

AMOS BRADLEY'S CHANGE OF HEART.

The rural free delivery wagon stopped at the front gate, deposited the morning mail in the tin box on the fence, and went creaking down the road through the sticky mud of a late March thaw. But before it had proceeded a hundred yards Amos Bradley came shuffling out of the house and made his way across the yard to the mail box, his heavy overshoes splashing the slush right and left, and his faded old coat flapping in the wind.

He opened the box, and perching a pair of ancient steel-bowed spectacles on his nose, proceeded leisurely to draw out and examine the contents.

There were but two pieces of mail—the county weekly paper and a thick white envelope directed to his spinster sister, who had kept house for him since the death of his wife some ten years ago.

Amos closed the cover of the tin box with a bang and went shuffling back to the kitchen, where his sister, fully fifteen years his junior, sat chopping mince-meat in a great wooden bowl.

"Mail's come, Martha," Amos announced, "an' here's a letter for ye."

He passed her the thick white envelope and sat down in a near-by chair, querulously expectant.

Martha wiped her hands on her apron and taking up the letter, examined the superscription attentively.

"You ain't got any idea who it's from, I s'pose, have ye, Martha?" Amos hinted broadly.

"Not the least," said she. "Twas mailed here in town, I see from the postmark. I don't know who'd be writin' to me."

She inserted a long, thin forefinger beneath the flap of the envelope and tore it open. Within was a second envelope with her name inscribed in a bold hand across the face. Martha paused to read it, while Amos fidgeted.

"All envelope, ain't it?" he asked a little testily.

"No, I guess not," she laughed. "They's somethin' or other inside this one."

She drew out the contents of the second envelope and opened its single fold. A square of tissue paper fluttered out and went zigzagging to the floor.

Amos leaned forward in his chair, his keen old eyes peering eagerly over the bows of his spectacles.

"Of course, of course," said Martha, scanning the heavily engraved lines. "I might 'a' known what it was! It's the invitation to Ellie's wedding."

"Is it?" said Amos, leaning yet nearer.

"Yes, an' I call it real neat, too," Martha declared, with the air of one whose opinions in such matters carried weight. "Mrs. Robert Bagley Thorpe," she read, "requests the honor of your presence at the marriage of her daughter, Elinor—"

Amos suddenly straightened himself in his chair. "Where do you figger mine is?" he interrupted the reading to demand.

"Yours! Your what?" said his sister.

"My invitation," he explained.

"Didn't you get one, too?"

"No, I never," he said, aggrievedly. "There wa'n't anythin' in the box but the paper and that invitation of yourn."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I am."

He sat for some time ruminating silently, his brows furrowed in perplexed thought. Surely they had not omitted him intentionally from the list of guests!

"Pr'aps that one's meant for both of us," he at length suggested, hopefully. "How's it directed, Martha?"

His sister picked up the outer envelope, which had slipped to the floor, and looked narrowly at the super-

scription. "Just 'Miss Martha B. Bradley,'" she announced.

"Is it the same on tother one?"

"Just the same," she said, after an examination of the inner envelope.

"You're sure there's not a word about me on either one of 'em, Martha?" he demanded with evidently rising anxiety.

"Not as I can see."

"Don't say 'and family' or anything like that, does it?" he persisted.

"Um-m, no," she admitted, reluctantly.

"Well, I snum,"—his disappointment was apparent in every line of his face,—"they ain't a-goin' to ask me!"

"Oh, I don't b'lieve—" she began.

"I do, if you don't!" he interrupted, with some heat. "They've left me out a-purpose. Prob'ly they think because I'm nigh eighty an' a little mite deaf that I'm too old to go to weddin's. Pr'aps they're 'fraid I ain't good enough to meet all them folks that's comin' on; or maybe it worried 'em for fear I'd eat with my knife. Ellie's the last one I sh'd ever thought would get stuck up," he ended, plaintively.

His eyes fell on a little table in one corner of the kitchen, littered with brass weights and small wooden wheels and well-worn levers—the works of an old hall clock he had been repairing of late. It fanned his anger into new and fiercer flame.

