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## THE ENGAGEMENT RING.

BY MISS DORR.

OROMBEGA, as everybody knows, is an aspiring village, with quite the airs of a city, indeed, in the beautiful valley of the Kennebec. Tulip Cottage, as everybody may not know, was a few years ago, a very bird-cage of a cottage, standing just without the village. The little dwelling was painted drab, with blinds and trimmings of a darker drab. There was a trim little yard in front, with flower beds that might have been designed to demonstrate a geometrical theorem, they were so quaintly exact in shape; and all as neatly kept as possible. Here crocuses heralded the spring; and such tulips blossomed as would have done the heart of a Myrtae good to see; and great golden-eyed pansies blinked gravely at the sun; and giants of the battle did battle bravely for supremacy among the roses; and gentle-eyed daisies modestly preached humility, as they have done, for ought I know, ever since Eve sinned by grasping arrogantly at forbidden knowledge; and pompous dahlias, all in gold and velvet, lifted themselves quite above their lowlier neighbors in their pride of stateliness; and many another treasure, dear to the heart of the florist, lived, and in its season blossomed, in these quaintly-cut, many angled flowerbeds.

The cottage was only large enough to afford a front entry, parlor, and kitchen, with the necessary closets below and three rooms above, cooey little rooms they were, too; with not much to boast of in the way of height, perhaps, and somewhat one-sided in appearance, on account of having a wall that maintained a bold perpendicular at starting, and half way to the ceiling; but yielding to the force of circumstances inclined abruptly, and thenceforth followed the slope of the roof. I wonder how many a human life might be represented by such a wall! The whole interior of this Lilliputian cottage was a six-leaved tract upon the grace of neatness, and pretty Amy Home, its mistress, a marvellous fine illustration for its front page. She was a rose-lipped, fresh-faced girl with eyes that laughed, and brows that hinted archness, and was altogether

so pretty that it was a pleasure just to look at her. At a levee in the village, she had lately won, by an overwhelming majority, in a ballot for 'the prettiest girl,' showing that the young men admired her properly, while the girls caressed, and perhaps envied her. Thus her beauty and her cleverness—for she had a cultivated mind, as well as a fair face—made her a person of considerable importance socially; though she earned her living by teaching, and was often enough at her wits' end to know how the new bonnet or the tasteful wrap which Fashion demanded, was to be obtained without taking the bread out of her own and brother's mouth.

And this brings me to say something of the brother, to whom, woman-like, Amy sacrificed with fond idolatry. He was her hero, though of the earth, earthy, it must be owned. Bart Home was two years younger than his sister, and was about eighteen, a comely youth of the Saxon type, fair-haired and blue-eyed. He was generous by impulse, and selfish by habit, self-willed, and yet easily led. He loved his sister truly, but being accustomed to her devotion to himself, thought it quite a matter of course that her wages should keep him, while his own small salary as clerk in a grocery store supplied him with such elegant indulgences as he must have foregone entirely, if he had borne his equal part in the expense of their housekeeping.

Mrs. Barbara Ware, an aunt of the brother and sister, had also a home at Tulip Cottage. She had come thither a year ago, on the death of her husband, to whom she had been a second wife. Mrs. Ware had a life annuity of a hundred dollars yearly, and chose to live upon it with her young relatives rather than with her husband's children, who had offered her a home. Her face was battered and time-rusted, but it was a good honest face for all that. She believed in dreams, pared her nails on Fridays to avert toothache, and inverted her boots every night, thereby securing certain exemption from cramp. She loved the young people in a hearty, undemonstrative fashion, and scolded them, too, upon occasions, with downright good will.

One afternoon—it was the last day of her spring term—Amy had made flying calls upon two or three acquaintances on her way from school, and, reaching home an hour past the usual time, met a young man coming out from the cottage, who with grave politeness lifted his hat, and held the gate open for her to pass. The gentleman had a grand face, crowned by a massive brow; deep-set eyes, which looked slumberously quiet in their depths, but were plainly capable of lightning glances; a fine mouth, expressing firmness, and sweetness as well; and was altogether, Amy thought, the noblest looking man she had ever seen. Of course she wondered who it was, as almost only one but a Gradgrind would have done. She had no idea of asking the question, however, though perhaps Aunt Barby, who looked vastly consequential, expected it.

'Hasn't Bart come in yet?' Amy asked, instead, picking up her tating, and working away at it with flying fingers.

'Oh, Bart, of course! You never think of anybody but Bart!' was the tart response. 'No, he hasn't come in. It is enough to try the patience of a saint, waiting for you two!'

