

Keziah in Search of a Friend



By
NOEL HOPE

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KEZIAH IN SEARCH OF A FRIEND



"KEZIAH CROUCHES STILL LOWER IN THE CORNER,
SOBBING BITTERLY."

[A 151.]

KEZIAH IN SEARCH OF A FRIEND.

A Story for Schoolgirls.

BY
NOEL HOPE.

WITH A PREFACE BY
MRS. BRAMWELL BOOTH.

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PREFACE.

MANY among the young people who read this book will probably not even glance at the preface. I cannot, therefore, write anything for them; but I earnestly hope that those who are among my readers will not fail to grasp the truth that is so well revealed in this story—that the friendships and companionships of life go a very long way to make or mar the success of our lives. The characters of young people are very largely formed by the friends and companions with whom they associate.

Few young people realise how truly the responsibility for making helpful friendships is laid upon their own shoulders. Many are very ready in later years to blame their circumstances for the undesirable connexions into which they have drifted, but few remember how possible it would have been for them to turn their back upon hurtful company and seek out what was desirable.

In some rare cases, there may have been the necessity for a lonely walk, and for making the choice of companionships amongst the good people of the past, and nowadays this choice is open to most by means of biographies and books of various kinds, which are helpful to nobility of character. But as with people, so with books, it is most important to be careful in our choice.

Many of our young readers will, I have no doubt, feel that had they been in Keziah's place they would not have made the same mistakes as she did. They will probably think that, in the same circumstances, they could have done very much better.

If all such young folks would bear in mind that they *are* making the story of their own lives; if sometimes they would look back upon what they have been doing and saying, or—even better still—look forward to what they intend to do and say, and form a careful and impartial judgment upon it, I think they would be very much helped.

But let me remind my readers in closing that the greatest and most wonderful Friendship of the world is open to them each; a friendship which refines, ennobles, enriches, and inspires, and of which the dearest and truest earthly friendship is but the symbol. I mean the friendship to which the Saviour referred when He said: "Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."

Without and apart from this, they will find the friendships of earth unsatisfying and full of disappointment; but if, as they pass through life, their acquaintance with the "Friend that sticketh closer than a brother" ripens and deepens, then they will prove that—with this best of gifts—all things needful will be added.

I warmly welcome this little book. May God speed it on its way and make it a blessing!

FLORENCE E. BOOTH.

August, 1908.

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Keziah in Search of a Friend.

CHAPTER I.

KEZIAH THINKS SHE WOULD LIKE A FRIEND.

"KEZIAH, your father and I have decided to send you to Miss Peckham's school next Monday."

"Oh, mother!"

And Keziah is too much overcome to utter another word for full half a minute. To school! Though she is nearly eleven years old, she has not yet been to school.

"Is—is Miss Peckham *nice*, mother?" she says at last.

"I believe she takes a real interest in her girls, dear, and I'm sure she teaches them well. Of course, you will find school very different from learning lessons at home, but you'll get to like it after a time."

"And the girls, mother; did you see any of the girls?" almost gasps Keziah.

"Oh, yes, Miss Peckham took me to the schoolroom and I saw them at work. It is not a large school, you know; twenty girls, I should think. I thought they all looked busy and bright. There, dear, run away; I want to look over the list of the books you will need."

"Twenty girls!" thinks Keziah to herself. "Twenty bright, busy girls. I'm sure mother means that they all looked cleverer than me. I'm backward and slow, and have never been to school before. Oh, I'm sure—I'm *quite* sure they'll look down on me dreadfully! I must ask Ruth what she thinks about it."

And she runs into the little back garden, and calls "Ruth! Ruth!" over the low paling.

Ruth Golding lives next door, and seldom a day passes in which Keziah and she do not have a chat together. They have not known each other very long, for it is only quite lately that Keziah's parents left the country village, where Keziah was born, and came to live in this crowded suburb of the great city.

"Ruth, I want to speak to you most particularly; do come for a minute!"

A gentle-looking girl, slightly older than Keziah, appears in the next-door garden, and comes forward with a smile.

"Oh, Ruth, you've been to school, and I never have, and now mother's going to send me to Miss Peckham's school on Monday! And there are twenty girls. Oh, shan't I feel awful amongst them!"

"Why, dear?" asks quiet Ruth.

"Oh, they'll find out directly that I've never been to school before, and then they'll despise me."

"But when they see how determined you are to make up for lost time, they'll respect you very much."



"THEY'LL FIND OUT DIRECTLY, AND THEN THEY'LL
DESPISE ME."

"Do you think there will be any really nice girls among them? I've never had a sister, and I do so want a really nice friend; one I could tell *everything*, and love very much."

"I don't know about telling *every* thing to a friend, but if we truly love the Lord, it is easy to love all His creatures."

Ruth smiles a little sadly as she says the last words. She already loves Keziah very much, and had hoped Keziah would soon learn to love her. Now she sees only too plainly that her little neighbour holds very different ideas of what a girl-friend should be.

The-girls form a strong contrast as they stand on each side of the low paling, a gleam of wintry sunshine lighting up their faces.

Keziah's hair is not exactly curly, but it shows a great tendency to break free from the ribbon and tumble all over her round, good-humoured face. Her dress, too, is carelessly put on, and a long "jag" already appears in her pretty apron; she caught it in the key of the back door as she ran out.

Ruth's brown hair is smooth as satin, whilst her plain, dark-blue dress and Salvation Army "shield" brooch explain the hopeful, happy expression in her clear brown eyes. That hope and happiness are only seen in a face when the soul within is at peace with God.

But Keziah feels disappointed at her answer. "That's the worst of Ruth, she takes everything so solemnly," she thinks.

"Oh, of course, but I don't mean *that* sort of

love at all!" she says aloud. "I mean a friend who likes just the things that I do, and who will tell me everything, and listen to all I've got to say. But I can see you don't understand one bit what I mean. There, I can't stay—only I thought I'd just tell you," and she turns away, quite vexed.

"I do wish Ruth was a little more like other girls," she thinks. "Fancy answering in that way! I don't believe she ever had a girl-friend, or wanted to have one. She's always so quiet and serious. I suppose that's because she's a Salvationist.

"Now, let me see—what sort of friend should I like? Oh, one just like Ernestine in that book Mrs. Grey lent me. A lovely girl, with golden hair, and cheeks like wild roses, and sweet white hands. I do wish mother would let me finish that book. I can't think why she should take it away—just when I had reached the most exciting part too. I did so much want to know what Ernestine settled to do when the old miser died and left her all his money."

It is Saturday, and plenty of housework falls to Keziah's share; for the Greenes do most of their own work. But Keziah is so full of what Monday will bring forth, that she can scarcely fix her attention on anything. Even while she is dusting mother's best china ornaments in the little parlour, her thoughts are busy about Miss Peckham's girls and the friend she hopes to find among them.

Keziah is the only girl in her family. She has

two brothers: Jack, who is several years older than herself, and baby Bennie.

She loves them both dearly, and as for father and mother—surely they are the best parents in the world!

But then Jack is a boy, and rather too old to understand her; besides, he has so many interests and amusements of his own. Bennie is just a baby, and father and mother are generally too busy to listen to her chatter. Oh, for a friend who will hear all she has to say! Yes, she does need a friend so badly!

Father and Jack come in to dinner, and directly the meal is over Jack goes to work to tidy the back garden. Keziah watches him digging the tiny beds, and sweeping the gravel path.

"Jack used to go to school," she thinks. "I wonder whether *he* ever had a friend—I wonder whether he thought school horrid at first?"

And she runs down the path, and stands beside him.

"I'm going to school on Monday," she says.

"So I heard; now don't stand there, whatever you do—can't you see how you're spoiling the corner of that bed? Look here, 'Ziah, if you've nothing to do, you might catch hold of the end of this line—I do like the edges of my walks straight, none of your crooked ways for me."

Keziah takes the end of the measuring line obediently; then she begins again.

"Did you like school, Jack?"

"No; that is, fairly—just look how you're holding that line—crooked as a dog's hind leg!"

"But did you make any friends among the boys, Jack—did you make one special friend, who said that he liked you better than anyone else?"

"Goodness me, of course not! Fancy a fellow saying such a thing as that—why, that's the way girls talk; silly nonsense, I call it."

Keziah is silent. Jack does not understand a bit better than Ruth, that is evident. Then she remembers that mother once had a school-friend.

"How stupid of me to forget that! Of course, a real friend. They were at school together, and they've been friends all their lives, and I know that Mrs. Richards—yes, that's the name—writes to mother still, although she's married, and has gone to live in Australia."

Keziah gets no opportunity of speaking to mother until Mrs. Greene comes to kiss her little daughter good-night.

"Mother," she whispers, her arms folded close about her mother's neck, "you had a real school-friend, hadn't you? Do tell me—what was she like?"

"Do you mean Mrs. Richards, who used then to be Fanny Dixon. Oh, she was a dear little soul—we were friends from the very first day."

"Were you afraid to speak to her—just to begin with, I mean?"

"Afraid of poor little Fanny? Certainly not; but she was very afraid of me. You see, Fanny was backward and shy, and her frocks shabby and poor-looking, and the fact is, the other girls used to tease her dreadfully. I thought it a shame to worry her so, and told them so, pretty plainly;

especially one day, I remember, when they had tormented her into a fit of sobbing. She was so grateful to me for taking her part."

"Then she wasn't pretty, or anything?" says Keziah, feeling quite disappointed.

"Pretty? Oh, dear no! She had straight, sandy hair, and weak eyes; everything seemed a trouble to her somehow. I used to help her with her lessons a good deal; but she never took a prize all the time she was at school. It's wonderful to think of, for she is quite a clever woman now."

"Sandy-haired, weak-eyed, stupid—oh, no, I could never, never care for such a friend as *that!*" thinks Keziah, and she shakes her head as she lays it on her pillow. "My friend must be ever so nice, ever so clever—the very sweetest girl in the whole school."

CHAPTER II.

ROSALIE THORNE.

THE fateful Monday arrives, and here is Keziah on her way to school, her new books packed in a brand new satchel and slung over her shoulder. How nervous she feels, and yet how important!

She meets a neighbour, and holds up her head. "Mrs. Grey can see that I'm going to a *good* school," she thinks; she meets a smartly-dressed girl of about her own age, and quakes inwardly. "Oh, dear, if that girl is one of Miss Peckham's, I'm sure she'll think me very stupid indeed!"

She arrives at the school; a private house, with some evergreens in front, and a brass plate on the gate: "Peckham House. School for Young Ladies."

She reads this over two or three times, and then, summoning all her courage, opens the gate gently and passes in.

A short gravel-walk leading to the house-door, where there is a porch, and two or three girls stand just outside laughing and chattering together. Directly they catch sight of Keziah they all stop talking, and, turning round, stare at her fixedly.

This is dreadful ! Keziah tries to look as though she does not care ; but her face gets redder and hotter every minute, and, in turning the corner of the path, she stumbles over an ornamental stone vase, and nearly falls.

One girl bursts into a loud laugh, and the others titter ; then somebody says :

“ Do be quiet ; it’s a shame to laugh at a new girl ! ”

Keziah looks up gratefully at the speaker. “ What a sweet girl she is ! ” she thinks. “ What lovely fair hair, and how *kind* of her to say that ! ”

A little crowd of girls come hurrying in. Keziah is swept along with them into the hall ; another minute, and she has forgotten everything but the awful fact that Miss Peckham herself has taken her by the hand, and is leading her into the schoolroom.

* * *

“ What is your name ? ”

Keziah looks up from her book with a quick thrill of surprise.

The pretty, fair-haired girl, who interfered when some of the girls laughed at her this morning, has crossed over from her desk near the fire, and is actually sitting on the form beside her.

“ Come, put down that old book ; we never work at lunch-time. I see you don’t go home to lunch—nor do I. What chats we shall have together ! ” and the fair-haired girl laughs sweetly.

The morning’s work has been a sad trial to Keziah. Miss Peckham is patient, but very strict ; and, then, she seems to expect so much.

Simple, home-taught Keziah is quite bewildered at the number of things she has been told to learn, and she is struggling to get some sort of an idea of her day's work, when the sweet voice of her school-fellow interrupts her.

"You haven't told me your name, you know," says the other, still smiling.

"Keziah Greene."

"Goodness me, how frightful! I can never, never call you that. My name is Rosalie Thorne."

"How very pretty! and—and it's just like you," says Keziah timidly, glancing up at the wavy, fair hair, and soft, pink cheeks, with deep admiration in her own honest eyes—and to herself she thinks, "Oh, she's exactly like Ernestine in that lovely book Mrs. Grey lent me."

"Well, Keziah isn't like you, I'm sure. Haven't you brought any lunch?"

Keziah produces some slices of brown bread and butter and two or three apples from the depths of her satchel.

"What nice applies!" and Rosalie picks up one. "I do *love* apples."

"Oh, please take one. These apples came from the country village where we used to live."

"The country—did you live in the country? Oh, you lucky girl!"

"You like birds and flowers! Oh, so do I! Do you like flowers?" asks Keziah eagerly; and to herself she thinks, "This is exactly the sort of girl I should like for a friend—only she's much too perfect, I'm afraid, to care for such a stupid girl as me."

"Flowers? I just *love* them!"

(She had said the same thing about the apples, but Keziah does not notice that.)

"Then I'll bring you some to-morrow. You'll let me bring you some?"

"You silly girl, of course I will! You are funny!" and Rosalie laughs merrily.

For some months past Keziah has been carefully tending several pots of hyacinths. Week by week she has watched the green shoots expanding into stalk, and leaf, and flower. Yesterday three of the most forward flower-spikes unclosed their waxen bells, greatly to her delight. They are great treasures in her eyes, but nothing would be too good for Rosalie.

The lunch-hour passes quickly; she can hardly believe her ears when the clock strikes two, and the girls who go home to dinner come trooping in for afternoon school.

"Oh, dear, it's two already, and I've hardly looked at one of my books!" she cries in dismay.

"Of course not. How funny to think you ought to work at lunch time! I wouldn't do such a thing for anybody. Well, I must fetch my music," and Rosalie trips away.

"How beautifully she plays the piano!" thinks Keziah, as she watches Rosalie's quick little fingers flying over the keys, "and she's six months younger than I. How lovely her hair is, so wavy and light, and yet quite neat. I wonder if she'll like my pink hyacinth the best? I wonder—oh, how I wonder if she will let me be her *real* friend!"

"Keziah Greene, let me hear you repeat your geography lesson."

Poor Keziah starts violently and makes a snatch at her book. She can hardly repeat ten words correctly.

Miss Peckham is still patient, but several degrees sterner than before.

"You really must keep your attention fixed on your work," she says, and there is a warning note in her voice which fills Keziah with fear.

For the rest of that afternoon at least she does work hard, and even Rosalie is forgotten.

"Oh, Ruth, I've got to know the dearest girl!" cries Keziah that evening, when Ruth calls in to hear how the first day at school has been spent.

"You can have no idea how sweet she is! She wouldn't let the other girls laugh at me, and she plays the piano, and is ever so clever. And she came and sat beside me and asked my name, and her name's Rosalie—isn't that lovely? And she said 'Keziah' wasn't a nice enough name for me, and I do believe we shall be real friends!"

"And how do you like school-work, dear?" asks Ruth, quietly.

"Oh, that's horrid, of course, but Rosalie says I shan't mind it after a time; we walked home together—she has to come as far up my road as Tatton Park Avenue—and she said I was very silly to worry myself so because Miss Peckham looked cross——"

"Did Miss Peckham look cross?"

"Yes, just a little. I hadn't learnt all she told

me; but, then, to do that I should have been obliged to work part of the lunch-hour, and Rosalie says she never does that."

"Most likely she has been to school regularly for years, whilst you have such a lot to make up. Keziah, dear, if I were you I wouldn't talk much to anyone, even in the lunch-hour, until I could take my place in the class with girls of my own age."

"Well, Rosalie says I ought to talk; she says I've evidently had a dreadfully dull life, not a bit like other girls. And I must learn to play the piano, nobody thinks anything of girls who can't play."

"But just think, dear. Of what use would that be to you? You're not particularly fond of music, you have no time to learn, and Mrs. Greene has no piano."

"I see you mean to be horrid, and find fault with everything I say. It's very unkind of you, Ruth—when I come home so happy, too. I do believe you're not a bit pleased that I've found a dear, sweet, delightful friend the very first day!"

"Now don't misunderstand me, Keziah, dear; I mean that you will need all your spare moments in which to catch up to the other girls in the class——"

But Keziah tosses her head, and walks off without another word.

The next morning, however, Keziah feels just a touch of regret as she slips a pen-knife through the juicy stalks of her long-cherished hyacinths. How she has watched and waited for their beauty

to unfold! But for Rosalie—nothing can be too good for her!

“I wonder if she’ll like the pink one best, its bells look exactly like soft pink wax; but then the blue hyacinth has the sweetest scent, and the white flowers are so big; I’m sure she *must* be pleased to have them!”

She hurries down the road, and waits at the turning leading to Rosalie’s house fully ten minutes, fidgety and nervous.

“How silly of me—she must have gone on!” and she runs all the way to the school, arriving quite out of breath.

Several girls are standing about, but no Rosalie; never mind, it is quite early yet.

More girls arrive; they are passing into the schoolroom now.

They have all gone in, and nine o’clock is striking! Oh, can Rosalie be ill?

What can she do? She dare not stay any longer; the girls will tell Miss Peckham. One more look and she must go in.

Breathless with excitement she runs back to the road. She sees in the distance a scarlet coat and a big black hat.

“Rosalie!” she cries, running towards her friend, “Oh, Rosalie, how late you are! I’ve been waiting ever so long to give you these hyacinths—look, aren’t they pretty? I grew them myself.”

“Yes, they’re very nice. But how silly of you to wait! Miss Peckham is sure to notice it more if two of us come in late together!”



“AREN'T THEY PRETTY! I GREW THEM MYSELF.”

And Rosalie hurries in without another word, she has scarcely noticed the precious hyacinths at all.

"Fifteen minutes late, young ladies!"

Keziah hears the sharp tones ring out, but she can hardly see Miss Peckham's stern face, for her eyes are misty with tears; tears of bitter disappointment.

"A late mark, Rosalie Thorne. Keziah Greene, this is a very bad beginning indeed. Don't let it occur again."

Rosalie goes to her place quite calmly, but Keziah feels burning hot all over.

"She's really angry this time. Oh, dear, oh, dear, what shall I do?"

A big tear rolls down her cheek and falls on the open page of her book. She wipes it hastily away, and tries to go on with her lesson; but her mind is in such a whirl she can make sense of nothing.

Presently, she steals a glance at Rosalie. She is working away, as sweet and unruffled as ever, whilst the hyacinths lie on her desk in the full glare of a hot fire. They will be quite spoilt by lunch-time.

"Oh, how silly I was to bring them; how silly I was to wait!" she thinks. "But, at least, I will *never* be late for school again!"

Lunch-time, however, brings Rosalie to her side of the room once more.

"Well, Kessie—I shall call you Kessie, I really *can't* say Keziah—how are you getting on? I saw that you were awfully upset when Miss

Peckham spoke so sharply; you're very stupid to care so much; she doesn't mean it one bit, only, of course, she must talk like that, especially as you're a new girl. Dear me, what large shoes you wear, and how muddy they are! Look at mine," and she sticks out a neat little shoe, without a mud-stain on it, and gives a gay little laugh. "You must be very strong to have such large hands and feet," she adds.

"I am strong," answers Keziah shortly; in spite of her admiration, she does not quite like this.

"Oh, how I wish I was!" sighs Rosalie. "I get *so* tired—even carrying my school-books quite wears me out—that is the reason why I'm so late sometimes."

Keziah's warm heart melts at once.

"How I should like to carry them for you, their weight would be nothing to me. Couldn't I meet you at Tatton Park Avenue every morning—you turn up there, and I have to pass the corner?"

"That *would* be nice! What a dear old thing you are!" and Rosalie puts her arm affectionately round Keziah's waist.

And the geography lesson? Well, that is neglected again. How can she take up a dull book whilst Rosalie Thorne is sitting beside her?

That evening when quiet little Ruth calls in to see how Keziah is getting on with her new duties she is met with a burst of joy and triumph.

"We are to be *friends*, Ruth, real friends, for all the rest of our lives! Fancy her caring to

have me for a friend! Oh, Ruth, she is such a dear, dear girl; you can't think how sweetly she came and comforted me to-day."

"Why, what was wrong?"

"Well, I was rather late this morning, and Miss Peckham was cross. Rosalie says she doesn't mean half she says, so it's all right."

"Late? Surely it didn't take you half an hour to walk down the road?"

"Oh, no; there was something else I wanted to do," answers Keziah hurriedly. "And she says I'm so strong—fancy, it makes her so tired to carry her school-books that she's late nearly every morning!"

"So you offered to carry them, I suppose?"

"Of course I did! I'm to meet her on the road."

"It's to be hoped that waiting to carry her books won't make *you* late every morning."

"I can see one thing very plainly," exclaims Keziah, angrily, "you dislike the idea of Rosalie being my friend at all!"

"I dislike the idea of anything which keeps you from your work, dear. You know I overheard your father tell mine that this school is really more expensive than he can well afford."

"Oh, yes, I know; but I've heard you say dozens of times that we ought to help one another," Keziah replies.

