HAVING HER OWN WAY

OR

A FAMILY FAILING.

[Contributed by "Jesson."]

Chapter V.

The days went by, and Tom Churchill found it more and more difficult to come to an understanding with Mr. Dobson. The poor father seemed to be so content at seeing what good terms the cousins were on together, and to take it for granted that all was going on as he at once desired and dreaded.

Nothing less urgent than Mr. Dobson's letters describing the well nigh desperate state of his health would have induced the head of the firm of Churchill Brothers to absent himself from Manchester just then. It seemed to him that he must be crazy to be going about day after day looking at scenery he cared nothing for, with heavy heart and moody face. He did his best, however, to hide from Amoret and her father the anxieties that were crushing him beneath their weight.

Roland found himself wondering why the man who was going to marry Amoret Dobson should at times look so moody and depressed. But the party at the villa did not see much of the young artist just then. Askam had professed to be very busy during the days that followed Tom Churchill's arrival and was off from morning till night among the mountains with his sketch book and easel, returning so late that the lights would all be out in the windows of Beau Sejour as he passed by the gate on his way to the hotel where Cadogan was waiting for him over his pipe and book.

Once or twice Amoret had reproached him with his neglect of them, but the young fellow had answered her so gently, and had begged her so earnestly to believe that he was unchanged in his devotion to her father and his little sister, that she had not the heart to quarrel with him outright.

It was Mr. Dobson who urged him most persistently to join them in their walks and drives. Roland generally contrived to evade these invitations, but it was not always possible to do so. Indeed, on the fourth or fifth morning of Mr Churchill's visit, Mr. Dobson, whose portrait had now been begun, called Roland seriously to account during the sitting for his neglect of his friends

"Tom was remarking at breakfast how little we have seen of you. I believe he has got it into his head, somehow, that you look upon him as an interloper," he said.

"My dear sir!" cried Roland, reddening to the tips of his ears.

"Well, you will admit that it looks like it; you have avoided us all so industriously of late," said Mr. Dobson, laughing.

"What a disagreeable wretch I must have been making of myself!" exclaimed the young man, doing his best to join in the laugh. "I see there is nothing for it but to redeem my character in Mr. Churchill's eyes with as little delay as possible. So, if you will allow me, sir, I will join you in your walk this afternoon."

"Do, do!" cried Mr. Dobson heartily. "We have missed you sadly."

Then he went into the garden and announced to the group assembled under the willows by the water's edge that he had secured Askam for their excursion to the Bosquet de Julie.

"Who was Julie, Mr. Cadogan, and why is the Bosquet named for her?" asked Amoret, turning to the convalescent as he lay back in his chair, with his straw hat tilted over his nose.

"Julie?" repeated Cadogan drowsily; "Julie was the heroine of one of Rosseau's novels, surely. But you had better ask Roland. It is more in his way than mine. I don't read French, and I saw him with the book the other day. I don't suppose it would interest you very much, Miss Dobson—philosophical, and all that sort of thing, I think it is."

"Ah, but Mr. Askam reads it," said Amoret, and he has very good taste indeed! I am sure it must be interesting—and I am glad he is coming with us to Clarens. He will tell me all about the place."

She had been looking a little paler than usual all the morning, and seemed out of spirits, Tom thought; but now the delicate color was stealing back into her face, her brown eyes shone softly, her sweet laughter rang out again in the tranquil gardens.

She was in high spirits by the time they all started for Clarens. Mr. Dobson and Cadogan in a carriage Tom, Roland, and Amoret on foot. She had on a fanciful walking dress that showed her trimly shod little feet, and her eyes were sparkling under the great soft white felt hat she wore, turned up picturesquely at one side and embroidered with a huge scarlet poppy.

Tom could not keep his eyes from the charming, flushed face. Roland was grim and impassive, but the girl seemed too happy to notice how silent both men were.

"How pretty all is—what delicious air!" she cried. "Tom, I am sure Switzerland must be the loveliest country in the whole world."

