

# THE PRIZE STORY.

NO. 14.

One lady or gentlemen's Solid Gold Watch, valued at about \$75, 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, at the end of the term, 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* 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 illustration.

## A SINGULAR ACCUSATION.

SENT BY CARRIE A. WOODS, BRANTFORD, ONT.

On a certain February afternoon nearly thirty years ago, I, Fred Weston, then studying surgery in the Paris hospitals, was seated at the window of my bachelor chamber on the fourth story of a dull old house in the Isle St. Louis, looking absently at the placid Seine, which flowed just beneath. I was meditating on a subject which had been disagreeably obtruded on my notice that day, namely, my own pecuniary difficulties.

Absorbed in my reflections on this momentous topic, I did not notice a curious scuffling noise on the stairs. My astonishment may be imagined when the door was suddenly thrown open, and there bounded into the room—a huge ape, of the orang-outang species, which after performing some fantastic capers, clapped a paw on my shoulder, and accosted me in the familiar voice of my friend Louis Dalattre.

To account for this startling phenomenon I must explain that it was Carnival time, and that Louis had assumed the disguise preparatory to joining the throng of masquers on the boulevards.

He was my fellow-student at the Hotel Dieu; like myself, a thorough Bohemian, though, luckily for him, his pocket were better furnished than mine, his father being a wealthy notaire of the Quartier d'Antin.

"Neat thing in costumes, isn't it?" he said complacently, removing his mask, and fastening his tale gracefully over one arm in the fashion of a lady's train. "Your old concierge nearly had a fit when I put my head into his lodge just now. But what's the matter?" he asked. "You look as dull as a wet Sunday."

"Read that, and you will understand why," I returned, handing him a letter which had reached me that morning.

"From Isaac Ullach? I thought you had given him the slip when you had changed your lodgings."

"No such luck; read what he says."

Louis perched himself on the table, and unfolded the document gingerly, as if it were something in the nature of a grenade, and might go off unexpectedly, he read it aloud:

"Monsieur,—When you quitted your old lodgings so abruptly a fortnight ago, you omitted leaving your address for inquiring friends, which was unkind to one who takes so much interest in you as I do—"

"Get some hint out of that, you mean, the old Shylak," interrupted the reader.

"I have not lost sight of you, however, and I shall do myself the honor of calling upon you this day week, when I trust you will be prepared to meet your engagements; otherwise I shall be under the necessity of providing you with apartments free of expense—at St. Pelagie."

"Accept, meanwhile, the assurance of my distinguished consideration."

"—ISAAC ULLACH."

Louis emitted a long, soft whistle as he refolded the money lender's letter.

"The old humbug doesn't mean it," he assured me, consolingly. "It's just a flash in the pan to frighten you. He knows that you have a rich uncle in England."

"Who will see me at the North Pole before he pays my debts," I interrupted, gloomily. "My uncle Probyn is a good-hearted old man, but he has the bad taste to be fonder of his money than of his promising nephew. Moreover, he has a horror of gambling; and if he knew that the greater part of what I owe had been lost at

cards, it would be all up with my 'expectations.'"

"Why won't you let me help you?" said Louis, reproachfully. "You know I have more money than I want. Will a thousand francs cover it?"

"No, nor three thousand."

He opened his eyes.

"You are more deeply dipped than I thought," he remarked.

After staring at me a moment in sympathetic silence, he gave the matter up with a hopeless shrug, and rose, putting on his mask again.

"Well, anyhow, don't stop moping in this suicidal hole," he said. "Put your cares in your pocket, and come out and see the fun."

"Not yet; I must write to my uncle. I don't expect he'll help me, but I'll give him the chance. I must do the penitent and pathetic."

"Write in a shaky hand, with plenty of blots, you know," he suggested. "Of course you will go with the rest of us to the Bal Masque to-night. Have you got a costume?"

"No; I mean to have hired one, but this affair put it out of my head."

"Well you can get one in the Temple market for a bagatelle. Come down to my rooms this evening; we'll dine at the Cafe Anglais for once in our lives. Au revoir!"

And he took himself off, humming a student's song.

Left to myself, I took up the money lender's letter and read it through once more, trying in vain to find a gleam of hope "between the lines." I felt distinctly certain that my creditor would be as good—or as bad—as his word, and that in the course of a few days I should find myself in a debtor's prison.

