

"Into the Frozen North!"

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serial starts to-day.

The Schoolgirl's Own



BREAKING BOUNDS!

(A striking episode from the fine new long complete story of the Girls of Morcove School contained in this issue, entitled: "THE DAY GIRL'S DILEMMA!")

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A Day-Girl Comes to Morcove School!**THE DAY-GIRL'S
DILEMMA!**

A magnificent new long complete story of the girls of Morcove School, introducing Jess Lingard, the scholarship day-girl, and her rich cousin, Stella Munro.

By **MARJORIE STANTON.**



Jess from the Council School.

"WELL, mother darling, I suppose I really ought to be off now."

"Why, yes, Jess dear, for 'twould never do, would it, for you to be late the first morning?"

"Catch me being late!" was the light-hearted answer. "Only somehow I wonder how you are going to manage without me, mother. Is that shocking conceit?"

"Dear child, as if I could think such a thing!" exclaimed the mother, turning about in this dim parlour behind her little shop to smile fondly at her daughter. "Nay, my lamb, it is only the loving thought you've always had for me that makes you want to be—"

"In two places at once; that's the word for it," Jess Lingard broke in, with a brisk nod that stirred the chestnut hair falling richly about her shoulders. "If only I could be here all day, to save you some of the popping in and out of the shop, and yet be at school, too!"

"If only you hadn't to cycle all that way to the school, fair weather or wet. That's what I'm thinking, Jess," the mother confessed, with a tincture of anxiety in her voice. "'Tis such a distance from here to Morcove. And yet—there, what a thing to be proud of, your winning that scholarship!"

And with uneasiness changing suddenly to great pride, Mrs. Lingard took up the Morcove school hat which Jess would be putting on before another minute was out.

For the moment the pretty girl was giving a last glance at herself in front of the mantelpiece mirror. The lustrous hair that had been flowing free ever since she got up—oh, ever so early, so as to help mother—this fateful Monday morning, had now to be gathered back. She ran it together at the nape of the neck, and made it secure there by a hair-slide, and then—

"My school hat, mother—thanks!"

"Well, to be sure!" was Mrs. Lingard's beaming exclamation, as she stood and watched the beaming hat put on rather tremblingly by the scholarship girl. "My dear, if only your poor father was alive to-day to see his little lass, as he used to call you, a real Morcove scholar at last!"

Jess said nothing in response to that. Perhaps her heart was too full for words. Ah, but it was an emotional moment, this! Although her pretty lips were smiling as she snapped the elastic under her chin, her eyes were suddenly flinching.

"Now the satchel! Gracious, what a set-out it is, mother!" the girl exclaimed, with a catchy little laugh, as she slipped the strap over one shoulder. "But that's all, at last, and I'll be there by nine easy, if I don't get a puncture. Touch wood!"

Mrs. Lingard now untaped her apron and tossed it aside. She was going to see Jess off from the shop doorway, and somehow this historic event seemed to demand the laying aside of that apron.

"Ta-ta, then, mother darling, and I'll be back by half-past five, I hope! And mind you save all the washing-up you can for me, by ad by; and mind you sit down properly to your dinner at half-past seven! And, mother—oh, mother darling, I don't wonder you're crying!"

"My dear, my darling little one, I'm not crying," protested Mrs. Lingard, wishing she had a corner of that apron to wipe her eyes with. "This is only joy, anyhow—all the joy in the world, my precious, to think that you—"

"There, that's that cheek, and now the other one!" Jess exclaimed, as she bestowed hugs and kisses. "And now one from you, mother, for luck, and I'll be all right!"

"If ever a poor widow-woman was blessed and comforted by having an angel in the home, I am," Mrs. Lingard almost sobbed. "There, my dear, run along, and though I'm proud that you should be going to Morcove School, I do think that Morcove School should be proud to have you!"

Jess, preparing to mount her cycle and ride away, gave another laugh.

"Your fault, mother, if they say I'm far too proud of myself! Well, good-bye—good-bye!"

And she was off, pedalling swiftly along this side-street in the quaint Devonshire town of Barncombe, where many who had known her since she was a tiny tot were ready to give a smile and a wave of the hand.

Fathers who were starting off to their own day's work, mothers who were shaking mats or hearth-stoning the doorstep—ay, and boys and girls who would be going off presently to the council school—they all knew where Jess Lingard was off to this morning. And whilst the grown-ups contended themselves with smiles and gestures full of goodwill, the youngsters indulged in a little cheering.

"Hooray!"

"Oh, look at Jess Lingard, off to boarding-school!"

"Ta-ta, Jess!"

"I wish I were you, Jess!"

Even when she was in the main street of the town, whizzing along faster than ever, she had to smile and dip her pretty head with its tell-tale hat to this acquaintance and that who called congrats and good luck. So many were the good folk of Barncombe who knew that little shop in the side street, and knew how Widow Lingard and her Jess had battled bravely for a living.

Then, with another half-hour to go before the council school-bell would be sending its clangour over the old-fashioned town, the girl who had won her way into Morcove School was pedalling along the open road.

Whir, whir, whir! Up one gentle rise in the highway, and down some other bit of a slope, along nice level stretches, sometimes in a hollow between the hills, and sometimes high up on a breezy plateau, with glimpses of the sea—on she sped. All the best time of the year was before her, and she was quite sure that this daily run to and from the school was going to be a sheer delight, not a trial.

Wet days—well, yes, there were bound to be some nasty ones, but she would just have to "stick" them. What, indeed, was she not prepared to "stick" in return for the privilege that had been won—the glorious privilege of attending a school famed throughout the kingdom!

Morcove—hurrah! There it was already, the great and famous school, with its vast range of handsome buildings standing high upon the headland. She free-wheeled down another hill, and lost the school then, but soon she was out of the hollow and could see the beautiful edifice again. Quarter to nine. She would do it easily.

And she did.

With five minutes to spare the new day-girl turned in at the handsome gateway and rode up the broad drive between the playing-fields, conscious of being glanced at by at least a hundred boarding girls who were at this moment drifting towards the schoolhouse.

An embarrassing moment! Jess, feeling herself in a red-hot state all over, suddenly wished that she had not reached her journey's end in quite such a breathless state. A fine chance for her to become an object of ridicule at the very start! What a lot of laughter was mixing with all the chatter. Were they making jokes about her?

"Hi! Whoa!"

Jess paid no heed to that sudden, mirthful cry, for she felt it was only a mocking one.

"Hi, stop! Whoa!"

There it was again, and this time some touch of earnestness in the mirthful voice changed Jess' mind. Gracious, what had she done, then, that one of the girls was crying to her to pull up? Was it an offence to ride one's bicycle all the way up to the porch?

Jess squeezed on the brakes and sprang from the saddle, feeling more confused than ever.

Then, to her intense relief, she found that no crowd was going to gather round. She was, in fact, being taken no particular notice of by now, except that here stood the one girl who had called to her to stop, and she looked very nice—awfully jolly, too!

