

"I would not have come had it not been for you. I wanted to see you so much, Bessie, dear! So I wrote him that I would come, and here I am. But why I am here, or the reason for this gorgeousness, I do not know."

"You know absolutely nothing?" demanded Bessie, with open-eyed astonishment.

"Absolutely nothing. I left home two years ago on account of—well, you know how. Then you were living at Woodbine Villa, Highbury, North. Papa was in the indigo business, and was a happy man when he could pay his bills. You were a rambling, long-legged girl in washed-out cotton frocks and shabby boots. I come back and find—this." She stopped for a moment as if words failed her; then went on again. "Know? I know nothing. I did read that papa had been a sheriff, and when that gorgeous equipage met me at the depot I was certain that it was one of the official equipages. And it really was only papa's private—Bessie, you must explain."

Bessie drew a long breath.

"How strange you must feel!" she exclaimed. "No wonder you stared and seemed surprised. Why, Marjorie, if it had been I, I should have shrieked—positively shrieked."

"I don't doubt it. But don't shriek now or you'll bring those two monsters upon us. And now, how has it all been brought about? Has papa discovered the philosopher's stone, or struck a gold mine in the back garden of Woodbine Villa? Poor old Woodbine Villa!"

"Hush!" said Bessie, looking around. "Don't speak so loud, dear. Papa doesn't like anything about the—the villa, and—and all that—to be known."

Marjorie's red lips curled scornfully, and then she leaned back and laughed long and merrily, but with a touch of scorn running through her merriment like a chord.

"Poor papa! The old days are to be forgotten—wiped out. I see. Done away with, like the old hats and coats he used to wear—how baggy and greasy at the seams they were! All to be forgotten; and we are to make believe we don't know where Highbury is, and that we always had a carriage with a coat of arms and two big footmen to stand in the passage—I beg pardon, I mean hall. You will have to draw up a list of forbidden words, Bess and I shall have to get them by heart. Let me see! Passage, parlor, wash-house. Then hall, drawing-room, and—what do you have in place of a wash-house? Bess, you don't know. Why, of course, we don't know there is such a place. Well, but I don't know yet how it all came about."

Bessie shook her head with a troubled air.

"Don't be so sarcastic, Marjorie dear. I don't know how it