Every trifling incident on the road supplied her with fresh sources of interest and amusement. Now it was a young woman carrying her baby in a tight pink fourre that made it look like a little bolster, and Amoret must stop to kiss the baby and to ask its name. Now it was a picturesquely wrinkled old crone, with her head tied up in a yellow foulard, and a basket filled with vine leaves on her back, who paused on her way down from the terraced vineyards to wish the pretty young lady good day, and call down a blessing on her bright face.

"Give me some money for her, Tom," cried Amoret. "It is to buy snuff, madame"—assisting her words with a little pantomime, at which the old creature laughed heartily, showing her toothless gums. "And will you be so kind as to tell me how old you are? Seventy! Oh, Tom, think of that! To be carrying a great basket and working in the hot sun at 70 years of age!"

Then, before Tom could answer, she had waved her hand to the old dame, and was running gayly on."

"Make haste, make haste!" she cried, "or the carriage will get to Clarens first, and we shall be disgraced forever!"

Singing a few bars of a march, she led the way along the sunshiny road between the reddening vineyards and the resplendent waters of the lake.

"The grapes are nearly ripe, Tom," she said as her cousin came up with her; "soon it will be the vintage, and then before another vintage—" She paused.

"And then?" asked Tom

"And then—and then—oh," laughing, but with a tremor in her sweet voice—"then all sorts of things will happen, no doubt. For one, Francine will be married to Jean the gardener. Somebody else, too?" with an arch look at her cousin from under the broad brim of her hat. "Mr. Cadogan will be quite strong again; my picture will be exhibited and make Mr. Roland Askam famous; and—But what is the use of looking forward on such a day as this? It is so perfect in itself! It is a shame to want anything beyond it! Mr Askam, what are you thinking about so morosely pray? Are you regretting already that you have consented to walk with us to the Bosquet de Julie, when you might have been smoking that dreadful black cheroot of yours on some mountain top or other, to which my voice could not reach?"

"One makes such sacrifices to friendship," said Roland solemnly, as he roused himself with an effort from his brown study.

"Oh, Bomston, arme schlimme! Generous friend!" cried Amoret, clasping her hands in pretty ecstasy

Roland looked at her in surprise

"What do you know about Bomston?" he asked as soon as he could turn again to her with a face of stolid gravity.

"Why, isn't he—isn't he—about his cub lionhoods, as well as you?" she asked, carelessly

Roland flushed

"You don't mean to say that you have lost sense!" he said

"And pray, why not?" making an impertinent little grimace

But Roland would not smile

"It is no laughing matter" indeed he said hotly "How on earth did you come by such a book, Miss Dobson?"

"Come by it! I did not come by it—it was given to me," answered Amoret, rather indignantly.

"Good heavens! By whom? Who can possibly have given you such a book?"

"Hush!" cried the girl sharply as Tom attracted by the squabble turned round. A turn in the leafy road soon put them out of sight of the carriage again and Amoret said, turning demurely to Roland, "Here is papa signalling to us. He is often tired. My dear Lord Bomston will you go on and tell him that I would rather walk all the way?"

"Lord Bomston?" repeated Churchill, looking puzzled

"Oh, Lord Bomston's traveling under an incognito just now, but he carries his title about with him, and gives his friends an occasional glimpse of it when an opportunity occurs," said Amoret in a hard tone.

"It is some joke, I suppose?" queried Churchill, looking wistfully from Amoret's flashing eyes to Roland's handsome, disturbed face.

The two young people had so many jokes between themselves; so many allusions and little words in which he felt that he could have no part

Amoret merely shrugged her shoulders, and Roland said quietly that he would go on and tell Mr. Dobson.

"You have been tormenting poor Askam again," said Tom, as the young man strode on ahead.

"Oh, it does him good!" Amoret declared with a laugh. "He is in a bad temper to-day. He often is of late!"

The cousins walked on in silence for some moments. Roland, having overtaken the carriage, had evidently accepted Mr. Dobson's offer of a lift, for they saw him jump in and take one of the vacant seats.

Tom waited silently until Amoret should care to speak. Perhaps it might be their last day together; every day he told himself so, but still he did not go. At least that hour was his; no one could rob him of it. The peaceful hush of afternoon had fallen upon all that mighty world of mountain peaks and gorges, of leaping torrents, of floating cloud wreaths, of snow shrouded crests, rising higher and higher and fading ghostlike into the dim blue distance. Far, far below, the lake stretched shining, unruffled, a plain of deeper sapphire. They stood alone, it seemed to Tom, they two, between heaven and earth.

