

REAPING THE WHIRLWIND

BY CHRISTINE FAHER

CHAPTER XXVI

Miss Burchill went to her new home, and was installed in her new duties without seeing either Mr. Robinson or Thurston. An upper servant, who seemed to be somewhat in the character of housekeeper, received her, showed her to an inviting suite of rooms which she was to occupy with her pupil, and voluntarily informed her that they were situated in a part of the house entirely remote from the rooms occupied by either Mr. Robinson or his guests; that information Miss Burchill received with much inward satisfaction. The same laconic domestic would have given her many more items of news regarding the house and its guests, but Mildred stopped her by requesting to see her pupil. The pupil came, entering in the shy, awkward way in which she was accustomed to meet strangers, and Mildred, at the first sight of the yellow face and great melancholy eyes, started and became so pale for a moment that the servant who had entered with the little girl thought she must be sick, and offered to get her some restorative.

"No, thank you," was the gentle answer; "and going forward she saluted the child so kindly that she became reassured immediately. Of her own accord she extended one hand, and looking into Miss Burchill's frank, kind eyes, she said, with a childish sigh of relief: "I am so glad you are the young lady that's to live with me. I didn't know but uncle might ask Mrs. Phillips, and—ugh!" A strange but very expressive shrug of the shoulders accompanied her last exclamation; it made Mildred wonder.

"Tell me your name," she said, resting Miss Burchill's hand. And being answered, she continued, "I haven't had any one to love me since mamma's death. Will you love me?" The little mouth quivered, and the large eyes were misty with tears. Miss Burchill's heart, tender from its own sensitiveness and aching from its late bereavement, was incapable of resisting such an appeal. She pressed the child to her, and her tears mingled with the little one's sobs. That night, when Cora slumbered in her own room, one opening from Mildred's chamber, Mildred took a small old-fashioned picture from her trunk and looked at it long and tearfully. It was that of a very young man, possibly not much beyond her own age, but the face was one of marked character, strong and full, and with an expression that evinced the restiveness of the boyish heart. The eyes and the whole upper part of the countenance was exactly like those of Cora Horton.

"Oh, mother!" she murmured, "if it should be! She indeed by my love and care of her, may I fulfil my promise to you. Heaven may not grant me a meeting with him, but it may have brought me to her. I cannot understand it," she continued to soliloquize, still looking at the picture. "If it should be she, how does she come to be his niece? But, no; I am utterly mistaken; it is only a strange chance which makes the name and the features alike."

She closed the case that contained the picture, and returned it to her trunk; but, firmly resolved as she was to shut out the idea regarding her pupil which had found entrance to her mind, the idea maintained its place, and grew until it entered into all her relations with Cora; it produced at last an affection for her pupil as intense as though the two were indeed sisters by blood. The child's disposition was such as to win regard, Frank, confiding with those to whom she became attached, she had also a vein of penetration remarkable for her age; and she sometimes startled Mildred by the depth of her observations. Passionately fond of her books, she quickly learned from her teacher all that the teacher could impart. The avidity with which she studied gave evidence sometimes of a too premature mind.

The seclusion was all that Robinson had promised, and beyond a brief note requesting Miss Burchill to make herself perfectly at home, and the arrival shortly after of a piano for the use of her pupil, she neither saw nor heard directly from him. Neither did she see Gerald, nor hear aught from him save a message delivered by one of the servants, expressing the hope that she was well and contented.

So the peaceful days wore on, and Cora seemed to lose her melancholy mien; a color often glowed in her cheeks, and her great eyes sometimes sparkled in a way that lit up the whole of her tawny face. The only time that she seemed to become her old, shy, strange self was when she returned from her evening visit to her uncle. He insisted on her company for a certain hour every evening and on her return she was generally thoughtful and abstracted, and occasionally even acted with a strange timidity, starting at shadows and clinging to Mildred's hand as they passed from room to room. It was as if she were agitated by fear, as she seemed to be, she never spoke of it, and when, on occasions, Mildred remonstrated with her she only shrugged.

It was difficult to tell with what feelings she regarded her uncle. She did not often speak of him,—indeed, she was given to singular reticence regarding her relatives,—and when she did, it was with the manner of one who, while deeming it

a duty to praise, was yet restrained by some secret hesitation.

