

# THE PRIZE STORY.

NO. 8.

One lady or gentleman's Solid Gold Stem-Winding and Stem-Setting genuine Elgin Watch, valued at about \$80, is offered every week as a prize for the best story, original or selected, sent to us by competitors under the following conditions:—1st. The story need not be the work of the sender, but may be selected from any newspaper, magazine, book or pamphlet wherever found, and may be either written or printed matter, as long as it is legible. 2nd. The sender must become a subscriber for TRUTH for at least six months, and must therefore send one dollar along with the story, together with name and address clearly given. 3rd. Competitors competing will have their term extended an additional half year for the dollar sent. If two persons happen to send in the same story the first one received at TRUTH office will have the preference. The publisher reserves the right to publish at any time any story, original or selected, which may fall to obtain a prize. The sum of three dollars (\$3) will be paid for such story when used. Address—Editor's Prize Story, "TRUTH" Office, Toronto, Canada.

The following attractive and well written story has been chosen as our prize story for the present week, as being appropriate and seasonable. The sender, Miss Mary Francis, Sherbrooke St., Montreal, Que., can obtain the Gold Hunting Case, Stem Winding Elgin Watch offered as a prize, by forwarding twenty-five cents for postage and Registration.

## THE WHITTAKERS GHOST.

The following ghost story has been told me, word for word, by an eye-witness, and is authenticated by persons of recognized position.

G. B. S.  
My name is Anna Ducane, and I had two sisters, Helene and Louise. About twenty years ago we lived with our parents on our farm in the neighbourhood of Montreal, that is to say, within about thirty miles of that city. Our life was a very quiet, uneventful one. From time to time we visited among our neighbours in the country, or spent a few days, shopping and sight-seeing, "in town" with our parents; but our excitements were simple and few, and a brood of ducks would serve us for conversation for a week. It is needless to say we enjoyed perfect health, and were all three of us strong, good-natured, and useful girls, who could turn our hands to most household employments, and a good many outdoor jobs as well—having a rather supercilious contempt of affectation and what we called "fine-ladyism."

All this I mention at the outset, because I wish to show that we were women to whom anything like nerves was unknown. At the time I speak of, Helene and I, who are twins, were nearly two-and-twenty, and Louise was about nineteen.

It was in the end of August that we received an unexpected and delightful invitation to spend some weeks in Montreal, at Whittakers, the house of an old Major Whittaker, who, with his two sisters, resided on a very pretty property on the outskirts of the town. Lucy Whittaker, their niece, had been at school with us in Hamilton, and her return from a visit to Europe was the reason of our invitation to her uncle's house. At first our mother declared she could not think of sending all three of us to stop in a town house; but Lucy wrote and insisted that none should be left behind. There was plenty of space, if we did not mind sharing one big room, like the ward of a hospital, which she was busy preparing for us.

So one evening early in September we found ourselves welcomed to Whittakers by Lucy, looking prettier than ever in a wonderful Parisian dress, the like of which none of us had ever seen. It quite cast into the shade all the elaborate preparations, the flouncings, frillings, and ironings, which had engrossed us all for the last fortnight.

But Lucy was just her own self, despite her smart new wardrobe, and she and Louise became at once as inseparable as they had been at school, while Helene and I fell straightway in love with the old Miss Whittakers, Miss Sara and Miss Hesba. They were different from any old ladies we had ever known; more refined in looks and manners than our country neighbours, and accomplished in many curious arts which now scarcely survive, such as tambour work, and painting on velvet, and playing the harp. We wanted at once to learn everything they could teach us, and thought that our three weeks' visit would never suffice if we did not begin immediately to be initiated into these mysticisms, which were to render us of fresh importance and attractiveness when we should return home.

So we threw ourselves into all sorts of employments with a will, and the days flew by rapidly. Lucy and Louise were generally out of doors together, either in the big, old-fashioned garden behind the house, where they chattered and picked fruit and whispered their secrets by the hour, or in the town itself; sight-seeing and promenading under the protection of a young relation of our hosts, Harry Leroy, who was, like ourselves, visiting Whittakers for the first time.

A word here about Major Whittaker, who, though not wanting in the hospitality and geniality of a host, somehow was very little seen by his visitors; except at eight o'clock, morning and evening, when he regularly read prayers to his assembled household, and at the two meals that followed. He never appeared downstairs, but spent his time in a little study over the porch, where, if the door stood accidentally open, the passer-by might see him hard at work on his life's object, a Harmony of the Four Gospels, over which he had been poring for years. I never knew anything of his past history—how he came by his military title, when he had left the army, or what had given him the very strong and peculiar religious opinions which he held. These opinions were enforced upon the household morning and evening at family prayers, where the Major's long extempore petitions sometimes kept us half an hour at a time upon our knees.