"I thought you might be glad to know you will save time and trouble by not riding up to the porch, because the machine must be stored over there," this girl informed Jess, pointing to the cycle-sheds.

"Oh, thank you!" said the day-girl, meeting

the other girl's dancing eyes. "I haven't much time, have I?"

"I'll be late, with you—eh?" suggested the friendly one. It was her breezy way of hinting that she would like to go with Jess to the cycle-sheds, and so Jess said again:

"Thank you! That's what I call being real nice. I—"

"You look rather nervous."

"I am nervous."

"There's no need to be," was the cheery assurance. "We'll soon make you feel at home, won't we, Paula dear?"

"Yes, wather, bai Jove!" was the rather charming simper from a very spic-and-span girl who had now come up with a languid step. "How do you do?" she exclaimed, in drawing-room fashion, extending a delicate hand to Jess. "We must introduce ourselves to one another, I pwesume. I am Paula Cweel, don't you know. This gal—my great friend, Polly Linton."

"Oh!" Jess said breathlessly. "I've heard of you, then. Your names have been in the local paper once or twice."

"E—I wogwet to say we have had that doubtful privilege," sighed Paula Creel. "Most distressing!"

"And once," said Polly Linton roguishly, "Paula had her pho—"

"Now, Polly dear!"

"Had her photograph—an awful thing it was, too!—in the daily paper, and—"

"This gal," broke in Paula sadly, pulling Polly by the sleeve, "spends a great deal of her time trying to make we cwoos. A most aggwavating creature, weally! However, a weal good friend, too—yes, wather!"

"I've heard of Betty Barton, too, and Madge Minden," Jess ventured to say.

"And talking of Betty and Madge—here they come!" chuckled Polly, indicating the girls in question as they approached.

So in another moment Jess was quite at ease with those girls also, and she was not wrong in thinking that it was a good enough start to have made—to have four of the nicest girls in the Fourth Form making themselves so friendly!

"Here, I know! I'll put your bike away for you!" Polly offered, and without further ado she took the machine from Jess and careered away with it—over the grass, and in and out amongst some croquet hoops, in thorough madeap fashion. She finished up with a nice figure eight movement on the gravel in front of the cycle store, and then rode the machine right into the shed.

Crash!

Jess' heart sank a little. That sound—it was as if the obliging Polly had ridden the machine right into a heap of other bikes!

"Oh, I hope she hasn't hurt herself!"

Then her companions laughed.

"What we hope is that she hasn't jiggered up your machine! Polly herself never comes to grief," said Betty. "A sort of double-jointed girl, with india-rubber limbs."

"Yes, wather! And swings ewewywhaah," added Paula. "Howevah— Bai Jove, goals, classes are assembling!"

They waited for Polly to rejoin them, which she did with a whoop and a yell as she streaked across from the shed, and then they all moved on to the schoolhouse.

Practically the last scholars to pass in out of the sunshine, Jess and her friendly companions came upon that scene of hurry-scurry which

always attended the muster for classes. And what a novel experience it was for the scholarship girl to see so many scholars taking a last minute dash up or down the stairs! How different from the "all in" of the council school, with the girls going two by two into the schoolhouse after being lined up in the yard.

This moment—her first moment beneath the roof of Morcove school! Jess had lain awake night after night just lately, thinking about it excitedly. It had been going to be such a solemn one; well, and so it was, although it was going by in what seemed a matter-of-fact fashion.

One girl more or less amongst so many seemed to make no difference at all, and it was just as if she had been here many a time before, for all the attention she attracted. The girls who had been so quick to companion her—they seemed like old friends already. Even so—yes, the solemnity of the occasion was being felt by Jess, and felt acutely.

Flustered though she was, distracted by so many strange voices and such a whirl of activity, she yet felt, in the very core of her being, how great and wonderful it was. That she, Jess Lizard, of the little confectionery shop in Barncombe, the girl who had been to council school and helped mother behind the counter and with the housework—helped her even with the washing every Monday morning—should be inside this school, going into classes in the next minute or so! How wonderful indeed!

"What a world of your own you are!" she could not help exclaiming in an awed tone, watching more and still more scholars joining the chattering assemblage. "You must be simply full up now in the school."

"We are—yes," answered Betty. "They just managed to find room for two new boarding pupils a week or so ago. One is a girl from Africa, the strangest, quaintest girl you ever saw; the other comes from London, and she is in our Form, too."

Betty peered around, then shook her head. "I was going to point her out to you, but she is not here yet. A handsome girl, isn't she, you girls?"

"Stella Munro, are you talking about?" asked Polly. "Oh, yes, handsome enough—"

"Bai Jove, yes, wather! Howevah—Gweat goodness, what's the mattah, Jess?"

The new day-girl had suddenly gone very white in the face.

"Heah, bai Jove, this is most distwessing!" exclaimed the compassionate Paula. "We must wealise, geals, it's wather a twial for Jess, her first morning, bai Jove!"

"Feeling shaky, are you, Jess?" Betty asked, and laid a friendly hand upon the new girl's shoulder. "But it's all right. You'll soon know everyone."

Jess did not answer. She was thinking: "I know Stella Munro already, and the sort of girl she is."

Face to Face.

AT that moment, in a certain study in the Fourth Form quarters, two girls were getting their books together for morning school.

One of these girls was giving her mind to what she was doing, as if she were rather afraid of making some omission that would get her blamed for being careless. The other girl, by contrast, had

all the air of not caring a scrap if she did get "jumped on" by a mistress by and by.

"Now, I wonder if I've got everything?" the first girl pondered aloud. "We've so left things to the last moment, Audrey, by talking about our plans for—for this evening, I don't feel at all ready for work."

"Bother work—that's what I say always!" Audrey Blain responded, with a shrug of her narrow shoulders. "Well, Stella, now that you've been here a week, you've had time to see what a wretched, unending round of piffing duties this life at Morcove is. And so do you wonder that I, a girl of my inclinations—"

Audrey glanced at herself in the glass as she spoke, so it was evident that one of her inclinations was to admire herself!

"Do you wonder that I feel I must break out sometimes? Oh, and the thing I hate most of all," she continued scornfully, "is the sort of



IN THE LINE OF FIRE! Naomer drove the croquet ball with great force against Paula's ankle. "Yeowp! My gwacious! You silly duffer!" howled the aristocrat, skipping about the lawn on one foot.

feeble attempt that is made to vary the monotony! An occasional outing—even a concert over at Barncombe, provided we go in a party. With a mistress—bah! What a life!

And she showed off her slender arms to good effect by stretching them whilst she yarned.

"Yes," Stella Munro agreed, rather softly and nervously, "it doesn't do to say so openly, of course, but—"

"Oh, I never make any bones about it!" Audrey interrupted. "The whole Form knows me for what I am! Anything but a Betty Barton or a Madge Minden! And you will find, Stella, that the girls don't all dislike me, just because I happen to have tastes of my own and the will to indulge them. There are some girls in the Form who have a sneaking regard for me."

