

THE PRIZE STORY.

NO. 26.

One lady or gentlemen'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:—Korosa'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.

THE OLD QUEEN.

SENT BY MISS BELLA TAYLOR, PAKENHAM, ONT.

In a small but magnificent cabinet of Hampton Court, sat Elizabeth, the stern old monarch of England. Upon her forehead darkening the furrows of age—afrown lowered ominously. Her eyes were vivid in their expression, and her thin lips clung together with the tenacity of stern and long-endured passion—the iron passion of age, in which there is no much pain.

Around her was everything beautiful, and costly enough to gratify even her queenly pride and fastidious taste: hangings of rare old tapestry; cushions glowing with crimson and gold; ebony tables carved to a net work, and woven over with gold, supporting vases and caskets of the same precious metal, in which the royal jewels were occasionally hung; birds of Paradise, preserved in all the brilliancy of their flowing plumage, and many a rare curiosity from the east, filled the royal cabinet. A Persian carpet, gorgeous with arabesque and flowers, covered a small portion of the floor, and upon this stood the great ebony chair, cushioned with purple velvet, in which the old queen was seated. The light from a large crystal window fell upon her wrinkled brow, shaded, not by the cold and wintry gray of age, but with false ringlets of sunny gold, unmounted by a small crown. Over her bowed, but still majestic figure, a robe of glowing crimson fell, wave after wave, till it lay a mass of mingled velvet, ermine, and jewels over the cushion on which her foot was pressed. Her withered neck, and the small, pale hand, that rested on the arm of her chair, were one blaze of jewels, that only kindled up the ravages of time they were intended to conceal. Before her stood a small cabinet of silver, encrusted with a mosaic of precious stones, whereon lay a jewelled pen and a roll of vellum, that seemed to have been freshly written upon.

Everything in the palace seemed moving on with the slow and regular magnificence that always surrounded the queen. Through an open door, which led to the anti-chamber of her withdrawing room, several pages and and yeomen of the guard, in their crimson vestments and golden roses, were moving about with the listless and indifferent air of persons on easy duties. Beyond, might be seen the maids of honor and ladies in attendance, gliding through the gorgeous apartments with that hushed and reverential manner which always bespoke their close neighborhood to royalty. But now even more than usual silence prevailed among the high-born beauties. Many a wistful glance was cast through the open door, and the color paled on each fair cheek, as the old queen sat with that stern look upon her features, gazing upon the role of parchment that her minister Cecil had just brought for her signature. She reached forth her hand, took up the parchment, and slowly unrolling it, began to read. The light lay broad upon her face, and those who gazed upon it, saw that a slight change fell upon her features. Some memory seemed busy with her heart, and, heaving a deep sigh, she laid the parchment down upon the cabinet, and while her hand rested on the edge, allowed it to roll together again, while she fell into deep thought.

All at once Elizabeth seemed to remember that she was not entirely alone. The form that had been gradually bowed as with an oppressing thought, was straightway up-lifted. She turned her eagle eyes upon the door, and rising, swept across the room, and closed it with her own hand. And now her aged features were sorely troubled; alternate flashes of anger, passion and tenderness that seemed almost as wild, shot from her eyes. Great emotion swept aside the in-

firmities of age for a moment, and she paced the floor of her cabinet with the quick and imperious tread that had been so conspicuous in her first queenly days.

"Why is he thus stubborn?" she muttered, clasping her hands, and then dashing them apart, as if ashamed of the feminine act. "He has the ring! he has the ring, and yet he sends it not! To save his own life will he not bend that stubborn will, and to his queen, his loving, too loving mistress?" These words seemed to overwhelm the haughty woman with recollections of the past; a tear started to her eye, and with something of lofty pride, she added: "But if the call of our love and favor bowed him not, what can be hoped from a fear of death? Is that stronger than—than—" Elizabeth did not finish the sentence, but sinking into her chair, pressed one hand to her eyes, and tears gushed through the jewels that flashed upon it.

And Elizabeth gave free course to the tears, that she might indulge in secret without detriment to her queenly pride; for that moment she was all the woman—a weak, trembling, disappointed old woman—in whose wrong heart tenderness had conquered pride. Essex, the petted favorite—the lover of her old age—it was his death-warrant that her counselors had laid before her. The pen was ready; the vellum was before her, lacking nothing but the royal signature. She arose, and while her hand and her face were wet with tears, snatched up the scroll with a burst of passionate feeling and trampled it under foot.

