

The Storyteller

THE EVOLUTION OF POTIPHAR

Monsieur Le Clere stood at the door of his hotel in a Western mining town, bowing and smiling as he watched Miss Mary Pendleton step into the automobile awaiting her, and which was to take her to Mass to the Catholic church some five miles distant. Monsieur had placed his best at the young lady's service, the best of a town that had sprung up almost in a day, and that now possessed two hotels, automobiles, electric cars and all modern conveniences.

What chance had brought Miss Mary Pendleton, of Virginia, to this far-off Western city that had only lately emerged from being a frontier town? Passing through the country twenty years ago, some impulse of wisdom had induced her father to buy up a large tract of land which for many years after his purchase had been of no value, until some later discoveries of mine operators proved that the Pendleton land covered valuable subterranean riches. By that time Mr. Pendleton, who had become a chronic invalid, could not leave home, and he had no son to represent him. Here was an opportunity for the display of characteristic American independence. Mary Pendleton, on hearing of the need, rose to the occasion.

'I will go,' she said, 'and attend to everything.'

So, accompanied only by a maid, she had journeyed some three thousand miles to the far-off mining city. What in a European girl would have seemed outre, came simply and naturally from the young American, who lost nothing of either her dignity or maidenliness by the undertaking.

Reaching R—— the early part of the week, she had been busily engaged ever since in seeing the men who were to work the mines. The task before her looked formidable, and the young girl began to fear it would necessitate her staying on the scene for several weeks. Even with constant telegraphic communication with her father, it seemed impossible that matters would resolve themselves into regular working order inside of two months. The hotel, however, was comfortable, and the consciousness of being of use to her father made Mary look at the matter philosophically.

Monsieur had explained to Miss Pendleton, when she asked for a carriage to drive to Mass, that the automobile was much better. She could reach the church much more quickly, and the chauffeur, an experienced man, had been a great deal on the roads in France, and could be trusted.

It was a spring day of cloudless beauty when they started, and soon the town, with its overhanging pall of gray smoke, was left behind, and they were out on the smooth, hard road that led to the mission three miles beyond. A quarter of a mile further and the auto came to a sudden halt; there was a sound of muttered words above, and just as Miss Pendleton was endeavoring to find out what was the matter, the man who steered began to make a rapid descent, and in another moment appeared in view.

'Beg pardon, mum,' said the chauffeur, whose French had a decidedly foreign idiom, 'but I'm thinking the baste won't go no further.'

'I suppose I can walk,' said Miss Pendleton, 'but I shall be late for Mass.'

'Sorry indeed, mum,' was the answer, 'but all the power in the world won't move the craythur till she's aither bein' fixed.'

Miss Pendleton decided to lose no more time in conversation, and alighted.

'I will send some one back as soon as I can reach the mission,' she said—'some one who can go on to the city and get a man to come to your assistance'; saying which she turned and commenced walking briskly up the road. Save for the certainty of being late for the service the young girl would have enjoyed the walk in the clear spring air. The sky, uncontaminated by the smoke of the city, was blue and cloudless, the birds were singing, and everywhere trees and bushes were bursting into bloom, making a scene of ideal loveliness.

She was not destined to finish her walk, however; the sound of carriage wheels coming rapidly from behind was presently audible, and just as she drew to one side of the road to get out of the way a light wagon passed by, and the sole occupant, catching sight of Miss Pendleton, suddenly reined in his horse. She glanced up, and recognised the young mine operator with whom she had held her chief conference the past week.

'You are in difficulties, Miss Pendleton,' he said, as he sprang lightly from his wagon and advanced, hat in hand: 'I have just passed a disabled auto, but I did not know it was yours till I overtook you.'

Mary, her fair face turned toward the speaker, the while she held up her dainty skirts, proceeded to explain matters to Mr. Barnes, who lost no time in proffering his services.

'I had started for a drive in the country,' he said, 'but I shall only be too happy to take you to church, and then drive you home. It will be a great pleasure, Miss Pendleton, so don't hesitate to accept.'

'I had not expected to have my difficulty so easily solved,' answered Mary, adding a cordial thank you as he assisted her into the wagon, and then aprang lightly after her.

'Did you notice what my chauffeur was doing as you passed him?' she queried.

'Sitting on a fence and smoking a pipe like a philosopher,' he answered, and she laughed.

Monsieur Le Clere introduced him as a French chauffeur,' she said; 'but that part of him which claims kinship with Mr. Dooley seems to have some of the Dooley philosophy; a Frenchman would have been storming all over the road at the delay.'

Mr. Barnes made some gay rejoinder, and conversation flowed easily until, a mile further on, they came in sight of the church, a long, low building of stone and brick, with a rectory, convent and orphanage near by.

Mr. Barnes had been telling Miss Pendleton of the heroic work done by the priests and nuns of the Indian mission. 'Father Giovanni, the head priest, is a splendid fellow,' he said. 'He is half Italian and half Indian, but born in this country and educated entirely at the mission. He has shown exceptional character and ability in every way. Besides, of course, talking English, he speaks Italian, and the Indian dialect common to the Indians of this region, so he can reach all classes. It is wonderful the work he does.'

They were at the church door by this time, where they found some men who promised to go back to the assistance of the chauffeur. The half-defined question in Mary's mind as to whether her companion intended accompanying her to Mass was answered as he helped her to alight from the wagon.

'If you will wait one moment,' he said, 'I will take my horse to the sheds and join you again.'

As he drove off she noticed, as she had done when she first met him, the appearance of mingled intelligence, keenness and refinement that characterised him. Gilded with good health and good looks, Mr. Barnes had long ago concluded that the one drawback to his happiness was his name. For what earthy reason had his paternal grandmother, who had lived and died among the rugged Vermont hills, named him Potiphar?

'It will help him in his career in life,' the old lady, who was a great character, had said. 'Name him John or Charles, and he will never rise above the level; but Potiphar will do great things.'

Great things Potiphar had done in his youth. He had smashed his grandmother's old china, a priceless heirloom. At five years he had been discovered walking around the leads of the house some fifty feet from the ground; and at eight years he had been nearly drowned in trying to rescue a pet dog. Having outgrown his childhood, he began to turn the energy of his early years into other channels. At twenty-one, taking his small capital, he had come West, and had prospered. Vermont honesty combined with Western enterprise speedily made him known and respected among his business conferees. As to his religion, at the time of his meeting with Mary it may be said to have been more a matter of temperament and heredity than of choice and conviction. He had grown up with the teaching of the Protestant catechism, and the services of the white-walled Congregational church ground into his very fibre; but like many of his kind a shaking-off of his environment had resulted in a corresponding cessation of church-going. Sunday was not actually profaned; but the West did not hold the exact counterpart of the old-fashioned, New England meeting-house, so a late bath, shave, a drive and the perusal of the papers was his usual Sunday routine.

Not much given to moralizing, the young man nevertheless mused on his way back to church at the faithfulness of the average Catholic, no matter how far from home, in attending Mass; and then his mind wandered to the grandmother only lately dead, and her controlling influence over all her family.

'What would she say if she could see me now?' he thought, remembering the old lady's horror of Popery, and her denunciation of the Catholic Church in her native town, that was chiefly attended by French immigrants from Canada.

Entering a Catholic church for the first time in his life, he was struck by the simplicity of the service. They were near enough to the altar for him to understand and follow the words of the priest, a clear, mellow voice being one of Father Giovanni's chief attractions. The priest took his text from Romans: 'For I reckon that the suffering of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come.'