"It's more than a sneaking regard; I've noticed it," Stella Munro answered. "Audrey, I believe with a very little trouble you could form quite a set of your own. There's something about you so—so fascinating. I've found that out myself, and I—I am so glad I'm in this study with you!"

"Thank you for those few kind words," Audrey said, with her most dazzling smile. "It is nice to have you, Stella; jolly to know what a really jolly sort you are. Fancy you, a new girl, being ready to join me in that bit of fun this evening!"

Stella said with a sort of reckless laugh, only it somehow fell flat:

"But what we are going to do can't be very dreadful, Audrey, or I am sure you wouldn't have proposed it."

"It is something to make a break in the monotony, that's all I know," was the airy answer. "Coming?"

She went with her mincing step to the door, and Stella Munro followed her into the Fourth Form corridor and along to the stairs. The pair of them were a trifle late, but Audrey was not going to do such an undignified thing as to hurry. As for Stella Munro, she was leaving it to her friend to set the pace, in more senses than one!

All at once

"Oh, bother!" Stella exclaimed ruefully. "There's a book I've forgotten, after all, and it is one I'll want first of all. Audrey, I'll fly back—"

"Don't do anything so silly! They can't expel you for being five minutes late. Take your time, and say 'hang' to them," Audrey advised her study mate, and then went on alone down the stairs to join the muster with her usual air of insolent aloofness.

But Stella Munro, whatever she might become as time went on, was not yet a second edition of Audrey Blain. After running back to the study, Stella got into quite a little panic.

Downstairs the hall and passages were now deserted, whilst the hum of industry came from all the different classrooms. Stella made a rush for the closed door of the Fourth Form classroom; then her nerve failed her, and she even turned back.

As she did this she suddenly glimpsed some other girl, who had just come out of the side passage where the Headmistress had her private room. This other girl came on with a brisk step across the hall, making for the Fourth Form classroom, and Stella felt it would be better to go in with her. But who was the girl? A new one, surely!

And then, as Stella gave the other scholar a closer scrutiny, recognition took place.

"Why? it is Jess—Jess Lingard!"

"Stella, I was told you had come to this school as a boarder," Jess answered, coming to a standstill in front of the other. "I—this is my first day, and I'm only a scholarship girl—a day-pupil, too."

"Oh, I see! Just fancy!" Stella breathed. "Are you in the Fourth Form?"

"Yes; I'm going in now. I had to report to the Headmistress. She is awfully nice, isn't she?"

Jess added gently, seeing how flustered the other looked.

"I was rather upset when I heard that you had come to Morceve, Stella. Knowing what you are—the daughter of such wealthy people, and— and so differently brought up from me—I felt it couldn't be very nice for you to find that I—"

"Oh, I don't know!" Stella blurted out feebly. "After all, Jess—"

"I'm only a distant relation, of course. So distant, Stella, that if you like it, it needn't be made known. I sha'n't think you a snob—not the least," Jess went on earnestly. "I shall only think it quite fair, if you prefer—"

"No," broke in Stella, proving that she had her good impulses. "I don't like the idea of keeping the relationship secret. We—we might go into class together now, and I can tell Miss Massingham that that is why I'm late."

"Because you met me out here unexpectedly, and we got talking? We haven't talked for long, have we?" Jess said, with a smile. She was looking her old happy self again, now that Stella had decided to "own" her.

"How is your mother?" Stella asked, perhaps to hang out the talk. "It is years since I saw her. Do you still—"

"Keep the shop in Barncombe? Yes," Jess said softly. "And it still keeps us, in what I'm afraid you would think a very poor way, Stella. But we are very happy, mother and I. How mother would love to see you, if you could look in some day."

"I shall do that, of course," was the answer. And after a pause: "Well, shall we go in now? You go first."

So Jess laid hold of the door-knob and twisted it, and next instant she was preceding her rich relation into the classroom, where all was very quiet, with a score or so of pretty heads bending over exercise-books and primer.

Miss Massingham was in charge, and she had nothing to say to Jess, only smiled a "Now you are all right!" and indicated the place she was to occupy. But she turned upon the lagging Stella in a rather ominous manner.

"You are very late, Stella!"

"Yes, Miss Massingham; I am very sorry. But I—I met Jess Lingard in the hall, and it was such a surprise. She—she is a sort of relation of mine—"

"Oh, in that case—" Miss Massingham exclaimed, in a mollified tone.

"We got talking—"

"Of course. Very well, you may go to your place, Stella. How extraordinary that you and our new day scholar should be related! Well, in Jess Lingard I imagine there is someone for the family as a whole to be very proud of."

It was said with the intention of passing on the news to the whole class, and Miss Massingham could not check the slight sensation—the sudden buzz of talk—which her own words had created.

"D'you hear that?" was the thrilling whisper from one girl and another. "Jess Lingard and Stella Munro—"

"Yes."

"Bai Jove! How extraordinary! How extremely—"

"Who ever would have dreamed it?"

For a full minute the burst of excitement went on, and then Miss Massingham said a quiet: "That will do, girls!" and after that the scratch-scratch of pens went on as industriously as before.

Now Jess was happy, full of that great happiness which the best natures so often find in what others have done that is creditable to themselves. It was good of Stella to have been so nice, instead of treating the fateful encounter as a very disagreeable upset.

And Stella, whilst that buzz of talk had been going on, had realised that she had not done her—

self any harm by owning the poor relation from the back streets in Barncombe. Quite the reverse in fact! All over the classroom heads had been turned so that she might receive a smiling glance which seemed to say:

"That was good of you, Stella—the decent thing!"

At break, she joined Jess on the way out into the open air, and then she was conscious of more pleased glances.

"Excuse my butting in," Polly Linton came up to say presently; "it is only for a moment. Some of us were going to ask you, Jess, if you'd take a stroll round with us; but now we know that you and Stella are related, and have heaps to talk about, it's different."

Which said, Polly skipped away to rejoin Betty, Paula, and Madge.

"We simply had to leave them to themselves for a bit of a pow," Polly said gaily, "although it's rather a shame."

"Yes, wather! You know, geals, I am most desisuous of being friently with the day-girl. She's a wipper—a bwick!"

"We'll have her to tea in Study 12," Betty proposed. "I'll get a chance to ask her presently. Meantime, I think it absolutely splendid—"

"About Stella Munro? Yes," agreed Madge, with her steady eyes upon Jess and Stella both, as they sauntered away, chatting like a couple who were going to be great friends. "And it only shows it doesn't do to judge too hastily. Now, my feeling about Stella was—"

"Same here!" put in Polly. "Just the girl for Audrey Blain to make a companion of—that's what I thought!"

Tess Trelawney had come up. She remarked, with an amused expression:

"I wonder how Audrey will like it, girls? What a shock to her majesty, to find that the girl with whom she was hitting it off so well is quite disposed to hit it off well with Jess!"

"If Stella Munro is the girl we hope this proves her to be," Betty said, "she'll leave Audrey to like it or lump it! Now, what about five minutes at crazy croquet?"

