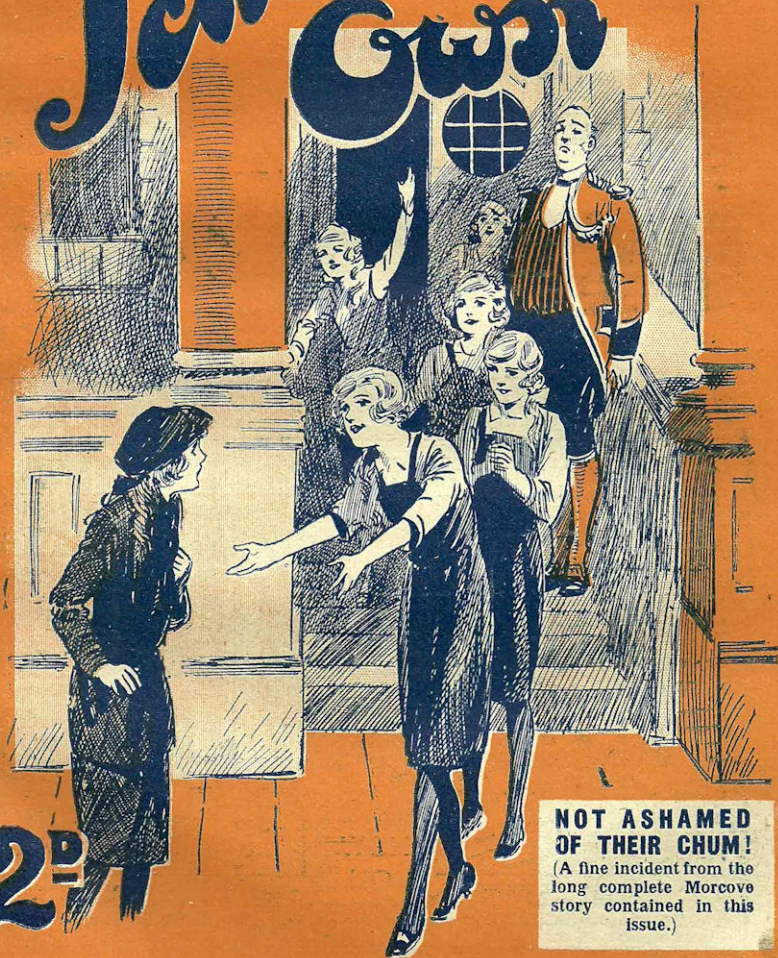


In this issue:

A splendid story of the Girls of Morcove School.

# "THE MORCOVE GIRLS IN LONDON!"

# The Schoolgirls' Own

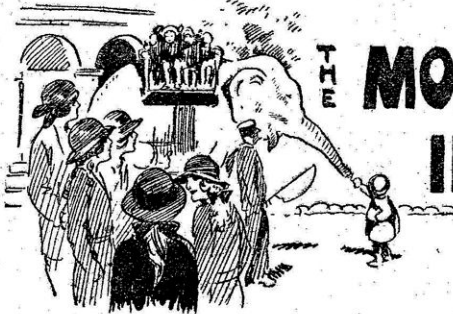


# 2<sup>nd</sup>

**NOT ASHAMED  
OF THEIR CHUM!**

(A fine incident from the long complete Morcove story contained in this issue.)

The Morcove girls are the most popular schoolgirls in the world!



THE

# MORCOVE GIRLS IN LONDON!

A magnificent new long complete story, telling how Betty Barton & Co. were fortunately able to combine pleasure with business.

By MARJORIE STANTON.

Off and Away.

"GOOD-BYE, girls!"  
"Good-bye, Miss Somerfield!"  
"Good-bye, Betty; good-bye all! Mind you bring back the silver shield!"  
"Ha, ha, ha! We'll have a try for it, anyhow!"  
"Yes, wather!"

It was a boisterous scene, such as had been so often witnessed at Morcove School; mistresses and scholars alike thronging forth into the open air, to give the heartiest send-off to those who were bound for the railway station.

They were a party of ten girls or so who were going away this morning, under the charge of Miss Redgrave, the Fourth Form's junior mistress. Three cars had been ordered, but to everybody's amusement it had turned out that two would have been almost enough after all. And for this reason:

At least seven of the girls regarded themselves as being absolutely inseparable, even for the few minutes' run to Morcove Road railway station!

Hence, when Betty Barton and Polly Linton entered the first car, five other girls must needs squeeze in after them, to the accompaniment of shrieks of laughter, mock screams of pain, and some very real wails of distress from one young lady.

"Hooray, we are off!" sang out Polly Linton, rocking about wildly on Paula Creel's lap, as the over-laden car slowly moved down the drive to the school gates. "Are we all right?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Hold tight!"  
"All right? Bai Jove, I'm crushed to death—help!" wailed poor Paula Creel, the aristocrat of the Fourth Form. And she had made herself look so particularly aristocratic this morning!

"Polly, get off me! Who's tweading on my foot? Naomer—Tess—Twixie!"

"Hold tight! Whoop-up, she goes!" laughed Madcap Polly, as the car swung round on to the main road, after passing through the gateway.

As the car swung, the packed mass of school-girl humanity swung too. More peals of merriment, with Paula, the worst sufferer, moaning to herself:

"My gwacious! Why, why did I not go in one of the other cars, bai Jove? My devotion to you geals will be the wuin of my fwook!"

"Don't shoot me off your lap!" protested Polly, setting herself more firmly, merely to tease the aristocrat. "I am just getting comfortable!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
"Comfortable!" groaned Paula. "Ah, dear!

How gweatly I wewget being included in this trip to London! Wheah are we now, geals?" she asked, with her hat still bashed over her pretty eyes.

"On the way to the station," Polly answered gaily. "Betty is now half out of the window, to wave a last good-bye to the girls we've left behind us. Naomer is sitting on the cab floor, squeezed amongst our legs."

"Gweat goodness, is that Naomer sticking a pin in my calf, bai Jove!" gasped poor Paula. "Oh, geals, wway wefwain! Naomer!"

"Ello, present!" sang out Morcove's dusky little scholar from the desert lands of North Africa. "Keep a smile, Paula!"

A dismal groan was the aristocrat's only answer. Nor was her protesting voice heard again, until the car was at the little wayside station, and they were all bundling out.

"Phew! I just loved that!" chuckled Polly, setting her hat to rights. "Paula darling, you look rather ruffled!"

"Yes, wather! Howevah, I will put my hair to wights when I am wcovered."

And Paula simply stood gasping for breath.

The two other cars drove up, and out of the first came Miss Redgrave, with Polly Delane and only a couple of other girls. But if they had made the brief journey in comfortable fashion, what could be said of the patrons of the third car? For there were only two—Audrey Blain and Stella Munro.

"Weal, I deelah!" Paula exclaimed softly. "To think of those geals wevelling in a car to themselves, bai Jove, whilst I've been crushed to a weck! Had I realised there was woom in that car—"

"No, you wouldn't have joined them; you know it," Tess Trelawney took the aristocrat up softly. "You know very well, Paula, you share our dislike of Audrey Blain."

"I wewget to say I do," Paula owned under her breath. "Nor can I pwetend to be vevy much in love with Stella Munwo, whilst she makes Audwey her ewony. Howevah!"

And Paula, always sorry to be troubled with disagreeable thoughts, gave her mind to the very pleasant task of shaking herself to rights.

The luggage was already at the station, stacked in a goodly pile on the platform. Nor had the girls been more than a few seconds waiting for the train before it came round the curve; a fussy little local train, but with a special saloon attached, so that the Morcove scholars would go straight through without changing.