"Certainly, dear; but not at the expense of a plain duty. Come, Keziah, don't let us quarrel. Show me your lessons for to-night. I thought that perhaps I could help you to prepare them."

Keziah says nothing to Ruth about her promise to Rosalie. Somehow she feels quite sure that Ruth would not approve.

"But that's only because Ruth does not know Rosalie," she argues to herself. "She has no idea how *sweet* Rosalie is, she thinks her just like other girls—like Maggie, and Margie, and Doris, and the rest; she doesn't know how easily Rosalie gets tired, how delicate she has always been; why, she told me yesterday that her mother had been obliged, twice over, to call in three doctors to her, and I've never been really ill in my life! I *ought* to help her, that's certain.

"Ruth doesn't mean to be unkind, of course; she does not understand Rosalie, that's all. But I do, and she's *my* friend—my very dearest, dearest friend. Oh, how happy I am!"

CHAPTER III.

IN DISGRACE.

NEXT morning, however, Keziah is not quite so happy when, on arriving at the corner of Park Road there is no Rosalie in sight. She fidgets up and down restlessly for ten minutes or so, and then Rosalie appears, smiling and placid as usual.

"Oh, Kessie, how kind of you!" she sighs, as Keziah takes her books, rather silently. "Ah! how nice it is to get rid of the horrid things!"

Keziah had quite prepared herself to tell Rosalie that she must keep better time, but she has not the heart to say anything when she sees her companion's gratitude, and soon the pair are chatting away quite gaily.

They talk about their homes, and the books they have read, and the things they like best, and presently Rosalie asks if Keziah has any brothers.

"Oh, yes, I've two. Jack, he's quite old, you know; that is, he's left school and goes to work, and then there's little Bennie, our baby."

"A baby-brother! Oh, how lovely! A dear, dear little baby-brother! I should want to kiss

him all day long if I were you. Don't you just love him too much for anything?"

"Yes, I love him very much," answers Keziah, feeling rather ashamed of herself, for she remembers how cross she got with baby only yesterday.

"Rosalie would love Bennie much better than I do. Rosalie wouldn't get impatient when he is tiresome," she thinks to herself.

"Oh, why haven't I a dear baby-brother? I've no one—no brothers or sisters to love me at all," sighs Rosalie, so plaintively that Keziah's warm heart is deeply touched. A bright flush rises to her cheeks as she lays her free hand on Rosalie's arm.

"Oh, Rosalie, if you'll let me I'll love you, I'll be a real true friend to you always and always!" she says it so earnestly that her eyes fill with tears.

"You dear, solemn old thing—how serious you look!" cries Rosalie, breaking into a peal of merry laughter.

Keziah cannot help feeling disappointed at her answer.

Miss Peckham looks at the pair rather severely; but they are only five minutes late this time and she says nothing.

Several days pass uneventfully. Ruth helps Keziah prepare her lessons every night, but hears very little more about the new friend. Indeed, Keziah is afraid that Ruth will find out that Rosalie is making her late every morning.

"Oh, if you'll only wait for me to-morrow,

I'll be sure to be ever so early," so Rosalie promises every afternoon; but she always fails to keep her word, just smiles as sweetly as ever, and has a fresh excuse for every day.

Miss Peckham is always stern now. Neither kind words nor good marks fall to Keziah's share, and this troubles her. But she tries to console herself with thinking, "Rosalie is my friend, and I *must* help her!"

One afternoon Miss Peckham announces that two school-inspectors are to visit the school next day. "And, young ladies, I need not remind you how important it is that you should all be in your places before they arrive. Any girl entering the schoolroom after nine o'clock will receive a bad mark, and thus lose all chance of a prize at the end of the half-year."

"Rosalie," says Keziah, as the pair walk home together, "do let me call at your house for the books to-morrow, I am so frightened at the idea of being late. You heard what Miss Peckham said."

"Call at my house? Oh, no, I couldn't think of bringing you out of your way like that."

"But I don't mind a bit, and I could help you to get ready; it wouldn't make any difference to me, I'm always up early in the morning."

"Oh, I couldn't think of it!" repeats Rosalie, shaking her head until her curls dance again. "Of course, if it's a trouble to you, I can carry my books myself."

"But it isn't a trouble. I love doing it, only——"

"Only Miss Peckham is a cross old fidget!" she cries with a sharp little twang in her voice, which Keziah has not heard before. "There, Kessie, I can see you feel you would rather not carry the books. I'll bring them myself. I daresay I shan't find them very heavy; I daresay I shan't be *very* tired," and she sighs deeply.

"Oh, Rosalie, you know I didn't mean that! You know quite well——"

"Of course you're tired of carrying them; you've been very kind, and I'm selfish, I suppose. You can't be expected to know how tired I get, how my arms ache, how lonely I am, with no brothers and sisters to love me!"

"Oh, Rosalie, don't!" cries Keziah in great distress. "I couldn't, wouldn't let you carry them for *anything*! I'll wait for you as usual, of course, only I do feel anxious that we should be in good time."

"Poor, dear old Kessie, how worried you look! Good-bye; it'll be all right, you'll see."

And Rosalie runs away laughing.

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No Rosalie again! This is too bad. What shall she do?

For five, ten, fifteen minutes, Keziah stands waiting at the meeting-place miserable and uncertain. Can anything have happened to prevent her coming? Surely, surely she would not be late, after their talk of yesterday if nothing were the matter?

Perhaps she is ill; hadn't she better run up to her house and inquire?

Then she remembers how Rosalie seemed to dislike the idea of her calling.

"If there is nothing the matter after all, she'd be so vexed with me. Oh, dear, what shall I do?"

Rosalie at last. Keziah runs forward to meet her.

"Quick, quick! give me the books; it's past nine already. Oh, Rosalie, why, why are you so late?"

"Late! is it late? I didn't know; are you sure?"

"Yes, yes! it struck nine five minutes ago. Oh, make haste!"

"Then our clock must be wrong. I'm sure it wanted ten minutes to the hour when I left. Why, Kessie, what a state you're in! It's all nonsense about these inspectors; they never come until long after they say they will. No, I *can't* run; indeed, I *can't*! My head always aches directly, and mother said I was not to do it."

Anxious as she is, loyal Keziah slackens her pace at once.

Rosalie is never a quick walker, but this morning she seems slower than usual to poor, impatient Keziah. It is fully twenty minutes past the hour when at last they reach the school.

Keziah flings off her hat and jacket in desperate haste, runs to the schoolroom door, and stops short.

There are voices within, strange voices; her heart sinks like lead; the inspectors are already there! What shall she do? Go in, or—she stands hesitating, with one hand on the door-knob.

"Come away!" whispers Rosalie, in muffled tones, behind her. "Miss Peckham will be dreadfully annoyed if we push in among the girls just now. Better wait in the room where we hang our hats until they've gone."

"Oh, don't you think she would rather have us go in?"

"No, no! see what a fuss it would make. Besides—there, let's sit on this shoe-box—besides, she won't know exactly how long we have been here, and we can say we got here directly after the inspectors, and were afraid to come in."

Keziah raises her head in surprise, and, for a moment, just a tiny doubt about her friend shows itself in the fixed expression of her honest grey eyes.

"That wouldn't be the truth," she says gravely.

"I don't know about that; perhaps we did."

There is silence for a few minutes, then Keziah says:

"I wish we'd gone in."

"Oh, no, no, no! I couldn't; just think how those dreadful inspectors would stare at us!"

Again there is silence. Keziah is too thoroughly anxious and uncomfortable to talk, and sits listening to the distant murmuring voices from the schoolroom. At last there is the click of a door, and the voices become suddenly louder; the visit is over.

"Come, Kessie, now's our time to slip in whilst Miss Peckham is talking to them in the other room, make haste!"

And away Rosalie darts, followed by Keziah, who feels more miserable and uncomfortable than before.

"Oh, won't you catch it!" cry a chorus of voices, as they enter the room. "Miss Peckham saw you through the window. Where have you been all this time?"

And they do catch it; Miss Peckham is really, thoroughly angry.

"You have disgraced yourselves; you have disgraced *me*. I could give no reason for your absence, for there was no reason. You are a couple of careless, disobedient girls, and I shall feel it my duty to speak to your parents! You, Rosalie Thorne——" here Rosalie bursts into loud sobs. "You, Rosalie Thorne——" repeats Miss Peckham; but she can get no farther, for Rosalie's sobs rise into perfect shrieks. Miss Peckham is obliged to take her into the next room, and dab her forehead with vinegar and water before she can quiet her at all.

Keziah does not sob. She is far too wretched for that.

By lunch-time Rosalie has quite recovered, and is gay and smiling as ever, but Miss Peckham's words have sunk deeply into Keziah's mind.

"You have disgraced yourself; I must speak to your parents." Does that mean that she will be expelled? Oh, what will father and mother say? The same dreary thoughts torment her all the morning, and when lunch-time comes at last, she sits with drooping head and clasped hands, too sad to eat or talk.

"Oh, Kessie, don't look so miserable. I'm so sorry, for I suppose it really was my fault," and Rosalie's soft little hand is slipped into hers. "Are you very, very cross with me? Ah, now you'll never want to carry my books any more!"

Keziah cannot resist the pleading voice, and all the little doubts which had crept into her mind against her friend vanish away.

"Oh, yes, I will. Indeed, I'm not cross, only it's very dreadful to have Miss Peckham speak like that, isn't it?"

"Disagreeable old thing! Never mind, she'll forget all about it in a day or two."

Keziah lies awake long that night, too troubled to sleep. The events of the day refuse to be banished from her mind.

What will Miss Peckham say to her father? Oh, how hard, how very hard she will work in the future if Miss Peckham will only give her another chance! At length she forgets her troubles in sleep.

CHAPTER IV.

TROUBLE.

WHAT is that? Keziah starts up in bed. It is broad daylight, and some one is knocking loudly at her door.

"Keziah, Keziah!" calls her father's voice. She springs out of bed in alarm.

"Yes, yes. Oh, father, what is the matter?"

"Little Bennie is ill, dear—very ill. Dress as quickly as you can and get your mother a cup of tea. She has been up all night, and is quite worn out. I must hurry away; I shall be late already. The doctor will be here soon, I hope; I shall call at his house on my way to the station."

"Little Bennie! Oh, father!"

"You cannot go to school to-day; mother must not be left alone. I'll arrange about to-morrow. Good-bye little girl, it'll be a sad day for you, I fear."

But Keziah does not hear the last words; she is thinking.

"Not to go to school, and Miss Peckham so angry already. Oh, dear, and I meant to work so hard to-day; to take such pains. What shall I do? I'm afraid I've been very, very silly."

Suddenly she remembers that Rosalie will expect to find her at the corner of Park Road as usual. This fresh trouble drives all the others out of her head.

"Suppose *she* comes early this time, and waits, and waits for me! She knows how dreadfully put out I was yesterday. Will she think that I am vexed with her, and won't come? If she does I know she'll cry and sob; she can't bear unkindness, and she'll think I am very unkind; that I don't love her at all!"

Keziah is almost crying herself at the thought. The closing of the street-door rouses her.

"There's father, gone without his breakfast. How horrid everything is!"

She kneels down for a few moments, but troubled thoughts about her girl-friend come between her and all heartfelt prayer.

Keziah's prayers are like herself, hot and impulsive at one time, careless and indifferent at another. She knows nothing of the comfort and strength of steady, persistent prayer.

Sometimes she takes great pleasure in repeating the pretty hymns her mother has taught her, and then she feels what a beautiful thing it would be to follow Jesus always, and how lovely Heaven must be, and the great white angels with their golden harps; but all this has no lasting effect on her mind. Any little extra excitement drives away her interest, and then her prayers are said quite thoughtlessly; the words fall from her lips; but her thoughts are busy elsewhere.

Keziah would be very much shocked if anyone

put all this before her in plain words. But it is so. As yet no real, lasting change has taken place in her heart.

Little wonder, then, that she rises from her knees this morning without a scrap of added strength, and with the load of her many anxieties still heavy upon her.

"Oh," she murmurs, "Rosalie will think I'm not her friend at all—she'll think I've done it on purpose! And I do believe she was really beginning to love me. It's *cruel* that all this should have happened just now—it is—it is!"

Poor Keziah, she has almost forgotten her Friend in Heaven.

Of course, the kitchen fire will not light for ever so long, and then the kettle will not boil, and she cannot find the teapot. At last, however, she has a cup of hot tea ready, and carries it upstairs.

Outside mother's door she pauses for a moment; not a sound to be heard; she opens the door very gently and peeps in. Mother is lying dressed upon the bed, beside baby's cot. The room is quite still.

She creeps to mother's side, and touches her gently. Mrs. Greene starts up.

"What—what is it? Oh! I must have fallen asleep. Has the doctor come?"

Keziah shakes her head, and shows her the cup.

"Some tea? My dear, thoughtful girl. Oh, we have had such a night. Poor, poor little Bennie! See, how quiet he lies now, precious darling; he is quite worn out. Oh, when will the doctor come!"

"Father said he would be here soon," whispers Keziah, quite awe-struck; she has never seen mother like this before. Bennie must be very, very ill.

She moves softly round the bed and bends over the cot where her baby-brother lies, and, young as she is, she sees a change in the weary little face which frightens her, and makes her forget even Rosalie for a time.

"I daren't leave him for a minute," whispers mother, watching her; "those dreadful fits may come on again at any moment. You must do the best you can downstairs without me; there are all the clothes to fold and mangle; do what you can, dear! I cannot leave baby."

Keziah kisses her mother gently, and leaves the room in silence. Presently the doctor comes.

Keziah waits until he has gone, and then steals, pale and anxious, back to mother's room again.

Mother looks even sadder than before. "Bennie is very, very ill, dear," is all she says. As Keziah closes the door she hears just one stifled sob.

A dreadful thought flashes into her mind: Is dear little Bennie going to die? Oh, that would be too terrible! She turns cold at the bare idea.

Returning to the kitchen she remembers that she has had no breakfast. So she drinks a cup of half-cold tea, and cuts a thick slice of bread and butter.

How unlike it all is to her dear bright little home! Yesterday's ashes scattered all over the dusty grate, a big pile of rough-dried clothes

waiting to be folded and mangled, last night's supper plates unwashed, the floor unswept.

She glances up at the clock. Ten minutes to nine; just the time she should meet Rosalie. Ah! how sorry she would be if she knew of this dreadful trouble!

"How she would pity me; how she would comfort me. She is so sweet and dear and good!"

Keziah's heart quite warms again at the thought of all Rosalie would say to her if she only knew.

She packs up her tea-cup and plate, and is just wondering what to do first, when there comes a gentle knock at the street door.

Opening it, she sees Ruth Golding, with a big apron hanging over one arm.

"Keziah, dear, I've called to see if I can't help you a little. My mother spoke to the doctor as he left your door, so we know all about it. Oh, Keziah, I'm so very, very sorry! I do pray that God will comfort you, and take all this trouble away very soon!" and, much to Keziah's surprise, Ruth throws her arms around her neck, and kisses her.

Keziah returns the kiss, but her thoughts have flown back to Rosalie again, and she thinks—"If even Ruth is so sorry for me, what will Rosalie be when she hears all about my trouble?"

What a change busy little Ruth makes in that uncomfortable kitchen in a short time! For she sets to work at once. She sweeps and dusts, folds and mangles. She makes a big kettle of water hot and sets Keziah to wash the plates and cups, whilst she gives the grate a thorough polish.

The kitchen soon looks as it should again, and Keziah feels better for the companionship and comfort.

"Ruth is very good!" she says, thoughtfully watching her; "but, oh, I shall see Rosalie to-morrow!"

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"So here you are at *last*, Keziah! Well, I do think you might have let me know you weren't coming yesterday! I waited for you ever so long."

It is thus that Rosalie greets her, as they meet inside the school-gate next morning.

"Oh, Rosalie, haven't you heard? Mother wrote to Miss Peckham, I know. We're in such dreadful trouble, our darling little Bennie is dangerously ill, the doctor says so, and he came twice yesterday, and mother sits up all night, and—and I do believe he's going to die!" and poor Keziah bursts into a flood of tears.

They have been pent up within her ever since her father awakened her with the sad news yesterday morning.

Keziah is not one of those girls whose tears flow easily, but just now her heart is sore indeed. Yet even as she sobs, she is thinking, "Ah! how sweet it will be to have Rosalie comfort me, she will see now how dreadful it all is!"

"Oh, dear, I am sorry. Well, don't cry so, I expect he'll soon be all right, I have been given up by the doctors three times myself. There, there, don't cry so, Kessie, you'll make your eyes quite red, you know."

Keziah looks up. Is *this* all the comfort Rosalie means to give her? No—no, she does not understand, yet, that's all.

"It's my baby-brother—the little brother you said you would love so. Oh, he's so changed! You would hardly know his pretty little face, now so white and drawn. And mother sits upstairs with him day and night, and yesterday I heard her sobbing——"

"Of course. My mother always cries when I'm ill. I expect you're not so used to illnesses as we are at our house. Well, I'm glad I did it now," she adds, after a short pause.

"Glad!" echoes Keziah, quite bewildered. How can Rosalie be glad whilst she is in such trouble?

"Yes; two new girls came yesterday, Dolly and Mary Smith. They're ever so nice, and, besides, they live up my road, so I've promised to walk to school with them every morning. You see, you never *really* liked carrying my books, and Dolly makes nothing of it. I told her it was a trouble to you, and as you didn't come yesterday, we settled it all. They're perfect loves of girls! Not your sort at all; but I daresay they'll like you when they get to know you!"

Poor Keziah! This is the friend she had looked to for comfort; the friend who was to make up for all her troubles!

Rosalie chatters on without waiting for an answer to anything she says, which is fortunate, for just now Keziah could not utter a single word; she feels half-choked.

How perpetually Rosalie has been in her thoughts during the last fortnight—how she has striven to please her in every way—how hard she has tried to win her love, even at the risk of displeasing her teacher and being expelled from the school! And all this is to count for nothing; she is to be put aside for the first new face. It is a bitter experience.

She thinks presently of the sorrow she has left in her home; of mother's sobs, and Bennie's white little face, and then she looks across the room to where Rosalie sits, smiling, bright-eyed, and gay as ever.

"She never cared for me, no, she never cared for me at all," and Keziah bends her head over her work, that the other girls may not see the great tears stealing down her cheeks.

Miss Peckham comes to her during the morning and speaks quite kindly, expressing sorrow for the trouble in her home. "Even *she* seems more sorry than Rosalie," thinks poor Keziah.

One or two girls speak to her at lunch-time; but Rosalie seems quite absorbed in her new friends; it is not until school is over that she speaks to her again, and then it is only—

"Well, good-bye, Kessie. I hope your brother will soon be better," and she trips away gaily with her new companions.

Keziah watches them, laughing and talking together. "Oh," she thinks, "how wrongly I have acted, how silly I have been!" And she turns homeward with a heavy heart. She is almost afraid to go in—if baby should be worse!



"KEZIAH WATCHES THEM, LAUGHING AND TALKING TOGETHER."

But gentle as her knock is, Ruth hears it and comes running to the door, her usually pale face all glowing with happiness.

"Good news—good news! Oh, Keziah, I'm so happy! Bennie's better—the doctor has just been, and he says he believes he will get well after all. Oh, I nearly put on my hat and ran all the way down the road to meet you; but then I thought that perhaps you would rather I got the tea ready. Oh, Keziah, hasn't the Lord been good to us? I feel like jumping for joy."

Keziah hardly knows Ruth, she is so excited and happy. Bennie is better; this is glorious news indeed.

"I've taken your mother some tea and she's lying down to rest, so we'll have tea all by ourselves. Look what a plate of toast I've made! Mrs. Jackson's been here all day, so the housework's done, and we can have a nice time together."

Mrs. Jackson is the charwoman who comes in to help Mrs. Greene two or three times a week.

Presently, as they sit together talking, Keziah tells Ruth something of her disappointment. Only something; she cannot bring herself to confess how bitterly she has felt Rosalie's coldness and want of sympathy.

"Ruth, you never quite liked the idea of our being friends. Did you guess that she didn't really care for me at all?"

"I didn't guess that then, and I don't believe it now. To be candid, I think she does care for you—a little."

"Do you?" asks Keziah earnestly.

"Yes, but, Keziah, how could one really love a friend until one knew more about her? You admired Rosalie, and she liked being admired. You didn't really *know* each other at all—at least, so it seems to me."

"Well, I'll never be so silly again. In future, I shall think of nothing but my work."

But Ruth turns away with a little sigh, and begins clearing away the teacups and saucers.

CHAPTER V.

CORA WITHERING HOLLOWAY.

"Now I'm really going to work hard," says Keziah, as she walks to school.

Two or three days have passed since the last chapter, and baby Bennie is quickly getting well.

"I've been very silly," she continues, shaking her head. "I've wasted time sadly, and wasted father's money, too, I'm afraid. Ruth told me it cost a great deal to keep me at this school. Well, I'll make up for everything now."

She feels quite a glow of shame as she passes the corner of Park Road.

"If Dolly and Mary Smith had not offered to carry Rosalie's books it would have been very difficult for me to give it up. How glad I ought to be!" she thinks.

Yet, as she glances up the road which she has so often watched for a well-known figure to appear, she cannot help giving one little sigh. She chokes it down and stamps her foot.