That was the signal for Polly to snatch up a mallet and make a feint of smiting Paula with it, causing Paula to yelp:

"Dwop it, you duffer! You make me cwoos! If you want someone to tease, Polly, pway tease Naomer. Here she is."

"Ello, present!" was the merry cry of the pretty little barbarian from the desert kingdom of Nakara, as she came up with a run. "Keep a smile, Paula!"

"Naomer darling, catch hold of this mallet—so," Polly said, showing Naomer how to grip the stick, "and now see if you can hit this ball. Wait a bit!"

But that was just what Naomer did not do. No sooner was the wooden ball set before her on the grass than she swiped at it—crack!

"Yeowp! My gwacious! You silly duffer, you!" howled poor Paula, skipping about on one foot, with a hand clapping the other ankle. "What a twial life is, with such a lot of widiculous eweatures—"

"You call me widiculose!" Naomer instantly flared up, scenting an insult. "He is not a nice word—yes."

"You are a most aggwawating eweature, that's all I know!" groaned Paula. "My foot—"

"I not be called widiculose!" Naomer announced grumpily. "You see this club?"

"Yes, wather! Howevah—"

"Ha na, ha!"

"You say I am a nice girl—tached like an English girl!" insisted Naomer, brandishing the croquet-stick in a most alarming manner.

"Or—"

"Naomer, pway—pway desist!" Paula entreated frantically, whilst the others pealed with laughter. "I gweatly wegwet, deah, in a moment of extweme pain, I used a far from parliamentary expression!"

"You shall say I am a nice girl!" Naomer said, following the aristocrat with the stick.

"An extwemely nice geal, Naomer!"

"Not widiculose?"

"No, no. A most charming geal! One I have a pwofound wegdar for, Naomer! So, pway—pway put down that mallet!"

Then Naomer became all smiles again. She threw the mallet aside, and simply hurled herself upon the aristocrat, who groaned again in secret at being clawed to pieces by such affectionate embraces.

"My wuffed hair! Oh, gweat goodness, what a twial life is!" sighed Paula, using a pocket comb and mirror as the bell rang for the resumption of work. "Polly and Naomer between them, they'll bwing me in sorrow to the gwave; I know they will!"

At this instant Betty put on a spurt to catch Jess, who had now parted company with Stella.

"I say, Jess," began the Fourth Form captain heartily, "will you come to tea in Study 12 this afternoon? We'll sit down at four-thirty sharp, so as not to keep you too late."

"Oh!" Jess's bonny face proclaimed unspeakable delight. It was a breathless moment for her before she could say: "Really, it is nice of you—all of you! I want to come ever so much, only you see, Stella Munro has asked me to tea in the study she shares with some other girl—Audrey Blain—and I've accepted."

"Then that's quite all right," Betty hastened to say. "Some other time, eh? You are going to have tea at school every day before cycling all that way home to Barncombe, and so you can always have tea with friends."

"Well, I—no, I hadn't arranged to have tea at the school," Jess had to answer frankly. "Mother thought I should, but I thought it was an expense that could be saved, and I had my way. I'm afraid I rule mother."

Then Betty could have hugged her.

"You and your mother and the little shop in Barncombe! How I want to look in there as soon as I get the chance!" exclaimed the Fourth Form captain. "All right! I'm so glad you have a good friend in Stella Munro."

But had she? Had Jess Lingard such a true friend in Stella, after all?

There was to be a doubt about that before the day was over!

Stella Munro's Choice.

"YOU don't mind, I hope, Audrey?" Stella said rather meekly to her study mate after classes that afternoon. "I have asked Jess Lingard to look in here for a cup of tea."

"I am afraid I do mind," was Audrey's very chilly answer, whilst her chin tilted an inch or so higher. "But it is as much your study as it is mine, and so I can't object, can I?"



AUDREY BLAIN'S FEAR: "We shall be expelled if you make a scene and draw attention to us, you little idiot!" Audrey Blain interposed furiously. "Go away, I tell you! Come on, Stella!"

"I—I have been hoping that Jess would be as much your friend as mine," was Stella's timid rejoinder. "She is quite a nice—"

"Oh, thank you, no!" Audrey interrupted, with undisguised disdain. "I have not kept myself as exclusive as I have, Stella, to start palling with an ex-council school girl."

"Other girls in the school, Audrey—"

"My dear Stella, don't let's argue it; that would be quite a waste of time," said Audrey, fiddling with a little lock of her honey-coloured hair. "Have your poor relation in for tea, as you are entitled to do. As for me, I'll make myself scarce."

"No, Audrey, I— Oh, wait!" blurted out Stella, making a dart to check the other girl on her way to the door. "I'm sorry! You know I wouldn't wish to do anything to displease you. I'd rather—much rather—put Jess off. She's a nice girl in her way, but it's you I want to keep in with."

A smile flickered about Audrey's lips.

"You seem to have tumbled to the situation, Stella, anyhow. Really, that is just about what it amounts to—you can't be pally with me and still have that girl from the greengrocer's shop—"

"Excuse me, Audrey, it is not a greengrocer—"

"Oh, well, whatever it is, it's a shop! And in a back street, too. Where they have fevers and

things, I expect; where they drop their aitches, anyhow, and say 'muvver—farver!' No, Stella, I'm sorry, but I am very much afraid you will have to choose between me or Jess Lingard."

"Then I choose you!" Stella gulped out impulsively. "Don't go away, Audrey; I'll make some excuse to Jess. I won't tell her the real reason why it is, but—"

Tap, tap! came a gentle knocking at the door at that very instant, and Stella's jaw dropped.

"That's Jess now—both! All right; I won't ask her in," she promised Audrey, and next instant she was out in the corridor with the day-girl, mumbling apologies for not being able to give her tea, after all.

"When I asked you this morning, Jess, I—I didn't know. It—it doesn't quite fit in with Audrey's Blain's plans. I'm awfully sorry! Perhaps you can accept that other invitation?"

Jess longed to do that. How she yearned for her first sight of the Form captain's study, with tea upon the table and quite a host of nice girls gathered there, all eagerness to be friendly! But they had been told that she was to be the guest of Stella Munro this afternoon, and now—

Now, Jess knew, just as well as if Stella had confessed it frankly; pressure had been brought to bear upon that girl to cancel the invitation. Audrey had snobbish objections to that study being invaded by a day-girl, who had once attended a council school. Of course, girls like Betty and Co. would be disgusted with Audrey for giving herself such airs. But—and this was what troubled Jess terribly—wouldn't they be still more disgusted with Stella for giving in to Audrey?

"She has had to choose between me and Audrey Blain and she has chosen Audrey," Jess guessed shrewdly. "Oh, I don't blame her the least little bit. But I fancy, somehow, the girls will think less of her, if ever they know."

And in a flash Jess' mind was quite made up. She would do all she possibly could to keep the other girls from knowing. If she quitted the school at once, very likely Betty and Co. would never be aware that she had not been to tea at that other study, after all. That was the thing to do—clear out!

