

THE LOVERS' LITANY.

Eye of gray, a sudden quail,
Driving rain and falling stars,
As the storm wears to sea
In a parting storm of cheer.

HAVING HER OWN WAY

A FAMILY FAILING.

[Contributed by "Jesson."]

EVEN O'CLOCK



The little carved wooden timepiece on the mantel chimed out the hour of 7. Mr. Dobson turned pale. He had been walking restlessly up and down the salon for the past half hour, rushing to the windows at every sound in the quiet room outside, and becoming every moment more anxious than he dared to admit, even to himself.

There was nothing but the familiar, exquisite scene to meet Mr. Dobson's eyes—the sun blazing hotly upon the white walled villa, with its numberless balconies and verandas, and its red striped Spanish blinds; the roses and magnolias and oleanders rejoicing in the golden blaze; the long tresses of the willows dipping into the cool green water far down beneath the last low terrace wall, the waves of which were overflowing with scarlet geraniums; and opposite to him, across the broad, blue green expanse of the loveliest lake in Switzerland, the glorious mountains of Savoy, their snow capped heads uplifted inexorably against the dazzling blue of the midsummer sky.

Decidedly the child needed someone to look after her when he was away. But, then, he never was away. It had only been the most urgent necessity that had induced him to go to Vevey without her. And what use would it be to engage a governess? Amoret would only laugh at the unfortunate woman and wheedle her, as she did her luckless father.

"Oh, yes, of course," said the girl eagerly, searching her pocket for her little lizard skin purse. "I am afraid I have not much—pas beaucoup, monsieur—but tenez! Here are five francs, and"—holding out the money—"you will make haste!"

"Oh, ma'am!" whispered Bingham, whose teeth were now chattering. "I don't like the looks of him! And I am afraid that he has been drinking."

"What does it matter," answered Amoret rapidly, "so long as he will take the note to papa? Quick!" she pleaded, as the man drew still nearer to the stone on which she was sitting. "Oh, please, do make haste!"

again—"if I could only send word to papa! What will he think? What will he do? And the doctors said he was not to be excited or annoyed about anything! Oh, Bingham, what shall I do?"

"If I could only manage to hobble on somehow!" continued poor Amoret. "But, no," her face contracted by a sudden pain as she tried to move her ankle, "it is quite impossible. I shall have to sit on this stone all night, that is evident, unless—oh, Bingham,—in piteous appeal—don't you think you could pick up courage and make your way back to Gifon? There is a hotel there; they could send a message to papa—they speak English at all those places."

"I have nothing else for you to steal," she said then, her head drawn up high; "you may as well go to the villa and deliver the letter. Nothing shall be done to you—I will not tell my father what you have done."

"No, no!" she panted; but her voice died away upon her lips; she felt her strength—nerved as she was by disgust and dread—giving way before the drunken scoundrel's persistence. "Papa," she thought, "oh, papa!"—and then a black cloud seemed to pass before her eyes and the roar of the torrent seemed suddenly to cease.

"She is better now," Amoret heard a low voice say—the next moment, as it seemed to her—and opening her eyes, she saw Bingham kneeling by her side, no longer crying and with her a man who looked English, and who certainly did not wear a blouse.

"Ah," she said, putting her two weak little hands up to her forehead, "what was it? Did I faint? Oh,—drawing a long breath—"what a horribly deathly sensation it is!"

"Don't try to speak just yet," said the voice again, very kindly. "You are safe now, and your maid is here. Keep quiet for a few minutes longer; there is no danger."

Amoret laid her head down again obediently. She knew then that it had been raised against the speaker's shoulder. She felt the roughness of his tweed coat against her cheek, and smelt the—her—not unpleasant fragrance of tobacco. There was a wet handkerchief on her forehead; it felt cool and pleasant. The girl closed her eyes.

"Oh, dear, sir," whispered Bingham nervously, "do you think she's going off again?"

"Well, Bingham," she said, with a weak little laugh, "you are not much better after all; and I—oh—as her thoughts became clearer, she sat up again and began to cry—"oh, papa, papa, I am a wicked girl! I had forgotten papa! Oh, Bingham, let us go home to papa! This gentleman will take care of us. You will, won't you?" she pleaded. "We should be afraid to go by ourselves, and then—my foot—I can't walk."