Into this commodious railway carriage, with its spacious windows and luxurious upholstery, the girls for London scrambled. Paula, for one, sinking down into a springy seat with a huge sigh of contentment.

"Aha! What a pwofound relief!" she remarked, beaming with delight. "I twust I shall now be left in peace, until we weach the great Metwopolis!"

Alas, for the amiable aristocrat's longing for tranquillity. Ten minutes later, as the train was jolting into Barncombe Station, a great bag of sandwiches fell off the hatrack, opening as it fell. And Paula was underneath!

Paula, in fact, suddenly found herself deluged by a cascade of ham and beef, with bread to match. With a howl of misery, she appealed to the laughing girls to "weliieve," her of the unwelcome "wepast."

"You are wespensible for this fwesh catastrophe!" She tried to frown at the chuckling Polly. "Haow fwivolous you are, Polly deah!"

There is not much doubt that Polly had meant that bag of sandwiches to tumble down on to the long-suffering Paula. But it was a pure accident when a ginger-beer cork suddenly went pop and clipped Paula's left ear.

Naomer had not yet got used to opening bottles of ginger beer. She screamed when the cork went pop. And so did Paula!

"Healp! My eah, bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway be sewious, some of you geals," Paula admonished the chucklers. "What with one and anoath of you, bai Jove, my life is a downwight mawydrom!"

All this time, and indeed throughout the journey to London, Audrey Blain remained aloof from the fun and chatter.

She flattered herself she was the queen of the Form; but "her majesty" had not many girls paying her court just at present! Of those who were going with her to London, there to take part in a certain inter-school singing contest, only Stella Munro was on intimate terms with her.

It had been a plain choice for Stella when she first came to Morcove, whether she would have Betty and Co. for her friends, or would just make her life with Audrey. And she had plumped for Audrey.

So, now, it was next to Audrey that Stella sat in the saloon carriage, and it was very little she had to say to Betty and the rest.

She might indeed have had nothing whatever to say to those girls, only—it was very awkward!—they all happened to be going to stay at her parents' house in the West End of London.

Awkward for Stella; awkward for Betty and Co., too!

When the Headmistress had announced that Mrs. Munro had very kindly offered the contingent from Morcove School the hospitality of a fine town house, so that they would not need to go to any hotel or hostel, the girls had had to look pleased. But, in secret—

Well, was it a wonder if they had felt that this arrangement was going to be, in Paula's words, "howbilly embawassing!"

For all they knew, Mrs. Munro might be a very charming, estimable lady, and an ideal hostess. But how could they possibly feel at ease, when that lady's own daughter had shown, all along, that she had no use for them as friends?

There was only one thing to be done, the chums had decided. As guests of Stella's mother, they must keep on as good terms with Stella as they

could, even though they would know all the time that she had nothing in common with them, but was all for Audrey.

And Stella, for her part, was making a point of being a bit gracious to the girls, if only because she felt that it would never do for her parents to discover the strained relations.

It was typical of her weak, nervous character, and her flattering attentions to Audrey, that she dreaded displeasing that girl by showing any niceness to the others.

"I thought you might wonder at my being a bit friendly with Betty and the rest," she said to Audrey at the journey's end. "But you see how it is, Audrey dear? I— Of course, I'm sorry mother took it into her head to ask them all here—"

"I'm not!" Audrey smiled sweetly. "Because, if they hadn't been asked, then I wouldn't have been asked either!"

"Oh, I don't know about that, Audrey," was the fluttering answer. "My idea was to have you all to myself here, whilst the others would be at a hostel. Only, mother, finding I wanted to have one chum, thought I would surely like to have the whole crowd!"

Audrey laughed lightly as she threw herself down into an easy chair in the beautiful bed-room which she and Stella were going to share.

"Your mater—and what a darling she is, by the way—she doesn't know that you and I are a little set of our own? She doesn't know that in the usual course Audrey Blain and Co. are not on speaking terms with the wonderful Form captain and her pals!"

"No, Audrey, mother doesn't know, and—if she can be kept from finding out—"

"So much the better, of course!" Audrey nodded, then settled her head against the cushion, and crossed one leg over the other. In that free-and-easy attitude, she let her pretty eyes glance over the room.

"A beautiful house altogether," was the remark with which she delighted Stella. "Reminds me in many ways of my own people's town house. I must take you round there one day, dear, although it is all shut up, because my people are abroad. Only an old servant there, as caretaker."

"I am so glad you like this room; I asked to have you in with me," Stella said, with the old adoring look for her dazzling friend. "Some of the others have got to sleep three to a room, but we shall be nicely to ourselves."

They had unpacked, and had made themselves tidy after the lengthy journey, and now the rumbling bong of a gong announced that tea was on the table downstairs.

Audrey stretched her supple arms and yawned. "Tea! That's good," she exclaimed vivaciously. "I hope I look presentable, Stella darling!"

"Oh, Audrey, when don't you look awfully—pretty, is all I can say, but that's not the word." "In fact, a credit to Morcove, eh?" Audrey laughed. "I always am a credit to the school, am I not? Very much so—ha, ha, ha!"

She minced to the door, expecting Stella to go down with her; but the daughter of the house seemed to come over sad all at once, and said she would follow in a moment.

Sadder still she looked, the instant she was left to herself; and with what good reason she knew only too well.

"A beautiful house, and so it is!" she mused aloud, echoing Audrey's praise of the place. "But

it shouldn't be ours—it wouldn't be ours any longer, if it—"

"If what?"

"Ah, Stella Munro had the answer, right enough! It was upon her conscience day and night!"

#### Coals of Fire.

AT that moment when Stella, alone in her beautiful bed-room in the imposing town house, was so plainly overwhelmed by some sudden wave of remorse, a certain girl was coming along the fashionable street at a brisk walk.

And the odd thing was, she wore the Morcove school-hat, although she was not one of the girls who had come all the way from Morcove to-day.

She was very pretty, in a homely sort of way—and isn't that very often the prettiest kind of prettiness? But she might easily have looked a very poor sort of girl to have any connection with Morcove School, North Devon. Only her instinct for neatness saved poor Jess Lingard's youthful figure from appearing very, very shabby, for her clothes had seen plenty of wear.

It is certain, too, that she felt overawed by the grandeur of the broad West End street. So different it was from a certain little back street in Barncombe, where her widowed mother had kept shop, and whence Jess herself had cycled to and from Morcove every day, as a scholarship girl.

Jess gazed at all the imposing housefronts that she was passing, as a person might who is a stranger to the neighbourhood, looking for a certain residence that has been described to her. But she knew the house she wanted right enough. She was only gazing, in that awed way, thinking what lots and lots of people must be very rich indeed, because there were such lots and lots of grand houses!

She was thinking, too, how there were myriads of poor people, only one didn't come upon them here!

Plenty of people just as poor as she and her mother were to-day, but not poorer, for nobody could be that. She and mother—they were penniless now.

And suddenly the tears were pricking in her eyes, as the tragedy of it all came home to her youthful mind again. She winked the moisture from her dark lashes, not liking to be seen using her handkerchief to dry the tears, and fetched a little sigh.

"Ah, well," she said to herself comfortingly, "there is one great blessing. Every time I go to the hospital, mother seems to be a little better!"

Then, suddenly, all the tenderness in her looks, inspired by the good girl's loving thoughts of her suffering mother, gave place to a burst of delight. The sun seemed to break out in Jess' face as she came to the house where the Munros lived, and saw a friend standing at the window.

"Betty Barton!" was the day girl's loud cry of delight, nor was it a one-sided affair, this joyful recognition.

"Jess—oh, it's Jess!" the captain of the Fourth Form at Morcove fairly shouted, standing at the open french-windows of the Munros' drawing-room.