And she did.

Tea—oh, how she thirsted for a cup, after the tiring session of afternoon work in the warm classroom! All the way home to Barncombe by bike, along those dusty roads, up hill and down hill, and not a drop of tea until she got indoors! Never mind, though. There were far worse things than going thirsty to the end of a long, tiring journey in the hot sunshine, and one of those things was the getting another girl disliked.

Ponf! That was the sort of weary sound poor Jess blew from her parched lips when at last she dismounted outside her mother's shop. Running the cycle up a side passage and so into the backyard, she propped it against a wall and then flashed into the house by way of the back door.

"Well, mother darling!"

"Bless and save us! Oh, my Jess, how hot and dusty you do look!" Mrs. Lingard exclaimed, all the joy at having her daughter home again a good deal tempered by the girl's fagged state. "But, see—tea's in the pot, just this moment made!"

"Tea! Oh, good! That's all I want, mother, after I've had another kiss," Jess declared. And, as their hard and lonely life together had taught them to do, mother and daughter were several moments hugging and kissing, as if they had been kept apart, for years.

"And now, dear," the good widow-woman prattled on, pointing to the laid cloth, "start away, and as soon as you've drunk your first cup you shall tell me all about it—the school and everything!"

But Jess, in spite of her raging thirst, was starting to talk about her first day at Morcove before the brimming cup had been passed to her.

Delightedly she described the great school to her mother, and the girls who had become her friends. Betty, the Form captain, Polly, the madcap, Madge, the musician, Paula, the aristocrat, Naomer from Africa—Jess skipped from one to another, keeping Mrs. Lingard standing at the table, open-mouthed.

"And now—what do you think, mother? I had a big, big surprise directly I got to the school this morning. I found that Stella Munro is a boarder. Fancy—Stella Munro!"

Then Jess drained her cup and resumed:

"And so the moment I heard that Stella Munro was at the school, I came over quite queer. I felt—oh, as if it was going to be a very horrid business for both of us. But, mother darling, she was very nice to me—owned me in front of the whole school!"

"As I don't see why she shouldn't," the widow put in, with a shrug and a glance round the spic-and-span living-room. "Indeed, I should have thought the girl might have seen that you had some tea, Jess darling, before you started back all that great way."

"Now, mother," Jess exclaimed, in a rallying fashion, jumping up from the tea-table, "as a matter of fact Stella did ask me to tea, only a hitch occurred."

"Ah, that's another matter altogether, dear!"

"Yes, and so please don't be bitter—"

"Heaven forgive me if I am, my lamb!" murmured Mrs. Lingard, keeping a loving hand about the girl's shoulders now that Jess was standing close to her again. "The girl Stella has been nice to you seemingly, and—"

"Shop!" came someone's sudden interruption from the other side of the glass door separating the confectionery department from the domestic, and a hand rapped the counter with some coppers impatiently.

Out to the counter whirled Jess, still wearing her Morcove hat, although she was oblivious of that fact.

She served that customer, and quite a dozen more who trickled in and out for sweets, tobacco, packets of tea, and bootlaces, before she was free to run upstairs to her own little bedroom, with its stained ceiling where the rain had come through the disjointed tiles of the roof.

Then as she suddenly saw her reflection in the mirror, she was reminded of the school hat, and once again her heart thrilled with delight. But, she thought to herself rebukingly, she should not have served customers in that hat! It seemed like paying an insult to Morcove!

This true-hearted, simple girl, with all her pride in the great school into which she had won her way by sheer dogged determination, and with all her needless fear of "disgracing it"—what would she have said if she had known the very real disgrace that two of its scholars were going to risk bringing upon themselves and the school before this evening was out?

It was just upon seven o'clock when two girls rather furtively slipped into the town cinema, where a very special film was the attraction for the week.

They were not wearing Morcove hats, but they belonged to Morcove School.

Audrey and Stella!

Jess to the Rescue.

IT was nine o'clock, and dusk was fast changing into dark night in such narrow back streets as the one where Jess and her mother had their quaint little shop.

The rickety door, with its belabelled glass panel, was bolted for the night, but for the thrifty widow-woman and her devoted Jess this was no idle hour.

More than ever to-night, in fact, Jess would be busy right up to bedtime. For there was "prep." to do, and prep. was not going to be done to the neglect of other tasks—all those varied tasks by which, every night of her life, Jess Lingard was able to be such a wonderful aid to her mother.

It was quite dark in the dingy back living-room, or it would have been but for the old glass lamp which was shedding a pool of yellow light upon the green tablecloth.

Jess was there at the table, doing wonderful things for mother in the way of secretarial work. She had checked invoices that had come in from the wholesalers, and had written one or two covering notes for remittances in payment of bills.

"And if I just slip out to the post with the letters, now they are finished, mother darling, that will be one little job knocked off," Jess said, as she gummed down the last envelope.

"Yes, my lamb. Finished already? Dear me, how quick you are at a thing that always puts your poor dull mother into a fume for an hour!"



STELLA MUNRO'S DISTRESS!

"How can I own up?" cried Stella. "You cannot," Jess said quietly. "But, Stella," she went on, "I feel that I can bear anything if only you'll promise not to get into such a scrape again!"

was the widow's admiring comment, as she looked up from her work-basket and mending. "I don't wonder you won a scholarship, Jess!"

"I'm going to pretend I'm winning the hundred yards, or trying to, on sports day," Jess laughed back, as a hint that she was going to race to and from the pillar-box. "And then prep."

It was very quiet out of doors now. Children who had been playing on the pavements had been called in to supper and bed. Only, just as Jess got to the top of the street where the pillar-box was, the side exits to the cinema were rattled open, and people came flocking forth, making quite a sudden hubbub.

This particular cinema was the very best in the town. It was built on a corner site, and although the side doors opened on to a very shabby by-street, its frontage was on a main road. Jess, having dropped her letters in the pillar-box, stood still, as she had often done before, to see the crowd come away, all chattering their comments on the show.

This way and that the audience drifted off in the falling darkness, and even then Jess stood dreamily there, starting to muse upon the story of the film that was being shown this week. It was one that had been taken from a story she herself had read and enjoyed ever so much, and so—

The sudden shock it gave her to see two girlish figures that she recognised instantly come flitting furtively from that side exit! Jess never forgot it.

It was as if, whilst she was dreaming of characters who belonged to the world of fiction, an electric battery had sent its current through her. She jumped violently, and gave a little gasping ejaculation.

Stella and Audrey—sneaking out of the cinema! Yes, sneaking their way out of the hall; there was no other word for it. And so Jess knew in a flash the awful thing that these two girls had done—a disgraceful, heinous thing!

In flat defiance of school regulations, they had been to the cinema without asking permission!

Jess found herself suddenly flitting after the two girls, as they dodged off.

