

Commencing  
in this issue:

# "Peg o' the Pansies"

*mobile*  
A Splendid New  
Series of Girl  
:: Guide Stories ::

# The Schoolgirl's Own



# 2<sup>nd</sup>

**HOW THE PRIZE WAS  
"LOST"!** A dramatic incident  
from the new long  
complete story of Morcove School  
contained in this issue.

A splendid yarn of the most popular schoolgirls in the world!



# THE SILVER SHIELD

A magnificent new long complete tale of the girls of Morcove School, telling of how they won the silver shield for singing and of the spiteful trick Audrey Blain played upon plucky Jess Lingard.

By MARJORIE STANTON.

For the Honour of Morcove.

"HARK! Oh, those girls are singing beautifully!"

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove—"

"I wonder what school they come from?"

"It doesn't matter who they are, or where they come from! We Morcove girls are whacked!"

The last speaker was Polly Linton, the madcap of the Fourth Form at Morcove School. The tone in which she spoke showed that she was more or less in jest—as Polly always was!

"Well, cheer up," she rattled on to her chums. "Even if we don't go home with the silver shield, we shall have had some fun out of the trip to London!"

"Yes, wather!"

After that simpering remark in hearty agreement from Paula Creel, the talk lapsed. For these girls—numbering about ten—as they sat along two forms in an ante-room of the great London concert hall, were anxious to hear the singing that was taking place on the fine stage in front of a vast audience.

Dearly would the chums of Morcove School have liked to be amongst the audience, instead of cooped up in this rather bare waiting-room.

But, as they themselves were entered for the great inter-school contest, which included some sight-singing, they had to be on hand behind the scenes, as it were, waiting for their "call."

The party of girls at present doing their very best for whatever school it was they represented, were certainly "in the running" for the coveted silver shield.

Even at this distance from the stage, with closed doors and crowded passages intervening, there was a fine quality about these voices perfectly distinguishable to Betty Barton and Co.

"What do you say, Madge darling?" Betty turned to whisper to Madge Minden, the musician of the Fourth Form. "Your opinion is the one that counts on matters musical!"

It was characteristic of Madge to give a subdued answer.

"I think they are as near perfect as can be," she said impartially. "If we beat them—well, we'll be able to pat ourselves on the back."

"Hi!" grinned Polly. "But never say die! Morcove for ever!"

"Yes, wather!"

"Keep a smile!"

That last quaint remark was Naomer Nakara's way of saying "Keep smiling!"

Naomer was a certain dusky damsel from a sultan's palace in North Africa. She was not taking part in the singing contest, but had come to London with the Morcove contingent so that she, a newcomer to the shores of Britain, might "see the sights."

"Bravo! Bravo!" echoed Polly softly, as they all heard a storm of applause mark the finish of the other school's effort. "Give 'em a cheer, girls!"

At this instant the room door opened, and a young lady came in, making a sign which the girls instantly understood.

"Our turn, Miss Redgrave? Oh, goodness!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Yes, girls; you have to go on now. And, oh, I am sure you will do your best for the old school," said the mistress under whose charge they had come to London for the contest.

She added quickly, whilst the girls stood up and formed into line:

"Don't be nervous, mind! It's a huge audience, but don't let that frighten you. The singing at sight is awfully stiff—all the others are saying it is too bad! But it's the same for all," she wound up cheerily.

"Yes, wather! Howeevah," palpitated Paula Creel, fiddling her hair to rights, "I twest I look pwsentable? Gwreat Scot, I feel all my bweath going from me!"

There was no more talk after that, for in a moment or so the Morcove girls were taking their places upon the great platform, with a sort of blurred vision of the vast audience which filled the auditorium.

Beyond the glare of the footlights they could see whole seas of faces, whilst the air hummed with talk and the rustle of programmes went on.

Miss Redgrave was moving quickly amongst the girls, getting them into position, and needless to say they did everything with alacrity.

The unpardonable thing for a choir to do is to take a long time settling down. But Betty

Barton and Co. had been carefully instructed, and all at once the audience was delighted to find that the girls were ready to start, and so the rustle of programmes and buzz of voices subsided.

A printed number had been put up, and by referring to the programme a newcomer would have found that this was the inter-school contest inaugurated for girls under sixteen, for a silver shield given by Lady Lundy. Betty and Co. were the fifteenth contingent to appear, and were the last of all the entrants.

Tap-tap! went the baton, amidst the sudden profound silence. And then, with a sudden spirited wave of the wooden wand, Miss Redgrave started the girls upon an item of their own selection.

Each choir had to give two such items, as examples of their singing, and then there was the heart-rending "test," at the hands of a professional conductor.

The song learned so carefully and practised so often at Morcove went off with a fine swinging heartiness, with the girls faithfully keeping their eyes upon Miss Redgrave's baton. And yet the odd thing was that Betty and Polly, and almost all the rest of them, afterwards said that they were sure they were looking at the audience all the time! Gaping at them stupidly!

It was only their imagination, of course. There never could have been the applause there was for the Morcove girls, if they had not made a complete success of that first item.

"Bravo, bravo! Bravo-o-o!" went up the prolonged cry, accompanied by a tornado of hand-claps, whilst the mistress modestly bowed on behalf of the girls, who were gasping for breath.

"Not so dusty, evidently!" Eolly had the sauce to comment in a whisper. "So never mind your hair, Paula old duck!"

"Gweat goodness, it's stwagging all over my eyes, bai Jove! I'm so hot and bweatless, geals! Don't we get a west?"