Miss Burchill had sent to know his wishes in regard to Cora's music. Would he be willing to have her receive instruction at the residence of Professor Clarmont? and the answer was an unqualified assent, and a strongly expressed desire that Miss Burchill would use her own judgment in every particular.

"He is very kind," said Mildred, secretly reproaching herself for her old unaccountable dislike of the factory owner.

"Yes, he is very good," echoed Cora, who had heard the remark; "and as if she were soliloquizing, 'I ought to love him, but—' She seemed to remember herself, and looking up, continued with a blush, 'I do love him, because he is my poor, dear mamma's brother.'"

Her words touched a responsive chord in Miss Burchill's heart. Was not her affection given to some one for a similar cause?

The musical instruction at Professor Clarmont's was immediately begun, Mildred always accompanying her pupil, and the little Frenchman was delighted at meeting again his old promising scholar. In his delight and his belief in her vocal ability, he would have resumed his lessons to her for a mere nominal amount, but her heart was still too sore from its recent bereavements to allow her to take up immediately a study that had given so much enjoyment to the dear ones who had gone.

To satisfy the little professor, however, she consented to sing one of her old pieces on the conclusion of each of Cora's lessons. Mrs. Phillips was not long in learning of their tri-weekly visits to Clarmont's, and she changed the hour of her own lesson so that it might immediately precede theirs; then she waited in an adjoining room, where she heard all that Mildred sang. On the occasion of Cora's third lesson she not only waited for the conclusion of Miss Burchill's song, but she lingered to meet the two. Half stifling Cora with a caress, she also extended a hand to Mildred.

"Miss Burchill, from all that I have heard of you, I am so delighted that you are dear little Cora's governess. Mr. Robinson told me how much satisfaction you gave."

Miss Burchill bowed slightly, and seemed anxious to depart, but Mrs. Phillips retained Cora's hand.

"I am going to give myself the pleasure of walking home with you," she said, "Do you know, you naughty girl, pinching Cora's cheek, that you have neglected me since Miss Burchill came to you? You have not been once to visit me, and when your uncle stopped the other afternoon, he said it was quite out of the question to get you away from your governess during the day. So to punish you, I am going all the way home with you. I must see the sanctum in which Miss Burchill and you seal your lessons, and perhaps I shall induce Miss Burchill to give me lessons in some of them, with an arch, pretty look at Mildred, as if she rated Miss Burchill's scholastic attainments far above her own."

Thus lightly talking, and paying the most flattering attentions to the governess, she did accompany them home, and insist with playful freedom, on seeing their sanctum, as she called the room in which Mildred instructed her pupil. When there, she professed to be delighted, turning over Cora's books, and examining all her apparatus for study with the enjoyment of a vivacious child. Certainly, Miss Burchill had never seen any one so lovely, and, despite a secret aversion which she could neither banish nor quite account for, the charm of that incomparably beautiful face, with its artless expression, was not without its effect upon her.

Mrs. Phillips paused over a voluminous history that she had picked up, and in a minute danced to Miss Burchill.

"Will you," she said, fastening her hands in a pretty, coaxing fashion on Mildred's arm, "allow me to come here every day or two and read history with you? You know, owing to papa's reverses, my education had to suffer somewhat, and, while I may have a smattering of the more edifying things, I am, no doubt, sadly deficient in what I should know. Will you, Miss Burchill?" as the latter was about to utter some disclaimer, "It will be a useful break in the monotony of my life; it will be something to keep away harrowing thoughts, for I have suffered so deeply."

She changed at once to a most touching picture of sorrow,—her head drooped, her eyes down, even her lips trembling as if she needed but a word to make her grief burst forth. And Mildred, touched in spite of herself, gave a less qualified answer than she otherwise might have done: "Mr. Robinson was her employer; she did not know that such a disposition of her time would meet his approval."

Mrs. Phillips obviated the difficulty at once, she would see Mr. Robinson that very instant, and she departed to do so, leaving Mildred dissatisfied with herself, secretly annoyed, and not a little puzzled that she should be the object of such warm attention on the part of the beautiful and wealthy young widow.

