

"My dear Amy," were her first words on her entrance, "I never felt inclined to be angry with you before—what can have detained you so late? the other ladies returned some time ago."

"Ah, dearest mamma, do not blame me," replied Amy, sorrowfully, "it was a sad cause; but pray, Ursula, help me off with these wraps, for I am tired."

"You do, indeed, look fatigued, my child," said Ursula, assisting her, "where have you been?"

Amy then related her visit to Dame Grey's cottage, and the fate of poor little Susan. Mrs. Somerville and Ursula looked at each other when she paused, while tears streamed down her cheeks.

"My own darling child, said the former, embracing her, "I need not indeed have blamed you—what a melancholy occurrence; yet grieve not thus, Amy—reflect on the happy state of that sweet babe, who has exchanged a life of poverty and cruel usage, for one of eternal bliss—and who knows but that her death may be the means of leading her parents to repentance."

"I thought of that myself," replied the weeping Amy, "and yet I cannot express the pain I felt, particularly when I remembered how very happy we all were yesterday, even at the time she must have been wandering alone and unfriended in the storm, and had not where to lay her innocent head."

"Let your thoughts rather turn to the fold she now inhabits, my child, and to the kind Shepherd who has carried her safely thither; come smile, my own Amy," continued Mrs. Somerville, "else our dear friends who have arrived this day will think you are not pleased to see them."

Amy *did* smile, but the light spirit of the morning had fled—she no longer felt gay. She allowed herself to be dressed without taking any interest in what had been selected by the woman's pride and affection of Mrs. Somerville, who was anxious that her beloved child should appear to the best advantage; and while Ursula braided with more than usual care, her luxuriant tresses, her thoughts were absorbed by far different objects.

"Shall I wait for you, mamma," she said, hesitatingly, when at length she was released from the duties of the toilet. "I have not yet seen them both—and strangers are, I believe, coming to dine today."

"Then hasten down before their arrival, my child," replied Mrs. Somerville, smiling, "I will follow you immediately."

And Amy, with a heightened colour, and a step agitated from some powerful emotion, descended to the door of the saloon. Here she paused; in another instant she would be in the presence of one whose image had been the too engrossing object of her thoughts for months, and she had not courage to turn the lock. At length, she gently unclosed it,

and entered the room with a palpitating heart. Lord Blondville was standing before the fire, talking to two strange gentlemen, and, apparently, the conversation was of an interesting nature, for his fine countenance was lit up with animation, yet of a grave, almost stern character, unusual to him. He glanced his eyes quickly in the direction of the door as it opened, and instantly came forward, on perceiving the timid approach of Amy; but there was no change in the expression of his features—no smile; he touched her hand coldly, spoke one or two words, and then turned away. Amy stood for one moment as if paralyzed; her soft and eloquent blue eye dilated as she gazed in astonishment upon him, but he avoided its encounter—when she, recollecting what was due to herself, with a mingled feeling of wounded pride, of disappointment and of heart-felt agony, moved to the most distant part of the room, and sat down by a table, covered over with prints and splendid albums, upon which she appeared to give her whole attention. She had heard the question from one of the strangers, addressed to the Earl, of "Who is that magnificent creature?" but it fell coldly on her ear. "He has forgotten me," were the words which seemed like a blight to wither every feeling of happiness, and all else was indifferent to her. The Countess was the only other lady present, and she was conversing with Mr. Martyn and Sir Charles Courtenay. Lady Emily never made her appearance when there was a dinner party, until the evening, and Amy missed the support her presence would have been to her. Could she have done so with propriety, willingly would she have returned to her own room—but her trial was not yet ended.

Lady Matilda and Miss Courtenay now entered together. Amy marked the instant effect it had on the Earl, who, gaily approaching them, said: "We have met before, fair ladies; how am I to requite the kind courtesy which induced you to welcome me at the gates?"

"Flatter not yourself that we waited there purposely for you," replied Miss Courtenay laughing; "We were looking out for our stray party, wondering why they came not; but it appears we might have watched long, had you not opportunely arrived to relieve our guard."

The Earl looked involuntarily towards Amy, as she uttered this, half playfully; but she appeared engrossed by a large folio, while one hand shaded her eyes from the vivid glare of the lamp. Mrs. Somerville at the same time entered. Lord Blondville immediately went forward to receive her with all his wonted cordiality, and led her towards the couch occupied by the Countess, where he remained talking to her. A few more guests soon afterwards arriving, dinner was announced, and Amy was conducted into the room by Sir Charles Courtenay.