

THE PRIZE STORY.

NO. 28.

One lady or gentleman's Fine Solid Gold Watch, valued 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, so 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 Street, "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.

THE STORY OF A TRANCE.

SENT BY MINNIE M. CARB, CHATHAM, N. B.

In August, 187-, I was surgeon of the E. N. Company's steamer *Racehorse*, and we were lying at Madras on our homeward voyage, when, the evening before we sailed, a gentleman named Talbot, a young fellow in the Civil Service, came on board to see the captain. They walked up and down the deck for some time, and then the captain sent for me, and introducing me to the stranger, said: "Mr. Talbot has come to ask me to take charge of his wife, doctor, who is going to honor us with her presence on our voyage out next time; and as he says she is very young and delicate, I thought he might like to speak to you about her."

I found Mr. Talbot very gentlemanly and agreeable, and we spent a pleasant hour together. He told me he had been married about a year; but on account of his wife's health, he had been obliged to leave her behind when he came to India a few months ago; that the doctors at home thought her well enough now to undertake the journey; and that, as he was very anxious to see her again, he wished her to come out at once, in preference to waiting till later in the year, especially as at that time the steamers were more crowded, and she would not be so well attended to. I assured him we should be very happy to do all we could to make his wife comfortable, and that we had an excellent stewardess, to whom I introduced him. He thanked us very warmly, and slipped a handsome present into the stewardess's hand as he went over the side.

We sailed from Madras next day, and arrived safely in London.

I had almost forgotten my meeting with Mr. Talbot, when one morning, a few days before we were due to leave London again, as I was writing in my cabin, the captain being on shore, the quartermaster brought me a card inscribed "Mr. G. Morris, Ledborough," and said the gentleman was waiting on the quarter deck to see me. I at once went out; and found a fine looking old parson, one of the old school, between sixty and seventy years of age, I should think, who addressed me in a very courteous manner, apologized for disturbing me, but said he had heard from his son-in-law, Mr. Talbot, of Madras, that I had kindly promised to take charge of his daughter, who was going out to Madras in the *Racehorse*, to join her husband.

I said how pleased I should be to do all I could for the young lady, but trusted that my service would not be required professionally. I showed the old gentleman round the ship and down into the saloons and cabins; and I assured him I would do my best to get Mrs. Talbot one of the latter to herself, which, I thought, would not be difficult, as we were rarely crowded with passengers so early in the season; and after half an hour's conversation, we parted, mutually pleased with each other. He left a card for the captain, with a pressing invitation for us both to dine with him that evening at his hotel in the Strand, when he would have the pleasure of introducing us to his daughter.

The captain returned on board shortly afterwards, and I gave him the card and message. He said how sorry he was he had an engagement that evening, but that I must go alone, and make his apologies; which I accordingly did, arriving at the hotel a few minutes before seven, the hour named for dinner. On inquiring for Mr. Morris, I was shown by the waiter into a large and handsomely furnished private sitting-room, where a round table was ready

laid for dinner. As the door opened, a young lady, who was seated at a piano at the other end of the room, rose and came towards me, and I found myself face to face with Mrs. Talbot. I am not good at describing female beauty, but I should like to give you some idea of this lady, with whom I was destined to go through such startling experiences hereafter. She was about eighteen years of age, but looked a year or two older, tall, above the average height of women, with a most perfect figure, which was well set off by the plain, dark-colored, close-fitting dress she wore. Her hands and feet were small and beautifully formed. Her fair broad forehead was set off by wavy braids of rich brown hair, and hazel eyes, beautifully softened in their brightness by dark silken lashes. Her face was not strictly beautiful, maybe, from a classical point of view; but I can only say that when she smiled and showed two rows of pearly teeth, and a bewitching dimple in either cheek, I thought I had never seen a more lovely creature.

I had just shaken hands with Mrs. Talbot, and was apologizing for the non-appearance of Captain G—, when her father came in, and shortly afterwards we sat down to dinner. A capital one it was too, with very good wine.

The conversation during dinner naturally turned upon our coming voyage, and I learned that this was the first time Mrs. Talbot had ever been out of England, or had in fact been separated from her parents—to whom she was evidently devotedly attached—for more than a few weeks at a time. She told me, with tears in her lovely eyes, that she had said good-bye to her mother the day before, as Mrs. Morris was not strong enough to travel up to town from their home in the west of England, and that she dreaded the parting with her father very much.

