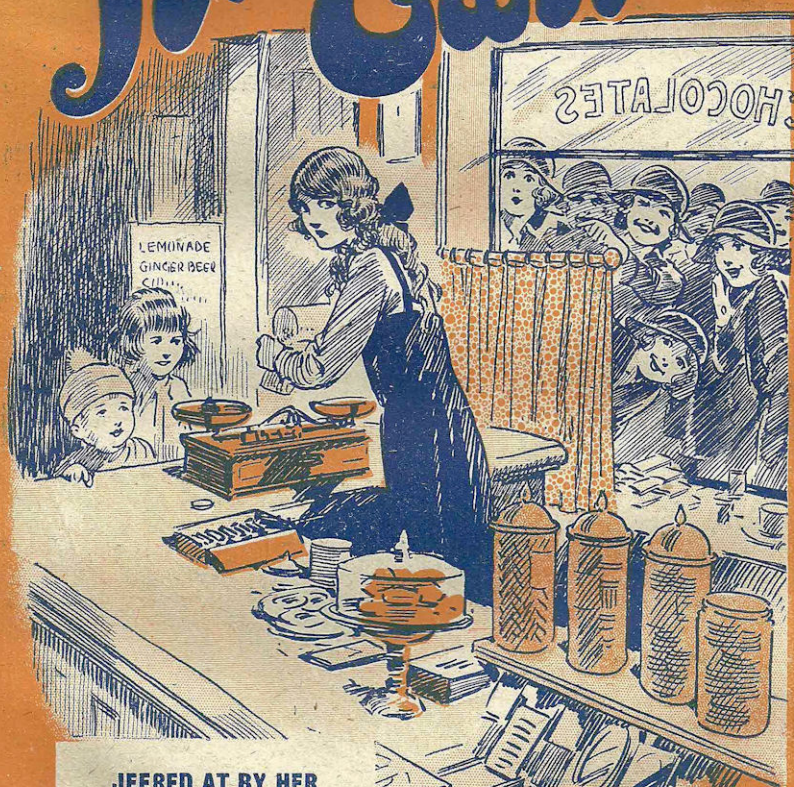


In this issue: **"Stella Munro's Choice!"** A stirring story of the girls of Morcove School.

The Schoolgirls' Own



JEERED AT BY HER SCHOOLFELLOWS!

(A moving incident from the new long complete story of the girls of Morcove School contained in this issue.)

2nd

A Story that will Appeal to all Schoolgirls.



STELLA MUNRO'S CHOICE

A magnificent new long complete story of the girls of Morcove School, featuring Jess Lingard, the scholarship day-girl.

By **MARJORIE STANTON.**

"The Poor Relation."

It was Polly Linton, the madcap of Morcove School, who had a sudden brilliant notion just as the whole party of girl-cyclists got to the top of Halfway Hill, that Saturday afternoon.

"All change, please!" was Polly's flippant way of announcing that she, for one, was going to top down from her saddle for a rest. "Alight here for Haystack Corner and Forty Winks!"

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, geals, what a bwilliant pposition!" approved Paula Creel, the aristocrat of the Fourth Form. She jumped down from her machine, let it fall crash to the grassy bank, and then pulled out her handkerchief.

"We'll have a wess—yes, wather! A bweather, geals!"

"This haystack," cried Polly, already clambering over a five-barred gate into the meadow; "it is like sitting on a feather bed, and oh, what gorgeous views!"

"We are a lucky lot, and no mistake," said Betty Barton, after standing to gaze round. "Now, just fancy the thousands of people who are cooped up in smoky old towns to-day!"

"Yes," said Madge Minden, always quick to pay attention to any earnest remark. "Even Barncombe town—only a couple of miles further on from here—will be a bit stuffy to-day."

"So think about Jess Lingard, as one person whom we know is cooped up," chimed in Tess Trelawney. "A whole afternoon's serving behind the counter in her mother's shop, most likely!"

Paula Creel was just then trying to get over the gate with all the elegance of high breeding. It was a ticklish job, unless you simply fell over the gate, much as Polly did. So Paula refrained from speech whilst she was occupied in preserving her dignity.

Then she took up the talk about Morcove's scholarship day-girl.

"Geals, when you wufer to the distwessing mannah in which Jess is forced to spend her Saturday halfer, bai Jove—"

"Not forced, Paula; she does it for love," put in Betty. "Just to help her mother."

"And pway, doesn't that make it all the more bwickish of her?" Paula exclaimed. "Weal thon! What I wposose is that, pwesently, we dwop in at that shop, just to cheah her up, bai Jove! Howevah, a wess first—yes, wather!"

And Paula floundered across to accommodate

herself, as Polly had already done, on the loose mound of hay that lay close to the actual stack.

"I heard," Polly said, "and I'm on to that wheeze! Poor Jess Lingard! It would be nice for us to pay her a surprise visit to-day. Isn't the hay lovely, Paula?"

"Yes, wather!"

"So sweet and warm—"

"Most awgeable, twuly!"

"And if you lie back and close your eyes, you simply—"

"Ye—yeowp, ow! Gweat goodness—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What wudiculous duffer has left a hay-wake in the hay?" Paula wanted to know dismally. "I sat on the pwongs, bai Jove!"

Polly and the rest fairly shrieked with laughter. "Pwecisely! I might have known you would gwim," groaned the discomfited aristocrat. "As sure as I come to gwief, you geals gwim! You make me cwoss, weally!"

"Order, please! How dare anybody laugh?" said Polly, with sudden mock solemnity. "Hem! We will now sit down, and the first girl who speaks will have to stand treat in Barncombe!"

"Yes, wather—"

"Paula! Paula is in for it!"

"I beg your pardon, Polly deah? Did you say—"

"You spoke, Paula; so there you are!"

"I—I—weally—"

"I said, the 'next girl who speaks,' and you said, 'Yes, wather.' That's fair, isn't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Betty and the others. "You can't get out of it, Paula dear!"

"Quite all wight!" beamed the aristocrat, who was never happier than when she was "standing treat." "With extreme pleasure, bai Jove!"

Howevah, I am weavy. My fwail form is pweswtvate after climbing the hill. I will theahfore lie back and—yurrop! Ow—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, dear, what is it this time, Paula?" the madcap spluttered.

"Nothing, nothing! I was suddenly awfwaid I had sat on my pocket miwwow," Paula explained, starting to get her little vanity case out of her frock pocket. "Quite all wight! And so, whilst I am about it, I may as well put my heah to wights!"

At this instant, and whilst Paula was setting to

work with comb and mirror, some belated girl-cyclist came along, giving a loud tr-r-ring of the bell as she saw the girls inside the field.

"Allo, present!" she hailed them merrily.

"You are lazy, yes? Take feefy line, yes!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Come on, Naomer darling," the chums chorused. "Room for you!"

"Yes, wather!"

So Naomer Nakara, Morcove's dusky little maiden from a desert kingdom in North Africa, stacked her machine alongside the rest, and came to the gate.

Nimble as an acrobat, she was over the top bar in a jiffy, made a rush for her chums, and did a sort of volplane into Paula's lap.

"Allo, present, Paula!"

"Pwésent!" groaned the long suffering aristocrat, thus interrupted in her toilette. "Oh, dear; oh, dear! What a twial life is!"

"Have you done all your lines, Naomer?" Betty asked, with a grin, and then her royal highness from Africa pouted.