"May thy queen perish with thee, Essex—my best, last beloved—if her hand touches this death-warrant!" she cried, in a voice that reached the anti-room. "What if thy proud stomach does refuse to send the token—Elizabeth can forgive the pride her favor has fostered. The lowest man may take life, but mercy is a royal prerogative. Let them gibe if they dare, and say that the queen would not shed the blood of him she loved! Ha! what intrusion is this!" she added, crushing the vellum beneath her foot, and dashing aside the tears that hung on her cheek. "Who dares thus force themselves on our privacy?"

As she spoke, Elizabeth drew herself up with more than regal majesty, and awaited the approach of two females, dressed in deep mourning, who came tremblingly toward her; one, a tall, beautiful woman, in the full bloom and summer of life, but pale with emotion, and trembling like an aspen leaf in every delicate limb, seemed to grow desperate as she met the eagle eyes of the queen; clasping her hands with a sort of wild and timid grace, she sprang forward and fell at Elizabeth's feet.

"My Lady of Essex here—here in our very presence!—and you also, Lady Blunt or Leicester—or Essex—for of your many husbands, dame, we are puzzled to know whose name befits you. Have you not both received our command not to approach the court?"

"We did receive it, most gracious Lady—most august queen," cried the elder female, kneeling by her young and beautiful daughter-in-law, and speaking with that subdued and touching pathos that seems born of the troubled waters in a heart that has been long in breaking. "We did receive it, but despair has made us bold. God, in his mercy touch your heart in our behalf—for we have no hope save in this disobedience."

The thin lips of Elizabeth Tudor curled with a cruel and haughty smile. Her rivals—the two rivals of her youth and of her age were at her feet. The widow of Leices-

ter, her first favorite—the wife of Essex, her last. Ah, how cruelly her heart exulted in the triumphs of that moment! how hard and stern it grew with the thought of revenge! An oath broke from her, and she replied with bitter violence:

"Then in this disobedience let all hope perish!"

"Oh, say not so, great queen, say not so!" cried the countess of Essex, lifting her beautiful face from the floor, where it had fallen, in the bitter anguish of her first repulse. "He has been rash, headstrong; but there is not in all England a heart more loyal, nor one that loves your august person more truly."

"Ay," replied Elizabeth, with a bitter sneer, "he proves it, by wedding with thy baby face."

"Oh, that he had never seen it!" cried the beautiful woman, in a passion of bitter despair, and burying the reviled features in her hands—for she saw that their very loveliness pleaded against her. "God help me!—I know not how to plead his cause! Will nothing save him? Great queen, will nothing save him?"

Again that face was lifted from the clasped hands, and the mass of golden ringlets in which it had been for a moment buried. Oh, how piteous, how full of sorrow, were those deep blue eyes, those tender and tremulous lips!

The old queen shook off the passionate grasp which the wretched woman had fixed upon her garments, and drawing back, bent her keen and disdainful eyes on the poor suppliant, but she made no answer; and Lady Essex read her fate too truly in those stern features. Her hands dropped, and her head sank forward upon her bosom, from which the last gleam of hope had gone forth.

And now the widow of Leicester—the mother of Essex—grew desperate in her anguish. As Elizabeth turned from the lovely form of her last rival to the faded beauty of Essex's mother, a shade of more gentle feeling stole over her face. In those sad and withered features there was nothing to excite envy, or outrage her own self-love. If Elizabeth was old, the suppliant at her feet had also lived all the bloom and brightness of youth, and a bitter sorrow added its palor to the marks that time had left.

"And you," said Elizabeth, "methought years ago the Countess of Leicester was informed that her presence would at all times be unwelcome to Elizabeth Tudor."

"I have come," said the Countess, in a voice of meek humility, pathetic with sorrow, but how unlike the passionate grief of Lady Essex, "I have come, knowing that my presence must always be hateful to your highness."

"And why hateful, pray?" cried the queen with a haughty sneer.

"Alas, I know not; for I have ever been a humble and loving subject,—"

The poor lady paused, for there was something in the queen's eye that warned her not to tread upon the ground of difference that existed between them. She bent her forehead till it almost touched Elizabeth's feet, and her demeanor was full of humility.

"I know, your highness, I know that with this bent form and aching heart, I am no longer deemed worthy even of that displeasure which sent the most faithful and loyal subject that ever queen had, to his grave, and now threatens all that is left to me—my last husband and noble son—with a darker death. Oh, that I could but die to save them! How willingly would I be stricken down here at your majesty's feet."

