

gail all the morning—not a smile of absolute pleasure, but rather a smile of discovery, as if the gratification of having found things out, almost repaid her for having found them not altogether agreeable; and had not her mistress, from an habitual dread of the consequences of this smile, scrupulously avoided asking any questions, the mysteries of Mr. Ainsworth's menage might have been painted in pretty strong colours, even at this early stage of their development.

"The fire, ma'am, is in the dining-room to-day, such as it is," said Betsy; and she led the way down stairs, and threw open the door of a large and scantily-furnished room, where a homely carpet, of considerably smaller dimensions, left a border of bare board all around it.

Isabel's heart sank within her. An old-fashioned mahogany table stood in the middle of the room, a sideboard at one end; the chairs were all in their places close up against the wall, and there was neither ottoman, sofa, nor stuffed arm-chair. The fire-place, that centre of attraction, which can send forth its welcome or its repulse as well as the most expressive human countenance—the fire-place was a little pinched-up, shallow receptacle, that would scarcely hold cinders enough to warm a bed. Betsy placed a seat beside it for her mistress. Neither of them spoke a word; and the maid, after inventing many excuses for remaining in the room, was compelled at last to take her departure, without having relieved her mind of its accumulating load.

Miss Ainsworth next made her appearance in due form. She was plainly dressed, had the pockets of her apron filled with keys, and looked extremely busy; but she sat down for a few minutes, evidently intent upon making herself agreeable. Isabel was too indolent, and therefore she was often considered too reserved, to converse, except when under the influence of mental or bodily stimulus; and Miss Ainsworth having discovered an unusual accumulation of dust upon the mantel-piece, was glad to make it an excuse for going out to scold the servant.

Poor Isabel! the blank desolation of that long morning was such, that she could not even betake herself to tears: she was, in fact too much confounded—too much appalled by her situation altogether; and she remained in the same position, fixed in a kind of stupor, until Betsy came back to ask her what she would like to take.

"What is there?" she asked of Betsy in her turn.

"Why ma'am," replied the maid, "that is more than I can tell you. There's the cold chicken, but Miss Ainsworth has got hold of that for dinner. And there's a few slices of ham that was left last night and some cold apple-pie. But whatever there is, it is locked up, and Miss Ainsworth has the key."

"You have nothing to do," said Isabel, "but tell her that you want to prepare me my luncheon; and bring me some wine as soon as you can, for I am dreadfully faint."

Miss Ainsworth, who was in reality a very reasonable sort of person, had no idea whatever of keeping any thing locked up from the now rightful mistress of the house. She came therefore on the first summons to offer up the keys of office and to request that Mrs. Ainsworth would freely express her wishes, whatever they might be. Isabel however was too indolent to take charge of the keys, and she replied by simply asking for something to eat—"the merest trifle in the world."

"I dare say you feel fatigued with your journey," observed Miss Ainsworth, "or I should hardly recommend you taking any thing before dinner. We always think it spoils the appetite."

"I will trouble you for a glass of wine then," said Isabel, somewhat pettishly.

Miss Ainsworth went to the sideboard, took out several decanters, dusted, and placed them on the table.

"Here is port," said she, "excellent cape wine, and our own raisin, and gooseberry."

"I never take any of them," said Isabel. "Have you neither sherry nor madeira?"

Miss Ainsworth looked a little surprised; but she found without much difficulty, a decanter of sherry, and, pouring out half a glass, sat down, and waited until Miss Ainsworth had drunk it; when she coolly asked her to take more; on her refusal, locked all up again safely in the sideboard.

Isabel had never felt herself so strangely circumstanced before. She had nothing to complain of, and nobody to blame yet she hastened to her own room, and, covered her face with her hands, gave way to a long and violent fit of weeping.

Mr. Ainsworth, the happy bridegroom, was all this while busy in his counting-house in the city, being eager, after so long an absence, to redeem the lost time; nor was it without considerable difficulty that he tore himself away from invoices, receipts and bales of goods, half an hour earlier than his usual time for returning home to dinner. He was a little surprised to find his bride in tears; but on second thoughts, this fact was easily accounted for, by his own protracted absence; and finding, after many apologies for the necessity of personal attention to his affairs in town, that she made an effort to put away her grief, he was the more confirmed in the flattering conclusions at which he had arrived. His own kindness, he thought, to say nothing of the approaching dinner, would set all right; and he descended, at the welcome sound of the bell, with the gentle Isabel leaning on his arm.

The first circumstance which struck the attention of the bride on casting a hasty glance over the table, was, that all the silver forks had been taken away, and that most of the other valuables, which had figured on the table the previous evening, had been removed; while a few old spoons, evidently of distant relationship, and two or three solitary cruets, remained in their stead. The dinner itself was a very nice, but a very small one: and Isabel could have fared tolerably well had her usual portion of porter or strong beer been placed beside her; but it is rather an awkward thing in so small a party, that every word can be heard, and especially if that party are water-drinkers only, for a delicate lady to ask for porter, and still worse for ale. Isabel had not the nerve to make this demand for herself, and nobody invited her to take more than a single glass of wine after the cloth had been removed.

Of course, she was peevish and fretful for the remainder of the evening; and so absorbed in self, as only to be reminded by some casual remark, that Mr. Ainsworth had a third daughter, an invalid, who never left her room. It immediately struck her as being high time her maternal duties should be so far fulfilled as to make the acquaintance, at least, of this young sufferer, who at the age of thirteen, was confined to her own apartment by hopeless and incurable lameness.

To this apartment, therefore, Isabel requested to be conducted, and she found there a poor sickly girl, pale and emaciated, whose temper was said to be so irritable, that she had been consigned almost entirely to the care of servants. "Noboc! could do anything with her," was the frequent remark of her sisters, and Isabel began to think it was but too just; for neither on this, nor many other visits of duty which she afterwards made to the sick chamber could she succeed in attaining the least advance towards intimacy with its afflicted occupant. She tried sympathy, but the child looked at her with a vacant stare; she tried conversation, but scarcely elicited an answer in return; she tried presents, but they were received with evident suspicion, and something like contempt. "Perhaps," said Isabel to herself, "it is imbecility of mind. Perhaps the child is an idiot as well as a cripple, and they have concealed this fact from me."

Unaccustomed as she was to pursue any course of action where difficulties lay in her way, the matter was soon