"Girls—quick! Look!"

The excited appeal had hardly been voiced before they were all there at the window: Polly and Paula, and Midge and Tess, and all the rest, including little Naomer, crushing together as they greeted lonely Jess Lingard with affectionate cries and wild waves of the hand.

"Oh, Jess, we have been longing to see you! You are coming in, aren't you?"

If Jess had not been coming in they would have dragged her into the house, that is certain.

Another instant, and the pompous footman at the hall door was looking somewhat scandalised as Betty and Co. swarmed out by the front door and down the steps, to surround Jess on the pavement.

Then, what a babel of eager questions, to upset the orderly silence of that select quarter of London.

"Jess darling, how is your mother?"

"Yes, Jess, how is she? Have you just come from the hos—"

"Bai Jove, Jess deah! Pway welieve our gweat anxiety!"

"Ello, present! Keep a smile, Jess! I love you! We all love you!" was Naomer's quaint way of voicing her sympathy with the day girl.

Meantime, one girl who had not troubled to rush out with the rest was taking her stand at the window. She was alone in the drawing-room, but another instant found her being joined by Stella Munro.

"I say, Stella darling," Audrey exclaimed lightly. "Do you see who is out there? That poor relation



**BARE-FACED ROBBERY!** All in a flash the monkey's brown arm snatched Paula Cree's treasured bag out of her hand. "My gwacious!" cried Paula. "How dare you!"

of yours; the sweet child, bless her, who squeezed into Morcove on a scholarship!"

Stella came quickly to the window, showing no amusement at Audrey's talk, although Audrey herself was chuckling.

"She has got back then from her visit to the hospital," Stella said in a whisper. "I'm sorry—"

"My dear Stella, whatever is there to be sorry about now? You do make a slogan of those words—'I'm sorry,' all day long!"

"Sh," Stella entreated, with a gesture. "Oh, Audrey, don't let my mother hear—"

"Why, as if I would be so stupid!"

"I—we—we all want to be kind to Jess now, don't we?" Stella suggested earnestly. "She is in such trouble, isn't she?"

"Well, yes," allowed Audrey, turning away from the window; "but lucky to have rich relations like you and your people to come to the rescue! She is staying in the house, of course; I remember your telling me—"

"I wrote to mother and father about her, and they did the kind thing," Stella said huskily.

It was strange that what had been done for her poor relation did not seem to give her any genuine delight; but there was a reason.

"She is staying under this roof, Audrey, whilst her mother is detained in hospital, and I— Oh, I want to be kind to her!"

"My dear Stella, you are perfectly at liberty to make all the fuss you like with her," was the airy answer. "I myself, although you know I have no fancy for girls who once went to a council school—Betty Barton is another of them—shall make a point of being perfectly sweet to your poor relation!"

What a teasing, offensive "sweetness" Audrey's was, however, when she had what was a chance to show genuine sympathy, half an hour later.

If Betty and the others had been on hand, this supercilious girl would never have dared to make such sport of Jess. But the chums had followed Miss Redgrave into the spacious music-room of the house, which Mrs. Munro had remarked would be an excellent place for the girls to use for their part-singing, prior to the great inter-school contest.

"What have they been doing to you up here in London, Jess?" Audrey asked with false sweetness. "Did a policeman take you up for being without visible means of subsistence, before you found quarters here?"

"Everybody was very kind," Jess answered simply. She detected the mocking tone in Audrey's voice, but was not going to fall out with her, since they were both guests at the same house.

"Plenty of newspaper reporters calling to interview you, no doubt?" Audrey teased on. "Whole columns in the evening papers about your mother's accident? Your poor, dear mother! Getting knocked down by that cab was most unfortunate."

Jess went very white in the face, but still held her indignation in check.

"And then that sad business about the shop in Barncombe," pursued Audrey. "It is quite true, is it, that even the turnover in shag and liquorice-sticks has resulted in a heavy loss?"

"I will tell you the exact position," Jess said in a steely tone, "and then you will see just what a huge joke it is. The shop and our little home are to be sold up. My mother got into the hands of moneylenders. Very funny, isn't it? Why don't you laugh outright? I am sure you want to!"

"No, I am very sorry," Audrey said, suddenly putting on a mock-sympathetic air. "Very sad, when people like your mother go raising money that they can never hope to pay back!"

"My mother raised money from what she thought was an honest firm, and in an honest way, at a time when poor father was on his deathbed," Jess allowed herself to say quietly. "The illness had run away with every penny. If you think it was a criminal thing to do, I don't, and neither do others who know the circumstances!"

Then she turned and quitted the room quickly, really unable to stand Audrey's heartless attitude any longer.

She had been given her own little bed-room high up in the lofty London mansion, and she was going quickly up the stairs to be alone, when someone came out of a side passage on the first floor and called her by her name:

"Jess!"

It was Stella, and the now penniless day girl of Morcove School faced her with a changed expression. All the bitterness and anguish caused by Audrey's cruel twitting fled from Jess' face, and she looked nothing but glad.

"Oh, Stella, at last—at last I've got a chance to—to thank you properly!" she gulped out emotionally. "You have been so good and kind to me!"

And in the fervour of her gratitude, she caught Stella by her hands and pressed them.

"You are all right for the present, are you?" Stella asked lamely. "I mean—"

"Yes, Stella, and I feel it is all thanks to you! When I rushed off to London, that day, because I had heard that mother had met with an accident and was in hospital, I had no idea how I was going to manage for myself. But you wrote to your parents at once, and they caught me during one of the visits to the hospital, and so—and so—"

She fetched a deep breath. "This beautiful house of yours has been like a home to me ever since!" she exclaimed enrapturedly. "It was good of you, Stella!"

"It was the least I could do," answered that girl; and again she seemed to derive no pleasure whatever from what appeared to be a kind action done towards the poor relation. "Which is your room?"

Jess said with sudden gaiety: "Oh, you must come and see! Such a dear room it is! Two floors higher up. Will you come now?"

She was in advance of Stella all the way, that girl making the ascent of the stairs with a dejected step that matched her dejected looks.

The second floor was not quite so grand as the first, of course, and the third floor was yet plainer than the second.

Jess, in fact, had been put in a part of the commodious house that was very, very close to the servants' quarters.

Stella stepped in after Jess, to find her standing there with a look that said: "Now, isn't this beautiful?"

It was clean and comfortable, needless to say; but it was worlds different from the rooms that had been allotted to the other girls from Morcove. And suddenly Stella looked more unhappy than ever.

"Well, I suppose you are satisfied, Jess—"

"Satisfied, Stella! Oh, just as if I could be anything else!"

"But we—we are so well-off," Stella had to exclaim, "and you are a relation. I—I would like you to have—"

Jess interrupted with a laugh of pure delight. "Now, Stella dear," she entreated, "don't you go to the other extreme with me! When I first came to Morcove as a day girl, and found that you were there, I was quite content to know that you were ready to be nice to me. I admit it hurt me, when you seemed to turn against me altogether, although even then I could understand it wasn't very pleasant for you to have a poor relation always round your feet! But, lately, you have atoned for everything!"

Atoned for everything!

What a stab at the heart those words were for Stella Munro!

For she knew that she would never atone for everything, until she had told her parents—told all the world—that the ruined widow and her devoted daughter were entitled to more than half the wealth which they, the Munro family, were enjoying to-day!

In for Some Fun.

THE girls of Morcove were out early next morning, expecting to be occupied all day with the important event that had brought them to London.

But, when they and Miss Redgrave presented themselves at the famous concert-hall where the great singing contest was to be held, they had what was a rather pleasant surprise.

Miss Redgrave was called upon to comply with certain formalities connected with the girls' entry for the contest; but after that, Betty and Co. heard with delight that they need not remain at the hall.

