

# The Storyteller

## BERNARD PENDREL'S SACRIFICE

(Concluded from last week.)

'I am dying!' he repeated. 'Hilda, will you ask Bernard—'

'Ask Bernard what?' she said, abandoning her well-meant but futile, foolish attempt to deceive him as to his condition.

'Of his charity, to pray for my soul,' gasped Anthony.

He spoke no more, a little while, and he had been called to render an account of his stewardship.

There had been some delay in sending for Mrs. Pendrel; and when she arrived, all was over.

To the inmates of the manor, indeed, the death seemed to have happened quite a long time ago. Mrs. Pendrel found the young widow and her mother occupied with milliners and dressmakers; Mrs. Denison trying to settle the vital question whether the children's mourning should be all black, or whether, considering their youth, a little white might not be introduced by way of 'relief'; whilst the mother submitted to the poisoning of a series of crape and lisse bonnets on her fair hair, finding a difficulty in selecting one that really did become her. Locked in a room upstairs, the dead man lay alone; and the world—his little world where he had been supreme master—went smoothly on without him.

'Did Anthony mention me?' Mrs. Pendrel inquired, in a pause of the voluble modiste's discourse.

'Oh, yes!' said Hilda sweetly. 'And Bernard too.'

'What did he say about Bernard?'

'Say? Oh, that we were to ask Bernard to pray for his soul! So unlike poor Anthony, wasn't it?'

'A sick fancy. He was wandering in his mind, poor man!' observed Mrs. Denison, apologetically for Anthony.

'Was the rector with him?' Mrs. Pendrel asked Hilda.

'N-no. Anthony didn't ask for him. We hadn't time to send for him. It was all so sudden, we never thought—' she had recourse to her handkerchief.

'Don't distress the poor child with questions, dear Mrs. Pendrel!' said Mrs. Denison. 'Have you ordered your mourning yet? It is quite a mercy that we must attend to those melancholy duties, isn't it? They prevent us from giving ourselves up to useless grief, don't they? So unchristian to fret, too, I think.'

Mrs. Pendrel sought the nurse, who had not yet left the manor.

'You were with Sir Anthony when he died, I believe?' she said. 'Possibly you heard him mention his nephew Bernard. If so, what were his exact words?'

The nurse repeated them. They were ringing in Mrs. Pendrel's ears as she gazed on the rigid face of the dead. How less than nothing were the things of earth to him now! How little anything mattered but to have sought first the kingdom of God and His justice!

In a mean street of a populous city was a humble church with the presbytery beside it. Day and night there were noise and clamor about it—the clang of hammers in loundry and workshop, the roar of furnaces, the shrill cries of children, the scolding of wrangling housewives, the hoarse laughter of men in the glittering drink shop at the corner. Smoke and soot and dust contended for supremacy; odors of fish and hot grease issued from the tall, dingy 'model' lodging-house towering above the grime.

The church doors were open, and the poor congregation were streaming in—poorly-clad, toil-tired men and women, ragged children, 'the wandering beggar weary-foot', all sorts and conditions but the well-to-do and richly clothed, with one exception.

This was a lady who entered with the crowd, in the hesitating manner of one to whom all the surroundings were strange. She took refuge behind a pillar, whence, however, she could see the altar, on which many candles were burning. The service began, but she was like a person who has not learned to read looking at a printed book. She did not understand; she knew not what meant that taking down and raising up of the gleaming monstrance, whilst the whole people bent in awe and devotion. But near her was a picture of the Mater Dolorosa, and that she did understand, knowing that it represented a Mother who had loved her Son as never other mother did, who had given Him up to death for the life of the world.

Then a voice that she knew and that thrilled her to her heart rang through the church in the divine praises: 'Blessed be God! Blessed be His holy Name!'

Gradually the congregation melted away, and the edifice was almost deserted. The priest reappeared, no longer in his vestments, but wearing a worn and faded cassock. He came down the aisle to the confessional; and the unseen watcher distinctly saw the refined, beautiful face, the sensitive mouth, the touches of grey in the clustering hair, the slight droop of the shoulders telling of fatigue.

He was intercepted first by a woman with a shawl over her head, and a 'Could ye spare a minute, yer reverence, plaze?' then by a crippled lad; to whom succeeded a sullen-looking man with two dirty children, who was at length swept aside by a fussy elderly maiden. To each tale of woe or want or grievance the priest listened with unchanging patience and interest; comforting, counselling, warning. He retired then to the confessional, round which a few penitents were waiting.

So, to dwell in a stifling slum, surrounded by sin and sorrow, poverty and care, at the beck and call of the lame, the halt, and the blind, the uncouth and uncultured, he had given up wealth and ease and leisure, social pleasures, 'sweet sights and sounds, soft speech, and willing service'! What religion but that truly of God could enable a man so far to conquer human nature, to make and to persevere in such a sacrifice?

The last penitent departed; and the priest emerged, turning out the lights as he advanced, until none were left but one that glimmered redly before the Tabernacle. There he knelt with arms extended in the form of a cross, the rays of the sanctuary lamp falling on his face, 'which then was as an angel's.'

At the sacristy door the strange lady awaited him.

'Bernard!'

'Mother!'

He drew her into the little room, and they wept in each other's arms.

'Bless me, though I would not bless you!' she sobbed. 'Bless and forgive! For now I know God's will, and I come to you, His priest, to learn how I may save my soul.'

'My own dearest mother!' he murmured, in his heart a very rapture of thanksgiving for this answer to his daily prayer for her.

'Anthony is dead,' she told him at length; and his last words were: "Ask Bernard of his charity to pray for my soul."'

'God Grant him eternal rest!' exclaimed the priest, deeply moved—'Ave Maria.'

## WORTH WHILE

It was only a Cinderella dance, not a brilliant gathering like that for which an invitation lay on Helen Langton's table, only a homely party of some twenty couples of boys and girls, who would dance and be happy under the mild chaperonage of Mrs. Lane. Had it been the big ball for which Helen had sent an uncompromising refusal, instead of to this homely entertainment that she was bound, she could not have been more particular over her toilette; yet at last even she herself could think of no further improvements, and Bridget pronounced her perfect.

Her dress was snowy white, so simply made as to be almost severe, and her hair, parted and drawn softly back from her face, made her look more like an Italian maiden of olden times than an American girl of to-day. Yet there was no lack of animation in her face—it was aglow with life; and in her eye was the dawning of a great happiness. To-night it was but the dawning, to-morrow the fulfilment might be there, if—and therein lay the secret of her acceptance of Mrs. Lane's invitation rather than that of the Van Buren's.

To-night there would be at Mrs. Lane's a guest who had yet to win for himself entrée to such houses as the Van Buren's. Some day he would be an honored guest at such receptions, but now he had his name to make, and, although he was rising rapidly in his profession, he was still too young to take a place amongst the foremost doctors of the city—a place which in the future would most surely be his.

Mr. Langton knew and approved of the friendship that had sprung up between the young doctor and his motherless daughter. Things had gone happily with them from the first, and Helen guessed with unerring instinct that the words just wanting to complete her happiness would be spoken to-night.

She was ready half an hour too soon, waiting with ill-concealed impatience for the carriage, when Bridget brought her a note, so soiled and crumpled that for a