"No, I won't, I won't be unhappy about that any more! I'll think of nothing but work—work before everything," and away she walks at a great rate.

Now, Keziah is ignorant in many ways, but she is not at all stupid naturally, and having really made up her mind to work hard, she soon succeeds in gaining a place in the school.

In a week or two she even begins to like her lessons, that is, she ceases to dislike them. Miss Peckham's sternness vanishes, and good marks become quite the usual thing. Keziah feels herself a real hard-working school-girl at last.

And then she begins to find life rather dull.

Rosalie is still sweet to her, but altogether taken up with her new friends, Dolly and Mary. Most of the other girls are friendly, a few are disagreeable; but Keziah does not care particularly for any of them. She must admire a friend very much indeed, or she is not interested. Margie and Maggie and the rest are nice enough in their way, but there is certainly nothing wonderful or splendid about them.

So the weeks pass, and the short days lengthen, and the tight little lilac-buds on the bushes in the narrow back-garden grow plumper and greener, and dusty sparrows begin to fly about with feathers and long straws in their beaks.

Spring is coming fast, and perhaps Keziah misses the country sights and sounds of her old home. She thinks of it very often.

"The same sort of lessons to do every day, the same kind of work at home—nothing to make one day different from another. Oh, I do wish things were more interesting!" she murmurs to herself one Monday morning, as she walks to school in a listless fashion.

She is a little later than usual, and five or six girls are already crowding into the little room where the hats and coats are kept, and a great deal of whispering is going on.

"What is it—what are they all looking at in there, Margie?" asks Keziah of a girl standing beside her as she begins to take off her jacket.

She is not much interested in asking the question, but Margie is all eagerness to answer.

"What! haven't you heard? A new girl this morning! Her father's as rich as can be, and she's awfully clever, and taller even than Amy Roberts, and she's only coming to learn music and geometry, and dreadful things of that sort, and she's wearing a watch and chain, and her school-bag's made of real velvet, embroidered in gold thread, and——"

Here the group of girls divides, and the new girl steps out, Keziah and Margie standing aside to allow her to pass.

She is very tall, her eyes large and dark, her eyebrows strongly marked, and her black hair tied back with a broad ribbon. Her dress is simply made; but it cost five times as much money as poor Rosalie's cheap finery. Her watch-chain is of frosted silver, and a handsome velvet bag dangles from her arm. Altogether, she looks most imposing, and Keziah is deeply impressed.

"What is her name?" she whispers.

"Cora Withering Holloway; doesn't that sound grand? She lives in the big house at the corner of Elm Grove—ever so fine, you know."

Keziah hangs up her jacket in silence, and presently follows Margie into the schoolroom—she has quite forgotten to feel dull.

The new girl has a desk all to herself, and her lessons are out of the hardest books; when she sits down to her music-lesson, Keziah is quite amazed at the rapid runs, and trills, and loud, bold chords she strikes out of the worn school piano.

“Ah! that is something like music! And to think I admired Rosalie’s simple little pieces only a few weeks ago! How could I have been so stupid?”

“What nice pencils you have in this box!”

Keziah starts suddenly; she had supposed the new girl at the other end of the room, and here she is leaning over her shoulder.

“Do you always stay in for lunch?”

“Oh, yes; and—and if you’d care to have some of these pencils I’d be very glad; my father sharpens them himself.”

“Thanks, yes, I will take one or two. Sharpening pencils soils one’s fingers shockingly, and mine are all too blunt to use. By the way, what a frightful draught there is! You know the place better than I do, so will you please close that window.”

“I—I—Miss Peckham wouldn’t like——”

“Wouldn’t like the window closed when it is making us all uncomfortable? How ridiculous!”

“She doesn’t allow us to——”

“Nonsense! I daresay she wouldn’t like a pack of mere children to meddle with the windows,

but this is quite different. If she says anything, tell her that *I* asked you."

And Cora Withering Holloway walks away with a most dignified air, leaving poor Keziah too awestruck to venture to disobey her.

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"Keziah—that is your name, is it not?" asks Cora next day.

"Some of the girls call me 'Kessie,'" answers Keziah, hoping that Cora will think this rather nice.

"Oh, nicknames are nonsense—I always call people by their own names," replies the new girl loftily. "Well, Keziah, I suppose you wouldn't mind asking for a pennyworth of chocolate caramels?"

"I—of course not," answers Keziah, very much surprised at the question.

It is lunch-time again, and she has just got out her packet of biscuits and apples.

"Well, it wouldn't do for me to be seen doing such a thing—I never buy less than threepennyworth at a time. Here's the penny, just run across the road and get me some, there's a kind creature. I asked that silly little light-haired girl—Rosalie What's-her-name?—and she made some lame excuse or other; I really forget what."

"I'm very, very sorry, but Miss Peckham doesn't like us running in and out during the lunch-hour, and——"

"What nonsense! Why, you talk as though we were all children! This isn't an infant school, is it? You forget that I am preparing for a

high-grade examination. Miss Peckham would certainly allow *me* to go. You're only going because I ask you, and, of course, I should explain if anything was said."

Keziah cannot argue against this. Certainly Cora Holloway is not like the other girls.

"She's altogether superior," thinks Keziah. "How grandly she talks; how gracefully she moves about—anyone can see at a glance how clever she is, with that high, white forehead, and those flashing black eyes. Oh, it's nice to be asked to do anything for a girl like that!"

"Have you got them already? Thanks so much. What's this? Oh, how disgusting! You've let them wrap the caramels in a bit of newspaper! You really shouldn't let people impose on you—it only spoils them—you should insist on being properly treated—I always do."

Keziah hangs her head, and feels quite ashamed of herself; Cora is evidently very particular, and she is careless and rough.

"And one thing I should like to mention, Keziah, since we are to be friends——"

Friends! Poor Keziah's heart quite jumps at the word. Can Cora really mean this? She looks up quickly.

"You won't mind? Well, it's this. You ran out just now without gloves—in this cold wind too—no wonder your hands are red and coarse-looking. You really should be more careful, anyone would think you spent half your time washing dishes and cleaning grates!"

Keziah's cheeks flush still more hotly, and it

costs her a great effort to say, "I—I do have to help mother at home sometimes."

"Really? How strange! Oh, I forgot, you live in one of those poky little houses beyond Tatton Park Avenue. Well, if you *must* do such things you should be careful to wear old gloves all the time; then, perhaps, people would not find it out. One should always *try* to look like a lady, you know."

And she walks away leaving Keziah quite tingling with shame, and a deep sense of her own inferiority.

"We've got a real lady at our school now," she says to quiet Ruth that evening, as the pair sit over her school-books.

Ruth looks up with a little smile. "Have you found another Rosalie already, Keziah?" she says.

"Rosalie! Rosalie is just an ordinary girl like myself—much prettier, of course, but—well, you know. Now Cora Holloway is splendid; tall and dark, and clever—oh, Ruth, you should hear her play the piano—Rosalie's just a baby against her! Of course, she isn't like any of the other girls; she's only coming for a few months to prepare for a dreadfully difficult examination; she doesn't learn with us, Miss Peckham is giving her quite special lessons."

"Did she tell you all this herself?"

"Oh, yes; you see she wanted me to do something for her which Miss Peckham doesn't allow the rest of us to do. But, of course, as she said, those rules for little girls don't apply to her."

"I hope you are quite sure of that, Keziah."

"Of course. It was nothing. And, Ruth, she's so particular. She seemed quite shocked at the idea of going about without gloves. She said we should always try to be ladies."

"Indeed we should. But, then, Keziah, so much depends upon the meaning we give to the word, you know."

"Cora means—oh, by the way, I don't call her 'Cora,' you know—I don't think she'd like it—well, she means some one who is particular about everything—and—and speaks in grand words, and has nice hands, and all that."

"That's all very well, Keziah; but it seems to me that a 'lady' should be straightforward and kind-hearted before everything, and that when this new friend of yours asked you to do something which Miss Peckham would not approve, *she* was not acting like a lady!"

"Cora Holloway not a lady? Ruth, what *are* you saying? She's a perfect lady. I've never seen such a lady in all my life before! She's not been brought up like you and me one bit—she's learnt heaps of things—it's very wrong of you to speak like that when you don't understand. She only wanted me to buy a few sweets, and as Miss Peckham herself is treating her quite differently, of course it was all right."

"Then she should have gone herself; she should not have sent you," persists Ruth.

"Miss Peckham didn't forbid us to go out; she only said she didn't like it!"

"I am sorry, Keziah, but I cannot think as you

do about it. Come, we will talk of something else."

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"Ruth called her 'my new friend,'" thinks Keziah. "Cora's friend! No, I can never be quite that. She's much too clever and grand. Yet she seems to like me—just a little, perhaps, and I really don't think she'd ever call me 'silly,' as she did Rosalie.

"Rosalie isn't very clever—how could I have been stupid enough to think so? Even Ruth knows more than she does, and I'm sure Ruth is not so selfish. Poor Ruth, evidently she has never met a girl like Cora.

"A little, yes, I do think she likes me a little better than the other girls, anyway."

At lunch-time Cora again condescends to appear at Keziah's end of the schoolroom.

"I suppose you don't have many lessons to prepare at home, Keziah?" she asks in her superior way.

"Oh, yes, I do—heaps and heaps! Chapter of history to read over, half a page of geography, page of spelling——"

"Goodness me, I don't want to hear about your baby lessons! What I want to know is, how you manage to learn them—who hears you repeat those which you must get off by heart?"

"Oh, Ruth does that! She's our next-door neighbour. She comes in every night and helps me ever so; it's very kind of her, I think."

"Oh, it's nothing to *hear* lessons, the trouble is to say them. I've no next-door neighbour to

help me, and though I've plenty of friends, of course, they are not the sort who would care to bother over lessons. My elder sister is generally engaged in the evenings, so you see I've really no one to assist me. Fancy trying to learn two pages of French verbs all by oneself!"

"Oh, I wish, I wish I were clever enough to be of some use!" says Keziah, timidly.

"Clever? You do not need to be clever at all. You would have nothing to do but look over a book."

"Oh, I should just love to do that!" begins Keziah; but just then Miss Peckham enters the room, and school recommences, putting an end to the conversation.

"Well, are you coming to help me this evening, as you promised?"

Keziah can hardly believe her ears. Does Cora Holloway really mean it? Is she actually inviting her to Elm Grove? It quite takes her breath away to think of such a thing.

"Could I really be of use to you?"

"Of course. Didn't we settle that before? I shall expect you soon after five-thirty. Ask for me. How horrid to be obliged to live at your end of the road!"

Keziah runs off in a hurry; she is anxious to get home as soon as possible so as to finish tea and be round at Cora's house at the time appointed. On her way to the cloak-room she meets a group of girls, to whom she imparts her "good news."

"What! has she invited you to Elm Grove?"

asks one of the girls. "I would give anything to see inside that house! There's a garden all round it, and a big almond-tree in front all covered with pink blossom. I wonder whether you will see Mrs. Holloway."

"I must be sure to ask mother for my best frock, and a new ribbon for my hair," thinks Keziah, as she leaves her companions and begins to put on her hat and jacket.

Suddenly she stops short. My own lessons! What shall I do? I had quite forgotten all about them! Well, I can't put her off now; after all, I daresay there will be plenty of time when I get back. I must tell Ruth not to call."

Then she runs home.

"Oh, mother, what do you think?" she cries, bursting into the room where Mrs. Greene sits at work. "I told you about Cora Holloway! Well, she's invited me to her house. I'm to go directly after tea!"

"That's very kind of her, and I shall be pleased to let you go. It's rather a pity to-night, though, because Jack is coming home especially early this evening. He wants to finish that little book-case he is making for father's birthday, and I think he rather depends on your help. Still, if you want to go very much——"

"Oh, mother, I do—I must!" cries Keziah very excitedly. "I'm sure Jack can get on very well without me."

"I'm afraid he will miss you; and there's another thing, what about your lessons for to-morrow?"

"I shall be back in plenty of time for them. Please can we have tea directly? And, mother, of course I can wear my best frock?"

"Why, dear, it's rather thin for such a chilly night."

"I must have it, mother! You don't know, Cora's a real lady, and——"

"It won't make you a 'lady' to put on a thin dress to-night. If your new friend is really a lady, that is, a sensible girl, she will not think better of you for wearing an unsuitable frock."

Oh, dear, it is quite clear to Keziah that mother doesn't understand how truly superior Cora is to every other girl!

Too excited to eat, she scarcely touches her tea, but hurries upstairs to brush her hair. She even forgets to wash up the tea-things, although that has always been her special work.

She is soon ready, and, just before starting, knocks next door.

Ruth appears as usual, and looks rather surprised to see her dressed to go out.

"Oh, Ruth, I just called to say that I'm going to a friend for an hour or so. You needn't trouble about my lessons to-night, I'll go through them by myself when I come back."

"Must you go at once, Keziah? That spelling wouldn't take long——"

"No—no; I can't stay a minute! Good-bye!" And away she runs, leaving Ruth standing at the door.

CHAPTER VI.

ELM GROVE.

KEZIAH feels very nervous, yet delightfully important, as she knocks at the door of Elm Grove.

What a bright light shines behind the stained-glass door, and how neat and trim the tiled foot-way looks!

"If—if you please, can I see Miss Holloway?"

Keziah has thought out the words half a dozen times at least, and yet somehow her voice will not sound easy and natural. Oh, dear, will the maid guess that she is not really used to calling at houses like this?

"Miss Holloway is out."

Here is a sad disappointment!

Keziah is just turning away, when she suddenly recollects that Cora has an elder sister.

"I mean Miss *Cora* Holloway. I—I think she expects me."

"Oh, will you wait, please, while I inquire?" And the neat maid trips away, leaving Keziah standing just inside the hall.

"Carpet on the stairs, and a lovely palm in a big yellow pot. I wish *we* could have red carpet on our stairs, instead of that horrid cheap oilcloth,

and a hanging lamp instead of a common gas-bracket, and—oh, here comes the servant! I wonder whether she guesses that we're too poor to have a servant at home?"

"It's quite right, miss; you're to come upstairs to Miss Cora's room."

Much impressed, Keziah follows the maid, who stops at the top of the second flight of stairs, and taps at a door.

"Come in!" cries Cora's voice, and Keziah enters.

A pretty room, all white and soft green. Green carpet, white and green curtains, snow-white bed. A cheerful little fire, its dancing flames making a pleasant sparkle in the bright tiles of the hearth, and lighting up a lovely vase of daffodils, which stands on a little table drawn close to the fire. Beside this table Cora herself is seated in a big wicker chair.

"Oh, here you are, Keziah! Rather late, aren't you? I hope you've brought slippers?"

"Oh, I didn't know! My boots are not muddy."

"But the carpet—and your boots—so thick—you must change them. You'll find a pair of slippers just inside the wardrobe."

Much abashed, Keziah obeys in silence. All this is very grand indeed. Her hat and coat laid aside, she comes timidly to the fireside, where Cora is seated in state, turning over her books.

"Ready? That's right. Take the other easy-chair, and we'll begin. I am really very glad to have you."

"Are you? Oh, I'm so very glad to come!" cries Keziah, delighted.

"Yes; my eyes are especially tired to-night. They're not strong, you know, and Doctor Browne says I ought to wear glasses; but of course I couldn't possibly do that!"

"Of course not," agrees Keziah, though she is not very clear as to the reason.

"Quite out of the question. We'll begin with French verbs. You don't know anything about French, of course; but you can follow the words as I repeat them, I suppose?"

Keziah takes the book, and fixes her eyes on the page, and Cora begins rattling off a long string of verbs. Keziah does her best to keep up with her, but finds it a very difficult business; the words are so unlike any she has seen before, and pronounced so differently. She is quite glad when the verbs are finished, and Cora leans back in her chair with a smile of self-satisfaction.

"I should think you must be one of the cleverest girls in the whole world!" exclaims Keziah, regarding her with admiration.

"Oh, not at all. Well, you helped me quite nicely. I believe we shall get on splendidly. Come, you must hear me repeat these columns of French spelling next. Be sure you follow me carefully."

Another twenty minutes of intense attention on Keziah's part. She has never worked so hard over her own lessons. Cora is really clever, and makes but few mistakes.

When Keziah has to read out questions for

Cora to answer she bungles sadly over some of the words, but Cora is quite kind about it.

"Oh, indeed, you're not at all bad. Well, that's the last. I've been really quite thankful for your help, Keziah."

Keziah flushes red with pleasure.

"Have some of these chocolates," and Cora holds out a box of fancy chocolates, daintily packed in silver paper, and tied up with ribbon. Keziah remembers the caramels screwed up in a fragment of old newspaper.

"Ah! no wonder Cora was disgusted, when she is used to things like this!"

"Now I must go and play to my father—he likes music in the evening. You can come again to-morrow?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" Keziah is quite sure about that.

"That's nice. Good-bye! Shall I come down to the door with you? No? Well, if you're sure you don't mind? Good-bye!"

Keziah is greatly excited; as she walks home through the dark streets, she can hardly believe that it is not all a dream. The grand house, the beautiful room, above all, the cleverness and elegance of this wonderful new friend of hers. French, music, drawing; is there anything Cora cannot manage?

Her brother Jack opens the door to her. His hands are very dirty, and he wears a big apron, with large dark smudges all down the front.

"Holloa, 'Ziah!" he shouts out, directly he sees her, "where *have* you been? I want you

badly. You know the shelves I'm making? Well, the glue won't stick. Do come and lend me a hand."

While he speaks, Keziah notices how narrow the hall, or, rather, the passage, seems; how cheap and ugly the oilcloth looks; how common the flaring gas-bracket; perhaps that is why she answers quite sharply—

"I can't, Jack. You know very well I've my lessons to prepare."

"But, 'Ziah——"

"I wish you wouldn't call me that horrid, vulgar name—you know how I hate it! I tell you I can't!" and she runs upstairs.

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"Mother," cries Keziah, running into the kitchen, where Mrs. Greene is washing rice for a pudding, "you don't mind if I go to Cora Holloway's to-night, do you? She wants me dreadfully; she's very clever, you know, and her eyes are so weak that she cannot get through her lessons without help. I've offered to hear her repeat her French verbs and things; you don't mind, do you?"

"But what about your own work, dear? It is nice to help a friend, but we mustn't do it at the expense of our own duties."

"I shall have plenty of time for my lessons afterwards; she only wants me for an hour or so. She's so kind to me, mother, and so very, very clever. I do believe it will make me clever only to be with her! I may go, mother?"

"Well, I think I may say yes," says Mrs. Greene, smiling at her little daughter's eagerness, and to herself she thinks, "Of course, Keziah will get on much faster with her own lessons if she learns to work with a nice, clever girl-friend."

"Perhaps you could prepare your own school tasks at Elm Grove?" she says aloud.

"Perhaps I could."

Keziah is just a little deceitful in this answer, she knows very well that she would never dare to propose such an arrangement to Cora.

Cora nods pleasantly when they meet in school that morning. This is a special favour, for Cora scarcely notices any of the other girls. Rosalie and her friends are not slow to discover this.

"Stuck up thing!" cries Dolly, directly Cora is out of hearing.

"I've no patience with people who give themselves such airs."

"Nor I," chimes in Rosalie, "and all because she lives in a big house, and has more money to spend than the rest of us—it's just vanity and nothing else."

"My mother says the Holloways are not as rich as they pretend to be," cries another girl. "I daresay Elm Grove isn't so grand inside, after all."

"It is!" cries Keziah, hot and indignant in a moment. "It's splendid—it's the most splendid house you can possibly imagine!"

"How do you know?" cry all the girls in chorus.

"Because I've been there, of course; because Cora Holloway is my friend, and I'm going there again to-night—*every* night, if I choose."

"What, you, Kessie? Only fancy!" exclaims Rosalie, opening her blue eyes very wide.

"Yes; every night, if I can," repeats Keziah triumphantly.

Rosalie almost threw her friendship away; but Cora, so infinitely superior, has picked her out from the whole school. Her heart swells with pride and joy at the thought, and she begins to think that she must be rather a clever sort of girl herself.

Ah! poor Keziah!

Tea over that evening, she hurries off to Elm Grove, and Ruth watches her go with a sad face. She is not afraid to knock loudly now, and follows the maid quite confidently upstairs.

Cora's room appears even prettier than before. Cora herself is turning over a large box of lace and ribbons. As Keziah enters she holds up a blue silk scarf.

"If I thought you'd care for it, I'd give you this scarf, Keziah—it's of no more use to me."

"Oh, I should just love to have it—how very, very kind of you!"

"Well, for goodness' sake don't crumple it up like that—it'll be nothing but a rag after such treatment!"

Cora speaks so sharply that Keziah quite starts, and hastily tries to smooth out the tumbled scarf with trembling fingers.

"You're only making it worse—clumsy girl!"

There, give it to me; anyone could see that you're not used to such things!"

Keziah, so happy a moment before, is almost ready to cry with vexation.

"I have been badly brought up, I suppose," she thinks. "It's all because we're so poor, and live in such a miserable little house, and never have anything nice."

And for the first time in her life a wave of real discontent flows into her mind.

"You've brought your slippers?" inquires Cora in a milder tone. "That's right. Ah! I see I shall make a lady of you in time."

She is smiling again now; but Keziah's thoughts are still running in the same direction, and the dear little home she has always loved so well begins to look mean and poor in her eyes.

