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"Deceiving the Day Girl!"

A SPLENDID STORY OF THE  
GIRLS OF MORCOVE SCHOOL

# The Schoolgirl's Own



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## HER COUSIN'S INHERITANCE!

(A dramatic incident in the new long complete story of the Girls of Morcove School, contained in this issue).

This Week's Fine Morcove School Story of Betty Barton & Co.

# Deceiving the Day Girl!

A magnificent new long complete story of the girls of Morcove School, featuring Jess Lingard, the scholarship girl, and her wealthy cousin, Stella Munro.

By Marjorie Stanton.



## No School To-day.

JESS LINGARD came with a spirited rush down the steep stairs and into the little parlour behind her mother's shop.

"Morning, mumsie! I shall have to be quick, shan't I? Not often I'm behind you in getting up, but I slept on this morning, and no mistake!"

"And none the worse for that, dear," beamed the widow-woman, running a caressing hand over the girl's head as they kissed each other. "With you sitting up so late to do the shop-books, after your school homework, I'm sure you need to take a bit longer in the morning."

"But look at the time!" Jess cried in mock dismay. "Five past eight—and there's the postman, mumsie!"

Excitedly the happy-hearted girl darted up two steps into the shop, just as the hurrying postman turned back to the shop door, after throwing a letter to the counter.

"Thank you, postman!" Jess had to cry genially. "From London, eh? Only a wholesaler's circular, I expect?"

Having smiled the ruddy-faced old postman out of the shop, she ran back to her mother, handing over the missive very unconcernedly.

"Nothing, mumsie! I always know it's nothing—at least, only business—when it's from London! So you have had your brekker, have you?" she rattled on, flinging herself into the chair that had been set for her at the table. "All I hope is that you didn't leave all the bacon for me!"

And a few moments later, when Mrs. Lingard had opened the letter and was reading it, Jess rattled on again:

"Mumsie, did you have any bacon at all with your brekker, I want to know? Because you are such a one for— Oh, mumsie darling! Mother, what's the matter?"

It was a sudden cry of wild dismay from the girl, as she glanced up and saw her mother reeling where she stood, as if the letter had dealt her a blow.

"Mother—"

"Ah, Jess darling, don't you bother; it doesn't concern you, dearie. At least, I—I— Oh, but I am afraid 'tis an upset altogether! A cruel one, Jess!"

"Tell me—let me read—"

"Oh, no, I couldn't!" was the poor widow's distressed cry, whilst she crushed the letter against her breast so that Jess could not take it. "'Tis business, dear—only business!"

There was a moment's silence then, with Jess still forgetting her breakfast and only gazing in sad uneasiness at her mother. The comely face of the widow had gone very white. She suddenly sat down, panting for breath.

"Mother darling, you say it is only business. Well, I have got used to interfering with business affairs, haven't I?" the girl said at last, forcing a smile. "I check the wholesalers' bills, and often write letters—"

"Yes, yes! Ah, you have been a wonderful help to me; what a blessing and a comfort to me, ever since your poor, dear father died!" was the fervent exclamation. "But this—this letter, Jess—No, I can't let you know. Oh, I cannot!"

And then, whilst Jess was staring in greater dismay than ever, the mother heaved a hard sigh, glancing at the clock on the mantelpiece.

"How do the trains go to London, I wonder?" she pondered aloud. "Isn't there one at nine o'clock?"

"Nine-five, mother; fast after Exeter—"

"Then I must catch it," was the remark with which the harassed woman suddenly staggered her daughter. "It is no use, Jess dear; I must go up—"

"But, mother—"

"The shop has been our living, Jess darling; but that living has gone now!"

Tremblingly she put on her things for the sudden journey to London, looking a becoming person when she was ready. Poor as they were, and hard as the struggle for respectability had been, mother and daughter had never let the lowly life mean slipshod manners.

Then she hastened downstairs, her mouth puckering in nervous fashion as she buttoned her gloves. Jess was serving a customer in the shop, and the poor agitated mother waited until the person had gone out under the tinkling bell, then went forward behind the counter.

"For I must take the money for my fare from the till, Jess darling," she remarked, pulling open the little drawer. "Dear, dear, such a little

money there is in the house, I'm almost afraid I shall want all of it!"

And there was, indeed, but a shilling or so in small change that the poor woman could leave behind, after she had reckoned up what the journey was going to cost her. It was like the thrifty mother to think only of the fare; and it was just like loving Jess to think of all the other necessary expenses.

"You must have a few shillings on you for food, mother—of course you must!" Jess had to insist. "How I wish I could see you off from Barnocob Station, but I must stay and mind the shop."

"All day, Jess dear?"

"All day—yes, mother! Don't fret about my missing school; I'll pick up with the work as soon as I get back! And what time, I wonder, will you be home this evening?" Jess added, now that her mother must needs hurry away if that nine-five was to be caught.

"I'm sure I don't know, but I'm afraid it can't be early, such a long journey it is," was the rueful answer. "But if it should come on dark before I'm back, you won't get miserable? Poor darling, but you'll have had a long, lonely day!"

Jess, with arms going about her mother, gave the happiest laugh she could.

"I'll be much too busy, up to the time you do get back, to feel humpy!" she exclaimed, whilst they gave each other kisses. "The shop all day, and then, after closing time, when it's time to think of you and the tiring day you've had, mother darling, there'll be supper to get!"

So they parted, and how little they suspected, either of them, when and where they would meet again.

There in the little back parlour, they supposed, when night should have come again. But, ah, there was to be no such happy return as that from Mrs. Lingard's fateful journey!

"I Will and I Won't!"

JESS LINGARD not at school to-day! remarked Polly Linton, as she and Betty Barton came out of the Fourth Form classroom together, after morning school.

"No, Polly," answered her bosom chum, in a rather concerned tone. "And I have been wondering what's the reason."

"Yes, wather," Paula Creel interposed, in that rather fatuous tone which was almost always sufficient to rout her chums out of any serious mood. "Bai Jove, were you wemarking about Jess Lingard, geals? I myself was gwieved to observe that she was not present at morning school!"

"There's one thing," chuckled Polly, starting to tease the long-suffering aristocrat of the Fourth Form, "Jess could be away every other day, and she would still beat some of us to a frazzle at the lessons!"

"Yes, wather! I agree—"

"You well may!" Polly went on witheringly. "When you get an aristocratic duffer standing up in class to say that Brazil is an island in the Pacific—"

"It was to be wegwetted," Paula sighed, "that we were asked questions about Bwazil! I must frankly confess, Polly dear, I am pwofoundly ignowant of Bwazil! Now, if it had been Afwica—"

Paula let a smile come to her pretty face as she watched a certain schoolfellow coming up to her with a light-hearted hop, skip, and jump.

"Afwica, geals, I could have explained, was

the countwy fwom which our fwient Naomer Nakawa originated! I could have given a most gwaphic account of Afwica, based on my own experiences!"