"An' there's gran'paw's old clock I was a-goin' to give her, just because she sets such a store by old things!" he burst out. "Here I've been a-workin' my daylight's out to get it runnin' in good shape, an' she not carin' enough to invite me to the weddin'! I'll l'arn 'em! I'll l'arn 'em how old an' decrepit I am!"

He rose and stalked wrathfully out of the house. In times of stress such as this the wood-pile was his greatest solace, and thither he went now.

All the morning Martha heard the drone of the saw and the sound of the ax on the chopping block, but she wisely refrained from interfering until the midday dinner was on the table. Then she put on her overshoes and her hood and went across the back yard.

"You better come into dinner an' stop actin' so ridiculous," she counseled. "The idea of you bein' out here with your coat off! I never heard of such a thing in my life! You'll get the rheumatism all over ye."

In silence he followed her into the house, but once in the kitchen, his eyes fell again upon the stand in the corner.

He strode over to it and stood regarding it with narrowed eyes.

"Too old to git an invite to her weddin', am I?" he mumbled. "Well, if that's so, I'm a good deal too old to be a-tink'erin' clocks to give her."

His arm shot out and swept the top of the little table clean.

Wooden wheels, levers and weights fell crashing to the floor. He kicked the debris viciously into the corner and slammed the table bottom up, on top of it.

"Maybe I am too old to go to weddin's! Maybe I am! But I ain't so old that I ain't got some spunk left yet. Now let's have dinner."

All the afternoon the old man sat by the kitchen stove, pretending to read the paper, but Martha noticed that every few moments he laid the paper aside to stare long and silently through the western window at the bleak vista of fields and the ragged line of hills beyond. That he was deeply hurt there could be no doubt.

She felt a growing resentment toward the thoughtlessness of the Thorpes.

"I shouldn't 'a' thought they'd 'a'

forgotten him," she told herself. "I declare, it's too bad of Ellie! He's takin' it dretful hard."

In her halting, clumsy fashion she tried to comfort her brother, but her attempts were such signal failures that she finally gave it up, and left him to his paper and his brooding.

It was just at dusk that the back door opened and some one came briskly into the little kitchen. Amos laid aside his paper and looked up.

"Why, Ellie Thorpe!" he heard his sister's voice exclaiming. "Come in. Ain't you cold?"

"Cold? Indeed not," laughed the girl. "Hello, Uncle Amos!"

He straightened himself in his chair. "Good evenin'!" he said, coldly.

The girl drew a chair beside his. In the gloom of the room she could not see the pain and disappointment in his face, but something in his tones told her of trouble. "What's the matter, Uncle Amos?" she asked. "Aren't you well?"

"Oh, I'm toler'ble, toler'ble," the old man replied, with a reserve that she had never seen in him before.

"I came over," she said, "especially to bring you this." She thrust a thick white envelope in his hands.

He took it and fumbled it awkwardly, turning it over and over.

"What—is it?" he asked, haltingly.

"It's your invitation to the wedding, Uncle Amos," she laughed. "The boys took them down to the office to mail last night, and somehow this one of yours was caught in the bottom of

the basket. I found it there this afternoon. I wouldn't have had yours delayed for the world," she added, gravely.

The old man bent forward to bring the fading light from the window on the envelope. There was his name across it in the same bold hand. He coughed weakly.

"I'm much obliged, Ellie, much obliged," he said, brightening up perceptibly.

"And you're coming, aren't you Uncle Amos?" she asked.

"Comin'? Of course I am!" he declared, with emphasis.

"I'm awfully sorry it happened this way," she said, "for I wanted you to have your invitation as soon as it could be sent. And, Uncle Amos," she said, drawing her chair closer to his, "you know there's no one to give me away at the wedding—no father or brothers, I mean—and I want you to do that for me. Will you?"

"Me?" he echoed, with an ill-concealed touch of pride. "I ain't fit to. You don't want sech an old fossil as I am!"

"Yes, I do," she interrupted. "I shall count on you."

"Well," he announced judicially, "if you're terrible set on it, maybe I will."

When Martha returned to the kitchen, after she had tendered her visitor the unusual honor of being shown through the frigid hall to the front door, she found Amos on his knees before the little pile of wheels and lev-

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