French verbs drive these new ideas away for a time; but once the feeling of discontent has been allowed, unchecked, to enter the mind, it is certain to return.

Faithful Ruth is waiting for Keziah when, fully two hours later, she arrives at home.

"Mother said I could go!" she cries, answering Ruth's sad little smile, "so please don't say anything; besides, if we waste time talking we shall not get finished before bedtime. Why, Ruth, what have you been doing to your hands? They're redder even than mine!"

"Very likely," answers Ruth quietly. "Poor old Mrs. Jackson looked so tired after doing our washing to-day that I helped her to hang out the sheets, so I suppose my hands are chapped."

"Now, that's just it—a girl *can't* look like a lady when she has to do rough work!"

"Stay a moment, Keziah. I don't at all like your new ideas about what makes a 'lady.' My dear Captain is one of the truest ladies in the whole world, and she says the Bible gives us the real picture of a lady."

"The Bible!"

"Yes; when it tells us about the fruit of the Spirit, you know. A lady should be full of 'love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, temperance.'"

Keziah hangs her head. What would Cora say to this?

CHAPTER VII.

THE TEA-PARTY.

"KEZIAH, I should like you to come to tea with me to-morrow," says Cora, one evening.

Keziah's face lights up with joy at the bare idea.

"Oh, that would be splendid!" she cries.

A fortnight has passed, and she is still going to Elm Grove every evening. Mrs. Greene believes that Keziah is helping on her own lessons by these visits. She misses her little daughter sadly sometimes, for baby Bennie is cutting his teeth, and is very fretful and difficult to manage; but if Keziah is really learning to be a clever girl, she does not grudge the extra trouble.

All this time Keziah's conscience is not quite easy. Cora has plenty of money and numbers of friends; mother has no one to help her. Ruth, too, tells her quite plainly that she should not be away from home so much; but Cora's cleverness, Cora's beautiful home, and grand ways have gained a great influence over her mind. She cannot refuse Cora anything.

And now Cora is asking her to tea. Could anything be more delightful?

"Yes, I was speaking about you to my friend, Isabel Smythe—my dearest friend, you know—and she said she would quite like to see you. Could you come home with me after school to-morrow?"

But Keziah's face falls. "Her dearest friend. Oh, dear, then she has another friend—a friend she likes better than me!"

"You haven't answered me, Keziah," says Cora, rather impatiently.

"Of course I'll come! I expect mother will let me. Is—is Isabel Smythe older than I am?"

"Older than you? Isabel is just the most stylish girl I know; *she* isn't a little schoolgirl. And, Keziah, don't wear those clumsy boots of yours; and pray get a new pair of gloves; Isabel isn't used to shabby things."

Keziah does not feel quite happy as she walks home. The invitation to tea is very nice; but she does wish Cora would not talk almost as though she despised her sometimes. Of course, Cora is really far too noble to despise anyone! Of that she is quite sure.

Keziah says nothing to Ruth about this new invitation; but she makes a most important business of it to her mother, and Mrs. Greene, who believes her daughter to be much wiser than she is, gives her consent directly.

"Only don't ask your new friend to tea in return until Bennie is better; he makes me so tired just now."

"No, mother," answers Keziah, meekly; but to herself she says, "Fancy asking Cora to tea in this poky little house! How little mother knows the kind of girl she is!"

Tea in the drawing-room at Elm Grove, with its long windows and grand furniture. A dainty tea-table set out with delicate china, and plates of fancy cakes and bread and butter, cut as thin as wafers.

Cora has changed her school-dress, and Keziah has smoothed her hair, and here is Isabel Smythe waiting for them.

Cora kisses her friend warmly, and then busies herself among the cups and saucers, while Keziah seats herself on the very edge of a chair, and tries to think she is enjoying herself.

"So you are Keziah Greene? Cora has told me about you," begins Isabel, taking a cup of tea daintily, and speaking in a very affected voice.

Isabel is several years older than Keziah, and very showily dressed. She looks straight at Keziah as she speaks, and seems to take note of everything she has on.

"Do you go out much?" she continues.

"No-o—that is, I come here every day."

"Every day! Cora, you didn't tell me that," Isabel is evidently surprised.

"Yes, I did, Isabel. She's only here while I run through my French lessons, you know."

"Oh, yes. Cora says you're quite useful to her. But I meant going out to tea, and for the evening, and that sort of thing."



“‘SO YOU ARE KEZIAH GREENE?’ BEGINS ISABEL, IN A
VERY AFFECTED VOICE.”

"Of course she doesn't," breaks in Cora, before Keziah can answer. "You know I told you that Keziah hasn't been brought up like us at all. It's really a wonder she knows anything."

"I was brought up in the country!" cries Keziah, trying to account for the difference, and to give some little dignity to her position; for she feels that these two big girls are setting her aside very thoroughly. "We'd a large garden there—ever so much longer than yours, Cora, and all full of apple-trees and strawberry-beds, and——"

"Country cottage-gardens always are large," remarks Isabel, with a scornful glance at Cora.

"We had a field beside, and we always kept a cow!" cries Keziah eagerly.

Isabel and Cora exchange looks again, and Keziah is sure they are "looking down" on her, and she grows more and more awkward and uncomfortable. Father said only last week that she was a clever girl—why should they treat her like this?

Desperately she tries to think of something bright and clever to say. Ah! she has been reading a book about the colours of flowers, and mother said it was a clever book, she will try that.

"Flowers are lovely things, aren't they?" she remarks, trying to appear at her ease. "Isn't it nice to think that all their pretty colours come from the sunshine, and that when the light isn't there they have no colours at all?"

"Don't talk nonsense, Keziah!" cries Cora,

sharply, glancing at Isabel, who is smiling mockingly.

"It *isn't* nonsense! It's the truth. I read all about it in a very clever book——"

"We don't want to hear all the things you read!" interrupts Cora, angrily.

Keziah feels this to be very unjust, and sits silent and indignant.

"No girl who is really well brought-up tries to show off before strangers," continues Cora in a severe tone, and she turns to Isabel. Keziah's plate and cup have been empty for some time, but Cora takes no notice. Keziah's cheeks grow hot, for she believes that her friend is neglecting her on purpose.

"How do you get on with your new music-teacher, Isabel?" asks Cora, carefully refraining from looking in Keziah's direction.

"Oh, she's detestable—such an old fright! Do you know, I've an idea she dyes her hair."

"Very likely; I'm sure her teeth are false."

"Well, if that's the way properly brought-up girls talk, I'm glad I don't understand how to do it," thinks Keziah. "How mean and horrid to say nasty things behind one's back in that way, and about Miss Wood, too, when everybody knows what a good, sweet old dear she is!" And she bursts out—

"Miss Wood *isn't* detestable, she's very good; she did more for the poor out-of-works than anybody this winter. My father told us all about it."

"You are very rude to interrupt when we are talking, Keziah. Miss Wood is quite ridiculous."

"She's just like an old maid in a book," laughs Isabel. "Oh, by the way, Cora, did you read that book I lent you?"

"Yes; but we'd better not talk about it just now," answers Cora, glancing at Keziah.

Keziah sees the glance, and jumps up quickly; they evidently want her to go, and she will go; she wishes she had never come.

"Oh, are you going?" asks Cora, very coldly. "Well, I suppose you'll come this evening as usual?"

For an instant Keziah thinks of refusing; then, in a flash, she remembers that to do so will almost certainly put an end to her acquaintance with Cora. She cannot give her up; she cannot throw away all the grandeur and dignity of such a friend; she cannot bear the idea of visiting Elm Grove no more. So she chokes down her feelings and tries to answer calmly, although her voice will shake a little.

"Yes, I—I suppose so."

But when Keziah reaches home, she finds to her dismay that mother has one of her bad headaches. She has looked white and weary all day; now she is almost helpless with pain.

Keziah loves her mother dearly, and usually nurses her with great care and tenderness when she is suffering; but just now she can hardly tear her thoughts away from Cora for a minute.

"What *can* I have done to offend her so? Oh, why did she speak to me in that horrid way?" So she thinks, over and over again.

Mother is obliged to lie down. Keziah bathes

her forehead with vinegar and water, finds an extra shawl for her feet, and shakes up her pillow; but though she does all the usual things, she does not do them in the usual loving, willing way. Mrs. Greene notices the difference, too, although she says nothing.

When at last mother is more comfortable, and Bennie is put to bed and asleep, Keziah begins to grow very uneasy. It is getting late. If she is to go to Elm Grove to-night, she ought to start at once. But to leave mother when she is ill!

She must! She cannot bear this miserable suspense. She *must* know what has turned Cora against her.

So Keziah steals up to mother's room and opens the door softly.

"Are you better, mother?"

"Much better, dear, and now the house is so quiet I think I could get a little sleep."

"Oh, then, you won't want me, so—so I think I'll just run round to Elm Grove. I'll tell Cora I can't stay long. She'd think it so strange if I didn't go."

"Very well."

Keziah can hear a little touch of disappointment in her mother's voice, but she will not allow herself to think of that, and a few minutes afterwards is hurrying down the road.

Cora is already seated over her books, and looks up with a slight frown as she enters. "You are so late that I had quite given you up," she says, coldly.

Keziah is so out of breath with the haste she

has made that she can scarcely speak. She sinks into a chair, and puts her handkerchief to her lips.

"I—I couldn't help it—mother's ill—I ran all the way," she pants.

"How very unladylike! I wonder you should do such a thing after all I've said to you."

"Cora, I think it's very unkind of you to say that. I knew I was late, so, of course, I hurried."

"'Cora' indeed! I don't remember ever giving you leave to call me 'Cora'—especially before people, as you did this afternoon. No wonder Isabel looked disgusted."

"You called me 'Keziah'!" cries Keziah, breathlessly.

"That's quite different; you are younger than I, and, besides, as Isabel said——" she pauses, and throws up her chin scornfully.

"What? What am I? What did that friend of yours say behind my back?" cries Keziah, her voice trembling with indignation.

"How you shout! I don't want the servant to hear."

"What did Isabel Smythe say about me?" repeats Keziah, still more angrily. "You must tell me—you *must*!"

"Oh, nothing. Only, of course, she found out directly that you hadn't been brought up as we have, I could see that by her face before you had been introduced five minutes. She said she wouldn't mind your stammering, and turning red, and looking as though you didn't know what to say, or even your soiled dress, and rough hands, if you weren't so conceited with it all,

and if you didn't seem to expect all the time to be treated exactly like one of ourselves."

"And you allowed her to talk like that, and didn't say a word!" almost screams Keziah, jumping to her feet in a perfect blaze of passion.

"No, indeed! I'm certainly not going to hurt Isabel's feelings on your account; and, besides, she only said what was true."

"True?" gasps Keziah.

"Yes; you are conceited, and you do behave very oddly sometimes, I must say."

"Oh, how can you speak to me like this! How can you say such cruel, cruel things!" Keziah's voice is choking with sobs now.

"What a ridiculous fuss you are making! I'm sure I don't see the use of your coming here at all, if you're going to waste all the time in fits of temper."

"I tried to help you, truly and truly I did; and I even left mother at home ill to come to you, though Ruth has told me over and over again that I was doing wrong!" sobs Keziah.

"What nonsense!"

"You—you are ungrateful, that's what you are!" cries Keziah, her tears giving way to indignation again, "and I don't believe *real* ladies say nasty, scornful things of people. Ruth says that ladies should be gentle, and meek, and faithful, and good, and I believe she's right! And mother's ill, and—and I'm going home!"

And snatching up her hat, she runs out of the room and out of the house.

How wretched—how intensely wretched she

feels! When Rosalie deserted her, she did not suffer like this. She was only unhappy then; now her heart is filled with hot, angry feelings; now her self-love is cruelly hurt, her pride humbled. She almost feels that she will never dare to hold up her head again.

Keziah was unwise to care for Rosalie so much; but she really liked her for herself alone. Her friendship for Cora has been a far more selfish feeling. "How superior I must be to other girls: Cora Holloway has chosen me to help her!" so she has thought. This evening she has learnt just how much Cora's "friendship" is worth.

It is Ruth who opens the door to her; somehow Ruth always seems to know when anyone is ill or in trouble, and quietly appears on the scene.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come home; now we can have a nice quiet talk together. I've given your father his supper, and your mother is still asleep. Why, Keziah, how strange you look! You've been crying. Ah! Keziah, dear, what has happened? What is the matter?" cries Ruth distressfully.

"Nothing," mutters Keziah, turning away.

"Is anything wrong with your friend Cora?"

"Friend! Don't call that girl *my* friend! You were quite right when you said she wasn't a real lady. She's behaved horridly to me, and I'll never go to her house again—never!"

"How angry you are, Keziah! I can't bear to see you like this."

"You'd be angry if you'd had the things said to you that I have."

"Should I, dear?"

"Well, perhaps you wouldn't. But, then, you don't feel things as I do. You're so quiet. After all I've done for that girl to have her speak to me like this. Oh, it makes me quite wild to think of it!"

"But, Keziah, you didn't go to Elm Grove only to please Cora Holloway; you went because you like going," says Ruth, quietly.

"What! are you going to begin to say nasty things to me next?" cries Keziah. Just now she is ready to quarrel with anyone. Companionship with Cora has not improved either her temper or her good sense.

"Keziah, you did like visiting at Cora's nice house; and you admired her because you thought her clever, and superior to the other girls. I am sure you never really loved her for herself. No friendship can last long unless there is real, unselfish love on one side at least. Come, don't be unjust, dear."

"Unjust! you should hear how unjustly I've been treated. But this is the last time. I'll never try to be friends with anyone again—never! *This* time I really mean it!"

Keziah wakes up next morning with that disagreeable sensation which we all know; the feeling which tells us something painful has happened before we can quite recollect what it is.

"I have quarrelled with Cora!"

She is not long in remembering that. How she dreads meeting her in school to-day! What will Cora say to her—what can she say to Cora?

"Perhaps when Cora comes to think it all over, she will be sorry for her unkindness. What shall I do if she says so, and asks me to help her again?"

At breakfast, and on her way to school, Keziah can think of nothing else. Just before she reaches the school, she sees Cora on the road in front of her.

"No, I won't wait until she has passed in, I'm not afraid of anyone."

But for all that her heart throbs wildly as she enters the school-gate, and finds herself suddenly face to face with the girl who has been in her thoughts all the morning.

One hurried glance, and her eyes droop, and the blood flies to her face. Cora is looking her straight in the eyes as though she was a total stranger. Poor Keziah! She cannot face that cold look and steady gaze; and, not daring to look up again, she hurries away without speaking a word.

"How cruel of her to look at me like that—to pretend she doesn't even know who I am! Oh, how could I make such a mistake—how could I think that hard-hearted girl would ever be my friend! But I've done with her, and all of them, I'll never—no, never, try to have a friend again!"

CHAPTER VIII.

MILLIE STEELE.

"DID you do all that yourself? How beautifully you draw—I wish you'd show me how you manage it. I'm so stupid at drawing!"

Keziah looks up from the copy of a landscape she is making. One of her school-mates is standing beside her desk, watching her work with great apparent admiration.

"I'm glad you like it," she says ungraciously, and continues her work.

She has seen this girl in class lately, but she is one of those who go home to dinner, and Keziah does not know her name.

"How steady your hand is! I do wish I could draw such clear, firm lines. But then, of course, you have been learning a long time."

Keziah looks up again. It is certainly rather nice to have one's work admired in this way.

"Oh, no! I've only been learning since I came here—that is, about two months."

"Why, you're little more than a new girl yourself! Well, you must be very clever."

Keziah begins to feel this very pleasant. It is nice to be thought clever at any time; but just

now, with her wounded self-love and smarting pride, she finds it especially soothing.

"Oh, it's simple enough," she says carelessly; and puts in a few strokes in a bold, dashing manner, just to show this girl how easily she can do it.

"You've only been here about a week, haven't you? I suppose that is why I do not know your name."

"I know yours; you're Keziah Greene. What an uncommon name 'Keziah' is! I do like it so."

"Do you? Now, I've never had that said before. The girls here all say it's hideous."

"But then they've only common names themselves, I expect. Now I wish I had a name like yours."

"What is your name?"

"Oh, just Millie Steele—nothing much in that, is there?"

"It's not so bad," remarks Keziah, in rather a superior tone.

All this is certainly very pleasant; and as she looks up into Millie Steele's face, the hurt expression that has hung over her features all day clears away, and for a time she forgets Cora's unkindness, and her own bitter, angry thoughts.

"I wish my hair was like yours, too," says Millie in a low voice. "It's dreadful to have the boys shout out 'carrots' wherever one goes."

Millie is tall and rather thin, she has dark eyes, but light eyelashes rather spoil their effect. She

is about Keziah's age, but looks older; and as for her hair——

"Well—yes, I suppose it is rather red," says Keziah, looking at it critically.

"Red—yes, horridly red. It's too bad that my hair shouldn't be like other girls'—isn't it?" rejoins Millie, with a short laugh. "By the way, don't you live just beyond Tatton Park Avenue? Yes? Well, as I live near there, would you very much mind if I walked home with you sometimes?"

"Of course not."

"That will be delightful—we shall have such nice talks! Ah! there's Miss Peckham; she'll be down on us if we talk any more just now, anyway." And Millie moves away.

All that day Cora does not take the slightest notice of Keziah. They are alone in the room for a minute or two at lunchtime, but Cora takes up a book. They meet face to face in the hall again, but the elder girl's features do not soften in the least. She is determined to make Keziah feel that she will never forgive her.

Keziah finds all this very hard to bear. She can see, too, that the other girls have noticed it, and are wondering what is wrong.

"I thought that stuck-up girl would soon quarrel with you, Kessie," remarks Rosalie, as she passes Keziah and her new friend, Millie Steele, at the gate. "I should never think of making a friend of such a conceited creature as that, myself."

"Nor I," cries Dolly Smith. "I thought

Keziah Greene wouldn't visit at Elm Grove long."

"I wouldn't go if I were asked ever so. Cora Holloway won't get the chance of ordering *me* about, I can tell her!" puts in Mary.

Keziah can bear no more, but she turns away and hurries up the road, her heart full of bitter, angry thoughts once more. "Nasty, unkind things!" she mutters to herself, "and as for Cora——"

"What were those girls talking about?" inquires a voice at her elbow.

Keziah had quite forgotten Millie, but Millie has quietly followed her.

"Oh, nothing particular."

"They seemed to be teasing you about something. I do think that kind of thing so common. But, then, of course, they are all quite ordinary girls. Now, Keziah—I may call you 'Keziah,' mayn't I?"

"Oh, of course you may!"

"And you'll call me 'Millie'? Well, dear, I do want to ask you something so much. You must have heaps of friends, you're just the girl to make friends wherever you go." (This is touching Keziah on a very tender spot indeed.) "Now, I'm not clever, or anything; but I do so want you to look upon me as one of your real friends—will you?"

Again Keziah finds Millie's words very pleasant. Here is a girl who is actually *asking* to be her friend! How different from the others! She was feeling so humbled, so hurt just now,

her self-conceit had fallen so low. Now her spirits rise again.

"Well, the fact is," she says in rather a lofty tone, "I haven't time for much of that sort of thing; but, of course, we'll be friends, if you like."

And they chat away pleasantly all the way home.

When Keziah arrives at the corner of Park Road and Tatton Park Avenue next morning—the very place where she used to wait for Rosalie—Millie Steele is waiting for *her*. She cannot help a little thrill of satisfied pride as Millie runs towards her.

"I wanted to walk to school with you so much, so I waited—you don't mind? Oh, what a heap of books you have—how very clever you must be!"

"Not at all, Millie. Only, of course, I'm anxious to learn all I can."

Even as Keziah says the words, she feels her conscience prick her a little. Well, at least *this* friend will never ask her to neglect her work.

Before the day is over Millie invites her to tea, and she promises to come.

"How kind of you! It will be such a treat to me, and to my mother, also—do make your mother let you come!"

Mrs. Greene gives her consent readily. She has noticed Keziah's sad looks, and thinks another little change will do her good.

It is enough for Mrs. Greene to know that Millie Steele is a pupil at Miss Peckham's school. If

she knew what sort of people the Steeles really were, would she be so willing to let her daughter visit them? We shall see.

All is very nice at first. The Steeles live in much the same sort of house as the Greenes, and Keziah soon feels quite at home.

Mrs. Steele is very kind to her indeed; so kind, in fact, that she calls her "dear" at almost every second word.

"Come and sit by me, dear; my girl has taken such a fancy to you, and so shall I, I'm sure. I hope you like shrimps, dear, and water-cress? Millie, we must make your dear friend eat a good tea."

Keziah does eat a good tea, and chatters away, too, at a great rate; she is quite surprised to find how easy it is to talk to Millie and Mrs. Steele, and she enjoys herself immensely.

"No stiffness, no show or pretence here," she thinks. "I can't imagine anything more unlike that horrid tea I had with Cora."

Millie heaps her plate with good things, and Mrs. Steele refills her cup.

"Millie says you're so clever at drawing, my dear," she remarks, in her most winning tones.

Mrs. Steele is rather thin and eager-looking, with lips that close very tightly over her teeth. In spite of her kindness and attention, Keziah cannot help thinking that she looks as though she could be very cross if anything put her out.

