

HAVING HER OWN WAY

A FAMILY FAILING.

(Contributed by "Jesson.")

"Yes, yes!"

"The truth is, then, that the poor lad has been so unfortunate as to fall in love." "Papa!"

"Now you know all. That is why he wants to go away."

Amoret sank down at her father's side, looking up at him with eager eyes.

"But," she said quickly, "he told me only the other day that he had never been in love."

"He did not know it himself, it appears; he declares that it came upon him unawares."

"But I don't understand, papa," the girl went on. "He has spent all his time with us, and—"

She paused. Her father did not speak; and suddenly an exquisite blush began to spread over her pale face.

"Papa," she said, almost in a whisper, "do you mean that he is in love with me?"

She read her answer in her father's face, and the blush spread over her throat and forehead until the very tips of her ears were crimson. She did not speak again for several minutes.

"She takes it very quietly," thought Mr. Dobson. "I thought it would have made a greater impression on her; but so much the better for us all!"

"Papa," Amoret said at last, without looking up, "I don't think it is fair that Mr. Askam should be sent away, or should go away, because of that."

"My dear child, I think you had better not interfere. If Askam has made up his mind that it is for the best—"

"But I think he is mistaken," persisted the girl softly. "It is a foolish and useless step to take. Where can he go? He has no home, and he is very happy here with us. I think, papa, that you should ask him to stay."

"My darling child!"

"Yes, papa; I want him to finish that portrait. I have set my heart upon it, and there is really no reason why he should run away."

"But since he wishes it?"

"He ought to finish his work first, tell him so. You need not say that I know anything, dad," with a sage little nod.

"Just tell him that I have set my heart upon his finishing the portrait before instead of after my marriage, and that unless he wants to make me very uncomfortable and to make me suspect something, he had better make up his mind to remain."

"In fact," returned Mr. Dobson, with a sigh of resignation, "you want to have your own way for once, and I am to help you to carry your point."

"Please, papa," very meekly. "Of course Mr. Askam will understand that nothing is changed because of—of his confession. I am still engaged to Tom. I am very sorry that he has been so foolish as to fall in love with me, but I don't think he should allow such a trifle as that to interfere with the performance of a task he has undertaken."

Mr. Dobson permitted himself to be kissed. He had yielded; there was nothing further to be said.

"Are you sure you can keep the secret?" he asked dismally. "Do you think that Askam will not suspect that you know?"

"I will try, papa," said Miss Amoret. "And now there is a train to Geneva in an hour and three-quarters," looking at the little watch that Roland had given back to her. "Don't you think that you might go over at once to the Beau Site and speak to him? Otherwise it may be too late."

"Anything else?" demanded her father, shrugging his bent shoulders as he stood up and laid prepared to obey his little tyrant.

"Only that he had better come to dinner with Mr. Cadogan—don't you think so, papa?" with a shower of kisses.

A few minutes later, Roland, as he was brushing his hair and combing his hair into his bag, was interrupted by a visit from Mr. Dobson, who declared that Amoret had begged him with questions, that she had set her heart upon the portrait's being finished before her marriage, and that therefore Askam must stay, at any rate until the picture is completed.

"If you don't," she summed up, "she will suspect something. Be a man, Roland, and go through with it!"

"Of course, sir, I will do as you wish," Roland answered quietly.

"That's right. I was half afraid you would refuse. You understand," hesitating, "that nothing is changed. Amoret is engaged, as you have known all along, and—"

"Don't be afraid, sir," said Roland firmly. "I think I may promise you to hide my lockless secret from Miss Dobson during the short time that will be necessary to complete the portrait. You have laid a sacred responsibility upon me to do so, indeed, for you have doubly trusted me. Knowing what you do, I should be the very vilest of cadavers if I could betray such a confidence as that."

"Come over to dinner," returned the father, giving him his hand, with a deep sigh of relief. "Let there be no difference in any way."

And so Roland went across with Cadogan to the villa, where they were received by Amoret with a careless nod and smile, in which even Roland, anxiously watching her, could not detect the faintest trace of consciousness.