A fortnight of our time at Whittakers had passed very pleasantly, and we were beginning to think, with reluctance, that in another week or so we must be returning home. I mentioned this one afternoon to Miss Hesba as we sat at our painting. She scouted the idea at once, declaring that as long as we cared to stay, and the fine weather continued, we must not think of leaving them.

But even as she spoke, Miss Sara got up and looked anxiously out of the window, for it seemed as if the splendid weather was about to break. Clouds had been creeping up since the morning, and a wet, sounding, whistling wind was beginning to haunt the chimneys; and to rattle the red leaves of the maples.

The two younger girls and Harry Leroy, came in from the garden, and, to our surprise, old Major Whittaker himself appeared from the regions above, shivering as if with cold. "Shut the windows," he said, "and don't go out any more this evening." For we generally spent the hour before and after prayers and supper in the verandah.

We did not heed his words particularly at the time, and soon he went away to his study again.

We spent the early part of the evening pleasantly enough, part-singing at the piano. Then came prayers and supper as usual, and then, as we recessed the hall from the dining-room, some one of us suggested that we should go out upon the steps of the front door and watch the storm which was rapidly coming up, and the clouds which dashed across the full moon, hanging like a red globe over the St. Lawrence.

I do not think either host or hostesses saw us, and we had quite forgotten the Major's counsel that we should not go out again that evening. We left the hall-door ajar, and stood out upon the gravel in front of the house, we four girls and young Mr. Leroy.

In order that the following circumstances may be clearly understood, I must explain a little the topography of Whittakers. It was a long, two-storied house, standing a little back from the road which ran into Montreal, and its entrance was not unlike that of many modern English villas. It had two wooden gates, both opening upon the road, which always stood wide, and these were connected by a semicircular sweep of gravel in front of the house, edged with laurels and shrubs. The log garden, orchard, and fields were all behind the house, which in front approaches within about fifty yards of the highway. The hall door of Whittakers stood always open during our visit—it was two leaves of battered, weather-stained oak, and on its outside were the marks whence two large knockers had evidently

been removed. We had remarked their removal before, and Mr. Leroy had said he supposed the rattle of the knockers had, interfered with the Harmony of the four Gospels in the study above.

As we stood upon the gravel walk we all five distinctly heard the noise of a heavy carriage approaching from the town along the road in front of us, apparently having two, or even four horses, and driven at a great pace. We could not see it for the laurels which intervened between us and the road on either side, but we knew it was rapidly drawing near the gate. Its approach interested us, for it was now nearly ten o'clock, and a visitor at such an hour was unheard of. But if not coming to Whittakers, whither could the carriage be going? for it was the last house of any importance for miles along that way.

We stepped back into the doorway, and found ourselves suddenly caught and dragged in by old Major Whittaker, who, trembling with excitement, and with his queer flowered dressing-gown fluttering round him, as though he had just been aroused from bed, somehow whirled us all into the hall, and banged to the great leaves of the door with a noise that made the house shake.

But above all the rattle of chains and bars—for the old man was busy securing the door as if for a siege—we heard the approach of the carriage, which, as we expected, turned in at the gate and drew up, with a crack of the whip and a splutter of gravel when the horses were sharply pulled in at the hall steps.

We all heard it; and so, I am sure, did Major Whittaker and his sisters, who had also come out into the hall. Not one of us dared say anything, for we were awed by the intensity of excitement which characterized every movement of our host.

A moment afterwards the old door was almost battered in by a furious assault upon it with the iron knocker, and, looking in each other's faces, we all recollected simultaneously that there was no knocker there. "Let us pray," said Major Whittaker's voice above the noise. We all knelt down, were we were, while he poured forth a long, rambling prayer, in which he entreated to be delivered from evil and ghostly influence; but we were all too frightened and excited to listen much. Lucy and Louise were both crying and receiving an undercurrent of consolation from Harry Leroy, while our host prayed on in a high, unnatural tone. The hammering on the front door continued at intervals.

However, these grew longer and longer, and at last the sound ceased altogether. Not so the prayers, for though I was longing to get away to our room, which also looked to the front, to see if the carriage remained at the door, the old Major kept us quite half an hour, without any reference to the usual family worship, which had been punctually performed as usual two hours before.

When at last we retired to our room our first rush, of course, was to the window, but all that was to be seen was the moon riding high in the sky, and the storm clouds sweeping past—no trace of a carriage or its occupants anywhere! Of course we lay awake till morning, discussing the extraordinary event, and Lucy came creeping in to sleep with Louise, too frightened to remain by herself.

