

a liberal education for women, was no admirer of an undue intellectual development. No one took Mrs. Swannington seriously, unless it was herself; they laughed with her and at her, and Mr. Musgrove, who mentally compared her to a pouter pigeon in appearance, and criticised her lazily during the meal, yet saw no one with whom he would sooner have gone down to dinner, although he cast glances occasionally in the direction of the neighbour to the young *attaché*.

"That young lady entered the room with you, did she not?" he said presently. "But it is not possible she can be your daughter. Is she perhaps your step-daughter?"

"She is my niece," said Mrs. Swannington, "and she lives with us. This is her first season, and she is making the most of it."

Mr. Musgrove did not care for *débutantes* as a rule. Nevertheless he continued to look with interest at Beattie.

"She has been very much admired," said Aunt Ella complacently.

Mr. Musgrove politely replied, "No wonder."

"For me," went on Aunt Ella, playing with her bread, that Mr. Musgrove might have an opportunity of observing her hands, "I find my position rather a responsibility. One has to do what is best for the child; but I sometimes think lately my task would be easier if she were plain."

"Perhaps so," said Mr. Musgrove amused.

"One often wonders how it is," went on Aunt Ella, "that so many charming women are single, while one sees women ugly, uninteresting and even disagreeable, married comparatively young. But of course the reason is clear; the beauty thinks nothing of admiration, she is used to it, so she can pick and choose, and perhaps she lets slip her chances; but your plain woman—some one pays her attention; she is amazed, delighted, such a thing was unlooked for; at once she responds, and there the matter ends—they are married."

Mr. Musgrove gathered from this that Miss Margetson was rejecting offers. Perhaps he was meant to. Aunt Ella was a clever woman in her way, and she knew something of human nature, especially man nature. Moreover, now that the time had gone by in which every unmarried man was a possible suitor for her hand, the day had arrived when she saw in them a possible suitor for Beattie's. However, although she found Mr. Musgrove good-looking and agreeable, and had assured herself that he was a bachelor, the chief matter—that of his prospects—had not been laid bare to her, and she would not regard him as eligible till it had been. She did not make her niece the staple subject of conversation. A few hints as to the girl's indifference to admiration, and she had given him a lazy ambition to try if he would find her indifferent. That was enough. Then the talk drifted to other channels. But in the drawing-room Mrs. Swannington lost no time in establishing herself by her hostess, and

having made discoveries beyond her expectation agreeable, felt that she was indeed a fortunate woman, and that the plan of campaign must be arranged as soon as possible. One thing was at once clear to her. She must open the eyes of that stupid Mrs. Gilman, who did not seem to realise her opportunities, to the chance that lay in her power of winning the gratitude of her husband's friend. It was for her to enable him to meet as frequently as possible at her house the young girl who would make him so charming a wife.

The unsuspecting Beattie meanwhile was chattering away merrily to Norah who, now that she saw her again, felt the old fascination return. Beattie's very joyousness, her absorption in the present, her interest in everything about her, although something scarcely comprehensible to the graver Norah, was in itself a charm. Though not remarkable in herself, Beattie had the power of stimulating others; as one of her friends once said, she was like a bracing wind. Norah grew brighter as they chattered together, her laugh rang out once or twice. Lady Anstruther would have wondered at her if she could have seen her pensive little friend listening to Beattie's stories of some of her doings, and appearing to take pleasure in sympathising.

"Oh, there are the gentlemen," said Beattie, pausing in the middle of a sentence; "and I have scarcely seen anything of you. When will you come and spend the day? At least, I haven't a whole day. Let me see, tomorrow?—no, I am engaged in the morning. Oh, yes, and in the afternoon too, and in the evening. Aunt Ella has a dinner-party Thursday? Thursday, I have only the morning free."

"Thursday Cousin Alice wants me to go shopping."

Beattie made a grimace.

"Friday? Saturday? Oh, come Sunday—then we can have a long talk. I have never asked you about Mr. Anstruther."

"He is abroad," said Norah blushing. She always reddened when he was mentioned unexpectedly.

"But you hear from him?"

"Oh, yes."

"Is he happy?" asked Beattie. Happiness was to her the most desirable thing in the world, and she could never bear any one to be otherwise. Norah said—

"He is studying hard; and he likes that, you know."

"Here comes Aunt Ella with that gentleman who took her into dinner. What a nuisance! I was afraid we shouldn't be allowed to talk. Now mind you come on Sunday. I shall expect you directly after dinner, and stay all the afternoon and evening."

Aunt Ella introduced Mr. Musgrove to her niece.

"Now, Beattie, I cannot let you monopolise Miss Gilman," she said, bestowing on Norah one of her most amiable smiles. "Mrs. Gilman will spare her to us one day, I am sure. Come now and tell me about yourself, my dear," and thus Mrs. Swannington

ensured the first *tête-à-tête* between Mr. Musgrove and Beattie.

Beattie was one of those girls who are so perfectly natural at all times, that they do not have one manner for their own sex and another for gentlemen. Mr. Musgrove, who was a trifle *blasé*, and inclined to be bored, had looked rather enviously at the two girls, evidently so genuinely interested in one another. His knowledge of young ladies had led him to believe them all somewhat artificial, and at any rate only tolerating one another's society when there was no gentleman present. But he was sufficiently observant to see at once that Mrs. Swannington's niece was just what she seemed, and that she neither simulated pleasure in the society of her girl-friend, nor was unduly elated at the prospect of his. Unlike Beattie herself, Cecil Musgrove was intensely critical. He had some knowledge of character, and was prone to dissecting the human mind and analysing motives to a degree that was fatal to enthusiastic admiration of his fellow-creatures. As he sometimes said, "he never let himself go," and perhaps to this was due some of his success. A mind which is dominated by other minds cannot so easily pursue an even course as that which is absolutely independent; and your hero-worshipper is apt to be led astray even by his heroes.

"So I hear this is your first season," said he to Beattie.

Beattie nodded and smiled.

"Yes," she said, "and I am enjoying myself so much."

"What do you enjoy?"

Beattie opened her eyes wide.

"Why, everything. I love people, you know."

"Do you? Now, I think the world would be more tolerable without them."

"Without people? Why, it wouldn't be the world. What a funny idea. Don't you love your fellow-creatures?"

Mr. Musgrove laughed.

"Not much."

"Why?" said Beattie. "Perhaps they have treated you badly." And she was prepared to be sympathetic.

"No, not particularly. On the whole they have, no doubt, behaved to me as well as I have deserved."

"Well," said Beattie, "then the only thing to be said is that you must be very hard-hearted." And she regarded him with as much severity as she was capable of.

Mr. Musgrove found her frankness refreshing. She was evidently quite in earnest, too. He pretended seriousness himself.

"Do you know," he said, "I believe you have stated a fact. You have only known me a few minutes, and yet you have told me the truth about myself. I am hard-hearted."

"Since you have confessed it," Beattie said, looking at him from under her lashes in a way that an accomplished flirt would have given anything to achieve, "I should advise you to set to work to cure it. You lose so much happiness. I should try and care for someone if I were you, and as soon as possible. I daresay you won't find it very difficult."