It appeared that they would not be called upon to do their "bit," for the glory of Morcove and the honour of the Form, until the day after to-morrow.

"Oh, I say—hooray!" Polly Linton exploded jubilantly, as soon as they were clear of the building. "That gives up a couple of days in London for sightseeing!"

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, geals—"

"The Zoo—the Tower of London—the National Gallery—every jolly thing there is!" Polly rattled on. Naomer darling."

"Elo, present!" cried that dusky little maiden, saluting the madcap, much to the amusement of passers-by.

"How would you like to go to the Zoo, and see real live camels from your own native Africa?"

Naomer said: "Ooo!" There was, however, a sudden lapse in Paula Creel's spirits, as she heard camels mentioned.

"Ah, deah," Paula murmured to Madge. "I didt trust that nevah again, bai Jove, would I have the pwoofund distwess of weneewing my acquaintance with that clumsy cweature. The camel, Madge—"

"Yes, deah; but let's keep up with the others, or we'll lose them!"

"The camel, Madge deah," sighed Paula, falling into step with her patient listener, "is a disagweeable cweature! Howevah, it will pwoably be a great pleasure to Naomer to go to the Zoo, so I am quite willing."

Of course, when the girls got to the Zoo—Miss Redgrave having assented with delight to the suggestion—Paula was soon enjoying herself tremendously.

Audrey and Stella did not look particularly happy. To Audrey it was a sheer waste of time roaming through the great gardens to look at the animals. Stella, for her part, needed something far more exciting than a visit to the Zoo to take her mind off the thing that was worrying her—the secret Thing that was upon her conscience day and night.

The chums of the Form, however, simply revelled in this unexpected treat.

It was a grand summer's day, and the gardens were not too crowded, and they drifted from cage to cage and house to house with unflagging delight.

As for Naomer, every time she stopped in front of a cage, she clapped her hands and did a caper, such a thrilling experience it was for her to see all the world's wild animals for the first time.

And then suddenly Paula was heard to give a rather dismal groan, as she saw a camel ambling towards them along the path, giving some children a ride.

There was no holding in Naomer! With a lightning rush she ran up to the sulky beast of the desert, crying out to him in the native language,

whilst she reached up her hands to caress the far from handsome head.

The keeper laughed, and so did the crowd which instantly gathered round. But Audrey held aloof, her head tilted high in disdain.

"Oh, Stella, how much longer are we to endure this?" exclaimed her majesty, the queen of the Form, disgustedly. "Did we come to London to be dragged about like a council-school treat? Bah, what nonsense it is!"

"We are going on to the Tower of London after lunch," Stella said meekly.

"The Tower—ugh," grimaced Audrey. "If there's anything worse than the Zoo, it's the Tower!"

And even these caustic remarks only half expressed the impatience she was feeling.

They all had a nice lunch served to them presently, at the restaurant near the Mappin terrace; but Audrey was thinking of the lunch they might have had at a West End restaurant—and a matinee afterwards? She and Stella, by themselves—that would have been something like a treat!

"We haven't been to the elephant house," Miss Redgrave remarked, as they came away from the tables. Whereupon Naomer, at the risk of getting indigestion, did another caper.

"Ooo, I want to see the evvylents! Ooo, we must see the evvylents!"

"Yes, wather," beamed Paula. "My wecollection of the elephant, Naomer, is that he is a docile cweature! A fwiently chap, don't you know! I weal wecollect being given a wide on an elephant—"

"Ooo, come on!" Naomer, the eager, panted, taking not the least notice of Paula. Paula, however, amiably continued her edifying lecture to the girl from Africa.

"I wather imagine, Naomer darling, you will pwefer the elephant to the camel. There is something about the camel I do not like. He has a hump. Yes, wather! And he gives me the hump, too!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Polly, who chanced to be listening.

And so to the elephants they went.

"And now, the monkey house!" Polly suggested gaily.

"Ooo, yes! I love ze monkey!"

"Oh, look, Paula!" Polly exclaimed on arriving at the monkey house. "There's one that has got a mirror for a plaything! Look at him looking at himself, just as you do, you know!"

As a matter of fact, Paula was just then taking out her own tiny pocket-mirror, and began to finger her hair to rights. Polly tugged at her, wanting her to stand closer and watch the amusing antics of the little brown rascals in their great cage.

"Do look, Paula dear!"

"I'm looking, Polly," murmured Paula dreamily, looking in her mirror. "Bai Jove, what a fright!"

"Which one do you mean?" asked Polly. "I think they are all darlings!"

There was one grinning rascal who came close to the bars at this instant, with the most innocent air of merely wanting to shake hands with Polly.

All in a flash, his brown arm was through the bars, and he had snatched Paula's treasured vanity case out of her hand.

Up the wires of the cage he raced with it, whilst the girls' shrieks of laughter drew other sightseers swarming to the spot.

"Ha, ha, ha! Oh, look at him!"

"The wascall!" wailed poor Paula. "Weally,



**A MEAN ULTIMATUM!** "Stella," breathed Audrey, "the day your cousin, Jess Lingard, comes to Morcove as a boarder I'm done with you!"

goals, the depwavity of these cweatures is simply dweadful!"

"Ha, ha ha! He's trying to eat it!" Polly chuckled on, packed in amongst a crowd of at least fifty people.

On the edge of that crowd stood Audrey, with Stella moodily beside her.

The daring girl suddenly observed that Miss Redgrave and the others were hemmed about with a host of mirthful people, and just as suddenly she plucked Stella by the sleeve.

"Come on!"

"What do you mean, Audrey? Come where?"

"Out of this, quick!" was Audrey's excited whisper. "Give them the slip, and go off on our own—now!"

And next moment it was done!

#### On Their Own.

**W**HEN the curtain came down at the end of the first act at the Majestic Theatre, that afternoon, Audrey turned to speak to Stella in a vivacious manner.

"How do you like it, Stella? Isn't this better than being fagged about like a common school-treat? The Zoo—bah, I can see enough monkeys any day, at Morcove! But this—is jolly."

They were in one of the first-tier boxes, for the theatre attendants had been putting out "House Full" boards by the time the errant schoolgirls turned up at the box-office.

Not a seat anywhere, the ticket man had said, unless they would take a box at two guineas? And Audrey, as cool as a cucumber, had promptly put down the money!

Now, whilst the orchestra played through the interval, she chatted away to Stella, at the same time watching the sea of faces in stalls and pit,

and the vast ranks of people who packed the circle-seats and gallery.

There must have been plenty of folk who felt astonished to see two mere schoolgirls enjoying a box to themselves; but Audrey Blain did not mind creating a sensation. She only talked and smiled away more than ever, feeling sure that people must be thinking what a brilliant, beautiful girl she was!

Stella, however, sat well back from the rounded front of the box, with its broad ledge on which there reposed a dainty sachet of chocolates. She had come to see the play, not to be seen by the audience.

"Have one—and cheer up, darling!" Audrey purred, pushing the costly sweets towards her fellow miscreant. "I thought you were going to give yourself up properly to an absolute picnic, you needed such a little persuasion! But I am afraid your conscience is troubling you!"

It was, and not merely over this stolen pleasure, either.

Stella had joined Audrey in the breathless rush to the theatre with the feeling that the play would help her to forget, for a few hours at least, the act of restitution which she owed Jess and her mother, and which she could not bring herself to perform.

Even the play, however, seemed to speak to her of the wickedness of what she had done last week, when she burnt a certain letter after reading it.

It was a play of good and bad characters, yet the villain of the piece had done nothing, so far, half so bad as she had done when she burnt that paper. She knew it, and shame was overwhelming her again.