That question was answered by a smart rat-tat of the baton, and poor Paula could only take a big gasp for breath as she saw the awful wand rise to the "ready" once again.

Then the tuneful set of voices gave their second piece by heart. It was a different song from the first; sweet and low, with pitfalls for the nervous and incautious. Were they getting through it all right?

Betty and Co. didn't know! They felt like automaton until the song ended, and a fresh round of hearty applause proclaimed the audience's satisfaction.

"And now—ugh!" Polly grimaced, whispering to Paula, as Miss Redgrave retired and the professional conductor came on. "My hat, what a guy!"

"Yes, wather! Howeevah——"

"He's a beaver, Paula!"

"Hush! Pway don't be fwiv——"

"He's a king-beaver! A yard of red beard!"

Polly insisted on whispering. "What a lot of hair to keep to rights, Paula!"

"Bai Jove, yes, wather! Howeevah——"

Paula said no more. She nearly fainted as the fearsome-looking conductor glared at her for talking. Polly giggled behind her handkerchief.

The conductor placed a chart in position, and proceeded to "put the girls through it," as the saying is.

Whether he had a special spite against the Morcove girls because he suspected them of harbouring a saucy youngster who had made rude comments on his wonderful beard, or whether he was just as merciless to other choirs, there is no telling. But he had Betty and Co. fairly trembling with suspense by the time that test was finished!

It seemed he was actually playing tricks on them. But they were not to be caught, although they heaved a sigh of relief when at last he put down his baton.

And then—what a surprise! All in a moment he left off being a merciless monster, and was laughing heartily at the way the girls had triumphed, whilst the audience cheered and cheered again, half the people standing up to wave programmes.

"Bravo! Bravo! Well done, Morcove!"

"Go hon!" Polly said, sotto voce. "Hold up, Paula; don't faint! We've won, I do believe!"

"Oh—oh, if we have!" breathed Betty and a few others. "What joy!"

They trooped away, rolly falling over a chair again, and then jumping noisily down from the platform. In the wings, swarms of people beamed upon the girls and clapped them, as they scurried along, all blushed.

"Well done! Excellent!" was the cry from all sides, causing Polly to make a sudden rush to get to the room where they had left Naomer.

"Naomer! Hooray!"

"Eilo, present! You win?"

"We don't know yet. But we live in hopes! Here's Paula, fainting for a glass of water! Betty, wasn't it fun? Madge, what did you think of it?"

Whilst they all burst in to talk together, they could still hear the applause going on. Then the house quieted down, except for the mum-mum of some grave speaker addressing the audience.

More thunders of applause after that, and then—

Ah! Here was Miss Redgrave, suddenly whirling upon the girls in great excitement—joyful excitement.

"Come along, girls! You have to——"

"What, what? Oh!"

"Have we won, then?"

"Bai Jove, geals! Is my heah weally all wight?"

"Come along! Lady Lundy is going to speak next," Miss Redgrave panted. "She awards the shield, you know! The judges have——"

"Oh, I say!"

"Fancy!"

"Bai Jove!"

And back to the platform trooped the flustered girls, Paula, for one, using a small mirror and comb to set her hair to rights!

#### Audrey Likes London.

ALL this time there had been two girls in the Morcove choir who, although they did their best at the singing, were plainly treating the great contest as a "bore."

One of these girls was Audrey Blain. To her, the school's entry for the contest had meant merely the chance of getting some enjoyment in London. And she had made up her mind that she would not go back to Morcove until she had had it!

The other girl was Stella Munro, another hankerer after excitement and pleasure, with a sort of adulation for Audrey Blain, as being a most fascinating, daring girl, whose friendship was worth anything.

Audrey Blain was as proud of her looks as she was headstrong and cynical. She had not the least doubt that now, as she returned to the concert-platform with the rest of the choir, her slim, graceful figure was being singled out by admiring eyes in the audience. Her amber-coloured hair was being envied by girls with mere "mouse" coloured tresses. Her eyes, she was sure, sparkled in the footlights as any great singer's would have done!

There she stood, accordingly, slightly aloof from the party of girls, taking care to let the audience see the disdain she had for all this fuss and ceremony—"kid's play" was her term for it.

She was in the background, for the simple reason that, not being able to take the lead, she refused to be mixed with the rank and file. At heart, how she envied Betty Barton the proud privilege of being called upon, as captain of the Form, to receive the handsome silver shield at the hands of Lady Lundy.

If Betty were only out of the way! Oh, if only that girl did not go on, day after day, keeping the loving loyalty of her Form companions!

Seldom was some such harsh thought as that far from Audrey Blain's mind. For it was her fixed belief that, if the Form had never known a Betty Barton, she herself would have been its queenly captain long ago.

"Girls of Morcove School—and I am happy to see so many faces that I recognise!" Lady Lundy said, with her most winning smile, as they paraded before her. "Some very flattering things have been said about your singing by the previous speaker. I am not going to repeat them, for that would make you vain."

There was a murmur of assent here, and so Paula felt it right to murmur an assenting:

"Yes, wather!"

"What I do want to say, to you and all the patrons of this most successful contest, is this," continued her ladyship. "I cannot help feeling, especially gratified that the shield is coming into Devonshire!"

There was a burst of applause, of course, the audience fully approving her ladyship's personal attachment to the West Country. Then she resumed, charming everybody by her unaffected little speech.

There had been some very fine singing to-day (Cheers). She knew, too, that all the choirs had nearly gone on strike because of the stiff tests they had been put through! (Laughter). But the peace had been kept—(laughter and cheers)—and in particular there had been perfect concord at the end—when the winners had to be named! (Hear, hear, and cheers.)

