

THE PRIZE STORY.

NO. 15.

One lady or gentleman's Solid Gold Watch, valued at about \$16, 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 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 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 reference. 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 Office, *Truth*, 1000, 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.

LOIS.

SENT BY MISS ELLA MITCHELL, WINDSOR, ONT.

An old red farm house, with its roof sloping toward the road, and rambling off at the back in an undecided way until stopped by the great barn, whose open doors showed full mows and made a dark setting for the vista of blue hills beyond. Along the side of the house were ranged squashes and pumpkins, absorbing their last allowance of sunshine, and the wide south porch was hung with strings of pepper and braided ears of corn. The front door with its fanlight and iron knocker, opened on a narrow path leading down to the road between rows of prim China asters; but the iron knocker was apparently seldom raised, for the path was grass grown, and an arm of the tall rose bush had reached quite across the doorway.

South of the house the orchard stretched away, the pyramids of gathered fruit making vivid spots of yellow and red against the brown grass. Through the still air came now and then the mellow thud of a falling apple or the sound of distant chopping, and over all lay the soft haze of an October day, darkened here and there by the smoke of a brush fire. The house faced the west, and just now all its little old fashioned panes were winking and blinking at the setting sun as though there was a good understanding between them. The place seemed the very heart of content; but down where the orchard sloped to the road a sorrowful little drama was being enacted. It was a common one,—merely the parting of two young hearts,—something we smile over every day, thinking how soon it will be outlived; and the actors were no tragedy king and queen, only a little New England girl of sixty years ago and her farmer lover.

There had been tears and vehement pleadings, but they were over now, and the two stood gravely regarding each other across the old rail fence. The girl's clasped hands rested on the fence, and the young man crossed them with his strong brown hands and made a final appeal:

"Lois, think what you have chosen; think what it will be to be shut up there with your grandmother."

"I know what it will be better than you can tell me; but that doesn't alter my duty," answered the girl steadily.

"But is it your duty?" urged the young, eager voice. "Your father is well able to hire a housekeeper to look after things and take care of your grandmother. There's Sam Johnson's widow, she'd jump at the chance of such a home."

A wan little smile glanced over the girl's face. "How long do you think grandma and Miry Johnson would agree?" she asked.

"Well, then, couldn't grandma go to your uncle's?"

"No, David," was the answer. "You know she tried that once and couldn't stand the children; besides, she was born in the old home and says she shall die there. It's no use talking; nobody except father and me will bear with her, and we must look after her as long as she lives."

"And the Duns live to be ninety," said the young man.

Her face paled a little, but she said "Yes," quietly.

"Oh, Lois," he burst forth, "don't do it! It will be a living death. Come with me. Now that I have this splendid chance, I want you to share my success, for I know I shall succeed."

"I am sure of it," said the girl, with a simple

faith, looking up to the sunburned face with loving eyes.

Those sweet eyes! As he looked down at them and thought how soon he should be beyond their light, he leaped the fence, and, throwing his arms about her, drew her closely to him.

But even the sweet sorrow of parting was to be shortened, for while the girl clung to him there came a shrill call of "Lois! Lois!" followed by a weak, impatient blast on the dinner-horn.

With a few hasty words of farewell, she broke from his detaining hold and ran swiftly through the orchard. When she reached the great flat door-stone, she stood a moment with her hand on the latch and looked back. Up the road went a solitary figure. How far he had gone already! The sun was down, the fields looked gray and bare, there was a chill in the air, and as she shut the door behind her she seemed to shut out forever youth and hope and love.

Grandma Dunn was in one of her worst moods. "Where ye been, Lois?" was the sharp inquiry.

"Down in the orchard," answered Lois, holding out her hands to the blaze in the fireplace, for the chill seemed to have crept to her heart.

"Was ye alone?" I thought once or twice I heard voices." And the old woman looked suspiciously at her.

"David Price was there," said the girl quietly.

"David Price was there, was he?" echoed the shrill voice. "Well, if David Price wants to see ye he'd better come to yer father's house. In my day young men didn't expect galls to go philandering 'cross lots to meet 'em; and I shall tell him so the next time he comes here."

