

IN SPITE OF ALL.

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

CHAPTER III.

SOME one was singing when Beattie was brought to the drawing-room door, so that not to interrupt the song she came in quietly unannounced and stood just within the *portière* till it should be finished. In those five minutes Michael Anstruther lost his heart to her.

There were not many people in the room, and, as Mrs. Gilman had said, they were all young. The cessation of the song was the signal for a buzz of lively talk and bright laughter. Mrs. Gilman greeted Beattie and then led her up to the singer.

"This is Miss Margetson, Norah," she said, and Beattie found herself face to face with a girl to whom she was at once attracted. She looked older than her eighteen years, and she was not exactly pretty, but she had a wonderfully sweet and pure expression and a charming voice.

"I have heard so much of you from cousin Alice," she said. "And Eva is always talking about you."

Mrs. Gilman left the two girls together, and very soon they were talking with ease to one another. To Beattie every new person was interesting, and Norah, whose experience of life had been deeper and sadder than Beattie's, could appreciate the spontaneous and unaffected manners of the latter. Michael Anstruther from his corner watched the two girls. Presently, drawn by the magnetism of his gaze, Beattie turned towards him "those eyes," and completed the conquest. But it was not till much later in the evening that he spoke to her. Everybody wanted to talk to Beattie, and Mr. Gilman was rather disposed to monopolise her. She was only a child to him, but he was very fond of her and Beattie liked him too. He was a solicitor, a clever man, somewhat cynical, as one of his profession may be pardoned for being, and yet genuinely kind and good-hearted. He had a great many friends and was thought highly of. Mrs. Swannington was right in saying it was he who attracted interesting people to his house, though Mrs. Gilman's gentle and gracious manner was perhaps not without power to draw them there again.

"Mr. Gilman," said Beattie presently, "who is that gentleman sitting all alone? No one seems to talk to him."

"Why, it's Anstruther. Hasn't my wife been looking after him? Poor fellow! Suppose we move across to his corner. He has hurt his leg, and that is why he keeps in one place. I am afraid he is finding it rather dull."

To Anstruther's joy, and somewhat to his embarrassment he saw his host and

the young girl move towards him. Mr. Gilman introduced them. And that very moment his wife called him away to sing. When the song was over he did not return to Beattie.

"I am so sorry to hear you have hurt yourself. I was wondering why you did not move about at all," said Beattie. And she regarded her companion with a sympathetic gaze.

"It was very good of you to think of me," he said. "I only sprained my foot at tennis. But I can't get about much. I shouldn't have come this evening to be a nuisance, only I wanted to see Norah Gilman. Her father is the parson in my old-home, and I was anxious to hear all the news."

"But she isn't talking to you at all, is she?" said Beattie, prepared to be indignant at his disappointment.

"Oh, yes," he said laughing. "It is all right. I dined here."

Beattie looked relieved.

"Don't you live at home, then?" she asked.

"No. I am studying to be a doctor. I am at Guy's now, but I am going to Paris in two months' time. My father has a friend there who is a great doctor, and I shall live with him. I want to see the Paris hospitals and learn all I can."

He spoke quietly, but his eyes kindled, and Beattie saw he was enthusiastic about his profession. She thought of Margaret and said: "I have a friend who is going to Paris too. She intends to study painting."

And then she began to talk to him about Margaret, and of how clever she was and how ambitious, and how she cared for nothing in comparison with her art. Anstruther listened with interest, but all the time he was thinking not of Margaret, but of Beattie. He thought he had never seen anyone so pretty and apparently so lacking in self-consciousness. Her sympathetic manner and ready talk set him at his ease, and he found himself answering her confidence with his own. In half-an-hour they seemed to have become old acquaintances. Mutual knowledge of this kind is an intuition as often as an acquirement.

A little stir in the room reminded him that he might lose his pleasant companion, and he said—

"If you don't mind a limping partner may I take you down to supper?"

And so the interview was prolonged.

When he stood up Beattie saw that he was a very tall man. His face was still boyish, but it wore a look of determination. He had a large chin of the type that denotes obstinacy, kind brown eyes, and dark smooth hair. He was plain, but his face was redeemed from ugliness by its indications of intellect and goodness. There was nothing mean or ignoble in its development.

Not that Beattie analysed his appearance. She was not very observant, and

seldom criticised. But she had strong instincts, and what she liked was generally worthy of her liking. Where she could exercise a choice, as with friends, she chose wisely.

The time passed quickly, and though Anstruther lingered in the supper-room as long as he could, he had to take Beattie back to the drawing-room at last. And almost directly her carriage was announced.

"I wonder when I shall see you again?" he said, as she held out her hand to him.

"I am afraid it won't be for a long while," Beattie answered simply. "We are going to Crabsley in a day or two, and when we return you will be starting for Paris, I expect."

Anstruther's eyes flashed. He was thankful he had not yet made any plans for the beginning of his summer holiday.

Before she left Beattie invited Norah and her cousin to tea the following afternoon. Mrs. Gilman refused for herself, but said she would send Norah. She wanted the girls to be friends with each other, and was glad they seemed mutually attracted.

Beattie did not see her aunt when she got home. Mrs. Swannington always retired early when possible. It was to this excellent habit she attributed the youthful appearance on which people sometimes congratulated her. At breakfast she asked a few questions of her niece, but though she had no reason for concealing his name, nothing was said that caused Beattie to allude to Michael Anstruther.

"Amateur singing and playing and chatter! it sounds dull enough," said Aunt Ella. "I wonder Mrs. Gilman did not get up a little dance, but after all Mr. Gilman's friends use their heads better than their feet, I fancy. But it is absurd to think young people care to hear each other's performances."

"I enjoyed myself very much," said Beattie. And her uncle looking at her bright eyes and fresh complexion said—

"Dissipation will agree with Miss Beattie, I expect. You will have to do a vast amount of chaperoning, Ella."

Aunt Ella shrugged her shoulders.

"I shall not over-exert myself, even for Beattie," she said.

In the afternoon Norah came. Mrs. Swannington was out driving, and the visitor was shown into Beattie's room.

Beattie's room had been nursery, then schoolroom, and was now to be her sanctum. In the great cupboard were many of the discarded toys, and on the shelves the now discarded school-books; a few story-books lay there also, but these were not often read. Beattie was not very fond of literature in any form. She had several pets which Aunt Ella permitted on condition that they were not brought near her. A cat and a family of kittens lay on the hearthrug. Two or three cages were hanging on