"I do five line, yes; then I say, I not do no more—no. I go to Barncombe—"

"And so here you are!" put in Polly. "Five lines, eh? That leaves you how many million still to do, Naomer?"

Naomer held up a hand to keep count with her fingers.

"I get feefy line for not getting up one morning. I get feefy line for not getting up the next morning. I get feefy more line—oh, I not know how many feefy line I get! But I know I not ever get up when the bell ring—no!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The girls lolled back in the hay, laughing at their dusky friend's defiance of school discipline. It was taking the headmistress and her staff all their time to tame this little wild thing from the sultan's palace at Nakara.

"Well," broke out restless Polly next moment; "now that we are all nicely rested—"

"Wested, bai Jove! Gweat Scott, geals—"

"I am sure, it has been perfectly delightful," the madcap said teasingly; "to lie back in the hay, and have such a nice rest!"

"I—I—Pway wealise, geals!" groaned the aristocrat. "I haven't wested! I have been industriously occupied, bai Jove—"

"In fiddling with your hair, of course!" chuckled Polly. "The sort of thing you would do! But come along, dear! Time's up!"

There was another groan from Paula, as she put away her vanity case, and scrambled up.

"Life," she sighed, "is one weawy wound of aggravating twials. However, I do not complain."

Naomer exclaimed, with a pretty grimace, as she went back to the gate with the girls:

"I complain, when I get feefy line every day! No matter. I shall do a thing with that school bell, you see!"

This rather dark threat passed unnoticed by Naomer's chums, for all at once there was the whiz of a motor-cycle and sidecar, going by at a great rate. A Morcove girl was driving, and the one passenger was also a scholar.

"Audrey Blain and Stella Munro," remarked Betty, sending her gaze after the outfit, as it whirred along in the direction of Barncombe. "What a pace!"

"What a smother of dust, too—pah!" grimaced Polly. "But that's like Audrey, to show off!"

Polly might have said with equal truth that it

was like Audrey Blain to "show off." The girl—pampered daughter of very wealthy parents—the airs and graces she gave herself, the curl of the lip she had for most of her schoolfellows, told how she looked upon school life as a horrid bore.

Audrey, however, had just lately found one girl who was just the sort for her. This was Stella Munro, the scholar riding in the side-car this afternoon.

Stella also could boast very wealthy parents, and she, like Audrey, had the restless longing to be "grand," and to get all the pleasure possible out of life. She had not Audrey's daring;—was rather a coward, in fact. But the cowardice was due to lack of character, and that defect was liable to make her easily led.

In other words, she was the sort of girl to be enticed into doing something, whilst all the time quaking in her shoes for fear of being found out.

Betty and the others now rode on towards the town, keeping up their talk and laughter, tr-tringing at their cycle bells, and generally enjoying the afternoon spin, with the fresh breeze from over the sea sporting with their hair. Good enough for them, were the push-bikes! And how they did chuckle, too, when they came upon Audrey and Stella, half a mile short of the town, held up with engine trouble!

Audrey, who, by some means, had got hold of a motor-cycle, was dismounted, and tugging away at greasy nuts with a spanner. She would not look round at her schoolfellows when they came riding merrily by; but Stella was still in the sidecar, and she could not help appearing rather humiliated.

"Most haste, less speed!" she felt bound to admit, ruefully, and Paula said:

"Yes, wather!"

Afterwards, Betty let out a quiet remark about Stella.

"That girl, she's not at all a bad sort," said the Fourth Form captain. "If only—"

"Yes, if only she doesn't get too deep-in with Audrey, before she is aware of it," Madge chimed in gravely. "How they do keep together, though, these days! And I notice that Stella doesn't seem to take much notice of Jess-Lingard after all, although that girl is a relation of hers."

"The poor relation!" Betty murmured, whilst she remembered the sneer with which she had heard Audrey use that phrase. "Poor Jess! What a difference between Stella Munro's life at Morcove, as a boarder, and the day-girl's, down this side-street! For this is the street, I fancy," the captain added, and steered her cycle accordingly.

Less than a minute later, and what a surprise—a real shock—Jess Lingard got, as she stood behind the counter in her mother's little confectionery establishment!

The window seemed to grow dark all in a moment, because of the crowd of girls that had gathered outside it. Jess saw familiar faces, and the familiar school hat on each pretty head, and she fairly gasped:

"Gracious, mother! Here's Betty—and Polly—and—oh, a lot more of the Form!"

"Never!" was the poor widow-woman's incredulous cry, as she came darting forth from the back parlour. "But—"

"Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle!" went the hanging bell, as the shop-door was pushed open; and all the mother and daughter could do was to gape at the crowd that flocked in.

"Oh, but, mother, don't be upset about these girls!" was the entreaty which Jess suddenly voiced, causing Betty and Co. to stare in return. "These girls aren't like the others. They would never do such a thing!"

The words checked the charms in the act of greeting the day-girl with jovial friendliness. "Never do such a thing"? What thing? There was something to be inquired into here!

"We—we don't understand, Jess dear," Betty broke out, rather confusedly. "What is it that other girls have been doing?"

"Oh—er—never mind; nothing, nothing!" blustered Jess, the day-girl, going red from brow to neck. "Mother darling, don't tell them—"

"Indeed, my dear, I shall tell them, because I think it only right!" was Mrs. Lingard's sudden indignant outcry. "The truth of it is, young ladies, there have been girls from the school here, this afternoon, only to tease my Jess—only to make her life a misery, if they can! And if you think that is quite fair of them, just because she's only a scholarship girl, and has to lend a hand in the shop on half-holidays, then—"

"Fair of them?" burst out Betty hotly. "Oh, it's shameful!"

"Disgusting!" chimed in the others. And with terrific heartiness Paula said:

"Yes, wather! Downright disgwaceful, bai Jove!"

Nicely Caught.

DURING the moment of utter consternation which Betty and Co. were experiencing, inside the poky little shop, Mrs. Lingard untaped her apron and cast it aside.

"For I am sure, my dears—if I may call you so—"

"Yes, wather!"

"I am sure, young ladies, you have only come to give your schoolfellow a mere friendly look-in. Just a call in passing, so to speak, and most kind of you, I'm sure! So I mustn't wear my apron—"

"Mrs. Lingard," burst out Betty, feeling she wanted to hug the good soul, "you are a duck! And your Jess is a dear, a—"

"A weal bwick, yes, wather!"

"And that's why we are here," chimed in Polly.

"Because it seemed to be so jolly selfish to be free for the afternoon, and Jess all the time—"

"To be sure, my dears; so it is hard on the lass, but what can I do?" exclaimed Mrs. Lingard.

"How I've begged and prayed her to leave the shop to me, seeing as she's at school all the week, and then the preparation work, every evening. But—"

"Here I am, and here I stay," Jess now declared flatly. "I can't help it, if there are girls at the school who think I'm a disgrace, because I serve in my mother's shop! Mother's only got me to help her, and—"

"Who are the girls who call it a disgrace? Where are they?" Betty flashed out spiritedly.

"That brings us back to the point! You said something about girls having been here, to tease and sneer. Of all the abominable bits of snobbery I ever heard of, that's the worst, I think!"

"Bat Jove, I weally cannot expwess my howwow of such conduct," said Paula. "Howevah, we guals have not come to sneer."

"Oh, didn't I know it, the moment I saw your faces?" Jess exclaimed admiringly. "You are not that sort, and so, mother, you see! I can afford to take no notice of the rest!"