She had an idea that they must have seen her, but this was a mistaken notion evidently. For, when she overtook them both and pulled one of them by the sleeve, the guilty couple flashed about together in utter panic, as if they were sure it was a mistress who had just caught them nicely. And then Audrey burst out in a relieved way, yet with intense fury:

"Oh, it's only that day-girl! Go away, you! How dare you—"

"Stella!" Jess panted, confining her attention to the girl she was holding by the sleeve. "Oh, Stella, what have you done to-night? Surely it is enough to get you expelled!"

"We shall get expelled if you make a scene and get us noticed, you little idiot!" Audrey interposed furiously. "Go away, I tell you! Come on, Stella!"

As she tore herself free of Jess's clutching hand, Stella jerked out nervously:

"You—you won't blab, will you, Jess? Promise never to tell."

"Of course I shall not tell! But, oh, Stella, it is awful! You boarding girls, you are not allowed—"

"Do come on!" Audrey exclaimed again, stamping a foot. "They'll say punctured bikes could never have kept us out as late as this!"

And then they were gone. In a way, Jess felt glad that they were dashing off, for it was past nine even now, and they had all the way to go to Morcove. Yet she felt she would have given anything to be able to exact a promise from Stella that there would never be anything like this again.

She pulled herself together, then turned to go back past the cinema, heaving a sick-at-heart sigh.

What a bad friend Stella must have found in Audrey Blain that she was doing this sort of thing at the very start of her career at Morcove! How weak, how easily led it proved Stella to be! And oh, what terrible consequences she would have to face sooner or later if she went on like this!

From such anguished thoughts as these Jess was roused by hearing a snatch of talk between two of the cinema attendants, at the side exit.

"Well, Alf," one was saying to the other, "it ought to mean a ten-bob reward for you, at least, if you take it back to-morrow."

"Ten bob?" So I should think, for returning a gold wrist-watch as good as this 'un' was the answer. "I'll trot along to Morcove School in my off-time to-morrow."

Jess stopped again, her heart beating faster than ever.

"Excuse me—"

"Allo! Good-evening, missy! But it isn't you that's dropped a gold wrist-watch during this evening's performance!" the man Alf exclaimed, displaying the rich find on the palm of his hand.

"No, but I—I go to Morcove School every day," Jess faltered desperately, "and so please—please let me take it, will you?"

"What and let you get the reward!" both men laughed good-humouredly.

"I am Jess Lingard—from the shop a few doors down this street," the girl began; and then Alf nodded quickly.

"Ay, I know you—served me many a time, you have."

"Well, then, will you trust me with the watch, and trust me to hand over any reward?" the girl pleaded earnestly. "I ask it because those girls will get into great disgrace if ever it is known that they were at the cinema!"

"Stella Munro, Morcove School, North Devon," the man Alf read from the inner side of the wrist-strap. "Ay, a bad look-out for Miss Stella, so I guessed, if I chose to send this per post to the Headmistress."

"You ought to hold it for a bit," the other man said jestingly, enjoying Jess's agitation. "You ought to get all the bigger reward for keeping mum!"

"Ah, you are not that sort, either of you!" Jess exclaimed, with faith in their rectitude. "All the same, you may very easily do the girl great harm, if you don't let me act as the go-between. I only want to save her from disgrace."

"Good enough!" said Alf heartily. "There you are, then, missy! Now it will be all right. Nothing said, and mind: you make her swear solemn she'll never do such a thing again."

"Thank you—thank you!" was Jess's fervent murmur, as she seized the watch and strap. "She shall have it in the morning, and then—yes, it will surely be all right."

And so it might have been, but for the per-verse-ty of fate!

If only Stella, when she missed the watch, had associated the loss with her stolen visit to the cinema, all would have gone well enough. But that was just what Stella did not do!

"Lost—a Watch."

It was not until next morning, before breakfast, that Stella missed the watch, and then she jumped to one swift and natural conclusion.

"I lost it about the school yesterday," she exclaimed to Audrey, "and I think I know where, too. In the grounds—"

"Sure?" Audrey asked, with a sudden uneasy frown.

"Positive! I—"

"So long as you didn't lose it at the—you know where," Audrey said, with a little sickly smile at the recollection of last night's bit of stolen pleasure, and the way they had got back late and had yet been exonerated from blame.

"Oh, no, it couldn't have been then!" Stella insisted convincingly. "I found the watch fidgeting my wrist at break, yesterday morning, and so I took it off and put it in my pocket. But I did it absently, and most likely it dropped to the ground instead of going into my pocket."

"But supposing—"

"I slipped a clean handkerchief into my pocket before we started out for our—our jaunt," Stella recalled, "and the watch was not in the pocket then, I'm certain!"

"Thank goodness for that!" Audrey rejoined, with a grimace. "Well, you'd better have a look for it, and I'll come and help you. There's time."

So they hurried off downstairs and into the open air, Stella heading the way to that part of the spacious grounds where she could remember having sauntered about yesterday. She and Audrey hunted all over the grass, longing to catch the sparkle of gold in the morning sunlight. But the minutes crept on, and the bell rang for breakfast and still the watch was not retrieved.

The sight of them continuing a search in spite of the call to brekker, brought along other girls.

"Lost something?" asked Jess Trelawney.

"Yes, my gold wrist-watch," said Stella. "I am positive I dropped it somewhere about the place yesterday."

She explained the circumstances to the whole batch of girls, whose comment was that it seemed strange the watch had not been found long before this!

"Put a notice on the board about it; that's best," advised Betty. "Then you'll have the whole school keeping a look-out for the watch."

It was the usual procedure in the case of lost articles of value, and Stella followed it. Abandoning the search for the time being, she made a run for the schoolhouse and wrote out a few lines before going into breakfast. Another minute and the notice was on the board, where it would catch the eye of dozens of scholars when they came away from the table.

"I hope she finds it soon," Betty said during breakfast. "The horrid thing is the risk of its getting trodden upon."

"Yes, wather! Most distressing!" remarked Paula, very politely accepting the marmalade from Madge. "Thanks, Madge! And, pway, what ails Naomer this morning that she—"

"'Ello, present!" came a sudden merry cry from the doorway, causing all at the Fourth Form table—including Miss Redgrave—to turn their eyes upon the perfectly adorable and saucy figure of the dusky little lady from Africa.

"Good-morning, Naomer!" Miss Redgrave said genially.—And then, with a little sigh at having to bestow censure:

"How is it that you are late to breakfast again this morning, Naomer?"

"I not get up," was the perfectly simple answer.

"But, Naomer, I have told you before—you must get up! When the bell goes—"

"In my country, if I not want to get up, then I not get up," Naomer informed the amused breakfast-party. "And if you laugh, I shall go to bed again!"

"Ha, ha, ha! How wick!" exploded Paula.

"Sit down, Naomer, and eat your br—"

"No, because you laugh, you silly duffers!" Naomer said, making use of the breezy phrases she had picked up from the girls. "I tell you, I go to bed again!"

"Naomer, stop!"

But Naomer, on the contrary, vanished, and when Dolly Delane was sent to fetch her back, the emissary returned after at least five minutes' absence; very breathless, and alone.