"'Elo, present!" cried Naomer Nakara, making a dash that nearly knocked Paula off her balance. "What you say about my country of Africa?"

"Er—er—"

"You say it is a nice country, or I bite you!" warned Naomer playfully. But there was such a display of white teeth as if they really wanted to bite that Paula turned quite pale!

"Pwecisely, I agree," she said hastily. "Afwica, Naomer, is certainly a—a wemarkable countwy! I pwefer Gwreat Bwitamin myself, yes, wather! Howevah—"

"What! You say your country is better than mine?" shrilled Naomer, causing a peal of laughter to go up from the girls standing around. "You say—"

"I say Afwica is a gwreat countwy, Naomer!" Paula almost howled, for the sake of being left in peace. "Twuly gwreat!"

"And beautiful?"

"Twuly beautiful, yes, wather! If it weren't for the wotten standstorms in the desert, bai Jove, and the distwessing heat, and the widiculous camels one has to wide— Healp! Naomer, dwop it! I'm saying Afwica is a gwand countwy— gwand!"

"Then I love you!" Naomer declared, suddenly leaving off playfully shaking the aristocrat and hugging her instead. "And I love your country, too! I shall love it more when I go to London next week!"

"That you will, Naomer!" Betty exclaimed heartily. "When you go up with us girls—"

"Hooray, yes, fancy!" Polly now shouted, pirouetting in her madcap fashion. "This time next week all we chums will be up in London, with Miss Redgrave! What fun!"

"Yes, wather! And what a chance for pwetty fwocks!" Paula added, taking out her little vanity case. "Gwacious, how you have wuffed me, Naomer! You weally are the twial of my life—you and Polly! Now, Polly, dwop it. Stop it, will you?"

For Polly, suddenly exuberant over the prospect of the coming jaunt to London, had caught the spic-and-span Paula about the waist, trying to get her to dance.

"London, Paula! Next week!—"

"Ye—ye—yes, wuw—wather! Huh—how—evah—"

"Let me dance her!" clamoured Naomer, and so poor Paula became a bone of contention between the two madcaps.

This way and that they pulled her, whilst she wailed and howled her distress, Betty and a few others looking on and shrieking with laughter.

Then, suddenly, the mirthful band of Fourth Form chums fell silent.

That sudden constraint had fallen upon them which people often feel, when someone they are not on good terms with chances to go by.

There were two girls going by at this instant. One was Audrey Blain, "the queen of the Form," as she fancied herself to be. The other girl was Stella Munro.

Audrey put on a mincing air as she went by Betty & Co., and Stella also tried to look very aloof, although she did not succeed as Audrey succeeded.

Now that school work was done with for the rest of the day—for this was Wednesday and a

"halfer"—the scholars were free to spend their time just as they pleased. Betty & Co., all open-air girls, were going to snatch a game of tennis between now and the call to dinner, and they romped off to the courts accordingly. Stella and Audrey, however, sauntered indoors and up to the study which they shared.

"Wednesday!" Audrey threw out lightly, sinking down into her own luxurious easy-chair.

"What is the programme, then, Stella dear?"

"I don't know what you would like to do, Audrey," was the response, "but I feel that I must go into Barncombe and call at Jess Lingard's shop, to see why she was not at school this morning."

Stella spoke rather nervously, as if afraid that her proposal would bring a grimace of displeasure to her majesty's handsome face. And sure enough it did.

"I don't know that slumming appeals to me as a pastime for Wednesday afternoon," she said.

"But I quite agree that it would be spiffing if we said we were going to Jess', and then—well—"

A wink completed the sentence. Then she laughed.

But Stella suddenly shook her head in absolute disagreement.

"No, Audrey; no more of that! I'm sorry! I'm awfully sorry, and I do hope you won't take offence. But we must not deceive others any more, as to the way we are spending our time!"

"Why not?" Audrey asked, more amused than annoyed at the other's scruples. "Are you afraid of getting expelled?"

"We—we ought to go on quietly for a bit, that is what I think," Stella said meekly. "You know we were properly caught the other day, by Betty Barton. She had every right to report us, and we had to give her that written promise not to commit any fresh breach of discipline."

"Oh, yes, it is a drawn sword hanging over our heads!" Audrey said, glancing up at the ceiling as if the sword was literally there. "And I suppose we ought to go in fear and trembling of the worthy captain! But you ought to know by this time, Stella, it takes a lot to hold me in check!"

"Well, Audrey," was the heavy response to that smiling remark, "I for one am not game for any—any secret jaunt to-day. I feel I must, for once, make a genuine visit to Jess Lingard's."

"You might bring me back a ha'porth of all-sorts from the shop, Stella darling!" laughed Audrey. "I am sure the sweets they sell must have a flavour of their own! Meantime—have one of these!"

And she took a costly box of chocolates off a shelf, removed the lid, and held the tempting array in front of Stella.

Audrey Blain looked at herself in the glass, and, possibly thinking that she could make herself prettier than this, drifted off upstairs, leaving Stella to herself.

To be left alone was a great relief until, all at once, the horrid thought came to Stella—was Audrey indifferent about her, Stella's, intention to pay the duty visits, because she was simply getting tired of her as a chum?

It was after dinner, when Stella had gone up to get ready for the run into Barncombe, that this misgiving seized Stella. It turned her quite cold for the moment. She wanted to be a bit nicer to Jess than she had been. She didn't want to get despised by the Form in general as being

a pampered girl who snobbishly slighted a poor relation. But oh, she did want to have Audrey always as a friend!

There was something about Audrey so charming, so fascinating. Being with Audrey was not like being with any other girl in the school. That was because Audrey was a law unto herself, her one object in life to get as free as possible from the "bore" of school and its discipline.

Stella had intended going down to the cycle-sheds and getting her machine out and riding away as soon as she was dressed. But now that that disquieting fear had seized her, she simply had to make for Study No. 8.

"Audrey—"

"Hallo! Not gone yet?" Audrey looked up from the book she was skimming through, to smile sweetly at her worshipping crony.



**TRAGIC NEWS!** Jess Lingard saw the constable place a telegram on the counter. "You are not to worry, my lass," he said sympathetically. "But we have received news from a London hospital that your mother has met with an accident!"

"I am just off," Stella said in a flustered way, standing by the door she had closed behind her. "Only, before I go—"

"I'm glad you did look in," Audrey interrupted, letting the book sink to her lap whilst she lolled back. "I've just been thinking; you might ask Jess which department of the shop pays best, the confectionery or the chandlery department!"

"Oh, Audrey, how you do poke fun at—"

"I'm quite serious," was the bland announcement. "I wish to know, because someday I may have to turn out and get my living. And I should think it must be a nice career, selling ha'penny sticks of liquorice! So fascinating, getting the gummy things out of their boxes, and taking sticky pennies in return!"

"Audrey, because you don't mind my going over to see Jess to-day that doesn't mean, does it, that—"

"Mean what, my pet?"

"That you—you really don't care much, now, if we do spend our halfers apart from each other?"

