

IN SPITE OF ALL.

By IDA LEMON, Author of "The Charming Cora," "A Winter Garment," etc.

CHAPTER XIV.



THE season came to an end, but the expected offer of marriage had not yet been in a d e. Aunt Ella was a little disappointed, but although Mr. Musgrove was still in town, she decided it was useless for them to stay any longer. L a t e hours and

the eating of various fattening and indigestible articles at dinners and suppers had begun to tell upon her. Her waist was an inch bigger than in February, her complexion was not at its best, and matters were getting alarming. She decided that there was nothing for it but Crabsley air, strict diet, and early hours. But, remembering that the place was distinctly dull, and being a great believer in the results of propinquity, she thought her that Crabsley might hasten that which London life had failed to bring to a point. Instead of going to the hotel she took a small furnished house which had attracted her attention the year before, and which was not let for the time she wanted it, and invited one or two favourite friends for short periods. Almost the first she asked was Mr. Cecil Musgrove, and he accepted the invitation.

It was with mingled feelings that Beattie looked forward to his visit. She had only seen him two or three times since her eyes had been opened to notice that which before had been hidden from her. There was really very little difference in his manner, but to Beattie there seemed a change. His undoubted liking for and interest in herself had a new meaning for her. She could not help observing his demeanour in a critical spirit quite foreign to her nature. As a consequence her own attitude had changed. She was shyer, more retiring, less unconstrained. The beautiful absence of self-consciousness, which had been one of her chief charms to Cecil, had gone, and by this she was just so much less attractive to him. He had admired too, her independence, her candour, and childlike naturalness. He had felt, and rightly, that Beattie was

unlike the calculating girl which, to his unfortunate experience, seemed the girl of the period. He had perceived that he could be her friend and she would not be offended that he was not her lover. But now that she had taken to blushing when he came near, sometimes avoiding him, and then, as if fearing she had been unkind, encouraging him to approach her, he began to waver a little. He did not want Beattie to be in love with him unless he was quite sure he meant to marry her. And he was not quite sure. The longer she held him at arm's length the more anxious he would be to conquer her indifference, but let her turn towards him and he had a disposition to go back. His affection for her had reached its highest point on the evening of the tableaux. It had not decreased exactly, but on the subsequent occasions when he had seen her he had realised that it might be well to keep it in check. He was too clever not to see through Mrs. Swannington, and he smiled when he received the invitation to Crabsley. Nevertheless he anticipated pleasure from the few days he was to spend there, and was even somewhat excited as to the probable issue of his visit.

For some reason sufficient to herself Beattie decided that if Aunt Ella were there to welcome him on his arrival that would be enough, and about half an hour before his train came in, while Mrs. Swannington was taking a siesta, she slipped away and started for a walk on the cliffs. After a momentary hesitation as to the direction she should take she resolved to climb the hill to the lighthouse, which was the highest point in Crabsley, and where the view was finest and the air most exhilarating. This was a place inaccessible to Aunt Ella, but Beattie's favourite, for she always enjoyed, in common with most healthy people, the getting to the top of anything. The afternoon was rather hot, but Miss Margetson feeling particularly exuberant, forgetting that she was a grown-up young lady and ought to be sober in her deportment, sang as she walked, though in an undertone. She also went a great deal too near the edge of the cliff, which, as the place had had more than one landslide, and there were ominous cracks and fissures here and there, was somewhat incautious. Once she had an inclination at a tempting slope to climb down the face of the cliff to the beach, but was deterred by a story the cook had told her of a girl who, doing so a year or two back, had sunk to her waist in a sort of quicksand formed by the water from a spring making its way just under the surface, and not being missed for some hours, was not released till evening, when she died of shock. The thought of this sobered Beattie for a few minutes till she fell to wondering whether if such a thing happened to her, Mr. Musgrove would be at all overcome at her position, or take it with the coolness

he generally manifested in the affairs of life, regarding her through an eyeglass while she was being pulled out, and then she found herself laughing out loud. Presently she came to the golf-links, and stood a little while looking at the players, some of whom she now knew by sight, and noticing, as she had often done before, that the most immaculately and conspicuously attired were usually the least skilful. One red-coated individual she could see, though she was too far off to catch the words, kept making excuses for himself, the caddie at each bad stroke grimacing and pointing behind the back of the player. The sight of Uncle Arthur in the distance, however, urged Beattie onwards. He was probably too engrossed in his game to notice the figure at the edge of the cliff, but her position made her rather conspicuous, and she did not want to be observed by him. He would be sure to beckon to her. Uncle Arthur was the sort of person who could never see her without wanting something of her, and besides, Beattie knew in her heart he was not much in favour of her taking walks by herself. So she went on her way till she came to the top of the hill, and then she found a little shelving place she knew of where she could be somewhat sheltered, and could rest in peace.

It was beautiful up there, with the sense of space, of freedom so delightful to the young. The blue expanse of sea, the cloud-flecked sky, were all her own. Far below her, as it seemed, on her left, was the quaint little village, with its strong-towered church. Beattie never shrank from solitude, because she did not yet know what it is to be lonely. She was almost perfectly happy as she sat there all alone, and yet she had a passing feeling of envy for the seagulls as they skimmed over the waves, and then soared higher with the sunlight on their breasts and wings.

"I wonder," she thought, "if the gulls have to be married young, or if their relations let them enjoy their freedom as long as they like. I don't suppose they recognise aunts and uncles though, and perhaps their parents let them please themselves. I somehow fancy birds are considered capable of looking after their own affairs as soon as they can obtain food. Well, but I can't even do that. If I had to obtain my own food I really don't know how I should set to work. I certainly couldn't teach like Edith nor paint like Margaret. I might do step-dancing, or be one of those girls in shops who put on the cloaks and jackets to show the ladies. Speaking of Margaret reminds me I have her letter in my pocket."

And settling herself more comfortably Beattie proceeded to read for the second time the closely-written sheets of foreign paper which had arrived for her that morning from Paris. Margaret's letters, however, were not altogether in writing. She freely employed the pictorial art. If