"She won't come, Miss Redgrave. I tried—"

"But—"

"She's gone to bed again."

"Oh!"

"Ha ha, ha!" exploded the whole Fourth Form breakfast-table, whilst Miss Redgrave, trying to look stern instead of amused, jumped up to go and tackle Naomer in the dormitory.

"You may rise as soon as you wish to," was the good-humoured mistress's parting word, and, needless to say, the next few seconds found Betty and Co. out of doors again.

The search for the watch was resumed, more and more girls taking part in it as they came out for an after-brekker turn in the open. At a quarter to nine perhaps a hundred scholars of all ages might have been seen pacing around, with eyes fixed searchingly upon the ground.

A quarter to nine! It was the time when, every morning for the rest of the term, Jess, the day-girl, must be pelting along from the town, on her way to school.

Whir, whir, whir!—on she came now, faster than ever, if anything, because she simply must get a chance to restore the watch to Stella before school began.

Half the night, compassionate Jess had laid awake in her humble little bedroom under the broken tiles, thinking of Stella and the lost watch. Stella was certain to have missed it, and to Jess it seemed inevitable that the guilty girl should associate its loss with the secret visit to the cinema.

What a terrible night Stella must have passed, then! In what an awful state of dread she must be in at this moment! Faster, then—faster, so as to end Stella's miserable anxiety with all possible speed!

Whir, whir! hummed the cycle, as the well-meaning day-girl licked along the dusty highway. She was on the last lap now, and it was still only ten to nine. With her hair floating behind her in the wind, she put her head lower than ever over the handlebars, and pedalled as if to win a hundred pound trophy, with her eyes upon the school gateway.

And then—

A sudden violent jar, the slither of a jammed wheel—crash!

And there was Jess, lying bruised and senseless in the dust of the road, with the broken-down bicycle piled beside her!

Not Good Enough.

THE porter at the gateway and his wife saw the distressing accident, and they ran to the spot, their cries of dismay attracting the attention of girls who had been prowling about just inside the gateway, looking for the watch. They also ran-out, and as soon as their horrified eyes saw the girlish victim of the accident, they knew her.

"It's the day-girl! Oh!"
 "Yes, it is Jess Lingard! Poor girl—"
 "How awful!"
 "Yes, wather! Geals—"
 "Is she badly hurt?"

With that grave fear in all their minds, the girls tore along to the scene of the smash, getting ahead of the porter and his wife. At a time like this, Betty and Co. could fly like the wind!

Betty, Polly, and Madge were the first three to reach the poor girl, and whilst others were still running up they got some idea of the state Jess was in.

"Badly stunned. This nasty cut about the head—look at it!" Betty exclaimed, in a shocked tone. "But that's all the harm, I think."

"Bad enough," said Madge, in great distress. "Poor Jess!"

"It's this cheap bike! Poor Jess, indeed!" Polly said, turning over the machine. "The best she has ever been able to afford, of course! Oh, why—why didn't I know? She could have had mine, instead of this rubbishy thing!"

There on the roadway, with quite a large crowd around, skilled hands were immediately giving the victim first-aid treatment. A glass of cold water from the lodge was ready to be placed to her lips when at last consciousness returned, and after a few sips she began to look much better.

So then they helped her to the grassy bank beside the road, where she rested in a dazed manner, conscious of being gazed at by half a hundred sympathisers.

"Case of most haste less speed, wasn't it, dear?" Polly Linton broke out at last, with a rallying laugh that she was sure would do good.

"Yes, I—I'm afraid I was scorching," Jess faltered, returning a rueful smile. "How angry the Headmistress will be—"

"Don't be silly! Accidents will happen, especially on a bike of that sort!" Polly exclaimed. "Well, it's only fit for the scrap-heap now, and a good job, too!"

"What! Oh, my poor bike! And it cost me—I saved up—"

"Now, now!" That was Polly the garrulous once again. "I've got a bike for you, Jess—oh, a beauty!"

"She shall have mine," said Madge. "Jess dear, you'll find you've got the choice of a dozen."

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, don't you know," came Paula's amiable drawl, "I cannot express the gratification it will give me to present you with a brand new model, Jess! As a token of friendship—wather!"

That was simply too much for poor Jess in her shaky state. To find everyone so nice and kind was as upsetting as the very reverse treatment would have been. In a sudden reaction, she burst into hysterical tears, and whipped out her handkerchief to stem them.

Clack! went something that flew from the handkerchief and struck the edge of the roadway at the feet of Betty and Co. They must have seen the object, even if the noise of its fall had not

drawn attention to it, for it flashed in the sunshine.

A gold wrist-watch on its leather strap! "Hallo!" was Polly's astounded cry, as she snatched up the valuable article. "Stella's lost watch!"

"Oh! Stella—where is Stella Munro? Stella—here!" went up the chorus, as the girl in question was seen to be racing towards the crowd along with Audrey and others. "Here is your missing watch!"

Then a silence fell, a silence only broken by the breathlessness of the newcomers as they joined the crowd.

"That's the watch," Polly said, handing it over to Stella, as she came to the front of the crowd. "Your name is written inside the strap."

"Yes, that—that's the watch!" gulped out Stella, going red and white by turns. "And you found it on the road? Oh!"

"No, Jess must have found it yesterday," someone explained. "It came out of her pocket just now."

Stella seemed to reel on the verge of a swoon. She clenched the watch in a closed fist, staring at Jess—staring, with nothing to say.

"Where did you find it yesterday, Jess?" Audrey asked suddenly. "Stella has been saying she must have dropped it in the school grounds."

Jess, getting unsteadily upon her feet, began in a flustered way:

"I—I was going to let you have it back, Stella, this morning—I—"

"Yes, but where did you find it?" several girls asked. "And when? What time yesterday?"

"I—I—"
 "We wonder you didn't restore it at once. The name was on the strap."

"Yes, but I—oh, I, I can't explain!"
 "Aren't we rather forgetting that Jess has only just come round after a nasty accident?" Betty interposed at this point. "The watch is restored to its owner. Surely that is good enough?"

But was it?
 Some at least of those who went back to the school, discussing the matter in grave tones, seemed to think that Jess-Lingard's explanation, so far, was not at all good enough. It was no explanation at all!

And it was the knowledge of what was being hinted, by this whispering tongue and that, which brought a white-faced Stella into the study she shared with Audrey, during break.

A Promise—for What it is Worth.

"WHAT shall I do? Oh, what shall I do, Audrey?" was Stella's anguished cry.

"About Jess and the watch!"
 "Do? Do nothing, of course!"

"But they—all her schoolfellows—they are bound to think that she found the watch yesterday and—and stuck to it."

"Well, let them! After all, Jess is only a day-girl," Audrey said, shrugging. "What do the feelings of a mere day-girl matter?"

"Audrey! She is in this plight to-day because she can't say how the watch came into her possession," Stella burst out hoarsely. She was utterly conscience-stricken. "I spoke to her on the quiet a moment ago. The watch was found by an honest attendant at the cinema. Jess did the best for me—got him to hand it to her. Don't you see? Oh, Audrey, what shall I do, when I'm being saved at that girl's expense?"