"How nice that your parents can afford to let you learn so many accomplishments! I suppose you have music and singing lessons?"

"Oh, no, not yet," answers Keziah, rather grandly, "but I intend to ask father about it soon."

"And does your father do all you ask him? Oh, you lucky girl!"

Keziah begins to feel a very superior sort of girl indeed; and Cora's sneering words are forgotten.

"Of course, your mother keeps a servant?"

"Oh, yes—that is, the servant doesn't sleep at our house, she comes in for the day."

The "servant" is only poor old Mrs. Jackson, the charwoman, who does Mrs. Greene's washing, and sometimes a little cleaning; but Keziah cannot bear to spoil the good impression she has evidently made on Millie's mother. It is so truly delightful to be looked up to by one's friends!

"I wish I knew your dear mother," continues Mrs. Steele, with a sigh; "we've no friends. Everybody is so stiff and stuck-up in this place. Just fancy, we've been here nearly six weeks, and not one invitation to tea yet! People are all for show nowadays, and we never make any fuss—we've no foolish pride about us."

"I'm sure mother hasn't a bit of pride about her, she always says that we ought to like people for what they are, not for what they have."

"Then we should just suit each other. Do you think your dear mother would come and see me one day?"

"Mother doesn't go out much—there's baby Bennie, you know."

"Oh, yes, and you've another brother, quite a big boy—he goes to work now, doesn't he?"

"Yes; he works with father at the gas-works."

"Oh, does he—in the gas-works? Now isn't that curious, one of my nephews—such a nice boy—has always wanted to work at the gas company. I'm sure your dear father would like him. How nice it would be if they could work together! Don't you think if you were to ask father, now, he might get Dick in?"

"Oh, father doesn't have anything to do with getting people into the works, Mrs. Steele."

"Well, you might mention it, anyway. Does your mother do all her sewing at home, my dear?"

"Most of it; not our best things, of course," answers Keziah, in her grandest manner. How very interested Mrs. Steele seems to be in everything belonging to her!

She feels more and more flattered, and quite delighted with these new friends; and in her self-satisfaction quite fails to notice that the purpose of all Mrs. Steele's questioning is to gain something for herself.

Ah, poor Keziah! Of all the harmful friends a girl can make, there is none more dangerous than the friend who flatters and pretends to be interested merely for the sake of what she can get.

"Oh, your mother puts your best frocks out, does she? Now do ask her to try *my* dressmaker. She makes all Millie's frocks——"

"I wish she didn't then!" interrupts Millie,

crossly. "I think Aunt Joe's a horrid dress-maker; and if she didn't make my dresses for nothing, she shouldn't do them at all."

"How dare you interrupt when I am speaking!" cries Mrs. Steele, and her face is so fierce all in a moment, and her voice sounds so hard and stern, that Keziah is quite astonished, and stares at her in some dismay. Mrs. Steele sees this, and softens her voice and smooths out her face directly.

"Yes, my dear, Miss Josephine is related to us, so, of course, she makes Millie's frocks, and Millie's not pleased because she cannot afford to put much work in them. But you should see the frocks she *can* make! Just beautiful. I saw a blue silk she sent home last week—how it would have suited you! I can fancy you going anywhere in that frock. You would pay for dressing up so. Are you thinking of having a new dress soon?"

"Oh, I expect so—mother likes me to look nice."

"Then you must have it made by Miss Josephine. I'll ask her to call on your mother."

"I—I don't know; perhaps you had better not just yet; and I don't think mother would let me wear a blue silk dress."

"Oh, do ask your mother, Keziah," cries Millie eagerly; "then, perhaps, Aunt Joe will give me some lace round *my* new frock—she always puts more work in my things when mother gets her an order. Besides, a girl like you ought to be nicely dressed, as mother says, it's a shame;

but, of course, if you've lived in the country your mother doesn't know. Wouldn't it be sweet if you and I could have blue silk dresses, made just alike!"

"I'm sure your dear friend will do all she can to persuade her mother," says Mrs. Steele in her sweetest tones. "Won't you, my dear?"

"Yes, I'll ask her," promises Keziah; but she does not feel very happy about it. Somehow, she feels that mother would not approve of all this.

"Why, you're eating nothing, my dear. Millie, pass those biscuits——" She stops short, some one has given a tremendous double-knock at the street-door.

To Keziah's surprise, mother and daughter glance at each other with looks of alarm.

"That's your father's knock. Open the door at once, or we shall have a nice scene."

The door is flung wide open, and a tall, stout man, with a dark, scowling face, enters.

"What—people here again?" he snaps, looking angrily at poor, scared Keziah.

"Now, Mr. Steele, just be quiet. Can't Millie have a friend to tea without all this fuss?" cries Mrs. Steele, sharply.

"She's always having friends to tea," grumbles Mr. Steele.

"She is always having friends to tea." Keziah feels troubled and uncomfortable. Only a few minutes ago Mrs. Steele told her they had *no* friends.

Mrs. Steele makes a great bustle with the tea-

pot, and begins pressing Keziah to take more tea; but Millie sits perfectly silent, and Mr. Steele takes no notice of her whatsoever.

After those short, impatient words, he says no more. But his angry eyes and scowling brow terrify Keziah, and she is very relieved indeed when Millie whispers that she has something to show her upstairs, and the two girls make their escape together.

Millie's room is the tiny attic, quite at the top of the house; there is very little furniture in it, and it looks bare and uncomfortable. Keziah follows her to the window without a word. She is feeling strange and frightened, and wishes herself safe at home.

Why did Mr. Steele look at her so angrily? Surely there was nothing wrong in having tea with her friend.

Oh, if her father is always like this, what a miserable time poor Millie must have! and she glances at her timidly, her face full of sympathy and pity.

To her great surprise, Millie answers the look by bursting into a peal of loud laughter.

"Goodness me, what a long face you're making! Doesn't your father ever come home cross, that you look so horrified?"

"He comes home very tired sometimes, and worried, but—but——"

"Oh, you don't know my father yet; mother and I think nothing of it."

"Millie, I don't think it is right to speak in that way. Your father was angry because we

had done something he did not like," replies Keziah gravely.

"Oh, nonsense! He was just cross, that's all."

"But he seemed to think that I should not have been asked to tea," persists Keziah. "I'm sure I wouldn't have come if I'd known."

"How unkind of you to say that! Father will be all right presently—it's nothing. Now you must look at my necklace—it's lovely; real coral. Mother bought it last week, and it only cost five shillings—isn't it sweet? You've nothing round your neck, but that little bit of white edging; why don't you get your mother to buy you a necklace like this?"

"Mother doesn't like me to wear such things," said Keziah, still very grave.

If she had been older she might have wondered why Mrs. Steele spent so much on a perfectly useless thing, whilst her daughter's boots needed mending so badly.

"Doesn't like you to wear a necklace! Why *ever* not?"

"Mother says it cannot do any good to wear useless ornaments, and it may do a great deal of harm."

Millie screws up her lips. "Oh, dear, then I suppose your mother goes in for self-denial, and prayer meetings, and all that sort of thing!" said she in a very peculiar tone.

"Why, of course! Doesn't *every* good person go to prayer meetings and services?" cries Keziah, with such an honest surprise in her eyes

and voice, that Millie's light eye-lashes droop over her shallow black eyes, and she turns away her head.

"I suppose so," she mutters, and begins hurriedly turning over the contents of her drawers.

There are not many clothes, but several boxes of ribbons and "knick-knacks," mostly useless.

Keziah has not cared, or evidently thought much about such things before; but at last she owns that a delicate little handkerchief, embroidered with forget-me-nots, and a shining sea-green hair-ribbon do rather take her fancy.

"Well, why don't you buy things like them?" asks Millie.

"Oh, I can't; I've very little money of my own—only two shillings—and, besides, mother buys all my things, and she likes everything very plain."

"You'd be surprised how little this ribbon cost; and, then, if you don't begin to buy things for yourself, you'll never learn how to do it."

"No, I suppose not," and Keziah lays the lovely ribbon down with a sigh. "Why, Millie, it's getting quite dark. I promised mother I'd be home long before this, I really must go."

"Must you really? Well, as you're in such a hurry, I'll let you out myself, without disturbing father and mother."

Keziah is only too pleased at this arrangement; and so they part.

But there is an uneasy sense of dissatisfaction in her mind as she walks home.

Why was Mr. Steele so angry? She remembers

that Millie gave her no real answer to the question. Then Millie certainly should not have laughed like that when she spoke of her father's displeasure.

"Shall I tell mother all about it, and ask her what she thinks? No; I can't. Poor Millie! she has been so nice to me, it would be a shame to tell tales of her."

And so the memory of Millie's pleasant words keeps Keziah silent.

Then she remembers her promise about the new dressmaker, and that worries her, too, for her conscience tells her that there are many little things about the Steeles that her mother would not like. However, she must speak about this; she has promised.

So when mother comes for her good-night kiss, as usual, she says:

"Mother, Mrs. Steele thought it would be so much better if you took Miss Josephine for your dressmaker."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; she said Miss Josephine would make my frocks beautifully."

"I'm quite satisfied with Mrs. Brown, Keziah; and, besides, Miss Josephine is very expensive, and not my style at all."

"She makes all Millie Steele's frocks, and the Steeles haven't any pride or nonsense about them—not a tiny bit, mother. Won't you try her just for once?"

Keziah does not explain that Millie's frocks are made for nothing. Little by little she is slipping

into the habit of telling her mother only *part* of the truth.

“Miss Josephine is too fine for me altogether,” says mother, decidedly, as she draws down the blind.

But Keziah thinks :

“Mother has always lived in the country, and knows nothing about the way people look at clothes up here.”

CHAPTER IX.

TWO SHILLINGS.

NEXT morning, when the friends meet as usual, Keziah is still troubled and grave.

They walk side by side almost in silence for a few minutes, until suddenly Millie bursts out:—

“Keziah, I can see it is quite useless to try and deceive you. I’ll tell you everything—everything!”

Keziah stops short, and looks at her in utter astonishment.

“Yes; I saw at once that you had discovered how unhappy—how *dreadfully* unhappy I am at home! I try to pretend not to mind it, but I can’t hide it from a real friend—oh, I can’t!”

Here Millie’s handkerchief comes out, and is held to her eyes; she is apparently sobbing bitterly.

“It’s always the same. I try, try, try to please father, but I can’t; he won’t let me love him, he won’t let me have a friend! Oh, Keziah, don’t turn from me, don’t let my troubles drive you away as they have all the rest!”

Keziah is greatly shocked to hear this.

“Millie, Millie, *don’t*, don’t talk like that! Of

course I won't leave you, and I'll only love you better if you're in trouble."

"How good, how sweet you are! You are the kindest, sweetest, bravest friend I ever had in my life!"

Even Keziah feels that this is rather too much, for she has done nothing. But, then, how very pleasant it is; how much nicer than Cora's coldness or Rosalie's selfishness!

It is surprising how quickly Millie cheers up after this little scene. The pair walk to school arm-in-arm, and now Keziah is quite sure that she has found her friend. A friend who needs her, who loves her!

The vague, uneasy feeling which warned her that all was not quite right, has passed away.

All that day Millie cannot do enough to show Keziah how much she prizes her friendship. They walk home together after school, Millie talking all the way of her troubles.

"I've no sisters or brothers, and even mother doesn't understand me," she says, mournfully, as they reach the corner of Park Road, "and you are my only real friend. Ah! do let me walk quite up to your door with you. Is this your number? What a nice little house! Now, good-bye, dearest Keziah, I'm so happy with you!" and after an affectionate kiss she runs away.

Tea over, Ruth comes in as usual, and Keziah gets out her books. The two girls have not seen very much of each other lately, and it so happens that Millie Steele's name has not even been mentioned between them.

"Is Cora Holloway still determined not to speak to you?" asks Ruth, as she turns over the leaves of Keziah's arithmetic.

"Cora? Oh, I suppose so!"

"You are not worrying so much about her unkindness?"

"No. You see, it isn't any good; and, besides, I think you were right, I didn't care for Cora as much as I thought."

"And you intend never to have another friend, Keziah?" asks Ruth, with a sad little smile.

"Well, I won't say that—the fact is, there's a girl at school now——"

"Oh, Keziah, have you found another Cora or Rosalie already?"

"I didn't find her, she found *me*, and she's not a bit like Cora or Rosalie. She's done everything she could think of to make me like her; she says she never met anyone like me, and she thinks 'Keziah' a lovely name, and, then, she's in such dreadful trouble. Hark! there's a knock at the street-door. Who can it be at this time of the evening?"

"I'll go whilst you look over your arithmetic again, I've found the place."

And Ruth steps into the narrow passage, and opens the door.

A girl of about her own age is standing on the doorstep; she looks up eagerly.

"Does Miss Keziah Greene live here? Oh, please tell her that I want to see her *most* particularly. I must see her, I shan't keep her a minute. I'm Millie Steele; she'll know."

What can this girl want with Keziah? Ruth feels that she does not at all like the eager, yet sly, look in her eyes.

Keziah is very much surprised when Ruth takes in the message; she is more surprised still when she goes to the door, and Millie, seizing her by both hands, bursts into tears on her shoulder.

"Oh, Keziah, I'm in such dreadful, dreadful trouble!" she sobs.

"Oh, Millie, what is it—what can have happened?"

"I came straight to you; you're the only person in the world I can ask to help me, and I don't think you will refuse?"

"Of course not. But what is it—what can be the matter?"

"Father sent me to get two shillingworth of stamps, and—and I've lost the money, and I daren't go home—I daren't!" Millie's sobs almost appear to choke her."

"How terrible! But, Millie, what can I do?"

"If you would lend me two shillings for a little while—just a day or two—I should be so truly, truly thankful! You told me you'd got two shillings."

"Well, so I have, but I'm not supposed to spend it all at once. I'll ask mother."

"Oh, no, no, no! If you do that father is sure to hear of it. I'll return it in a day or two for certain. I only want you to *lend* it. Oh, Keziah, you will help me, won't you? I've no one but you!"

Keziah is overcome by Millie's eagerness and

tears, so without further hesitation she runs upstairs and soon returns with the money, whereupon Millie throws both arms around her neck, and kisses her, apparently, in a most affectionate manner.

"And, Keziah, you won't tell anyone, will you? It's only for a day or two. Now, promise."

"Very well."

"Ah! you are a real friend; I'll never forget what you've done, never."

And she runs away with Keziah's precious two shillings in her hand.

Keziah returns to her lessons in a rather uncomfortable frame of mind. She is just realising that she has promised to keep a secret from her mother; but she seeks comfort in the thought, "After all, it is only for a few days."

Ruth glances at her thoughtful face; she heard her run upstairs, and half suspects what has happened.

"Is that the girl you were speaking of—your new friend?" she asks.

"Yes; that's Millie Steele."

"Steele! I've heard the name before. I've heard something about Millie, too."

"You've heard no harm concerning her, I suppose?" Keziah cries sharply; having trusted Millie, she feels bound to defend her.

"I've heard that she doesn't always speak the truth," says Ruth quietly.

"What a shame! Poor Millie! just because she's unhappy at home, everybody is unjust to her."

"How do you know she's unhappy at home, Keziah?"

"Because I've been there, and have seen it for myself."

Keziah has quite forgotten that she believed something had been done to displease Mr. Steele, until Millie told her that he was always the same.

"Did Millie tell you herself that she was unhappy?"

"Yes."

"My Captain says we should always be on our guard with people who complain of their homes to the first person they meet."

"How *can* you be so unjust! She didn't tell me a thing until we'd agreed to be real friends. Poor Millie, I won't hear another word against her!"

And so the matter was, for the time being, allowed to rest.

"Keziah, do let us go out together this afternoon—it's a half-holiday, you know, and we so seldom get the time for a real long talk."

It is Millie who is speaking.

"That will be very nice, Millie. Where shall we go? The flowers in the park are lovely just now, and there are plenty of seats."

"Oh, no! the park is so dull—and, besides, one can never get a seat to oneself. I know, let's look round at the shops, perhaps we shall see a handkerchief like those of mine you admired so much, and I heard you say you wanted a hair-ribbon."

"Did I, Millie? I don't remember that."

"Oh, yes you did! We'll buy one, and, perhaps, look at some handkerchiefs. What fun we shall have!"

"But, Millie, I've only threepence left in my purse—and two farthings."

"Oh, I daresay that will do! You haven't said anything about that two shillings at home?"

"No; you see, I promised. But, Millie, somehow I feel that mother ought to know. I should be so glad to tell her."

"That would never do! But you needn't worry. I shall pay you back in a day or two. Well, I'll call for you directly after dinner. We shall enjoy ourselves! The shops in the High Street are splendid just now."

Millie is right, the shop windows are very gay indeed this sunny afternoon, and Keziah and she find plenty to look at.

Left to herself, Keziah would spend most of her time over the big, beautiful roses and orchids in the flower-shops, but Millie does not care for flowers, and drags her away.

"Ah, this is the place we want!" she cries, pausing before the window of a large draper's.

"Oh, I know this shop! Mother often buys things here."

"Does she, dear? That's all the better. Now, these artificial flowers are something like, and—why, look here, the very shade of ribbon you want; and only threepence farthing a yard! Come along, a yard of this you must have," and she links her arm through Keziah's and marches her into the shop.

"This is the ribbon-counter; sit down, Keziah—you should try to look as though you were quite used to shopping, you know."

Millie, at any rate, appears quite used to it. In spite of her bewilderment, Keziah cannot help admiring the business-like way in which she says, "We wish to look at some ribbons, please," and turns over the large boxes placed before her.

"Ah! this is the colour—look, Keziah. We'll take a yard of this, please."

"There's a yard and three-quarters here, miss; you can have the piece for fourpence halfpenny," says the shopwoman in a persuasive voice.

"Very well," answers Millie, grandly.

But Keziah whispers, "Millie, I can't pay for all that, I told you I hadn't the money!"

"Oh, that's all right! I owe you ever so much more."

"What can I show you next, miss?"

"Well, let me see—we did want to look at some fancy handkerchiefs——"

"Millie, I *can't* buy them!" whispers Keziah again.

"Oh, don't fuss so! We do want to look at them, you know we decided that. Look, aren't they just lovely! Now isn't this lucky—here's the very sort you wanted—why, we might have searched for weeks and not found them. Yes, we'll take two of these, please. Oh, how sweet, I *must* have one of these with the dear little rose-buds! That's all, I don't think we want anything more to-day."

"Nothing more, miss?" and the shop-assistant



"MY FRIEND HASN'T ENOUGH CHANGE WITH HER TO
PAY TO-DAY."

takes out her pencil and does a little rapid arithmetic.

"One and ninepence three-farthings, please," and she passes the bill to Millie.

"Oh, it's this young lady's! I'll pay you for the handkerchief I've bought when I give you back the two shillings, Keziah." This last sentence in a whisper.

"But, Millie, you *know* I can't pay her—you must tell her, I can't," returns Keziah, desperately.

"Very well. Oh, my friend hasn't enough change with her to pay to-day; but that doesn't matter, does it? She lives at No. 8 Sunnyside Villas."

"I would rather the young lady paid now," says the shopwoman.

"Well, she can't! But I'm sure you know Mrs. Greene—that's her mother—she buys all her things at this shop."

"Oh, I'm to send the bill in to Mrs. Greene?"

"Yes, that will be best."

"But, Millie——"

"Oh, come along, Keziah, we shall be late for tea. Here's your parcel."

"I'm sure mother won't like this, Millie. I'm certain she'll think I've wasted the money."

"Nonsense! My mother wouldn't mind, and you've told me over and over again that your mother is the best in the world."

"So she is; but I ought not to have spent the money without asking her first."

"My dear girl, you are old enough to buy a

hair-ribbon for yourself, surely! And it made me wretched to see how much you longed for those handkerchiefs. Why, if I had my way, you should have everything you wanted!"

"It's very nice of you to like me so much, Millie. When do you think that bill will come in?"

"Oh, to-morrow, I expect. Perhaps you had better tell your mother to-night. I wish I could come and explain; but father said I must be in by tea-time. Good-bye!"

Keziah walks home, quaking inwardly.

"Oh, dear, why did I allow Millie to buy these things? The dear girl is so anxious to please me, and she doesn't know how particular mother is—perhaps a little *too* particular, considering how old I am. Well, I can't tell her to-night, because Jack is coming home early; perhaps I shall feel better about it in the morning."

Keziah is not sorry when the day is over, and she is able to get to bed to "sleep off" the unhappy feeling concerning that wretched parcel.

"You bought a ribbon for your hair yesterday, Keziah? Why, I gave you a new one only this week; surely you did not need another 'already?'" observes Keziah's mother the next day.

"It was such a pretty colour, and so cheap; and—and I bought two handkerchiefs, and please could you let me have my pocket-money for next month. I—I haven't enough to pay for them."

"You brought them away without paying for them! That was very wrong of you, for you know how much I dislike any kind of debt,

Keziah. What can have possessed you to act in this manner without saying a word to me?"

"They were so cheap," mutters Keziah, hanging her head.

"Bring them to me."

Mother speaks quite sternly, and it is with a throbbing heart that Keziah hurries upstairs, and returns with the little parcel. She has no pleasure in its contents now. "Hateful things," she thinks. "I wish I could throw them away!"

"Keziah, how could you buy such rubbish! The ribbon is quite unsuitable—I could never allow you to wear it, and the handkerchiefs are only made for show—quite useless. What is the amount of the bill?"

