

BOYS AND GIRLS

Janet Shadd

(Ida T. Thurston, in the *Presbyterian Banner*.)

'There's that girl still at the window. I wonder if she's been there ever since we went by this morning?' said Kitty Keene.

'I'm sorry for her if she has had that great heavy baby in her arms all day,' Louise Weatherby returned carelessly.

'I've been sorry for that girl ever since she's lived there.' It was Alice Bartlett who said that, and she said it so earnestly that the other girls looked at her in surprise and then, with one impulse, glanced back again at the face pressed close up against the window of the little old cottage that they had just passed.

'Why?' Louise questioned, curiously.

'Oh, because she seems to be always carrying that big baby about; and she looks so kind of forlorn and wishful, somehow,' Alice explained; and then she added with a touch of shyness, 'I should think, to a girl like that, it wouldn't seem fair.'

'What wouldn't seem fair, Alice Bartlett? What are you talking about?' Kitty snapped out. Kitty was always impatient over anything that she did not understand and sometimes over things that she did.

'Why I mean, the difference—don't you see?' Alice answered, flushing uncomfortably under Kitty's half-scornful gaze. 'If you had to live in such a house as that and lug around a great heavy baby all day—wouldn't you feel sometimes that it wasn't fair, Kitty, when you saw other girls like us having good times together and going to school and all?'

'Why—I don't know,' returned Kitty, drawing her pretty brows together in an impatient frown. 'How in the world can I tell how I should feel if I were some other kind of a girl? I always supposed that such people didn't care about things—as we do.'

'You mean that that's what you want to suppose because it might make you uncomfortable to think that they do care,' laughed Louise. 'Now I don't allow myself to think about such people at all, for what's the use? It would only spoil my pleasure and do them no good.'

'Unless you could help them,' Alice amended gently.

'Help them—pshaw! How can we help that girl, for instance? Maybe you'd like to run back and offer to take care of the baby for her to-morrow, as it's Saturday, Alice,' Louise mocked merrily.

'Oh, do let's talk about something else!' Kitty exclaimed in her impulsive fashion. 'Have you seen the lovely Easter things in Stibel's window, Lou?'

Louise was quite ready to discuss Easter novelties, and no further reference was made to the other girl before the three parted, but the memory of her wistful face lingered in Alice Bartlett's thoughts—she could not forget her. She looked for her as she passed the cottage Monday morning, but she was not at the window.

It chanced that Kitty and Louise had an errand in another direction, so Alice walked home alone that afternoon. This time the girl was at the window, and Alice smiled and nodded to her as she went by. A moment later she heard swift footsteps behind her, and looking back,

saw the girl running after her with a paper in her hand.

'I saw you drop it,' she panted, holding out the paper, and looking at Alice with an eager light in her eyes.

'Oh, thank you—I should have had a failure if I'd lost that,' Alice answered, as she slipped the paper into one of her books. 'It has the special problems for to-morrow. Thank you ever so much.'

The girl muttered under her breath something about hurrying back, but still she lingered, her black eyes watching Alice's face with eager interest.

'I've often seen you at your window,' Alice said, hesitatingly.

'I always see you when you go by,' returned the other, instantly. 'I watch for you—now,' she added, her tone a little uncertain, as if fearful that her watching might displease this girl.

'Do you? What for?' inquired Alice, wonderingly.

'Cause—I like to,' the girl answered, turning her eyes aside for a moment.

'Is the baby your little brother?' Alice questioned.

The girl nodded.

'Don't you get tired carrying him about so much?'

'No, indeed, I love him. He's always been sickly, but if he dies I hope I'll die, too!' exclaimed the girl, with sudden passion.

'Oh,' cried Alice, 'you mustn't say that!'

'Why mustn't I? It's true,' the girl flung back with a flashing glance of her black eyes.