No doubt a good many people in the audience would go away feeling sorry that their particular choir had not won. But of this her ladyship was convinced; no one would dispute the fairness of the award. (Cheers). In fact, the girls now standing before her had been acclaimed the winners by the general public, almost before the committee of judges could get a say in the matter! (Laughter and prolonged cheering.)

"And so, girls, I have this very, very great pleasure," Lady Lundy wound up, all smiles and graciousness. "The pleasure of handing you the silver shield, to take back with you to that little corner of the Kingdom which I love best of all! Well done, girls; well done!"

She was seen to be adding a few more smiling remarks as she delivered the coveted shield into Betty's hands, and started shaking hands with all the girls; but applause drowned all that was said. How the audience cheered, and clapped, and stamped its feet!

"Poof!" was Betty's first exclamation, when at last she and her companions were done with the whole overwhelming, never-to-be-forgotten ordeal. "Yes, wather! Bai Jovo, the welief!" palpitated Paula.

"And we won—we won!" Polly reiterated hilariously, as she waltzed Naomer round the ante-room.

"And now, I suppose," Audrey threw out sneeringly, "we catch the first train back to Morcove? Mustn't dream of spending another hour in London! O-oh, noo!"



**AUDREY'S ALOOFNESS:** She simply swept past her schoolfellows with curling lip. Audrey's whole air was that of some jumped-up celebrity who refuses to rub shoulders with ordinary people.

"For shame, Audrey," Miss Redgrave said gently, joining the girls just in time to hear that sarcastic remark. "We have had three days in London, and are not going back until to-morrow. Isn't that good enough—when we have the shield to take back, too!"

"Oh, of course," Audrey shrugged, with false sweetness; "we went to The Zoo, and the Tower of London."

Miss Redgrave ignored her. "This beautiful shield," she exclaimed, thrilling with pride in the girls' success. "We will see if we can get it engraved, in commemoration of our winning it this year, before we get back to

Morcove. I have been told an address where I can get the work done immediately."

"Hooray! That's the idea!" cried Polly. They were all getting their outdoor things on, and she snapped the elastic under her chin with such high-spirited carelessness that it made her wince.

Scores of other schoolgirls were now preparing to depart, a babel of talk going on all the while. With a nice spirit a great number of them showered congratulations on the Morcove contingent, who were thus kept in talk all the way out of the great building.

Cabs were in keen demand, and Miss Redgrave thought herself lucky to get sufficient for her requirements. In the end, Betty, Polly, Paula, Madge, Tess, and Naomer were driven off in one taxi, whilst Miss Redgrave joined three of the girls in a second vehicle. The third, Audrey and Stella managed to secure for themselves.

"So it is back to Morcove in the morning, is it?" Audrey began, as soon as she was alone with her idolising friend. "Not if I know it, Stella!"

"It is a sickening shame," that girl acknowledged, knowing how her brilliant friend hated school life. "We might have been given a couple more days in London, at least."

"Stella, listen to me," Audrey said, lolling back in the cab. "You can come in with me over a daring wheeze I've got! We girls are all staying at your mother's house in the West End. Well, then, if you and I miss the train to-morrow, you'll make it all right with your mother, if I engage to make it all right with Miss Somerfield at the school!"

"Oh, Audrey—"

"Listen, I tell you! My people also have a town house in London, as you know, only they are away just at present. I shall ask Miss Redgrave's permission to go round to my people's place in the morning on a good excuse. She'll let you come, too, and we'll promise to be at the station in good time for the train to the West of England. Only," Audrey added, with a light laugh, "we shall just miss it in the end—ha, ha, ha!"

Stella's face wore the expression that was so often called up when she was being lured into mischief by her daring friend. She looked uneasy, shocked, and yet eager to go on with the idea, because it meant a secret "speer" with Audrey.

"That would give us another night in London, Audrey? And—"

"It would! And I promise you there will be no rowing for us at the finish," Audrey assured her nervous crony. "What do you say, then?"

"I—I'd love to be at home to-morrow night," Stella said wistfully. "I happen to know that mother is going to the Opera. She has a box—"

"Oh, how spiffing! Then she could quite easily take us!" Audrey sat up, and slapped her hand into Stella's lap gaily. "Then we simply must do it, Stella darling—we must! Where are we now?"

She glanced out of the cab window, and, knowing London well, recognised the street they were skimming through.

"Another five minutes yet," she remarked, and lolled back again, resting her small feet upon the opposite seat. "Stella darling, when does the—er—the poor relation go back to Morcove?"

At this reference to Jess Lingard, Stella Munro looked suddenly unhappy.

"The day after to-morrow, I believe," she said rather drearily. "She is not going back with Betty and the rest, I know, because—"

"Of course, she didn't come up with them," put in Audrey.

"It is not that so much," Stella went on, in an embarrassed manner. "Jess has begged to be allowed to stay on an extra day, so that she can be a little longer with her mother. But I believe the girl is to go back to Morcove the day after to-morrow."

"Pity she is to go back at all, that's what I say!" Audrey said, with a sudden malicious expression.

"Yes, Audrey," the other assented heavily. "I'm sorry. You know I—to please you—I decided not to ask my people to pay for Jess' schooling at Morcove. You said, if she came to the school as a boarder, you would have to be done with me."

"Very heartless of me, wasn't it?" Audrey said, with her sweetest smile.