Isaac Ullach was a Jew, whose mean little shop in the Place du Pantheon was almost as well known in that quarter as the Pantheon itself. Ostensibly a dealer in second-hand jewellery and silver, in reality he was a usurer, and one of the most grasping and rapacious of his tribe, as I had discovered to my cost.

I had flattered myself that, for a time at least, I was safe from his importunities, in the world-forgotten corner of the city in which I had taken sanctuary. For the last fortnight I had been lodging in one of a group of ancient and dilapidated tenements (long since swept away) which formed a sort of cul-de-sac, called the "Impasse du Cloître. The one in which I dwelt was at the end of this "no thoroughfare," and was built with the back wall sheer to the river, so that, leaning out of my bedroom window, I could drop a stone into the water. It was a gruesome old house, damp and dark and close, with steep stairs and long tiled passages, and a pervading fragrance of mould and mildew.

A capital hiding place, however. There were no lodgers besides myself, no visitors, no passers-by: In the very heart of Paris I lived as solitary as a lighthouse-keeper. But if I had buried myself in the Catacombs Isaac would have managed to find me out.

Failing to extract any comfort from his letter, I threw it aside, and sat down to indite such an appeal to my uncle as should not only touch his heart but loosen his purse-strings. But the inspiration would not come at my call. I spilt half a dozen sheets of paper, scribbled my blotting-book all over with horrid heads, and then gave it up as a bad job. Being by this time

heartily tired of my own company, I resolved to take a stroll on the Boulevards, and write my letter when I returned.

The clock of Notre Dame was striking four as I crossed the Pont Louis Philippe. The river flashed and sparkled in the afternoon sunlight, reflecting a cloudless sky; the air was as mild as if the month had been May instead of February. Even nature seemed to sympathize with the universal holiday.

The Carnival was the Carnival in those days, not the dismal mockery it has become of late years, and when I reached the Boulevards the revelry was at its height. The pavements were lined with spectators, and the horse-road thronged with masquers on foot or in vehicles, their costumes forming a mass of variegated brightness which united in fresh combinations every moment, like the changing colors of a kaleidoscope.

Pierrots and Polichinelles, harlequins and diabolos, Turks and debardeurs; English mifords, with shark-like teeth, sandy whiskers and Scotch caps; a shipful of sailors, a wagon-load of burlesque Pompeians, then a car of clowns and acrobats, followed by a great cage-full of monkeys, among whom I recognized my friend. Such a bright, gay, crowded scene, such frolicsome uproar and contagious gaiety that surely none but a misanthrope could have looked on in disapproval.

For the time, I forgot all my troubles and perplexities, and entered into the spirit of the scene as thoroughly as if I had not a care in the world. But when the crowd began to thin, as the afternoon waned, I suddenly recollected that I had not yet written my letter, and it was now nearly six o'clock. I was just about to turn into the Rue Richelieu, when I was startled to hear myself called by name in a voice unmistakably English. At the same time I received a violent poke in the back with the handle of a stick or umbrella. Turning round sharply to expostulate, to my astonishment I found myself face to face with the very person who had been in my thoughts at the moment—my uncle Probyn.

He was struggling to get through the crowd to my side, looking very much flushed and "flustered," and tightly grasped the umbrella with which he had assaulted me, and which, like himself, was of rather a plethoric habit.

"Why, uncle!" I exclaimed, as we shook hands, "I can hardly believe my eyes! Who would have expected to see you here?"

"No one who knew me. I should think," he returned, drily. "You won't catch me in a Carnival crowd again—William let loose! I am glad to see," he added, glancing at me approvingly, "that you have not made a fool of yourself like the rest of them."

"I feel very little in the mood for folly of any sort just now," I answered, with an ostentatious sigh, considering how I could best open up the subject of my difficulties, and wondering whether it was any rumour of them which had brought him across the Channel.

"Give me your arm, my boy, and let us get out of this racket," he said, pushing his way through the crowd with the help of the stout umbrella.

"Are you alone?" I enquired, when we reached the comparative quiet of the Rue Richelieu.