'Oh, because—' Alice began, and then paused uncertainly. In the dark, serious eyes there was something that made her all at once so very, very sorry for this other girl. 'There's somebody else besides you and the baby, isn't there?' she asked, after a moment's silence.

'There's father. He works in the foundry.'

'And do you do everything—all the work of the house, and take care of the baby, too?'

Again the girl nodded.

'So, of course, you can't go to school,' Alice went on. 'And don't you ever get out with other girls?'

'Don't know any girls; we just moved here last month.'

'You must be awfully lonesome,' Alice exclaimed, earnestly. Then moved by a sudden impulse she added: 'I wish you'd come to our Sunday-school—you'd get acquainted with some very nice girls there. Wouldn't you like to come?'

'I don't know—maybe I would,' replied the girl, cautiously.

'I wish you would,' Alice repeated, with added earnestness. 'It's at the gray stone church, corner of Elm and State streets. You know the church?'

Again that silent nod was the only answer.

'Please come next Sunday at nine o'clock,' Alice urged. 'I shall expect you and be disappointed if you don't. Now I must go, for I have to puzzle out those problems that you saved for me.' She moved away, but instantly turned back again to say, 'Oh, I forgot to ask your name. Mine is Alice Bartlett.'

'Mine is Janet Shadd,' returned the girl.

'Thank you, Janet, and good-bye—till Sunday,' Alice returned.

Janet stood for a moment looking after her, then she ran back to the cottage.

Many times in the next few days Alice found herself thinking of Janet Shadd and her lonely life. She wished that she could do something to brighten it, and she tried to interest Kitty and Louise in the girl; but Kitty and Louise were carelessly indifferent, and to her dismayed surprise they seemed to think that she had made a mistake in inviting Janet to their Sunday-school.

'You ought to have told her to go to the mission school—that's the place for a girl like that. She'll never feel comfortable in our school,' Louise declared, decidedly.

'I don't see why not,' Alice maintained, the color rising in her cheeks.

'Oh, Alice, you must see—of course you do!' Louise exclaimed, impatiently. 'A girl that lives in a place like that cottage and has nothing decent to wear can't feel comfortable in a school like ours, where there are no poor folks, of course she can't. At the mission she'd find plenty of her own sort—lots of the foundry folks go there. Don't you think that that's the place for her, Kitty?'

'Why,' of course,' assented Kitty, with her careless little laugh. 'Nobody but Alice would have thought of dragging her into our school.'

The color burned in Alice's cheeks, but she said, softly, 'Don't you think Miss Margaret would, Kitty?'

'Oh, Miss Margaret—she's a saint; but there is only one Miss Margaret in our school, remember. You can't measure the others by her,' Kitty declared, lightly.

'But, Kitty, please, please do be nice to her—to Janet, I mean, if she does come. You and Louise can speak to her anyway, and I know Miss Margaret will,' Alice urged, eagerly.

'Oh, I'll speak to her if that's all you want,' Louise answered; then moved by a sudden fear, she added, 'but see here, Alice Bartlett, you needn't try to bring your Janet Shadd into our class—we won't stand that, will we, Kit?'

'Not much,' responded Kitty, promptly; 'but even Alice would know better than that, Lou. Janet Shadd—ugh! What a fishy name!' she added, with a shrug as she turned away, taking Louise with her.

Alice stood looking after them with a very sober face, wondering if she really had made a mistake in inviting Janet to their Sunday-school. Somehow, she felt certain that the girl would not have gone to the mission school had she suggested that. As to Miss Margaret's class, Alice had not once thought of taking Janet there. Of course, there was no other teacher like Miss Margaret—all her girls knew that. There were seven of them, and they had never had any other teacher nor she any other class. They had come down from the 'infant room' together, and had always been friends and school-mates—all seven of them. No, of course no other girl could be admitted into that class, but there were plenty of others, and, perhaps, anyway Janet would not come. Before Sunday Alice half wished that she would not, she felt such a weight of responsibility about her.