"One and ninepence halfpenny," gasps out poor Keziah.

"Well, you have the two-shilling piece your grandmother gave you at Christmas, you must pay the bill with that, and I trust the loss of your money will be a warning to you in future."

Keziah's heart beats faster still. Her two-shilling piece. What would mother say if she knew?

"Take it to the shop this afternoon, and let me never hear of your doing such a thing again."

"Oh, mother, I shouldn't have time; you know Millie Steele is to come home with me to tea this evening."

"Very well; to-morrow, then. Keziah, you must promise never to do such a thing again, unless you wish me to feel that I cannot trust my daughter."

Keziah promises, with many tears, and to herself she says, "Oh, I'll never keep anything from mother again! Millie must give me my money at once, and I'll pay the bill directly."

As it happens, she does not get a chance to speak to Millie all day, and May Smith, who is going in the same direction, walks up the road with them when they return home in the evening.

Then Millie has to be introduced to Mrs. Greene, and, of course, mother pours out the tea. Mother is very grave still. Keziah is uneasy, and Millie unusually silent. Altogether, it is quite a relief when the meal is over, and Keziah takes her friend into the garden.

"I can see that your mother doesn't approve of me," Millie says, directly they are alone.

"Millie!"

"I am sure of it. I suppose you've told her all about that two shillings."

"Indeed, I have not! Oh, Millie, you know I haven't! Mother likes you all right, but she's angry with me about those things we bought; she says they're all useless, and I must pay for them at once. So—so you'll give me my money back to-night, won't you?" she adds, timidly.

"To-night! Why, I haven't a penny!"

"But, Millie, you must. You said you only wanted it for a day or two."

"A 'day or two' generally means a week or two—you ought to know that."

"But I *must* have it—or tell mother that I've lent it to you!"

"No, no; you promised. Wait a moment,

I've thought of a way out of the trouble. Come with me to my aunt's to-morrow afternoon, she's very fond of me, and I'm sure if we ask her she'll give me the money directly."

"Where does she live?"

"Oh! Clark's Square, in the City."

"I'm sure mother wouldn't like me to go to the City without her knowing."

"Well, we shouldn't be long, you know. Mrs. Greene would only think you were having tea at my house."

"What! not tell mother? It seems to me it would be much better for you to go to your aunt's by yourself."

"I'm far more likely to get it if you're there to show that what I say is true——" Millie stops short, and turns rather red, then she goes on hurriedly.

"I did think you wouldn't refuse to help me, when I'm trying all I can to think of a way to get you the money. We should be back quite early."

"But it costs money to go to the City," falters Keziah.

"Only twopence each way. You've threepence and I've a penny, and my aunt will pay the return fares."

"But—but I can't do it; it would be deceiving mother."

"What nonsense! You will ask Mrs. Greene if you can spend the afternoon with me, and that will be true enough. Goodness me! there's that sly girl from next door—Ruth What's-her-name

—watching us from her garden ! Meddling thing ! What business is it of hers ?”

“ She’s not sly, or meddling either ! She’s the truest, kindest girl in the world. I only wish I were one-half as good and true myself !” cries Keziah, flashing out ; and for one brief minute she doubts, she almost dislikes, Millie Steele.

But Millie is quick to read her face, and replies, “ How thoroughly you believe in your friends—how truly you trust them ! I’m glad I’m one of your friends, Keziah, dear. Come, shall we go indoors and ask about to-morrow ?”

CHAPTER X.

A FALSE STEP.

"You are quite sure your aunt will give us the money?" asks Keziah next morning. The two girls are already on their way to the station.

Yes; Keziah is going, and her mother does not know about the plan.

"Oh, quite sure! She's given me money several times so as to save me from a scolding. She knows how severe my father is."

"But, Millie, are you always losing money?"

"Losing money! I never lost a penny in my life. I'm not so silly," cries Millie indignantly. "That is," she adds, checking herself, "I never lost any before the other day."

"Then why does your aunt give you money?"

"Oh, just to get the things which all girls want! She knows I never have any money from father."

"What does your father say to that, Millie?"

"Is it likely I should tell him? Why, he'd expect me to buy my own shoes if he knew."

"Mother says that we ought to tell our parents everything," says Keziah gravely.

"Oh, yes, I know! but we can't always do that. You can't tell your mother what you're doing now."

"I could, and I would directly, if you'd only give me permission to break my promise. Oh, Millie, *do!* Mother would be angry just at first, but when she saw that I was really sorry for having deceived her, she would forgive me, I am sure."

"Yes; if you promised to have nothing to do with me in future. Do you think I don't know? Do you think I've never been served that way before? Is *that* your idea of being a friend—just to make things all right for yourself, and leave me out altogether? Oh! I did think that you were above such meanness; I did think you would keep your word—that you were a different sort of girl to that, Keziah!" And Millie turns away, and covers her face with her handkerchief.

"Millie, don't! You know I didn't mean it like that. Of course, I should take all the blame on myself. Millie, I say——"

"Oh, how cruel you are!" sobs Millie. "Why can I never find a real friend?"

"Millie, I only say that that is what I should *like* to do," says Keziah sadly.

"I shouldn't dream of telling tales of you—I hate tell-tales!"

"Millie, do be quiet. You know I've agreed to do as you wish."

"Yes; so you have. Well, I'll try not to think any more of what you've just said. By the way, why aren't you wearing your new hair-ribbon?"

Didn't I tell you that my cousins liked people to be nicely dressed?"

"Your cousins! You didn't say anything about cousins at all. Oh, I do hope we're not to see a lot of people!"

"Do you? Well, I've six cousins, all nice, bright girls, and then there's Bertie, and Cyril Foster, and Tom Mitchell—they're nearly sure to drop in to tea."

"I do hope they won't come while we're there; you'll come away directly, won't you?"

But Millie only laughs. "Here's the station. I'll get the tickets. We're in luck's way; there's a train just signalled."

And away she darts to the booking-office, leaving Keziah standing alone on the platform.

A train journey is usually a great treat to Keziah. She loves the rush and excitement of travelling; but to-day a horrid, guilty feeling quite destroys her pleasure.

Suppose some of these people know her by sight, and tell her mother that they have seen her here? Even if she is not found out, is mother never to know about this journey to the City? What! keep a secret from mother all her life—?

"Here are the tickets—quick, Keziah—quick—the train is just coming in!"

Millie, all eager and breathless, seizes Keziah by the arm, and, as the train steams into the station, fixes on a carriage, and almost before it has stopped, pushes her in.

"Didn't I manage that splendidly?" she pants, sinking back into a seat. "Why, how worried

you look, Keziah! You silly girl, we're just in for a bit of real fun!"

"I do wish mother knew."

"Nonsense! I haven't told my mother. We're old enough to take care of ourselves, I should hope. What a glum face you're making! You're not afraid of going about without your mother, are you?"

But Keziah does not answer. She feels more certain than ever that she is doing wrong.

Arrived at the big City station, Millie takes her arm again, and what with the delightful bustle, and the crowds of people all round her, Keziah forgets her forebodings for a few minutes. Millie is chattering away gaily, and she is beginning to answer in the same style, when suddenly she feels Millie's hand tighten on her arm.

"Now I call that real bad luck! Who would think that sly girl would spy on us even here!"

Keziah looks up quickly, and as she does so she catches sight of Ruth's face at the window of a train that is moving out of the station!

Ruth has seen her, and is very troubled at the sight. She is returning home from a short visit to her grandmother. But what is Keziah doing alone with that girl?

"I will call in this evening and try to win her confidence," thinks Ruth.

She does not go to Keziah's mother at once, because she never dreams that Mrs. Greene knows nothing of this visit to the City, and it is growing dark when at last Ruth knocks at the Greene's door and asks to see Keziah.

"Keziah? Oh, she's spending the day at Millie's house—naughty girl, she ought to have been home an hour ago."

Ruth's pale face flushes, and a quick look of alarm flashes into her eyes.

"Oh! Mrs. Greene, she isn't at Millie's house; she's gone to the City—didn't you know?"

"Gone to the City? How do you know? Ruth, what *do* you mean?"

"Oh, Mrs. Greene, I saw her. Mother sent me to grandma's this morning, and just as the train that brought me home was moving out of the station, I saw Keziah and Millie Steele on the platform."

"With Millie Steele! What time was that?"

"About one o'clock. Oh, Mrs. Greene, I'm so dreadfully sorry I did not come to you directly I got home—but, indeed, I never dreamt that you did not know."

"One o'clock, and it's now past eight! What can she be doing? She was supposed to spend the day at Millie Steele's house. I can't understand it. Keziah has always been so truthful, so trustworthy, I cannot believe she would wilfully deceive me—and Millie Steele, too, so quiet and well-behaved—there has been a dreadful mistake made somewhere!"

"Mrs. Greene, I'm afraid you don't quite know Millie Steele; I hate to speak unkindly of anyone, but——" Ruth stops, and hesitates.

"What? Please tell me! Isn't Millie to be depended on?"

"A girl I know says that Millie is deceitful

and extravagant, she is always trying to get money from her friends to spend on ribbons and laces, and her father has found her out in this so often that he won't let her bring anyone to the house if he can help it."

"Why did I not know? Oh, what shall I do if she is not home soon? It is getting quite dark. She may be lost in the great City, and none of us know in which direction to look for her."

"Perhaps Mrs. Steele knows where they are?" cries Ruth eagerly, "I'll go round to her house. I'll run all the way, and be back directly."

"You are a good girl, Ruth! Yes, be quick!"

Ruth is quick. She darts down the road, and, never pausing to take breath for an instant, arrives, panting and flushed, at the Steeles' door.

In her agitation she rings more violently than she intends, and, in spite of her anxiety, is rather startled at the loud peel which follows.

Mrs. Steele is evidently startled too, and is soon hurrying to the door.

That she is in a bad temper is very clear.

"Well, and who are you, I should like to know, and what do you mean by pulling my bell in that fashion?" she snaps.

"I'm so sorry—I didn't mean it."

"Didn't mean it! If you've broken my bell, you shall pay for it, whoever you are."

"Oh, please forgive me. I've called about Keziah—Keziah Greene, you know. Her mother is so dreadfully anxious about her; please do tell me where she is."

"I don't know anything about her, and if I did I shouldn't tell you—wrenching at my bell like that!"

"But Mrs. Steele, you *must* tell me. Your girl Millie has taken Keziah to the City, and her mother sent me to you."

"Then you can just go back to her again."

"But Keziah has never been out so late by herself before," Ruth continues. "She knows no one in the City, and she is not used to finding her way about."

"Oh, indeed! Well, my compliments to Mrs. Greene; I should just like to come round and give her a piece of my mind. Her precious daughter has led my Millie into no end of extravagance—buying rubbishing handkerchiefs, of no use to anybody, and then insisting on her paying for them straight away. Millie came to me last night almost crying about Keziah's meanness."

"Mrs. Steele, you must be mistaken! Keziah is the most generous, straightforward girl I ever met with."

"Oh, very well. My girl tells untruths, I suppose, for she said Keziah would give her no peace about the money, but threatened every day to tell her mother."

"Oh, dear, there *must* be some mistake—that isn't like Keziah at all. Only tell me where my friend is now, and I'm sure Mrs. Greene will explain everything afterwards."

"I don't know where she is."

"Millie didn't tell you where they were going?"

"No."

"Does she often stay out as late as this?"

"Very likely, Miss Impertinence!"

"Has she friends in the City?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"Oh, Mrs. Steele, don't you see that if you can't give me an idea as to where she is, Mr. and Mrs. Greene will have to go to the City, and search and search until they find her?"

"What nonsense! Can't two girls go out for a few hours together without all this fuss? I've no patience with such coddling ways!"

"Ah! there's Mr. Steele coming up the road, perhaps he'll know where they're likely to be."

And Ruth is darting off to meet him, when Mrs. Steele catches her by the arm.

"Yes, go and complain to her father, do, and get the poor girl into trouble. Since you *will* make a fuss, I expect they've gone to Millie's aunt's house for the evening."

"But where's that? How shall we know where to go?"

"Ridiculous! Why can't you leave them alone? No. 2 Clark's Square, near the Lyne Hotel. There, get away with you!"

Ruth speeds up the road, repeating the words, "No. 2 Clark's Square" over and over again, in case she should forget them. As she turns a corner, she almost runs into Jack Greene, Keziah's elder brother.

"Oh, here you are!" he exclaims, nearly as breathless as herself. "I'd just got in when you left, and mother sent me after you. Have you found out where Keziah is?"

"Yes," pants Ruth. "Clark's Square, in the City—at least, she *might* be there. I've had such work to get the address from Mrs. Steele."

"What a brick you are, Ruth! As for Keziah, she deserves a good fright for giving us all this trouble. What are we to do next? It's father's late Saturday, worse luck!"

Mrs. Greene is standing at the open door anxiously watching for their return.

"No sign of her yet, Ruth," she says sadly. "Have you found out where she is?"

"Millie's aunt's—No. 2 Clark's Square!" pants Ruth, still out of breath.

"But where is that? I never heard of it before."

"It's near the Lyne Hotel, Mrs. Steele says," cries Ruth.

"Oh! I know where that is," cries Jack suddenly—"Western Street, you know."

"Western Street? My grandfather's shop is in Western Street!" exclaims Ruth, surprised.

"But what are we to do now?" asks Mrs. Greene, helplessly. "Oh, Jack, if only your father were at home!"

"Let's look up the next train, mother; perhaps you can fetch her home."

"But Bennie—he's so feverish and queer; I'm afraid to leave him——"

"I'll sit beside his crib the whole time you are away, Mrs. Green; he'll be all right with me," volunteers Ruth.

"Of course he will, mother. Now, let's see. 'Up trains, City.' Ah! here we are. Eight-thirty—you've lost that; nine-one—that doesn't

stop at our station; nine-fifty—that's the next. How annoying—over an hour to wait!"

"Oh, dear, dear, *how* I wish your father were at home!" repeats Mrs. Greene tearfully.

"I have it, mother! Why not telegraph?" cries Jack.

"Telegraph to Clark's Square?"

"Yes; tell them to send Keziah back directly, or we'll send a policeman, or something!"

"A telegram wouldn't be delivered there much under an hour, and then Keziah would have to come back alone—that is, if they let her come at all."

"I know!" cries Ruth, joyfully. "Why not telephone? That would only take a few minutes."

"Ruth, don't be silly," says Jack, irritably. "How can we telephone to a place where there's no telephone laid on?"

"Oh, Mrs. Greene—Jack—I've thought of the way!" Ruth's cheeks are flushed, and her eyes dancing with excitement. "I'm so glad—so very glad I went up to grandpa's to-day, for, you see, he's got a telephone! It has just been laid on to his shop in Western Street. We'll telephone to him, and grandma will go to Clark's Square and bring Keziah home. Now, isn't that a splendid plan?"

"That it is!" cries Jack, catching her enthusiasm at once. "Ruth, I was a sneak to call you 'silly' just now. You're a brick—the most thorough brick I ever saw in my life!"

But Mrs. Greene looks more bewildered than ever.

"Telephone? I've never telephoned in my life," she says, hopelessly.

"Oh, I have," says Jack, confidently. "But, Ruth, what about your grandfather's number?"

"The number is printed on his new bills, and grandma gave me one to-day."

"Run and get it, there's a good girl, and we'll be off in no time. The nearest telephone is in the Library Buildings, you know."

Another minute and the two are hurrying down the road together.

"Jack you must work the telephone; I don't understand it, you know," whispers Ruth, nervously, when they reach the office.

Jack laughs as they enter the door. He soon gets possession of the instrument, and gives the number.

"Are you there?"

Ruth is pale with anxiety.

"No; you don't know me. I'm Jack Greene; I'm speaking for Ruth Golding," shouts Jack down the 'phone.

"Now, Ruth, fire away—it's all right; what am I to say?"

Ruth dictates her plan in a low voice, and Jack repeats her words in his most manly tones; then he listens again. "Your grandmother's going," he says, ringing off and stepping away from the instrument.

Mrs. Greene looks a little happier when they return and tell her what they have done. They are just beginning to calculate the time it will all take, when they are startled by a loud knock.

"Keziah!" cries Ruth, and she flies out of the room, closely followed by Jack and Mrs. Greene.

"Only a letter, and without a stamp, too!" Ruth hands it to Mrs. Greene.

"It's a bill—I don't owe any bills!" she says; then she sees that it is the account for the ribbon and handkerchiefs.

"What can be the meaning of this? Keziah promised she would pay for them at once."

"Perhaps she hadn't enough money," suggests Ruth.

"She had a two-shilling piece—it must be in her purse now. Surely, she cannot have taken that with her to spend in the City, after all her promises to me!"

"Keziah would *never* break a promise!" cries loyal Ruth.

"We will go up to her room and see." Mrs. Greene goes to the drawer in which Keziah keeps her special treasures, and taking out the purse she finds it is empty.

"Oh, Ruth, the money is gone! I could not have believed this—to deceive me, to disobey me in this way—it's too dreadful!"

"I feel sure Keziah is not so much to blame as you think, Mrs. Greene. She believes in Millie, and Millie has deceived her in some way. I feel certain that Millie is at the bottom of it all."

CHAPTER XI.

CLARK'S SQUARE.

"HORRID little tell-tale! Of course, she'll run straight to your mother and tell her where she saw you," cries Millie, as she looks longingly after the train which is carrying Ruth home; for we must now return to the two girls at the City station.

"If she does, it won't be for the sake of telling tales, but because she thinks it right," answers Keziah, much distressed.

"Oh, yes, I know—thinks it right to get other people into trouble. Well, if she tells, she does. I, for one, am going to enjoy myself while I can, and I advise you to do the same. Come along, there are some lovely shops down this road; ever so much better than those in our poky old High Street."

"I don't care about shops just now, Millie—indeed, I don't. Oh, do let us get the money as quickly as possible and go home. How can I be happy whilst mother is worrying about me?"

"She won't worry, she'll know you're all right. Now don't be horrid, and spoil everything, just as we've got the chance of a b't of real fun."

"Millie, I would *much* rather go straight to your aunt's house," says Keziah tearfully. "I can't bear to think of what mother will say when she hears about all this; I really couldn't enjoy myself."

"Oh, very well, come along," cries Millie, shortly. "I suppose I must do as you say, since you've made up your mind to be disagreeable," and she leads the way in silence.

At last they reach a dusty square, with a railed-off space in the middle, where a few trees and smoke-grimed shrubs are growing.

"This is Clark's Square," says Millie, breaking the silence. "Of course, in the City it's awfully grand to live in a square. All the richest people live in squares," she adds loftily.

Keziah is duly impressed; though she cannot help thinking that Clark's Square doesn't look a very nice place to live in after all.

"They won't expect us a bit, calling at this time," remarks Millie, sulkily, as she rings the bell. "There, just as I thought, no one to answer the bell; all the girls upstairs dressing for the afternoon. It's all your fault for hurrying here so early," and she rings again.

A slow, heavy step is heard within, and the door is opened by a stout, good-natured looking woman.

"Why, it's never Millie?" she exclaims in a hearty voice. "Why, Millie, I'm glad you've come to-day. The girls have quite a tea on. Who's your friend, my dear?"

Millie's face clears. "Oh, Keziah Greene—we

go to the same school. Keziah, this is Aunt Jane. Are all the girls upstairs?"

"I really couldn't say, my dear. Come in, both of you. Millie, show your friend where to leave her hat, and then come down to me in the sitting-room," and the stout lady walks away, leaving them standing in the hall.

"Aunt Jane's in a very good humour, that's fortunate," remarks Millie as she leads the way upstairs.

"You'll ask her for the money directly, won't you, Millie? I'm so anxious to get home."

"Oh, I daresay!" answers Millie, carelessly. "By the way, Keziah, as I never have any money, and Aunt Jane has plenty, I'm thinking of asking her for three shillings instead of two—she'll never miss it."

"She looks very good-natured."

"She's good-natured enough. Come in here; this is Amy's room. Put your hat on the bed. Your hair's all right, only I do wish you had that new ribbon. Well, now we'll go down. Remember, it's to be three shillings."

"What is to be three shillings? I don't understand you."

"Yes, you do; we've just settled it. Aunt Jane must think I owe you three shillings instead of two."

"Millie!"

Keziah utters but the one word, and stands staring. Can she believe her ears? Is Millie really deliberately planning to tell an untruth—to trick her aunt out of her money?

It may seem strange, but until this moment Keziah has never suspected that Millie is not a straightforward girl. Blinded by Millie's pretended friendship and admiration, she has failed to see through many little acts of deceit, many untruthful speeches.

But she cannot blind herself to the wrongdoing here.

"Millie!" she repeats, and in so horrified a tone that Millie turns round and faces her sharply.

"Millie, I *can't* believe that you would really ask me to tell your aunt an untruth!"

"Rubbish!" snaps Millie; but for all her pretence of not caring, she turns red at the horrified tone in Keziah's voice.

"Millie, say you don't mean that!"

Millie mutters something about "a ridiculous fuss," and looks out of the window.

There is a long silence. At last Keziah sees her fancied "friend" as she really is—as she has been from the first. Many things that she had passed over without trying to understand, become plain to her now.

How undutifully she spoke of her father—how unjustly of Ruth! How eager she was to borrow the two shillings, how careless about paying it back.

