

of the corridor, scantily, even meanly furnished, and had apparently been long unoccupied, as, although it was now June, there was something damp, chilly, and uncomfortable about it. During the whole of this visit, she was destined to suffer from annoyances of one kind or another. If there was a spooney, or country cousin, among the guests, Lady Ashton would be sure to bring him to Miss Leicester, and whisper her to amuse him if possible, and she would greatly oblige. So that Isabel scarcely ever enjoyed herself. Or just as some expedition was being arranged, Lady Ashton would, by employing Isabel about her flowers, or some other trivial thing, contrive to keep her from making one of the party. Isabel, though intensely disgusted, was too proud to remonstrate. And even when Charles, once or twice, interfered to prevent her being kept at home, she felt almost inclined to refuse, so annoyed and angry did Lady Ashton appear.

True, she might have had some enjoyment from the society of Harry and Everard. But so surely as Lady Ashton observed either of them in conversation with her, she invariably wanted to introduce them to some 'charming young ladies.' And she took good care that Isabel should not join any of the riding parties. Once Arthur Barrington had particularly requested her to do so, and even offered his own horse (as Lady Ashton had assured them that every horse that could carry a lady had already been appropriated), but his aunt interposed: "O my dear Arthur, if you would only be so good as to lend it to poor little Mary Cleavers! Of course I would not have ventured to suggest your giving up your horse; but as you are willing to do so, I must put in a claim for poor little Mary, who is almost breaking her heart at the idea of staying at home. And Miss Leicester is so good-natured, that I am sure she will not object."

"Excuse me, aunt, but"—began Arthur.

"Here! Mary, dear," cried Lady Ashton; and before Arthur could finish the sentence, his aunt had informed Mary that he had kindly promised his horse. Mary turned, and overwhelmed the astonished Arthur with her profuse thanks.

"Confound it," muttered Arthur (who was too much a gentleman to contradict his aunt and make a scene); then bowing politely to Miss Cleaver, he turned to Isabel, saying, "Will you come for a row on the lake, Miss Leicester, as our riding to-day is now out of the question, as my aunt has monopolized 'Archer'."