But in another moment Amoret turned with a sigh and a smile, and, passing her hand hurriedly across her forehead, said:

"Come, let us go on, Tom! I believe I was getting sentimental. I was trying to imagine that I thought myself a very tiny atom indeed in presence of these stupendous Alpine summits, and that all my little troubles and vexations didn't matter much after all. But it was very false sentiment, and I am sure that one's troubles, while they last, are quite as big as Mont Blanc itself."

"Yes, how should it be otherwise?" said Tom quietly.

"Of course not. How could papa's happiness ever seem a little thing to me, even if the mountains do climb heaven high over yonder?"

"How, indeed, my dear?" with his eyes fixed upon the eager face.

"It is the mountains and everything else in my world that seems small to me compared with that! That is my Mont Blanc! And so there is the end of my revery, and now, if you please, monsieur, we will make haste after the carriage, and I will never, never be sentimental any more!"

Half an hour's walk brought them to the Chateau des Cretes, nestling tranquilly in the afternoon heat among its pretty, prim clipped hedges of laurel and yew. And here they found the carriage standing empty, the gentlemen having proceeded to the Bosquet on foot, the driver explained.

"It is close at hand; mademoiselle has but to follow the path," he added.

Passing along the shaded alley the cousins found themselves on a sunny slope covered with mounds of newly mown hay that scented the sultry air.

Mr. Dobson and Cadogan were lying luxuriously on a bank at a safe distance from a picturesque clump of gnarled apple trees, in the boughs of which two or three men had climbed to shake the apples down on the grass, which was thickly carpeted with the faint lilac flowers and the delicate, semi transparent stalks of the autumn crocus.

The men were laughing over their work, and occasionally pelting each other with apples. Their voices echoed pleasantly in the sweet, sunny silence.

Roland was now here to be seen.

"Oh, you lazy things!" cried Amoret, running across the slope toward her father. "After riding all the way, you lie down to rest in this ignominious fashion instead of finding out the Bosquet!"

"My dear Miss Dobson, I am sorry to destroy your illusions, but this is the Bosquet de Julie, and these are the trees, Roland has informed us, sacred to her sentimental memory," said Cadogan, raising himself on his elbow

"This the Bosquet de Julie?" cried Amoret, looking around aghast.

"So it appears. Whether it is worth while to go through so much to get at so little, as Sam Weller's charity boy said about the alphabet, I leave you to decide."

Amoret broke into a laughing, vexed laugh. "It was to see that clump of apple trees, those prosaic little hay cocks, that they had come such a distance!"

"Never mind!" she said brightly. "It has been a delightful walk, and least we can always say we have made our pilgrimage to the Bosquet de Julie. It sounds so romantic, and I need not divulge the truth about the apples and the hay. Swear that you will not, Mr. Dean!"

And Cadogan, having sworn, subsided lazily on to his flowery bank again.

"Did anyone ever see such a carpet of flowers?" cried Amoret. "I wonder if it was to pick crocuses that Julie went to the Bosquet? I shall consider myself in gathering an armful. Papa, you are not tired? You will wait till I get them?"

She was gone before he could answer, the pretty, fantastic figure appearing, through the trees as she stooped again and again, with a little cry of delight, disappearing at last beyond the mossy, gnarled trunks

She had her hands so full that they could hold no more when presently she heard footsteps close at hand

"Oh, Tom, come and help me! They are lovely! I should like to fill the carriage with them! What a pity they have no perfume!" she exclaimed

"Your cousin is with Mr Dobson. I came after you because I had something to say"

It was Roland's voice and it sounded somewhat cold

"About the book, I suppose?" said Amoret, drawing herself up as she perceived her mistake

"Yes, about the book. Perhaps you will talk reasonably now that there is no one here to appreciate your witty remarks at my expense"

The girl started and bit her lip.

"Go on, perhaps you will be kind enough not to lecture me as if—as if you had any right to," she said.