Audrey stared at the girl who had got this out in blurring fashion at last. Then she tossed the book aside, stood up, and came mincing across to her.

"Is that what is worrying you, silly goose? When you know that you are the only friend I have in Morcove now?" Audrey said, smiling.

"I know this, Audrey, you are the only friend I—I sort of want," gulped Stella. "So, you—you are not going to drop me, are you?"

"Drop you! I'm going to spank you, if you talk so silly," Audrey laughed, giving her friend a playful shaking. "Oh, run along! You may see something of me bye and bye! You look very nice in those clothes. Much too nice for the Lingard Emporium, Limited! Ta-ta!"

Then Stella almost abandoned her project for the afternoon. She saw Audrey standing here, looking so fascinating, so engaging, and she had a mental vision, at the same time, of that shop in Barncombe; the cramped shop, the dim back parlour, the miserable backyard, the whole street, with its swarms of children playing touch round the lamp-posts.

"Audrey, I—I don't want to go!"

"My pet, of course you don't! But being a girl with some shred of conscience, instead of the out-and-outer that I am, you feel you must go. By—by—ee!"

And Audrey flicked a hand, dismissing her hesitant friend upon the duty visit.

#### is it Ruin ?

ONCE again, the tinkle, tinkle, tinkle! of the hanging bell in the shop doorway.

It came at a moment when Jess Lingard was out in the backyard, putting a few things over the line.

For Jess was making a busy day of it whilst she was about it. The housework had been got through before she had her humble mid-day dinner, and customers were few and far between; so she had thought to herself, why not "run through" a certain little bit of washing that was in the dirty-clothes basket?

It was only a trifle, for there never was an accumulation when washing-day came round at the Lingards' lowly little home. Jess had put on a coarse apron, and got her sleeves rolled above her elbows, and, with the loveliest tub of suds, she had scrubbed and rinsed away. And what a housewifely pride she felt at the dazzling whiteness of those things which she was now pegging out to dry!

But there was the bell again!

"Coming!" sang out Jess, whilst the thought seized her, was it only another customer, or perhaps somebody from Morcove to inquire why she had not been at school to-day?

It was Wednesday, and lots of Morcove scholars were certain to be running into the town; so this might be—it might be Betty Barton, or one of Jess' other chums, or a whole crowd of them! It would be just like them to drop in for a few minutes.

Half-past two—just the time when they might be expected to look in, if they were coming!

Jess, however, had no such happy treat in store for her.

It was neither customer nor school-friend who stood between the shop doorway and the small counter, when the willing little soul ran through the back of the house and up two steps into the shop.

"'Afternoon, missy!" said a gruff voice, belonging to a very burly, bullying sort of man. "Yer mother in?"

"No, sir. Mother has gone to London, on business."

"Oh, has she! Gone on business, has she! The same business belike that has brought me here!" the man remarked mysteriously, with a look round the shop as if he were mentally stock-taking.

Jess, with a sudden vague dread of the man, felt it was not worth while asking, was he a commercial traveller, hoping to book an order? He so unmistakably was not.

"I hope there hasn't been any—any muddle, sir?" she faltered. "I mean, oughtn't mother to have gone to London after all? She went off in a great fluster, because of a letter—"

"Oh, ay, I can understand her reason for going up to town," the man nodded, pushing back his hat and taking out a red handkerchief to mop his forehead with. "No, she didn't expect me! Only, you see, I've sort of come about the same business."

"Have you, sir? But I—I don't know what the business is. Mother didn't tell me!"

"I don't s'pose she keerd' too," he returned, looking down upon Jess with a hard eye. "Well, I dunno—"

"If there is anything I can do, sir—to save my mother trouble—"

"Save her trouble!" he exclaimed roughly. "It's me that's having the trouble, coming a goodish way by train o' purpose to see about the business, and then her not here!"

The girl's heart was beating rapidly now.

"See about the business, sir? Please, how do you mean?"

"See about the shop, missy—ay, this here shop; your mother's shop, what I'm standing in now!" he emphasised, with a stamp of one heavy foot. "I've come a long way, I have, to see about taking it over!"

Poor Jess! Oh, how her head swam now! Take over the shop—this man? But, then, what would become of her and mother? Where would be their livelihood then?

"I don't like to ask you in, sir, to sit down and talk," the dismayed girl quavered. "But, oh, I would like to know what you mean? I've heard nothing. Mother hasn't said anything about expecting you, or selling the shop, or—"

"No, I don't suppose she has," he broke in again, with a short laugh. "I'm one as comes along at short notice, I am. I believe in swooping, I do! When I see my chance, then I swoops!"

He added, with a gratified air:

"Made a lot of money that way, I have, missy! All by swooping! Don't you go by appearances. I don't wear no lahdy-dahdy clothes; but I've got money in the bank as 'ud buy up this here street, never mind about a poor show like this here shop!"

"I believe you know why mother has gone to London!" Jess exclaimed, shrinking a little more in dread of the man. Somehow, his talk of "swooping" made her think of a vulture swooping for where there are bones to be picked.

"I don't mind saying I do, missy," he said, boastfulness making him confidential. "I've a way of getting the tip, you see; when a business is going dikey, I get wind of it!"

Again, how like the vulture, with his scent for the carcase!

"I get wind of it, missy, and then I swoops—see? I makes an offer, see? This here shop, for instance. I comes and looks round it, and I has a squint at the books—"

"You can't see what books we keep now, sir—"

"Law bless you, I wa'n't a-going to ask it!" he assured the frightened girl airily. "Only, seeing as I've come all this way, mebbe I could just have a look round—"

"No!" Jess refused flatly, and, for all she was so unnerved, she took her stand before him. "You must please go away altogether. How do I know that you are—what you say you are? You—"

"Think I'm a thief, do you?" he broke in, indignantly. "I like that, I do! When I've got more money in the bank—"

"I'm sorry, sir, but oh, you—you—"

"And fifty shops up and down the country, what I've took over and made to pay. Ay, I make 'em pay, and there's my card to prove it!" he said, slamming down a very large business card on the counter.

Before Jess could say a word, he gave a puff of discontent, and swung back to the door.

"All right, I'm off," he informed the girl disgustedly. "And whether I come again, just depends! I can tell you this, missy, from what I've seen of your precious shop a'ready, I don't think much on it. I don't wonder that your mother is in Queer Street!"

And with that parting shot, he went out, causing the bell to give a fearful jingle-jangle as he slammed the door behind him.

Jess' horrified eyes watched the receding figure until it was out of sight, then they switched to the card lying upon the counter.

"J. Gubbins," she read, "Business Broker and General Dealer," and then the address.

Judging by the address on the card, he had come at least sixty miles to "swoop" upon this little shop that was in—

"Queer Street!" Jess echoed hoarsely. "That's the way people talk of people or businesses that are ruined! They are in Queer Street! Are we ruined, then? Oh—oh, mother darling, is that what you kept from me this morning? Our living and our home—ruined!"

And it was at this instant that Stella Munro came into the shop.

