

# BOYS AND GIRLS

## 'Thinketh No Evil.'

'Oh mother, what do you think! Would you believe it? Maggie Vernon has been cheating! Isn't it dreadful!'

Elsie Vawdrey burst into her mother's sitting-room one afternoon, her face flushed, her eyes shining, her voice raised in her excitement.

Mrs. Vawdrey looked up at the sound quietly,—

'That is a very serious charge to bring against any one, Elsie. Are you sure it is true?'

'Quite sure. At least, Ada Kingstone said so; and she was there.'

'Oh! So you heard it from some one else?' Mrs. Vawdrey asked.

'Yes: I wasn't at the reading just then, but Ada told me everything that happened. Just fancy it, mother! That little model of a Maggie Vernon—every one knows about it now!'

There was a slight but an unmistakable note of triumph in Elsie's voice. Mrs. Vawdrey looked grieved as she heard it, and laid her work aside.

'Will you tell me what Ada said, Elsie?' Elsie looked quickly into her mother's face.

'Are you so sorry, mother? Don't you believe it?'

'From what I know of Maggie Vernon, I think it most unlikely that she would cheat, as you call it, or do anything else that would be mean and underhand.'

'I didn't know you liked her so much, mother,' Elsie said, rather sullenly.

'I do like her, Elsie; and I am sorry for her too, for I think she has been unfairly treated. No; not about this, perhaps, for I don't know the particulars yet. Now tell me what Ada said.'

'You know all the girls who are just twelve were told to write a composition on a special subject: we had to read them aloud to the master ourselves, and there is to be a prize given for the best—'

'I saw you writing yours,' Mrs. Vawdrey said, with a vivid recollection of Elsie very flushed and worried-looking, surrounded by papers, and with extremely inky fingers.

'I was called up to read mine third, and then I had to go for my music lesson. Maggie Vernon came next to me, and began to read hers. It was a very good composition, Ada said' (here Mrs. Vawdrey detected the grudging admission of praise in Elsie's tone); 'but, quite suddenly, Mr. Ryder stopped her, and asked if it were all her own, and if she were quite sure that no one had helped her, or if she hadn't read something like it in a book. Ada said she didn't answer for a moment, but her face got redder and redder, and her eyes quite flashed with anger, and at last she murmured something that hardly any one heard; then Mr. Ryder let her finish.'

'And on the strength of that, Ada and you believe that Maggie had been cheating?'

'Yes, we do, mother; at least nearly all of us. Don't you?'

'No: Maggie is very clever at writing compositions. Her father told me so, and I have seen some of them myself.'

'But why should she have looked so red and uncomfortable when Mr. Ryder asked her about it?'

'Maggie is sensitive, and the idea may have occurred to her that some of you would think she had been helped. My own opinion is, that Mr. Ryder only asked her the questions because the composition was very good, and he wanted to be quite sure she had done it all herself. Did he ask no one else?'

'Oh, yes; two or three of the others,' Elsie admitted.

'Well, then, why don't you suspect them as well as Maggie?'

'They didn't seem to care a bit, and she looked very unhappy about it; and, mother, she doesn't deserve the prize unless she did it all herself. Ada says she is sure mine is the next best.'

'Elsie dear, I am afraid you have not had very kindly feelings towards Maggie since she won the drawing prize you were so anxious to have; and I do think this has influenced you, and that in this case you have been too ready to talk about her and listen to unkind suggestions. Your friend Ada does not like her either; and you know, Elsie, Maggie works much harder than you do.'

'Not over this,' Elsie said, somewhat hastily.

'Perhaps not in this particular case, but

and never without due cause, went away miserable.

Even had she wished it, Elsie found it impossible to prevent the mischief Ada and she had set on foot: the girls were beginning to treat Maggie coldly, refusing to speak to her unless they were obliged, and shrugging their shoulders when she came into sight. Maggie said nothing, but went about as usual, looking pale and quiet. And so things went on until, a week later, Elsie was summoned to the drawing-room, and found Mr. Vernon there talking to her mother.

'Elsie,' Mrs. Vawdrey said quietly, 'Maggie is not well, and the doctor says she is fretting about something; her father and he think it is some school trouble. Do you know of anything? I think you can help us.'

Elsie flushed crimson, and looked imploringly at her mother; but Mrs. Vawdrey said nothing. Mr. Vernon was watching her with



as a general rule,' said her mother. 'Have Ada and you talked about it to the other girls?'

'All of them are talking of it,' was the evasive reply.

'But Ada and you must have begun it,' Mrs. Vawdrey said gravely.

Elsie did not answer. Her conscience was beginning to smite her somewhat. She knew that she had been absolutely glad when she heard Ada's story, and had discussed it eagerly with the other girls. She had been so anxious for the prize herself, and she was afraid of none of her rivals save Maggie Vernon. In the excitement of the contest she had lent herself to what in her inmost heart she believed to be an injustice.

'I am sorry you have acted in such an unkind and ungenerous way, Elsie,' her mother said coldly; and Elsie, who very seldom heard her mother's voice sound like that,

kindly eyes, and Elsie felt she could not bear to meet them just then.

At last, driven to it by those questioning looks, Elsie blurted out the truth. It was the most painful thing she had ever had to do, and she never forgot that dreadful half-hour. Mr. Vernon was very indignant at first, but after a while he held out his hand to Elsie and smiled.

'Thank you for telling me the truth. I know how difficult it must have been for you. I suppose I need hardly tell you that I know positively that the essay was Maggie's own. She worked very hard at it, poor child,' he added, turning to Mrs. Vawdrey.

'I am sure she did, and I am very glad to think that she will most likely get the prize,' Elsie's mother said gently. 'Did she tell you what was troubling her, Mr. Vernon?'

'No; that was why I came to you. I