Mrs. Lingard was about to make it clearer than ever that she regarded the present visitors as being welcome as flowers in May, when Jess suddenly made a startling announcement.

She had gone back to the shop doorway, to look up and down the street, and now she flashed round.

"Betty—all of you! Here come Grace Garfield and Ella Elgood, and two or three other girls. They look up to mischief, too."

"Coming here, you mean?" Betty exclaimed tensely. "Otherwise, they would not be down this side-street. So, then—"

"Jess—quick, tell me!" Polly broke out excitedly. "Are they the girls who have been here before this afternoon?"

"I—I— Well—"

"They are! Then, I know what," rushed on



EVIDENCE OF HER GUILT! Jess stepped forward and picked the crumpled envelope out of the basket. She started to open it, and then Stella made a rush—a panicky rush to snatch it from her cousin.

the madcap. "A wheeze! Mrs. Lingard, do let me and my chums pop into your parlour and hide there?"

"My dears—"

"We'll teach them a lesson, if we hear them annoying your Jess," Polly explained breathlessly.

"My dears, the parlour's yours to make free with, whether 'tis to hide there or just make yourselves at home in," was the widow's hearty response. "By all means, my dears—down two steps, you'll notice!"

The place was old-fashioned enough, and dim enough, too, for strangers to need a warning about the "two steps down." Even as it was, one or two of the girls almost fell over each other going

down into the parlour; but that was because they acted in such a hurry.

Only just in time. Hardly had they herded together in the back parlour than—tinkle, tinkle, tinkle! went the shop-bell and hard on the heels of a small child, two or three girl customers flounced into the shop.

"'Allo, Jess, 'ow are yer?" asked Grace Garfield, putting on a very coarse voice. "'Ow's yer muvver ter-day?"

"'Arf ounce o' corf-candy, and a ha'porth o' choo'lit!" requested Ella Elgood, adopting a similar tone.

"I shall not serve you," Jess said calmly. "You may think you are funny, but if my mother chose to tell the police——"

"'Wot, wot, tell the perlice?" sniggered another girl. "'Wot about the day-gal that found a watch and kep' it?"

"'Yuss!"

"If you say one word more about that watch I found——"

"Oh, don't talk; serve your customers!" Grace now mocked at the day-girl, in an ordinary tone. "You'll never become the biggest shop in Barncombe if you squabble with your customers."

"What pretty tickets you've written out for the sweet-jars?" chuckled Ella. "Is that how they taught you to write at the council school?"

Then one of the other tormentors took up the teasing in a coarse voice again:

"'Ere! 'Urry up and serve us! Shop, muvver—sho-op! Forward!"

Forward it was, then—not for Mrs. Lingard, but for the girls who had been lying in ambush, so to speak, in the parlour.

Up the two stairs into the shop stormed Betty and Co., simply furious at the insulting treatment to which poor Jess had been subjected—and not for the first time to-day, either.

Startled gasps came from Grace Garfield and her cronies as they saw what they were in for. They scuttled for the doorway, trying to see which of them could be first out of the shop, but too late was that panicky retreat.

In a twinkling, the chums of the Fourth Form were all amongst the would-be fugitives, and surely the howls for mercy could have been heard at the top of the street.

What a Surprise!

"S O this is the game you've been playing to-day?"

"Ow! Stop it, Betty! Stop——"

"We'll teach you to come teasing Jess. Oh, you—you——"

"Leggo, be qui-et, Polly. Ow——"

"O-o-o! We were only in fuf-fuf-fun, Madge!"

"Fun! We are not in fun, anyhow."

It didn't seem as if Betty and Co. were, certainly. They were properly roused and no wonder.

"For you geals to tweek Jess as if she were a disgrace to the school!" Paula simpered heatedly, whilst she gave good account of herself in the general mix-up. "Wetches! It's you who are the disgracees—yes, wather!"

"So take that—and that!" cried Polly, giving a more or less harmless tug at Grace Garfield's hair. "And now—get out!"

"Yes, go on; wetweat! Withdwa your offensive pvesence from this establishment!"

"Paula—Betty—— Oh, do stop! We—o-o-o! Look here——"

"'Allo, present!" sang out the nimble Nakara.

throwing herself into the scummage just inside the shop doorway. "Take feefy line; take two feefy line! Yes!"

"Take yourselves off!" was Betty's grim advice, and Grace Garfield and Co. were only too glad to act upon it.

Given the chance to scuttle off, they simply shot headlong through the shop doorway one after another, leaving the chums of the Fourth breathless but triumphant.

Polly promptly started to imitate a brass band. "Pom, pom, pom! Ta, ra; ta, ra; ta, ra! That's the stuff to gi' 'em! They fell into it just nicely that time!"

"Gweat fun, wather! Worth getting wuffed for, I decleah," said Paula, starting to put her hair to rights. "Pway, Mrs. Lingard, don't look so distwessed. If there's any damage done——"

"Oh, my dears, my dears!" palpitated Jess' mother, looking nothing but grateful for the way the shop had been cleared of the offensive visitors. "If it wasn't a real kindness on your part to stand up for my dear Jess like that, then I don't know what kindness is. Jess, my lamb——"

"Oh, she's crying. It's upset her!" Madge exclaimed in distress. "Never mind, Jess——"

"I wish I could manage not to mind," was the half-sobbing answer, whilst the poor, persecuted girl hurriedly wiped her eyes. "I suppose I'm silly to let it upset me. I'm not as plucky as some of you girls. I—I didn't steal that watch, though, and that's what hurts me. Their saying that I——"

"Yes, we heard," Betty broke in fiercely. "Shame, shame! Just because you found a watch one day and didn't return it until the next! They have no right to call it stealing."

"The next time—the very next time I hear them suggesting anything like that," Polly said, with such a war-like expression that even Jess smiled all at once, despite her emotions. "I shall take hold of the girl—no matter who it is—like this!"

It was unfortunate for Paula that the madcap, to give effect to her words, took hold of that long-suffering aristocrat very fiercely!

"I shall hold her like this, girls——"

"Yes, wather. Howehav, Polly—pway wealise——"

"And I shall——"

"Yes, wather! But, Polly——"

"Give her such a shaking!"

"Yurrow, stop it, you duffer! Pway wealise who—who—whom you are sh-sh-shaking!" howled poor Paula, her teeth rattling like castanets.

"Pup-pup-Polly, you-you——"

Polly suddenly left off shaking the inoffensive one.

"Oh, is it you, Paula?"

"Yes, wather, you widiculous cweature! Gweat goodness, look at my wuffed hair now!" wailed poor Paula. "And——"

"Gracious, look who is coming into the shop!" said Madge.

All looked accordingly, and all stood thunder-struck—except Paula.

She, "wealising" what a "wuffed" state she was in, simply fled into the parlour down two steps, and from the parlour into the kitchen.

"Lady Lundy, fwom Barncombe Castle!" Paula was gasping agitatedly to herself as she fled. "Gweat goodness, I wouldn't have her leddyship see me in this disgraceful state for all the world! What a twial life is—ah, dear!"

Meantime the other girls were feeling inclined to flee before the presence of this distinguished visitor. There had been such excitement over the rout of Grace Garfield and Co., for all Betty and the others knew, her ladyship's beautiful car might have been at the kerb even when that rumpus was going on inside the shop!

Even when Lady Lundy had put them at their ease by including them in the cordial talk which she started with Mrs. Lingard and Jess, the girls still felt that they ought to efface themselves.