"He won't come again," Lois answered (oh, with what a heavy heart!). "He's going away."

"Where's he going now?" demanded Grandma Dunn, as though the young man's life had been one round of travel, whereas he had never been forty miles from his native town.

"Out to his uncle Micah's in Ohio. His uncle is going to take him into business," answered Lois.

"Hum!" said Grandma Dunn; "'a rollin' stone gathers no moss.' Then, with a thought of her own comfort, "Are ye ever goin' to set the table? I'm just a-famishin' for my supper."

Joshua Dunn, coming in just then, looked from his mother to his daughter, and said, in his grave way, "Seems to me Lois, you might look after your grandmother a little closer."

Poor Lois! She had the feeling, so common to all of us, that the conscious acceptance of a burden must somehow lighten it, and that the secret self-sacrifice must in some mysterious way be felt and appreciated, but here in the first hour of her cross-bearing had come not praise, but blame.

She made no answer; her face flushed, then paled, and with close shut lips she walked quickly from the room.

"Joshua," quavered Grandma Dunn, "ye ought to take that gell in hand. She's gettin' more high-headed every day. She's goin' to be the very pattern of her mother."

"There, there, mother!" answered the farmer. "Let the girl alone. She's well enough; and the more she grows like her

mother the better it'll please me." For Joshua Dunn held in very tender remembrance the young wife who had given her life for her baby's.

Lois did not come down to supper, but when her father brought in the milk she came and took care of it in her deft, quiet way.

He stood and watched her, his one ewe-lamb, his motherless child. How dear she was to him, from her shining brown hair to her willing foot! He was a man of few caresses, but by and by he went over to her and laid his rough hand gently on her head, and said, "Father's good little girl." Then, as though frightened at this unwonted exhibition of affection, he gathered the milk pails together and hurried out.

The touch and the words eased the heart-ache a little, but that night, lying with wide wakeful eyes fixed on the square of moonlight on the floor, Lois said over and over, "The Duns live to be ninety," "The Duns live to be ninety." And she was only twenty. How could she bear this for seventy years?

But nature is kind to the young, and Lois had forgotten her trouble long before another pair of eyes closed in the farmhouse.

Joshua Dunn pondered long and sorrowfully. He had not been father and mother both for twenty years without having his perceptions sharpened where his child was concerned, and, remembering David Price's frequent visits, and certain loiterings in the old porch, and sundry tender glances, it was not difficult to connect Lois's sober face with the young man's going away. In his inmost heart he was thankful that he was not called upon to give her up; but something must be done to cheer her. If only her mother were alive! But he must do his best alone.

She should have some new dresses, she must have young company: he would take her up to the village oftener. But alas for the tender planning! The next time Joshua Dunn went to the village he was carried there and laid beside his young wife.

It had happened very suddenly. He had gone out to the barn in the morning, and, not coming in to breakfast, Lois had gone in search of him, and found him lying under the feet of a horse he had lately bought, the good, kind face trampled out of recognition.

Well, we can live through a great deal, and after the first bewilderment was over Lois took up her old duties as a nurse.

Joshua Dunn had been a well-to-do farmer, and everything was left to Lois. There was to be no anxiety about ways and means; there was nothing to do, except to live, with all the brightness of life gone. Grandma Dunn, in the face of a real sorrow, stopped fretting for a while, and Lois had a faint hope that their mutual loss might bring them nearer together; but after a few weeks things fell back in their old courses, her grandmother repining and upbraiding, and Lois cared for her in a cold, mechanical way.

Then the keen New England consciences awoke. Was this the spirit of self-sacrifice? Had she given up her love merely to do the work a hired servant might do, and with the same feelings? Was she not cheapening her sacrifice by withholding a part of the price?

So the lonely girl goaded herself until by prayers and tears she grew into a softer frame of mind, and the silent indifference with which she had borne her grandmother's sharp speeches changed to pity for the poor cross-grained nature. If Grandma Dunn noticed the change, she gave no sign; but it made life more tolerable for Lois. At the best, time dragged very slowly at the old farmhouse. The mornings were bearable, for the care of the house kept her busy; but in the long summer afternoons, when her grandmother dozed in her chair, and in the long winter evenings, when she sat alone by the fire, she grew to have the feeling that they had lived in the same way for a hundred years, and would live on and on indefinitely.