"She does not suspect," he said to himself.

tainly prettier and sweeter than ever, as Roland found to his cost. He looked forward to his daily visit to the studio with mingled dread and delight. For now Amoret was always present during the sitting, her cousin being no longer there to absorb her time. Indeed, they had fallen back quite naturally into all their old ways. There were the same long, lazy mornings on the lake as formerly, the same happy little dinners, with music afterward in the salon, since the evenings were now growing sufficiently chilly to make it pleasant to gather round the wood fire, which Mr. Dobson liked to see glowing on the brass dogs.

The only change apparent in Amoret's manner to Roland was that she seemed gentler, kinder, more winning than before she had learned his secret. The little impertinences in which she used to indulge had given place to a hundred pretty, womanly ways, which had all the effect of rendering Roland's state all the more desperate. In spite of all his good resolutions, in spite of the fact that he was pledged in honor not to betray himself, he could not help feeling how dangerously sweet was this renewed and closer intimacy.

If the child had known, he told himself, she would not have been so friendly; but of course she suspected nothing. His only hope of escape from torture lay in avoiding being left alone with her. He could not bear to listen to her little confidences, sometimes even to see her tears again in her great brown eyes.

The portrait would soon be finished now, Roland, with mingled relief and dread, was beginning to count the days that must elapse before the hour of his departure arrived.

"It is getting on very fast," said Amoret one day, coming to look over his shoulder, as he had prepared to put away his brushes, and Mr. Dobson, released, went off to join Cadogan.

"Yes; a day or two now will be all that I shall need," Roland answered cheerfully; "so, if you have any commissions for England—"

"You have made up your mind to go, then?" interposed the girl in a low voice. "I thought the business you spoke of could be arranged without you."

"No," gently, "it was only deferred, you know. And it is more than ever necessary that I should go away."

A brief silence ensued. Amoret still stood before the easel with her eyes fixed upon the picture.

"It was good of you to stay because I asked you," she said presently. "And you don't know how much more I shall value the picture, dear as it is to me for its own sake, because of the sacrifice you made to finish it."

"Oh, you must not think too much of that," said Roland, smiling at her. "A few days more or less could not make so very much difference, after all!"

A sudden pain seemed to pierce the girl's heart. How strong he was—how true and loyal! Never by so much as a word or a look had he allowed her to perceive what he had confessed to her father. A few days ago he had seemed to her little more than a playfellow—a boy to be teased and petted with sisterly tyranny; but now he compelled her respect. She was conscious of a will of iron under his pleasant fraternal manner. She knew that when the time came he would go away, silent to the last.

"And in two days the portrait will be finished," she reflected, unconsciously clasping her hands as she stood before the easel.

Roland was making haste to be gone; but he paused, impressed by something in the girl's attitude.

"What is that little head bent about now?" he said gently; and as he flushed, and started, and turned round to him as he spoke.

She looked very pretty, in her soft pink gown, with a lace handkerchief tied in a large knot under her chin; but there were shadows beneath her eyes, and her lips quivered as she smiled. Roland was again puzzled by a strange air of delicacy which seemed to have come to her lately, and which he had remarked uneasily more than once. His eyes met hers now for a moment and his gaze was full of impotent misery. He could bear his own pain, fierce as it was; but how was he to bear hers? He turned abruptly away, and crossed the room to one of the windows.

"I was thinking about you," said Amoret, simply, "and wishing that—that you need not go away."

He started and bit his lip as he stood with his hands thrust into his pockets, looking out of the window. It was a day of shower and wind, with heavy mists blotting out the mountains, and with white surges defining the edges of the lake, the blue green waters of which were troubled, breaking here and there into fitful white caps.

"I must go," he answered curtly.

"Yes, I know; but I am very sorry indeed, Roland. It will be harder than ever for me now to do what is right. As long as I see you every day, and know how steadily you are working, and how faithfully you are performing your duty, it gives me courage to imitate you. But when you are gone—"

"When I am gone," Roland interposed steadily, and facing her, pale but cheerful, "you will try even harder to please me than if I were here. And you know that it will please me to be sure that my sister is doing what she believed to be right, no matter at what cost to herself."

"Yes," she said softly, and put out a trembling little hand, "Roland, I will try."

"I know you will, dear," he replied; and then he pressed her hand quietly, and the next moment was gone.