Her ladyship had evidently called to see the widow and her daughter upon some matter or other which was no concern of Betty and Co.'s. The dingy back parlour was the only place, apart from the shop, into which a visitor could be asked, and the girls did not want to be in the way.

So, with a degree of stealthiness that perhaps caused Lady Lundy some secret amusement, the chums beat a retreat into the parlour, and thence into the kitchen. Paula was not there; she had escaped into the backyard! The girls slipped out after her, and then, like the Arabs in the poem, they "silently stole away."

Quietly the cycles were wheeled out into the roadway and quietly Betty and Co. rode off, feeling quite sure that their abrupt departure would give no offence to Jess and her mother.

"But I wish I knew why Lady Lundy has called at the shop like that. I'm curious!" Polly owned frankly, when they were in the next street.

"Nothing unusual for Lady Lundy to be doing a round of visits amongst the poor people of Barncombe," Betty remarked. "She's a good sort—"

"Yes, wather! I've a profound respect for Lady Lundy."

"What it means, I expect," said Madge softly, "is that Lady Lundy has a profound respect for the way Jess and her mother have battled along for a living since the father died. It would be like Lady Lundy, too, to have a word of praise and encouragement for Jess over the scholarship."

"We'll hear all about it on Monday," was Tess Trelawney's conviction. And so it proved.

The Envy of All.

MONDAY morning found Jess at school as usual, and during break she came out with a scrap of news so pleasing that she simply couldn't keep it to herself.

"You know Lady Lundy looked it at the shop on Saturday afternoon?" she burst out, joining Betty and Co. on the outskirts of the tennis courts. "It was to say such nice things about my having got the Morcove scholarship! And that was not all, either!"

"Bai Jove—"

"There's a sort of garden party coming off at Barncombe Castle on Wednesday," Jess rattled on elatedly, "and I'm to go."

"Oh," said Betty and Co., with good-natured envy. "You lucky girl!"

"Not as a guest, of course!" Jess made haste to explain, with a laugh. "I'm wanted to help serve the refreshments, and I'm to be paid. I hope it isn't disgracing Morcove, but, oh, it will be a boon to earn a few shillings."

"You ought to be spanked for thinking we may think it is disgracing Morcove!" Polly said, with mock indignation. "You will go to Barncombe Castle, Jess—"

"I mean to."

"Yes, wather! And, bai Jove," sighed Paula; "how I wish I were going, too. Even as a waitress, bai Jove!"

"Waitress, you!" Polly promptly said derisively. "You'd make a fine waitress, Paula. Half asleep all the time, and the rest of the time putting your hair to rights—ha, ha, ha!"

At that instant Audrey Blain came by, twirling a tennis racket. She had been playing a short game of singles with Stella Munro, who was also coming away from the courts. Stella, however, had got detained in talk for a few moments with some other girl and Audrey was drifting about to wait for her.

When Stella did come running up to rejoin her handsome friend, she found her moodily silent. Nothing, in fact, was said until the two of them had sauntered to a much quieter part of the school grounds.

Then Audrey suddenly halted and turned about, looking across to where Jess Lingard was still in the company of Betty and Co.

"Stella, that poor relation of yours—"

"Jess?" Stella exclaimed, in a sort of sighing tone, as if to say: "How I wish you wouldn't call her my 'poor relation'!"

"Did I hear her saying something about her going to Barncombe Castle?"

"Oh, yes," Stella answered quickly. "Jess has told me all about it. Who is this Lady Lundy? And Barncombe Castle—I suppose it is a grand place?"

"Awfully," Audrey said softly. "Lady Lundy is the greatest personage in the county. It's a great honour to—receive the least favour at her hands."

"Lucky Jess, then!" Stella exclaimed. "She is to go to the garden party as a sort of useful help in connection with the buffet. Of course, it is simply done to—well—"

"Out of common charity to your poor relation and her mother, yes," Andrew said, tongue in cheek. "Oh, I'm not jealous of your poor relation's invitation! Now, if she had been invited as a guest—but that's absurd!" And Audrey laughed.

Stella said suddenly:

"You'd like to go to Barncombe Castle as a visitor—a guest?"

"Who wouldn't!" answered the girl, who thirsted for grand society. "Ask any of the girls; some of them would even be glad to change places with your poor relation—just for the day."

"I am not sure that I wouldn't be glad, myself!" Stella owned, with a laugh. "All that I hear about Barncombe Castle and Lady Lundy makes me long to go! There's a daughter of Lady Lundy's, too, isn't there?"

Audrey nodded pensively.

"Lady Evelyn Knight—only daughter of the earl and countess," she murmured. "Friends with her, you are friends with one of the nicest girls in Society!"

"Audrey—don't! You make my mouth water!" Stella exclaimed, with a look of longing. "Oh, if only there were a few invitations going, for some of us girls!"

Audrey did not deem it necessary to remark that, if invitations were sent along for a few of the scholars, she herself was not likely to be on the list. She kept silent altogether concerning a former event at Barncombe Castle, when she had not impressed Lady Evelyn Knight at all favourably!

She heard Stella giving expression to the great



MORE HASTE—“Audrey Blain and Stella Munro,” remarked Betty, as the motor-bicycle and sidecar whizzed past, going in the direction of Barncombe. “What a pace, too!”

longing to view the glories of Barncombe Castle on a fete day, and into Audrey's cunning brain crept the idea:

Why not play upon Stella's longing? Why not think that longing to one's own advantage?

Barncombe Castle, on a day when all the cream of Society would be there! Audrey had her longings, too. If only they could be gratified! If only the thing could be worked—somehow!

But how?

That was the problem which made her give only poor attention to her school work when classes were resumed.

Next Wednesday—the day after to-morrow. It did not leave much time for devising and carrying out a scheme. Almost desperate with the sudden determination to worm her way into Barncombe Castle on the day, she went apart from the rest of the scholars at mid-day; even avoided Stella, so as to have a chance to think out a plan.

And suddenly she saw it. A plan which, if successful, would give her and Stella many glorious hours at the castle; a glorious chance of getting to know tip-top people and getting liked by them!

As soon as the idea had come to her she went with an elated step indoors and up to the study, which she shared with Stella. She thought she might find that girl there and might unfold the plan at once. Stella was certain to jump at it.

But the study was deserted, as it chanced, and so Audrey fell to pacing to and fro, communing with herself.

Yes, there was not the least reason why the plan should not go off successfully. A tricky business, but then—she was an expert!

Barncombe Castle! Lady Evelyn Knight and all her delightful friends. A chance to make a far different impression upon them this time!

Halting in front of a mirror, Audrey asked herself passionately: why shouldn't she make headway with the Barncombe Castle “set”? She was no booby of a schoolgirl. The recognised beauty of the school; the very queen of the Form—so she could claim to be. Her manners, her way of dressing—all the things that, in her opinion, counted with Society people—everything was in her favour!

“I always have been better fitted for Barncombe Castle than Morcove,” she said to herself fiercely, still proudly surveying herself in the glass. “And it is to Barncombe Castle I am going when the day comes!”

Stella entered the study a moment later, and her designing friend flashed at her:

“I say! Didn't you tell me that your parents were motoring through Devonshire this week?”

“Yes—why?” asked Stella, in surprise at the question. “They will get to Exeter on Wednesday and be there—”

“Then it is all right?” Audrey burst out, bringing her hands together with a delighted clap. “Stella darling, I know just how we can go to Barncombe Castle on the great day! Listen, and I'll tell you.”

