a strong and obstinate form that he determined to submit them to his confidential clerk, and knowing that the clerk sometimes remained in the bank until long after hours, he returned to the private office with the hope of finding him. His astonishment at seeing the suspected partner in his place was so great that he was speechless for a moment, while his eyes rapidly surveyed the open books, the torn leaves, and the disposed of, convinced him that all he had feared was absolutely true. He was a man of terrible temper when aroused, and he burst forth now in passionate accusation. The guilty partner could offer no defence, and, too proud to invoke any clemency, he bore all in silence until the senior partner turned to sound the alarm for a constable. That the guilty man would not brook, and he sprang on the senior partner. He was much the stronger, not yet as they clinked and fell he had an opportunity of fastening his hand firmly in the neckerchief of the prostrate man; he twisted it tightly, and held it so until the witness of his guilt was no longer able to testify against him. Scarcely realizing that he had committed murder and labouring under an uncontrollable excitement, he had still cunning enough to devise plans for averting all suspicion from himself. A handkerchief lay on the floor; it had been under the man's hand when he entered the room, and had dropped in the encounter. Fearing that it might be his own, and so betray him, he searched for the name; it was that of the clerk. While he held it and while he looked at the body, hesitating whether to leave it as it had fallen, he saw a tiny stream of blood dyeing the side of the forehead, which must have been struck in the fall. He wiped the blood with the handkerchief and threw it on the dead man's breast. That might be one link which would fasten suspicion on another; but then, in order to make it a substantial link, the accounts of the clerk should be shown to be wrong. He sat down again before the books, and with feverish haste altered the figures of the clerk's own accounts with the bank. Still he was not satisfied. Now that he had committed the deed, he feared every precaution must be taken to avert suspicion from himself. He thought of the unsigned checks, and knowing where they were he brought them forth."

"From boyhood he had been able to imitate any penmanship, and, familiar as he was with that of the clerk, it was scarcely an effort to sign and indorse the checks. Cunning had lent him strange courage. He drew the corpse under the table, where it could not be seen readily; he replaced the books, locked up all, and managed to get out of the bank without being seen by even the night watchman. He exerted himself in favor of the convicted clerk only as a balm to his own haunted conscience. That was somewhat appeased by the fact that the poor clerk escaped hanging; but, now that he himself was dying, his dreadful secret was too much for him. He told it all to this relative of his, and then, his guilty soul still tormented, he wrote it out, and had a notary called in as a witness, not to the contents of the paper, but to the fact that the dying man swore he had written those contents. His worm eaten conscience had also compelled him to save the very leaves he had torn out of the books of the banking firm; these also he gave to his relative."

"She, however, was made to swear that she would not use the confession until after the death of the daughter of this dying man, should she be the survivor, unless by its use she could prevent the commission of any further gross wrong. In the case of her death being first, she was to leave the confession in the hands of the daughter."

"A gross wrong was about to be committed, and in order to prevent it the confession had been used. The result will be publicly known in a day or two at most. Do you understand my story, Mr. Robinson? Do you know the characters concerned in it?"

"Robinson made the first motion he had made since the commencement of the tale. He ran forward and said, in a husky whisper: "The clerk is my brother-in-law, Chester Horton."

"And the partner, Mr. Robinson,—who is he?"

"Rodney was also leaning forward, but the factory owner only stared without replying."

"The partner," resumed Rodney, "was Mr. Brewer, the father of Mrs. Phillips."

"I suppose it's no use asking you how you came by this knowledge, and it's no use, either, crying after split milk. I suppose I'll have to give Miss Burchill up. I don't mind telling you that I'll cut me up dreadful, though, for I like her. She's a fine girl, and I meant to make her love me after I got her. You want to see Chester Horton right away, I suppose, or maybe you have already seen him, or written to him and Miss Burchill, too?"

"I have not. Neither of them knows a syllable of what I have told you; but Horton must return with me to New York tomorrow. There are some preliminaries to be attended to which will require his presence," answered Rodney, not a little surprised at the easy manner in which the factory owner had relinquished his expectation of marrying Miss Burchill."

"Then you must stay at the Castle to-night," said Robinson, emphasizing the must and placing, at the same time, his hand familiarly on the lawyer's shoulder. "Come, Rodney," he continued, doing his utmost to make his manner exceedingly warm, "don't think me such a bad, hard fellow as some people do. I know Gerald felt awful cut up about Miss Burchill, and I suppose he's as angry as I am, and I suppose it's all made right now; so just let us be friends, will you? He took his hand from Robinson's shoulder and extended it. The lawyer grasped it, deeming a show of friendliness the best policy under the circumstances. "I'll send Chester and Miss Burchill to you, but I've a small favor to ask of you: will you see that this thing is not told to any one else in the house until to-morrow."

"Certainly," replied Rodney; "there's no hurry in making it known until it is publicly proclaimed."