"N-n-no, Audrey. I—I quite understand. You hate everything in life that is sordid. And Jess was brought up as a poor girl. She—she and her mother are penniless now. It wouldn't have been pleasant to—have Jess at the school, as my penniless relation."

"And yet you wanted to have her!"

Stella, turning rather pallid, answered meekly: "Yes, I admit it; I did want to—to do her a good turn. It was for a certain reason. But I gave in to you, Audrey. You'll always remember that I put your wishes before my own."

"You nice girl! We are rather good pals, aren't we?" cooed Audrey. "Only your not getting your people to pay for Jess' schooling has not made much difference after all, has it?"

"N-n-no—"

"Thanks to clever Betty Barton and Company!" Audrey said, in her most withering tone. "They are sort of adopting Jess—pooh! Mean to arrange to pay for her schooling themselves, if you ever heard of such nonsense!"

"Those girls, Audrey—they mean well, I suppose—"

"Rubbish! They only mean to spite me, that's all! They know that I wanted to keep Jess out of Morcove; I didn't mean to see my best friend—that's you—bothered to death with a poor relation! And so, to spite me, they say Jess shall come to Morcove, even if they have to find the money themselves!"

The girl's scowling expression, as she finished these bitter remarks, bore witness to her enmity against Betty and Co.

"Well, here we are," she exclaimed presently, as the car slowed up at the kerb, outside the fine Munro mansion. "And now for more of Jess, I suppose! The sweet child, bless her!"

In reality, the haughty girl was glad to find Jess indoors; was glad to find that girl in the entrance hall, caught up in a lot of excited talk with Betty and Co. It gave Audrey a chance of showing off her insolent aloofness from one whom she considered was dirt beneath her feet.

The chums, just back from their triumph at the concert hall, had found that Jess, for her part, was just back from a visit to her mother in hospital. Whilst she, Jess, was eager to know all about the singing contest, the girls were anxious to hear the latest about Mrs. Lingard. And, for very shame, Stella Munro had to join the group in the hall.

But Audrey—she simply swept past all of them with her proud head held higher than ever, and her lip curling. Her whole air was that of a young queen who cannot deign to brush shoulders with beggars.

In this haughty fashion she minced across the hall to the grand staircase, and ascended to the room which she shared with Stella. Alone there, she took off her outdoor things and tossed them aside, then stood regarding herself in the mirror.

Pleased with her appearance, as she always was, she next drifted to the window and gazed down into the fashionable street, with the roaring note of London life sounding in her ears like a great tide.

London! How she loved it! How often, at Morcove School, when the tide had been booming on the beach below the great headland, had the noise of the surge made her think of the great city, with all its opportunities for pleasure—gaiety!

"Back to the school again—bah!" she exclaimed disgustingly. "I've a good mind to end everything by getting expelled. Then my people will simply have to have me at home! Morcove!—and the only girl of my stamp in the Form is Stella Munro. Stella, with a poor relation—a horrid kid from the council school!—to be always under our feet!"

Then the shallow girl gave one of her careless shrugs.

"Anyhow," she muttered cynically, "if Jess does come to the school at Betty and Co.'s expense, I can easily find a way, no doubt, to get her turned out. And that's just what I will do!"

#### Artful as Ever.

**N**EXT morning Audrey took the first step towards the fulfilment of her plans for the day.

Breakfast was over, and the girls were mostly packing for the return journey to Morcove, when the graceless girl very demurely took her stand in front of Miss Redgrave.

"If you please, Miss Redgrave—"

"Well, Audrey?"

"Could I be granted permission, please, to run round to my people's house in Park Lane?" Audrey asked, with all the innocence that she knew so well how to assume.

"Your people are not there," the youthful mistress returned rather coldly. "I understood you to say they were abroad, and the house is shut up."

"Yes, Miss Redgrave; but a housekeeper is in charge as caretaker. If you would please grant me the privilege, I would so like to look in at my own home," was the purring entreaty. "I want to get a few things that I could do with at school."

There was an ominous pause before Miss Redgrave said, in a regretful tone:

"Audrey, I am not at all pleased with the way you have behaved whilst in London with the other girls."

"Oh, Miss Redgrave!"

"No, I am not," was the pained remark. "You have not pulled with the other girls. That is nothing new for you, I know; but that is not all. I am satisfied in my own mind that you and

Stella gave me the slip when we were visiting the Zoo. I have not made a fuss—I could not, when we were all guests of Stella's people. But it will be a long time, Audrey, before I forget your trying behaviour!"

Audrey, with an air of injured innocence, protested prettily:

"I am sure I did my best at the singing contest, yesterday!"

"You did, Audrey. I want to be fair; you sang as well as any. What I complain of about you is your inclination to go your own way. You must remember you are still a schoolgirl, subject to discipline. No one can say that Morcove schoolgirls have a dull time. Then why do you spoil the general harmony by being discontented?"

"Miss Redgrave, I'm sorry if I have given you that impression—"

"I hardly know when to believe you in your oft-expressed apologies and excuses," the mistress said gravely. "You ask me to grant you this favour. If it were any other girl, I would do so at once. But how am I to be sure that you won't abuse the privilege?"

"Miss Redgrave, I promise to be at Waterloo in good time for the train. I know London well. I shan't get lost!"

"I have no fear of any mishap of that sort," was the ready answer. "What I do fear is that you may think it doesn't matter much, after all, if you do follow by a later train."

"I can't do more than promise, Miss Redgrave!" "You can do more—keep the promise," the mistress said, with her steady eyes upon the demure suppliant.

"Will you let Stella go with me? Audrey pleaded artfully. "Then she will—keep me up to mark!"