'Have you learned that by experience?' Amy questioned, with a laugh. 'Well! It tries mine, and that's experience enough for me. I told my nephew, Robert Ware, today, he never could have got that calm way he has got, if it hadn't been for keeping clear of the girls; leastways if they're all like Amy Home.'

'You did?' 'Yes. And he said he thought it was highly probable, and he should lay it by as a bit of wisdom for future use. He's a man worth a girl's knowing, though, Robert Ware is, and as pleasant mannered with a battered old woman like me, as if I was a queen I told him I hadn't seen him half enough. But he's got to meet a man on business this evening, and tomorrow morning he takes the early train to Boston.'

'I shall not see him, then,' thought Amy, with a little sigh. But presently Bart came in; and in talking and laughing with him, over their supper, which had awaited his coming, she forgot—or very nearly forgot, at least—her regret at having missed the acquaintance of Robert Ware. When Bart had gone back to the store, Aunt Barby rolled up her knitting work, and put on her bonnet, saying she was going to spend the evening with Mrs. Dunning. Amy, left alone, fidgeted with her work a few minutes, threw it down to take up a book, but soon found she

had no more relish for reading than for work. So book and tating were allowed to lie idly upon her lap, while she fell to considering whether she dare afford herself a new dress out of the money due for her last term of teaching. This led to a close calculation of necessary expenses, at the end of which she concluded she would have to give up the dress. And then I'm afraid she lost somewhat of her usual brave cheerfulness, and got to thinking that life is but a weariness at the best; and a teacher's life the greatest weariness of all; and if it were not for Bart she could almost wish that—that the wish that was very near coming she would not admit into her thought at all—that life was like a fairy tale, with a wonderful godmother in it for herself, and a brave prince to take her away from her weary, weary toil, and give her the right to share his own luxury and splendor. She had just reached this very reasonable climax, and was laughing softly at her own foolishness, when there came a knock at the door. 'I wonder if that is a stroke of the fairy godmother's wand?' she thought, still laughing; and, opening the door, found herself face to face with Mr. Ware.

'Aunt Barby said'—she began in her surprise, and stopped, confused and blushing.

'Aunt Barby probably said that I had an engagement for the evening, and would not be able to come. But the gentleman I expected to meet failed to appear. Is Mrs. Ware at home?'

'No. She will be very sorry.'

'That is unlucky. But I hope you are going to let me come in and wait until she comes?'

'I don't know. I'm afraid it will be inconsistent with a precious bit of Aunt Barby's wisdom which you have laid by for future use.'

'You have heard of it then? But—I beg your pardon—I think you are confounding the future with the present.'

'If I were to remind you of the same, twenty years hence, I suppose I should still be confounding the future with the present. But if you choose to risk your equanimity by coming in, I'll try not to disturb it by any very wild flights.'

Amy accordingly led the way into the parlor. Then, having freshened the fire by adding a stick or two of wood—for the evenings were chill yet—she brought the evening paper and new magazine, and offered them to Mr. Ware.

'If that means,' he said, smiling quietly, 'that I am to spend the evening in reading, I really hope you will not insist upon it. If you will kindly permit it, I should infinitely prefer to improve the time by getting acquainted with the young relative of our mutual aunt.'

'I am sure we shall quarrel; but I have no objection.'

And quarrel they did; but the acquaintance seemed to progress very auspiciously, for all that.

'Land! Robert! if it isn't you!' cried Aunt Barby, in great astonishment, when she returned later in the evening. 'I thought you couldn't come.'

Robert again explained that the gentleman had failed to meet his engagement.

'That's as much dependence as you can put on what folks say now-a-days. Will it make any difference about your going in the morning?'

'I shall not go in the morning.'

'Well, then, you had better bring your things right here. They charge awfully at the taverns, I've heard say, and I think it's an up and down sin to humor folks by paying such prices.'

Robert seemed greatly amused by his relative's peculiar notion of sin.

'What do you say, Miss Home?' he asked. 'Shall I take Aunt Barby's advice, or fall under her ban as an up-and-down sinner?'

'You must choose the least of two evils, if you can. Aunt Barby will never forgive you, if you slight her advice, and I shall quarrel with you all the time if you take it.'

'The latter is an inducement which I cannot resist. I think, Aunt Barby I will come.'