#### What Stella Found.

JESS stared at the newcomer—and no wonder. Of all her fellow scholars at Morcové School this was the very last one she had expected to see to-day.

For, what had her few weeks at Morcové, as a day scholar, taught Jess as regards this particular girl? Simply that Stella, largely under the influence of Audrey Blain, had no use for a "poor relation" who was only at the "great school" because she had chanced to win a scholarship!

This, then, was a sudden change in Stella's attitude, and a change for the better. Jess realised as much in a flash, so that a smile of welcome chased away her first look of amazement.

"Stella! Oh, how nice of you to come!" was

the day girl's earnest cry. "You felt a little uneasy, did you, because I was not at school this morning?"

"I—I felt it was a duty to look over and see if all was well," Stella blurted out, with a sudden sense of being at peace with her conscience. "I'm sorry, Jess—"

"But whatever is there to be sorry about?" "I'm sorry if—if I have seemed to neglect you rather," the wealthy girl gulped out. "But you know how it is, Jess. One gets—caught up—"

"Oh, yes, I understand!" Jess said, and indeed she understood only too well.

Ah, if there had never been any Audrey Blain at Morcové School, Stella would have done the nice thing by her poor relation long before to-day! That was Jess' conviction.

"Come into the parlour, Stella," the widow's daughter exclaimed, and led the way down those two steps into what Stella felt was all the old dinginess and all the old poverty.

"Sit down, and I'll get you a cup of tea in a jiffy, for you must be tired and thirsty after your ride in from Morcové," Jess rattled on hospitably. "I have had a bit of an upset—a double upset, in fact. But you don't want to be bothered about that."

"Where is your mother, Jess?" This questioned, Jess was only too glad to get out with troubles that she had heroically meant to withhold from her visitor. She told how a very disturbing letter had come for her mother that morning, causing her to go off in great haste to London.

"But why?" Stella asked, more and more pleased with herself at the sympathetic part she was playing.

"Oh, Stella, I don't know the ins and outs of it all," came from Jess then, with a sudden tremor in her voice. "But a horrid man was here just a minute before you turned up, and I gathered from him that he is after the business!"

"You mean—"

"Ready to buy it at a break-up price, yes!" Jess said, her eyes brimming with tears. "He makes it his business, it seems, to buy up bankrupt shops, and—and— Oh, Stella, I'm afraid that is what it means," the poor girl cried out tragically, bursting into tears. "Mother is ruined!"

It came out too quickly for the girl whose sympathies were out of practice. She gazed rather stupidly, whereas many another girl would have jumped up, to fling comforting arms about that poor little soul who was in such a sudden flood of tears.

"Mother wouldn't tell me before she went off, Stella! She—"

"When will she be back, then?" Stella asked helplessly. "Of course, this accounts for your not being at school. You are so loyal to your mother. I'm sorry, Jess. I am awfully sorry for you, but—don't you think you are exaggerating the trouble?"

"If you had seen that man, the sort he was, and the way he talked about swooping!" faltered Jess, trying to dry her eyes. "But I know; I know it is wrong to give way like this! Mother will be back some time this evening, and I must be patient and—"

Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle!  
The bell again, and—how Jess's heart sank again as she swung about and saw who was in the shop.

A policeman!



**EVERY PENNY OF VALUE!** Crash! fell the two bowls to the floor, the coins running all over the boards. "Oh, dear!" wailed poor Jess. "Some of the money has gone under the counter!"

"Oh, Stella, it's a policeman!" she gasped below her breath. "Oh, dear, dear, what has happened now?"

"You had better see," was the feeble advice from the girl whose sympathies were a bit rusty.

Nor did she go with Jess, as that girl, taking a grip on her shaken nerve, went out into the shop and said:

"Good afternoon, constable."

"Afternoon, my dear," he responded in a fatherly way. "You are Jess Lingard, aren't you? And you're the only one about the place, eh?"

"I've a friend—a relative, in fact," Jess faltered; "but she has only looked in for a few minutes. My mother is up in London."

"Ay, I know she is, my dear," was the gently nodded answer. "I have some news for you about your mother. Now you know, my lass, you mustn't take on; because I don't suppose it is serious; but—"

"What, then—what?" Jess jerked out excitedly. "Oh, what has happened to mother?"

Then she saw the constable's big right hand open, displaying a telegram.

"As I say, my lass, you are not to worry, but we were telegraphed to from a hospital in London, to let you know officially. Your mother, Jess Lingard—"

"Oh, sir! Oh, Stella, do you hear!" Jess sobbed out wildly, and at last Stella came forward, just as the kindly policeman broke the news as gently as he could.

Mrs. Lingard had met with an accident in the streets of London.

She had been knocked down by a car, and was

now in hospital. The policeman named the hospital, and explained that it was the custom for all hospital authorities to communicate with the local police, if there was news to be conveyed to an injured person's home. That was considered to be better than sending a telegram direct to the house.

It was good to see how this policeman, after the manner of his kind, did all he could to soften the blow for poor Jess.

He assured her that it could not have been a very serious accident, or the hospital authorities would have advised her going to London at once. Was there anything they, the police, could do, he wanted to know, to help her in this extremity? Would she like the superintendent to arrange for someone to come in and look after the place?

But Jess, whilst she struggled to keep back her tears, shook her head in reply.

"Oh, no, thank you all the same," she managed to falter at last. "You are very kind, sir; I am sure you are all very kind, but I don't need anybody! In fact, sir, I—I shall go to London—"

"Do what, my dear?"

"Go to London—oh, I must!" the poor girl cried. "I shall catch the next train, and find my way to that hospital somehow, and the shop must be locked up!"

The policeman seemed to question the wisdom of this project; but when Jess appealed to Stella, and Stella rose to the occasion, the good fellow's scruples were overcome.

For Stella, besides saying that she herself would stand by Jess in her trouble, made it clear to the constable that Miss Somerfield, the school's headmistress, would be ready to do anything to help. There was really no need for the police to trouble themselves, Stella assured the constable; and so, in the end, he went away.

"Thank you, Stella!" was Jess' fervent cry, as soon as they were left alone in the house. "You couldn't have done anything better than help me get rid of him. Oh, I didn't want strangers, not even the kindest, in the place! I feel that all the world is somehow coming into this shop, whilst mother and I are being driven out! Poor mother—oh, my poor darling mother, up there in London—nearly killed, perhaps!"

"Now, don't," pleaded Stella awkwardly. "If you mean to go—"

"I must, Stella! Only think, if it were your mother. Oh, what girl wouldn't go at once?"

"Yes, and I'm sorry! I am awfully sorry, Jess!" Stella declared, as usual. "Well, what more can I do? I say, I can lend you some money towards the fare—"

"How good and kind you are!" exclaimed the day girl. "I—I am afraid I really may have to borrow a little. It depends what is in the till, you see," she added, and ran round behind the counter to find out how much money was available.

