

"Oh, no, Aunt Ella," Beattie said indignantly. "You are thinking of Rosie Sinclair."

"But—yes." Aunt Ella turned into her bed-room. "Well, I am glad you beat her in something."

Mrs. Swannington's remarks were quite without malice. She found it more interesting to pick faults in people than to praise them, but she meant no unkindness, and her deeds were so far better than her words, that, if she did not make a practice of doing good, at any rate she never voluntarily injured anybody, and, where she liked, she was generous to a degree, as her husband had good cause to know.

Mr. Swannington did not come home to luncheon. Generally Beattie had her early dinner at the school, where it could be obtained by girls who lived at a distance or whose parents did not care for them to come backwards and forwards twice. So that to Mrs. Swannington luncheon was a solitary meal and would have been a dull one, but for the fact that every morsel she ate and every sip she drank had a special bearing on her course of banting, which could be more deliberately undertaken now than when the appetites of others had to be considered, or demands in the way of conversation made upon her. Besides which she liked eating only less than dress, and at other meals she was constantly put in the way of temptation by some succulent but fat-forming dish. No one could measure her struggles in the matter of whipped cream, nor all it meant to her to pass it by. But at luncheon she positively forbade its appearance.

Beattie's presence to-day made little difference to her. For once the girl was not talkative. She was still feeling a little low-spirited at her parting from the other girls. So Aunt Ella ate her chicken and dry biscuits silently and deliberately. Presently she said—

"I do not drive again to-day, Beattie. I rest an hour and then I take my walk. I may perhaps call on Mrs. Gilman. You can come with me if you like; and then we will go on to Kensington and get you a walking costume. At Crabtree one dresses."

Beattie hated shopping, especially with Aunt Ella, who was very long in making a choice, and, as it seemed to the impatient girl, over-particular in matching; but she liked Mrs. Gilman and was glad to go and see her.

At four the two set forth. Aunt Ella proceeded very slowly, with short uneven steps, and it was a good thing for Beattie that her walk of the morning had taken away some of her usual energy, as otherwise she would have scarcely had patience at their scant progress. They had not very far to go. Aunt Ella, who measured her exercise as she weighed her food, knew exactly the distance. Mrs. Gilman was at home, but she was not in the drawing-room when her visitors were shown in.

Aunt Ella took out her pince-nez and looked about the room. She never allowed herself to be bored.

"There is nothing new," she said aloud. "How tired one gets of these

everlasting photographs. And Mrs. Gilman's friends are all so plain. Ah, there is a fresh likeness of Evelyn. That child will not be pretty. She has her father's nose. Yes, there is a new photograph. Well, that is a face I admire. Who is he, I wonder?" She seated herself in her usual attitude, one daintily-shod foot thrust a little forward, her hands on her lap, for she heard Mrs. Gilman approaching.

The door opened and a lady of about Aunt Ella's age entered the room. She was tall and slender and rather pretty. She seemed genuinely pleased to see Mrs. Swannington, and kissed Beattie warmly.

"Eva will be so glad you have come," she said. "I have just been out with her."

"You have had her photographed again, I see," said Mrs. Swannington. "It is very charming. She grows more like her father."

"Do you think so?" said Mrs. Gilman, looking pleased, and she fetched the photograph and handed it to her friend, who remarked—

"It is quite a little picture. For children I always find a lady-photographer more successful than a man. She has more sympathy. If I had children I would learn photography that I might myself take them. The best attitudes and expressions are not to be seen in the photographer's studio, but at home. Presently, you will see every mother will be her children's photographer."

"And every wife her husband's?" Mrs. Gilman asked laughing.

Mrs. Swannington raised both hands. The expressive French mannerism was natural to her and favoured the display of her charms.

"But—no!" she said, with a little scream of horror. "The world is too full of ugly men. But tell me, who is that in the carved frame? It is a face that interests me."

"That? Oh, he is a friend of Robin's, a barrister. He is extremely clever, and Robin thinks he will be a great man one day. He is only a little over thirty now, though he seems older. I think him very handsome."

"Without doubt," said Aunt Ella.

"I will ask you to meet him when next he dines here," said Mrs. Gilman. "And that reminds me. I want you to let Beattie spend the evening here next Tuesday. I have two or three people coming, all young, and I should so like to have Beattie. I am expecting a cousin to stay with me. She is coming to town for a day or two, and then we all go to Devonshire together."

"Beattie goes nowhere yet," said Aunt Ella. "It is but to-day her school broke up, and she will not come out till next season."

"But this is all so informal, dear Mrs. Swannington. And Norah and she would get on so well I am sure. Norah is very little older. How old are you, Beattie?"

"I am just seventeen," said Beattie.

"Do let me come, Aunt Ella."

"As you will. It is very kind of you, dear Mrs. Gilman. But are we not to

see little Eva? Beattie will be disappointed."

Mrs. Swannington did not care for children. But she never failed to show interest in them to their mothers. The bell was rung, and presently a little girl of about six appeared. When she saw Beattie she ran to her with a cry of pleasure for she was very fond of her, but she could hardly be persuaded to speak to the older lady. Tea being brought in, however, the attention of the latter was turned elsewhere.

"Very weak, and no milk. I dare not. And only one lump of sugar. Ah, my dear Mrs. Gilman, how I envy you that you are thin."

The two ladies now entered upon an interesting subject, for both were concerned in it. Mrs. Gilman was only one degree less anxious to be stouter than Mrs. Swannington to be thin. And Beattie and Eva were left to entertain each other. Eva was a dear little child, really pretty and very natural and bright. She told Beattie all about her new toys, for she had just had a birthday, and presently took her away to the nursery to show her some kittens.

"Beattie is a wonderfully sweet girl," said Mrs. Gilman. "She does great credit to your bringing up."

Mrs. Swannington shrugged her shoulders.

"I do not take much credit. She has a nice disposition, and I have left it alone. You will perhaps be shocked at me, but I have not patience with all the new notions on the training of girls. Was I trained? No. My dear mother was an admirable woman and she understood the world. She chose me a husband who was good-looking and amiable. *Enfin*. I am happy. I shall do the same for Beattie."

"But Beattie may have her own ideas," Mrs. Gilman ventured to suggest.

"Not at all. If I had made of her a clever woman, or let her go on studying, and so on till she was three years older, she might. Then she would have got ideals and such nonsense. Now she has none. As yet she prefers the society of schoolgirls to that of men. She is unconscious of her beauty. She has no romantic notions. I know what is for her happiness, and I shall act for her. She will marry whom I choose, and, believe me, after twelve years of marriage and of observation of other women's husbands, I can safely decide for Beattie."

Mrs. Gilman did not feel the matter was as simple as her visitor seemed to think. But she was sensible enough to refrain from expressing an opinion. She was not so worldly-wise as Mrs. Swannington, but neither was she so shallow. She could see that Beattie would not necessarily be satisfied with what would satisfy her aunt. Mr. Gilman always said that Mrs. Swannington had no soul. At any rate her cravings were entirely for such things as this world could satisfy. She asked little of her friends. If they were ill or dull she avoided them. If they took offence she found others. If they complained of her she was indifferent. Yet many people