

THE PRIZE STORY.

NO. 25.

One lady or gentleman's Fine Solid Gold Watch 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 be a subscriber for Truth for at least four months, and must, therefore, send one dollar along with the story, together with the name and address clearly given. Present subscribers will have their term extended 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. The sender can obtain the Watch offered as the prize, by forwarding twenty-five cents for postage and registration.

MISS BASHBY.

SENT BY MISS MARTHA PERKINS, BELLEVILLE, ONT.

"The old Bee-hive is a-goin' to be torn down," said Keturah, as she placed a plate of buckwheat cakes on the breakfast table.

"The Bee-hive torn down!" said mother.

"Why, Keturah, who told you?"

"Jones's boy, when he kem to borrow the wheelbarrow. He says, says he, 'They're a-goin' to tear down the old Bee-hive; and time enough too, says I; it ain't been fit for human creatures to live in this long time.'"

"Edward," said mother, "have you heard anything of this?"

Father slowly emerged from the depths of his morning paper. "What! Oh, the old Weatherbee place! Yes, I believe the town has decided that it is unsafe to live in, and so better be torn down."

"Poor Miss Bashby!" said mother.

"What will become of her?"

"Poor-house, most likely," answered father dreamily, again absorbed in the stock-list.

The old Weatherbee house, or the Bee-hive, as it was called, stood on a hill just at the outskirts of the village. A winding lane led up to it from the main street, a lane that in summer was a tangle of black-berry and sweet-brier bushes, with here and there a gnarled oak-tree leaning against the old stone wall. People said that it was once a pretty avenue that led up in gradual windings to the fine house on the hill.

But the once fine house was now a dilapidated old building, and only a cart track wound up the hill among the tangle of neglected trees and shrubs. It was a two-storied, squarely-built house, with huge chimneys, and small diamond-paned windows. A flight of stone steps led up to the front door, and a long L connected the main house with huge barns and outhouses.

But the windows were broken, a part of the main roof had fallen in, and only two low rooms in the L had been habitable for many years. There, Miss Bathsheba and her invalid sister, Miss Patience, had lived, dependent for their daily bread on the pitance the two earned by plain sewing and the kindly charity of the neighbors.

Miss Patience, who, Miss Bashby often scornfully declared, "hadn't a bit of Weatherbee pride in her," received gratefully the assistance of friends, but Miss Bashby could not forget that she was a Weatherbee, and accepted what was given her more as her right than as a gift.

Often mother sent us children up the long lane to the old house, with some little delicacy to tempt the appetite of the invalid. I dreaded, yet was half glad to go. The old house, and the two tall women with their queer, old-time ways, had a strange fascination for me.

As I stood on the worn steps, knocking at the door, and heard the slow tread of old Miss Bashby echoing down the long passage, I felt like placing my basket on the door-sill, and running away.

"What do you want, child?"

"Please Miss—Miss Weatherbee—mother sent you this."

"Oh!" said Miss Bashby, calmly, as she lifted the snowy napkin, "jelly! It looks nice: I hope it will taste as good as it looks. Tell your mother that the last she sent was a little too strong of lemon; I hope this is better."

Then the soft voice of Miss Patience floated out through the doorway; "is that you, Sadie Allen? Tell your mother, dear, that we are very thankful for her kindness." Then Miss Bashby shut the door with an emphatic bang, and I knew, as well as if I

had heard it, that Miss Patience was receiving a lecture, repeated for the five-hundredth time, on her want of pride.

At last one day, poor Miss Patience, weary of life, slipped out of it quietly, and was laid to sleep with the rest of her grand family in the great Weatherbee tomb.

I have no doubt Miss Bashby sorrowed long and bitterly for her sister, but the tears she shed, if any, were all in secret; no one ever saw her weep. An extra bow of black on the old-fashioned bonnet; a sterner set to the thin lips; a few added crow's feet under the cold gray eyes—that was all.

And now the old house was to be torn down—not fit to live in—but what could be done with poor Miss Bashby? Not many of the neighbors had any sympathy for her, but mother's tender heart was touched. "If she has to go to the poor-house it will be the death of her," she said.

"O children, don't you think we ought to ask her to spend the winter with us? I can't bear the thought of her going to the poor-house."

"Why, Mother Allen!" was the universal exclamation, "how can we?"

"Oh I don't like her," said Ned, gruffly, "she is so horribly proud."

"O mother!" I said, "do you really think we ought? Isn't there some other way?"

"Never mind," said mother, pleasantly; "we will say no more about it. Perhaps it wouldn't be best. I shall not ask her unless you are all willing."