I ought to explain that she was almost as much a stranger to Whittakers as we were, having been lately left an orphan to the charge of her uncle, who had at first sent her on a tour with some friends to Europe. Consequently the bombardment of the house by the ghost and the spectre knocker (for we were convinced that what we had heard was supernatural) was as terrible to her as to us.

The next morning it seemed as if all the pleasure of our visit was gone, and—a straw will show which way the wind blows—on some reference being made to our return home, I was struck, but not altogether astonished, to find that no opposition was made to our carrying out our intention, even by Miss Hesba. The two old ladies were evidently miserable and ill-at-ease about something, and though no allusion was made to the occurrence of the night before, it was in all our minds, and rose up between us and all enjoyment.

Our pleasant morning employments were not resumed, for the Misses Whittaker were closeted upstair with their brother, and we younger ones preferred keeping all together in the garden, where the sun shone and we seemed to be out of the supernatural influence which invaded the gloomy old place. Harry Leroy confided to us that

he had investigated the front of the house, and that traces of the wheels of a heavy vehicle and the hoof-marks of a pair of horses were distinctly visible upon the gravel!

By-and-by, when we came in to early dinner, Miss Sara took me aside, and, twisting her watch-guard about in her hands from nervousness, explained that she and her brother thought perhaps it would be better, "under the unfortunate circumstances," that our visit to Whittakers should end as soon as possible. Without actually saying so, she gave me to understand that the annoyance of the previous evening was not by any means over.

I was glad of her plain speaking, for though I did not personally mind the "ghost," as we had already begun to call this disturbing influence, among ourselves, I could not bear the change which had so suddenly fallen upon the previously cheerful household. Besides, I dreaded its effect upon Louise, who was of a very excitable temperament. So I gladly arranged with Miss Sara to have a note ready for my mother, to be sent that afternoon by a special messenger, to prepare her for our unexpected return home, as soon as four despatched places could be obtained in the stage, which in those days was the means of communication between Montreal and our nearest village. Four places—for I persuaded Miss Whittaker to let us take Lucy with us. I could not bear the idea of leaving the girl companionless, though her aunt said, with a sigh: "Lucy is one of us, and must learn to bear this as we do."

That night we again all slept together in the big front bed room. I must mention that I had not told any of the others of Miss Sara's hint that possibly the ghost was not yet laid to rest, for, I thought, we had talked over the matter quite enough. So I incited Lucy to tell us some of her European experiences, and we all went to sleep in the middle of her description of Cologne Cathedral.

We must have slept about two hours or so, when I was awakened by a sharp pinch from Helene, and called out, "What are you doing?" before I opened my eyes. Her answer, "Hush! it is here in the room!" woke me up thoroughly. I saw her face looking, pale in the dim light, towards the window, a large bow, which occupied the whole end of the front room to the right head of our bed. Louise and Lucy slept in another bed on our left, and consequently further from the window.

I followed the direction of her looks with my eyes, but without stirring, for her words had given me an uncomfortable kind of thrill. There, behind the big dressing-table, which stood in the centre of the bow-window, but well into the room, leaving a considerable space clear behind it, I saw a tall veiled figure, which something told me at once was not human. It was muffled from head to foot in trailing, grey garments, and something was wrapped about its head, but from its long, swinging strides—for it paced to and fro in the little enclosure between window and table—I guessed it to be a male figure, though the garments were womanly, or perhaps monkish. At first it did not appear to notice us, but presently it began somewhat to slacken its regular walk, and turning its hooded head towards us, seemed to be intently regarding us. My hand was tightly locked in Helene's, and I know the same thought was in both our minds. "What if it comes into the open part of the room, and near either of the beds?"

Suddenly a little gasp from the other bed told us that the other girls were also awake (it was too dark to see their faces), and Louise's voice broke the intense silence. In that Name to which all powers must yield, she commanded it to be gone.

This was Louise, the most timid and nervous of us all! I forgot the ghost in my amazement, and turned to look at her, as she sat up in bed, a trembling little white figure.

A moment after, when I looked to the window, the ghost was gone. Louise had exercised it. She was crying bitterly now, and shaking all over. Helene and I jumped up and crowded round her, patting and soothing her until her sobbing ceased.

"I don't know what put it into my head to do it, I'm sure," she explained; "but I had been looking at the dreadful thing so long, long before any of you woke—and at last I felt I should go mad if I did not speak. I could see his eyes quite plainly, like two lamps, looking me through and I knew it was I who must speak to him."

By-and-by, when we were all a little