And so it was to be during the remainder of the performance. During the comic parts, when the whole house was roaring with laughter, only the ghost of a smile flickered at Stella's lips. At the very end, when retribution was coming upon the unmasked villain, she shuddered to think of the retribution that might yet come upon her own guilty self.

"I can't go on like this—oh, I can't!" she was thinking miserably to herself, whilst Audrey prattled away at her on the way out of the theatre.

Not a hundred yards along the teeming pavements Audrey drew her into a grand teashop, where all was a babel of after-theatre talk, the clatter of china, and the thrumming of a string band. Audrey saucily gave orders to the waitress, and saucily poured out when the tea was brought. Stella was thinking:

"I must do more than I have done, so far, for poor Jess and her mother. Oh, it makes me so miserable to think that—"

"Your tea, darling!" exclaimed Audrey, reveling in the admiration she was getting, as she queened it at the little table. "Oh, to be done with Morcove, and to have this every day!" she added, sending an enchanted look all over the great room.

"Of course," she laughed on presently, "if ever Miss Redgrave gets to know about this there will be an R O W! But it isn't like going off on one's own at Morcove. London is such a huge place, and—"

"Audrey!—Stella! So here you are!" spoke a voice behind Audrey's back, and that girl set down her cup with a crash, whilst Stella, on the opposite side of the table, sat upright, staring in horror.

Miss Redgrave!

Here she was, with Betty and Co. forming a sort of crocodile behind her, in the thronged tea-room!

Even now, such was the audacity of Audrey, she kept her nerve.

"Oh, there you are!" she exclaimed merrily, looking round. "Whatever became of you in the monk—"

"Stand up when you speak to your mistress, Audrey," Miss Redgrave said sternly. "You forget yourself!"

"Sorry, and all that," Audrey smiled, rising with such dignity that she still retained other people's admiring glances.

"Now explain," Miss Redgrave said quietly. "Where have you been?"

"But, dear Miss Redgrave," cooed Audrey, "Stella and I might almost ask the same question! We lost you at the Zoo! We knew it was no use looking for you, so we gave you up!"

"I am asking you, where have you been?"

"Well, we have looked at some shops," Audrey answered sweetly. "And—excuse me, but the girls behind you are blocking the way for the waitress!"

Miss Redgrave looked nettled.

She moved round, so as to enable the girls to get out of the way of other people, and after this manœuvring the mistress did not resume her talk with Audrey, who resumed her tea with smiling composure.

Audrey, in fact, could afford not to worry. Miss Redgrave might be angry; but Miss Redgrave was almost powerless to take any disciplinary action, since she, Audrey, had had Mrs. Munro's own daughter as a fellow culprit!

How could any mistress make a to-do about an escapade of this sort, when she herself and all the girls were guests at the home of one of the culprits?

Meanwhile, Stella had noticed with intense surprise that Jess Lingard was with the chums. What did this mean?

The answer, when it came, made Stella feel meaner than ever.

"I was round at the hospital this afternoon, Stella," Jess explained, putting herself close to her rich relation as they all left the teashop. "And who should turn up but Miss Redgrave and all the girls—at least, except you and Audrey."

Except Stella and Audrey—yes!

"It was not the proper visiting day, but I can always get let in; the matron in charge of the ward is so sweet," Jess went on earnestly. "But just fancy; Miss Redgrave and all of them were allowed to see mother, and it made her—oh, so happy!"

"Then they didn't go on to the Tower?" Stella faltered.

"No. After the Zoo they all thought it would be nice to try and see mother, even though it was not the visiting day, and so they called at the hospital, and that's how I fell in with them!"

Stella felt the dagger going to her heart again. To think of Betty and Co. doing a kind thing of that sort, instead of being all for the pleasures that London offered; whilst she and Audrey—

"I'm sorry," Stella gulped out heavily. "Jess, if I had known there was a chance of being admitted to the ward, I'd have turned up there."

A lie! And after it had been spoken, she felt she must wipe her lips.

Oh, was she never going to get right with herself, and right with Jess, was her miserable thought. And her conscience answered her.

Never, until she had done the right thing—told her father that she had found, and in a panicky moment had destroyed, evidence which proved the widow and her daughter to be entitled to all the

wealth which had come to him as a windfall, twelve months ago!

#### Doing Her Best for Jess.

LATE that evening, as Mr. Harvey Munro was by himself in his favourite snuggery of the town house, enjoying a good cigar, the door softly opened and Stella stood revealed.

"Father—"

"Well, my dear?"

"May I—I speak with you for a few moments?"

The nervous girl was nervous even with her own father. Yet he was not a forbidding sort of man. Pretty hard and worldly he might be at his office in the city; but no one could say that he was a bear in his own home. Towards this only daughter of his he was especially indulgent.

"Why, of course; I am glad to find you coming to me for a little chat," he smiled, flicking his cigar ash into the fireplace. "It has been an unexpected treat, Stella, having you home for a few days during term-time!"

He added, whilst Stella closed the door and came slowly across to him:

"Your mother and I—we enjoy having all the girls, too. They seem a nice lot altogether, and I guess you are great pals with them? I can't imagine my girl failing to be popular!"

There was a moment's silence, except that some music came faintly from the drawing-room. The other girls were there, and Mrs. Munro had persuaded Madgo to play.

"It is about Jess, father," Stella began, standing nervously before him. "I—I have been anxious to know; are they really ruined, Jess and her mother?"

"Not a penny to lay their hands on, my dear," was the airy answer. "The moneylenders are



**EXIT AUDREY!** Despite her struggles, Audrey was thrust into the passage by the justly incensed Betty, and the door shut on her—slam!



going to take everything—the shop, the home, every stick!"

"I'm sorry—"

"Why, so'm I," he said, drawing at his cigar. "It is a bad business, but can't be helped. You mustn't let it worry you, though. Your mother and I—we shall do something for them!"

And he blew a satisfied puff of smoke towards the electric-light.

In an ill-at-ease fashion Stella took a turn about the room then faced him again.

"What are you going to do for them, father, may I ask?"

"Ah, now, well!" he replied, hardening a little out of sheer habit, as he was called upon to discuss absolute terms. "What do you think we ought to do? This is the position. The Lingards are only distant relations. You call the mother your auntie, and you call Jess your cousin; but that's only to be sort of nice, isn't it? They are distant relations. Not only that; they were sort of estranged from us for many years, weren't they?"

"But, father—"

"Oh, I know," he exclaimed, waving his cigar airily. "Let bygones be bygones! We are not going to be uncharitable, Stella! They are in a bad way, no mistake, and of course, we can well afford to help them."

"Yes, father—"

"Especially now we've got all that South American money!" he pursued contentedly. "So, if you want to know, Stella, I propose to set the mother up with a new shop; give her a good start! When she is quite recovered from her injuries, that is to say. She'll have to rest quiet for a month or two, and that will cost me a trifle, you know."

"And—and Jess, father?"

"Ah, Jess now!" He got up, pulling down his waistcoat. "Jess, I think, should go into the business with her mother. The wisest thing—quite the best, all things considered! Something for her to come in for, later on in life."

Stella took a moment to steady her breathing.

"Father, there's one thing I—I want to say. Jess is very keen on learning. She—"

"Yes, she must be a smart girl at the school work, ever to have won that scholarship at the council school?" he agreed. "But that scholarship doesn't pay for her boarding at Morcove, Stella. It only covers the tuition, mind you!"

"But you—"

"You think I might stretch a point, and pay for her boarding at Morcove?" he said, with a rather wry smile. "Another couple of hundred a year, that means, all told."

Again there was a pause, and now there came the sweet voice of a girl singing in the drawing-room.