His torture was nearly over; two days later the portrait was finished, and that evening Roland was to dine at Beau Sejour and to say good by to his friends there, having decided to start for England on the following morning. He clung to Cadogan's elbow all the afternoon, and would have had his friend go across with him from the hotel at 5 o'clock, at which hour he had promised Amoret to arrive; but Cadogan declared that he had a letter to finish and that he would follow him in a quarter of an hour, and so Roland found himself

obliged to go alone.

Amoret was alone in the salon, where the fire was already lighted and filling the pretty flower-scented room with flickering lights and shadows. She was sitting, half hidden in an arm chair before the hearth, and did not look round as he opened the door.

"Well, papa," she said in a cheerful tone, "what news from Tom?"

"It is not papa; it is only I," replied Roland, as he threaded his way among the chairs and tables to her side.

She sat up then, smiling and blushing. "Only you?" she returned, holding out her hand. "Oh, poor you—how cold you are! Come to the fire! Has it not turned out a miserable evening?"

Roland hesitated, looking round the dusky room.

"Papa will be here presently," said Amoret, in answer to Roland's look. "He has gone off to read his letters in peace; he has had one from my cousin."

"Ah,"—in a constrained tone, as he stood with his elbow on the mantelpiece at a little distance from her chair—"I hope Mr. Churchill—"

"I don't know what news there is from Tom," the girl interrupted hurriedly. "I have not seen papa since the post arrived. Well, and what have you been doing with yourself all the afternoon—packing, I suppose?"

"I have been reading letters too," said Roland, "and I have come across early to give you a saying."

"A saying!" the girl repeated, startled. "Not a real one? I have not read you any new way, have I?"

"But, indeed you have!" returned Roland, with a little catching of the breath. "I am sorry I did not mean to do it, whatever it is. I was glad to spend the day with us to be the happiest of boys."

"I know, dear; I know, but I have not had a rapturous one from Tom!"

"Oh," with a sigh of relief, "is that all? Roland, how you startled me?"

"What do you think you deserve for sending a schoolboy such a hamper of delights, such a box of presents as he has never dreamed of in all his life before?"

"I only sent a few things for his birthday day," Amoret declared, laughing and blushing. "Tom took them for me; it was such a good opportunity, and you are not to scold me. If you are my big brother, Tom is my little one, isn't he?"

Roland did not speak. How sweet she was as she stood up and drew near to him on the hearth, her eyes shining, her delicate cheeks flushing. His heart was faint with the delight of those few moments stolen from his misery.

"They are the last, the very last," he told himself. "I shall never be alone with Amoret Dobson again."

"I have had a letter from Tom, too," the girl went on, "a dear little letter— I played a game of bezique in the light of a rose shaded lamp."

It was some days now since Mr. Dobson had come downstairs after a month's illness. He was surely regaining his strength, and with his improving health the color was coming back to his daughter's cheeks and the soft luster to her eyes. And she had another reason too, for the smiles that came so readily to her lips, for the pretty laughter and gay chatter that were heard once again in the pleasant chambers of Beau Sejour. Sometimes she blamed herself for being so happy when others were in trouble, but, in spite of these secret reproaches, her youth, her joy, her awakening heart, would assert themselves, and close her eyes as she might to the future, it still shone brightly, and seemed to fill all her little world with rosy light.

She still looked at Cadogan piteously, but did not speak, and the artist continued imperturbably:

"Roland warned me not to breathe a word of his intentions to you, Miss Dobson, and that is why I have hastened to tell you. I thought it just possible that, having been such good friends, you two, you might have something to say to him before he goes."

Amoret turned pale and her breath came fast.

"Of course, if I have been mistaken," Cadogan went on, "there is no harm done. If you have nothing to say, Roland will leave Montreaux in an hour, and—"

"But I have!" exclaimed the girl, breathlessly.

"So I supposed,"

"But how can I say it if he is going away?"

Her companion made no answer.

"Mr. Cadogan?"—hesitating—"don't you think you might ask Mr. Askam to come over for five minutes?"

"He would murder me if I suggested such a thing," said Mr. Cadogan gravely. "I am sorry, Miss Dobson, but I am afraid that it is quite out of the question."

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