

A Complete Story

PROVIDENTIAL

"Father dear, I really think you had better not venture out in the morning. You know the doctor told you to take no risks."

"Bless the child!" ejaculated old Simon Rudford, regarding his daughter thoughtfully. "So you think that because I happen to be a little out of sorts I am likely to neglect Sunday Mass?"

"No, father, I know you better than that," she answered proudly. "But you see," she added seriously, "you are really very unwell; the doctor told me so, and I fear the mile walk to Mortney is too much for you at present."

"Don't worry, child," said her father cheerily. "I'm not so poorly as you think, and, please God, I'll get to Mass somehow."

Dorothy and her father had come to live at Sunnydale two years previously, the latter taking possession of the house bequeathed to him by a distant relative. It was a cosy little residence, situated in grounds of its own, on the long undulating road that led to Mortney, and here the two passed their days in peace and happiness, their only regret being that the church was so far away.

"Father," the girl said after a pause, "wouldn't it be lovely if this little dwelling of ours could be taken and planted within five minutes' walk from the church?"

"It certainly would," he agreed. "But then the merit of attending Mass under easy circumstances wouldn't be so great as when one perseveres through difficulties. Do you remember how your grandparents tramped three miles to daily Mass? And they never complained of the distance, no matter how inclement the weather."

"I know, father, I know," she nodded, "but I don't regret the distance for my own sake; it is for yours."

"There you go again, my dear." His tone was reproachful. "You worry and fret—and why? I am not broken-down, though you think I am. I tell you I am not so bad as you imagine, and—"

A sudden spasm of pain rendered him speechless, and Dorothy, realising his danger, sprang to his side, administering the stimulant, which the doctor had told her to keep always in readiness.

"I fear I am not much good, after all, my dear," he said feebly, holding his hand to his side. "This is a heart attack. I wish you could get the priest. I feel very ill."

"I will, father dear," she said soothingly. "But I think I had first better help you to bed. I cannot leave you in this state. You want rest."

She felt anxious and lonesome as she put the pillows at his back. She wished somebody was there to advise her. What could she do? Although she had said she would get the priest, she did not see how this was to be managed. Sarah, the maid, had gone home for a few hours, and would not return till seven. To leave her father alone was not safe. What was she to do?

Her eyes wandered to a picture of the

Mother of Sorrows, hanging above her father's bed, and on the instant her fears vanished.

"Dear Mother," she prayed, "you know I cannot leave father. Do help me. I am so worried, so upset. I want to send for the priest and the doctor, but cannot. Send some one to me."

She had scarcely uttered the words when there came a knock at the street door. Going down, she found it to be a cyclist, who politely asked her, if she could oblige him with a piece of clean linen.

"My bicycle skidded and pitched me over," he went on to explain apologetically. "I am not seriously hurt," seeing her look of concern, "but I thought I had better bind up these few scratches at once. My mother once had a poisoned finger through neglecting a small cut, and ever since she's been most careful over the slightest mishap. She would worry frightfully if I neglected this now."

"She's quite right," agreed Dorothy. "One cannot be too careful over these small accidents. Come in, and I will get some warm water. You must bathe those cuts before binding them up."

Within a few minutes the young fellow's hand was carefully washed and bound, and with many profuse thanks he prepared to take his leave.

"Have you far to go?" Dorothy asked him.

He smiled.

"I suppose you would consider it a long way," was his answer, with a somewhat superior air, "but it's no distance to a cyclist like me. I live at Hillside, some miles beyond Mortney."

Her hopes rose.

"Then your coming here is providential," she said, an eager catch in her voice. "Will you do me a favor?"

"With pleasure."

"As you are passing through Mortney, would you mind calling at the presbytery attached to the Catholic church there? You know it?"

He nodded.

"Will you ask the priest to call here at once? Just say the lady at Oak Cottage, Sunnydale, asks him to come and see her father, who is sick. The priest knows us well. I wish you would also ask the doctor to call. He lives a few doors beyond the presbytery, Doctor Hobbs."

"I know him," said the lad.

"Say that my father has had a heart attack, and that I should like him to come at once. I would be most grateful if you would do this for me."

"Indeed I will."

Looking behind him as he went down to the gate, he added:

"I am only too glad to do you a good turn. You've done one for me."

He was not long gone before both priest and doctor were in attendance on the sick man, and Dorothy had the satisfaction of

seeing him relieved and comforted. The attack proved to be only slight, and Father Doyle said that he did not think it necessary to administer the Sacraments. He would call again next day, he added. Doctor Hobbs prescribed, and the medicine proved effective. She was deeply grateful to the young cyclist for his prompt execution of her wishes.

"Father," she said, about a fortnight later when they were seated together in the cosy parlor, "wasn't it wonderful how my prayers were answered the day you were taken sick? And so quickly answered! When I turned to Our Lady of Sorrows and told her my predicament, I said I had no prospect of getting the priest and the doctor, and asked her to send some one to me. She heard me at once."

"It was certainly providential," her father remarked thoughtfully, "I wish I could thank that lad for his goodness."

"I should have asked him his name," she said, "but in my anxiety I overlooked it. I was so glad the priest came so quickly, father."

"So was I. Few of us are ready to stand before our Judge," he remarked. "When I thought I was about to die, I remembered how unforgiving I had been to poor John, and I wondered how I could dare to expect the Almighty to forgive me."

"What did my brother do to displease you? You know you've never told me. Did he marry against your wish?"

"Yes, he married a poor village girl."

"Was she a Catholic?"

"Oh, yes—one of the best, but from a social point of view John might have done better. He was so handsome; any lady would have been proud to marry him."

"But, father, surely it was a great blessing that John should have chosen a good girl for his wife," reasoned Dorothy.

"I didn't look at it in that light," he admitted. "John's social loss was a bitter pill to swallow, I thought; though, in truth, Agnes was a nice girl—refined and good-looking, and decently educated. John had a right to her."

"Have you seen John since his marriage?"

"No; he went away. Later, I heard that he had obtained a comfortable berth at Leyton. He wrote three different times, but I did not answer his letters. After some years I began to relent; so I made inquiries concerning him. They had left Leyton, and no one knew where they had gone. I've prayed to meet my boy again. I've not seen him for sixteen years."

"Is that a good portrait of him?" asked Dorothy, pointing to a picture hanging in an alcove.

"Yes; it was taken soon after your mother died. You were three at the time." The old man paused and regarded her wistfully. "It would greatly comfort me to know that you have your brother's protection when I am gone," he said thoughtfully. "I am afraid I've done wrong in keeping you at home, near me. You ought to have seen a little of the world. You might have been comfortably married by now."

She leaned forward and kissed him.

"Don't talk that way, dear," she gently