"That's a pretty song," the father commented softly, after listening for a minute. "Who would that be, Stella, my girl?"

"I think it must be Jess, father."

"Jess? Then she sings well, my dear!"

"Jess does everything well, I fancy," said the girl whose conscience was troubling her. "That's why—at least, it is partly why—oh, father! Couldn't Jess stay on at Morcove as a boarder, until her education is finished? It—it seems so hard that she should have to leave!"

He threw away his cigar.

"If you think it is going to be hard—mean of your old father not to add that help to all the rest," he said indulgently, "then I'll give in, Stella! Another couple of hundred a year; but I'll foot the bill cheerfully enough, if it is only to please you!"

And now he laid a hand caressingly upon Stella's shoulder.

"I'm to take it that you want me to do that for Jess, eh?" he talked on. "Do the really handsome thing—"

"Oh, father, if—if you can really—afford it!"

"Afford it! Of course I can! We'd be in a far different position, if we hadn't had that South American money. I may as well tell you, Stella, it came at the right time. I had had some nasty losses. But we are in clover now, and I don't mind what I do to indulge my daughter's generous regard for less lucky ones."

"Thank you, father. You—"

"Only, there is one point, my dear," he interrupted her, with sudden gravity. "Are you quite sure that you won't be sorry by-and-by that you asked me to keep Jess at that school?"

She asked, with raised brows:

"Why, father?"

"Well, for this reason," was the answer. "I am sorry for Mrs. Lingard, and I want to help her. But that doesn't mean I want to have her living next door to me—always under my eyes, so to speak. Will you, then, always want to have Jess—who, mind you, will still be in such a different position from your own—always hanging around you?"

Stella drooped her head suddenly, and only too well the matter-of-fact father saw how he must have touched a point that troubled her.

"Yes, it is worth thinking about," he pursued.

"Take a bit of time, my dear. Never let impulses sweep you right off your feet. No use being generous, and then regretting it. Begin as you mean to go on. Some people would say I am teaching you to be hard; I know I'm just teaching you to be shrewd!"

"Still, father, I think—I think I'd like Jess to stay at Morcove. I—I feel it is only fair to her—"

At that instant a burst of handclaps came from the drawing-room. It marked the finish of Jess' little song; but to Stella it seemed, for the instant, as if she was being applauded for what she had just said.

Then all the self-satisfaction died away in her breast.

Even if she got Jess' schooling paid for by her father, what a mere drop in the ocean that "generosity" would be! Charity for the girl, whilst she was being denied—justice!

The guilty-minded girl was very white in the face as her father closed the quiet talk by tapping her affectionately upon the shoulders again, saying:

"Think it over, Stella! What you would like to do does credit to your kind instincts; but whether you ought to do it is another matter. Think it over."

"Very well, father," she said, rather drearily, and crossed towards the door in a flustered manner.

Almost before she had got outside the room, however, she felt inclined to turn round and give her decision. Jess must continue at school—she must! It would break her heart to have her schooling cut short; to grow up only half educated!

Stella did not turn back to say this to her father, but she was suddenly resolved to say it in the morning. Yes, she would do that for Jess, at any rate, get her schooling paid for.

She entered the drawing-room, and in a moment Jess was with her, asking in her shy, affectionate tone:

"Where have you been, Stella? We missed you."

"I—I've been with my father, talking about you. I—I don't want you to have to leave Morcove."

Stella's flustered answer had a special meaning for Jess.

"You have been suggesting he should pay for my schooling, I do believe!" she guessed. "Getting your father to promise to do more and more for me—as if he and your mother had not done quite enough already! Oh, Stella," Jess added, with a sudden shining in her eyes, "how good you are to me, these days!"

Stella had only just sat down. She now got up again restlessly, saying, "I'm rather tired—good-night, all!"

And next moment she was gone.

#### Audrey Breaks Out.

IT was an hour later when the other girls went up to their bed-rooms, and by that time Betty and Co. were full of yawns.

Not so Audrey.

After a cold good-night to the Form-captain and the rest, Audrey was suddenly seized with a desire to have some sport with Betty and Co. She, Audrey, was not in the mood for bed yet awhile. Her idea was that, being in London, they all ought to be keeping it up until one in the morning!

So she turned back to a certain bed-room door and minced into that handsome guest-chamber, where Betty, Polly, and Paula were being accommodated.

"Oh—er—I have taken the liberty of looking in," Audrey said, with mock sweetness, "to know what the programme is for to-morrow!"

"How should we know?" Betty retorted curtly. She could tell at once that Audrey was in one of her goading moods.

"I thought perhaps Miss Redgrave would have consulted with our worthy captain as to what would be a suitable treat for all of us. Something quite harmless, of course! Battersea Park, and a glass of milk and a bun!"

"Oh, go away, Audrey," Polly exclaimed. "You can't complain for the lack of amusement anyhow. You know you went to a theatre this afternoon, you and Stella!"

"That isn't to say I don't want to go to another—and shall, quite likely," Audrey said recklessly. "So you found out, did you? How very clever!"

"If you knew how you very nearly gave yourself away to Miss Redgrave," Betty said disgustedly, "you would soon get your spirit up. You were lucky for you that Miss Redgrave didn't see what we saw, when we joined you in the teashop; part of a ticket for the Majestic Theatre—you pulled it out with your handkerchief."

"Really? I must be more careful!" Audrey laughed lightly.

"Bai Jove, Audrey, you ought to be thoroughly ashamed of yourself, don't you know!" Paula feared her scornfully. "One of these days you will get yourself expelled!"

"A great day for Betty, that," Audrey remarked, still keeping her mocking eyes upon the Form captain. "How she will rejoice!"

"Have you come here to pick a quarrel?" Betty asked calmly.

"Ooo, noo!" said Audrey. "I just felt in the mood to pay my respects to the worthy capt—"

"You hateful girl—clear out!" Betty exploded, taking a stride towards her inveterate enemy.

"Steady," Audrey responded. "I never do take orders from you Betty, even when we are at school! At present we are in London, and so—"

She finished by taking out a cigarette-case, selecting a cigarette, and putting it between her lips.

"You dare light that in this room!" Betty said, quivering from head to foot. "Polly—Paula, don't speak. I'll deal with her!"

Audrey put the cigarette-case away, and took out some matches.

"You have simply asked me to show you plainly, Betty, I don't care a fig for you and your precious authority," she said, striking a match. "Report away! I really don't care a hang if I get expelled or not! But I warn you, Betty, if—"

There was a sudden flick—a lightning motion of Betty's hand, snatching the cigarette from Audrey's lips.

Then Audrey did what she had been spoiling for the excuse to do for many a day now.

She struck at Betty with her open hand—dealt that girl a smart slap across one cheek.

"Audrey! Audrey!" gasped Polly and Paula in shocked tones. "Oh—"

"Well, she shouldn't be so bossy! That's been owing to her a long while! She will get another, if—Betty, stop! Oh, you cat!" hissed the self-styled queen of the Form, as the captain took hold of her. "Take your hands off me!"

Betty, instead, hustled the detestable girl towards the door. There was a scuffle, with Audrey looking like a fury now. This was happening in front of Polly and Paula—this sudden humiliation at the hands of the hated captain!

She struggled and hit out wildly. No use!

Ignominiously she was swung to the door, which Betty managed to open without relinquishing her hold of the girl. And ignominiously Audrey was propelled into the corridor, the door closing instantly with a spirited—

Slam!

The sudden commotion had been heard by the occupants of adjoining rooms, and other doors instantly opened.

"Elo, present!" came roguishly from Naomer, as she peered forth along with Madge, Tess, and the rest. "Keep a smile!"

Rather an apt remark to make to Audrey, in her present discomfited state! If looks could kill, she would have slain Naomer and all of them.