There was something in this speech that seemed to move the old queen. The angry expression of her mouth relaxed a little, and turning her eyes away, she seemed to meditate.

"Oh, Lady, look on me! Am I not sufficiently bereaved?" cried the mother of Essex, sweeping back the raven hair from her temples, where many a silver thread was woven. "My youth was clouded by your displeasure. Must its blight press me to the grave? If so, let me perish, but save my son!"

Still the queen seemed to ponder; she evidently heard nothing that her rival was saying.

"I was his mother," cried the unhappy woman, "and loved him as only a mother can love, yet when he found favor with your highness—when I saw that his heart was lured by your generous condescension, till even his own mother was as nought

compared to the worship which he lavished upon his queen, I rejoiced in the sacrifice, and surrendered him willingly—but to death. Oh, not to death! Great queen, say that he is not rendered up to that! It were a cruel return for so much love."

Elizabeth was now greatly disturbed; she withdrew her garments from the suppliant's grasp and sat down. Once more the woman grew strong against the queen.

"Your son was a traitor," she said, "taken with arms in his hands—he has had a fair trial, and death is but justice!"

"He loved you, lady, and your continued displeasure drove him mad!" pleaded the mother, searching eagerly for some shadow of hope in the dim eyes of Elizabeth. "When you condemn him, I can but answer—he was guilty, but he loved you beyond all earthly things."

"Beyond all earthly things!" cried the queen, turning her eyes upon the Countess of Essex, who still knelt upon the carpet, pale and hopeless.

The wretched young Countess lifted her eyes at these words, and a mournful smile crossed her lips.

"Spare but his life," she cried, "and I will never see him more—I can give him up—but not to the block—oh God—not to the block!" and, shuddering under fate to foot, she sank to her old position again.

The queen glanced at her with a sort of impatient motion of the head, and then turning to her cabinet, took up a slip of parchment and wrote upon it.

"Take this," she said, reaching it toward the elder countess; "it is an order for your admission to the tower. Go and see your son."

The Countess of Essex almost sprang to her feet, but sank down again as she met the stern eyes of Elizabeth. She, remarking the eager joy that sparkled over her face, coldly added:

"Go and see your son—but go alone, and when you leave the Tower, come back hither, and then our answer to your prayer will be given!"

The Dowager Countess took the order, and cast a supplicating glance from the face of the tortured wife—which was pale and wild with sudden emotions—to that of the queen.

"The Lady Essex will remain here," she said, with cruel deliberation, and a grim smile crept over her mouth as she marked the air of keen disappointment with which the poor creature watched her mother-in-law as she rose to depart.

"Oh, for sweet mercy's sake, let me go with her," cried the agonized wife, as her companion in misery moved toward the door. "Mother, mother, plead for me."

"Go!" said the queen, sternly, waving her hand. "The Countess of Essex will await you here."

Still upon her knees, the unhappy wife of Essex watched her mother-in-law as she opened the door and disappeared. Her lips were parted, and her eyes grew wild and eager, like those of a newly prisoned bird, when he seeks to dart through the wires of his cage. The queen watched her narrowly and the cold smile deepened around her lips. She found infinite satisfaction in the torture which she was inflicting on the young and suffering wife whom Essex had dared to marry against her own imperious will. The humble position which the suppliant dared not change, unbidden, even if weakness had not chained her to the floor, the look of keen disappointment that settled on her eloquent face, were all sources of cruel pleasure to the iron-hearted Elizabeth. Her revenge on the youth and beauty that had won the love of Essex from herself, seemed perfect. Notwithstanding his contumacy and his pride, she could have pardoned him then, but for the thought that her clemency must reunite him to that beautiful young wife.

For some considerable time Elizabeth sat fostering her revengeful jealousy in silence. Lady Essex had almost fallen upon the floor, and covered, rather than knelt, at her enemy's feet. She seemed withered to the heart by the cruel scorn with which her petition had been received.

At last the queen arose and entered her bed-chamber, into which the cabinet opened. With her, all struggle was ended; she had resolved how to act, and left the room with a slow but imperious tread, leaving the poor wife faint and heart-sick with suspense.

Half an hour after the queen was in her audience chamber, receiving some foreign ambassadors with more than her usual elaborate courtesy; but the reception soon be-