Awfully Kind of Audrey.

WEDNESDAY had dawned a perfectly ideal day for any sort of outdoor event, and Jess—with permission to be absent from school this morning—could just imagine how beautiful the grounds of Barncombe Castle would look with this brilliant sunshine flooding down upon flags and bunting, upon velvet lawns and gay flower-beds.

It was at half-past one that she had to present herself at the castle-entrance, and to ask for Lady Evelyn Knight, who would then turn her over to the matronly person in charge of the catering arrangements.

Meantime, Jess was spending the morning doing all she could to help her mother. Customers came trickling in and out, and every time the shop-bell tinkled, Jess somehow managed to dart out to the counter to do the serving.

What arguments—squabbles, even—mother and daughter had as to who should see to the shop, and who should get on with the housework; and then the bit of washing that was “going” in the copper—that must be seen to also. But they were laughing arguments; they were the most loving squabbles you could imagine. Can't you just imagine, too, how Jess got her own way all the time?

Dear, splendid Jess, a daughter for any mother to be proud of!

“I wish, mother darling, you would be reasonable!” Jess said more than once during the morning, in a lecturing tone. “Considering I'm going to have that lovely treat this afternoon, I do think I ought to be allowed to do a little in the house and shop this morning!”

“A little—well, my lamb, I like your notions of a little!” was all Mrs. Lingard could answer, letting her loving eyes dwell adoringly upon the girl. “All I know is, dearie, there's a difference when you're at home—a world 'o' difference to me! I don't have nothing to do at all!”

“Nor you shouldn't do,” said Jess, adapting her grammar to the style her homely mother favoured.

"What's the use of me, if I can't be a help?"

So the morning sped away, all the quicker and happier for lighthearted Jess, because she kept busy. At twelve o'clock she and her mother sat down to an early dinner. Then it was: "No, mother, I'll do that!" when the water was boiling for the washing-up. "You can dry, though—I'll let you do the drying."

Willing hands make quick work, and Jess was in plenty of time when at last she romped off upstairs, to make herself just as nice as she could for the "job" at Barncombe Castle. Should she wear the awfully becoming Morcove hat, though? Yes—why not?

And on it went at last, as the scholarship day-girl remembered that her headmistress knew all about to-day's business and had not voiced the least objection to the Morcove day-girl earning a few shillings by becoming waitress for an afternoon.

Then, just as Jess was ready to go downstairs and say good-bye to her mother, she heard the whir of a motor-cycle in the street. The noise ceased just outside the shop, and next instant:

"Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle!" went the bell, to be followed by girlish voices—that Jess recognised immediately.

Stella and Audrey!

Down the stairs raced Jess, to find her mother thrown into a sudden fluster by what the unexpected visitors had begun to tell her.

"Oh, Jess darling, I wonder what you will say? It seems that Stella's parents are in Exeter to-day and I'm wanted to go to them—"

"Go to Stella's parents!" Jess gasped. "Why, how strange, when it is years, isn't it, since they or any other part of the family have shown the least desire to meet you?"

She added quickly:

"I'm sorry, Stella, if saying that hurts you. But—it really is the case, isn't it? Your side of the family has not been at all friendly to—"

"I know," Stella gulped, looking very uncomfortable. "There is a lot to be sorry about. Since you and I came to Morcove, I—I've felt a bit ashamed, and that's why I would like your mother to meet my people after all this time, and make it up!"

"They own a car, don't they?" Jess could not help remarking. "Then couldn't they come to mother, instead of mother being asked to go to them?"

"Nay, Jess dear," interposed Mrs. Lingard, still all of a fluster. "As to that, my lamb, Stella will explain. And I am sure it does credit to you, Stella—"

"Oh, I don't know about that," blurted out that girl confusedly. "But this is the position, Jess, I—I rather suddenly took it into my head to beg my parents to do the nice thing by your mother. They happen to be in Exeter, but they must leave for Cornwall to-night. I did it all by telegram."

"There was no time, you see," interposed Audrey, with perfect calmness. "That is what Stella is trying to make plain to you. She wired, begging them to come over to Barncombe; they wired back that it was impossible. Then she wired that she would get your mother to run down to Exeter, if they would like her to, and they answered: 'Yes.'"

Jess' pretty face was brightening rapidly.

"Oh, I see—now I quite understand! Stella, how good it was of you!" she exclaimed fervently,

and caught her wealthy schoolfellow by the hand. "Mother will go, of course."

"But, Jess darling, how can I go?" was Mrs. Lingard's half distraught cry. "When it's your day for going to Barncombe Castle! And the shop—who's to look after the shop, dearie?"

"Yes, we thought of that," Audrey interposed again suavely. "It would never do to lock it up; you would only send customers to other shops, who would keep them."

Jess listened to this gloomily, nodding in "That's only too true!" a fashion.

"Well, mother darling, then it simply means that I can't go to Barncombe Castle!" was the devoted girl's decision, spoken after the very faintest sigh of resignation. "Never mind!"

"Oh, Jess darling, the disappointment for you. No—"

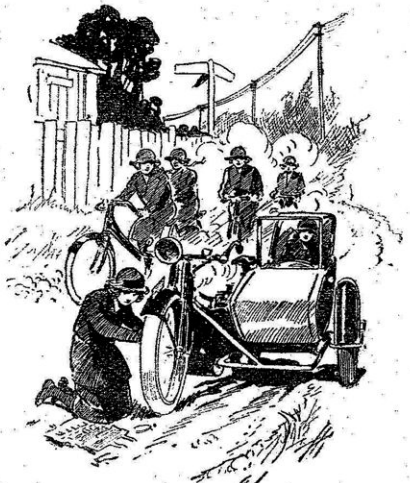
"Yes, mother!" Jess meant to have her own unselfish way again, that was evident. "Never mind about Barncombe Castle. The thing is for this reunion to take place at Exeter whilst there is a chance."

"Well, I must say, I think Jess is right," Audrey threw out casually. "The sooner family divisions are healed up, the better, surely. Especially when you are not so well off that you can afford to be independent."

"Mother, you must go! I'll stay and look after the shop," Jess declared again firmly. "I don't know how the trains go to Exeter, but do—oh, please do run up and get your things on, and get along to the station!"

"There is a train to Exeter in fifteen minutes from now," Audrey remarked. "I said to Stella, coming along, 'I could run Mrs. Lingard to the station in the sidcar!'"

"Oh, my dear, thank you, I'm sure!" the mother



—LESS SPEED! Audrey was kneeling down by the side of the front wheel, tugging away at greasy nuts with a spanner. She would not look round at her schoolfellows when they came riding merrily by.

exclaimed. "Wouldn't that be troubling you, though?"

"Not at all. I can run back afterwards and pick up Stella."

The next Mrs. Lingard knew was that Jess was simply pushing her towards the stairs. There was to be no more argument. The girl's sublime devotion to her mother's best interests would not allow of any deliberation. It was all so clear to Jess what ought to be done.

For long enough had darling mother, in her widowhood, been the neglected, almost forgotten, connection-by-marriage of the Munro family. Now if Stella's people were ready to make amends for past neglect, for goodness sake let the chance be seized. As for Barncombe Castle—oh, never mind about that!

