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Lexie's Friend

By Mrs. Paul E. King

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The school bus came to a halt along the curb. With a flurry of noise and excitement, the students began filing into the bus, some of them pushing and shoving to get a favorite middle seat, or the back seat even.

Just why so many of my peers preferred the very last seat was beyond my human reasoning and imagination. It was noisy back there. And I mean noisy! Not to say that the front part of the bus was exactly hush-hush quiet; it wasn't. But the back of the bus was . . . Well, dare I say awful! (If Miss Pridgeon were here, she'd correct my grammar and/or choice of words, I know: " 'Terrible' may be the better word to use, don't you think so, Lexie?" she'd say.)



Well, perhaps she's right; but to my way of thinking, "awful" is the better chosen word of the two for describing and fitting the situation of the twice-daily bus runs. Horrendous would not be too far from depicting the way things go back there some times. At any rate, I don't like the back seat; it and I are not "close cousins," as the saying goes. Not that there is any evil power in the seat, mind you; that would be making a false accusation against an inanimate object, which would be perfectly ridiculous. The problem stems not from the seat but from the occupants of the seat.

Someone was suddenly shoving and pushing me from behind. "Get a move on, Lexie, if you don't want to be trampled to death," the voice shouted.

I turned and saw Rory Closs. He towered over me. And I mean towered. Rory was six foot four and one-half inches; I was a mere four foot eleven. He weighed in at two hundred twelve pounds; I at barely eighty.

"Move, Lexie!" he bellowed. "Can't you see we're all wanting on the bus?"

He glared down at me. I squeezed my tiny flame against the side of the bus and let him pass, thankful to have his frightening eyes looking at someone else beside me--someone who could "look him down" and wasn't afraid of him.

"Are you going to just stand there, Lexie?" Caroline Sommers asked, pushing her way into the bus. "Come on," she encouraged. "You've got to learn to take your stand, to stand up for your rights."

What rights? I wondered, remembering the day when I had turned all there was of me over to God, with no reservations whatever. From that moment, I was sanctified holy by the power of God's Spirit, I felt I had no "rights," as such: Everything belonged to Him; my desires, ambitions, plans and wishes; all were His. I had no "rights;" they were His . . . all His. I was His humble love slave for time and for all eternity.

"Come on, Lex." It was Stan Tucker. "I'll help you inside." With that, he pushed his way to my side and grabbed hold of my arm, saying, "Out of my way everybody; let the midget inside."

Once inside the bus, he looked down on me. "See, it's that easy, Lex. You'll have to push to get anything these days. Now come and sit beside me."

"Tha... thanks, Stan; thanks much. But I... I. . . well, you see, I just don't go along with all this . . . this roughhouse sort of things. Good manners, politeness and common courtesies are still in excellent taste. If these things were practiced, the shoving, pushing, mad-house game would be forever annihilated."

"Here, Lexie," Caroline called above the raucous laughter and the loud noise. "I saved this seat for you."

"She's sitting by me," Stan shouted back, taking my arm again.

"Please Stan!" I exclaimed. "Let go of my arm. I . . . I'll sit beside Bajah."

Stan turned lose of my arm like it was a hot potato. Relieved beyond measure, I dropped on the seat beside the shy girl.

"You would!" Caroline yelled derisively.

Bajah looked at me and smiled. I returned her smile. She was new in school; worse still, she had no friends and spoke extremely broken English. Her name, Bajah, was my feeble attempt at the pronunciation of her much-longer, more-complicated name. I liked her. Truth of the matter was that I felt closer to my new-found friend than to most of the classmates of long time standing. So many of them were light and chaffy, seeming to glory in things of the baser sort. Bajah, on the other hand, was seriously studious and diligent, with moral standards to match her high IQ.

One of the fellows on the bus started a sing-song sort of rhyme about Bajah, making sport of her plain, simple attire and the long, thick, blue-black braid that hung down her back.

She blushed in humiliation.

"I'm your friend," I said softly, shifting my books so I could free my hand and squeeze hers in warm friendship.

Tears shimmered in her great, dark eyes, which looked like pools of liquid onyx, I thought, feeling embarrassed and disgusted with many of my counterparts and wondering what kind of home training they received, if any.

A kindred spirit developed between us, cementing us together in the beautiful bond of friendship. Sometimes trials were good for one, I soliloquized soberly; they brought out the best--or the worst, as the case may be--of those being tried and really showed up which side one was on: the side of right or wrong, good or evil.

The boy continued his sing-song rhyme, making small but pointed innuendoes, all directed at my friend. With each new rhyme, there was a loud roar of applause and raucous laughter.

Bajah turned her face toward the window and looked out. I felt like crying, and for the first time in my life, I received a bit of insight into the feelings of my wonderful Lord. He, too, was made sport of, yet without sin or fault. And He was mocked, despised, rejected, but He never opened His mouth in self defense. People could be so cruel, I thought, watching my friend and longing desperately to help her--to console her.