"I am so sorry to trouble you," she went on hurriedly, sitting up and putting her hand to her dizzy head; "but—"

"Yes," Amoret said again, breathlessly. "I understand. Ah"—as Mr. Dobson's slow footsteps crossed the neighboring room—"he is coming! Do I look very white? I must get a color." She put her hands up hastily, and rubbed her bloodless cheeks. "He must not know that you have been talking to me. Oh, dad," she broke into a hysterical laugh as Mr. Dobson opened the door—"Doctor Grimshaw says it may be a fortnight before I can put my foot to the ground, isn't he a dreadful man? And what am I to do with myself, I should like to know, all of that time?"

"No," Amoret admitted ruefully, "and I wish I were not afraid to stay here while you went and told papa, but I am."

"Well," he returned, laughing again, "the path is not very good. I think I must concentrate all my energies upon following it as well as I can in the dark."

"I can't give you my rings—they were my mother's. Ah, you coward!"—for the man had now seized her hand and

was dragging off the rings, cutting her tender flesh as he did so and making it bleed.

"What good does it do to scream?" she demanded, her voice hardly trembling, though her face was ashy pale. "I wouldn't mind losing my rings even if I thought he would take the note. But, now that he has robbed me, he will be afraid to go to the house. We are no better off than we were before."

"You have my rings now," Amoret said to the man in her halting French; "but at least you will take the letter?"

"I will call to-morrow," he said, "to inquire after your mistress. Her ankle should be seen to at once. Here is my card. I am staying at the Hotel Beau Site, close by. If I can be of any use I hope Mr. Dobson will let me know."

"Mr. Roland Askam," Bingham read on the card she carried in to Amoret, who, with broken words and sobs and kisses, was hurriedly relating the story of her danger and her deliverance from it.

"God bless him, whoever he may be!" said Mr. Dobson solemnly. "He has given me back my very life. What can I ever do for him in return?"

All right long Amoret lay awake, haunted by her father's face, as she had seen it through her tears on her return.

Deathly pale, she sat among the pillows and listened, with her great startled brown eyes fixed upon good Doctor Grimshaw's face.

"There, my child," said the old man gently. "I can tell you nothing more; and you must not be over anxious. After all, we doctors are not infallible: like other people, we are sometimes mistaken in our opinions. But"—laying his trembling hand upon her head—"your father must live carefully, and avoid any possibility of annoyance or excitement."

"Yes," murmured Amoret. "It has seemed to me that of late he has had some special cause for distress of mind. Do you try and find out, my dear, what it is, and smooth it away, if possible."

"Yes," Amoret said again, breathlessly. "I understand. Ah"—as Mr. Dobson's slow footsteps crossed the neighboring room—"he is coming! Do I look very white? I must get a color." She put her hands up hastily, and rubbed her bloodless cheeks. "He must not know that you have been talking to me. Oh, dad," she broke into a hysterical laugh as Mr. Dobson opened the door—"Doctor Grimshaw says it may be a fortnight before I can put my foot to the ground, isn't he a dreadful man? And what am I to do with myself, I should like to know, all of that time?"

"We have never yet had any secrets," she thought, "and I never could see the good of beating about the bush. He will know that I have been questioning Dr. Grimshaw. I had better not try to hide it from him."

"Papa must try to thank you, Mr. Askam," she said; "I am afraid I can not. But it is not because I am not very grateful."

"She blushed as she spoke; she was guiltily conscious of having almost forgotten her protector of the Gorge de Chanderon; it seemed to her that so

much had happened since the previous night. She had experienced dread and sorrow; she had given her life away to Cousin Tom.

"I called this morning at your hotel, Mr. Askam," Mr. Dobson was saying; "but they told me you were out. When you know all that my little girl is to me, you will understand what I feel toward the man who befriended her in a great danger."

Roland Askam pressed the trembling hand of the speaker, and said a few quiet words. He saw how ill Mr. Dobson was, and could understand his daughter's anxiety of the previous evening. And then, in order to give the invalid time to compose himself, he turned to speak to the young lady on the sofa, and the two young people regarded each other with some natural curiosity.

Amoret saw a tall, strong, fair young man of about 25, who was decidedly as good looking as she could possibly have desired her hero to be. His frank smile showed the whiteness of teeth, his well-shielded nose, crisp, brown beard, and square, honest forehead, his "eyes of dangerous gray," all seemed to Miss Dobson just what should accompany the kind voice and the strong arms that had come to her in her need.

