

THE STORY OF A TICKET AGENT.

"Western train's gone, ma'am," said Farmer Brown, coming into the waiting-room of the little depot.

"The train I was to take?" I said, gasping.

"Yes, ma'am. Too bad, but can't be helped. Harness will give out sometimes, you know," sympathizingly.

"When is the next Western-bound train due?"

"Not till six o'clock. You've five hours to wait. Be dreadful tiresome, ma'am. There's a nice family that live in the other part of the house: s'pose I tote you in there. I know Mrs. Holly'll give you a bite to eat, and she'll be proud to let you rest on her spare bed. Fine woman, Miss Holly is; I know her. Won't you go in and see her ma'am?"

"No, I thank you sir. I dare say that I'll be quite comfortable here."

"Wall, jess as you please. But now I must be going. Hope you'll get to your journey's on't safe, ma'am. Good-by."

And Farmer Brown left the room, mounted his wagon, and soon disappeared down the dusty road.

I had been visiting a friend who lived in the country settlement, some five or six miles from the solitary building dignified by the name of depot, and when the time came for me to return home, she placed me in the care of a neighbouring farmer who was going to a distant village and would pass the station.

During our ride we met with an accident. Part of the harness gave away, and we were detained such a length of time that, as the reader knows, I was too late for the train.

After farmer Brown left me, I amused myself by reading a newspaper which some one had left lying on the seat.

Finishing this, I studied the design of the wallpaper, counted the panes of glass in the little window, and wondered at the tidiness of the whole apartment.

"Country depots are generally such vile, dirty places! Wonder why this is an exception?" I said to myself. Then a thought struck me. "Oh, probably the place is kept clean by Mrs. Holly, over whose virtues Farmer Brown was so enthusiastic. Wonder if this same worthy female would give me a glass of water?" and I tapped on the door communicating with the other apartment.

"Come in!" said a cheery voice, and entering, I found myself in one of the prettiest, cosiest rooms I had ever seen.

The most delicate tint of buff was on the walls, cool matting covered the floor, muslin curtains, festooned with ivy, hung at the windows, and here and there were pictures, brackets, books and flowers, and all the dainty belongings that make a room look so "homely" and pleasant.

And, most charming of all, there lay in a white-draped cradle a rosy baby, fast asleep, with rings of golden hair over his white brow, and the great, red, velvet rose clasped in his dimpled hand.

Over him bent a woman of twenty-two or three—a little mite of a woman, with a bright, dark face, vividly-coloured, big black eyes, and wondrous dark hair wound in heavy braids about her stately head.

She rose with a bright smile when I entered. "Excuse me, but may I trouble you for a glass of water?"

"No trouble at all, ma'am. Pray be seated. Excuse me;" and she left the room.

Presently she returned, bearing a salver covered with a snowy-white napkin, and containing a glass of water, a glass of creamy milk, a saucer of luscious strawberries, and a plate of yellow sponge cake, light as yellow foam.

"Pardon me," she said, smiling, "if I take too great a liberty; but, you see, Farmer Brown told me of your being obliged to wait so long, and I thought you might be hungry."

"Why, how very kind you are!" I exclaimed in pleased surprise.

"Not at all. It is pleasure to me. If you are hot and dusty, perhaps you'd like to bathe your face. If so just step in here;" and she led the way into a little white bedroom, the very heart of cleanliness and purity.

In a little while I was a different being from the cross, dusty, hungry mortal who had sat in the hot waiting-room.

I found Mrs. Holly a perfect little gem of a woman, and, after the manner of our sex, we soon became as well acquainted as if we had known each other for years.

And while I lay languidly on her comfortable sofa, and she seated in her low rocking-chair, stitched away at her baby's dress, she told me the romance of her life.

"I have lived in this depot all my days," she began, "My father was agent here, and he served the company so long and so well that when he died they kindly allowed me to remain in this place, with the same wages too. For, you see, I was seventeen, and father had long before taught me telegraphy and all the other work. About a year after father's death I became acquainted with Jack—Jack Holly—my husband;" and Mrs. Holly looked up and smiled.

"Jack was one of the best engineers on the road (and is now, too), and every one considered him an

honest, likely young fellow. He thought the world of me, and we became engaged. But you know how girls are. The weakest of them can make a strong man tremble."