"I thought I had the right to prevent you from reading an unsuitable book," returned Roland curtly "I thought you had given me some of the privileges of a brother. And if you were really my sister I should certainly not allow you to read Rosseaus novels."

"Why do you interfere?" cried the girl. "And why do you talk about the rights of a brother?" Does that mean only the right to scold me and be disagreeable? That is all you care to do now, and I will not be lectured!"

"I am very sorry," declared Roland stiffly. "I assure you I will never interfere again; but in this instance I am resolved to do what is right. If Mr. Dobson knew that you were in possession of such a book he would forbid you to read it. I must ask you to give it up to me, or else I shall feel bound to tell him."

Amoret did not answer for a few moments. Her breath came fast; she stood looking down at the flowers in her hand, and pulling the delicate petals to pieces.

"How do you know that I have not read it already?" she asked.

"Because if you had you could not look me in the face," the young man returned firmly. "I can see plainly enough that you have not read it yet Amoret, why don't you give in when you know quite well that you are in the wrong?" his voice softening.

"If the book is so wicked, why did you read it? Mr. Cadogan saw you with it; he told me so," perversely.

"That has nothing whatever to do with the question," replied Roland calmly. "I have read a great many things that for me are harmless, but for you would be in the highest degree dangerous and improper. It is nonsense to argue about it. This book is not wicked, as it happens, but it is one which no good English girl would care to read, and I don't intend that you shall read it. You may be as impertinent as you like—I don't care. But I forbid you to open that novel again! Do you hear? I forbid you!"

The girl burst into tears, and, letting the flowers fall at her feet, she sank down upon the grass, hiding her face in her hands and sobbing as if her heart would break.

"You are very unkind to me. I don't know what I have done that you should treat me so badly!" she panted.

"I am not unkind," persisted Roland, thrusting his hands into his pockets, and walking a few paces away from her. "If I saw you pull some poisonous berries out of the hedge there and eat them in childish ignorance, would you think me unkind if I held your arm? And yet, when I want to prevent you from poisoning your mind——"

"I don't want to poison my mind!" she said, flaming up at him. "I never want to touch the horrid book again! It was only because you read it. And—and Mr. Cadogan said it was philosophical, and I have been trying ever since you began reading and talking with me to like the books you like——"

Roland Askam's face changed, flushed, and softened.

"My poor little Amoret!" he said hurriedly.

But Amoret went on, sobbing still between her words.

"And so I asked Tom to buy it for me, and I only had time to peep into it before I started. It seemed very dull, I thought; but I could not help laughing about Lord Bomston, because it seemed such a funny name to choose, and he seemed to be always preaching in the book, and—and——"

"There, there, my poor little Amoret—poor child!"

The young man knelt down beside her on the grass now, and tried to draw her hands from her face.

"I am a blundering brute of a fellow! I might have known that it was all a mistake. Forgive me, dear! Look at me and see how sorry I am!"

"Yes, but you said such dreadful things before Tom, and he did not know—he only bought it because I asked him!"

"I understand, dear Of course he had no idea of what he was giving you. I am awfully sorry that I scolded before him; but you startled me with your 'Lord Bomston' And I could not bear the idea of my little sister reading such odious rubbish."

"You do care about me still, then?"

She raised her pretty, tear stained face and looked at him very wistfully The lips were quivering

"Of course I do! Who need you ask?" drawing back a little

"Because you are so changed to me lately. You are nearly always angry with me, and you know how unhappy I am. I might be a little but kind Roland, if you were going to be married I should be sorry for you, and would try to be as nice as ever I could so as to keep your love for you. But—but you don't care what happens to me, and I am unhappy or not"

"Amoret, don't say that! You know it is not true. And—and I hoped you were at least contented. I had no idea you were unhappy."