So it came to pass that Robert Ware was quartered in one of the chambers with a slant in the wall. When, at the end of a fortnight, he went away, Amy had quarrelled with him to such purpose that he found Othello's occupation would be gone, unless he secured the privilege of quarrelling with her all his life, and Amy, who had learned to know and revere the many characters of which his face was the unerring index, gave the promise which he sought, and sighed no longer for fairy godmother, nor for brave prince.

It did not exactly rain visitors at Tulip Cottage, but the place certainly

seemed to be getting a slight sprinkle. Robert Ware was scarcely gone, when another gentleman appeared, being brought to tea by Bart, and introduced as Mr. Morrison. There was a general effect of artificial polish about this gentleman, from his black hair, shining with pomatum, and his gleaming teeth, which Amy suspected to be false, to the lustrous gloss of his shapely boots.

His manner and discourse aided, or possibly created, this effect. Amy, while pleased with his courtly grace, and ready causerie, could not help wondering why the easy descent to Avernus should so frequently come unbidden to her mind. She could see that Mr. Morrison had already gained a powerful influence over her brother. The pang this discovery gave her made her aware how much she distrusted Bart's new friend.

Unconsciously her manner assumed a haughtiness, which all the guest's polite deference could not overcome.

'What ails you, Amy?' Bart bent over her to whisper. 'You are as stupid as a crow that does nothing but cry caw! caw! And I want Morrison to admire you.'

'Nonsense, Bart!' Amy answered, with deepening color, and, raising her eyes, surprised a peculiar look upon the gentleman's face, which set her wondering whether or not he had divined the purport of Bart's whisper.

'Home!' said Mr. Morrison. 'Do you know that your sister reminds me of the young Countess of Chedwig, whom I knew when I was in England? I have hardly ever seen two faces more alike. The countess was quite the belle of the London season two years ago, and I've seen half a dozen fellows ready, if looks could kill, to strike me dead, when she would put her white hand upon my arm, and say, 'Come, Morrison! take me away from all this glare, and blaze, and din. Take me into the conservatory, where the flowers live; I am more akin to them than to these,' and so indeed she was.'

'How delightfully intimate you must have been,' said Amy, gravely. 'And did not the queen ask your advice upon some affairs of state, and, to reward your condescension in giving it, offer you the hand of one of the royal princesses? It seems to me that I do remember reading something of the sort in the papers of that time.'

'I dare say it was some other gentleman of my name, or one similar to mine,' returned the other with superb coolness. But in his heart I am afraid he was saying: 'Confound her! Who would have thought such a posy faced child of a girl would be so sharp? She shall pay for that derisive frown, if Godfrey Morrison's fascination has not lost its power.'

For two or three weeks Mr. Morrison was always calling at Tulip Cottage or passing Amy's school house just as the teacher was ready to go home, and so, of course, walking along with her; or meeting her in stores when she was shopping; or at moonlight sails upon the river, gotten up by the young people of her set. This might, perhaps, have gone on much longer, if Amy had not very pointedly assured him that, however well calculated he might be to dazzle countesses and people of that ilk, she feared his qualities were much too shining to be appreciated by a humble cottage girl like herself. As this was uttered in answer to an elaborate declaration of love, I think the gentleman may have been in a fair way of being convinced that his boasted fascination had lost somewhat of its power.

But the attractions which had failed to interest the sister were still all-powerful with the brother. For what purpose Godfrey Morrison bestowed his friendship upon Bart Home, so much his inferior in years and in experience of life, was best known to himself. Perhaps he was thinking that humiliation, through the brother Amy so dearly loved, would be a very convenient form of revenge upon herself.

'Bart, dear,' said Amy, one evening, 'I'm afraid Godfrey Morrison is not a safe companion for you?'

'That is just like a woman. Always trumping up some absurd scare for fear a fellow will enjoy himself. What is amiss with Morrison I should like to know!'

'Do you yourself consider him a person of correct moral principles?'

'He isn't a solemn prig like Robert Ware, if that is what you mean.'

'I am sorry you don't like Robert, Bart.'

'Oh, I like him. He's a pattern man; that's what he is. I like him as well as you do the paper pattern you cut your new saquee out by.'

'Unjust, Bart! Robert is the truest gentleman.'

'Well, I never said he was not a gentleman. To be sure he is. And I wish all the chaps I am in with were

like him. I wish I was like him. I do, Amy,' and, covering his face with his hands, the boy burst into a sudden storm of tears.

'Bart, dear Bart! what is it?' Amy asked, taking his head between her hands and laying it against her shoulder. Are you in any trouble?'

(To be Continued.)

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