"A weak, white girl held all his heart-strings in her small, white hand," I said.

"Yes, and I dare say I often pulled Jack's heart-strings rather hard; but he was gentle and kind when I flirted with the country lads, and when I was wild and wayward he didn't remonstrate. But one day there came along a city chap, who engaged board for the summer at a farm house in the neighbourhood."

"This Clarence Devarges as he was called was handsome, well-dressed, and had that polished, indescribable air that is so fascinating to most silly girls. Jack was kind and well-mannered, but he didn't have a bit of style about him, and style is what I doted on in those days so I snubbed Jack, and smiled on Mr. Devarges when he offered me his attentions. I flirted most dreadfully with him till even generous Jack was displeased."

"One morning, looking somewhat grave and sad, he came into the ticket-office. The last passenger had gone, and the train was moving out. Jack's train had stopped to take on freight."

"Well, how long is this thing going to last?" said Jack.

"What thing?" I snapped out.

"Why, this affair with Devarges. I see it is going beyond a mere flirtation."

"Pray what of it?"

"Only that I do not want my future wife's name joined with that of a—" Jack paused, then added, earnestly, "Well, I warn you against this fellow. Who knows who he is?"

"Mr. Devarges is a perfect gentleman, and that is more than I can say of some others!" I said, hotly; and then some demon prompted me to add, "And, Mr. Holly, in regard to your future wife, I believe I do not aspire to that honour—and—here is your ring." I drew off the little golden band and handed it to him.

"Nell, do you mean this?" inquired Jack, with his white lips.

"Yes, I do. I'm tired of your carping and criticising. This affair may as well be ended now and forever," pettishly.

"So be it, then. Good-by," said Jack, and without another word left the room.

"To tell the truth, I hadn't meant half I said, and every minute expected that Jack would kiss me and we'd make up. But now he was gone forever. A mist came over my eyes as I watched the fast-disappearing train, and I would have indulged in a good cry, but just then the 'special' came puffing up, and the president of the road came in. He was a kind old gentleman whom I had known since I was a wee girl."

"Good-day Miss Nellie. Every thing prosperous, I hope. Will you do a favour for me?"

"Certainly, sir, if I can."

"Well you see, when we were coming down, I met a man who owed me some money. Paid me six hundred dollars, and I don't know what to do with it, as we are going up in the woods to see about laying out a new road. We shall be gone two days. Don't want to take the money with me—will you take charge of it while I'm gone?"

"If you'll trust me."

"Bless my soul! yes, of course. Here's the money. Must hurry away. Good morning."

"Scarcely had portly Mr. Sayre trotted away, before Mr. Devarges came sauntering in."

"Got quite a little sum there, haven't you, Miss Nellie?" eying the bills in my hand.

"Yes," I replied, laughing. "Mr. Sayre has made me his banker. Look! Six hundred dollars! How rich I should feel if it were mine."

"You deserve to have much more, and doubtless that pretty face'll win it."

"Somehow his bold compliment failed to please, and so it was with coldness that I said, 'Take a chair, Mr. Devarges.'"

"No, I thank you, Miss Nellie. I have an appointment. But will you allow me to call on you this evening?"

"Well, I scarcely think I shall be at home. You know mother and sister Lula are away, and a little while ago I got word from grandma saying that perhaps I had better come and stay all night with her."

"It was true that I had received such word from grandma, but I had no thought of accepting it. I had hoped that Jack would come and make up, and of course I didn't care to have Mr. Devarges all at the same time."

"What will you do with your money, Miss Nell?" carelessly inquired Mr. Devarges.

"O, I shall put it right here in this drawer. No one knows about it, and it will be perfectly secure."

"Dare say! Good morning," and with a courtly bow my admirer then left.

All that day I busied myself at my duties, and when night came I put on the dress that Jack liked best, and very anxiously waited for his coming.

"Seven o'clock! eight o'clock! the last train had come and gone, and my duties for the day were over. I put out the light of the ticket office, went into the sitting-room, and sat and waited. Ten o'clock! half-

past ten! No use waiting any longer—he would not come.

"I shivered with a nameless dread, and closed the door. Went to bed and cried myself to sleep."