Mr. Askam on his side, was thinking at the same moment that he was more than rewarded for the loss of his dinner the night before. Until then Amoret had been to him, as he to her, little more than a voice, a faint fragrance of violets, the flutter of a ribbon against his cheek—and a sufficiently substantial weight in his arms.

He looked at her now with his keen artist's glance, and saw a very young face with great brown eyes raised to his in wondering admiration and gratitude. Amoret was always pale, but she had a pretty, red, flower like mouth, and she blushed readily when people spoke to her. Her brown hair was cropped behind like a boy's, and in front it curled in a mass of soft little rings over her white forehead and delicate dark eyebrows.

Lying among her pillows, in a white gown and with a knot of yellow velvet tied under her soft chin, she looked a study ready made, Roland Askam thought, for a charming little tableau de genre. And the pretty Swiss saloon lent itself so delightfully as background, with its polished floor and carved cabinets and chintzy pieces, its blue china clock, its spindle legged chairs and tables, and every where the glimmer of the tall white lilies with which Amoret loved to fill the bowls and jars.

This mutual inspection occupied only a very few moments, and then the young man, having inquired with due politeness after Miss Dobson's ankle, and seated himself upon a chair close to her sofa, produced from his pocket the watch and rings which she had believed were lost forever.

"I forgot these last night," he said; "I was in such a hurry to get back to Jack—to my friend Cadogan."

"Oh," cried Amoret, blushing with joy, "how very good of you to have got them back for me! They are my mother's rings—I thought I should never see them any more."

She slipped them on to her slender fingers, for which the beautiful old jewels seemed far too heavy, and covered them with childish kisses.

"Your maid told me that the fellow had robbed you," returned the young man, "and of course I made him give the things up. And when I had seen Jack I went out again and put the police on the scoundrel's track. It is not often such things happen in these parts; but," turning to Mr. Dobson, "I don't think Miss Dobson ought to go so far again by herself—it is hardly safe."

"Oh, please don't blame me!" said Amoret, laughing and putting her hands up to her ears. "Of course I will never do it again—I never did it before. I don't know what put it into my head; and I could never believe that a man could be so cowardly, and so—so dreadful!" She blushed vividly again, and then as suddenly turned pale.

"I think indeed it has been a lesson to her," observed Mr. Dobson, smoothing the girl's brown hair with his trembling hand, "for here she is laid upon her sofa for many a day to come. And if it had not been for you, Mr. Askam—"

"I am only sorry I let the fellow off so easily! If I had known all"—with an involuntary glance at the picturesque head among the pillows, of which Amoret was demurely aware—"I would have broken every bone in his body!"

"Oh, dear me," thought Miss Dobson, "I believe he is capable of doing it! Well, Tom won't go about the world breaking people's bones for me—that is one comfort. These very young men, looking dispraggingly with her eyes of 16 at Roland, with his 25 years of manliness and good health, "are so impetuous, so foolish!"

"The doctors are agreed," he said. "They both advised me to set my affairs in order—nay, child," as Amoret, in spite of herself, uttered a cry of pain. "it will not happen any the sooner because we are warned; but it is of you I am thinking. I can not rest day or night when I remember how utterly alone in the world you would be if I were to leave you."

Amoret sat up and faced him bravely, though the sharp sword of sorrow had pierced her very heart.

"We will talk of it together, papa," she said cheerfully. "Of course it distresses you. Let us think about it, dear. What would you like me to do if—"

The words died on her lips, the little face was paler than ever, but she smiled bravely.

"Well, you know, my darling," he began, "even if all goes well with me, you would have to marry some day."

"Oh!" the poor child's heart sank within her. "You would like me to marry—to leave you?"

"I think it would be best, dear," he answered. "Think how it would ease my mind, if I could see you settled in a home of your own, and a kind husband to take care of you when I—"

"Papa!"

Do what she would, she could not suppress a sharp cry of pain.

"Oh, my little Amoret!" the father answered, in a moment that they were in each other's arms again, and lying silently heart to heart.