Robinson left the room, and sending a servant to summon his brother-in-law to Rodney, he went himself in search of Miss Burchill. It was the first time during her residence at The Castle that the factory owner had ever entered the little parlor assigned to her private use, and his presence there now frightened her. Had he come to inquire upon her fulfillment of the marriage contract? But it could not be, for there was a fortnight yet; still she paled and trembled, and, feeling her fright, smiled and purposely refrained from speaking for a moment; then he said, joyfully: "Ain't ready for the marriage yet, be you?"

"Mr. Robinson?" Her very lips were white, and they seemed powerless to frame another word than that frightened utterance of his name.

"Well, don't be skeered. I ain't come to insist on you marryin' me. I've come to tell you that your needn't marry me. Rodney's downstairs with all the proofs of Chester's innocence."

She did not seem to understand him. He repeated what he said, adding a fuller explanation. Her uncle's innocence proved, her own enforced and hated marriage contract with Robinson annulled! She comprehended all at last, and she could not speak from very joy. The color came rapidly back to her cheeks and lips, and her large soft eyes shone with an expression which seemed to light up her whole face, and which made her look to the factory owner prettier than ever. His narrow, callous heart loved her with an intensity that he had never known before, and it impelled him, since he could not have her love in return, to have, at least, not her hatred."

"Mildred," he said, with so strange a softening of his tones that it instantly won her readily aroused sympathy; "let me call you so this once, while I ask you to forgive me for endeavoring to force you to be my wife, and while I ask you now not to hate me, but to feel kind of friendly to me."

the girl in happy tears, she was convinced of the truth of the glad tidings. TO BE CONTINUED

HIS FIRST PENITENT

"What's the matter with John? You look cross to day," Mr. Fanning said to his friend, the laundryman, as he handed a package across the low counter. "The Chinaman grunted. 'No like American ways,' he answered at last, grumpily. John Lee was a very sophisticated Chinaman, raised in America, and it was only when he was put out that he relapsed into Chinese lingo. 'Why not?' his customer inquired in some surprise, knowing John's heretofore loudly expressed devotion to the land of his adoption. 'No treat my children right at school,' was the reply. 'Call 'em heathens—won't play with them.' A touch of feeling showed in the pale, opaque eyes. 'Make me mad,' he said, briefly. 'Where do they go? Oh, the Herdin school. I see. Well, it's rather a mixed crowd.' Mr. Fanning remarked thoughtfully. 'Did you complain to the teacher?' 'She says she can't help it. He shrugs with Oriental resignation. 'No more school, I guess.' 'Oh, but that won't do,' the American argued. 'Of course they must have an education. Why not,' on a sudden thought, 'send them to St. Gregory's Parish school?' John looked interested. 'On the avenue?' he queried. 'Would they take them?' 'Of course, I can't say as to that,' was the hasty reply. 'Perhaps, Fanning reminded himself, he had spoken too quickly. 'But you might go and see. And you would have to pay, you know.'

A single gesture indicated that was a small matter. 'Want my children to be happy, John said consolingly. That was how it happened that John Lee's three children were sent to St. Gregory's School. Their father was well-to-do, and their mother, who had been born in America of Chinese parents, had inherited some money, so the children were always well and daintily clad. To the little Catholic children in whose room the three Celestials made their first appearance they were like so many dolls on a Christmas tree, all the more delighted because they could walk and talk and suffer themselves to be played with far from being ostracized, and gradually the children became accustomed to their continued presence, and they themselves became quite at home in the school. The year that John Lee, Jr., graduated in the eighth grade at St. Gregory's, Mr. Fanning left Plainville, and it was many years before he saw the little town again. In the year of Our Lord 1916, Mr. Fanning, who was travelling for the American Scraper Factory, found himself in France, with business gone to smash and poor prospects ahead, owing to the War, whose first opening hostilities had just shaken the world. Knowing that the company's representative in the Orient had been called home the previous spring, he decided to go to China, assured that there he would pick up considerable left-over business. On a glorious day in October, Mr. Fanning, making his way along one of the busy streets of Hong Kong, flowing with its picturesque cosmopolitan crowd, was feeling curiously lonely and far away from anyone he knew. It was with a pang of real homesickness that he heard two English-speaking people greet each other, and he turned the next corner with the private resolution that it would not be long until good old America should see him again. In the midst of the pleasant glow that came with the thought, he heard his name spoken. It was a Chinaman who spoke, and it was a moment before Mr. Fanning recognized his old acquaintance of Plainville, John Lee, into whose shop he had made many a trip. 'John Lee!' the American exclaimed. 'By all that's cool, who would expect to see you here? and they shook hands cordially. John Lee grunted. 'Chinamen always come home to die,' he stated, joyfully. 'But why are you here so far from America?' 'Business, John, business,' Mr. Fanning said briskly. 'And you don't look much like dying, I must say. Are you here to stay?' 'Yes, to stay.' The Oriental's face sobered. 'You don't know about my son,' he went on. He is a priest, and has come home to be a missionary among his own people. So we—his mother and I—came along and will help him in his work. You know we are Catholics?' 'No, I didn't. You see, I left Plainville so long ago—' 'I know. It was after you went away. After John graduated at St. Gregory, he went to a Catholic College,' the Chinaman related quietly. 'and it was there he became a Catholic. His mother and the two girls followed him into the church.'