"After all," Jess said quite cheerfully, when Audrey had gone off with Mrs. Lingard in the motor-cycle and side-car, leaving Stella to keep her "poor relation" company at the shop; "I can write a nice note to Lady Lundy, thanking her just the same and telling her why it was."

Stella said:

"Yes, of course," and then seemed to want to say something more. At last she got it out.

"We—Audrey and I—er—we thought we might run along to Barncombe Castle and explain to Lady Lundy or her daughter."

"Will you? Oh, that's good of you!" Jess exclaimed gratefully. "Then they won't be all of a fidget, wondering what's become of me because I have not turned up."

Poor guileless Jess!

Her going to Barncombe Castle had been such a great event for her to look forward to, she had a sort of idea that Lady Lundy was going to look out for her all day, and be very concerned because she did not turn up!

In a few minutes Audrey came back from the railway station, and then she also was thanked by the day-girl for this offer to run to the castle and make suitable explanations. Jess went out on to the pavement to see Stella smuggle down into the swagger sidecar, whilst Audrey took her seat upon the saddle, and her last words to both girls were full of fervent gratitude.

"I think you've been awfully good to-day, Stella—doing your best to bring about a re-union between my mother and your people. And you, Audrey, for making yourself so useful with the motor-cycle—thanks, thanks!"

"Delighted, I'm sure," Audrey said, hiding a smile by bending down to flood the carburettor.

"Without the cycle to rush people about in, mother would never have got away to Exeter in time!" was Jess' grateful cry.

Then—back to the dingy shop. Dingier than ever it was, after Jess' brief run out into the brilliant sunshine; but, never mind, she said to herself again. The great thing was that mother had been prevailed upon to catch that train to Exeter!

Thinking of the rush there had been for that train, Jess suddenly wondered—why, how had mother managed about a ticket, when she had gone off without any money?

Jess was sure her mother had left the home with no more than a few pence upon her, because all the available cash resources were always kept in the shop-till, and she had been so flustered she had not remembered to provide herself with money.

"So, Audrey must have bought a ticket for her," Jess exclaimed aloud to herself. "How

awfully good of Audrey. Really, she and Stella to-day have been bricks!"

And the next moment would have found Jess singing blithely about some household task in the kitchen only the shop-bell went—tinkle, tinkle!

"I want a pair o' bootlaces, Jess," said a buxom neighbour, smiling affably at the girl in charge of the shop. "And I'll take Joe's half-ounce o' shag whilst I'm here. Jess, I thought you was going to Barncombe Castle to-day?"

"Well, that business is off!" Jess answered, laughing with cheerful resignation. "Mother's had to go to Exeter in a hurry, and so I'm looking after the shop. Good-afternoon, Mrs. Plummer!"

She rattled the few coppers into the till, then ran back into the kitchen. There was some ironing to do, and the iron was now hot enough. She brought it away from the stove and set it upon her damped blanket—thump. Then—

Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle!

"That bell again! Never mind, it only meant more customers—"

No, not customers this time!

Jess heard a babel of girlish voices that she recognised, and even before she could rush out into the shop, up the two steps, she was crying excitedly:

"Betty! Polly! Oh, you girls—Madge—Paula—"

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove—"

"But why—what—"

"Hooray, we are in time!" sang out Polly boisterously. "So you haven't started yet, Jess; which means that you can go with us!"

"Go where? Whatever—"

"To Barncombe Castle, of course!" all the chums of the Fourth answered in chorus.

Their Loss Her Gain.

JESS took her round eyes off the girls to peer out through the shop window, and now she saw a roomy car standing at the kerb.

"It is like this, dear," Betty burst out gaily.

"Lady Evelyn rang up the headmistress an hour ago, and begged permission for us girls to go to the garden party. Directly we were told—"

"We shouted hurrah!" said Polly.

"Yes, wather! And put on our best fwocks, bai Jove!"

"And thought of you, how you would be starting for the castle early this afternoon," Betty rushed on. "So we got the school chauffeur to drive us this way and pick you up!"

"How kind of you—oh, everybody is so kind to-day," Jess burst out, looking quite tearful all at once. "But I can't go. I've got to mind the shop."

"What!"

"Mother's had to go to Exeter at short notice. So Barncombe Castle is a wash-out for me," said Jess.

"Is it?" Betty answered promptly. "Nothing of the sort. I'll mind the shop!"

"No, I will—I will—I will!" came from Polly, Paula, Madge, Tess and Trixie. And even Naomer Nakara was ready to cry:

"Allo, present! I mind ze shop. I tell all ze customers take feefy line!"

"Ha, ha, ha! But I spoke first," said Betty.

"Here I am, and here I stay—"

"Ditto me," said Polly flatly. "I must stay, to see that Betty gets the right change! All the rest of you can now depart, taking Jess with you!"

Depart they did, too, before another ten minutes was out—and with them went Jess.

She had met her match this time. All very well for the selfless girl to have her own way with mother; but she was up against a goodness of heart equal to her own in the chums of Morcove. They simply allowed her no say in the matter at all.

A bewildered, overwhelmed Jess was more or less hustled out of the shop into the car, which drove off with her and all the girls, except Betty and Polly.

And for the rest of that afternoon, whenever the shop-bell gave its tinkle, tinkle, tinkle, it was either Betty or Polly, if not both of them together, who ran out to serve behind the counter.

They did the ironing, too—more fun for the chums of Study 12! If there were moments when they thought wistfully of all that they were missing, by not being at Barncombe Castle on this great day of the garden party, they certainly did not make long faces about what they had let themselves in for.

It was just a joke—ripping fun—a real novelty; to be in charge of this shop in the little side-street in Barncombe!

How indeed could the two girls feel downhearted when their loss was Jess' gain? Such a treat for Morcove's day-girl has had never yet come the way of that plucky, deserving little soul!

Rebuffed.

IN the motor-cycle and sidcar, Audrey and Stella had arrived at the castle.

The swagger "oufit" had been garaged in a certain courtyard specially set apart, to-day, for visitors' cars and carriages; and now the scheming couple could almost feel that their plan had succeeded.

Almost—but not quite!

Before they could gain admittance to that part of the castle and grounds which had been given over to the great fête, they must deal with one or another of the officials appointed to keep out unwitted folk.

"Here's a fellow we can try," Audrey said below her breath, steering her way through the fashionable throng towards one uniformed custodian. "Leave him to me, Stella; I know just what to say, and how to say it!"

So Stella kept a pace or so behind, as her daring friend walked forward boldly, to where the man in uniform was passing in people who had tickets to show.

"Your ticket, miss?" he challenged Audrey promptly.

"I and my friend—"

"Have you your tickets, young ladies? My strict orders are not to admit anybody without tickets," was the brisk interruption.

Then Audrey showed what a nerve she had. Drawing herself up, she bestowed a resentful look upon the zealous keeper of the barrier, whilst she began a haughty explanation.

In a tone loud enough for people round about to hear, she said that she and her friend had come with an important message for Lady Lundy herself, or for Lady Evelyn. So would the ticket inspector kindly not be so officious?

"I'm sorry, miss," he said, still passing through people with tickets, but keeping Audrey and Stella back. "Them's my orders. If you've a message, the best thing you can do, a busy time like this, is to write it out."

"But—"

"Her ladyship is bound to be too taken up with the company in general, miss, to spare time for you. The same with Lady Evelyn. Show all tickets, please!"

"This is a most exasperating person, Stella dear," Audrey said in a loud, disgusted tone, whilst swell folk continued to drift by, showing their coveted tickets. "I shall make a complaint to—oh, there is Lady Evelyn!"