Her perplexity was rather increased when Cora asked, almost as soon as the door had closed on Mrs. Phillips: "Do you like her?"

There was something a determined emphasis on the second word of the question, and such a penetrating, eager look of the child's eyes on Miss Burchill's face that Miss Bur-

chill herself felt obliged to pause before giving a reply. The little girl waited without the least diminution of her penetrating look.

"I have not yet seen enough of Mrs. Phillips to give a decided opinion," was the answer at last; "and besides it our duty to dislike no one."

"No one?" said the little girl. "Not even if you can't help a creeping feeling coming over you against a person? If you can't help thinking that a person isn't true, that they don't mean just what they say?"

"Yes; even if we experience all that," answered Mildred; "and we have no right to think anybody untrue just on our own suspicions or feelings."

"Well, what would you do if you had just that feeling for a person? If you felt every time they touched you just like jumping away from them, and telling them you didn't want them near you? and if, every time they spoke and said such nice things, and seemed to think so much of you, you felt like saying to them they didn't mean it, and it was all just lies they were telling?"

"In that case," said Mildred, gravely and gently; "I should try to find out all the nice, lovable qualities of such a person, and in constantly keeping those before my mind I should be likely to forget much that I disliked. But in any event, I ought to exert my will in such a manner that all aversion should be kept down; then also, it would be my duty to seize opportunities of being kind to such a person."

The child's face fell.

"And you are an artful hypocrite, Mrs. Phillips," she said scornfully, "that I ought to do all this with Mrs. Phillips? I don't know why, but I do dislike her."

"Yes, Cora; we know no evil of her, and we must think her very good and treat her accordingly."

So when Mrs. Phillips returned, armed with Robinson's cordial permission to read daily with Miss Burchill, she found herself quite kindly received by the governess and her pupil. And the widow did not fail to come a single day, and she availed herself of every opportunity to ingratiate herself with Miss Burchill; actually making secret studies of the character of Mildred, so that she might deport herself accordingly. She affected a horror of all fibbing, on more than one occasion inventing little instances in which her own truthfulness, having been put to severe test, came out triumphantly, and relating the whole in a brief, unaffected way that seemed quite natural and simple. She was full of sympathy for the poor, asking all sorts of questions about the residents of the humbler part of the village, and quaintly wondering if their delicacy would be wounded should she make some charitable visits among them.

She loved retirement. Was there not ample evidence of that in the fact, that though the midwinter influx of visitors to "The Castle" had already set in, she had so far refused every invitation to make one of them. The company of Miss Burchill and Cora afforded her, to use her own gushing words, " repose and enjoyment."

Miss Burchill was somewhat won by it all, and when occasionally there came strange thoughts regarding Mrs. Phillips' old engagement to Thurston, and she wondered whether that engagement had been justly and honorably severed by Miss Brower, she was accustomed to silence her doubts with the very reasoning she had used with her pupil. She knew no positive evil of the young widow. Why, then, should she doubt her? And, thus throwing the mantle of her own tender charity over every suspicion, she continued to receive Mrs. Phillips with gentle kindness, and to inculcate in her pupil the same gentle, forgiving, tender goodness.

CHAPTER XXVII

Mrs. Phillips executed her project of visiting the poor. Dressed in the plainest of her sombre dresses, she passed an entire morning in calling at the homes in which Mildred had told her the greatest poverty existed, but her first care had been to make the acquaintance of Mrs. Hogan, for Miss Burchill had told her of the poor woman's kindness to herself. Little did Mildred dream, when she gave that information, how it whetted Mrs. Phillips' desire to see Mrs. Hogan in order to satisfy her own secret suspicions. And the poor, simple woman was readily enough beguiled into conversation by the charming young widow. She told, with little effort to draw her out, all that she knew of Miss Burchill, and speaking of her brought her naturally enough to tell of the kindness of Gerald Thurston, both to herself and to Miss Burchill; and Mrs. Phillips' heart beat wildly when she heard, and her cheeks reddened from secret emotions of jealousy and anger, but when she spoke it was in the same sweet, low, gentle tones which she had first assumed.

"And Mr. Thurston continues his kindness to you, does he not? Of course he visits you?" she said.