"My friend, Drummond, was with me a few moments ago, but I lost him in the crowd. He came over to see his son—you know Sam Drummond, don't you?—and I thought I might as well run across and have a look at you. But when I called at your lodgings yesterday they told me you had gone away and left no address."

Here was the opening ready made, and I plunged into it headlong.

"Why, yes; I was compelled to change my quarters for reasons which—the fact is, uncle, I am in a trilling difficulty."

He stopped short, tucked his umbrella under his arm, and glared at me through his spectacles.

"Does that mean that you are in debt, sir?"

Calling up as contrite a look as I could assume at so short a notice, I owned the sad impeachment, murmuring something incoherent about the expenses of my medical studies "the cost of books, and—lecture-fees."

"Lecture-fees!" echoed my uncle, with scornful incredulity. "Folly and dissipation more likely. How much do

you owe, sir? Come, you had better make a clean breast of it."

Taking my courage in both hands I named the sum-total. The torrent of indignation that descended on my devoted head would quite have overwhelmed me, if I had not been aware that my uncle's wrath, like a tropical thunderstorm, was brief in proportion to its violence.

His lecture lasted all the way from the Rue Richelieu to his hotel in the Rue St. Honore; by that time he had talked himself out of breath, and was considerably calmer. A glass or two of Medoc and a rest in an easy-chair had such a happy effect on his temper that, after a little more grumbling, sotto voce, he called for pen and ink, and produced—his check-book. He had taken up the pen, and I was already beginning to pour out my thanks, when he paused—ah, that pause!

"On second thoughts, I won't give it you now," he said. Then seeing how my face lengthened, he added: "Oh, you shall have it, but I'd rather send it to you. Shall you be at home at seven o'clock? Very good; give me your address."

I complied, and as he did not ask me to stay, and indeed, for some reason, seemed anxious to get rid of me, I soon afterwards wished him good-bye. He was returning to England the same night.

For the life of me I could not understand why he preferred to send the cheque instead of giving it me at once; however, as I trusted his promise, I did not trouble myself to conjure his reasons for delay. It was enough for me that in another hour the precious document would be in my hands, and to-morrow I could free myself from the hateful bondage of debt.

Relieved of the weight which had oppressed them, my spirits went up with a bound; I found myself humming Louis' song, "La vie a des attraites," and executing an impromptu pas seul on the pavement. Would not I distinguish myself at the Opera Ball to-night! I felt as if there were quicksilver in my heels.

Before going to search for a costume, I resolved that I would drop in "permissively" on Isaac Ullach.

I hailed the first empty fiacre that passed me, and drove to the Place du Pantheon.

His shop was open as usual—little cared he for fetes and holidays—and he was in the little dark den at the back, occupied with a couple of rather shady-looking clients.

I burst in upon him sans ceremonie.

"A hundred thanks for your billet-dox received this morning," I began. "I had no idea you knew my present address, so you may imagine what a delightful surprise it was to hear from you."

"Yes, I thought it would be," he answered, quietly, glancing at me under his bent brows. He had a hook nose, an obstinate chin, and a mouth that shut like a trap. In other respects he matched his shop, being small and dark, and not too clean.

"But this is a day of surprises," I went on; "I have just seen a relative of mine, who was the last person I expected to meet."

He was suddenly interested.

"A relative? Was it your uncle?" he asked quickly, coming forward.

"You have guessed. It was that worthy man, and he— But you are occupied," I broke off, pretending to be going. "It's of no consequence—another time."

"Of no consequence, dear sir?" the money lender exclaimed in a tone of plaintive reproach, becoming all at once aggressively civil. "But everything that concerns my clients is of consequence to me."

"You take such a deep interest in their welfare—fifty per cent., oh? Well, then, to relieve your friendly anxiety, I'll tell you that my uncle has promised to send me a check this evening. So rejoice and sing psalms!"

"Chut, chut! not so loud!" he interposed in an undertone, with a glance at his visitors which was anything but flattering to them. "There's no need to announce it pro bono."

"Or for the benefit of your friends there, who are listening with all their ears; very true. I shall call upon you to-morrow. Au revoir!"

"If it is all the same to you, cher monsieur," he answered, with his sly smile, "I think I will call upon you to-night instead. The money may as well be in my pocket as in yours, hein?"

"Better; mine has a hole in it. Don't