She threw up her head and stepped along to the room she was sharing with Stella Munro, glad to reflect that that girl had gone up to bed an hour ago, and was probably asleep by now.

But Audrey was out in her reckoning there.

To her amazement, she found Stella sitting about in the lavish bedroom, still fully dressed.

"Hello!" Audrey exclaimed, trying to look sweet-tempered. "I didn't expect this. What are you moping about?"

"What have you been doing, to get so ruffled?" returned Stella gloomily.

"If you want to know," was the answer. "I have just given the Form captain a smack in the face—a real smack, yes!"

"Whatever for—?"

"What for? I don't know, except that I hate her!" Audrey suddenly blazed out, a malignant look in her handsome eyes.

Stella stood up in a frightened way. She could only stare aghast at her passionate friend, as that girl started undressing as if she would tear her clothes to pieces.

Then all at once Audrey controlled her rage, and swung about with a catchy little laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha! What a stupid you must think me to be, to get in such a paddy over Betty! Now, Stella, what's your trouble? Tell me. And have one of these to soothe you."

But Stella, as the cigarettes were offered, declined with a shake of the head.

"Well, I suppose I may?" Audrey smiled. "I always do at home. You've been sitting here for a whole hour, moping. What about?"

"Audrey, I'm sorry—"

"Needless to say! But you do say it, of course! Well, what is it this time, Humpty?"

Audrey was now suddenly in one of those playful, fascinating moods which made her different in Stella's eyes to all other girls.

"The fact is, Audrey," said the daughter of the house heavily, "I have been thinking a good deal about Jess. I—I have come to the conclusion that it is the least we can do—my people, I mean—to pay for her schooling at Morcove."

"So—"

"So I am getting my father to do that, Audrey. He will if I ask him. He was quite willing, this evening, only he advised me to think it over."

"And having thought it over," Audrey rejoined with smiling sarcasm, "you have come to the conclusion that Jess, as a boarding scholar, will be a great acquisition? A friend for you, the sweet child, bless her! Tell me, Stella darling, do you propose to have her in our study at Morcove?"

"I—I—"

"Because, if so, let me order a broom, to sweep up the dropped aitches with. They always do drop their aitches, these council school scholarship prodigies!"

"Oh, Audrey—"

"It will be so nice having her sit down to tea at our table. 'Ere! Shove over the marmalade, one on yer! Fanks!" Audrey said, putting on the most awful voice. "I 'ad a letter from muvver to-day. She's got a job taking in washing, muvver 'as!"

Stella forced a laugh.

"How perfectly absurd you are, Audrey. Whenever did you hear Jess drop an aitch? Considering her upbringing, she's wonderful."

"I am considering her upbringing. Frankly, Stella, I bar—absolutely bar girls from council schools. And I must tell you this," Audrey said, with sudden deadly seriousness, "the day Jess Lingard comes to Morcove as a boarding scholar, I'm done with you!"

"No, no—"

"Yes! I mean it," the queenly girl declared flatly. "It has been bad enough to endure her as a day girl—your poor relation! Stella, what on earth do you want to go getting her boarded at Morcove for? Hasn't she been a big enough nuisance all along?"

Stella sat down in a collapsed way, but started up from the chair in the next instant. She was deathly pale.

"Audrey!" she implored. "I want to be kind to Jess! I must be—"

"Well, be kind! But don't expect me to take up with the kid, because I won't!" The speaker looked at herself in the glass. "It isn't decided yet, Stella?"

"No. But—"

"Then think twice before you do it, that's all!"

Audrey spoke with all the haughty insolence that she knew she could safely adopt towards this fawning friend of hers. Stella could be bullied, and it only made her like you all the more. That was what Audrey had found out weeks ago, and she was going to get her own way by bullying now.

Still smoking the cigarette, she resumed her disrobing for the night. Only when she had put on her nightdress and done her hair did she toss the cigarette away. Then, with a terse but sweet,

"Good-night, Stella," she got into her bed, and coiled down snugly.

All this found Stella till unprepared for bed. In an absent, worried manner she at last disrobed, and was in the act of switching out the light when she paused.

For a few moments she gazed at Audrey, then crossed to her bedside.

"Audrey—"

"Hello? I was nearly asleep!"

"Audrey dear, you—you didn't really mean that? You won't really drop me if Jess comes to Morcove as a boarder?"

"Won't I! You'll lose me as a friend, Stella, and then—no more fun for you!"

"But if you knew the reason—"

"Bother the reason! Bother Jess altogether! I shan't mind if I have to break with you, Stella. But I think that you'll be sorry."

"Oh, Audrey, you know I will!" Stella exclaimed half tearfully.

"Then you know what to do—good-night!"

Stella stood a moment longer at that bedside, gazing with a sort of tearful desperation at the girl who was the evil genius of her life. Then, suppressing a sigh, she went to her own bed.

Long after that—long after midnight had been chimed from fifty different London steeples—it seemed to the unhappy girl that she could still hear Audrey's last words echoing loudly:

"You know what to do!"

And so she did—or rather, she knew what she ought to do. But what exactly she would do when morning should have come again, was more than Stella Munro had been able to decide before she fell to sleep in the small hours, simply worn out with worry.

#### The Chums to the Rescue.

JESS LINGARD, in her plain little bedroom high up in the Munro mansion, was suddenly wide awake after a sound night's sleep.

Through the open window came the rumble of London's traffic. What a jolly morning, with the curtains blowing about in the breeze, and the strong sunshine making little thrusts and dashes into the bed-room!

"Well, I must get up," was Jess' prompt decision. "And I wonder what sort of a night darling mumsie has had? She really was much better yesterday, and so— Yes, come in!"

Morcove's penniless day girl voiced that cry in a rather startled way, as a tap came at the door.

She could hear a teacup rattling on a tray, and—gracious, was someone actually bringing her an early morning cup?

Then the door opened, and into the room sailed Naomer Nakara, in the prettiest of dressing-gowns.

"Ello, present!" she cried gaily, floating across the room with the small teatray. "Keep a smile!"

"Naomer! Oh, good morning, Naomer, but—what—who—"

"It is for you!" said Naomer gleefully. "The maid, she brings us all a cup of tea. Then we wonder, is there one for Jess up the stairs? Then I say, go see! And here, I am, and I love you!" wound up Naomer, managing to kiss Jess without upsetting the tray.

Jess was delighted. At the same time, she felt slightly embarrassed.

From what Naomer had said, it was apparent that the girls downstairs had suspected they were being treated with more hospitality than she, Jess, was receiving. So they were, Jess knew; but she was not making a grievance of it. Her feeling

was that the Munros had been "simply awfully kind!"

"Now I must go," said Naomer, "because Madge and the others in my room say I am not to stop. They say I must not tell you that we do not like to have the tea, when you have none!"

"Naomer—"

"They say I must not ask Meesis Munro why we have tea and you do not," Naomer prattled on artlessly. "I ask why? And they say, because we are guests! But you are a guest, and you should be the same as us!"

All this did not lessen Jess' embarrassment. It was only after a very awkward silence that she spoke solemnly.

"Naomer, you must go back to Madge and the others in your room, and say it was very kind of them, but I am being well looked after. Mr. and Mrs. Munro had me here at very great inconvenience, and—and—Stella is being awfully kind!"

"But you sleep in a room like this!"

"Never your mind. I call it a lovely room! How could I feel slighted, Naomer, when, do you know,

then the joy of knowing that it meant Stella's being really admired by Betty and Co.

"It may even lead to Stella breaking with Audrey at last—and oh, what a blessing that would be, for her own sake!" Jess said to herself, rushing through her morning toilette. "All along I have seen that Stella, away from Audrey, is a—"

Tap-tap! Now who was that this time?