Another pause. It really did not look as if Audrey was going to get her own way after all.

"Well, I don't wish to be unreasonable," the mistress broke out at last. "Your home is in London, and you know London well. Miss Somerfield, I feel sure, would think you quite capable of getting about. On the understanding, then, that you get to Waterloo by eleven o'clock, to meet us in good time for the eleven-thirty, you may go to Park Lane."

"Oh, Miss Redgrave, how good you are!"

"Mind you be good, and keep that promise," the mistress rejoined, with a little grimace of displeasure at the girl's flattery. "Run along, for you have no time to waste; that is certain."

Audrey went off quickly enough. In a few seconds she was with Stella upstairs in the bedroom they had shared.

"Spiffing! The deed is done!" Audrey chuckled, with a little flourish of the hand as she came into the room. "You can come, too, Stella darling!"

"To Park Lane?"

"Yes! Hurry, then! Oh, this is glorious!"

Five minutes later their luggage was being taken down to a cab that had been fetched for them. Everything was done by Audrey to suggest that the train to Morcove was going to be caught, after the fleeting visit to Park Lane.

Her and Stella's luggage was put on board, and Audrey even went back into the house to tip the servants. At the same time, she said a most affectionate good-bye to Mrs. Munro, as did Stella.

The lady in question, whose worst failing was, perhaps, a certain want of thought, came out on to the front steps to wave the two girls farewell.



**THE GIRL SHE HATED!** Audrey saw the silver shield on the chair by Jess' bedside. Dare she take it! For a while she stood and hesitated.

Very handsome she looked, in her well-fitting clothes; very jolly, too. Now that she and her husband were simply rolling in money, Mrs. Munro was becoming quite the society butterfly.

"Good-bye, Stella darling," she cried gaily. "Have a nice time at the school. I wish you could have stayed longer. Good-bye, Audrey!"

"Good-bye, Mrs. Munro, and thank you ever so! You have been nice! See you again soon, I hope!"

Thus Audrey, as the cab sped away. She drew in her head from the window, and flopped back, laughing.

"Ha, ha, ha!" Your mother little knows that we'll be back for another night under her roof, by and by, Stella! She won't be angry, will she?"

"Of course not!" Stella exclaimed, looking eager for the excitement and pleasure that the stolen day promised. "So long as we satisfy her that no one will be worrying about us—"

"I shall see to that, trust me!" Audrey said coolly. "Another lovely day! And we are in London! And to-night—the Opera! Stella, do—do get your mother to take us!"

"Of course I will," was the eager answer. "Oh, Audrey, it will be jolly—"

"Topping! Worth putting on one's best frock for—the Opera!" Audrey agreed heartily. And then she closed her eyes and sat smiling dreamily, in ecstasies over the stolen pleasures which she and Stella were to enjoy.

Nor, for a minute or so, did Stella look anything but very elated over the daring scheme. But, before the journey's end in the cab, all the girl's brightness certainly had given place to gloom—why, she knew best!

Rather guiltily she rallied her drooping spirits as the cab reached the Blains' house in Park Lane. Audrey sat up then and preened herself, and Stella was quick to put on an appearance of being happy, even though there was the old leaden weight weighing upon her heart.

When they alighted, Audrey made the cabman set down the luggage on the pavement, and then paid him and let him drive away. That done, she ran gaily up the front steps to the handsome porch of the swagger town house.

Her finger dabbed at a bell-push, causing a subdued *ts-r-r-ring—tr-ring* indoors; and, after a brief wait the girls heard a woman's step padding towards the door.

"This is old Mother Meagles, the housekeeper; a prim sort, but don't take the least notice of her," Audrey remarked airily, as the bolts were being drawn back.

Then the door opened, and Audrey burst out laughing as she greeted the astonished dame with a flippant, "Good-morning, Mrs. Meagles!"

Meantime, Betty and Co. had heard about Audrey and Stella's little jaunt to Park Lane; and, when the chums were on their way to Waterloo, they discussed the likelihood of their seeing anything more of the flyaway pair that day.

In other words, Betty and her friends were pretty certain that it was all a ruse to get another day in London!

Sure enough, by a quarter-past eleven, at Waterloo station, Miss Redgrave and the girls were still waiting for Audrey and Stella to put in an appearance.

They were also waiting anxiously for someone else, and that was a boy from the silversmiths' where Miss Redgrave had left the silver shield to be engraved.

The manager had promised faithfully that it would be done by this morning, as the engraver was to work overtime on it, and the arrangement had been that a boy from the shop would meet Miss Redgrave with the shield at Waterloo.

"Twenty-past!" the mistress commented uneasily, as they all kept their eyes upon the big clock. "Where are those girls! I declare, if they miss the train they shall not find me begging them off!"

She added in a vexed voice:

"And the silver shield—that has not been brought to us, as it was promised."

"Couldn't you telephone to the shop, just to find out what is being done?" suggested Madge; and Miss Redgrave brightened.

"Excellent idea, Madge!" she agreed. "We'll find a telephone box that is not in use."

There was one close-by where the girls were waiting to go forward to the train, and in a flash Miss Redgrave was inside the box, ringing up the silversmiths' number.

A minute later she opened the sound-proof door to announce the result of her talk over the wire.

"Isn't it a shame, girls? They have not been able to get the shield done in time—"

"Oh—"

"So what I have done is to tell them to send the shield, when it is finished to-day, to Mrs. Munro's house. Then Jess Lingard can bring it with her to-morrow."

"Yes!" chorused the girls, heartily approving this plan. "Yes, rather!"