In her excitement she pulled the drawer open so violently that it came right out of its recess, and then—

Crash! fell the two bowls of silver and copper to the floor, the coins running all over the floor.

"There! Oh, dear, dear!" wailed poor Jess. "And some of the money has gone under the counter! A thing I've never done before—upset the till like this! But I'm all so upset myself!"

"I'll pick up the money. You take my purse," Stella pleaded, laying it down upon the counter. "When is the train, do you know?"

"There's one at three-fifteen—"

"Then you had better look sharp," Stella advised, glancing at her wrist watch. "I'll stay around and see to any customers until closing time."

"Oh, no—"

"But I want to!"

And Stella meant it.

She was being swept along by really generous impulses now. Her start had been a hesitant one, it was true, but now that she knew what it is like to do one's duty, she felt ever so pleased and self-satisfied.

The next minute found her actually serving behind the counter, whilst Jess was upstairs getting ready for the journey.

The customer was only a very small boy, with a very grubby face, wanting a penn'orth o' choo'lits, please; but Stella served him without any disdainfulness, trying to treat the whole thing as a joke.

Then Jess came hastening down from her little bed-room under the tiles, and for the second time that fateful day there was a hurried good-bye in the shop doorway.

"Stella, dear—for you have been a dear, you know," Jess said at parting; "you really needn't stay to see to any customers. I could lock up the place—"

"No," Stella still insisted virtuously. "I'll remain until seven, and then lock up, and take the key with me. I am sorry, Jess; I'm awfully sorry we have not been better friends before, but—"

"Never mind what's past and done with," Jess said softly, her eyes ashine with gratitude. "All Morocco shall know how you have stood by me to-day! Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, then, and I do hope good will come of your journey to London!"

When she went round behind the counter again, Stella was reminded of the money spilt from the till. There was some still to be retrieved, and down on her knees she went, picking up odd pennies, and a sixpence or so, from this dark corner and that. They were dark corners, but not dusty ones—trust Jess and her mother for that!

It was Stella's conviction, however, that some money could only be recovered by her shifting the counter, as one might have to shift a desk. It was a box-like erection, not fastened to the floor, and at one end it was not even firmly set upon the floor, so that there was a thin space into which she knew some of the coins had, perversely, hidden themselves.

Rising erect, she took a grip on the wooden counter, and heaved and pushed, shifting it a few inches at that end.

Sure enough, a shilling and a halfpenny were now revealed; but there was something else besides.

To Stella's amazement, she saw an old, dusty envelope, with an address and a postmark which looked as if it had never been opened.

She snatched it up, and—yes! How strange it was! The envelope had never been opened, and inside there was a letter which, therefore, could never have been read!

She looked at the postmark, and it was when she saw that the stamp was a South American one, and the postmark one dated twelve months ago, that she suddenly went white to the lips.

Re-enter Audrey.

ALONE in the shop, Stella gazed at that unopened letter which appeared to have been lying for a whole year under Mrs. Lingard's counter, and still the colour kept out of her cheeks, whilst her breath came and went rapidly.

This letter—now, let her think; how had it failed to be delivered properly?

The problem was solved in a moment. Stella could imagine the postman, one morning a year ago, coming into the deserted shop and laying down the letter in the usual happy-go-lucky way. She could picture Mrs. Lingard or Jess suddenly running out to serve a breakfast-time rush of customers, and in the bustle mixing up that letter with paper bags, and so on.

Or perhaps the letter had been blown by the wind on to the floor, and had then been slipped under the counter by the motion of someone's feet. Anyhow, the letter had miscarried, only coming to light to-day like this.

And it was from South America.

That meant a great deal to Stella Munro, the wealthy relation of the Lingards'.

Whenever Stella heard or saw South America mentioned, she was reminded of how a great deal of her father's wealth had come from that source—less than a year ago.

They had not been a poor family before that; but the extra money they had come into, less than a year ago, had meant the difference between comfortable circumstances and absolute wealth.



**A YEAR OLD POSTMARK!** Stella picked up the dusty envelope, and was surprised to find that it had not been opened. Then the colour left her cheeks, for the envelope bore a South American stamp!



For a full minute longer she stared at the envelope, reading the address over and over again. The letter had been intended for Jess' father; but he was dead now.

"Mr. James Lingard, Barncombe, North Devon, England," the excited girl read over and over again; and then the words: "Please forward if gone away. Important!"

Important. She went down the two steps into the dingy parlour, taking the letter with her. She put it upon the table, but took it up again at once. Important. And from South America.

Then, suddenly, Stella Munro forsook the straight path she had embarked upon to-day. She opened the letter!

As she took out the missive inside, which was penned in a rather clumsy, unscholarly hand, a little newspaper cutting fell away and floated down to the carpet. She snatched it up, read the snippet of print before starting to read the letter, and now her face went whiter than ever, if possible.

"Oh!" she breathed in great agitation.

A nervous glance towards the shop—but it was all right; no one was coming in—and she started upon the letter.

There, close to the parlour window, she devoured this missive that a tragic mischance had debarred Jess' father from receiving. Twice she rushed through it, then crushed it up in her hand, speaking excitedly to herself in sheer panic.

"What shall I do about it!" she panted huskily. "Mrs. Lingard ought to know about it, of course, but— No, why should I, after all this time? And yet—"

And yet, to withhold the information that the letter and the newspaper cutting conveyed—how shameful, wicked, despicable it would be!

She knew it. She, who still had a conscience, knew full well what a wicked injustice it would be to the Lingards, not to pass on the letter to them. Especially at this time, when they were so poor—threatened with ruin, if what Jess had surmised was correct.

By the law of the land, apart from the question of common honesty, the Lingards ought to be given the letter. But it meant giving them—what?

Stella knew that, too. It meant giving the widow and her daughter—passing on to them what they were entitled to by law—all the money that Stella's own father had come into!

She felt hot all over, then very cold.

"Now, Stella!" her own conscience seemed to be crying at her. "Play the game! Don't be a cheat, a thief! This is taking a mean advantage of Jess Lingard's loyalty to her mother!"

But something else whispered her to different effect. The voice of the tempter, saying:

"Quick, burn the letter—burn everything! You've got used to being the daughter of a very wealthy man. You won't like being just comfortably off again! You may be absolutely poor, you and your parents, if they have to give up every penny that they came into twelve months ago!"

To a girl so vacillating as Stella Munro was, the temptation was almost bound to prove too great. Her gaze took note of the kitchen-fire, and all at once she stepped across to it. She held out the letter in the envelope, and with a trembling hand held it nearer and nearer to the coals—until it scorched!

It took fire instantly. There, it was blazing now, and the thing was done! It would always

be on her conscience, she knew; but couldn't she, in a roundabout way, make it up to Jess and her mother somehow? By being very kind to them, and—

"Hallo, Stella darling!" came a cooing cry, at the same instant that the shop bell jangled. And there was Audrey, all "got up" for the run she had made into Barncombe.

"Aha, caught you! What are you looking so guilty about?" she said playfully. "Where is the poor relation? Likewise, Dame Lingard? Are you in possession, like the broker's man, Stella?"

