

"Oh, no, thank you; not at all," Margaret answered, blushing slightly as she took a seat at Miss Polehampton's left hand. She was more intimidated by this unwonted kindness of address than by any imaginable severity. The schoolmistress was tall and imposing in appearance: her manner was usually a little pompous, and it did not seem quite natural to Margaret that she should speak so gently.

"My dear," said Miss Polehampton, "when your dear mamma gave you into my charge, I am sure she considered me responsible for the influences under which you were brought, and the friendships that you made under my roof. "

"Mamma knew that I could not be hurt by any friendship that I made *here*," said Margaret, with the softest flattery. She was quite sincere: it was natural to her to say "pretty things" to people.

"Quite so," the schoolmistress admitted. "Quite so, dear Margaret, if you keep within your own grade in society. There is no pupil in this establishment, I am thankful to say, who is not of suitable family and prospects to become your friend. You are young yet, and do not understand the complications in which people sometimes involve themselves by making friendships out of their own sphere. But /understand, and I wish to caution you."

"I am not aware that I have made any unsuitable friendships," said Margaret, with a rather proud look in her hazel eyes.

"Well—no, I hope not," said Miss Polehampton with a hesitating little cough. "You understand, my dear, that in an establishment like mine, persons must be employed to do certain work who are not quite equal in position to—to—ourselves. Persons of inferior birth and station, I mean, to whom the care of the younger girls, and certain menial duties, must be committed. These persons, my dear, with whom you must necessarily be brought in contact, and whom I hope you will always treat with perfect courtesy and consideration, need not, at the same time, be made your intimate friends."

"I have never made friends with any of the servants," said Margaret, quietly. Miss Polehampton was somewhat irritated by this remark.

"I do not allude to the servants," she said with momentary sharpness. "I do not consider Miss Colwyn a servant, or I should not, of course, allow her to sit at the same table with you. But there is a sort of familiarity of which I do not altogether approve—"

She paused, and Margaret drew up her head and spoke with unusual decision.

"Miss Colwyn is my greatest friend."

"Yes, my dear, that is what I complain of. Could you not find a friend in your own rank of life without making one of Miss Colwyn?"