

Most heavily did this ceremony pass to her, and earnestly did she wish it over. She continued almost silent during the whole time, until her companion led his conversation to the scene she had witnessed at the cottage, which, he did with his usual affectation of sympathy and tenderness of manner—this at once gained her attention. Miss Courtenay appeared in charming spirits, seated between the two gentlemen Amy had noticed, on her first entrance; and whose names Sir Charles informed her were Lord Rosemount, and the Honorable Colonel D'Arcey. She looked for Mr. Martyn, who, she perceived, was near the Countess, but from the foot of the table she most sedulously kept her eyes. She was talking so earnestly upon the subject of poor little Susan, that she did not at first observe Lady Blondville rise from table; she deeply blushed and felt particularly vexed as she noticed Miss Courtenay turn towards Lady Matilda and smile. In leaving the room, she had to pass the Earl, and in doing so encountered his dark eyes fixed upon her, while the firm compression of his lip gave to his whole countenance an expression so severe that she shrank from it dismayed, and felt, oh, how thankful, when the door was closed upon her. In the saloon she found Lady Emily and Arthur; the boy flew forward with his usual affection to meet her, and she clasped her arms round him, with difficulty restraining a gush of tears.

"Are you as happy as you expected to be this day, dearest Amy?" enquired Lady Emily, taking her hand, and looking anxiously in her face.

"Oh, no, no, nor may I ever dream of happiness again."

"My dear girl, you surprise me; sit down by me, and tell me what you can possibly mean—and yet, I fear I may guess; pray compose yourself, or you will attract the invidious observation of others."

Amy obeyed, while Arthur still clung to her fondly, saying:

"Poor Amy is not well—she is tired—that cross Sir Charles Courtenay kept her out too long."

"May I ask how it happened that you were so late home today, dear Amy?" enquired Lady Emily, in the kindest tone.

"Not tonight, dear Emily—tomorrow you shall hear what has made this wished-for day the most miserable one of my life—spare me now, I beseech you."

The folding doors to the music-room were now thrown open, and it was brilliantly lighted. The rest of the ladies adjourned there, after speaking to Lady Emily. Mrs. Somerville had watched her young charge during dinner, but, unconscious that she had any new cause for the deep depression she remarked, she attributed it to the one alone, and, therefore, hoped it might be dispelled during the evening. The Countess appeared graver than usu-

al, and occasionally cast an anxious glance towards her; but her chief attention was, of course, engrossed by her guests.

Miss Courtenay was performing a brilliant piece on the harp, when the gentlemen entered, at a late hour, most of whom advanced towards Lady Emily; and conversed with her till they were attracted by the music. The Earl addressed a few words of affection to her as she caught his hand; but when she would have detained him, he broke away. Mr. Martyn alone lingered, and drew his chair near the couch:

"I have come to you," he said, smiling, "to hear your report upon my adopted child—tell me, has society spoiled her, or is she still my own dear Amy?"

"If being one of the most gentle, sweet creatures in the world, gives her that privilege," replied Lady Emily, pressing Amy's hand in hers, "she has still a right to it. I know not how it is, but she wins all hearts—even old Vernon's has been taken by surprise; and you know," she continued, smiling, "how difficult he is to please."

"The opinion of an old and faithful servant carries some weight in my estimation," returned Mr. Martyn, much gratified, "and I can assure you, that of Vernon is not to be despised—the old man is very acute in his observations."

At this moment Lady Matilda commenced playing a beautiful waltz, Miss Courtenay having risen from the harp, amidst the plaudits of all. The young lady started, and looked innocently round her, then began to dance, throwing herself into various graceful attitudes, until she approached the spot where the Earl was standing. Here she paused, and pleadingly turned her eyes upon him; the appeal to his gallantry was irresistible—he instantly stepped forward, while she, with a pretty look of childish helplessness, laid her crossed hands on his shoulder, and suffered him to bear her lightly round the room. Both danced admirably, and every eye was upon them. An indescribable pang shot through the heart of Amy, as she watched their movements, though no mean envy assailed her; it was the gaiety with which Lord Blondville addressed his fair partner which most pained her. At length, panting and fatigued, Miss Courtenay threw herself into a chair, the Earl remaining by her side.

"Lord Blondville must be very fond of dancing, is he not?" asked Amy.

"Who—my brother?" replied Lady Emily, carelessly—"no, I do not think he is—but he feels it right, in my mother's house, to make it agreeable to her guests; even Mr. Martyn, with all his gravity, could scarcely have resisted such an invitation to waltz," and she smiled.

"I fear the day for my running after butterflies has passed," said Mr. Martyn, returning her smile; "but had it not, I scarcely think yonder pretty flutterer would have tempted me to the chase. Amy,