That girl, pulling herself together, at once told Audrey as much as was necessary, and it is fair to say that even Audrey was shocked to hear about the street accident in London.

But she soon got over the upset, realising that the present situation could be turned to good account.

"You promised to mind the shop, then?"

"I said I would, and then look up and take the key to school with me," Stella answered, causing Audrey to do a little dance round the parlour.

"Spiffing! It is a lovely chance, Stella! We will look up now, and get away on a jaunt, and if we are back late there will be that excuse. Had to mind the shop! Ha, ha, ha!"

"No Audrey," Stella said, but very weakly. "Oh, don't start suggesting that sort of thing! Just think, we must be careful."

"My dear Stella, I'm always careful!"

"We must remember that Betty has the whip hand over us," the weak girl went on. "She solemnly warned us that if she caught us again she would feel bound to take that confession we signed to the headmistress. And so—"

"Confession—pooh! There is no confession!" Audrey claimed lightly.

"How do you mean?" cried Stella. "Betty made us give her that confession, when she caught us at the Callowbys! She kept it—"

"But she hasn't got it now," broke in Audrey coolly. "For the simple reason, you goose, I've got hold of it to-day, and destroyed it!"

She added with a laugh:

"And so you see, my dear, how very careful I can be! Ha, ha, ha!"

#### Betty and Co. Bewildered.

STELLA gazed at Audrey in a shocked way. "You have destroyed that paper Betty had? Oh, Audrey, how could you? How could you dare do such a—a desperate thing?"

And then, with Audrey laughing again, Stella turned pale once more.

She was suddenly recollecting what a much more important paper she had been wrongfully destroying only a minute ago!

"What do I care?" chuckled Audrey. "I consider Betty got that confession out of us unfairly. So I made no bones of slipping into her study, when no one was there, and simply searching for it. Ha, ha, ha! Won't Betty look green when she finds it gone?"

Stella sat down, clasping her hands in her lap.

"Oh, Audrey! I'm sorry! What a pair we are!"

"You? There's nothing terrible about you," smiled Audrey derisively. "Think how good you have been to stay and mind the shop, besides giving Jess the fare to London! Come on. We are off for a lark, as a set-off to such good behaviour! Otherwise they'll be sprouting," she finished, feeling Stella's shoulders. "The wings of a cherub!"

She had her own way with the unstable Stella. It took Audrey a good deal of coaxing, and it might have taken more, only all at once Stella, in the depths of misery over the dastardly destruction of that letter from South America, wanted to get away from the shop—wanted to do something that would help her to forget.

And so, ten minutes later, both girls quitted the shop, and Stella pulled the door shut and then locked it, pocketing the key.

Audrey, for her part, got a laugh out of the hasty departure by pinning a bold notice on the locked door:

CLOSED!

This establishment will shortly re-open

Under Entirely

NEW MANAGEMENT!!!

"Oh, Audrey!" Stella protested heavily, but the flippant girl would not allow her to tear down the notice.

"It is right, isn't it?" Audrey laughed. "The shop will be changing hands, from what you have told me. And then I suppose Jess Lingard will have to come into the school as a combination twenny-maid scholarship-kid! Ha, ha, ha! Come along, Gloomy!"

They each had a bicycle, and next minute they were clear of the mean street, Audrey showing what her intention was when she led the way out of the town by a road that would take them straight to the Callowbys'.

Back there in the mean street children left off playing their simple games to come and gaze at the notice on the shop-door. Then some grown-ups gathered around, reading the notice with amazement. They were mostly humble folk who knew the Lingards well, and what the notice said simply took their breath away.

Yet what was their surprise even, compared with that of certain schoolgirls who presently turned up, all riding bicycles.

It gave the chums of the Fourth Form—for they were the new arrivals—quite a big turn to see a crowd gathered outside the day girl's home. Dismounting quickly, and piling their bikes around a lamp-post, they made a rush for the shop, giving gasps of amazement when they scanned that notice on the locked door.

"Closed!"

"Bai Jove, geals!"

"But how extraordinary!"

"Yes, wather! Do I wead that notice awight, geals? It says—"

"To be opened under entire new management! And that's the strangest thing of all!" Betty Barton exclaimed. "What has become of the poor Lingards, then?"

In their utter bewilderment, the scholars sought information of the other bystanders, but there was no getting the mystery cleared up. One or two children said that a policeman had been to the shop recently, when it was still open for trade, but they supposed he was off duty and only buying some tobacco.

All the chums could elucidate was that Jess had been in attendance at the shop up to a little while ago, but had been seen to go off suddenly as if dressed for a journey.

"And then two gals like you come out," volunteered one urchin, "and one of 'em locked up the door, and took the key wiv her, and t'other stuck the notice up!"

"Two girls—"

"Like as if they belonged to your school, miss," Betty was answered.

She and her chums rode away at last, feeling just as anxious as they were bewildered.

Trouble—sudden terrible trouble, apparently—accounted for Jess' absence from morning school. But what that trouble was they were unable to conjecture, except that it was not illness, but more of a business nature, involving mother and daughter alike.

Betty & Co. would have liked to stay in Barncombe and get to the bottom of the mystery, but they had not a minute to spare.

They were going over to Barncombe House School, as a team to play a cricket match; and their turning aside even for that minute or so, to inquire after Jess, had made them late enough.

So, now, they had to pedal out of the town as fast as the crowded thoroughfares would permit, and half an hour later found them on the Barncombe House sports ground going in to bat.

The match did not begin without a good deal of merriment over Naomer Nakara's presence in the Morcove IV. Form team. Even her own schoolfellows were not yet quite used to Naomer and her antics, and so it may be imagined the sensation she made amongst the Barncombe House girls!

Naomer had a good deal yet to learn about cricket, but it would have fairly broken her heart not to include her in to-day's team. So, the chums made her last girl in, and very excitedly she ran out to the wicket, when that great moment came, with Paula Creel for a partner.

By that time the visitors were looking rather glum, for the score was a very poor one, and—well, what could one still hope for, with Paula at one end of the crease and Naomer at the other!

"Ello, present!" Naomer pealed merrily, sticking out her bat to take middle. She had seen other girls do this, and meant to be in the fashion.

"Pway be careful, deah," Paula called to her from the other end of the pitch. "Don't try swiping! Leave me to get the wuns, remember!"

"Get the runs—Paula!" was Polly's chuckling comment on this. "I can see Paula and Naomer— But watch!"

The others watched eagerly enough, as the first ball came down for Naomer to play.

Whilst it was on the way, Naomer started a sort of step dance. She gave a still livelier caper as the ball rushed for the wicket, and then—whiz!

Naomer swung round and round, carried about by the momentum of the bat, and next instant—snick! The bales were off, with the middle stump out of the ground!

"He was not a good one," Naomer explained, as she stopped spinning. "I have him again!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And it took quite a long time, and quite a lot of tact, for both sides to convince Naomer that she had been bowled first ball; was out for a "duck"—and Paula with her!