In a light-hearted manner Jess nipped to the door and whipped it open.

"Oh, come in, Stella! Good-morning! Isn't it a gorgeous day? And I've slept so well!" cried Jess, all before she had time to see how worried and wretched Stella must be.

But in another instant the poor day girl had divined the other's unhappy mood, and was exclaiming in dismay:

"Why, Stella, what's the matter then? You look as if you hadn't slept a wink!"

"I'm sorry, Jess," gulped the guilty-minded girl.

"I'm awfully sorry, Jess, but—"

"Yes, what?"

"I've been thinking things over, Jess, and I—"



**CAUGHT!** "Audrey—Stella!" called out Miss Redgrave. "Where have you girls been?" At the sound of the mistress' voice the guilty pair started in their seats. They were in for it now!

Mr. Munro is actually going to set my poor mother up in business!"

"But—"

"And, do you know, Stella even hinted last night that I shall have my schooling paid for at Morcove, instead of having to leave school and start earning my living! If that isn't being kind, I don't know what is!" Jess finished, meaning every word most emphatically. "So tell all the girls that, dear, and I am sure they will be glad."

Whereupon Naomer scampered away, leaving Jess to drink the tea and then nip out of bed to start dressing, with a great joy beating in her heart.

Knowing the sort of girls Betty and Co. were, she realised that they would be the first to give credit to Stella Munro and her parents for doing the really generous thing by her. They only had to know about it, and they would feel like cheering Stella when they all met at breakfast-time.

So, in Jess' mind, the prospect of staying on at Morcove begat one great joy after another.

The primary joy of being able to finish one's education at a great school like that; then the joy of knowing Stella and her parents were so kind;

don't think you had better stay on at Morcove after all. I mean—oh, Jess, will you mind much, if I don't persuade father to pay for your schooling?"

In a staggered manner, Jess, poor girl, said jerkily:

"Why, of course, Stella, if you'd rather not, after all, then you mustn't. Goodness, I wouldn't like to be a—a burden to you, if that's what you fear!"

"Jess, I'm sorry, but you see—"

"Yes, I think I see," faltered the day girl huskily, whilst she turned aside to hide her stricken face. "All right! Then that's all over! Only, what a pity you gave me that hint last night!"

"It was a pity, Jess. I'm sorry—"

"I am, too, if only because I have told the girls that you and your parents were even going to be as generous as that to me! But they'll understand," Jess hastened to say soothingly to Stella, who was looking horrified. "I'll make them!"

Stella simply backed out of the room after that, and drew the door shut.

She had seen that Jess was not crying, but was doing something even more painful to witness than that—she was heroically not crying. Keeping her

brimming eyes turned away, and biting, ah, so hard, at her underlip.

The girl who had cheated Jess and her widowed mother out of thousands of pounds—doomed them to poverty when they should have been rich—crept away in a shame-stricken fashion.

Awful thing that she had done now, and yet—oh, she had been driven to do it! That threat from Audrey; it had altered everything.

She wanted to be kind to Jess; she wanted to appease her conscience by getting charity for the poor girl who, with her widowed mother, was being denied justice. But more than all this, when it came to the point, she found she still wanted—Audrey!

And so, presently, she would tell her father that she had thought better of that idea that he should pay for Jess' schooling. He, of course, would think none the worse of her for that; he had been rather opposed to the plan, because it seemed like "pampering" paupers. But what would Jess herself think of it all?

Stella suddenly hardened her heart, and made up her mind to keep it hardened against the girl.

After that fresh wave of remorse and shame, her feeling were swinging in the opposite direction. She was glad—glad she had cancelled the idea of having Jess kept at Morcove.

Better to let her drop clean out of that life, and go out into the world to earn her living. Once out of the way, she could be forgotten! At Morcove, her very presence would have been a continual reminder of the wrong that had been done.

"She'll get over the disappointment, too," Stella comforted herself by thinking. "She is trying to do that already."

And that was true enough.

Poor Jess! How bravely she was struggling at this moment to conquer the bitter, cruel disappointment.

The great gladness that had filled her soul this morning—all gone now!

No more hope of continuing at Morcove; of working hard there, to repay the Munros' kindness in finding the money, and to qualify for some career in life. After this, she must be thrown out, only half educated, to start the unequal struggle in the stern battle of life!

Tragically she tried to stem the tears that were flowing fast. Courageously the good girl was calling upon herself to meet the bitter disappointment with a cheerful courage. Generously, too, she was trying to excuse Stella; was reminding herself that in any case the Munros had been awfully kind. Only—

Oh, if she could but have stayed at Morcove just a little while longer, what a difference it would have meant!

Meantime, something that Naomer had told the chums had made those girls hurry through their dressing, with the desire to find Stella and say how delighted they were at the plan she had proposed for Jess' continuance at school.

Coming away from their rooms, they tapped at the door of that room where they expected Stella

to be; but it was Audrey who answered the knock.

"Well?" Audrey asked them curtly.

"Where is Stella?" Betty cried, going straight to the point. "We want to see her at once. There's something we have heard that makes us proud of her."

"Yes, wather! It's a wipping thing she is doing for Jess!"

"Indeed?" Audrey replied dryly, with her tantalising smile.

"You know, of course?" Polly said excitedly. "Stella is getting her father to pay for Jess' schooling at Morcove!"

"Stella is doing nothing of the sort, let me tell you," Audrey answered, with her handsome head thrown up. "Stella told me, only half an hour ago, that she has decided not to have Jess at Morcove."

"Wha-a-at!" cried the chums, all in one breath. "Oh—"

"Bai Jove—"

"Find Stella, and she will tell you," was the airy answer; and then the door closed in their faces.

Betty and Co could not find Stella, however, for the simple reason that she was purposely keeping out of their way. They were still seeking her, when they came to Jess' room, and found that girl alone there.

"We'll ask her what she knows," Betty muttered breathlessly, as they all swarmed into the room. "Jess dear, is it true that you are not going to stay at Morcove after all? Or— Oh, she's been crying!"

"Bai Jove! Jess darling—"

"You poor dear!"

"Then it is true!" Polly almost shouted indignantly. "Stella has changed her mind! Oh, oh, how shameful! how mean!"

"Sh! It is awful," Betty said huskily, "but we are guests in this house, and so—"

"Bai Jove, after this, gials, I'd wather stay anywhere but heah!"

"Hear, hear. Let's all go down and—"

"No, steady," Betty pleaded, although she was just as indignant as the rest. "Jess dear, is it really the case then? The Munros, although they are so rich, will not find the money for you to remain at Morcove?"

"They—they have been awfully kind to me and mother," Jess said, keeping a stiff upper lip. "Perhaps it was expecting too much—"

"They won't pay for your schooling, Jess?"

"No. They—"

"Then we will!" Betty Barton said without an instant's hesitation. "We'll do it somehow! Won't we, girls?"

And Stella, had she been there, would have known that it was as good as settled, when Polly, Paula, Madge—every one of the chums of the Form—gave the hearty answer:

"Yes, yes! We will!"

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove—"

"You will be with us, Jess darling," cried Betty, taking the widow's daughter by the hand, "at Morcove as a boarder!"

(END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.)

(Bravo, Betty and Co. ! They do not intend to see their chum cheated of her rights, and when they say a thing they mean it. Audrey Blain's plotting has gone for nothing and Jess will return to Morcove—but at the expense of her loyal chums! What will Stella think when she hears of this unselfish action? Next week's story, "THE SILVER SHIELD," tells how the Morcove girls farad at the singing tournament, and you are bound to enjoy it. Place your order for next week's issue now.)

