

summer sea before them, his grave eyes fixed on her face, and his manner betraying the homage he was yielding to her girlish beauty. She began to understand Michael better now that life had opened before her, to apprehend what had been his feeling towards herself though by no means realising its intensity. If she had formulated her idea it would have been: "If Mr. Anstruther had not gone away, perhaps he too would have grown to care for me in time. He was sorry to say good-bye."

It was not till the end of April or early in May that Norah Gilman came up to London to pay her promised visit to her cousins, which had been postponed partly from her own disinclination for it, and partly because her father had been poorly and she had insisted on staying with him. The past six months had tended to deepen Norah's natural seriousness, and by showing her the sadness of life, the worthlessness of so many things people count of value, in the presence of crushing sorrow and broken health, had drawn her more earnestly to the consideration of those things which alone avail when realities have to be faced. Lady Anstruther too, now that she thought it no longer so probable that Norah would marry Michael, had ceased to endeavour to fit her for the position she would occupy as his wife. After all, why should she make the girl conform herself to the world? For her, the death of her son and the shattered health of her husband had broken the ties she still had to it. Herself an invalid, it was unlikely she would mix with it again, and the things which comforted her now in many a dark and trying hour, were not those which the world had given her. Even, she told herself, the joys of married life were so easily turned to grief, the husband of her youth was bereft of his strength, and she must hear his complainings and see him suffer; of her children, three had been taken from her, and of one of these she could only think with sorrow. Michael too, for whom she would have made any sacrifice, she could not save from unhappiness. She could no longer give him all he desired.

Seeing that this was so, why should she wish that Norah should attach herself to perishable things? If it seemed strange that so young a girl should ask nothing of life, but be content to walk in quiet shadowed paths, yet was it not well with her? She had the peace of God, and Lady Anstruther sometimes envied her serenity. But she did not know that Norah too craved an earthly gift. The depth of her love for Michael was hidden even from his mother.

Michael had remained at Woodfield during the terrible time which followed Geoffrey's death. There was no one but himself to attend to all that was necessary. For him, the aspect of the world was suddenly changed. His boyhood was quite over now. He was a man in feeling as well as in years. The enchantment of youth, its hopefulness, and its pleasures seemed gone. Were his ambitions to be set aside also? Must he renounce the profession he had chosen and to which he was devoted, in

order to minister to the declining years of his parents and to attend to the estate? His very being cried out against it. At first there could be no question where his duty lay, and he followed it; but during the long winter weeks he grew more and more restless, and however he hid his feelings from Sir John and his mother, Norah could see he was longing to be gone.

With the death of his brother Mike's prospects were sufficiently changed to make him a far more desirable suitor for Beattie, but he shrank from putting this before the Swanningtons, or turning his brother's death to his own advantage. Still, he intended to go and see them again before very long, and if he were favourably received, to ask that the period of his waiting might be curtailed. Yet somehow since the shock of Geoffrey's death with all that followed it, his nerve had suffered, he had a discouraging premonition of failure; and when, being in town, he did call once, to find the drawing-room full of visitors, and Beattie not at home, he lost courage still further. Mrs. Swannington had little attention to spare for him and her politeness was somewhat frigid. His inquiries for Beattie showed him that she was not apparently pining for him. She was mentioned several times by others, and he learnt that she was the centre of attraction to a circle in which he had no part. He waited some time hoping she would return from the entertainment at which she was, but finally left without seeing her. Mrs. Swannington asked him how long he would be in town, and learning, regretted that they were engaged every day of his stay. Beattie, she said, would be sorry to miss him. But she did not tell Beattie he had called.

Aunt Ella knew Michael's position was improved, but she had taken rather a dislike to him since she had refused him for Beattie. Moreover, she hated gloom or undue seriousness, and it must be confessed that Michael, in his mourning black and with a rather miserable expression of countenance did not add to the general enlivenment and seemed rather out of place among the lively visitors, all acquainted with one another, and indulging in banter and light laughter. Mike was young enough to be somewhat intolerant of the surface aspect of society and he thought these people frivolous and shallow. His ideal of Beattie was such that he could not adapt her to these surroundings and he left feeling that she was farther out of his reach than ever.

When he returned to Woodfield he was more than usually quiet and grave. The Gilman boys declared that "old Mike had got awfully dull," and Norah noticed that he seemed to have lost hope and interest. He would not ask his parents to let him go. A dogged sense of duty kept him. But Norah spoke to her father about it, and he opened Lady Anstruther's eyes to the unconscious selfishness of which they were being guilty. A week later, at her wish, and with his father's consent he escaped like a bird from its cage.

In spite of the lower portion of his

body being paralysed, Sir John began to regain his general health. His intellect was still vigorous, and he became able to interest himself to some degree in the management of his property and such other matters as came under his attention. He read a good deal, and he had an attendant who was sufficiently well-educated to be something of a companion to him. Lady Anstruther, now that she was unable to do much visiting, found her friends came to her, unwilling to lose sight of one who, without being beautiful or in any way conspicuous, had yet by her charm and kindness and culture and a certain elegance both of appearance and manner been always welcome and always popular. Her maid had been with her for many years, and two or three times a week Norah Gilman always came to tell her news of the village, or to ask her advice, or to hear part of the letter which had come from Michael. Sometimes too she had one to show, for Mike during the autumn and winter had seen so much of Norah that it would have been strange if their intimacy could have stopped abruptly at his departure. He relied on Norah for truthful accounts of his parents' condition or for any home news which they would not be likely to give. Perhaps, he hoped too that sometimes he would hear about Beattie through her, but at this time there were no letters from Beattie to Norah, and the friendship between them did not seem to be progressing.

Nevertheless it was the hope of seeing Beattie Margetson which was chiefly before Norah as she prepared for her visit to London. Her first enthusiasm about her friend had naturally died a little during the period of absence and her absorption in other interests. Perhaps, too, she was somewhat disappointed that Beattie's correspondence had fallen off. She felt that she had not taken a strong enough hold of the girl for her interest in her to survive separation, and perhaps it was rather unreasonable to expect it. Norah was modest enough to think herself unlikely to be an absorbing person to the beautiful girl who had so many friends, but she was fond of Beattie at any rate, and almost her first question to Mrs. Gilman after their meeting was to inquire after her, and express a hope that she would see her soon. Mrs. Gilman laughed.

"You mustn't expect to see much of her, Norah," she said. "I don't. She is whirled about by Mrs. Swannington to entertainments of all descriptions and at all times, and all the young men are in love with her and all the young women envy her. And she is just as much a child as ever, I think, though they are doing their best to spoil her. I've asked one or two nice people to dinner next Tuesday, though, and they are coming, so you will be able to judge for yourself."

Among these "nice people" was Cecil Musgrave, whose portrait Mrs. Swannington had noticed when she visited Mrs. Gilman. It was curious that it was at her house Beattie met for the first time both Michael Anstruther and the man who was to be his rival.

(To be continued.)