"I had slept an hour, perhaps, and then awoke with a sudden start, feeling a great difficulty in breathing. A part of the quilt lay across my mouth, I thought; but, on reaching my hand to remove it, I found it was a handkerchief saturated with—what? chloroform!"

"A thrill of terror passed over me. Who had done this? Was there some one in the house?"

"I silently arose, and just then almost screamed as a sudden sound smote upon my ear. It was only the clock striking the hour of midnight. I placed my hand upon my heart to soothe its fierce throbs."

"Stepping along, carefully avoiding all obstacles, I reached the door, opened it, and advanced into the sitting-room. No one was there; but some one was in the ticket-office, for I saw a light and heard a voice! What did they want? The money!—O, the money left in my charge! Somebody was stealing it, an what should I say to Mr. Sayre? My God! I might be accused of taking it myself, and thus forfeit honour and position!"

"Rather lose my life!" I said to myself. "I'll defend that money until death!" and looked around for some weapon."

"Under the stove was a large iron poker. Seizing it carefully, I started toward the door."

"God aid me!" I said, with white lips; and then, opening the door of the office, I stole softly in. A man with his back towards me was at the other end of the room. He had forced open the drawer, taken out the money, and was looking gloatingly at the crisp green bills, when I stole behind him. I had just raised the poker to strike him, when he glanced around."

"My God! it was Clarence Devarges!"

"Hang it! now I suppose I'll have to kill this pretty—he seized me by the throat, and, uttering a faint cry, I sank down. Just then Jack, my own dear Jack, rushed in. I heard oaths, blows, fierce struggling—then all was dark."

"For the first time in my life I fainted away."

"When I recovered, Jack's face was bending over me, and Jack's voice uttering loving words. I put my arm about his neck and cried like a weak baby."

"Arn't you hurt, Jack?"

"Not a bit, dearest. Devarges is disabled, though, with a pistol wound in his leg. 'Tisn't very severe, but will prevent his escape."

"O, Jack, how came you here?"

"Why, you see, when we parted this morning, Nell, I thought I'd never see you again; but to-night, after I had come home, I made up my mind to come and try and 'make up.'"

"I rather thought he was a scamp, because, when I was in the city yesterday, the chief of police told me that he had reason to think that a noted gambler and 'blackleg' had come up in these parts. He gave a description, and it suited Devarges perfectly, all excepting a moustache you so admired, which was false and fell off in our scuffle."

"Well, as I said, I saw Devarges prowling about, and I thought I would see what he was up to. He looked in the window at you, and I heard him mutter, 'The deuce take it! She is at home, after all! What the deuce made her say she was going to her grandmother's? Now, I suppose I'll have to wait till my pretty bird is asleep.'"

"So he sat down under one tree, and I sat down under another. We both saw you open the door and look out. After you had been in bed about an hour, Devarges forced open the sitting-room window and crawled in. While he was in the office lighting the lamp, I also got in at the window and concealed myself in the closet, and—well, you know the rest."

"Jack," said I tearfully, "you'll forgive me for being naughty and wayward, and you'll believe me when I say that I have loved you all the time, won't you?"

"Well, ma'am, Jack said he would, and we've been happy ever since. And this is my story, ma'am, my only romance."

"There, the baby has woke up! See him stretch out his arms! I do believe he wants to go to you. Would you like to take him? He isn't a bit afraid of strangers."

THE Italian Government has been evincing in various ways a sensible desire to preserve a pacific policy; while feasting Fritz it did not forget France, but sent her a very acceptable New Year's gift and greeting in the shape of a formal and final settlement of the vexed question of consular jurisdiction at Tunis, a proceeding which has given great satisfaction.

THE ship canal between the Baltic Sea and the German Ocean will, it is estimated, save a journey of 600 miles for a vessel making a trip between either of those waters, as the circumnavigation of the peninsula of Jutland will be unnecessary. In all, the proposed canal will be only some fifty miles—or about half that of the Suez Canal—extending from Gluckstadt to Kiel.

OF all Oriental carpets the Persian are by far the best, and the test of a true Persian carpet is that used by the natives themselves, namely, to drop a piece of red-hot charcoal upon it. This leaves a singed round spot. If the carpet is a good one of the first quality, the hand can then brush off the singed wool without the least trace of the burn being afterward discernible.