Then the Barncombe House team went in to bat, with victory almost a certainty. It was such a poor score to beat. With Polly and Tess, however, putting all they could into the bowling, the home team's score did not mount up so very quickly.

And when it was only a case of getting the last wicket down, with Barncombe House still three runs short for a tie, a marvellous thing happened.

Naomer made a brilliant catch, securing the game for her side, after all!

"'Ello, present!" she cried, as she caught and held the ball.

"Bravo, bravo!" her chums simply had to applaud her. "Oh, you darling!"

Morcove Fourth Form had beaten the home team—only by a fluke, perhaps. But, as Betty said afterwards, it was a wonder they had not received a thorough drubbing, when they were all so upset in their minds on account of that strange affair of Jess Lingard and her widowed mother.

The shop suddenly closed, and formal notice put up that when it reopened it would be in new hands.

What then was to become of the Lingards?

Impossible to believe that they had had a sudden tempting offer for the shop, and were selling for that reason. No; when Betty & Co. knew, as they did, what a poor living it had been for the widow and her daughter, the one awful fact that seemed to emerge from the situation was this:

In spite of all the toil and thrift, a crash had come!

#### It Must Be Stopped!

IT was past seven when the girl-cricketers started back for Morcove School.

A lengthy cycle-ride was before them, and so it came as a surprise to the others when Betty suddenly suggested their all going by a certain roundabout way.

What was the reason?

Betty would not say; but she had a very grave reason.

Her chums seemed to have overlooked the remark that had been passed, outside the shop, about two schoolgirls having locked up the shop, after Jess had left. Betty, however, had been thinking about that as much as anything else during the cricket-match. Who were the girls? Who else, to be sure, but Stella and Audrey!

So, now, for a reason it was not advisable to divulge, she got her chums to cycle homewards by that roundabout route, traversing side roads that wound their way over beautiful moorland country.

It was by far a prettier "spin" for the victorious team than the straight run home would have been, and this was a perfect evening, a gentle, cool breeze blowing across open country that was all golden in the light of the down-going sun. So no one grumbled—quite the reverse. Even languid Paula had declared herself to be "weady, ay, weady," for the "woundabout woute!"

Then, halfway home, Betty proposed a halt, and whilst her chums were lying about in the bracken beside the moorland road, she managed to slip away from them for a few minutes.

Only five minutes, at the most; but in those five minutes the uneasy form captain accomplished her purpose.

She rejoined her chums with a heavy heart, and with a longing to confide in them at once. But she refrained, and it was not until the school had been reached, and she was in Study No. 12 with Polly, Paula, and a few others, that she at last spoke out.

"I want your advice," she suddenly checked all the light gossip by saying very seriously. "From what we were told outside Jess' shop, two Morcove girls locked up the place after Jess had gone. Well, those girls were Stella Munro and Audrey Blain."

"Bai Jove!"

"Are they back?" Polly exclaimed eagerly. "If so, we can ask them what the mystery is! They must know!"

"They are not back yet," Betty said gravely. "And I fully expect them to be later than call-over even."

"Why?" asked Madge. "Do you imagine that they have been involved in the trouble at the shop, and something they have to do is making them late?"

Betty shook her head sadly.

"Not that," she sighed. "I wish it was the case, but it isn't! The horrid truth is that Stella and Audrey are taking advantage of that business at the shop to have a nice jolly time with certain girl friends whom they have been forbidden by the headmistress to mix with."

"Phew!" whistled Polly.

"Now, what am I to do?" the form captain asked. "I know that Stella and Audrey locked up the shop as soon as Jess had gone, and made for their friends' house. We passed it close on our way home, and I scouted round and saw them there. By-the-by, they are going to come in late—this is certain—with the excuse that the trouble at the shop detained them!"

"Oh!" Madge exclaimed disgustedly. "You mean, they will pretend they have only just come away from the shop—"

"After staying around to be of use—"

"And all the time they have been enjoying themselves!"

"With friends they have been forbidden to mix with," Betty rejoined in a pained tone. "One moment, though! I want to tell you that I caught Stella and Audrey there, on another occasion. They ought to have been reported, but I—well—"

"You gave them a chance?" said Tess.

"Yes. On condition that they wrote me a full admission of their breach of discipline on that occasion, and promised not to do anything of the sort again, I held my tongue. But I kept that paper. They had warning, too, that if I did catch them disgracing themselves and the school again I would lay the whole matter before the headmistress."

"Quite right, too!" murmured several of the captain's chums.

"Yes," rejoined Polly quickly. "And if you want my opinion, here it is. If those girls come back presently, with any humbugging talk to account for their being out late, they out with that paper, Betty, and let them take the consequences!"

"I really think you should," Madge said. "Unless all discipline and all your authority as captain is to become a dead letter—"

"Bai Jove, but it is downright disgraceful of that couple!" Paula broke in disgustedly. "After the way you let them off, Betty, they weally don't deserve any mercy now!"

"And yet—" Betty sighed, and then got up to take a turn about the study. "How I hate—how we all hate giving information against another girl, even when it has become a plain duty!"

Madge said again, in a tight-lipped manner;

"The thing has got to be stopped!"

"Yes, wather! Geals—"

"Where is that paper?" Polly broke out, in her headstrong manner. "May we see it, Betty?"

"Oh, yes," the captain answered, going to a table-drawer that was locked. "You won't ever gossip about it, I know," she went on, taking a small bunch of keys from her dress-pocket, "if we

find that there is no need to use it after all. And let us hope that— Hallo!"

She voiced the startled exclamation as she stepped away from the table.

For, after inserting the key, she had found that the lock was burst.

A mere tug had pulled the drawer right out, and at a glance she saw that the paper was gone.

"Gone!" she almost shouted, whilst all her chums sprang to their feet, sharing her excitement to the full. "It's gone—the paper that Audrey and Stella signed—"

"Gone—gone?" echoed the others incredulously. "And the lock burst? Oh—"

"Bai Jove!"  
"The wretch—the wretch!" Polly cried out furiously. "Audrey, I mean! Audrey has forced the drawer, and taken the paper away!"

**Audrey Thinks It Funny.**

**I**MEDIATELY after call-over, that evening, Miss Massingham sought out the headmistress in that lady's sanctum.

"I have to report Audrey Blain and Stella

Blain's movements since dinner-time—and Stella Munro's?"

Even as the question was put, with Betty at her wits' ends to know how to answer it, there was a slight commotion in the passage, some breathless talk between two hurrying girls, and then the door was rapped.

"Come in!" Miss Somerfield exclaimed. "Ah, here they are, the very pair we have been getting so anxious about!"

Yes, there they were; Audrey and Stella, both in a hot and breathless condition, as if they had lost not a moment in reporting as soon as they got back.

"If you please, Miss Somerfield," Audrey panted demurely, "you must think this dreadful of us, but—"

"We are sorry," put in Stella meekly. "We—"

"Has there been an accident, then, or what?" exclaimed the steady-eyed headmistress.

