

PENDER AMONG THE RESIDENTS

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Pender among the residents by Forrest Reid

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FORREST REID

**PENDER AMONG
THE RESIDENTS**

PENDER AMONG THE RESIDENTS

by

FORREST REID

Author of "Following Darkness," "A Garden by the Sea,"
"Pirates of the Spring"

"Ah ! Cattina, pour dormir tranquille, il faut n'avoir
jamais fait certains rêves."

Lorenzaccio.



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To
MRS. FRANK WORKMAN

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PART I

THE ARRIVAL

I

CAPTAIN CHAFFINCH, being of a musical turn, paused for a moment outside Miss Foy's small house, or rather, outside the gate of her garden. Certain strains, on his approach, had revealed themselves as the opening bars of the waltz from *Faust*. They came brightly tripping to his ear, but of a sudden faltered, made a blind stagger at recovery, and—abruptly ceased. The captain, whistling the conclusion of the air for himself, passed on down the street, while the piano, unabashed, started upon a second attempt.

The piano was old, and its voice most tremulous and cracked. Some of the keys had a disconcerting habit, when struck, of not returning to their original position. One or two of them, even beneath the firm touch of Miss Adeline Burton, refused to respond at all. On these occasions a remote and wiry tinkle was all that could be heard, sounding from unfathomable depths within, but this plaintive tinkle, so feeble, so helpless, had no effect upon the younger Miss Burton; she but pounded the harder, with a joyous determination that set the brass candlesticks dancing, and irritated her instructress nearly to the point of tears.

Every Tuesday and Friday Adeline Burton came for a music lesson, and every Tuesday and Friday, at the same point, in the same way, she broke down. Miss Foy always knew that she would. She waited for the crash and jangle of wrong notes with nerves on edge. As the dangerous passage drew near, her eyes

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behind their glasses assumed a peculiar fixity, her breathing became audible. The insouciant Adeline, aware of these symptoms, increased the *tempo* recklessly; she attacked *con furore*, and then—bang, jangle, jar, and sudden silence.

"Let me *show* you, Adeline. I can't think why you should find those particular bars so difficult."

Miss Foy's voice was querulous, but fatally weak. Straightening her glasses and seating herself on the music-stool, which Adeline vacated with unnecessary alacrity, she played the awkward passage, while her pupil craned her neck to try to catch a glimpse of what was passing in the street. Miss Foy's bony fingers were stiff, her performance lacked confidence, though long acquaintance with the piano gave her a strategical advantage over that doddering instrument which Adeline did not possess. Miss Foy knew exactly which notes were dumb, and which, when once struck down, required to be deftly reinstated before again coming into action. Still, she preferred *andantes* to *allegros*, and even on a good piano technique had never been her strongest point. Somehow, while listening to her playing, one found oneself speculating as to whether she couldn't do anything for her neuritis—a preoccupation that interfered with a due attention to the music. Her glasses, also, were a drawback. Owing either to a weak spring, or to some peculiarity in the formation of the bridge of her nose, they had a trick of falling off at the most critical moment, and the sudden darkness that then descended upon Miss Foy invariably brought the piece to a conclusion. She was never asked to play in public; she played as seldom as possible in the presence of her more advanced pupils; nor could one even picture her as indulging in a little music for her own private entertainment.

One had an equal difficulty, it must be confessed, in picturing her as painting "in water-colours and in oils," doing "poker-work," studying "French," or even "English, literature." Yet of all these arts Miss

Foy was mistress. A printed circular found its way once or twice a year into the homes of most of the inhabitants of Ballycastle, reminding them of the fact. Nobody in Ballycastle had ever desired that a child of theirs should learn "poker-work," or "painting in water-colours and in oils." Nobody had ever expressed a desire to study "literature." Captain Chaffinch alone, on his first appearance in these parts, had inquired about the "French," and unfortunately a long residence abroad during his boyhood had rendered him ineligible. Miss Foy discovered that he merely wanted conversation, that he had an idea that it would be rather pleasant to drop back occasionally into bilingual habits: but Miss Foy spoke only *très peu*, and her *Grammaire des Grammaires*, in its neat linen cover, remained undisturbed upon the shelf.

A few little girls and three or four small boys were the only pupils she had ever secured. They came to her for music: nobody had ever come to her for anything else. Nevertheless, the "painting in water-colours and in oils," the "French," the "poker-work," and "literature," remained bravely in Miss Foy's prospectus, a perpetual challenge to Ballycastle culture. If the neighbouring youths and maidens grew up in ignorance of these things it would not be Miss Foy's fault. She did her best. She was there, on the spot, an accessible and far from expensive source of enlightenment—the rest obviously was a matter for her fellow townsmen.

Miss Foy hated teaching. Not so much because she knew she was incompetent as because it upset her. There were certain of the simpler *Lieder Ohne Worte*, for instance, favourites with parents, which awakened in her an anguish no human being should be called on to endure. She never gave a lesson but she felt afterwards that she had been either too severe, or too indulgent, and since she was, temperamentally, incapable of harming a fly, naturally it was her severity that bothered her most. She *did*, in point of fact, get cross with the little girls rather often: they were all