"He goes to the shop once in a while to see Dick, but Dick is doing so well now that we can get along without Mr. Thurston's help at present."

These being no more to learn in reference either to Miss Burchill or Thurston, Mrs. Phillips took her leave, promising to come in often to see Mrs. Hogan, and leaving with her so generous a souvenir of her visit that the poor woman was quite overwhelmed. She had ascertained the names of a few of the poorest families, and these also she visited, promising in the case of one who

there was illness, to send some delicacies from home, and all the time her face wore its most captivating expression and her voice kept its sweetest tones, while inwardly she was filled with weariness and disgust. But Gerald might—nay, there was every possibility that he would—hear of her charitable visitations; thus he would know there was also that in her character which she felt, or rather feared, that he admired Miss Burchill, and that was motive sufficient to make her trample on her heart, if necessary.

Miss Balk, seeing Mrs. Phillips' preparations for her charitable visits and not knowing the object, looked on with grim wonder. Jellies, sweetmeats, even soups, were put up, and the basket intrusted to the servant, while the widow without a word to Barbara, followed. But the latter followed the widow, and having ascertained the quarter to which she had gone, she readily enough understood the rest. Her lips came together with their usual snap, and her keen eyes sparkled, but she did not accost Helen about it until evening.

"How soon will Gerald Thurston know that you have turned Sister of Charity?" she said suddenly.

"And how do you know that I have done so?" was the retort: "I followed you this morning to learn the destination of the basket you gave Lida."

"You are a mean, sneaking spy, Barbara Balk."

"And you are an artful hypocrite, Mrs. Phillips," she said scornfully, "that I ought to do all this with Mrs. Phillips? I don't know why, but I do dislike her."

"Because your hypocrisy amuses me. You are so short-sighted that you fail utterly to see how impossible it is for your little games to win. Thurston has too much character ever to recover from his disgust at your perfidy. But scheme on, Mrs. Phillips, flatter around the flame of your own vanity until it consumes you."

Helen scarcely heard the last word; she had hurried from the room, violently slamming the door behind her.

TO BE CONTINUED THE BISHOP'S VISIT

The Bishop was coming. Unless his course was deflected by some unlooked-for happening he would arrive in the village the next Wednesday evening and would administer the sacrament of Confirmation on the following day, which would be a feast day.

When the saintly old prelate who had charge of the diocese intimated that he was coming, Father Daly was wont to rejoice, for his visits carried sunshine with them; but time, which regarded not priest or layman, had laid his hand so heavily on the old man that an assistant had been given him, an auxiliary in the shape of a titular bishop whom Father Daly had never met.

The parish was normally a poor one. It was now an abnormally poor one, as the country was laboring under one of those periodical spells of business depression and when work was scarce and wages low. As the congregation of St. Charles' made its living by the sweat of its brow, for the most part, it had often difficulty in finding opportunities to extend the sweat profitably, and hence contributions to the church had fallen to low ebb.

St. Charles' was an old church and it sorely needed repairs. That very morning, which had been wet, as Father Daly walked down the center aisle a drop of water had fallen with a spot on his head. He looked up reproachfully at the roof and breathed a prayer that the weather might be dry on the following Thursday. A coat of paint would have been an advantage to the church and some of the vestments showed signs of wear.

As Father Daly was diffident about asking for anything, and as funds were very low, these adjuncts to usefulness and appearance were out of the question at present and the very attenuated income of the good priest was so drawn upon by calls for assistance that its balance was microscopic.

Father Daly loved all mankind, Jew or Gentile, with one exception and that was himself. He was wont to flout and disregard his personal needs to such an extent that Mrs. McCarthy, his housekeeper, felt called upon at times to remonstrate with the priest about the state of his clothes—he ought to get a new coat, a new cassock, a new hat! On such occasions Father Daly would listen meekly, at times glancing at his pet dog before the fire as if he rather envied a creature that came into the world with a suit of clothes and wore the same suit, unrebuked and uncorrected, until it left it.

He had cause to feel proud of his flock even if it was a poor one. They attended closely to their duties and gave what they could afford; but it did seem odd that every one in the village to whom the hyphenated adjective of well-to-do could be applied was either a non-Catholic or, as was Mr. Danskin, unfriendly to all churches.