"She's a little idiot—a prig!" sneered Audrey, caressing her fair hair. "Why couldn't she tell a fib for once, and say she found the watch in the grounds?"

"That wouldn't clear her. Girls want to know why it was still in her possession this morning. Besides—"

"There must be some way out—with a little finesse," Audrey said tartly.

"Finesse? You mean downright lying!" Stella said huskily. "Audrey, that girl can't tell lies. Oh, I only wish I was as good and true as she is!"

"Make her your friend, then, and let her teach you!" laughed Audrey, turning to quit the room. "The gentle art of becoming a prig—by Jess Lingard! Oh, Stella, don't look at me like that! Be sensible! Come, pull yourself together! Crying—"

"I can't help it! I'm wretched!" sobbed Stella, who had dropped into a chair and was weeping violently. "It is so unfair, so despicable, to let that girl, a relation of mine, too—"

"Yes, that's the worst of poor relations; they

her delicate hand caressingly over Stella's head. "Why do you let it worry you? You'll never make a second Audrey Blain, at this rate!"

And then she was gone, knowing the weak character with whom she was dealing. Even when Audrey met Jess in the corridor, and guessed that that girl was seeking out Stella, she remained as composed as ever. It was all right! Stella had a conscience; Stella was yearning to own up. But she would never have the pluck to do so!

Nor indeed, was there anything in Stella's demeanour to suggest plucky determination when Jess quietly entered the study.

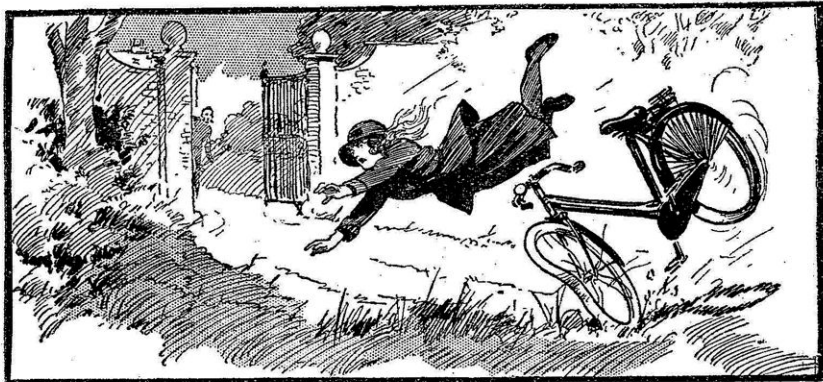
The wretched girl had collapsed into a chair, and was the picture of guilty cowardice.

"Stella!"

"Well, Jess?" she sighed miserably, showing her haggard face to the newcomer. "You have come to ask what I'm going to do? Oh, I don't know! I'm so sorry, so frightfully sorry! But how can I—how can I own up?"

"You cannot," Jess said quietly and decisively.

"And I am not here to pester you into doing any such thing. But I— Stella, I feel I can bear



THE ACCIDENT! A sudden violent jar, the slither of a jammed wheel—crash! And Jess went flying headlong over the handlebars.

always make themselves a nuisance. Oh, dear," Audrey said, giving another touch to her hair in front of the glass, "how I wish I could find a world where everybody was like myself!"

With that flippant remark, she moved again to the door, and then Stella sprang up.

"Audrey, shall I own up and clear Jess?" she panted. "I want to—I feel I must! Let me, Audrey; it need not mean getting you into disgrace. They need not know you were with me at the cinema."

"You'll be expelled if you do own up," Audrey answered flatly. "And even if you did get let off for once, being your first offence, I can tell you this. You'll have no more little razzles with me!"

The other sighed desperately.

"You know how I like being your best friend, Audrey. Ever since I came to Morcove I've felt very fond of you. You—you're different from all other girls."

"I am certainly a bit different from your poor relation! Oh, duffer!" Audrey went on, sweeping

anything if only you'll promise not to get into such a scrape again!"

"It has taught me a lesson; I know that!" exclaimed the unhappy culprit bitterly.

"It has taught you, I should think, what sort of a friend Audrey is! She lured you on to going with her to the cinema. Stella, if you are not careful, that girl will be your undoing."

Jess resumed, after a spell of heavy silence:

"I came to ask you, Stella—you mean me to give that honest fellow at the cinema something for finding the watch?"

"Yes. I have been forgetting. Fancy you thinking of him at a time like this!" Stella exclaimed, starting up. "Will a pound be sufficient reward? I don't know. I—"

"Oh, ample!"

In a shaky manner Stella found the money and laid it down. As she took her hand away from the pound note, she turned her eyes upon Jess again, and they were swimming with fresh tears.

"I am rewarding that man, Jess—how can I ever reward you? Oh, when I think how it will

last—the stigma, the suspicion that you stuck to what wasn't yours! Jess, you won't be able to keep silent. I'm sure you won't!"

"I will," was the day-girl's firm response, spoken with set teeth. "That is a promise, Stella. Don't cry, Stella, only say that in return for this you will never, never let Audrey lead you into mischief again. Make it a promise, and when I remember it and see you keeping it, I shall have all the reward I want."

The earnest words were followed by another silence. Stella's face was streaming with tears. She could not have spoken for the silent sobs that were shaking her. But all at once she seized Jess's hand, and pressed it in a passionate way, and then—

Then they heard the bell ringing for the resumption of work, and Jess went alone from the room—alone, because the other girl had crashed down into the chair again, and was having her cry out.

Significant whisperings amongst a certain group of girls whom Jess passed on her way down through the house! Whisperings that changed to sudden stony silence as she went by the girls, whilst here and there a shoulder was turned to her coldly.

So she knew the cruel fate that had overtaken her on this, merely her second day at Morcove as a scholarship girl. How blackly her character was besmirched! But could it be helped?

No.

Caught on the horns of such a terrible dilemma, she had done only what any other decent girl would have felt bound to do. That was her simple way of looking at it all.

It had been a case of either saying exactly how she came into possession of the watch, or of giving no explanation at all. The former course would have meant dire disgrace for Stella. As for the other way—oh, well enough Jess knew what it was to mean!

Unmerited suspicion, a stigma that would last, perhaps, for the rest of her time at Morcove. But there it was, a thing that could not be helped.

No, she did not mind, so long as she could think of those tears that she had seen Stella shed, and of the promise that that passionate squeeze of the hand had surely implied. A promise on Stella's part never to get into such grave mischief again!

"She will keep it. I am sure she will," was the day-girl's comforting thought, "even as I mean to keep mine!"

But, ah, Jess little knew!

(END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.)

(Jess is a fine girl, isn't she? A real sterling character, well fitted to become the friend of Betty Barton & Co., and lucky is Stella Munro to have such a splendid cousin. But does Stella appreciate this fact and endeavour to break away from Audrey? This you will find out in next week's new long complete story, entitled: "Stella Munro's Choice!")

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