But after ten years had worn away a new interest came into her life. One day a paper from Boston strayed up to the red house on the hill. Lois did not know the paper held a high rank in the literature of the day, but she felt the difference between it and their country weekly. One little story pleased her especially. It did not abound in developments, murder, and high-wrought situations, like the weekly stories, but ran

along as naturally as one friend might talk to another, and the thought came to her, why couldn't she write a story?

So, on a afternoon when Grandma Dunn was safely off in her nap, Lois sat down in the shady porch and wrote her first story. It was only the story of a life which had been lived in her own village. There was no attempt at fine writing, no romance, no tragedy,—unless the story of a broken heart is always a tragedy,—but the story was told so simple and tenderly that it seemed like a quiet brook running at twilight between banks of fern and alder, until it is lost in shadow.

With many misgivings she sent it to the Boston paper, and the editor, a man of quiet tastes, read it himself, then took and read it to his invalid wife; and the result was that in a few weeks Lois received a paper addressed in a strange handwriting, and in it her little story; and not only that, but a letter came containing a check and a few words of praise. With a heart lighter than it had been since her father's death, she took the paper and letter to her room. She turned the check over and over,—her own money; the first she had ever earned, and earned in such a delightful way! Then she read and re-read her story, and wondered how it sounded to others. She looked the paper over to compare it with other stories, and a familiar name caught her eye, and, among the marriage notices, she read this: "In this city, 10th inst., by the Rev. Daniel Simpson, Mary, only daughter of Roger Leonard, of this city, to David Price, of Cleveland, Ohio."

She held the paper a few minutes, then folded it smoothly and laid it away. Her brief sunshine had clouded over.

After a while, urged by her loneliness, she took up her pen again; and in all the years that followed she found it a refuge and comfort, not only to herself, but to others; for her writings, though often crude had a simplicity and naturalness which touched other hearts; and besides the modest money return there came to her once in a while a letter from some stranger with words of kindly appreciation.

One day, when her grandmother was unusually restless, Lois, to entertain her, brought down her first story and read it to her. Grandma Dunn had often listened to her stories without suspecting the author, and her blunt criticisms were amusing and sometimes helpful. "Hum!" she said at the end of this one: "that woman had better the same life as Missy Peters—she that was a Shepley; only nobody would think of puttin' Missy in a story,—a poor, shilly thing. If she'd a had less book learnin' and more common sense, Job Peter's folks would 'a' liked her a deal better, and she wouldn't 'a' been badgered to death by 'em." Then, with sudden irrelevancy, "Ye ought to be married, Lois. There ought to be children about the house. Ye'd 'a' done better to have taken that David Price that used to hang round here. Somebody was a tellin' of me the other day that he was reel fore-handed out to Ohio. But gells never know what's best for 'em." And she went off to an inarticulate muttering.

For a moment Lois felt a wild impulse to tell her grandmother why she had not married David Price, to lay open before her the long years of loneliness, the starvation of heart, which had been endured for her sake; but the life-long habit of reserve was not easily broken, and the words died away without utterance.

Afterward she was glad of this silence,—for that night the querulous voice stopped suddenly, and the chain that had bound Lois for twenty years was broken. She was free. But what was freedom worth to her? The zest was gone out of life; she had grown away from her old friends and made no new ones; there was no tie to bind her to Hillsborough, and she felt the full extent of her loneliness when she realized the fact that she had no ties in any place in the world. But she could not stay in her old home; so after a while she sold the farm and moved away to a small town near Boston, guided in her choice only by the fact that from this town had come some of the friendly stranger letters. Here she settled herself in a comfortable home, and faced resolutely the thirty or forty years which is all human probability lay before her. The people about her proved kindly and intelligent; she found more congenial society than she had ever known before; her pleasant house became a centre of quiet sociability, and she enjoyed a kind of autumnal happiness.