It seemed to Audrey a most wonderful bit of luck. There, sure enough, going by in the ground, just inside the barrier, was the earl and countess one fair daughter. She was exchanging smiles and handshakes with the newly-arriving people.

"Lady Evelyn, Lady Evelyn!" Audrey did not hesitate to call out sweetly, whilst she signalled with a gloved hand. "Could you spare a moment, please?"

The beautiful girl gave but a moment's startled glance in the direction of the barrier, and then—recognising the Morcove hat—came running up.

"Oh, come inside!" she said, and Audrey almost put out her tongue at the gatekeeper, knowing how humiliated he must be feeling.

Stella followed, feeling very dithery, in spite of the composure with which her daring friend was carrying things off. Nor did it end Stella's qualms to notice that Lady Evelyn suddenly left off smiling so sweetly. It was as if she had mistaken Audrey, in the Morcove hat, for some other scholar!

"If you please, Lady Evelyn," gushed Audrey, "we promised Jess Lingard that we would come and tell you why she can't turn up to-day—to help with the waiting, wasn't it?"

"Oh, Jess Lingard—the girl from the shop—"

"Yes, Lady Evelyn. She is a scholar at Morcove now; and, by the way, Stella Munro here, is a rather well-to-do relation of Jess!"

"Indeed!" said Lady Evelyn, with the merest glance at Stella. "I am surprised to learn that Jess Lingard has wealthy relations! She and her mother are so poor themselves, are they not, Miss Munro?"

"Er—er—"

"I think I had better explain why Jess isn't here," Audrey said, coming to Stella's rescue. And she told a nice dramatic tale of the way Mrs. Lingard had had to hurry off to Exeter, and the reason for the journey.

"So Jess had to stay behind at the shop, you see, Lady Evelyn, and—"

"Yes. I see that you did not offer to stay for her," was the dry remark, which had a sort of blighting effect upon Audrey and Stella both.

"Well, I must make it up to the girl some day—poor child, she will be disappointed! Thank you for bringing the message. Good-day."

"Er—if your ladyship would like us to—"

"Pardon?" Lady Evelyn said, as Audrey broke off, losing her nerve at last.

"If—if—we thought, your ladyship, that we might make ourselves—that is to say—useful—"

"In Jess Lingard's place?" The earl's daughter laughed icily. "Oh, then I wonder you didn't take her place in the shop! Jenkins, show these—"

"The grounds look very beautiful," Audrey burst out, hoping to win an invitation by flattery.

"So everybody is kind enough to say," smiled Lady Evelyn. "Jenkins, these two girls wish to pass out."

Wish to pass out! And what they were wishing, with all heart and soul, was that they could

be allowed to stay! Oh, the humiliation, the galling bitterness of it, when Jenkins shouted smartly:

"This way, please! Pass out, please; don't keep others waiting who want to come in! Show all tickets, please!"

There was a grin on Jenkins' face—such a grin as made Audrey wait to box his ears. Ugh! She and Stella had been turned back, after all. Beaten!

And there was worse to come.

Even as they were drifting back disconsolately to their motor-cycle and sidecar, a fine car purred to a standstill in the courtyard, and out leapt a whole batch of girls. Girls in the Morcove hat!

Paula, Madge, Tess, Trixie, Naomer Nakara—and Jess!

Jess, after all!

"'Allo, present!" Noamer said, coming at Audrey and Stella with a skip and a jump. "We go to the party!"

"Yes, wather!" Bai Jove, Audwey—and you, Stella, what are you doing here?"

"What are you?" retorted Audrey fiercely. "You won't get in without tickets!"

"Oh, I think we shall," Madge said quietly. "We have a special invitation, and we are to go to a special entrance, where our names are on a list."

That was simply too much for Audrey.

She felt that if she stayed another moment—tried to say a single word—she would only end by screaming!

She turned her back upon the other girls, gave a sign to Stella: "Come on!" and then made for the motor-cycle.

In sullen silence Audrey Blain drove Stella Munro all the way back to Morcove. Never, never had she felt so crestfallen, so utterly beaten, so humiliated.

After all the clever scheming and planning, all the audacity with which she had acted—this defeat!

"There's only one comfort," she was thinking moodily. "The girls will never know that there was a plot!"

But wouldn't they?

That remained to be seen!

Found Out.

ABOUT seven o'clock that evening Jess got back to the little shop in the side-street of Barncombe, along with Paula, Madge, and the others who had been to the fête.

Customers were just coming away from the shop as the girls got down from the car. Jess and her friends trooped inside, to find Betty and Polly behind the counter, the madcap stirring over the till-ful of small change, because she liked the sound of it.

"'Allo, present! Take feefy line!" cried Naomer gaily.

"We've taken two pounds four and threepence farthing—hooray!" was Polly's proud announcement. "How's that, Jess, for a record?"

"Oh, Betty—Polly, splendid!" exclaimed the day-girl, looking pleasantly tired after her exciting time at the castle. "Thank you ever so, ever so!"

"Fiddle!" said the madcap. "Had a nice afternoon?"

"Spiffing?"

"Yes, wather, geals! Bai Jove—"

"It was a dream!" Jess went on ecstatically. "I'm not used to such grandeur! And, what do you think? I didn't have to make myself useful after all. Lady Evelyn treated me just the same as she treated these other Morcove girls!"

"Why, of course!" Madge put in, smiling. "We might have known Lady Evelyn would!"

"Yes, wather!"

"But she made me take a ten shilling note when I came away, just as if I had been working!" Jess announced, in an overwhelmed way.

"They are just too kind to everybody at Barncombe Castle!"

"But very strict with uninvited guests," said Tess, chuckling.

And then the amusing story was told, for the benefit of Betty and Polly, about Audrey and Stella's attempt to "wangle" an invitation.

The two chums of Study 12, like Madge and the rest, smelt a rat; but they did not say anything in front of Jess.

Poor Jess, if ever she found out that Audrey and Stella had been serving their own interests when they brought off that hurried journey of Mrs. Lingard's to Exeter! What a shock to the girl's faith in Stella's good nature it would be!

In tip-top spirits the chums all re-entered their car at last, to go on home to the school, and then Jess was left all alone in the dingy parlour. The shop was closed now, and Jess was able to sit down and live over again the happiness she had known in the last few hours—all thanks to the way Betty and Polly had given up their own share in the treat for her sake.

So at last the twilight crept on and Jess began to wonder: when would mother get back from Exeter? Perhaps, if Stella's people had been very nice to her; they had persuaded her to stay the night, and in that case—

Hark! No, that was mother now, rapping at the shop-door, for Jess to admit her.

Out ran the eager girl, to turn back the key and draw the bolts with joyful eagerness. She was all a-dance with excitement. What a glorious time she could tell mother she had had, after all! And mother would have a happy story to tell, surely, about the journey and its outcome.

Then, as the loving girl got back to the parlour with her mother, she received a shock. To her great surprise she saw Mrs. Lingard subside into a chair, dejected, almost tearful with disappointment.

"Mother darling. Oh—"

"My lamb, I'm sorry if I'm a bit sick at heart," the good woman almost whimpered; "but it has been such a disappointment. They weren't there!"

"Not there! You mean to say that Stella's people—"

"They had left, dearie. I ought never to have gone by that afternoon train; that is what it amounts to. When I got to the hotel and made inquiries, I found that Mr. and Mrs. Munro had gone! Then the hotel clerk said that they had not been able to wait after two o'clock, as they had telegraphed would be the case."