But the next day there were signs of capitulation among us. Strange to say, our big boy, Ned, was the first to surrender.

"See here, mother," he said, "I don't want to be mean. Let her come. I can stand it if the rest can."

Will said quietly, "Poor old thing! I don't care if Ned doesn't."

Then I, too, said, but with a foreboding threat, "We will try and get along some way."

But there still remained one tower of strength to storm.

When Keturah heard of it, she exclaimed, "The Lord love us! Comin' here? Not if I know it! Now, Miss Allen, do be reasonable! I've lived with ye more'n fifteen year—nursed most all the children—helped fetch 'em through the whoopin'-cough, measles and et cetera, but as for havin' that mean old creature—"

"Keturah!" said mother, warningly—"then the kitchen door was shut, and only the occasional sound of mother's pleading voice and Keturah's angry sniffs came to us from the scene of battle."

When mother came out of the kitchen some half hour later, we knew by the quiet smile on her face, and the subdued rattle of dishes from Keturah's domain, that the latter was vanquished.

So the very next day Miss Bashby came. We gave her the south bed-room, and had an open fire, and a cosy arm-chair beside it, ready to welcome her. But if an idea that she would show any gratitude had crept into our minds, we were doomed to disappointment. Hoping she would say that she was pleased with her room, I walked softly by the door, and glanced in. She was standing by the dusty bed, closely examining the sheets and pillow cases.

"H'm, h'm," I heard her mutter, "colleen, all of 'em; gentlefolks used linen in my day," and then she sighed heavily.

The autumn days went swiftly by, and the cold, snowy days of winter came. Miss Bashby had been with us now two months,

and we got on very well. Keturah was most patient of us all, and won golden opinions from mother. The boys were courteous and respectful, and said very little to Miss Bashby; I think they were half afraid of her. Little Joey we tried to keep out of her way altogether, as, the only time he visited her room, she said she didn't like little boys. But the gaze of her large round spectacles, and the sharp click of her knitting needles, had a curious fascination for the little man. Often when he was unusually quiet, on hunting him up, he was found just outside Miss Bashby's open door. Once, on coming to take him away, I heard him ask solemnly, with his brown eyes fixed on her wrinkled face:

"What makes you look so, Miss Bashby? You is all wizzled up! Is your skin too big for you?"

One day in January, a cold, clear, frosty day, there came a letter saying Aunt Mary was very ill.

After a hurried consultation, it was decided that mother should start at once for Brunswick, where Aunt Mary lived, and that further should accompany her. After many hasty directions to Keturah and me, they started to catch the early train. Mother's last words were, "Be kind to Miss Bashby."

For a few days things went very well. The boys were less unruly than usual, Miss Bashby was quite amiable for her, and Keturah was as sunny as a May morning. But alas! the peace was of short duration.

One morning, in going down the cellar stairs, Keturah slipped and sprained her ankle. It was very painful, and poor Keturah, with many gasps and groans, could do nothing but lie helpless on the kitchen lounge, and give directions about the work.

"Keturah," I would question, as, with sleeves rolled up and a long apron on, I went resolutely to work, "how much molasses do you put in the gingerbread?"

"O Miss Sadie! Miss Sadie!" poor Keturah would groan, "only to think of me a-lyin' here like a log, and you, such a little spindlin' creature, a-doin' my work. Oh dear! Oh dear!"

"But, Keturah, do tell me how much molasses, or I shall never get the gingerbread done."

"Oh land! Bring me the jug and I'll measure it for you. Goodness, child! not that two quart bowl! What are you thinkin' of? It only takes a cupfull. O Lord! to think of Keturah Skinner ever comin' to this pass!" and so on during the long day.

Miss Bashby was particularly disagreeable just at this crisis. No wonder she complained of the cooking. Poor Keturah, lying helpless on the lounge, couldn't see to everything, and so the bread was heavy, the pie-crust like dough, and the coffee a very unattractive beverage.

The boys, good fellows, laughed and joked about it; said they had never enjoyed anything so much in their lives. But Miss Bashby—she said nothing, but the gesture of disgust with which she pushed away her plate at table, and gathering her shawl about her, marched majestically to her room and shut the door, was worse than anything we had to bear. Poor Keturah, with her promise to mother fresh in her memory, could only shut her mouth resolutely and groan.

One bright, cold Wednesday afternoon, Keturah, whose foot now allowed her to hobble about a little, was helping me finish the kitchen work, and Miss Bashby was safely shut up in her den, when Will and Ned rushed pell-mell into the kitchen with a loud demand for Joey.