Audrey gave a reassuring laugh.

"Oh, no, Miss Somerfield! The fact is—"  
She took a moment for breath. "Stella went into Barncombe to visit Jess Lingard, who was not



**FIRST BALL!** Naomer made a wild swipe at the ball, and missed it by yards. The next instant—click! and the balls were flying in the air as the ball struck the middle stump. "He not a good one!" exclaimed Naomer. "I have him again!"

Munro as being absent," the Fourth Form Mistress announced regretfully. "They have been out since early in the afternoon, and they had their bicycles with them."

Miss Somerfield, whilst looking rather concerned, was obviously not inclined to suspect any breach of discipline.

"I hope it does not mean they have met with an accident," was her anxious remark. "Does anybody know which way the two girls went? I would like to ask the form captain about this."

So Betty was sent for, and was fully prepared for the sort of questions that were going to be asked, when she got to the headmistress's study. Miss Massingham had by that time withdrawn, leaving the matter in Miss Somerfield's hands.

"You are aware, Betty, that two members of your Form are still absent from school, although it is close upon bedtime," began the headmistress. "I wonder, do you know anything of Audrey

at school to-day. I joined her there later. By that time Jess had had to rush off to London, because her mother has met with a shocking accident in town—"

"In London?" exclaimed Miss Somerfield. "Oh, how very distressing! Why, why didn't poor Jess get into touch with me? Had I known—"

"I'm sorry," gulped Stella, "but Jess was off in such a hurry, so as not to miss her train, there was no time to think what was best. I stayed behind at the shop—"

"Quite so; ah, that was right of you, Stella!" the headmistress approved quickly. "As a relative of the Lingards, you naturally felt you must stand by them. You and Audrey both took charge; I see. But there was no need to keep the shop open right on through the evening?"

"We didn't," said Audrey blandly. "We locked it up—"

"At the usual hour? I see," Miss Somerfield repeated, still approvingly. "But how is it then that you are as late as this?"

How, indeed!

Betty, who had been given a sign from the headmistress not to go away, knew how it was. And now she was going to see what sort of a fibbing explanation Audrey would give.

"We felt you would approve of our staying as late as possible," Audrey answered suavely, "to put the place in order, and also to be there in case people should call."

A slight shade passed across Miss Somerfield's face now.

"There, I rather think you exceeded your responsibilities," she said, in a chilled tone. "However, I must not upbraid you for having gone too far, since you were influenced from first to last by kindly motives. You may go, and I will try to find out over the 'phone—"

She broke off with the cry: "One moment," as all three girls were on their way to the door.

"Stella, whilst you are here," she resumed, taking up a letter from her desk. "Your mother has written from her town house in London; a very kind and considerate letter indeed. It is in reference to the party of Fourth Form scholars going to London next week."

"For the inter-school singing contest?" put in Audrey softly.

"Yes," nodded the headmistress. "Stella's mother writes that she will be very pleased to accommodate our Morcove contingent, so that they will not have to stay at a hostel or a hotel. She begs me to accept the offer as a token of her goodwill towards the school where her own daughter is having such a happy time!"

With a sudden flush, Stella gulped out the most suitable rejoinder she could think of.

"I—I hope you will accept, Miss Somerfield. I know your mother means it. She is very kind—"

"Then it is a pity you don't take after her!" was Betty's thought, as she stood by, fuming inwardly with disgust. "You, chasing off with Audrey to the Callowby girls' place, when poor Jess and her widowed mother are in such trouble! Oh, your horrid fraud!"

Nor did the Form captain, in her righteous anger, mean to mince her words, as soon as she could get Stella and Audrey to herself!

There was no opportunity that night, and so the two miscreants went to bed entirely in ignorance of the fact that Betty had seen them at the Callowbys' country house, and had also found out that the paper had been filched from the drawer in Study No. 12. And how Audrey was chucking to herself, long after lights out, at the clever way she had "scored" again!

What a jolly time they had spent, she and Stella together, with Vanessa and Muriel Callowby! The very best time they had had, so far! Really, it paid to be daring!

Thus Audrey, as she lay with her cheek to the pillow in the Fourth Form dormitory, exulting over the way she had outwitted the Form captain—that Betty, hang her!

But Stella—

No gloriing, on her part, in the thought of the fun and jollity that had made the time fly past at the Callowbys' place. Whilst that fun was going, she had given herself up to it because it was an anodyne for her guilty pangs. Now, in the silence and darkness of the night, she could only think of the heinous thing done by her in the Lingards' home; the reading and burning of that

long-lost letter, when it should have been passed on, unopened, into the poor widowed mother's hands.

In her mind's eye Stella seemed to see a picture of the little shop that had been the Lingards' humble livelihood, with the door locked up and that notice on it:

"CLOSED. To be reopened under entire new management!"

So it was going to be, she felt. The loss of their very home for that poor widow and her daughter. A harder life than ever to be faced by mother and child after this; and all the time they were really entitled to that South American money.

Towards midnight, Stella turned over in her bed to try and get to sleep. No use! Long after midnight, she was still as wide awake as ever.

"I must make it all right for Jess," she was saying over and over again, in an attempt to pacify her conscience. "I will be very kind to her from now onwards, so that it will be almost as good as if she and her mother had come into the money."

No use!

In her heart of hearts she knew that, whilst thousands of pounds were being wickedly withheld from the mother and daughter, it would be a mockery of justice to offer them a dole, a little help out of "charity"!

Next morning it was known all through the school that Mrs. Lingard had been very seriously injured when she was knocked down in one of London's thronged streets on the previous day. For Miss Somerfield had been making good use of the 'phone—first to get in talk with the Barncombe police, and then with the hospital in London.

It was known, too, why yesterday the poor widow had had to go off in such haste to London, and why the shop was closed—closed indeed, so far as the Lingards were concerned.

Mrs. Lingard had innocently got into the toils of a money-lending firm some time back, and it was the old, old story.

Only when that letter had come from London, yesterday morning, did she know how utterly in the snare she was.

Poor woman! She had done what seemed to be the only possible thing when she hastened off to London to try and get mercy—a little time to turn round in. And there, alas, in her flustered state, she had been struck down by a car in one of the busy streets.

"I am sorry," Stella Munro said monotonously, when other scholars came to her about it all. "Yes, I am awfully sorry; but my people will do something. We—we have money, and—and I shall ask my people to help them."

How nice it sounded! But still, in her heart of hearts she knew how guilty she was. Only, the thing was done now, and she was going to forget about it, if she could.

If!

(END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.)

(You will thoroughly enjoy next week's long complete story of the girls of Morcove School. The title: "THE MORCOVE GIRLS IN LONDON!" promises a new experience for Betty Barton & Co., and you an ocker forward to some unique adventures. And Jess Lingard, she too, is in London. Will she meet her schoolfellows—and if so, how will the scheming Audrey continue her vendetta against the poor scholarship girl?)