However, he made the best of it. There was no use in asking Timothy McCarthy, who occupied the triple office of sexton, gardener and hostler to do anything to the church roof. He had tried, and each time it leaked the more. Timothy's talents did not run to roofs. He was now raking up leaves and making the church

grounds as neat as possible for the visiting Bishop.

Consulting with Mrs. McCarthy about the entertainment of the Bishop, he found that estimable woman supremely confident. "I can cook a dinner for an archbishop," she said, "to say nothing of a bishop."

Father Daly imagined she would have been equally confident if called upon to sarye up a repast for the Holy Father himself.

As the sun in his revolutions around the earth is entirely unmindful of the goings and comings of bishops Monday and Tuesday passed away and the eventful Wednesday arrived. And it began busily for Father Daly. After Mass he set to work to straighten out the details for the High Mass to be celebrated the next day. This finished, he looked over the list of calls he was expected to make—a list augmented by one or two that came in during the morning. As these calls lay in and around the village, they consumed some time, and it was one o'clock when Father Daly returned to the house.

It was not permitted him to spend the evening in arrangements for the next day. Just after dinner a messenger arrived with the news that Patrick Mahony had fallen from a hayloft and was badly injured, in fact was in great danger of death. Father Daly was asked to come immediately.

Mahony lived on a farm quite a distance from the village and Father Daly's jagged wagon was out of commission. At the time it reposed in front of the blacksmith's shop, probably exchanging confidences with other disabled veterans of the road. The only thing to do was to go afoot.

Not that Father Daly thought overmuch of that. On such a call he would have waded through deep snow or braved a pouring rain-storm, and, after all, the distance was only three miles, with a fairly good road and a day that was all that could be desired. The distance did not give him any concern, for he was as vigorous as a plowman, but could he return in time to receive his visitor? On no account must he fail to meet the Bishop at the railroad station. He felt confident, however, that he could go to and return from the Mahony farm in time, so he started out bravely afoot.

Father Daly was a devoted lover of nature, and to a man with such inclinations the journey was delightful. The sky was cloudless, the sun, while warm, was not oppressive and a previous shower had made the road firm and settled the dust. Bright-hued birds darted among the trees and thrilled their melodies. A red-headed woodpecker on a dead tree, spying the passer, tapped a shrill alarm to the denizens of the woods and fields that a stranger was nigh. All these movements and sounds were interesting to the priest, and he nodded to the woodpecker as if he recognized an old friend.

He was now passing the home of John Danskin, the wealthiest man in the village. Noted for his hostility to all churches, he especially disliked the Catholic religion, which he derided as being non-progressive and superstitious. Father Daly remembered with a good natured smile his comparison of him to an out-of-date wagon, without the courage to break loose and go free.

It was a beautiful home, set in the midst of a well-cropped lawn, with a profusion of flowers surrounding it, and Father Daly gave it his full meed of admiration as he passed.

Presently he saw through the trees the hipped roof of the old Mahony house, and, mending his pace, he soon stood within its doors. To his great relief he found that Mahony, while hurt by his fall, was not in immediate danger of death. The doctor, who was in attendance, said that, as his skull was not fractured, unless internal injury developed later he would likely recover. Father Daly administered the consolations of religion to the injured man and then, in that cheery fashion that so endeared him to his people, comforted his wife and children in their misfortune.

But time was flying, and it was necessary to go at once if he expected to meet his engagement without walking with unseemly haste. Mahony's son wanted to take the horse from the plow and drive Father Daly home in the wagon, but the priest would not permit it.

"I'll have plenty of time to reach the station before four o'clock," he said, "and I don't mind walking. You had better remain with your mother in case anything should happen."

He set out with a brisk stride, although he felt that haste was not necessary. In fact, he could not resist the temptation to pause amusedly to view the antics of a grey squirrel which, perched on a branch, querulously barked his protest against being observed.

Just before he reached the Danskin home loud, excited shouting, coming from the direction of the house, fell upon the priest's ears. Hastening his steps by the thick copt of undergrowth which intercepted his view, he was horrified upon reaching the open, to see that the house was on fire. Volumes of smoke were pouring through the roof and windows while long tongues of flame shot through the murr.