"Now I must just 'phone to the Munros' house, and tell Jess to bring the shield down to Morcove to-morrow."

"And 'be very careful not to lose it, too!" Polly threw out, but only in fun. She was ready to nod in agreement, when Betty said:

"Trust Jess!"  
"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, geals," beamed Paula, "we couldn't leave the shield in safer hands, I weckon!"

Miss Redgrave came out of the telephone box looking satisfied. She had spoken with Mrs. Munro, and with Jess Lingard also, and so the arrangement was quite understood.

"Twenty-five minutes past! Girls," the mistress said gravely, "we cannot hang about any longer, waiting for Stella and Audrey! They are going to miss that train—and that is all the thanks one gets for being indulgent!"

"Shame!" Polly said fiercely, but under her breath, as she and her chums took up their luggage. Miss Redgrave was going in advance, to get the tickets clipped in a batch, and so the girls were free to talk amongst themselves.

"Didn't we say so?" was Tess Trelawney's grimaced comment. "It was never Audrey and Stella's intention to catch the train!"

"Yet Audrey promised, so Miss Redgrave said," muttered Madge disgustedly.

"Ah," murmured Betty. "We know what Audrey's promises are worth! Stella's too!"

And Paula said:

"Bai Jove, that's a fact, we do!"

#### Plotting Against the Poor Girl.

WITH a lightsome step indeed did Jess Lingard walk back to the Munros' grand town house that afternoon, when her usual daily visit to the hospital was over.

Oh, but how fine it was, the good girl was thinking, to know that darling mother was certain to make a perfect recovery now!

Even so late as yesterday, the kindly ward-matron had been unable to tell the anxious girl that the sufferer was quite out of danger. But this morning a rather skilful bit of surgery, the aftermath of the operation which had been performed when the poor widow woman was first taken to hospital, had been performed with perfect success. And so Jess, whose anxiety for her mother had become known to all, had met with smiles everywhere.

Smiles from the very surgeon who had now "finished" with Mrs. Lingard, as he chanced to meet Jess in one of the airy passages of the great London hospital; smiles from nurses, and from other patients in mother's ward, and from mother, too—ah, what happy smiles from mother!

It meant that Jess could now go back to Morcove, as it had been arranged for her to do as soon as all risk of a set-back was out of the way. She hoped to see mother just once again, by running round to the hospital first thing in the morning; and then she could catch the eleven-thirty to Morcove, as the chums had caught it to-day.

She pictured them as getting to Exeter by now, all in tip-top spirits. Those girls!—what a jolly lot they were, and what kind hearts they had! Kind? It wasn't the word for the goodness they had shown towards her.

For, although the matter was not quite settled, it was as good as certain, Jess knew, that she was to become a boarder at Morcove as the outcome of concerted action by Betty and Co.

The girls had not said much to her; they were reluctant to make a lot of talk out of what they were doing. But they must have spoken to Miss Redgrave, whilst in London, and Miss Redgrave must have been in telegraphic communication with the Head Mistress at Morcove. Or else how was it that that lady had wired to Jess: "Please return here, at school's expense, as soon as your mother is convalescent."

One thing Jess would have liked, to complete her happiness—not that she was inclined to grumble, far from it. Only, she would have loved to make the journey to Morcove with the girls.

But they had gone back a day in advance of her—why, she knew full well. The painful fact was, Betty and Co. had not wished to prolong their stay under the Munros' roof, when they were not at all pleased with Stella's attitude towards her, Jess.

Now, as she came to the Munros' house-front and went up the grand steps, she met an errand-boy just coming away. Jess was admitted by the footman, to find him still handling a small, flat parcel which had just been delivered.

"Here, missy," the rather supercilious footman said to the girl, whose poor circumstances were so well known in the house. "I see this is addressed to you."

"Oh, then it must be the lovely shield!" Jess exclaimed, tremblingly taking the parcel from him. "Now to be very careful! If I should



**"I'VE LOST THE SHIELD!"**

Jess sobbed out the words as the Morcove girls crowded round to greet her.



lose it—my goodness, I think I would die of the disgrace! Betty and the rest would never forgive me, that is certain!"

This was hardly said to the footman, for already he was reopening the front door as he saw a taxicab pulling up at the kerb. Jess gave a mere glance into the street—and then stared, hard.

Audrey and Stella! They had alighted from the cab, and now Audrey was paying the driver, whilst Stella came on up the steps.

Jess ran to meet her, gasping out: "Stella! Why—?"

"I'm sorry," Stella said flusteredly. "We—were missed that train at Waterloo this morning! Is my mother in?"

Jess did not know; but the footman interposed with the remark that Mrs. Munro was paying some calls.

Then Audrey came racing up the steps, laughing as if the whole scrape was a great joke.

"Hello!" she threw out at Jess. "I was forgetting that you were still here! We are going to have the honour, apparently, of going by train with you to-morrow! A very great honour, to be sure!"

Then she turned her back upon the penniless girl, who was still agast at what had happened. Jess knew there would be trouble about this.

"Oh, Stella!" she faltered. "How I wish you had caught that train! You'll both get into a terrible row—"

"No, we shan't get into a terrible row, so see!" Audrey flounced round to say, scornfully.

"How can we be blamed? It was not our fault! And we have done our best to save anybody being anxious on our account."

She minced away, whilst Stella lingered close to Jess.

"You see, Jess, we—we—the cab we were in broke down," Stella floundered, and Jess knew for certain the girl was fibbing. "Audrey sent a wire to the school; she also sent a wire that would be handed to Miss Redgrave on the train, at Andover Junction. What more could we do?"

