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## THE ENGAGEMENT RING.

BY MISS DORR.

"What trouble should I be in, unless it is because you and Aunt Barby are always casting Robert Ware in my teeth, as if you were aching to get me made up after his pattern?"

"My dear Bart!" "Well, I don't mean that I blame you for it. Didn't I just wish myself that I was like him? There is Morrison now, springing to his feet and throwing on his hat. 'Don't worry, Amy. It is all right.' Kissing her hastily, he hurried out, and walked down the street with Morrison."

I suppose every town has its meanest man. The meanest man in Norombega was Joram Lane. To begin with, he was an unmitigated rascal in money transactions whenever there was a chance to insert a cloven foot. Then he was a sensualist and a gambler. Of course he abused his wife, and slandered all Norombegans, who, in spite of his apparent wealth and lavish style of living, looked coldly upon him. Amy had offended this fellow by refusing—and very properly, as I think—to dance with him at a New Year's ball. After that he never missed his fling at her, whenever there was an opportunity. A villainous, venomous scamp was Joram Lane. Such as makes one immensely ashamed of one's relations, in view of the fact that all mankind are brothers. This man, meeting Godfrey Morrison a day or two later, called out in stereotyped phrase—

"What's the news, Morrison?" "News! Why, an old chap, of whom you never heard, probably, says 'there is nothing new under the sun.' But old things come around in strange fashion, sometimes, that's the truth. A smart set of girls you've got around here, Lane; only it's a pity their career should have been nipped in the bud by detection."

"Why? What's up?" "I've just heard from Lawyer Help that some of your Norombega girls have been detected in stealing."

"Who are they?" "Oh! they are going to keep it dark for the present, and see what their

folks will do about settling up. One of them, though, is as pretty a girl as there is in the village. Too bad, isn't it?"

Not noting—or perhaps noting, and not caring for—the evil glitter in Joram Lane's green-black eyes, Morrison passed on. The next person Lane met was one of his own cronies.

"Heard the news, Bill?" he asked. "Not I! Didn't know there was any of the article manufactured, nowadays. Don't feed it out to me all at once, man. I shouldn't dare to take a full mouthful at first."

"Oh, bother your nonsense! You'll have to take it in the lump, or not at all. You'll find it a pretty good mouthful, too."

"Well, let's have it." "Amy Home—the prettiest girl in the village, you know—has been stealing."

"Phew! That is a mouthful!" "It is pretty likely Mrs. Ware and the rest of them will put their heads together to hush it up. But I had the news direct from headquarters."

"Mrs. Ware? What can she do? I thought she had nothing but her annuity."

"Oh, she's one of those women that if they had only ten dollars a year, would nip, and scrimp, and pinch, and manage to save half of it."

The next time the story was told, it was with the addition that Aunt Barby had paid fifty dollars of hush money. In a week Norombega was full of it. Of course a great many particulars had been added by this time, such as a description of the goods stolen, and the manner of Amy's detection. How an officer had gone to Tulip Cottage, and had found Aunt Barby in the act of cutting out one of the dresses. How Amy had laughed, and pretended not to care; and Aunt Barby had cried, and pleaded to be allowed to settle the affair, and save the family credit. And so the cruel lie kept agitating the still waters of Norombega society, in an ever-widening circle. And Amy wondered why people looked so strangely at her when they met, and why her scholars, one after another began to leave school. I do not mean to say that all who heard the vile tale believed it. There were some people, and they of the best in the place, who treated it as absurd, and scarcely remembered the contemptible trash when they had heard it.

But many who were envious of Amy's beauty, and of her popularity in society, or who, alas for poor human nature, were conscious of some moral taint in themselves, believed it gladly.

"I always wondered where she got her money to dress with," said Mrs. Peregrine Potts, whose squint-eyed daughter, the amiable Amelia Potts, was afflicted with chronic shabbiness upon a yearly allowance for dress, and wonderful skill in making the worse appear the better garment.

No hint reached Tulip Cottage of the tale that was becoming familiar as household words elsewhere; but while the summer days lengthened to their utmost, borrowing a portion from the night at each end, and rioting in splendor through all their golden length Amy felt a dull foreboding pain; though the feeling was almost as vague and undefined as that of poor Mrs. Gradgrind, who thought there was a pain somewhere in the room, but could not positively say that she had got it.