Jess stood very still, trying to puzzle all this out.

"You mean, a telegram was sent to Stella at the school, saying you must get to Exeter before two or it would be no use?"

"Yes, dearie. It was no fault of Mr. and Mrs. Munro, seemingly. The telegram went off in good time. The clerk told me so."

"Was it Stella's fault, then, that you went on a wild goose chase?" Jess said, with a sudden heavy frown. "But perhaps the telegram was not delivered at the school?"

"That's all I can suppose," sighed Mrs. Lingard, unpinning her hat in a weary fashion.

It was after a full minute's sad silence that Jess said quietly:

"All right, mother; I'll see Stella about it in the morning!"

And she did.

Jess only reached school on her bicycle sharp on nine o'clock, so she had no time then to have a word with Stella. During break, the day-girl tried to get a moment with her wealthy relation, but that girl eluded her. At mid-day, however, Jess knew that she was all right now for an interview. She went upstairs to the Fourth Form quarters, and tapped at the door of Study No. 8. "Come in!" was the haughty injunction voiced

"I—I'm sorry, Jess. A telegram came, saying—"

"Oh, you did get the telegram? The one saying that it was no use, unless mother could get there before two o'clock?"

"Yes," gulped Stella, going red and white by turns. "But—"

"What time did the telegram come?" Jess asked, her suspicions aroused by the other's embarrassment. "I want to know. I shall never be satisfied until I do know."

And then—perhaps because she saw Stella's eyes suddenly go uneasily to the wastepaper-basket—Jess found herself stepping to that receptacle for litter. The instant she looked down into it, she saw a screwed-up sheet of flimsy paper and a crumpled buff envelope.

The telegram!

Jess pounced and snatched it up. She started to open out the crumpled flimsy, and then Stella



IN DEFENCE OF THEIR CHUM!

Betty and Co. were amongst the would-be fugitives,

Grace Garfield and her cronies scuttled for the doorway in a frantic retreat. In a twinkling, and punishing them for their mean behaviour.

by Audrey Blain, and so Jess entered, to find Stella with "her majesty."

"Oh, it's the poor relation!" Audrey exclaimed, with a little grimace. "Then I will depart. How did your mother get on at Exeter yesterday, Jess?" she asked, with a teasing sort of smile.

Without waiting for an answer, Audrey quitted the room, closing the door behind her, and then Jess saw that Stella was averting her eyes in a rather guilty fashion.

"Stella, my mother simply had a wild goose chase yesterday," Jess said sadly. "She went to Exeter all for nothing, and if it had not been for the kindness of Betty and Polly, I would have missed the treat at Barncombe Castle—all for nothing!"

"I—I'm sorry," Stella said huskily. "I am awfully sorry, Jess."

"You don't ask me why it turned out a wild goose chase," the day-girl went on steadily. "Have you guessed, then? Oh, Stella, is it possible that you even knew that—that the afternoon train would be much too late for my mother to travel by?"

made a sudden rush—a panicky rush to snatch it from the girl.

"No—keep off! Stella, I am going to see what time—I will see!" Jess cried out fiercely. "It will be on the telegram—oh!"

The cry of anguish came as the day-girl's eyes glimpsed the vital details.

"Handed in at Exeter, ten-twelve," she read. "Received at Morcove ten thirty-two."

She crushed up the telegram and faced Stella with blazing eyes.

"You must have had this telegram by eleven o'clock!" Jess flashed disgustedly. "Ample time either to get my mother off by an earlier train, or to decide that it was too late! But you let her go by the afternoon train. You and Audrey—you only wanted to get her out of the way, so that I would be chained to the shop!"

With Stella standing there, with nothing to say for herself—no denial, no excuse to offer—Jess knew that what she had said was the truth. And suddenly she burst into tears.

This Friend—or That?

THERE was a moment when Stella herself looked miserable enough to give way to a sudden flood of weeping. Then her expression seemed to harden.

Was it because, in the midst of all her remorse for the plot she had lent herself to—a plot that had failed utterly—she suddenly took notice of Audrey's own photograph on the study mantelpiece?

It may have been so, for she did keep her troubled eyes upon the portrait of her handsome, fascinating, audacious friend, and it was then that her heart seemed to steel itself.

"You had better go away," she said desperately to Jess. "I—I'm sorry—"

"Sorry! How often are you going to be sorry—and then do something else to injure me and mother?" Jess exclaimed, with extreme bitterness.

"You said you were sorry that other time, Stella. You made me a promise, and I trusted you to keep it!"

"Oh, well—"

"A promise not to let Audrey lead you into fresh disgrace—"

"It isn't a disgrace!" Stella protested hotly.

"No disgrace?" Jess returned, with an indignant stare from her tearful eyes. "I suppose you call it no disgrace, because the whole school is not to know. But don't you feel the secret disgrace; don't you feel thoroughly ashamed, when this is the second time I've been the victim of your hankering after excitement and pleasure?"

Stella pursed her lips and turned to the window. As for poor Jess there was a lot more she wanted to say, only she felt it would be better to wait until her bitter mood had gone. She gulped back a last hard sob and moved towards the door—and then Audrey came in again.

"Hallo!" Audrey said, noticing Jess' traces of recent weeping. "Making another scene?"

"You know why!" Jess said hotly. "How you could have been so heartless as to send my poor mother on that useless journey yesterday—"

"Oh, come," Audrey broke in, flippantly. "I expected she enjoyed the excursion. I paid her fare, anyway!"

"You shall have it back—now," Jess burst out, taking out her purse. "There you are—luckily

I've got ten shillings; it is what Lady Lundy paid me yesterday. I can't spend it better, I feel, than in getting mother out of debt to you for that fare! You schemer!"

"Jess, don't call Audrey names like that," Stella turned about to say, her face very pallid. "I can't allow it!"

"I shall call her names like that, because it is what she is!" Jess answered, ready to quit the room disgustedly. "She is a designing girl, a bad friend for you, Stella—"

"And you—you are Stella's poor relation, and she ought to stand by you, is that it? Throw me over, and become your bosom friend!" Audrey said, with her usual sneer. "Well, let Stella decide now, once and for all! No time like the present."

"I know this," Jess said in great anguish, "Stella can never be a true friend to me whilst she is like putty in your hands! Stella, what is it to be, then? We can't go on like this. Oh, think—think. For your own sake, I implore you, have done with this girl."

"No, I can't," Stella said at last huskily. "I'm sorry, Jess. I'll never again be a party to anything that means trouble for you; I promise you that. But—"

"You promised once before," Jess said bitterly, twisting the knob of the study door. "You'll never keep your promises whilst you keep with Audrey Blain. And you mean to do that, although you must see what a bad friend she is for you?"

"You have heard what she said," Audrey interposed curtly. "Stella doesn't belong to a world like yours! Why should she saddle herself with a poor relation? She has chosen—me!"

"She will live to regret her choice," was Jess Lingard's prophetic word, as she passed from the room.

And how true that prophecy came, all Morcove was soon to know.

(END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.)

(Enobishness has triumphed! Stella Munro, faced with the question of whom she shall have for a friend—Audrey the rich girl, or Jess Lingard, the scholarship girl—has unhesitatingly chosen the former! That she has made a great mistake will be seen in next week's story, entitled "Risking Expulsion!")

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