"Because you will never let me speak to you, and I have no one else. I don't let papa suspect how cross Roland is. I don't like to think about my marriage—it frightens me! I can't bear to be alone with Tom, kind as he is And when we are married we shall always be together. I feel now as if I would rather die than be with Tom without papa and you Oh, Roland, do you think that I shall ever ever get used to it after I am married to him? He is so good I know"

Roland did not answer immediately. He had taken his handkerchief from his pocket, and was wiping the tears from his eyes Then he said, in the same strained tone

"If you feel, dear, that this marriage is trying best"

"Oh, yes, yes!" she exclaimed hurriedly "I have made up my mind to marry Tom Only a little while ago I was thinking of papa and I resolved to, on that I would marry him, no matter how unhappy it made me only it is so hard never to be able to talk about it You don't mind, Roland, do you, if I prose a little to you? I was very disagreeable and ungrateful just now But I am not ungrateful really, it is only that I am unhappy, and sometimes I say and do things that I am sorry for afterwards But you forgive me don't you?"

"My little Amoret," returned Roland, with infinite tenderness, "there is nothing to forgive, it is I who should ask pardon of you"

"I wish," she said laughing at him through her tears, "that I was going to marry you instead of Tom!"

"Amoret!"

He drew back, letting her hands go, and turning pale under his healthy sunburn.

"Oh, you would scold me a great deal but I am used to that! And I am not half as much afraid of you as I am of Tom."

"Hush, dear, hush!" said Roland gently.

"Do you know," she went on, not heeding him and relieved by this opportunity of pouring out all her troubles to a sympathetic listener—"do you know that Tom thought, the first time he saw you, that you were in love with me? 'No such luck!' I told him. We are always quarreling. Oh, Roland," with a piteous, wry face, "why didn't you fall in love with me? It was the least you could have done after saving me that day in the Gorge de Chanderon!"

"You see, dear," the young man answered steadily, "it was not to be. And—and it is all for the best, since your father would never have given you to a poor wretch of a wandering artist like me. But," smiling at her, "we won't talk about that any more; we will talk of Cousin Tom instead. I think—I am sure—that he is a very good fellow, dear, and that he will be very tender and very true to—to his wife. And, since it is for your father's sake that you marry him, you will not shrink from the sacrifice."

"Oh, no, no!" the girl assented hurriedly.

"And later perhaps," Roland's voice faltered for a moment, "love may come, as contentment surely will, through a duty bravely performed."

"Roland," said Amoret wonderingly, "how pale you are! Is your head aching again?"

"Yes; you know I have often had headaches lately; but it is nothing. And, now that we have had our talk out, don't you think we had better join the others? They will be wondering what has become of us."

"Yes, I was forgetting." She sprang up, putting her hands to her ruffled hair. "Do my eyes look very red? Would they know that I have been crying? Oh, my poor flowers!" looking at the little heap of withered crocuses at her feet. "I had forgotten all about them."

"I will gather you some more before we go, dear, never mind!"

"Thank you, Roland." The girl smiled gratefully. "You are not angry with me any more now?"

"No, my dear," he said, "not indeed!"

"And you know that I won't read any more of that stupid book. I will give it to you when we get back. Tom need never know."

"If I have your word, it will be quite enough," replied Roland gently.

"Yes, of course it would be. I always keep my word. Papa says I am very honorable in little things; but I would rather give it to you. I like to do what you tell me: and you are not Lord Bomston any more, you are my big brother again."

"Yes, dear: your big brother Roland."

"Kiss me, then," she said, holding up her sweet, innocent face.

Roland hesitated for a moment, then, taking her in his strong, young arms, he pressed his lips to her forehead.

"Heaven bless you, dear!" he whispered hoarsely; and then he let her go, and walked quickly away from her across the slanting shadows on the sunny sward.

Chapter VI.

All night long Roland Askam paced his little room under the roof of the Villa Sate, trying vainly to decide what would be the best for him to do

His pulses were throbbing still and his arms tingled with the recollection of those few moments under the old apple trees of the Bosquet de Julie, when he had clasped Amoret to him and his lips had touched her brow and the soft rings of her hair.