"Well, I don't know," sighed Jess, unhappily. "It is most unfortunate, Stella! I only hope they believe that story about the breakdown with the cab."

"Don't you believe it?" Audrey suddenly called out, from half-way up the first flight of stairs.

Jess did not answer. She wished she could say she believed the excuse; but she did not, and her silence as good as admitted her unbelief.

Audrey glared down at her for an instant, then tossed her head and went on up to her room, where the luggage was soon being handed in by one of the servants.

"You see, Stella you see what it means to have that kid hanging around!" the reckless girl said. "She will be asking your own mother to discredit our word, if we don't look out!"

Of course, nothing like that happened. In a sad sort of way, Jess was glad to find out later that Mrs. Munro placed absolute faith in that story about the cab's breakdown.

Such a thing, Mrs. Munro said, might happen to anyone, and, anyhow, the two girls had certainly done wisely when they at once sent those telegrams. So long as nobody was left in a state of anxiety, Mrs. Munro's easy-going feeling was that her daughter and Audrey might very well be spending another night in London.

She, with her butterfly disposition, had taken a great fancy to Audrey. She knew that Audrey's people were really swell folk. Audrey herself she thought most charming, for a girl of her age. There was something dashing, brilliant, about the queen of the Fourth Form at Morcove, that Mrs. Munro wished—rather foolishly, it must be said—her own daughter would acquire.

And so it is not surprising that that evening saw the wealthy lady, herself all in fine raiment and diamonds, taking Stella and Audrey to the Opera.

Jess had not been invited to go, for the simple reason that Mrs. Munro, whilst wanting to be kind to the girl, did not mean to pamper her. Enough was being done for her and the widowed mother, Mrs. Munro felt, without making a sort of protégée of the girl.

But Audrey—whose people moved in society—was on a different footing altogether. Oh, of course! By making a fuss with Audrey Blain, Mrs. Munro saw herself being "taken up" by the Blains; when they should return to their fine house in Park Lane.

A liveried attendant opened the door of the swagger car when it drew up under the portico, and out stepped gorgeous Mrs. Munro, to be followed by her daughter and Audrey.

Stella appeared a little flustered, yet flushed with eager anticipation of the evening's pleasure. Audrey, for her part, drifted into the brilliantly-lit foyer of the Opera house as if every evening saw her at some high society resort.

"She is perfect at the part!" was Mrs. Munro's mental comment, noting with what languid grace Audrey took her seat in the box, whilst Stella sat down with nervous awkwardness. "How glad I am we sent Stella to Morcove, if this is the sort of boon companion she has found there!"

Nor did the misguided mother fail to mark her pleasure at Audrey's elegant behaviour.

Between the acts of the beautiful opera, the girls were encouraged to chat away vivaciously, whilst they dipped into an expensive box of chocolates, and turned their opera-glasses upon all the grand folk who were there.

And not a thought, all this time, of poor Cinderella-Jess! Not a pitying thought, anyhow, had either of the girls who were revelling in this great treat. But thinking of Jess they were, in a certain way.

"You are enjoying what Jess has been cheated out of!" Stella's guilty conscience was whispering to her. "Shame, shame, to be leaving that girl and her mother in sheer want—depending upon people's charity—when you know what they are entitled to!"

But Stella had hardened her heart. She could not appease her conscience, but she was getting into the habit of fiercely ignoring its reproaches. She felt that she had better practise being hard, too, since Jess was going to be always under her eye at Morcove.

Always there, to remind her of how Betty and Co. had refused to let the poor girl be turned out into the world, only half educated!

As for Audrey—it was strange, but in the very midst of the performance, a startling idea had come to her in regard to Jess. She was turning it over in her mind now, and the more she pondered the scheme, the more she liked it.

That silver shield which Jess was being entrusted with. If only the girl could be made to lose it!

Betty and Co would never forgive her! As for still taking an interest in her—no, not likely. If she lost the shield, she would find the girls done with her!

But how—how to carry out a plot of this sort? The music and singing went on, and all the time Audrey's mind went on with that desperate idea. Going home in the car, after the performance, she lolled back and shut her eyes so as to be able to think the better. How could Jess be to lose the shield? It must be done; it was such a sure way of turning Betty and Co. against her! But how—how?

Long past midnight, so desperate did Audrey feel, she suddenly got out of her bed and crept away from the bed-room, stealing up the stairs to the much plainer bed-room where the Cinderella of the house was sleeping.

Like a thief in the night, Audrey stole into that room; and perhaps some idea of thieving was actually in her mind. But if so she rejected the scheme as impracticable.

She merely stood just inside the bed-room doorway, gazing across at Jess, whose eyes were closed in peaceful sleep.

There she lay, the unwanted girl!—pauper Jess, who would most likely have to come in to Study 8 at Morcove, since she was Stella's own relation!

There was the silver shield, too, placed beside the girl's bed, on a chair. It had been unpacked—simply, as Audrey could guess, because Jess had so wanted to admire it: the beautiful silver trophy which her schoolfellows had won!

The moon was shining into the plain bed room. For a full minute Audrey stood motionless, gazing at the sleeper.

Easy to creep across to the shield and smuggle it away! But that would not get Jess blamed for its loss. No; and at last Audrey turned away, giving a sigh of desperation as she trailed silently back to her own bed.

In a few hours the new day would be here, and she and Stella would be journeying back to Morcove with Jess Lingard. Once back at school, and the shield safely delivered, there would never be another such chance of getting the girl into black disfavour with the girls who had "adopted" her.

