

* The Inglenook *

Amri Trimble's "Ellum,"

ANNIE HAMILTON DONNELL.

"That's a fine old elm!" Mr. Trimble.

The summer boarder tilted her dainty head to gaze up into the majestic heights of green.

"Well, I calculate you're right about that, Miss Gertrude. I was tellin' 'Liph jest this mornin' that there must be six good ox-yokes in that there butt. 'An', I says, 'the sooner you an' me get 'em out, the better, 'Liph. It ain't reasonable to put it off any longer,' says I."

"But, Mr. Trimble, you can't mean that you are going to cut the tree down!" gasped the summer boarder in horrified amazement. The old farmer was still mentally laying off the straight, splendid trunk into ox-yokes.

"Yes," he drawled, "I guess 'Liph an' me 'll get round to it this fall—I've been calculatin' to do it a long spell back. There's six good ox-yokes there, sure. There ain't a finer ellum in this country."

"But it's a sin to cut it down—it would be wicked, Mr. Trimble!" expostulated the indignant young voice. Was the old man crazy? It was, far and away, the grandest elm she had ever seen. Ox-yokes! "Mr. Trimble, I wouldn't give you as much by five hundred dollars for your farm, if you cut that tree down!" the girl cried.

"Sho!" the old man ejaculated slowly.

Nothing more was said of the subject then, as the clear tinkle of Mrs. Trimble's dinner-bell interrupted. The slow, hot summer crept away, and in the early fall the summer boarders went back to their barren, elmless, city homes. The last thing Gertrude's eyes rested on wistfully was the glorious tree with the doom of the ax upon it. She sighed helplessly.

Mary Trimble sighed too. The horror had brooded over her for years, but it seemed slowly and surely looming into reality now. This time Amri was in earnest. She had seen him walking about the tree many times lately, making plans. She heard him discussing the plans with 'Liph out in the shed at noons.

"Amri's goin' to cut it down—Amri's goin' to cut the elm down!" the poor woman lamented over her work. The idea of making strenuous objection did not occur to Mary Trimble. She was not an adept at making objections to Amri.

"I don't know how we can live without the old elm—I don't know how we can," her mournful thought ran on. "It was the first thing I set eyes on when Amri brought me home. I was feelin' a little mite homesick and it was a dreadful comfort to see that tree. There was elms at home, too."

She was very tired. The drag of summer boarders had worn upon her frail, ageing body. It was harder to have courage when she was tired. Now she sank into the kitchen rocker and rocked herself back and forth in a burst of tears.

"It's always be'n a comfort," she sobbed aloud. "It was a comfort to Amber, too. She used to love to play house under it from the time she was knee-high, Amber did. Heart alive I can see the little thing now, in her little gingham apron, settin' out there with her playthings. Once I found her there sound asleep an' there was the shadder of the old tree restin' on her little

mite of a round face as lovin' an' protectin' as a kiss."

The kitchen rocker ceased its swaying and the worn little figure in it sat upright, gazing back into the lost years. The look of mothers who are desolate was in the sad eyes of Mary Trimble.

"An' when she went acrost the river to teach in the Drew neighborhood, she could see the old elm just as plain, Amber could. She was dreadful homesick over there, an' 'Liph an' I used to run the barn lantern up in the side of the elm next to the river for her to watch. It was the greatest comfort to Amber. 'Mother,' she used to say, 'I'm glad the Lord planted that elm tree right in our front yard. I want to live in sight of it, and when I die, I want to sleep in sight of it. I should be homesick away from the old elm, mother.'"

Mrs. Trimble began to rock again slowly. The tears dripped in steady procession over her cheeks. She was thinking of Amber's grave in "sight" of the old elm tree.

But the doom of the tree was put off yet again, for a little later. Amri Trimble was stricken with apoplexy. He lay all winter in the little bed-room off the parlor, and his patient little wife cared for him and yielded to his whims tenderly. He was not sick—only helpless. There was plenty of will power left in the stubborn old mind of Amri Trimble, and there was plenty of time to exert it. It was not an easy life his humble little wife led.

In the early spring he began to gain a little—to move first a finger, then a hand and arm. Little by little life began to creep feebly back to the old man's rugged body. But still he could not compass strength to get out of the little bed-room. With returning vitality came restlessness, and he fumed and fretted unavailingly. He was constantly devising work for 'Liph to do. And then, one day he remembered the old elm tree. That was in April.