"And you?" Mr. Fanning asked, interested. There was a shake of the head. "Took me some time longer." John Lee admitted. "My little China—she died. Then I came to you. My other girl is married now and lives in America. So," the familiar shrug, "the rest of our years—to God."

Mr. Fanning was deeply impressed, and memory too often harshly stilled awoke with a sharp insistent pain. The little story, so briefly and simply told, was, yet, weighted with an earnestness that went straight to his heart. "So little John Lee is a priest," he said at last. "How strange it seems! And how odd that I should meet you," he added, "of all the people right here."

"The Chinaman smiled quietly. 'It was the good God who let me meet you,' he announced calmly. 'That I might thank you. It was because you told me to send my children to St. Gregory's school that all these good things came to me. We pray for you every day.' 'What? Pray for me?' The hot blood rushed over Mr. Fanning's face. 'Why, that's most awfully good of you, John,' he stammered. 'And my son—would you like to see him?' John asked. 'Yes, indeed,' was the quick reply. 'Come, then,' the Chinaman said. 'Today he is here. To-morrow we leave for his distant mission in Kwangtung.'

And, discoursing on the happenings of the years since they had seen each other, John Lee led his American friend by a curious, narrow street to a small Catholic chapel, where in the vestry they found Father John Lee receiving a gift of vestments from the pastor of the humble church, none too rich himself in the matter of sanctuary fittings. Tears came unbidden to Mr. Fanning's eyes as he knelt to receive the young Chinese priest's blessing. 'Do you know what I call you?' Father Lee said a little later. 'My benefactor,' smiling seriously. 'My father never lets me forget that but for you I might still be a pagan—far from the light, instead of looking forward to a lifetime of looking at my soul longings to engage in.'

His eyes lit up and his whole face glowed as with an inward light. The American's eyes were fastened on him wistfully. 'It would make me very happy,' he declared, 'to think I had even the very smallest part in the making of your wonderful vocation. It brings home to one, doesn't it,' he went on thoughtfully, 'what great things may appear at the time but the slightest suggestion?' 'Nothing is idle,' the young priest said gravely. 'It is well for us when we come to know this.' 'The pastor, an old Chinese priest, took them to his study, where tea was forthcoming, and there they chatted for a long time on various subjects. Then Mr. Fanning rose to go. 'Thank you again, my friend,' Father Lee exclaimed, taking the American's hand in a fervent clasp. 'Be assured always of my prayers and good wishes.' 'Will you?' Mr. Fanning asked, an odd intonation in his voice, 'pray that I may get—safe home?' 'Safe—home?' The young priest flashed him a sudden close look. 'Do you mean—' He paused, and allowed himself to smile a little, lifting his shoulders, 'do you mean—America—or—Heaven?'"

"Oh," Mr. Fanning flushed, and smiled also, but affected to speak lightly, 'both, perhaps. I've been something of a wanderer—from my Church, I'm afraid, as well as from the land of my birth. 'Marv's beautiful and tender was the light that came into the young priest's eyes, and he reached out both hands in a gesture of passionate appeal. 'My friend,' he murmured in a voice broken with feeling, 'oh, my friend, will you not complete your benefaction to me by coming home now—as my first penitent?'"

Perfect peace and happiness enveloped the wanderer the next morning as he knelt in the little church, the low voice of the celebrant at the altar coming to him like the soft touch of a beloved hand. The gray light pierced but dimly through the high windows, and the early shadows concealed the deficiencies of the poor chapel, rude temple enough for the housing of the Most High; but to the foreigner kneeling among the few Chinese worshippers, the humble place was filled with light ineffable, and joy was his that he had indeed come safe home. He had breakfast with Father Lee, and later accompanied the latter and mother and the young priest to the train that was to take them to the scene of their labors. Tears filled his eyes as he waved them to a last goodbye; but it was with a lighter heart than he had carried for some years that he turned his face to the days that were to take him back to his homeland.—By Helen Moriarty, in the Family Fireside.

A girl, a great lover of Nature, went to the seashore for a holiday, and approaching a typical fisherman said: "Ah, sir, how well you must know the face of Nature, and how it in all its false moods! Have you ever seen the sun sinking in such a glare of glory that it swallows up the horizon with fire?" "Have you not seen the mist gliding down the hillside like a specter? Have you never," she went on, impassionately, "seen the moon struggling to slake off the grip of the ragged, rugged storm cloud?" "No, miss," responded the fisherman, "I used to see them things but I'm on the water-wagon now."

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