

the walls, and when Beattie practised on the old piano their occupants added trills and turns to the scales. There had been white rats, but when one of them escaped Aunt Ella forbade them ever after. There was a parrot which a friend of her father's had brought to Beattie, and which had learnt to use bad language on the voyage; and last, but not least, there was a stuffed monkey which Beattie loved as if it had been alive. The poor monkey had been a great joy to her. She had made a little hat and jacket for it, and petted it like a child, but Jacko had gone into consumption and coughed distressingly till finally death overtook him. No one grieved except Beattie and James, the footman, who helped to look after all the creatures, and he it was who had suggested that the form of their favourite should be preserved to them. A Christmas present from her uncle had enabled Beattie to pay for it, and often afterwards she prepared her lessons with Jacko sitting on the table before her, his comical red-capped head on one side, and his glass eyes watching her face.

The room was shabby. Aunt Ella had proposed its being done up next spring and being made more fit for a grown-up young lady, but Beattie loved it as it was. There were marks on the table-cloth which had been made with spilt ink, and saucepans containing hot toffee, and fruit which had been given to the animals; there were also sundry stains on the carpet, and beaks and claws and paws had left their impressions on various articles in the room, but yet somehow its untidiness was cheering rather than depressing, and as Norah looked round her she exclaimed heartily, "Oh, Miss Margetson, what a delightful room."

Beattie had ensconced her in the arm-chair and perched herself on the rocking-horse which was her favourite seat.

"I am glad you like it," she said, "I prefer it to any room in the house. But Aunt Ella never comes in if she can help it. She says it is like a boy's room, but then she is not fond of animals. Are you?"

"I like horses," said Norah.

"Oh, so do I; I just love riding. You ought to see Queen Bess. My uncle gave her to me when I was fifteen. She is a perfect beauty. I wonder if we could ride together."

"I don't ride," said Norah quietly. "I love horses, but we can't afford to keep them. My father is a clergyman, you know, and we are very poor."

Beattie blushed.

"We keep a pony for driving though," went on Norah, smiling at her reassuringly, "a quiet old thing that is nobody knows how old. But she is safe, and that is a good thing, for father himself drives very often, and he is absent-minded and near-sighted so I should be afraid if he had a spirited creature."

"Mr. Anstruther lives in your father's parish, he said," remarked Beattie.

It was now Norah's turn to blush, a slight pink blush that Beattie did not observe.

"Yes, his father is the squire."

"Tell me about him," said Beattie. "He seemed very nice."

"There isn't much to tell," said Norah. But nevertheless she began to talk about him, and he was the subject of conversation for quite twenty minutes.

"Lady Anstruther is very sweet," said Norah. "She has been like a mother to me. My own mother is dead, you know. She is not pretty, but she has eyes like—like Michael, and she has such a gentle manner. Sir John never comes to church. He doesn't believe in—things. He is rather bitter sometimes. The eldest son turned out badly. But he is dead now. And then there is Geoffrey who will come into the property. He is a soldier. Some people like Geoffrey best, but I—we are all fond of Mike."

"Is that what you call him? It sounds like a dog," said Beattie laughing. "Well."

"Well, he is going to be a doctor, as perhaps he told you. The property is heavily mortgaged, and there isn't much money, so it was much better for Mike to be quite independent of the estate. Sir John will buy him a practice when he wants one."

"I should think he would be a nice doctor," said Beattie. "Aren't there any girls?"

Norah shook her head. "There was one, Evelyn. She died when she was sixteen. That is what changed Sir John, I think. He is never very nice to me when I go to the Hall. He gets out of my way if he can. I am not in the least like Evelyn, but I suppose I remind him of what he has lost. She and I were almost the only girls in Woodfield. The doctor's wife is young, but she is married and of course that makes a difference. Evelyn and I were often together. I haven't made any friend since."

"Didn't you go to a school?" asked Beattie, thinking of some twenty young women who all counted themselves her friends.

"No, father taught me. The boys have to be educated at school though."

"Oh, have you any brothers? That must be nice. I often wish I had. How many are there?"

"Two, Cyril and Walter. They are both younger than I am. I have to be their mother, you know, as well as their sister."

"I suppose that is what makes you seem so much more grown up than I do," said Beattie. "I can't feel as if we are almost the same age."

"Yes, that is what makes me rather lonely, I suppose," said Norah with a sigh which she stifled. "I am too old for my age."

"I wish you could come and stay with me some time," said Beattie impulsively. "I know lots of nice girls, and I could introduce you to some of them."

Norah looked pleased.

"It is sweet of you to think of that. But I don't want any other girl-friends if you would be one."

"I," said Beattie. "Why, of course I will gladly. Shall I write to you sometimes?"

"Oh, would you?" said Norah eagerly.

She was generally very reserved, but few people maintained their reserve long with Beattie.

"Perhaps some day," said Norah, "you will be able to come to Woodfield."

"I daresay Aunt Ella would let me," said Beattie, "as she knows Mrs. Gilman so well. But speaking of Aunt Ella, I had forgotten all about tea. It will have been in the drawing-room ever so long. Let us go down."

Mrs. Swannington had had her tea, but she was still in the drawing-room reading a novel. She looked with some envy at the two young girls able to eat chocolate cake and almond biscuits without any ulterior thought as to their fattening or indigestible properties. Her tea had consisted of dry toast, very thin and crisp. She found her novel, which was in her native tongue, more interesting than the girls' chatter, but she laid it aside for a little while, and talked to Norah.

Norah had a pretty and somewhat deferential manner, not too common in these days. Aunt Ella liked to be treated with respect, and she was more favourably impressed by Norah than with most of the young ladies Beattie had brought home from school. These latter generally showed their relief when Aunt Ella left them and their chagrin when she appeared, but Norah talked to Beattie as naturally as if they had been alone, and answered all Aunt Ella's questions without resenting them.

She was not consciously anxious to ingratiate herself with Mrs. Swannington, though she did want to see more of Beattie. She succeeded in doing the former however, and Aunt Ella was quite affable to her.

"I like that Norah," she said to Beattie when the girl had gone. "She has manners. That *gauche* Margaret is far less pleasing to me. She has no respect for her elders. But she is dowdy, this Norah. Did you observe her sleeves? And the way her hair is done! It grieves me to see a girl not make the best of herself."

"She is poor," said Beattie.

Aunt Ella shrugged her shoulders.

"But no. She is English. The feet of an Englishwoman alone spoil her." And Aunt Ella regarded her dainty Pinet shoes with evident satisfaction. "No Englishwoman has pretty feet or good taste."

"I am English," said Beattie laughing.

And Aunt Ella answered—

"Yes, but I help you to conquer the fact. When you are older you will better appreciate my aid. Besides your uncle has assured me there is Irish blood in the Swanningtons. That has saved you, Beattie. For your Englishwoman undiluted I have a detestation, so dull, so heavy, and so insular. Still, what would you? One must have acquaintances, even if they bore one. But oh! the British matron!" And with a sigh Mrs. Swannington resettled herself in her low chair, and returned to the perusal of her French novel.

(To be continued.)