

but she preferred his company to that of herself, her husband or her niece. At any rate he had some topics of conversation not, as in their case, already exhausted by constant intercourse. She felt too that it would be nice during her stay to attach this young man to herself, so that she might have some one to walk with her and talk to her when Mr. Swannington was at the club, and to change her books at the library, and fetch and carry for her at her desire. And yet Aunt Ella had her wits about her.

"You must not wonder, my dear," she said to her husband, "if you see me much with that young Anstruther. It is necessary that I should not let him choose Beattie for a companion, and he says he knows no one else here. I have ascertained that he is but a younger son, with no special prospects. He seems however very simple and straightforward, and I think I can keep him sufficiently well amused."

"My dear," said the easy-going gentleman, "you understand these things better than I."

But Mr. Anstruther was a determined young man, and he meant to see more of Beattie. Fortune favoured him. There had been a touch of east in the wind during the evening, and perhaps Aunt Ella had got a little chill. At any rate she complained of feeling poorly the next day, and decided to keep her room till luncheon. Mr. Swannington bathed and breakfasted and went off on his bicycle, and Beattie strolled down to the beach for amusement. There Michael found her. And there Mr. Swannington saw them when he came back from his ride two hours later. During those two hours they had talked as people can only talk to each other before they have learnt by life's experience distrust and caution and worldly wisdom. Older people doubt the interest of their listeners in their hopes and aspirations, in the simple details of their past, and their plans for the future. But the sympathy of a young man and a young woman mutually attracted, and knowing nothing of disillusionment, is like a foretaste of that intercourse which will exist in a world where selfishness and hardness and doubt are known no longer. Neither of the two was wearied—to both it seemed as if something fresh had come into life. Michael knew why he was so contented, but Beattie only felt she had found a new friend.

But for Aunt Ella's words on the previous evening, Mr. Swannington might not have noticed their apparent absorption in each other. Men are not so observant in these matters as women. As it was he was not disposed to interfere with them; but he joined them, and the three strolled about till lunch time. Mrs. Swannington was in the room when the two men entered and Anstruther inquired after her health.

"We have been down on the beach," said Mr. Swannington. Beattie had gone to remove her hat. The lady supposed that there had been a trio, she certainly did not imagine that there had

been a *tête-à-tête*. Not that Beattie would for one moment have deceived her; she did not even think there was anything to conceal.

Anstruther stayed for a week, the greater part of which time he spent with the Swanningtons. He began to like Mr. Swannington, who, if he did not respond to the intellectual side of him, commanded his respect in other ways. He soon saw he was a sensible man, well-informed in practical subjects, and proficient in all manly sports; his dislike for Mrs. Swannington too lessened as their intimacy progressed, but though she was unfailingly kind to him herself, her undisguised worldliness, and the hints she gave him as to her respect for wealth and her ambitions for Beattie, made him well understand that she would not favour his suit. But he was hopeful notwithstanding. If Beattie cared for him she would be true to him. They were both young, and he would work very hard to make a position for himself. Many men had to conquer far greater obstacles than one woman's opposition. And Aunt Ella had not openly declared it. But as the days passed she was beginning to see that, in spite of all her vigilance, Michael managed to be beside her niece more often than she approved of, and that Beattie's eyes brightened as he drew near.

"If it was not that young Anstruther is going abroad so soon," she said to her husband, "I should discourage this intimacy."

"There doesn't seem much harm in it," said Mr. Swannington. "He is a nice young fellow enough, and I think she likes him."

"My dear!" cried Mrs. Swannington with upraised hands. "Nice! But he has nothing a year—positively nothing! And as for her, girls of that age like any man who is polite to them. She has seen no one yet with whom to compare him."

At the end of the week however a sudden stop was put to their intercourse. Michael received a telegram stating that his mother had been taken ill and bidding him hasten home.

The Swanningtons were out when he got it and the train which he would take left Crabsley in less than an hour. He was stunned by the sudden news which might be even more serious than it seemed. But there was no time to waste. He packed his portmanteau, called for his bill, and ordered a conveyance. While he was waiting for it his thoughts turned momentarily to Beattie. There was no time to go in search of his friends, but he would like to leave a message. He enclosed the telegram in an envelope and gave it to the hall-porter to deliver to Mrs. Swannington. That would be sufficient explanation of his sudden departure.

As for Beattie he could not leave her, to meet again he knew not when, without some word. He rapidly wrote—

"DEAR MISS MARGETSON,

"I hope you will forgive my writing to you. I must say good-bye.

This week, thanks to you, has been the happiest in my life. It is my earnest hope that I may see you again before long.

"Yours sincerely,

"MICHAEL ANSTRUTHER."

This note, after a momentary hesitation, he also gave to the porter. He would have preferred some method of delivery less likely to attract Aunt Ella's attention, but he had no choice; and anything underhand was as distasteful to him as it would have been to Beattie.

He caught a momentary glimpse of her as he drove away. She was just returning to the hotel. Mrs. Swannington was panting along a few steps behind her, but he did not notice the elder lady, so earnestly was his gaze directed after her niece. He had caught the look of sorrow and dismay on her face when she saw he was going away. Mrs. Swannington turned and stared after the carriage. Then foreseeing there might be an explanation at the hotel she hurried on. Beattie was waiting for her.

"Mr. Anstruther seems to be leaving," she said, and Aunt Ella saw she was genuinely distressed.

"Oh, well," she said, "it is not much matter. We should have all bored each other had he stayed much longer. But I wonder at the suddenness of his flight."

The porter delivered his notes.

Aunt Ella opened hers at once, and seeing the telegram quickly read it. Then she handed it to her niece. Beattie had not yet opened her note. Some instinct told her it was for her eyes alone and she slipped it into her pocket. She read the telegram with dismay.

"Oh, auntie," she said, "I hope his mother is not dying."

"Dying? Not likely!" said Aunt Ella, with some asperity in her voice. She too was sorry in her own way for Michael, but Beattie's evident sorrow annoyed her. She would be angry with herself if Beattie had already engaged her affections. Not that she would let that interfere with her plans for her, but it would make things more difficult. Besides, it would reflect upon her own wisdom in the management of affairs. "I expect," she said, "the young man ought to be spending his holidays at home, and his people are getting jealous."

Beattie did not hear this last remark. Her eyes were full of tears and she did not want Aunt Ella to see them. She felt heavy-hearted indeed when she closed the door of her room. Then she tore open her letter.

The few lines soothed and comforted her. The sudden parting seemed less final. But they did not convey to her all that Michael meant they should. Beattie did not realise that he was in love with her. She had had no experience in these matters and in some things she was singularly childish. Many girls of her age acquire a knowledge of life from books which antedates their own experience, but Beattie seldom read any but schoolgirls' stories or such books as do not deal with love