"Mary," he called, sharply.

"Yes, I'm comin', Amri—I'll be right there."

"Where's 'Liph this mornin'?"

"He's fixin' up the old harness, Amri. Don't you know you told him to?"

"Well, you tell him to leave that till it rains. Tell him to get the ax an' chop down the old ellum. Mary!" There was no answer.

"Mary!" Amri called again.

"Well, Amri."

"Tell 'Liph I don't want any waitin' this time. That ellum's comin' down. He can get out the ox-yokes an' pay the doctor's bill with 'em. 'Liph'll know jest the way I was goin' to begin—I guess we planned it often enough. Tell him to get Ben Doolittle to help him if he's skeery. Ben's a good hand. Mary!"

"Well, Amri."

"I want that ellum felled down today. I ain't goin' to have that starin' at me another day. First you know them ox-yokes'll be wormeat' an' onmarketable."

An hour later Amri called again.

"Mary, where be you?"

"Here I am Amri—I'm gettin' your broth ready."

"I ain't heard the ax yet, Mary."

"No, Amri."

"Well?"

"'Liph's grindin' it."

"Grindin' his ax, is he? Mary, you go an tell him I'm waitin' to him chop. Tell him I ain't goin' to wait any longer. What's got to be done's got to be done."

The thud of the ax was distinctly audible a few moments later and Amri Trimble lay listening to it grimly. He waited expectantly for the crash and when it came, he turned his face to the wall, vaguely disappointed.

That night he slept little and his gaunt old face was flushed unwontedly. He insisted on going out into the parlor next day, but Mary put him off persistently. For a week she put him off. Some new born courage seemed infused into her mild nature.

"Not yet, Amri," she insisted eagerly. "You ain't able to yet. You wait a little longer till you get your strength up."

And Amri waited, perforce. He had never obeyed Mary before, and the sensation, in its strangeness, rather overawed him. But the day came when he crept with halting, feeble steps into the larger world of the little hair-cloth-furnished parlor. 'Liph supported him and Mary went before with pillows. An odd look of defiance and terror intermingled had found its way into her quiet face.

"The winder! I want to go over and set by the winder, 'Liph," the invalid gasped, but Mary interposed her lean little frame doggedly.

"Not yet, Amri. You better be satisfied to stop on this side of the room at first. You ain't strong enough to walk clear acrost—"

"The winder!" commanded Amri with breathless impatience. "Put up them curtains, Mary. I want to see out."

"No, no—Oh, Amri!"

The curtains were all drawn carefully. Mary had pinned the loose thin draperies together. Her hands refused to release them. They trembled like little withered leaves in the wind.

"Now let me down—easy 'Liph! Its a dreadful way acrost the room, ain't it? I'm tuckered out. It seems queer to be out here; how long has it be'n, Mary? Mary!"

"Yes—yes, Amri."

"Why don't you answer? How long has it be'n since I was out here in the parlor, I said? What day is today, Mary?"

"Tuesday, Amri, today's Tuesday. 'Liph says it Arbor Day, when the Governor asks them to set out plants and trees—"

She stopped suddenly, but Amri did not heed.

"Who said it was Harbor Day? I don't believe it!" he cried querulously. His face had winced at Mary's words.

"They said it was goin' to be, down to the store last night, Amri. 'Liph was down there."

"Well, I don't know as it matters any great whether it's Harbor Day or Fourth of July. Ain't you goin' to put up them curtains, Mary? I want to see out."

The withered little hands tremulously unpinned the draperies. Mary Trimble's face was white with dread. But Amri's face—Amri's face lit up with a flash of glad light that transfigured it. The limp old figure straightened up in the chair.

"It's there!" Amri cried exultantly, his eyes on the beautiful old elm tree. A great load had slipped away from his shoulders. His little wife watched him in fear that turned to wonder, then to joy. Amri was glad.

"Oh Amri!—yes, it's there. I was afraid to tell you, I thought you would be so angry because 'Liph didn't cut it down—Amri, Amri, I couldn't let him! I kept rememberin' our little dead girl, Amri. Amber was so fond of the old tree! I wouldn't let 'Liph cut it down. It was the big, dead summer