"Just let us take him on the ice a while! We won't keep him long. It is such a splendid day; the ice is as firm as can be, no danger at all. Get the little chap ready, that's a good sister, and hurry up about it; we can't wait."

With a questioning look at Keturah, which she answered with an emphatic nod, I hastened to get the little cap and mittens and gray ulster, while the proud owner of these boyish garments danced and pranced and wriggled with delight, till I could scarcely get them on, and I only had time for a word of caution before a grand rush was made for the door, and Joey was off in high glee.

"Old Dr. Wilbur is a-bitchin' up his team," said Keturah, as she glanced out of the window for a last look at the retreating boys. "I guess some of them poor trash over to Hingham's Corner is took sick again. They always send for Dr. Wilbur, 'cause he always goes when they send, and he never charges 'em nothin'. Them kind is mighty 'cate!"

Smiling at Keturah's philosophy, I hastened my work of getting the kitchen tidy. Presently Miss Bashby made her appearance at the kitchen door.

"Sadie Allen," said she, solemnly "I'm going to lie down for my afternoon nap. If any of the neighbors should come in and inquire for me, don't disturb me on any account. I can't be broken of my rest." Then she shut the door and walked slowly back to her room.

"Land o' love!" said Keturah, "Ef any of the neighbors call! Lord help us! Did you ever hear the likes of that! ... reek their askin'!"

"Keturah! Keturah!" said I, as gravely as I could, though my lips would twitch in spite of me. "Don't you forget what mother said about—"

"Now, Sadie Allen," retorted my irate help, "you know I wouldn't so much as hurt a spear of her hair, and she ain't got any; but she is most awful aggravatin'; that you'll allow."

Yes, I would allow that.

But hark! What was that? Loud shouts, followed by an ominous silence, and then a wild, confused murmur of steps and voices. Keturah and I gazed at each other in dismay. Suddenly the kitchen door opened, and Will, with cap and coat off, with dishevelled hair, and face as white as death, staggered into the room and flung himself into a chair, covering his face with his hands.

"Will!" said I, breathlessly.

"Will Allen!" gasped Keturah, rushing to his side and tearing his hands away from his face. "What is it? Tell us quick!"

"Oh!" groaned the poor boy, "O mother! mother! And you left him in my care! O Joey! Joey!"

"What about Joey? O Will, what has happened to Joey?"

"Drowned!" said Will desperately.

"Went down through a breathing-hole. They fished him out, but, oh dear! he's dead. Oh Joey! Joey! They're bringing him home!"

There was a stamping of feet outside the door, and a crowd of men and boys entered, one of them bearing a dripping, half-frozen burden in his arms.

Was that our Joey?—the little white face set and rigid, the small hands hanging helplessly down, the brown eyes closed, and the long hair, wet and shining, flung back over the dripping clothes.

"Poor little chap!" said the burden-bearer, in a choking voice. "Guess he's done for. You see, he went in under so far, and we couldn't—"

Here his voice grew husky, and he turned away his face from us. "O Lord! O Lord!" wailed Keturah.

"What shall we do? Somebody run for the doctor—somebody get somethin' to give him—somebody—and she wrung her hands helplessly.

No one moved. The man still held his dripping burden; the crowd waited, awed to silence. I stood like a stone, my head whirling, my senses fast leaving me, when a new actor appeared on the scene.

"What's all this?" said a sharp voice, and Miss Bashby's head was thrust in at the door.

She took in the situation instantly.

"Keturah Skinner," she said, in a commanding voice, "take the child and carry him into my room. Sarah Allen, get the big scissors and cut all his clothes off as quick as you can and wrap him up in blankets. Will stop crying, and run up-stairs for the brandy! Jim Spooner, go for Dr. Wilbur as fast as ever you went—he's just started for Hingham's Corners—run across lots and head him off. Dead? He shall not die! Hot water, Keturah; hot bricks—everything hot! Now clear out, every one of you!" (turning to the crowd) "you can't do any good here!"

Oh, how we worked! we rolled the poor little body in blankets; we applied hot bricks and hot water; we rubbed the icy limbs.

Ten minutes went by—twenty. "O Miss Bashby," I sobbed, "he will never wake! never!"

"Hush, child!" she said, and her voice was softer than I had ever heard it: "I think we shall bring him too. There! I do believe he breathes a little—don't stop a minute, keep right on working. Yes, I'm sure of it!"

Oh, what a moment of suspense that was! Surely he breathed. "O God, only let him live!"

"Yes," said Keturah, hysterically, "just as sure as you're a born sinner, he's comin' out of it!"

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