Had she suspected anything? No, how should she, an innocent little thing like that, who had asked him to kiss her as unconsciously as though he had indeed been the brother he had called himself: And yet how she clung to his friendship, how sweet she always was to him even in her most willful moods! Was it possible that she felt for him the first faint stirring of that emotion which during the past few days had taken such complete possession of him At one moment he decided that she did not the next he was telling himself that if as yet Amoret did not love him, it only needed a word a touch, from him to transform into love the confidence, the regard the sympathy she had always displayed to wards him

And thinking thus, Roland felt that a plain duty lay before him to be performed Without a home, without prospects, with his little brother still to educate and provide for he had been so foolish as to fall in love with a girl who was beyond his reach in every sense of the word who was the only child of a comparatively rich man and who was already engaged to her cousin and as he paced the narrow floor of his room he gave vent to more than one impatient ejaculation of self contempt He to be falling in love at his age and with so many serious things to think about! But how was he to help himself? It was past remedying now He had been going quietly along, not troubling his head about love or marriage not dreaming of such things, and now, there he was, flurried, stranded, at his wits' end!

There was of course only one thing to be done, only one course open to an honest man

Roland resolved to speak to Mr Dobson during the sitting which had been fixed for that morning He had the studio all to himself, Amoret set out to walk to Villeneuve with Tom, and would not be back until luncheon

Mr Dobson had noticed his young friend's haggard looks the result of Roland's sleepless night when he came in, and now as for the third or fourth time the artist answered him quite at random, he inquired, with fatherly solicitude if anything was wrong—if he did not feel well

"I am well enough, sir" Roland answered changing color, "but there is something I wanted to speak to you about"

"Nothing very serious, I hope?"

"Bad enough, sir, but I believe I shall be the only sufferer."

"Don't say that, Askam. Anything that hurts you will hurt us. Amoret and I have grown to like you very sincerely, my boy, as I think you know."

"Yes, sir, I know it, I am very proud and glad to know it; and it is just that which causes my trouble."

"I don't quite understand."

"You can understand, sir, that after all your kindness to me it is very hard for me to have to say that—that I don't deserve it—that I have no right to come to your house any more."

"Askam!"

"I assure you, sir," the young man went on hurriedly, his brush trembling in his hand, "that this is the hardest thing I ever tried to do in my life! I wish you would just understand that something has occurred to prevent me from coming here any more after to day. I am very sorry about the portrait, but——"

"Askam," said Mr. Dobson gravely, "what is all this about? I have trusted you as if you were my own son; my girl has been a sister to you since the day you rendered her the service that neither she nor I can ever forget; and do you mean to tell me, after all we have heard about you from Cadogan, and after all we have seen of you ourselves, that you have been concealing something from me—that there is something in your antecedents or in your past conduct that renders you unworthy of the place I have given you beside my little girl in my house?"

"Good heavens, no, sir!" cried Roland, flinging down his brushes and looking Mr. Dobson so straight in the eyes that the old man sighed and smiled with a sense of relief.

"I hardly thought it possible, he declared heartily; "but you will admit that what you have said is rather startling. Come now, Roland, speak out—speak out as if you really were my boy. You have got into some young man's scrape—is not that it? And I can help you perhaps with advice or money?"

"It is nothing of that sort," said Roland. "There are worse scrapes than getting into debt, sir. You can get out of debt again, you know, but if—if you fall in love it is not so easy to——"

Mr. Dobson looked at him, half puzzled, half amused.

"Is that all?" he exclaimed. "Why, you foolish lad, what a fright you have given me about nothing at all! So that's it, is it? You are in love, eh—and I suppose you want to be off after the lady and to leave me and my portrait in the lurch? Is it fair to ask who she is?"

There was a pause. Mr. Dobson looked at Roland's miserable young face, and his own changed.

"Askam," he said abruptly, as the young man still kept silence, "it is not—no, of course it could not be—it is not Amoret?"

"But it is, though, replied Roland, flushing to the roots of his hair. I told you, sir, that it was not an easy confession to make; but now the murder is out and I will go away."

"But," said Mr. Dobson in amazement, "you have known from the first that she was engaged?"

"Yes, sir; I have no excuse to offer for myself, none at all, except that I gave you my word of honor I was not thinking of such a thing! I am not a susceptible fellow as a rule. I have never been in love in my life before. It all came upon me quite unawares."

Mr. Dobson sat absorbed in thought for some moments; then he said abruptly:

"And she—the child?"

