

**MR. FOLEY OF SALMON:
A STORY OF LIFE IN A
CALIFORNIA VILLAGE**

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Mr. Foley of Salmon: A Story of Life in a California Village by J. J. Curran

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CHAPTER I

THE VILLAGERS OF SAWYERS BAR DECIDE TO ENGAGE A LADY TEACHER—MR. DAVIS IS SENT ON A MISSION.

THE arrival of the United States mail at Sawyers Bar, a mining town of some five hundred inhabitants, situated in Siskiyou County, the most northern county in the great State of California, was an event of more than ordinary interest to the people of that burg on a Saturday in the month of May; the major portion of the community was arrayed in holiday attire, or as Mr. Foley remarked, had their "store clothes" on.

The cause of this display was the expected coming of a lady school teacher, the first in the history of the town, so the appearance of the mail coach was awaited by a larger concourse than usual. Since the establishment of the District up to the present epoch, a male pedagogue had presided over and taught the young idea how to shoot. The employment of a lady teacher was an innovation that the parents viewed with distrust and failed to see the wisdom of. When the fiat had gone forth that the Trustees had engaged a young lady from San Francisco for the ensuing term, the question of her ability to discipline the pupils had been argued pro and con among all classes. It was the chief topic of conversation, and the concensus of opinion was

that no woman was equal to the task, for Sawyers Bar enjoyed the unenviable reputation of being the most difficult school in the county to manage. The register showed an average attendance of fifty scholars; among this number were some boys from 14 to 17 years of age, who made the duration of the teacher a bane. An incumbent who succeeded in staying out the term, never applied for a second, so it came to a condition that it was next to impossible to procure a teacher.

Mr. George Davis was one of the Trustees and Clerk of the Board. On this memorable occasion, as the time for opening school approached, he called a meeting of the Trustees and addressed them thus: "Gentlemen, I must remind you that it is nearing the time when school should begin. You are familiar with these facts, viz: that our school is a hard proposition; of the trouble our predecessors have experienced in securing teachers. From what I can learn, there is no competent instructor in the county who desires the place at any salary; there is no citizen of this District who wants the office of Trustee. You are aware that at the last election the position literally went begging. Affairs have reached a crisis. It's up to us. What are we going to do about it? Have you a remedy to suggest?"

Mr. Crane suggested they follow the usual custom and try to employ a man. Mr. Knowlton, the third Trustee, said he could see no other alternative.

"Well," resumed Mr. Davis, "I propose a change; that is, we hire a lady."

"A woman teach this school," exclaimed Mr. Crane, "it's absurd. Those larger boys would make it intolerant for her, and I doubt if she would remain a month."

Mr. Knowlton acquiesced in this opinion.

"Listen," said Mr. Davis, "I have cogitated on this subject; I can see no other solution but to try a lady teacher. I confess it will be an experiment. In the past the men have exhausted all kinds of means; moral suasion and corporal punishment have availed nothing. Those boys have been suspended and expelled a number of times. On promising to reform, they have been re-instated, only to resume their habits of mischief. Complaints have been lodged with the Trustees, until they have become annoyed and disgusted with the whole business. A lady for teacher I am determined to have; if you do not coincide in this view, I will resign. In a few days I leave for the Bay City. My friends will direct me to select a competent first grade teacher. Give me your consent in this matter and I will assume the responsibility and onus should it result in disaster."

"We yield to your logic. Go ahead; we will support you. Our school will have everything to gain, and nothing to lose," replied the other Trustees.

So the vexed question was settled. That evening Mr. Davis conceived the idea that the time was

opportune to acquaint the public generally with the information. He sauntered into the leading resort, where were congregated typical representatives of the community. He saluted all affably; exchanged a few pointers on the weather, and discussed the outlook for the mines. Fixing his gaze upon Mr. O'Brien, the father of the most incorrigible boy, he exclaimed: "Did you hear the latest?" Being answered in the negative he continued: "The Trustees have decided to engage a lady to teach this school the coming term."

"You surely don't mean it." "You are springing a joke on us," were the remarks that greeted his ears.

"Gentlemen, I was never more in earnest in my life." As he perceived several were about to speak, he raised his hand to command silence. "Hear me out. I can anticipate any objection or argument you are about to make. I have thoroughly canvassed the question, and spent some time pondering over the possibility of success or failure of the venture. I opine that an experienced lady with her gentle ways and mild discipline, will subdue and captivate the pupils. I hope the future will fulfill this prediction. I ask you to reserve your decision until we have given the lady an impartial trial, and place no obstacle in her way. Should it result different from what I have prophesied, I assure you I will come to you and candidly acknowledge I have erred, and my judgment was at fault."

Mr. Davis was a voluble speaker. His words carried weight and conviction. He was the leading merchant of the town, highly respected by all and an influential man.

"A - word with you, Mr. Davis," spoke Mr. Foley. "I wish you would secure a good looking single lady, and possibly some of us old bachelors might induce her to take another name and pre- side over a miner's domicile. I am going to take time by the forelock and announce myself as a candidate for matrimonial honors right now." This sally evoked laughter, and closed the incident for the time.

Mr. Davis arrived in San Francisco. For many years he had purchased merchandise of a wholesale firm. The senior partner was Mr. Stevens. When Mr. Davis had finished business he made known to Mr. Stevens his commission to employ a teacher. He gave a detailed account of the school, and what he considered it required, and invoked the aid of the city merchant. Mr. Davis paused, and Mr. Stevens made answer: "I have in mind the identical lady that will suit you. You will be truly fortunate to secure her services; the more you become acquainted with her the better you will like her. I believe you will be delighted with her. This young lady's name is Miss May Wilton. I have known her since childhood, and I regard her with almost the same affection that I feel toward my own daughter. She is a most estimable lady, and is everything you could desire. She is a first grade