Meanwhile, ignorant of the evil that was brooding around his sister, Bart Home, with a facility in that respect natural to young men, was working out trouble for himself. Godfrey Morrison—the elegant, the polished Morrison—was still his most familiar friend, and undoubtedly incited the youth to a hundred extravagances that would have been unthought-of. Then, when Bart had drawn as much of his quarter's salary as was already due, he would offer to lend money, with a careless good-nature that was quite irresistible. So Bart, almost without thought, allowed the yoke of debt to be slipped about his neck, and because it was easily borne, kept adding to its weight, until it galled him grievously. After that outburst to his sister, in which he had wished—and very heartily for the moment—that he was like Robert Ware, he grew moody and sullen when at home; eating his meals hastily, and hurrying out again when he had done; and evincing manifested impatience if Aunt Barby commented upon his haste, or Amy's loving glance rested anxiously upon him. Aunt Barby declared that 'Amy had spoiled the boy, and no wonder.' And Amy, loving heart! feared he was working too hard in the store, and revolved plans innumerable for giving him rest, all impracticable, unluckily, for the want of money.

One evening Bart came in earlier than usual, and flung himself, fact downwards, upon the sofa, but not before Amy had seen that a ghastly pallor was upon his features. Greatly shocked, she left her work, and kneeling beside him, took one of his hands and pressed it between her own. "Bart!" she said. "There was no answer." "Oh, Bart! What has happened? It is something dreadful, I am sure. Have you lost your place in the store?" "Still no answer."

"Because if you have, it may not be so bad after all. I have been thinking lately that you need a rest; and when my school is done I shall have a little money that I can spare, and you, perhaps, will have a little of your own, and you can go up to Boston, and Robert will get a place for you, I know, where you can do much better than you can here. So Bart—O, Bart! what is the matter?" for the youth's whole frame was shaken with convulsive sobbing.

"I'll tell you what's the matter," he said, starting up, and gazing upon her wildly. "You think a precious deal of your immaculate brother, don't you? What will you do when he goes to prison for robbery? O, Amy! don't look at me like that. I—I believe I am going mad!"

She had grown fearfully white; but she sat down beside him upon the sofa, and drew his head down into her lap. She parted the hair from his throbbing brow, and kept passing her hands across it with gentle mesmeric touch. At last he grew quiet, soothed into calmness by the firm will that had kept her own tumultuous sorrow down. "Now Bart," she said, gently, but in unnatural, measured tones, you must tell me all. All—and then I can decide what I must do to help you. Tell me about the money first. You took it from the store, I suppose? Has it been found not?"

"No. But it will be to-morrow." "How much is it?" "One hundred dollars."

The amount seemed terribly large to Amy. She had never had so much money at one time in her life. She could not help the look of dismay that came upon her face. But she resumed her questioning gently, as before.

"How did it happen, Bart?" "I was owing Morrison money—about fifty dollars; and yesterday he told me he was going away, and asked me if it would be convenient for me to pay him. I hadn't any money, and I had to tell him so. 'Well, Bart,' he says, 'don't look so distressed about it. I didn't mean to ask you for it. But the amount of it is just this, I have got to have a hundred dollars between now and two o'clock this afternoon. Now here is my watch, worth a hundred and fifty dollars of any man's money. Bixby, the jeweller, told me so yesterday. But I did not know of going away then, and did not want to sell it; and to-day Bixby's out of town and won't be back until to-morrow. Now, I don't want to run around town offering my watch for sale, and proclaiming upon the house-tops that Godfrey Morrison is precious hard up. But if you take it for a hundred dollars, you may have it. You can borrow the money out of the safe, you know, and when Bixby comes home he'll give you at least a hundred and a quarter for the watch, with which you can refund before your governor, Marsh, gets home, and nobody be the wiser for it.' And that is how it happened, Amy. I would have been struck down dead before I'd have done it, if I had not thought I could pay the money back the next day."

"But the watch, Bart?" "I offered it to Bixby this evening, and he says it isn't worth five dollars."

"Oh, that cruel, cruel Morrison!" cried Amy, bursting into tears. "What shall we do?"

Bart had no suggestion to make, but looked utterly hopeless. Amy fell into deep thought, sitting there with a strained, intense look in her eyes, and turning a ring round and round upon her finger. It was a ring which Robert had given her the day that he went away. They had been laughing pleasantly at some of Aunt Barby's superstitions, and he had said with a smile: 'We'll have a little superstition of our own, Amy. We will cage little finger in the ring, with the understanding that ring and finger are never to be disunited, lest some dire calamity befall our love.'

It had been lightly spoken, but Amy had held the condition sacred, and the ring had never left the finger upon which Robert had placed it. Now, as she turned it round and round calling almost despairingly upon her benumbed brain to assist her in forming some plan to avert the disgrace that menaced them, her eye caught the sparkle of its pure gems, as they imprisoned the light, played

with it lovingly, and flashed it out again. She hid the hand upon which the ring shone in the folds of her dress, as if it were a tempter, offering an alternative which she could not entertain. Sell the ring? No, no. She must find some other way. Then she went over again, with sickening pain, all the impossibilities that had been revolved, and recognized as such at first. When she drew her hand out from among the folds again, the idea of parting with the ring was still negated, but something less decidedly, than before.