I knew, to a small degree, how she felt. At least, I thought I did. All my life . . . since I've been big enough and old enough to go to school, that is... I've had a sort of complex over my name, Lexie. Especially when someone calls me Lex or lexicon. (I'm sure I don't need to tell you that a lexicon is a dictionary," especially of an ancient language, as Greek, Hebrew, or Latin," my dictionary states.) So I felt sure I knew how to sympathize with Bajah.

Closing my eyes, I prayed. Then an idea popped into my head. Smiling, I said softly, "Bajah, you don't live too far from our house..."

She turned from the window and looked at me. "That is right," she agreed, in faltering but perfect English this time.

"Could you . . . I mean, well, why not come over to my house after supper tonight?"

She looked at me with puzzled eyes.

Easing the books out of my arm and onto my lap, I tried again, this time using my hands in a gesture or semblance of feeding myself. "Could you come over to my house after you are finished eating tonight, the Lord willing?"

She smiled broadly at my miming. Her eyes glowed with understanding. "You . . . mean . . . din-ner?" she asked again in halting English.

I nodded and gave her hand another tight squeeze. "Come over to my house after dinner. May you? Will you, please?"

"You are . . . so . . . kind!" she exclaimed. "So very kind! I will.., ask my parents..."

The bus stopped and Bajah made a hasty exit. But not before she turned and smiled at me.

Stan came up and sat down beside me. "Don't you know you're forfeiting your chances of being voted the most outstanding girl in your class, Lexie?" he said insolently. "What makes you like you are? Why do you take up with something like her?" he asked, pointing his index finger toward Bajah's slender and now rapidly-retreating figure.

Easing my body around to face him, I replied, "In answer to question number one--why I am like I am--let me say that it's Jesus who has made me the way I am . . . all new and changed and different inside. Outside, too. And why do I 'take up' with Bajah who is not a 'something' but is a lovely human being. Well, here again my answer is Jesus. Then, as to this forfeiture which you mentioned, well..."

"I suppose you'll bring God into that, too!" Stan stormed, getting to his feet and hurrying back to the seat which he had vacated to come and speak to me.

Mr. Tanner drew the bus alongside the curb at my street and I felt like a bird regaining its freedom from a tightly-shut cage as I stepped out into the beautiful September sunshine and walked up the sidewalk to the door of our modest bungalow.

Mother met me inside the door with a warm smile and an endearing hug, asking me how my day went and was I hungry, to which I replied that my day was beautiful and

I was starved, or felt like I was. We both laughed together. But this was common at our house; ours was a home where love and laughter were as much a part of our life as we were to each other.

I told Mother what had transpired on the bus and how crushed and embarrassed I was for Bajah, confessing my inmost feelings about my name and associating my feelings with those of my shy friend's.

Mother registered mild shock for a brief moment then she laughed. "Oh, Lexie Ruth," she said, "I'm sorry you feel this way; your father and I both love your name because we love you. And it fits you so well. In fact, we couldn't think of you having any name but Lexie. Look at it this way, honey, the name doesn't make you; you make the name. See what I mean?"

I thought it over for a while; then I smiled. "Thanks, Mother; thanks much," I said. "I'll try to make the name Lexie Ruth Brownlee a name of honor and one that will be remembered as having done something for God." With that said, I hurried to my room and deposited my books on the desk then changed into other clothes and busied myself helping Mom to get supper.

Bajah knocked on the door just as I was finishing the dishes, and when she and Morn met, it was a case of instant and mutual friendship. Dad and my brothers, too.

I dried my hands and looked at my friend in astonishment. She had changed from the silent, shy, inscrutable young sophomore that she had been at school. Now she was talking . . . broken, halting English, to be sure, but talking like she didn't want to stop. Not ever. Her soft voice rippled on and on happily as she told of all the interesting things that went on in her homeland--how the East Indians lived, what foods they ate, how their food was prepared and such things.

My heart overflowed with happiness and joy over the fact that here, in our home, a trampled-down soul could feel relaxed and released. I bowed my head and thanked God for the blessing and the heritage of a Christian home.

Bajah's hand on my arm brought me back quickly to what was going on. "I am honored to have Lexie for my friend," she was telling my parents and my two brothers. "She is so... different," she added softly, "and I mean to find out what it is that makes her the way she is. There's something," she insisted sweetly. "Something I must know what it is."

Later while popping corn in the kitchen, I was able to tell Bajah that it was Jesus, the Son of the living God, who made the new and wonderful change in my heart and life, adding that she, too, could experience the reality and the joy of full salvation if she wanted to.

"Whatever I must do," she told me with child-like simplicity and trust, "I'll do it; only show me the way."

That was one of the most wonderful days of my life . . . leading my first soul to Jesus--but not my last. It was merely the beginning of the most thrilling and exciting ministry anyone can experience--being a soul winner for Jesus.

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THE END