It was the girl who recovered herself first. Was not all excitement forbidden to her father? She sat up laughing, and went on in a very matter of fact tone—

"A nice pair of geese we are, dad, to be fretting about my marriage. Why, of course, every girl marries. You would not like your little Amoret to be an old maid, would you? No, of course not! So, now that is settled, I will make haste and fall in love. Only with whom? That is the question."

"Is there no one—no one at all," began Mr. Dobson nervously, "whom you have seen that you could learn to like?"

Amoret knitted her pretty brows, pursed up her lips, and tried very hard to think of all the men she had seen in her short life.

"Papa," she said, laughing a little hysterically. "I have met so few people! There is dear old Doctor Grimshaw, where, and the curate, and that is all. And then at Manchester there is—"

"Yes, yes, at Manchester," interrupted the poor father anxiously—"the cousins, you know. There was Tom—Tom is really not a bad fellow, dear."

"Tom is the best fellow in the world," assented Amoret warmly. "They are all three good fellows, but I like Tom even better than Ned or Jim."

"That is what I thought!" exclaimed her father, no longer concealing his anger. "If I were once sure that my little Amoret would have so kind a protector—"

"Papa," broke in Amoret, her voice rather unsteady, although she still smiled at him—"so that is what you have been plotting, dear. Why did you not tell me before?"

"I hardly dared. I—I could scarcely bear to think of it myself. It seems too much to ask of you, my darling; but—"

"What that I should marry Tom?"

"Yes, I know that you used to laugh at him, and—"

"Oh, but that was only nonsense, you know! Papa, I never thought about it seriously at all. I—with a tremulous laugh—"I was so happy to be with you, I cared for nothing else; but now—it is different. And it really would make me happy if I were to marry Cousin Tom? Is it the thought of this that has been fretting you of late?"

"Yes, the thought of what might happen—and you friendless. And so I wrote the other day to the cousins, and I asked him to come and see us; but I was afraid that you—"

"That I should laugh at Tom again when he came?" asked Amoret. "But indeed I won't, dear! I don't mind confessing to you"—the girl set her teeth and clenched her hands, though the pretty, fond smile never left her lips—"that I always liked Tom a little bit; and now, if my marrying him will set your mind at rest, and relieve you from any further suffering, why, all I have got to say is that I think I am a very lucky girl to find such a good, sensible, kind hearted husband as Tom, and I will say 'yes' the moment he asks me again. And, oh"—as the tears began to roll down her face—"what a twinge my foot gave me just then! Oh, there's another one! What a baby I am to cry; but I really can't help it, and I'm as happy as a queen!"

"My little Amoret—my good child!" Mr. Dobson murmured, clasping her in his arms and laying his cheek down upon her brown head.

But Amoret was not going to allow any more sentiment, and she began to draw pictures of their life when she should be married, and how she meant to queep it over poor Ned and poor Jim in the villa at Euphonia.

"They will spoil me, you know," she said; "but Tom will be more severe. He is so sensible. He will keep me in order, just as you do, dad."

"Exactly—as I do!" assented Mr. Dobson, his sad heart warming into happiness again under the sunshine of Amoret's gaiety.

Surely, he said to himself, the thought of the marriage could not be altogether distasteful to the child, since she could talk and laugh about it so easily. He felt himself wonderfully cheered by his daughter's good spirits, and the two were chatting together very happily, when the door was opened and Francine announced "Mr. Askam."

Mr. Dobson rose with eagerness to meet the young man, while Amoret smiled at him from among her pillows and held out her hand.

"Papa must try to thank you, Mr. Askam," she said; "I am afraid I can not. But it is not because I am not very grateful."

In the right hand of the speaker, and said a few quiet words. He saw how ill Mr. Dobson was, and could understand his daughter's anxiety of the previous evening. And then, in order to give the invalid time to compose himself, he turned to speak to the young lady on the sofa, and the two young people regarded each other with some natural curiosity. Amoret saw a tall, strong, fair young man of about 25, who was decidedly as good looking as she could possibly have desired her hero to be. His frank smile showed the whiteness of teeth, his well-shielded nose, crisp, brown beard, and square, honest forehead, his "eyes of dangerous gray," all seemed to Miss Dobson just what should accompany the kind voice and the strong arms that had come to her in her need. Mr. Askam on his side, was thinking at the same moment that he was more than rewarded for the loss of his dinner the night before. 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