"Bart," she said, laying her hand upon his arm, "we will get the money somehow. Never fear, but we will get it somehow."

"O Amy!" cried the brother, his countenance clearing suddenly. "If you say you will get it, I am sure you will. For I never knew you to fail of doing what you had faith enough to promise to do."

She did not fail in this. For at noon of the next day she put the money in her brother's hand, though at how sore a sacrifice it had been obtained, he was far from comprehending. He was deeply grateful, however, and hugged his sister tenderly.

"Saved! saved! And by you," he cried. "I am going to begin from this time to prove to you that I am worth saving. Please God, Amy, I will never have to shame myself again with thinking that you were worthier to be a man than I."

Poor Amy. If she had known that, while saving her brother's character for honesty, at such a sacrifice, her own name was everywhere spoken of as that of a common thief, I fear that even Bart's many avowal would have been insufficient to comfort her.

I am quite aware that, according to established precedent, I ought to have given the credit of the delicate fiction, at which Norombega was agape, to feminine gossips. As it did not belong to them, however, in the present instance, I have, with somewhat of rashness, I dare say, ventured upon an innovation. But they were nimble tongued enough in comments, when once it had reached their ears, you may be sure.

"O, mother!" cried the gushing Amelia Potts, running into the Peregrine Potts' sitting room, considerably out of breath, and looking, as to attire, very much as if she had been standing against a particularly hard wind. "O mother! What do you suppose that girl—Amy Home—with a deal of virtuously indignant emphasis upon the name, 'has been doing now? If Mr. Ware only knew! Oh, I do think it is somebody's duty to inform him!"

"Well," returned the maternal Potts, tartly, "I don't suppose there is any need of your sweeping the carpet with your shawl, whatever Amy Home may have done. You had best remember it ain't so easy getting you clothes, as it is some folks'."

"Some folks don't find it so easy in the end, perhaps. At least I should think so, if I had to sell such a splendid ring as Mr. Ware gave Amy, to clear myself from straits. Her engagement ring, too. Joram Lane was into Bixby's and saw her when she sold it. Oh, I should die, I know I should."

"The way of the transgressor is hard!" sighed Mrs. Peregrine. "As I live, 'Melie Potts, you've tore your dress out of the gathers more than half a yard.'"

"Well! Somebody stepped on it. I wasn't to blame."

"Oh, of course you wasn't to blame! You never are. What did she get for the ring?"

"A hundred dollars. Oh, it was such a beauty! There must be something terrible to hush up this time, or she never would have parted with it."

"I pity Robert Ware, though he ought to have been sensibler than to be taken in by a pretty face. I declare, 'Melie, if I was you, I'd write to him. I think it belongs to his friends to put a stop to the deception there is going on.'"

It happened that Robert Ware had once walked home with Miss Potts when she had spent an evening with Amy Home. Consequently the fair Amelia was considered—in her own family—to be rather intimately acquainted with him than otherwise.

"I almost think it is my duty, and—I will. He shall know he has got one friend, if he has not another in the universe."

The epistle by which Robert Ware, for his consolation, was to be convinced of the grand fact that he had 'one friend,' was as follows:—

"DEAR MR. WARE: I am so sorry, and I pity you so much, and I never would have written, if I did not think it my duty as your friend to inform you how much you are deceived in Amy Home. Isn't it a pity, and she

so pretty, too, though beauty is vain and a foster of vanity, mother says, and maybe it would have been better for her if she hadn't been so cried up for her beauty, which some folks think is nothing so remarkable after all. And now her love of dress has got her into trouble, and she has been taking things out of the stores, and Mrs. Ware had to pay all the money she had saved to hush it up, and Amy has had to sell her diamond ring—the one you gave her—and it's in everybody's mouth; but if you want to know more about it, you can ask Bixby, the jeweller, who had it of her, or Joram Lane, that knows all about it. So no more now from

"Your friend, AMELIA V. POTTS."

I suppose Miss Potts meant to say that the story—not the ring—was in everybody's mouth. It may be observed, too, that the orthography of the fair letter-writer has some slight peculiarities. But so has that of Chancer, Yellowplush, and other great geniuses; which may not prove by inference that Miss Potts was a great genius, but it shows at least that eccentricities in spelling are not without precedent.

(To be Continued.)

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(To be Continued.)



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