"Miss Dobson knows nothing, sir. You can not suppose that I am capable of abusing your hospitality and your confidence so far as to speak to her?"

The young fellow's voice was husky; he turned away suddenly, for his eyes had grown dim. Mr. Dobson held out his hand, and Roland grasped it with a feeling of intense gratitude and regard.

"I suspect you of nothing unworthy, Roland," he said warmly, "you have behaved in a very straightforward and manly way. Only, Amoret may have seen; she is so quick"

"Miss Dobson has no idea, I feel convinced, sir, of the truth. It is only within the past few days," repressing a sigh, "that I have known myself"

"That is right, that is right," rejoined Mr Dobson hurriedly, and looking infinitely relieved. "It would only upset her and Churchill, too You see, he has come here at the greatest personal inconvenience in order to ratify their engagement I wouldn't for the world have him suppose——"

"I understand, sir," said Roland steadily, "and you need not be afraid. Neither of them shall see anything Only yesterday I had rather a fright," laughing miserably "I felt that I was hardly master of myself. It would not do for me to be too much with your daughter. Her very unconsciousness and kindness, Heaven bless her, only make it harder for me"

"Poor boy, poor boy!" murmured the elder man, patting him soothingly upon the shoulder

"It will be better for me to go away," Roland went on "You will make some excuse I will say that I have been called to England on business"

"Yes, yes! I shall be heartily sorry to lose you, Askam After all that has passed it is not likely that Amoret or I could part from you without regret. But it will only be for a time—when once she is married, you must come back to us We must make your little brother's acquaintance, too, Amoret has set her heart on that I hope we shall have many a happy day together yet"

"Thank you, sir," said the young man; and wringing Mr Dobson's hand, he tore himself off, quite incapable just then of listening to another word of kindness.

Amoret was running across the hall in her boating dress, pulling off her gloves and flinging her hat as usual on to the table He hardly saw her

"Roland," she exclaimed, surprised, "where are you rushing to in such a hurry? Is the sitting over? Where is papa? We have had such a pleasant pull up from Villeneuve!"

"Yes—no, thank you, good by," said Roland incoherently; and Amoret, puzzled, heard his hasty feet crossing the gravel, and the garden gate shut sharply after him.

"Yes—no, thank you, good by!" she repeated to herself, half laughing. "What in the world did he mean by all that?"

She went to the book room, where Mr. Dobson, almost as agitated as Roland himself, was doing his best to compose himself in anticipation of his daughter's watchful gaze.

"Papa," she said, "what in the world is the matter with Roland Askam, and what did he mean by saying, 'Yes—no, thank you, good by,' when I asked him where he was going to?"

"There is nothing the matter," declared her father as calmly as he could; "only he—he has been telling me that he will not be able to finish my portrait just now. He—he is obliged to go to England at once—on business."

"On business?" echoed Amoret. "Is there anything the matter with Clinton, papa?"

"N—no—not that I am aware of. I don't think Askam mentioned what the business was; he only said he would be compelled to leave rather suddenly."

"Rather suddenly!" repeated the girl. "You call that 'rather suddenly,' papa, rushing off like a whirlwind, and talking a lot of nonsense! If there is nothing the matter with his brother, the business can't be very important. He has no business; he has often said so."

"Well, my darling," Mr. Dobson was getting alarmed, "Askam knows his own affairs best, you know, and I quite approve of his decision."

"You approve of it! Oh, papa," reproachfully, "when you have always seemed to like him so much!"

"So I did—so I do; but I agree with him that he is better away for the present."

Amoret made a gesture of desperation and bewilderment.

"Papa," she said, with soft vehemence, "will you or will you not tell me the truth about Roland Askam, and why he rushed out of the house without so much as looking at me? I am determined to find out, so you may as well tell me. And I think, "she paused, as if she were going to cry; "I think it is a shame that you should have a secret from me; I have none from you, no, not one!"

Mr. Dobson felt that he was lost. If she began to look at him like that he knew very well that he could not resist her.

"My darling," he said soothingly, "it could do you no good to tell you; it would only make you very uncomfortable."

Amoret opened her brown eyes very wide.

"Please, go on, papa."

"The truth is, if you insist on knowing

[To be continued.]