"Only natural, my dear May," said he: "but think of poor Will in his lonely bungalow at Madras, eagerly expecting your arrival; and cheer up."

"So I do, papa," she replied; "but I dread the parting all the same, and only wish Will would give up that horrid India, and come home, so that we could all be together."

I thought of the many young, fresh-looking, pretty English girls that I had seen going out to that country, whom I had met only a few years afterwards, looking pale-faced, worn, and quite old, and how much better it would be for her to remain in England; but of course I did not say so.

When dinner was over, we had music; and I found Mrs. Talbot played and sang most delightfully; and I thought we had cause to congratulate ourselves upon such an acquisition during our long voyage.

After giving them all sorts of advice about sending their luggage on board and their own embarkation, I took my leave; and as I wended my way eastward, I confided to my cheroot what a charming creature I thought Mrs. Talbot, and how much I considered Talbot was to be envied.

The day passed on, and the morning of our departure arrived; and about noon I saw the small steamer that brings off the passengers coming alongside the *Racehorse*, where she was lying in the river off Gravesend. I was called away just at the moment, and on returning shortly afterwards, found Mr. Morris and his daughter on the quarter-deck talking to the captain. I was rather vexed at not having been the first to

welcome them on board; but this feeling soon passed away, and I set myself to work to assist them in getting their traps down into the cabin, which, as I thought, I had been able to secure for Mrs. Talbot alone. I must pass over the parting between father and daughter—it was too sacred to be lightly touched upon; and though one in my position sees so much of that sort of thing, I was very much affected by it. As the old man went over the side to return to the shore, leaving his child behind him, whom he might never see in this world again, the tears stood in his eyes, and I think also in mine, as he pressed my hand, bade God bless me, and whispered: "Take care of her; she is very sensitive, and will, I know, feel these partings very much."

I was still gazing at the small steamer, which was now at some distance from the *Racehorse*, thinking how many sad hearts were on board her, and especially of the brave old man who was returning to his childless home, when I was interrupted by the stewardess, who informed me that Mrs. Talbot, after parting from her father, had retired to her cabin, where she had had a succession of fainting-fits, followed by an hysterical burst of tears. I gave Mrs. Abbott directions what to do, said she was to be kept perfectly quiet, and that I would come and see her later on, but that at present I thought the fewer people she saw, the better. By this time we were under way; and as the good ship threaded her course down the crowded river, I turned to have a look at the other passengers, who were nearly all at the time on deck. They were the usual sort we have before the really busy season commences, mostly Civil Service and other government officials returning from their three months' leave, with very few ladies. But one, I may as well say a few words about now, as she plays an important part in my story, though I did not make her acquaintance till some time later. She was a Mrs. Johns, a very handsome Eurasian, (or "half-caste," as we call them), wife of a government pleader in Calcutta, who, though not in society there, yet gave herself no end of airs, on the strength, I suppose, of the many rupees her husband was making. She was a tall, fine woman of about thirty, I believe, but looked some years older, with flashing black eyes, and, like all those people, dressed in the most magnificent style. At first sight, she gave one the impression of being a supercilious and disagreeable woman; but I afterwards found that beneath the layer of affectation, she possessed a warm and kind heart. She travelled with her ayah and kitmutghar (native table servant) and quite looked down on those who were not similarly accompanied.

Some hours afterwards, as I walked up and down the deck with a young fellow in the P. W. D., who had taken a former trip with us, I noticed Mrs. Abbott, the stewardess, standing by the companion hatchway, evidently wishing to speak to me. I went forward, and asked her how Mrs. Talbot was. She told me that she had at last fallen asleep, but not before she had completely worn herself out with crying. Even now, she was not quiet, but moaning and sighing in her sleep. The stewardess then whispered something in my ear, at which I started, and exclaimed: "Impossible! The doctors would never have allowed her to make the voyage if such were the case."

"You will find I am right," replied Mrs. Abbott. "But I wish, sir, you would come and see her."