"She almost *made* me buy those handkerchiefs; she has led me into deceiving mother. Ruth warned me against her. Oh, how foolish, how wicked I have been!"

Keziah picks up her hat. "I'm going home," she says, and walks to the door.

But Millie bounds across the room and catches her by the shoulder.

"Indeed, you shan't! You've spoilt my day already. You shan't disgrace me too. You'll stay to tea and behave yourself. You *can't* get home," she adds, with an unpleasant laugh. "Remember, I have to ask my aunt to pay for the tickets, and you don't know the way, besides!"

"Millie!" gasps Keziah again, too shocked and hurt at the change in Millie's manner to utter another word.

"Well, it's too bad—that it is! I've tried all I could to plan a nice day for you, and give you a treat, and this is the way you serve me! You've told me often enough what a dull life you have, and how hard you have to work at home, and I so looked forward to giving you a happy day. It is hard, indeed it is, to have you turn on me in this way!"

Soft-hearted Keziah feels rather touched at this.

Millie is not a truthful girl, not at all what she once thought her; but perhaps she meant to act kindly after all.

"Of course, I'm sorry if you are disappointed, but you know I *cannot* do as you wish. And, Millie, I must go home directly."

Millie is just about to answer, when the door is flung open boisterously, and the smartly-dressed girl Keziah had noticed chatting to the baker's lad at the area door enters quickly.

"Hallo, Mill! you're here, then? So glad

you've come to-day; who's your friend?" and she fixes a decided stare on Keziah's face.

"Oh, Amy, I've brought Keziah all this way to see you, and now she must go home at once; isn't it horrid of her? Do make her stay. You don't know how much good it will do her to see a bit of life. She's always poked up at home, you know, and she's growing up to be just the primmest, most old-fashioned girl that ever was seen."

"Of course, she'll stay!" returns Amy, lightly, evidently caring very little as to whether she does or not. "I say, Millie, it was just like you to come to-day; you always seem to know when we're planning to have some fun."

"Of course I do! Do you suppose I can't tell? I guessed you'd have friends to tea to-day, and Keziah and I arranged between us to give you a little surprise."

"Millie! how can you say that?" interrupts Keziah, hotly indignant again. "We came because we wanted to see your aunt, and we *must* see her at once; after that, you can stay or not, as you like. I am going home!"

"What can you two girls want with mother?" asks Amy, looking curiously from one to the other.

"Oh, nothing—only something Keziah wants to ask her about," answers Millie, carelessly; "but there's no hurry."

"There is hurry!" cries Keziah, excitedly. "Millie, you must settle it all at once!"

"If you can't settle whatever it is without

mother, you'll have to wait," remarks Amy, nodding her head; "she's just gone out, and won't be home until after tea."

"There, now! you must wait, whether you like it or not, so it's no use being disagreeable, Keziah. You can be nice enough, if you like. Come, Amy, let's go down to the others."

"The boys haven't come yet; Nellie and Beatie are out, and Emmie and Katie are curling their hair—that always takes them nearly an hour, you know; but, I say, Mill, do come and help me with the bread and butter."

The cloth is already laid in the somewhat dingy sitting-room. Keziah wishes the windows were wider open to let out the smell of stale tobacco-smoke, for the air down here strikes her as decidedly "stuffy."

Amy and Millie disappear into the kitchen, and Keziah is left alone.

How wretched she feels as she seats herself on the hard, horse-hair sofa, and, leaning her head on her hands, begins to think!

Ah! what was her unhappiness at Rosalie's coldness, or Cora's unkindness to this! Her feelings were hurt by the former, her self-love by the latter; but this time it is her conscience, her soul, that has suffered. She has deceived her mother, she has acted without her knowledge, and she is, perhaps, causing her keen anxiety at this very moment.

And she must sit here and wait, and wait, and do nothing! She is full of misgivings, too, about Millie's cousins; she feels quite sure that they

are not the kind of girls her mother would care to have her visit.

For a whole hour Keziah sits alone; she is miserable, and feels that she deserves to be so. "Oh, what dreadful mistakes I make in choosing my friends! But this is the worst of all!"

Big tears are stealing slowly down her cheeks, and her breast is beginning to heave with sobs, when she hears a great sound of scrambling and laughing in the hall above; the sounds grow rapidly louder, the door bursts open, and a troop of boys and girls enter, all chattering together.

Keziah starts to her feet, wondering what she ought to do; the boys and girls scatter noisily through the room, and Millie and Amy appear with the bread and butter and cake.

"Beatie, Nellie, Emmie, set the chairs round," orders Amy, "and, Millie, you had better introduce your friend while I make the tea."

Now, Millie has by no means forgiven Keziah for refusing to be guided by her any longer, and, as she puts it to herself, she means to "serve her out." So she calls out quite loudly:

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is my friend, Keziah Greene, and what do you think? Why, she considers it really wicked to go out to tea!"

The boys stare, the girls laugh, Keziah turns quite white.

"She does, she told me so just now; she wanted to go home directly she heard you were all coming. But, then, there's hardly anything she *doesn't* think wicked. I know she doesn't approve of the



"THE BOYS STARE, THE GIRLS LAUGH, AND KEZIAH
TURNS QUITE WHITE."

way you girls are dressed. *She* never wears bangles or necklaces, or feathers in her hats, or lace on her dress. Oh, no; she doesn't think it right—do you, Keziah, dear?"

But Keziah's lips are quivering, and she cannot utter a word.

"Now, girls, what are you laughing at? Come, all of you, tea is quite ready," and to Keziah's intense relief, Amy bustles them all into their places, and so, for the time at least, she is left in peace.

She has a chair at the end of the table farthest from Millie; but though she has tasted nothing since the morning, she cannot eat, even her cup of tea seems to choke her. Millie's jeering words have put the finishing touch to her self-reproach and misery. She feels altogether out of place among these noisy, loud-voiced boys and girls. Silent and nervous, she shrinks if they only look towards her, and all the time she is thinking:

"Oh, if mother only saw me here! Over and over again she has told me not to be seen laughing and talking with girls who frizz their hair, and dress like Millie's cousins, and the boys are not nice. Our Jack always cuts the bread and butter at home, and wouldn't think of letting me fetch his chair; but these boys allow the girls to wait on them all the time. Oh, when will Millie's aunt come back? I shall go straight to her when she does, and tell her everything. She looks so good-natured; I'm sure she'll let me go home."

Meantime, the rest of the party are talking over various plans for amusing themselves after tea.

"Let's walk in the Park and listen to the band," suggests Amy.

"Oh, no; that's so slow!" cries Bertie, one of the boys from next door.

"Besides, it's raining," remarks Millie.

"So it is—pouring, I declare. Well, we must just have games at home, I suppose; we can take this table out of the way, and make as much noise as we please until mother comes home."

Keziah looks from one to the other in great surprise. Do these big boys and girls mean to play romping games like children? She is scarcely eleven yet, but she gave up little children's play some time ago.

"All right. I vote for blind-man's buff!" cries a fat, sandy-haired boy, whom the others call Tommy Mitchell.

"No, thanks, Tommy; it's much too hot for anything of the sort, and, besides, I don't forget how you tripped me up with a chair last time we played."

"Of course, that's half the fun. Oh, do let's have it; everything else is so slow!"

"Well, go and play by yourselves, boys; we girls have the tea-things to wash, and the salad to make for supper."

"Play by ourselves? No fun in that!" cries Cyril, a dark-haired boy, with a face much too old for his years. "I say, Bertie, while the girls are at work, I'll show you some of the conjuring tricks my uncle taught me. Come along, we must get clothes-pegs and things."

"Oh, let us come, too—let us come, too!" cry

some of the girls, Millie amongst them, and they follow the boys out of the room.

Nellie and Emmie pack the tea-things together, and Amy steps briskly to and fro, putting the chairs in order. Keziah is standing forlornly by herself, such an expression of distress and dismay on her white face that presently even careless Amy notices it.

"Have Millie and you quarrelled?" she asks, with a nearer approach to kindness than anything she has said yet.

"I—I don't know; I suppose so," stammers bewildered Keziah. Then suddenly she bursts out, "Oh, it isn't that! I must go home. I must go home! I've promised my mother *never* to play rough games with strange boys and girls, and she doesn't know I'm here, and——"

"Go home, then. I'm sure *we* don't want you. I can't think why Millie brought you here at all," interrupts Amy, much offended.

"But—but I don't know the way, and I haven't any money for the train."

"And you expect me to give you some? Likely thing indeed! Millie brought you here, and she must get you home again," and she flounces out of the room.

The other girls carry the trays away, and again Keziah is left alone.

She was wretched before, she is terrified now. What will those dreadful boys and girls do when they return? Will they try to force her to play with them? She has no friend, no one to appeal to.

"How cruel Millie was! Yes, and I feel sure she will try to make the others cruel to me also. But I will not play with them; no, I will not. I have disobeyed mother already, they shall not make me break my promise, too!"

For a long, long time she sits there, listening to the clatter of girls' voices in the next room—the distant shouts of the boys; apparently, she is quite forgotten.

It is quite dark before they all troop in again, flushed and excited, Amy with a taper in her hand, from which she lights the gas.

"Goodness me!" she exclaims, as she turns up the jets, "if we haven't left that friend of yours alone all this time, Millie, in the dark, too."

"It's her own fault for being so disagreeable; well, at any rate, we'll make it up to her now. Come, Amy, let's have a game of forfeits; let's make her play, whether she likes it or not," she adds, spitefully.

"Forfeits—oh, yes, forfeits!" cry several girls.

"Very well," agrees Amy. "I'll hear the forfeits first—this is my chair. Now, then, come along all of you.

"Yes; come along, Keziah!" cries Millie, clapping her hands.

But Keziah stands quite still, staring straight before her.

"You perfect silly, you *shall* play!" screams Millie; still Keziah does not move.

"Make her play! Beatie, Emmie, Nellie, she thinks herself too good to play with us—*she*

never does anything she's been told not to—no, indeed!”

“Come, we won't stand any nonsense here. You'll just have to play!” and to Keziah's intense terror Emmie and Beatie seize her by the shoulders and drag her into the middle of the room.

At that very instant the door-bell rings violently.

CHAPTER XII.

JUST IN TIME.

"WHAT'S that?" The girls look at one another.

"Oh, nothing particular," declares Amy, "perhaps the post. Mother has her key, and it's father's club-night, you know. Katie, answer the bell directly!"

"I don't see why I should be made to go just because I'm the youngest—go yourself," says rebellious Katie.

"How dare you speak to me like that? Go at once I say!"

"Shan't!"

The bell rings again, and more violently than before.

"Katie, if you don't go this minute I'll tell mother about that plate you broke—I know where you've hidden the pieces."

Katie leaves the room slowly, grumbling to herself, and banging the door after her.

"Now, girls, let's go on with the game—what do you say—shall we begin with Keziah Greene?"

"Yes—yes; oh, good—that will be fun!" cry all the others, amid loud bursts of laughter.

"Very well; now who'll call out the forfeits first?"

"Tommy Mitchell—do have Tommy Mitchell," cry several girls. "He always thinks of the funniest things."

"Come along, Tommy—now, Keziah, you're *going* to play—we won't stand any more nonsense."

Keziah looks round the room desperately—thoughtless faces, curious eyes, Millie's spiteful smile—no one to take her part. For a minute her heart fails her. Oh, what will they do if she refuses to obey them?

"I—I don't know how to play," she says, trembling from head to foot. "Oh, please, *please* leave me out!"

"Nonsense! Anybody can play at forfeits. I sit in this chair; Tommy kneels beside me with his eyes blind-folded; then I hold up something belonging to somebody—a glove or shoe, or anything like that—and ask him what the owner of that thing is to do; then he says something, and the owner has to do it, has to pay the forfeit—see? before she may take her thing back."

"But suppose it's something she ought not to do?" asks Keziah, trembling more than ever.

"As though we should tell you to do anything you ought not—rude little thing!" cries Amy.

But one girl whispers, "Why, that's half the fun," and Keziah hears her.

"Now, girls, collect the forfeits. Keziah must give me a shoe, as she wears neither ribbons nor bangles."

"I can't play—I can't indeed! Let me go into the next room—I don't mind sitting by myself.

I don't mind being alone in the dark; but I can't play—I really *can't*!”

“You shall play! Emmie, Beatie, give me her shoe.”

“No—no—no!” But the more terrified Keziah appears, the louder the laughter grows.

Suddenly Katie reappears, and raising her voice to a perfect scream to make it heard above the din, she cries:

“Amy, you must come! There's an old woman at the door, and she says she won't go away until she's seen Keziah Greene. I told you it was no use sending me.”

The laughter stops suddenly, but Keziah cries, “It's mother—mother has come to take me home! Oh, mother, mother!” and she breaks away from her tormentors and runs towards the door. Alas! half a dozen hands catch her by the skirts, and drag her back in spite of her struggles.

But Amy turns to Millie. “You had better go and see this person, whoever she is—the whole thing is your doing,” she says sharply.

“It can't be Mrs. Greene—she doesn't know anything about this place,” replies Millie sulkily. “Why didn't that little silly say Keziah wasn't here?”

“I'm not going to tell stories just to please you,” retorts Katie. “It's all Amy's fault for sending me to the door.”

“We shall have to let her go, I suppose,” says Amy.

“Oh, what a shame!” cries Tommy Mitchell. “I'd just thought of the funniest forfeits for Miss

Keziah—you would have laughed yourself into fits."

The door-bell rings again.

"There, she's ringing the bell to make you hurry up—she'll come right down here if you don't make haste. Amy, do go and see if you can't make her go away."

Amy pushes her way through the circle of boys and girls, and runs upstairs.

"Too bad to spoil our fun like this," says one girl. "Now, Tommy, what was it you thought of? Do tell!"

"Oh, do—do!" cry several voices, and they gather round grinning, fat-faced Tommy, laughing and whispering together.

We all know what boys like Tommy Mitchell think "good fun"—silly tricks, spiteful "practical jokes," generally painful to the feelings, often harmful to the soul; but Keziah never hears what it is she has escaped, for suddenly she realises that the way to the door is clear! In an instant she has darted out and is flying up the stairs.

There are loud outcries and a rush of feet behind her, but she has a good start, and terror gives her strength; before anyone can touch her, she reaches the hall.

Two figures are standing there, just beneath the gas-lamp, Amy, and—she springs forward—then stops short—no, it is not her mother, but an utter stranger!

A little old lady, very quietly dressed, with kind, dark eyes, and grey hair. Her hand is on Amy's arm, and Amy is hanging her head and

looking ashamed. They both glance up quickly as Keziah bounds up the stairs, and the little old lady takes a step towards her.

"I think you must be Keziah Greene, my dear," she says, holding out her hand. "I am Ruth Golding's grandmother, and I've come to take you home."

Poor Keziah's overwrought feelings give way altogether at the sound of that kind voice—she just throws her arms round the old lady's neck, and bursts into a passion of tears on her shoulder.

"Hush, hush! you mustn't give way like this—indeed, you mustn't, my dear!" says the old lady, trying to check poor Keziah's almost hysterical sobbing. "Come, come, fetch your hat, and we'll start for home directly. It's getting very late now, and your mother must be in a sad way about you. Keziah, you must control yourself. Think of your mother!"

"Yes—yes—I will. Oh, Mrs. Golding, only take me home!" and with a great effort Keziah manages to choke back her most violent sobs; though her breast is still heaving painfully when she runs upstairs for her hat. She finds it in the dark, and as she returns hears Amy making excuses to Mrs. Golding for not sending her home before. "We knew nothing about it—it was nothing to do with us," and so on.

One or two boys and girls are listening and whispering at the top of the stairs leading down to the sitting-room, but Millie is not amongst them. Evidently she thinks it safest to keep out of the way.

Another minute, and the door of No. 2 Clark's Square has closed behind them, and Mrs. Golding and Keziah are walking down the wet street. The rain beats in their faces, in spite of Mrs. Golding's umbrella; but Keziah is far too glad and thankful to care for that. Yet when she thinks of home and mother, she is fearful too.

"Oh, Mrs. Golding, is mother very angry?" she says, clinging to her new friend's arm.

"More troubled than angry, I should think, my dear; but, of course, I don't know."

"Didn't you come from mother? Then how did you find out where I was—how could you find out, when even mother didn't know?"

Mrs. Golding explains. Keziah is silent for a few moments; then she says, in a low voice: "It was Ruth's doing, after all?"

"Yes, my dear, Ruth is a good girl, and a true friend, but I expect you know that as well as I do."

Again Keziah is silent. "A true friend." The words echo in her mind strangely. How she has longed for a friend, how hard she has tried to find one, how bitterly she has been disappointed!

She is still thinking deeply when they reach the great City station, where she caught that glimpse of Ruth this morning. Mrs. Golding gets tickets; fortunately, a train is almost on the point of starting.

They hurry down the long platform, and Keziah feels almost as though she were moving in a dream. The great electric lamps, the bustle, the noise bewilder her tired eyes and weary brain,

and through it all the dull, heavy sense of wrongdoing, of disgrace weighs painfully on her heart. They have the carriage to themselves, and Keziah leans back in her corner with a weary sigh.

"So it was Ruth who helped me after all; if she hadn't seen me this morning—oh, dear, how long ago that seems now—I should be in that dreadful house still! A true friend; yes, she has been one to me, and I wouldn't believe her when she warned me against Millie. I've hardly spoken to her lately. I pretended not to see her this morning when she was watering her flowers before breakfast—I was so afraid she would ask me how I was going to spend the day.

"Suppose she saw me turn away—saw that I did it on purpose—after she's been so good and kind to me, hearing my lessons night after night, helping us all so when Bennie was ill—oh, that would be dreadful!"

"Yes, little Ruth is a good girl," continues the old lady thoughtfully, as though speaking to herself. "I am sure she comes into our dull old shop like a ray of sunshine. And such a nice voice she has too; many a girl who could sing as sweetly as she can would be always wanting to show off; but she never thinks of singing unless she's asked, and then it's only for the sake of singing the Lord's praises, and giving other folks pleasure. And then, fine as some folks think themselves, I always say that to my mind our little Ruth's face is the most beautiful I have ever seen."

Keziah stares. Ruth beautiful?—plainly-dressed, quiet Ruth, with nothing fine or showy about her!

"I suppose it's the true and loving spirit one sees in her eyes," says Mrs. Golding, still thoughtfully, "and she's a wise little soul, too—just wonderful sense for one so young. Well—well, the Bible says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and Ruth fears, aye, loves the Lord with all her heart."

Wise, loving, beautiful with the best and truest beauty, what a friend Ruth would make! Keziah feels a sudden glow at her heart with the thought; then as suddenly a chill runs through her.

Would Ruth take her for a friend? Ruth, so good, so wise—she so full of faults, so weak-willed, so foolish? And Ruth, who until now has seemed so within her reach, such an everyday, commonplace sort of friend, seems lifted into another position altogether.

"Oh," she thinks, "I would be only too glad, too thankful, to have such a friend! But it's too late now, she's borne with me, and borne with me, and listened to all the silly things I've said, and tried to show me how to behave sensibly—oh, if I had only understood how good she is before! There was Rosalie, and then Cora, and now to-day—oh, how self-willed, how blind I have been! How could I think so much of those girls, and neglect the real friend close to me all the time!"

And Keziah crouches still lower in the corner, sobbing bitterly; while the very whirr of the iron wheels seem throbbing out the words, "Too late—too late!"

CHAPTER XIII.

RUTH.

How wearisome that journey is to poor tired Keziah! Yet she is sorry when it is over, for now she has her mother to face. What will she say—what will she do?

Again kind little Mrs. Golding tucks the exhausted girl's arm under her own; the rain is heavier than ever, and, in spite of all the old lady's efforts with the big umbrella, Keziah's thin dress is soon wet through; yet, feverish and excited, she hardly notices the fact.

Hurriedly turning a corner, they almost run into a dark figure, battling with a dripping umbrella, held against the wind.

"Holloa—beg your pardon!" cries a voice Keziah knows at once, for it is her brother Jack's. "Why, if it isn't Miss Keziah at last! Well, I hope you're satisfied—here's mother nearly out of her senses about you, and Ruth and I tearing about all the evening like a couple of lunatics. What on earth made you go off in that way, without a word to anyone? Your precious 'friends' again, I suppose!"

"Oh, Jack—oh, please, *please* don't!" sobs Keziah.

"Come, my boy, don't say anything about it to-night, she's thoroughly upset, and very sorry besides," interposes Ruth's grandmother.

"Sorry? So she ought to be. Why, mother's in such a state she's made me meet every train."

"Is Ruth with her?"

"Of course. Ruth's always on the spot when she's wanted. The way that girl thinks of things, and her pluck, and—you know. She's as different as white from black from all those stupid girls 'Ziah takes up with. Now what was it, after all? I suppose you found her at Clark's Square—awfully good of you to go."

"We'd better leave all that until Keziah has seen her mother. Remember, I must go back to-night, and the last train leaves in half an hour.

"Fancy you taking all this trouble for us! Anyone could see that you are Ruth's grandmother—a sort of Ruth grown old," he adds with a boyish laugh.

"Yes, yes, so you are," whispers Keziah under her breath, and she sighs deeply. Somehow, Ruth seems getting farther and farther away from her every minute.

