

"That is a fine likeness of my young lord, God bless him, for one of the kindest and best. I remember I used to think he never would meet any one deserving of him; but, praised be His name, I have lived to see my error."

"Indeed!" replied Amy, slightly confused, "who can have had the power to make so favourable a change in your opinion?"

"She who can feel for the wants and miseries of others," replied the old man, fervently—"she who is as good as she is beautiful—who has been sent as a blessing from above, to confer happiness on a noble house—such is the Lady Amanda de Manfredonia."

"Good, kind Vernon, I deserve not all this praise," returned Amy, affected by his words.

"Yes, my dear young lady, you do, and may God so reward you; you will forgive an old man's freedom, who has danced the original of that picture on his knee many a time before you were born, and a noble child he was."

Amy pressed his withered hand, while a tear stood in her eye. She felt more gratified at that moment than if she had won a diadem.

This day was spent in the delightful anticipation of the morrow. There had been a heavy fall of snow during the morning, which precluded any of the party from leaving the house; but various amusements were at their command within. Miss Courtenay was the chief promoter even to a game at battledore in the old hall, much to the delight of Amy and young Arthur, whose joyous laugh resounded above all.

Susan came not to her appointment, as she promised; doubtless her mother would not spare her. Lady Emily felt sorry, as she knew the disappointment it would prove to the little girl herself, and she had wished her to share in the general happiness at the Falcon's Nest.

The following proved one of those clear, bright, frosty days, so rare and so prized in England—the robins came flocking to be fed at the windows—a cheerful fire blazed on the ample hearth of the breakfast parlour—comfort, with elegance, appeared in every corner. Arthur threw open the sash, to place the usual supply of crumbs for his favourites.

"Now really, my young friend," said Sir Charles, shivering, "we could dispense with that arrangement."

"Do not mind it one moment, for the sake of the dear robins," replied Arthur; "I cannot bear to see them hungry, when I am surrounded by plenty."

"Your philanthropy may be good, but it has a chilling influence on others," returned Sir Charles, and as he spoke he drove the birds away, and shut the window.

"Harold would not have done that," said Arthur, indignantly.

"Harold is Arthur's model," added the Countess.

smiling, "we must pardon his partiality; but what do you propose doing this promising day?"

"If we can enlist our forces, we intend taking a long walk," replied Lady Matilda; "Amy, are you so disposed?"

Amy readily assented, and the hour was fixed; but in the course of the morning, so many visitors called, that our pedestrians did not set out until much later than they had intended. It was still fine, however, and they were all too cheerful and too happy to heed whether the sun shone or not.

Miss Courtenay contrived that Amy should be left to the care of her brother, whose arm was always proffered, and frequently accepted with reluctance. They had walked a considerable distance, when Lady Matilda, looking at her watch, exclaimed at the lateness of the hour, and proposed their turning:

"I should wish to reach home before the arrival of my brother," she said, "and it is now past four o'clock."

As they drew near the cottages belonging to the peasantry, within a mile of the Falcon's Nest, Amy suddenly recollected Susan Grey, and on looking towards the one where she dwelt, she perceived the shutters were closed; she paused before it, saying:

"I fear some one must be ill here—do let me inquire; I will not detain you a moment."

"Amy, what a tiresome creature you are," replied Lady Matilda; "we are already much later than I wished—I cannot wait for you indeed."

Amy again pleaded; when Miss Courtenay obligingly said:

"I am sure, Charles will be delighted to wait for you; Matilda and I will stroll slowly on, and you can soon overtake us."

"I shall be most happy, charmed," repeated Sir Charles, pressing his hands affectedly together, and bowing over them.

"Thank you a thousand times," said Amy, raising the latch; "I will rejoin you immediately."

But on entering the cottage, a different scene presented itself to what she had expected. Mrs. Grey, the mother of Susan, was sitting in a chair, her apron over her face, and rocking herself, apparently in the extremity of some powerful emotion, for she was sobbing loud and bitterly. Her husband appeared at some distance, his head resting on the table, his arms folded, but silent—motionless. A strange woman was moving stealthily across the room, engaged in some little domestic offices; she was also in tears.

"Alas, what has happened?" enquired Amy; "where is Susan, and why did she not come to Lady Emily yesterday?"

"Susan will never come again," replied the woman, brushing her hand across her eyes—"the dear lamb is gone for ever."