I at once went below with the stewardess, thinking what a complication this would make, if true. As I entered the cabin where Mrs. Talbot was lying on a sofa, looking, I thought, very pale and exhausted, she opened her eyes, showing how light her sleep had been, and holding out her hand, said with a slight blush: "You little thought I should so soon be in your hands professionally, Dr. Weston; but I told you how I dreaded the parting with my father; and you see my instincts were true. I fell asleep just now, and oh!"—she shuddered—"what horrid dreams I had. I dreamt that I died on the voyage, and was buried in the Red Sea, and"—

"Hush, my dear young lady," said I, seeing how excited she was becoming. "Try and compose yourself by looking forward to your happy meeting with your husband."

"Ah! Will, poor Will," she cried, "I shall never see you again, either;" and

she burst into an uncontrollable fit of weeping.

Seeing my presence had only the effect of exciting her more, I quitted the cabin, telling the stewardess not to allow her to talk, but to give her the medicine I would send, at once. As soon as I had despatched one of the stewards with the draught, I went to my cabin to dress for dinner. While dressing, I thought a good deal about my fair patient. She was, I could see, of a very excitable temperament, one of those highly and sensitively organized creatures, who feel pain and pleasure far more acutely than we more phlegmatic ones can imagine. I trusted a night's rest would do her great good, and that before we reached Malta, she would be quite herself again. Vain hope; but I must not anticipate.

Next morning, I was delighted to hear that Mrs. Talbot had passed a quiet night, and felt well enough to come on deck. She continued to improve, but did not seem to recover her spirits, and more than once I found her in tears. "Do not know me," she said on one occasion; "I know how foolish it is; but I can't help it, when I think of those two dear old things at home, to whom I was all in all, and how they will get on without me. I feel so miserable, and half inclined to return home from Gibraltar."

I tried to soothe her by again saying she should try to look forward, instead of back; but it seemed of no use; she appeared to shrink from all mention of her husband's name, and I began to wonder why. I knew she had been married very young—when barely seventeen, in fact; but I understood it to be a love match, and—Well, you see, being a bachelor myself, I suppose I couldn't make it out.

We chatted away on different subjects for some time, and I was glad to see her getting into a more cheerful frame of mind. She told me, among other things, that she had made the acquaintance of Mrs. Johns, who, though vulgar, was yet amusing in her intense conceit.

We had a smooth passage to Gibraltar; the much-maligned Bay of Biscay, that all seem so much to dread, was as calm as a millpond; and on anchoring there, I went for a run on shore with young Moscrieff, the P. W. D. man I spoke of. We were to sail again at 5 p.m., so in good time we drove down to the *Ragged Staff* and returned to the ship.

On arriving on board, I was shocked to hear from Mrs. Abbott, that shortly after I had gone ashore, the mail-boat came off, and that Mrs. Talbot got a letter, which she took to her cabin, where the stewardess found her shortly afterwards in a dead faint, from which she had some difficulty in reviving her.

I went down at once, and found Mrs. Talbot still sobbing hysterically. She told me all had happened as she expected—that the letter was from her father, who wrote that on his return home he had found her dear mother ill in bed, evidently overcome by the shock of her daughter's departure.

I was sure she was making the worst of matters, and exaggerating what her father had written, as I felt certain he was too sensible to write such a thing, even if it were the case; but all I could say was of no avail, so I left her to the care of the stewardess.

I will not weary you with accounts of Mrs. Talbot's health from day to day; suffice it to say she was again getting better, when a fearful shock awaited her at Malta. Among the letters brought on board there was one for her with a deep black border, addressed in a man's hand. Not knowing Mr. Morris's handwriting, I thought at first it was from him, containing the news of her mother's death; but on looking again I saw the postmark was "Glasgow;" and smiling to myself to think how nervous I was getting on Mrs. Talbot's behalf, I took the letter down to her, forgetting that she might very likely jump to the same conclusion, which, unfortunately, proved to be the case; for, not finding her in the saloon, I knocked at her cabin door, which she opened, and seeing the black-edged letter in my hand, shrieked out: "She is dead! and you have come to break the news to me. Oh, my poor mother!" and fell fainting into my arms.

I laid her on the sofa and called loudly for the stewardess. Mrs. Johns was in her cabin opposite, and hearing me calling, rushed in to see what was the matter, and assisted me in restoring her to consciousness. This took a long time, which rather

alarmed her pulse and Mrs. Johns to run to the surgeon's ward, where she behaved as usual.

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