They have all seen how much better Ruth is than other girls—all save her own stupid self. How could she have been so blind?

A few minutes bring them to their own door, which Jack opens with his key. Keziah is trembling so again that she can scarcely stand.

"Here she is, mother!" sings out Jack; and the next instant she is folded close in her mother's arms.

There are no scoldings—no reproaches.

Mrs. Greene is far too thankful to have her little daughter back safe and sound to remember how naughty she has been; and, indeed, Keziah needs no scolding to make her understand. No one could blame her more than she is blaming herself.

On her mother's shoulder, before she sleeps that night, she sobs out a full confession of all her doings during the past few days. She tells of the fate of her two-shilling piece, of her efforts to get it returned, of all the mistakes which followed.

"Oh, mother, if you knew how wretched I have been since I had a secret from you! I knew it was wrong yet I thought I couldn't help it—but you may be sure, mother dear, that I will never have one again. I can never forget to-day, and all the troubles my wrongdoing led to. I've been so miserable—so wretched, I never spent such a horrid day in the whole of my life. If it hadn't been for Mrs. Golding, and—and Ruth, I don't know what would have become of me. Mother, I quite forgot to thank Mrs. Golding."

"We will go to her home and thank her together; she must be a good, kind woman—as Jack says, a sort of Ruth grown old."

Keziah is silent. She is dimly conscious that Ruth was in the passage when Jack opened the door, but she slipped away without speaking.

"Does Ruth despise me too much to care to see me again?" The thought torments her but she is afraid to ask her mother any questions.

A strange new shyness of Ruth has grown up in her mind. Much as she now longs for Ruth's friendship, she is almost afraid to meet her.

In spite of her weariness and exhaustion of body and mind, Keziah sleeps badly—she wakes so often that the night seems never-ending. At length, towards morning she falls into a deeper sleep, from which she awakes to find the sun streaming into her room, and her head throbbing with pain.

Presently mother peeps in, and seeing how ill she is feeling, will not let her attempt to get up, but brings her weak tea and toast, and bids her lie still and try to rest.

But she cannot rest, her head aches so; her face is burning, and there is no cool place on the pillow.

It is Sunday, and she can hear the bells ringing. If it were Monday, she could not go to school to-day. When Ruth hears she is ill, will she come to her? Oh, how hot her head is—how parched her throat—and the tea only makes her feel worse.

Will Ruth come? Oh, dear! why did she act so foolishly, why has she made it so impossible for Ruth to really love her?

“Of course she won't come. She helped me yesterday just because I was in trouble, as she would help anyone. Oh, what a wicked girl she must think me!” and Keziah tosses restlessly again to the other side of the bed.

As she does so, the door-handle moves gently; she looks up—Ruth is in the room.

Their eyes meet, and a deeper flush than that of fever burns in Keziah's cheeks, and she turns quickly away, all trembling and ashamed, drawing the sheet over her face.

But Ruth steps swiftly to her side.

"Keziah!" she cries. "Keziah, what is the matter? Why do you hide from me, Keziah, dear?" And Ruth steps quickly to the bedside, and with gentle fingers draws the sheet from Keziah's fevered face, laying a cool hand lightly on the throbbing forehead.

"Oh, dear, how hot your head is—you are quite ill; no wonder after all you went through yesterday. Keziah, I longed to tell you last night how glad I was to see you safe home again; but I knew your mother would want you all to herself, so I slipped away with dear old granny. Granny told me how she found you, and how sadly troubled you seemed. Perhaps some day you will tell me all about it? I'm so sorry, so very sorry for you, dear."

"It was my own fault, all my own fault," moans Keziah; then she adds, with a little sigh of relief, "Oh, how nice and cool your hand feels!"

"Does it, Keziah? Then I'm sure some cold water would ease the pain. Look at what I've brought you; you must eat some of these, whilst I get a basin and sponge to bathe your poor head."

"Grapes! Oh, how kind of you! They're just what I've been longing for. How good you are to me!"



"WHAT A DREADFUL THING TO SAY!"

And she lies back on her pillow with closed eyes, while Ruth deftly touches her aching brow with the wet sponge.

"That's ever so nice; I feel better already. I always feel so comfortable when I'm with you, Ruth."

Ruth laughs softly. "Now, dear, you mustn't talk like that, or I shall begin to think you mistake me for one of your friends—your *special* friends, you know."

"Oh, Ruth, *don't*—please don't make fun of me! I've never had a real friend—never, and now I suppose I never shall have one."

"Never have a real friend? What a dreadful thing to say!"

"No; I've done nothing but make terrible mistakes, and now I haven't any friends at all. Why is it, Ruth? Why have all my friends failed me like this?"

"Perhaps, dear, because you didn't choose your friends in quite the right way," answers Ruth very gently.

"There was Rosalie; I really tried to make her like me; tried as hard as ever I could."

"But think, Keziah; you knew nothing about her when you chose her for your friend, save that she was bright, and nice-looking, and seemed good-natured. Weren't you really rather unjust to poor Rosalie; didn't you make quite an idol of her for a time, and then get angry and hurt because she couldn't give you the sympathy and steady affection that had never been a part of her character?"

Keziah is silent, for she feels that this is only too true.

"Cora Holloway treated me shamefully," she mutters, after a long pause.

"But, then, you never really loved Cora at all. Keziah, forgive me. I don't want to talk about these things whilst your head pains you so."

"But I want you to talk; do, please. I've been thinking about it all so much, and my head's better; you sponge it so nicely, Ruth. Well, about Cora?"

"I'm afraid, dear, as you only liked Cora because she looked grand and imposing, and lived in a fine house, you couldn't expect any better treatment than you received. As for Millie Steele——"

"Oh, don't talk about her, please; I was altogether wrong there, I know that. I just did what she asked me, because she flattered me—said I was clever, and bright, and pretended to like me when she didn't care for me one bit. I can see that now; and, Ruth, I never really cared for her. Often and often I felt that the things she said were all wrong; yet I wouldn't own it to myself; it was so nice to have some one always making a fuss of me! And to think how she turned on me yesterday; why, she did all she could to make those cousins of hers tease and ill-treat me. I couldn't have believed that any girl would act so unkindly."

"Ah! Keziah, what else could you expect? You listened to her, you allowed her to persuade you into deceiving your mother. Those who

tempt us to do wrong are always the first to turn on us. An untruthful girl cannot make a true friend."

Again there is a short silence, which Keziah breaks by saying very timidly, "Ruth, what is the right way of choosing a friend?"

"I think, dear, that we can only choose our friends rightly by remembering that there is only one perfect Friend for us all—a Friend we must love so much that we like all our other friends only for their likeness to Him, and for what He did for them, and for us, and all the world."

"You mean Jesus Christ," says Keziah, in a very low voice.

"Yes, dear. We must think of Him and His service before everything, and then we shall never go wrong. 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you.' That is what my Captain always says to us. She says it is the only way we can make really helpful friends."

Keziah does not answer for a minute or two. She is thinking deeply.

"You are more like Him than any girl I have ever seen," she says at last with a little quiver in her voice.

"Oh, Keziah, don't! You mustn't talk like that!" cries Ruth quite distressed.

"Well, it's true; and everybody who knows you thinks so."

"Keziah, you mustn't; I can't bear it." And this time it is Ruth who turns away and hangs her head.

“I know you can’t love me after all the bad and silly things I’ve done and said—at least not for a long, long time. But, Ruth, I’m going to make you like me by doing things to deserve your friendship, and so, perhaps, some day——”

Ruth looks up suddenly, and her sweet brown eyes are glittering with happy tears. “Keziah, dear, dear Keziah, I do love you—I’ve always loved you—you’re so warm-hearted, so generous, I’ve always felt we should be true friends; and I’ve waited, and hoped, and been so sorry——”

“You!” Keziah catches Ruth’s hand in both hers. “Oh, Ruth, I’m not good enough, indeed, I’m not; but you must help me, dear, and I’ll try so hard; but, oh, I can never hope to be as good as you!”

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW TO CHOOSE A FRIEND.

THAT day is a happy one for both girls, certainly the happiest Keziah has spent for many months. Ruth sits with her, brings her delicious bread and milk of her own making, and then reads her to sleep.

It is late in the afternoon when Keziah awakes, feeling tired still, but otherwise quite well.

"I can get up now, I'm sure, my headache has quite gone," she says gratefully to Ruth, who is still with her. "Oh, Ruth, I believe it just comes natural to you to do the right thing for everybody! *You* never had to learn to think for others; you were never selfish and thoughtless like me!"

"Keziah, you never made a greater mistake in your life. You are naturally far more unselfish than I am."

"Now look here, Ruth, I want to believe everything you say, but I really *can't* stand that, you know. You'll be telling me next that you're naturally fond of fine frocks like Rosalie Thorne, or shops and silly games like Millie Steele."

"It would be quite true."

"Ruth!"

"Yes, Keziah; you see you haven't known me very long—not a year yet. Two years ago I longed for a big hat trimmed with roses, and worried mother to put frills on my frocks, and looked forward to the time when I could frizz my hair and wear high-heeled shoes."

"Oh, Ruth, that would never do! You wouldn't be Ruth dressed up like that—you were never meant to be that kind of girl, I'm sure."

"So I realised, dear, when God came into my life, and changed it all."

"And do you never wish for the old days back again? Have you quite, quite given up caring for everything?" asks Keziah, rather wistfully.

Ruth laughs outright. "Oh, Keziah, how oddly you talk! It's just because I care for so many lovely things now, so many beautiful, deeply interesting things that I haven't time in the day, or room in my mind, for the old, dull amusements, the old, narrow, silly thoughts and feelings."

Keziah feels rather puzzled, and does not answer.

"But surely you know all this as well as I do. Did you particularly enjoy your tea with Cora?"

"It was horrid."

"Or your walks and talks with Rosalie?"

"Not after the first."

"Or shopping with Millie, or her cousins' idea of a 'bit of fun'?"

"Please don't!"

"I'm not saying it in reproach; I only want you to notice that when people think only of

amusing themselves, they don't succeed in getting much happiness out of their lives, for all their trouble. They have quite as much disappointment, and worry, and envy, and bitterness as they do fun. I never saw an unhappier face than Cora's, or a more discontented one than Millie Steele's. How much better to leave all these disappointing things alone, and try to be really happy!"

"You mean, I suppose, never to have any friends, or go out to tea, or——"

"Stop a moment, Keziah, to show you that you are mistaken, I invite you to tea with a dear friend of mine this very afternoon. That is, if you really feel well enough."

Keziah starts. "A friend of yours?"

"Yes; one I love very much, who has helped me greatly, and who, I believe, will help you."

"Oh, a grown-up friend," says Keziah, relieved. "Your Captain, I suppose?"

"My Captain is all I have said and more; but I'm not speaking of her just now. I mean a girl like ourselves. She is a darling, and you will soon love her as I do."

"I'm pretty sure I shan't, mutters Keziah under her breath. "Ruth is to be *my* friend, and I don't want other people interfering!"

"While you dress, I'll run and pick Aggie some flowers—poor dear! She loves them so."

"Flowers, too! Ruth never gives me any of her flowers," thinks Keziah. "I'm sure I shan't like her—who is she—why hasn't Ruth told me about her before?"

Ruth talks cheerfully as they set out together, but Keziah makes very short answers. She would be ashamed to own it, but she is certainly rather jealous of "Aggie" already.

"Why, I do believe it's the whole family!" cries Ruth suddenly.

Keziah looks up. A little troop of children are trudging down the road; a shabby troop they are, odd, neglected little things, pale and sickly-looking. The eldest is a girl of about nine, and that the baby in her arms is roaring at the top of his voice, is only too certain.

So sad and pitiful do they look, dragging along through the thick dust, that for a while Keziah quite forgets her selfish thoughts; for all jealousy is selfishness.

"Oh, Ruth, what poor little things! Can't we do something to brighten them up a bit?"

The answer comes quickly enough from the children themselves.

"Oh, there's Miss Wuth—there's Miss Wuth!" screams the eldest girl, "come along. Johnnie hold your noise do—Miss Wuth'll hear you!"

Dejected faces brighten up as though by magic; even the baby's yells cease, and the whole party swoop at Ruth as though she were something good to eat.

"How sweet to have the very sight of one bring such happy smiles to such poor little faces! What has Ruth done to make them love her so?" thinks Keziah, watching them. "Can't I do something? I know that big baby is much too heavy for that thin little girl to carry. Ruth, would baby Johnnie

let me carry him?" and Keziah goes up to him and holds out her arms.

Baby Johnnie half makes up his mind to cry again, but thinks better of it, and lets Keziah take him.

"Oh, thank you, miss, he *does* make my arms ache so," says his little nurse.

"You poor little thing—I'll carry him every step of the way!"

It is a pity Keziah does not understand the bright look Ruth gives her at the words.

"Ruth, it makes my heart ache to see these poor little mites with these old battered hats—they don't shade their eyes from the sun one bit. I've two old straw-hats at home; do you think they would wear them?"

"I should think so, indeed!" cries Ruth, with that happy light shining in her eyes again.

"I've outgrown my holland pinafores," continues Keziah, thoughtfully, "and, if mother doesn't mind, I should like to give those too—they want a good deal of mending, though."

"Well, I'm making baby Johnnie a frock, suppose I come over to your house after school to-morrow; we could sit in the garden, and sew and talk together?"

"That would be delightful. I know! I'll trim the hats afresh with that green ribbon I bought when—oh, I forgot, you don't know about that yet!"

"Well, if you like, you shall tell me to-morrow. Come, you must give Johnnie back to his little

mother; we can't take him quite home, or Aggie will wonder what has become of me."

Aggie again! Why should Aggie have all this consideration? Keziah's smiles fade away.

"I do believe Ruth wants me to think that she likes Aggie best," she thinks; and she says "good-bye" to the little family so ungraciously that Ruth is quite puzzled.

"Is your head paining you again?" she asks.

"Oh, no," answers Keziah shortly.

Ruth looks rather surprised, but says nothing. They are in a very poor street now; narrow, dull, and airless.

"I suppose this is a short cut to your friend's house?" says Keziah presently, looking rather disgusted.

"No, this is where she lives," and Ruth stops, and knocks at a dingy door.

It is opened after a while by a cross-looking woman, very poorly dressed.

"Is Aggie better to-day, Mrs. Twist?"

"No, she isn't; and, what's more, the doctor said yesterday that she never will be—just a burden on me as long as she lives."

"Poor Aggie! She tries to be patient."

"Oh, I daresay. You'll want to make tea as usual, I suppose; the kettle's boiling."

"That's nice—see, mother's sent you a whole packet of tea this time. We can go in, I suppose?"

"Of course! She's been wild to see you."

Ruth steps across the room to an inner door. "Come, Keziah," she says, and opens it. "Aggie, I've brought my friend, Keziah, to see you."

A tiny room, lighted by one small window; a narrow bed, and on it, lying at full length, the figure of a girl of twelve or thirteen. Keziah has never seen such a pale, fragile-looking creature, such thin hands—never seen, too, such a look of love and joy as flashes into the patient eyes as they rest on Ruth's face.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come! I try to be patient; but—did mother tell you?—the doctor says now that I shall never be well, or run about like other girls any more!"

And this is Ruth's friend! This poor, pale cripple, the girl of whom she was jealous! Keziah hangs her head, and is too ashamed to speak.

But after Aggie and Ruth have had a little whispered talk together, and Ruth has bustled into the next room to get the tea, she feels that she must make some effort, for the sick girl is looking at her—oh, so wistfully and timidly!

"Do you really have to lie here all day long?" asks Keziah, rather huskily.

"Oh, yes, miss! there's something wrong with my back; it's been bad for two years."

And Aggie speaks quite cheerfully.

"How *dreadful!*"

"Well, miss, it was cruelly hard at first—that is, before your friend found me out; but she's made all the difference. I used to fret terribly, and think God was cruel and unjust to treat me so much worse than other girls, and when the pain came I felt half mad."

"And why aren't you like that now?" asks Keziah, in a very low voice.

"Oh, she told me all about the Saviour, and what He suffered for me, and she sings of the bright Home beyond the skies, and tells me how free and strong I shall be there at last; and when I want to get up and help other people, she shows me that though I can't ever *work* for Jesus, I can *bear* things for Him."

And Keziah thinks, "Ah, what a beautiful thing to do! How grand to bring peace and joy into this poor girl's dreadful life!"

Presently Ruth returns with the tea-tray, which she arranges on a little rickety table by Aggie's bedside.

"Tea, ladies, please," she says cheerfully. "We shall have quite a prayer meeting this evening—shan't we, Aggie? Keziah can sing, too; and, do you know, Aggie, she used to live in the country, and can tell the loveliest stories about the birds and beasts. Tell Aggie about your tame hedgehog, Keziah."

Keziah tells the hedgehog story, and many country tales besides. She has never told them so well before; but, then, she has never had such a keenly-interested listener as poor Aggie.

"This *has* been a happy day," she remarks, as Ruth and she walk home together.

"Yes, dear, and you have helped to make others happy, too," says Ruth quietly.

"Is *this* the kind of happiness you meant, Ruth, when you spoke of a truly happy life this morning?"

"Yes—just the beginning of it; but, oh, Keziah, there is so much, so very much besides!

Think of the wonderful joy of really feeling that you are working for the Lord; that you are taking His messages of love, and peace, and hope to poor despairing souls! And then, somehow, you enjoy everything that is really true and beautiful so much more thoroughly when you are fighting on the Lord's side—all the wonderful things He has made have such a meaning for you—you love them all so much, and the old, narrow, selfish life looks so poor and mean!"

"But somehow I can't help being interested in pretty things," says Keziah, with a slight return to her manner of this morning.

"Of course you like pretty things—so do I. Only I like to be sure that what I am admiring is *really* a pretty thing, and not only a sham."

"Real things, sham things—Ruth, I don't understand."

"By shams I mean all the useless things, the senseless things, the harmful things, that so many girls run after just because they won't stop to think. All amusements that make us discontented with our daily work, or give us false ideas about life, are sham amusements. For instance, novelettes. You don't read novelettes, do you, Keziah?"

"I read part of one, once; but mother took it away," and Keziah blushes a little, as she remembers "Ernestine," and the ideas she formed from it about a friend.

"The worst of novelettes is, they give one such altogether untrue ideas about people and about

everything. And nothing can be really interesting if it is not true, can it, Keziah?"

"I suppose not. Still, it did seem nice that Ernestine—that was the girl's name in the story—should have such a lovely time after she had been so dreadfully miserable. You see, her step-mother was very unkind to her, and made her work ever so hard, and only gave her shabby clothes to wear; and then an old miser, who lived next door, died, and left her all his money—and she had thousands and thousands of pounds all of a sudden."

"And so you think she must have been quite happy?"

"Well, you see, things are horrid sometimes when you haven't much money, aren't they? Now we are obliged to live in a very small house, and there's always something to do. Of course, I love them all at home very much—you know I don't mean anything against them—only——"

"Only you are still thinking a little too much about the shams, dear."

"But it is miserable sometimes when Bennie is cross, and mother has a headache, and Jack wants his tea in a hurry——"

"Ah, yes, I know, your trials are real enough; it's the sham cure that you have in your mind of which I am speaking."

"The girl in your story was supposed to become perfectly happy because she was rich. Riches do not make people happy. Cora Holloway is the richest girl you know, yet I should think her life was about the dreariest it is possible to imagine."

Always discontented, always thinking of herself, without one true friend, without an atom of real love for anyone."

"That's quite true, Ruth, she hasn't a friend. You know I told you what a fuss she made of Isabel Smythe? Well, they've quarrelled dreadfully. I saw them meet in the High Street the other day, and they just stared each other straight in the face, and went on without speaking."

"Sham friendships always end like that. Those two never really cared for each other! I dare say they made a great show of being very affectionate; but they only met to chatter about dress, and tell unkind little tales of people they knew. Why, such friendship as that is no better than an artificial flower. Bright enough to look at from a distance, but when you really see into it, all the beauty disappears—there is no scent, no seed, nothing but a coloured rag after all."

"But real friendship is like a lovely spray of apple-blossom!" cries Keziah, enthusiastically, "so sweet, so full of scent, and then, all the time, you know that when the petals fall a beautiful apple will be left behind."

"Yes, and the Bible tells us that we are to know things by their fruit, doesn't it? Artificial flowers cannot bear fruit, and sham friendships can do no good to our souls. To be really beautiful a thing must be true."

"Why, Ruth, I didn't know you could talk like this!"

"Oh, Keziah, I feel it all so much, and when I think of the wonderful things that are to come,

I could sing for joy. We do have troubles now, dear, and sometimes they seem hard to bear, but look to the end! That is the great reality—all sorrow, all pain, gone for ever, our robes white as snow, shining as the sun, golden crowns on our heads, golden harps in our hands, more than all, and above all, the presence of the Lord Himself; and the joy of having helped, ever so little, to bring others with us to that Heavenly Home!"

Keziah lifts her head, and her honest grey eyes are filled with a new light.

"Oh, Ruth," she whispers, "teach me to be more like Him; teach me how to love the true things, and turn from the shams; teach me how to love the Lord with my whole heart, and to love His service too.

"Ah! I am only just beginning to see how full, and wide, and beautiful it all is myself. But, Keziah, we will learn together. Shall we?"

And Ruth turns and kisses her.

THE END.

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