The Chariot Cometh

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She stood up and straightened her clothing. She put the coat and purse into a bundle under her arm. Her hair had loosened and now both braids hung down her back. Her hands and knees were very dirty and both stockings were torn beyond repair. She pulled at her wet skirts, then brushed some loose strands of hair from her face and bravely walked toward town.

The street behind the depot was deserted. So far so good. She cut through a neighbor’s yard and hurried up to her own little porch. As she unlocked her door, she glanced quickly around to see if she had been noticed. Only old Tom, the brown and white cat, had seen her. He arched his back and purred a greeting as he rubbed against her leg.

Just as she stooped to touch the cat she was aware of a distant train whistle. The eight o’clock was comin’ through! Cedar Center would have mail.

She scooped up the cat and went into the kitchen where she put him on the window sill as she reached for the coffee pot.

The Postmistress was on the job.

Verda Aegerter, Sc. & H. Jr.

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A STICKY SWIRL of dry, dense dust choked the last august city father of Postville as the battered Ford pounced to a stop, spewing its final puffs of bilious blue smoke into the clinging July afternoon. The driver was out, the door slamming behind him, before the pleading engine had stopped, and he stood knee-deep in the unsettled dust with a worn Bible under one arm. With his free hand he waved chaotically up and down, nearly lifting his bony body from the ground with each upward jerk. “Blessed, blessed be thee, O great and glorious city walls, for in thy humble arms
ye have welcomed the golden chariot and its precious cargo of gifts from the East.” With this he bowed swiftly, ripping his moldy alpaca coat on the fender of the rusty chariot that sagged in the street. “Blessed, Blessed!” and with a snatch, he picked up the Bible that had fallen with a thud during his screeching oratory. With a bat-like leap he descended upon the bewildered, gagging old man on the porch, his hand outstretched, a golden denture grin shining through his stained red beard. Before the old man could raise his hand to shake, the jumping prophet had hopped into the street with a “Behold, behold,” and had the back door of the car swung open displaying an assortment of plaster of paris statuettes, stacks of paperbound books, tin-framed mottos and faded photographs of the Last Supper and the Crucifixion, most of which tumbled into the dust. With a deft foot he kicked the fragments of a plaster “Ten Commandments” under the chariot and bounced back to the puzzled city father on the porch.

“Behold, behold,” again and he stuck a genuine autographed photograph of St. Augustine into the old man’s face, his paper-boy change-maker clattering. “Such wonders as the likes of you have never laid fond eyes on before. One dollar and ninety-nine cents! Think of it!” The old man was now on his feet, held up by the tight grip of the bearded dervish, who had his hand in the old man’s pocket. Shaking on his feet, the last citizen of Postville watched his wad of greasy bills being daintily counted in front of his baffled eyes. The jumping chariot driver was now in a frenzy of nervous babblings of quotations as he dashed back and forth across the porch bringing back treasures from the East and counting money, while his customer looked strangely at the pile of paper and plaster at his feet.

Suddenly the whirling, leaping prophet was back in the Ford and had the engine sputtering. Clouds of oil fumes engulfed the old man as he stood in a daze. The car was pulling out. The last citizen of Postville raised his hand to plead, and was answered by a final “Blessed, blessed!” The old man stood in the trail of yellow dust coughing, and the golden chariot pounced into the West.