Father Daly vaulted over the fence with the agility of a sixteen-year-old boy and ran at full speed towards the house. There were some twenty or more people run-

ning around frantically, all anxious to help, but entirely disorganized and in each other's way. A man had dashed off on horseback to summon the fire-engine, but the fire system of the village was a volunteer one and it was impossible to reach the members and get them together in time to be of any service.

The few feeble attempts made to extinguish the flames with buckets from the pump were soon abandoned, and then followed a wild effort to rescue the contents of the house. Valuable articles of furniture were dragged to porch and then toppled on the ground, where they lay broken and useless.

It was into this crowd of hysterical women and willing but unsuccessful men that Father Daly rushed, and in few minutes from the babel of tongues he had extracted the facts. The fire had started in the kitchen, on the northwest corner of the house, and the flames had spread with great rapidity, fanned by the brisk wind. Mr. and Mrs. Danskin were both away and the three children had been left in care of the nurse.

"Are they safe?" cried the priest. "Where are they?" Some one pointed to the front of the house where the nurse, crying bitterly, crouched on the grass with two little children clinging to her.

"But there are three children," cried Father Daly, "and there are only two here. Where is the other one?"

"My God, isn't he here?" screamed the woman. "George, George, where are you?" "Listen," said the priest sharply. "Did he come out with you? Be sensible and answer me!"

The distracted woman replied between her sobs: "I was in the nursery—the room back over the pantry—when I heard them crying. 'Fire,' I opened the door and found the hall filled with smoke and could hear the noise of the flames. I caught up the two little children in my arms and told George to take hold of my dress and to follow me. I know he followed me out the room. The smoke was so thick in the hall that I almost smothered, and I could see nothing; but I was sure that George was right behind me. When I did not see him after I reached the lawn, I supposed he was mixed up among the crowd. Oh, George, where are you?" she screamed.

Father Daly ran around to the rear of the house. As he did so a wall of horror arose from the crowd. At a window of the back room, which was not yet burning although the roof was on fire and the flames were belching out of the windows of the floor beneath, appeared the face of a little boy. So small was he that only half of his face was visible over the lower sash.

"A ladder—quick!" shouted the priest. "But there was no ladder. There had been a step ladder, but that was in the kitchen and was probably in ashes now."

"Holy Mother, have pity on the little one!" ejaculated Father Daly, as he rushed to the front of the house.

He peered in, and it seemed like looking into a furnace. But he noticed two things: first, that the main staircase was not yet burning, although both sides of the hall were afire, and, secondly, that, it being warm weather, all the front windows were open and the draught drew the fire towards the front of the house. If the child could be reached, he might be saved before the fire had eaten its way to the rear room.

His mind was quickly made up. Snatching up a portiere which was lying on the porch, he wrapped it about his head and face and dashed up the staircase.

As he did so, there were loud shouts of remonstrance from those standing around the house. "He's going to his death!" "It will mean two dead instead of one!" Some Catholics began saying a Hail Mary in behalf of their beloved priest, while others sobbed and bemoaned the sacrifice. Father Daly heard them not. The roar of the rushing flames drowned all noises from the outside. The varnish of the banisters was bubbling from the intense heat and at intervals a shaft of flame would burst from the opposite wall. The acrid smoke made his eyes and lungs ache, and but for the fact that the front windows were open, allowing part of the smoke to escape, he would have been stifled before he gained the landing.

Finally he reached it, and pausing a moment to recover his breath, which came laboriously from his racked lungs, he snatched open the door and plunged into the room. Although the flames had not yet reached it, the situation of its two occupants was perilous, indeed. Smoke was oozing from the cracks in the door and it was with difficulty that Father Daly discerned the child huddled in a corner and crying bitterly. There was no time to be lost. At any moment the roof might fall in and the smoke was growing more and more stifling. Clasping the child in his arms and wrapping the portiere about him, he rushed back into the hall.

His escape by the stairs was cut off. They were now burning fiercely, while startling crashes evidenced that the roof was falling in. "Mother of God," he murmured, "if ever I needed thy help I need it now!" He re-entered the room and opened the one window on the north side. There was no window directly beneath, but there was one about five feet distant, and out of this the

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