

"Mike is coming home on Thursday to say good-bye," she said.

"So soon," exclaimed Norah, not very joyfully, for the parting which was to follow the meeting was in her thoughts.

"Yes, and for only a day or two," said Lady Anstruther.

Then she turned to Beattie. "You know Michael, I am told, Miss Margetson?"

"Oh yes," said Beattie. "But it is a long time since I have seen him. We were at the same seaside place the year before last, and we were a good deal together. He came back suddenly because you were ill. I have only met him once since then."

"I daresay you will find him changed. He was only a boy at that time."

Beattie laughed.

"I expect to me he would seem more like a boy now. When they are past seventeen girls are much older than boys of the same age, I think. I am sure young men of nineteen appear to me mere children."

"Men have their revenge, Miss Margetson," said Sir John. "A time comes when women of middle age would gladly be as young as men of the same years, I can tell you."

"I daresay," said Beattie nodding, and thinking of Aunt Ella who was beginning no longer to keep birthdays. "I always think myself growing old must be very disagreeable for a woman."

"Consider my feelings," said Lady Anstruther, pointing to her white hair. "I, you see, Miss Margetson, have got past the time when one's sensations on the subject are a matter of conjecture." "You don't seem old," said Beattie decidedly.

"I have a girl friend to keep me in touch with young people, you see. But I will tell you a secret, Miss Beattie. Youth does not have all the advantages of life, and elderly people who keep in sympathy with others and try to be unselfish, may have a young heart long after they are bald and wrinkled. It is the selfish old people whose age is troublesome to themselves and those about them. But Norah here will never bear to hear any old people spoken against. She loves them every one."

"I am sorry for their helplessness," said Norah gently. "I can as soon find fault with their deficiencies as with those of little children."

Sir John shook his head.

"They have had time to learn better," he said. "But it is a good thing the world has its Norahs, or who would have any pity for the tiresome old creatures who are no longer any use?"

Norah knew he was thinking of himself, and slid her hand into his. They were great friends now, he and she, and always sided together when there was anything to be discussed. It had also come to be a cause of secret amusement among the lookers-on that no one must find fault with one of them if the other were present. Geoffrey must not accuse Norah of being too proper, nor the rectory boys make fun of Sir John's peculiarities. Even when the girls had taken their leave, having promised to

dine at the Hall with Mr. Gilman on Friday, Lady Anstruther could not get her husband to agree with her that Norah was put in the shade by the beauty of her friend.

"Certainly she is a lovely girl," said Sir John. "and I daresay most young men would be more attracted to her at first. She has a winning manner too, and she seems singularly unaffected. But Mike is not quite ordinary in his tastes. He ought to be able to discern the points in which Norah is superior to her."

"I wish he would," said Lady Anstruther.

"Norah is more intellectual, she is deeper, and one can see her unselfishness in every action. Besides, she is free, and the other is bound."

"I suppose she is," said Lady Anstruther suddenly. "Did you notice dear, that she wore no engagement ring?"

Sir John was obliged to confess he had not observed these details.

"Perhaps the affair is still private. I don't think Norah even knows anything about it."

"Norah never tells secrets," said Sir John.

Lady Anstruther laughed. It was hard to believe that this piece of perfection was the "goody-goody chit" of not so very long ago.

"I should not be surprised," said Sir John, "supposing Mr. Michael marries at all, which I think rather unlikely, for he seems to value his liberty amazingly, if he brought home a bride from some out-of-the-way place and sprung her upon us. That is rather his way of doing things."

"I never tell secrets," said Lady Anstruther, "or I could put that notion out of your mind. But, poor boy, he is really too young to think of getting married at all, and if it hadn't been for this love affair of his I should never have thought of such a thing for years to come."

The time passed very pleasantly for Beattie. She was never bored and so did not complain of the dullness, although she wondered a little that Norah could settle down contentedly all the year round at such a place as Woodfield. Visiting the poor was a novelty to her, and the neat cottages with their open doors were a contrast to the slums on which Mrs. Swannington had laid her prohibition. Also human nature shows to advantage before young lady visitors, with open purses and ready sympathies. Beattie found everybody kind and amiable and charming, and was in high favour in the village. There was a sense of peace too in living for a while with those whose ideal of life was in tune with hers. There was no danger of Mr. Gilman or Norah making fun of her as Aunt Ella did, for striving after something better than the mere indulgence of her own tastes. Only Beattie began to perceive that an earnest life, whatever its rewards, must entail some sacrifice of popularity. She liked to please and be pleased. She gathered as she watched the life of Norah's father and noticed things he

said, that doing good did not necessarily bring thanks and praise but rather blame and criticism, and that being good was not only abstaining from evil but contending for that which is right. And she began dimly to understand that genuine religion was no mere sentiment, but a hard fight not only with oneself, which is comparatively easy, but with others which is nearly always hard. It meant swimming against the tide, it meant climbing up the hill, it meant walking along the thorny rather than the smooth way; above all, it meant to some extent, and perhaps its degree was a measure of its reality, loneliness. Sometimes, too, there came into her mind the saying, "Can two walk together unless they be agreed?" and doubts crept in about a future with a man who saw not these things as she did. But she put away her fears. "She did not know him as he was. Love would work such changes. When they were married he would let her have her way, and perhaps come to think as she did." And then the momentary misgiving would pass away into happy expectations.

Perhaps if Beattie had confided in Norah about herself and Cecil, Norah would have been led to tell Beattie that she too cared for some one. But though she was generally unreserved, in this matter the girl kept her own counsel; too many people already had associated her name with Mr. Musgrove's, and she felt that until there was something definite to tell it would be more delicate to refrain from speaking of him in connection with herself, though Norah's perceptions must be dull indeed if she did not gather that Beattie's interest in a person whom she so frequently spoke of was more than usually warm. For her part Norah had lived in an atmosphere so different from Beattie's that it was natural for her to hide in her heart that which pertained to her deeper feelings; to discuss her love affair as some girls do would have seemed to her almost like profaning something sacred. She was innately an idealist, and she elevated everything she touched in a way that those who have come much in contact with the realities of life find it almost impossible to understand.

She wondered that the whole of Friday passed without Mike coming to see them. It was true they were to go to the Hall in the evening, but that would not usually have deterred him from running down to inquire how they all were. She knew he had returned the previous afternoon, because Lady Anstruther had sent her maid with a message to Norah about something on Thursday evening. However, she supposed there were reasons, and she had learnt that which sometimes seems to be the great secret of getting through life, to wait. She little thought it was the presence of Beattie at the Rectory which kept Michael away.

Mike had not known she was staying with Norah, and nothing was further from his thoughts as he came home than the possibility of seeing her. He, like his mother, had often wondered that Norah had not mentioned Beattie's