And so Audrey, as she coiled down in her bed once more, was still trying to think how—how to make Jess Lingard lose the shield during the journey home!

#### Audrey Gets Her Chance.

WHEN the West of England express steamed out of Waterloo station, at half-past eleven next morning, it had on board Audrey, Stella, and Jess.

They were in a first-class compartment of the corridor train, all by themselves. If Audrey could have had her way, she would have seen Jess put into a third-class carriage; but Mrs. Munro had come to the station to see them off, and had taken the tickets, and had not bothered to discriminate between the two wealthy girls and the penniless one.

At the same time, there had been something in Mrs. Munro's manner, at parting—and Jess had been conscious of it—which as good as said:

"You are travelling first-class, Jess; so mind you try to behave accordingly!"

After which, doubtless, Mrs. Munro had gone back in her grand car to the West End, feeling

she had amply done her duty again by "those poor Lingards." What with Mr. Munro undertaking to set the widow up in business, and Jess having been given hospitality during that girl's stay in London, mother and daughter really had nothing to grumble about!

Jess, as she sat in her corner of the luxurious compartment, with the priceless silver shield firmly placed on the hat rack above her head, did not look as if she was in a discontented, ungrateful mood. If she was very quiet, only speaking when spoken to, that was simply because she was being made to realise that Audrey wished to be proudly aloof from her, and that Stella was weakly pandering to the proud girl's snobbish feelings.

It all augured painful times for Jess, poor girl, for the rest of her stay at Morcove School—that was to say, if she let Audrey's snobbish hostility worry her. But Jess did not mean to let it worry her, except in so far as it affected her relations with Stella.

Audrey sat in a corner of the carriage farthest removed from Jess'. In de-luxe fashion, the queen of the Fourth Form had provided herself with a whole batch of expensive magazines for the journey, and chocolates, too. She invited Stella to come and sit beside her, pointedly ignoring Jess; and the two looked through the magazines, and talked softly between themselves, whilst Jess gazed out of the opposite window.

Ah, well! The embarrassing journey would soon be over, and then—then for all the loving comradeship of Betty and Co.!

Those girls—if what seemed all a dream at present really did come true, and she was kept on at Morcove through the generosity of her schoolfellows, she would never, never know how to be grateful enough to them all!

"Here, do you want a chocolate?" Audrey asked suddenly, as if she was throwing a bone to a dog. But that is not quite right. Few girls speak to a dog in the way that Audrey spoke to Jess!

"No, thank you."

Nor would Jess, perhaps, have owned to being hungry, when lunch-time came round, only she had been told by Mrs. Munro that "the girls will see that you have something to eat with them."

"We are going to get lunch in the diner now," Audrey threw out, getting up with a jingle of bracelets. "Stella, I suppose your esteemed relation wants her ration?"

"Oh, she must come with us, of course," Stella said awkwardly. "You—you must come with us, Jess."

"It would be enough for me," said Jess, "if I could just get a snack sitting here. I—"

"First-class passengers don't eat sandwiches, and litter the place with greasy bags," sneered Audrey. "Go on; to the right, in the corridor!"

So Jess, with a glance up to the hat-rack, obeyed the curt mandate.

As she staggered along the corridor of the rocking train, she was telling herself not to worry about the safety of the silver shield. People were leaving their seats in other compartments to get lunch in the dining-car, and they were leaving all their belongings behind them.

Stella followed next behind Jess; then two or three other passengers separated the two girls from Audrey in the cramped corridor. So, when Audrey suddenly turned back to get one of the magazines, Stella and Jess were unaware of her doing so.

At that instant, the train whistled before entering a tunnel.

Audrey got oack to the deserted first-class compartment just as the train roared into the black darkness of the tunnel. The electric lights were switched on, and she took a look at herself in the compartment mirror.

Then, by fateful chance, she at that moment caught sight of the flat parcel on the hat-rack, above where Jess had been sitting.

The silver shield!

Audrey suddenly turned white to the lips with excitement.

Now! she was thinking. Now, whilst she was alone in the carriage, and whilst the train was in the tunnel—why not lose the shield!

In a flash she was at the other side of the compartment. She looked round to keep her eyes upon the corridor. No one was going by. The lunch-time procession towards the dining-car had ended.

Should she do it—should she?

"Yes—yes!" urged all that was base within her. "Now!"

And so, still half-turned so as to watch the corridor, she reached up and took the brown paper parcel.

With her other hand she tugged the strap of the window, and let down the glass.

The train was still rattling and roaring through the tunnel. Smoke billowed into the compartment, where Audrey was lurching about with the motion of the carriage.

Once again she shot a cautious glance behind her to see that she was not observed. And then—

Out of the lowered window she dropped the wrapped-up trophy, and seemed to hear it fall with a clattering bang between the speeding train and the glistening walls of the tunnel.

Done!

She had done the deed, and harshly she laughed to think of Jess Lingard's dismay and grief, the girl's tragic bewilderment and despair, when she should come back to the carriage to find the shield gone—vanished!

Gone, and herself unable to prove that it had not been lost at some point of the journey, through her own gross carelessness!

#### Waiting for Jess.

POLLY LINTON suddenly drank down the cup of tea that had been getting cold whilst she was chattering away to all the chums who were gathered round the table in Study No. 12.

"That's that!" said Polly gaily, clattering the cup back into the saucer. "As the auctioneers say: Are you all done?"

"I think so," laughed Betty, glancing at the empty plates on which cakes and pasties had been piled high only half an hour ago.

"Bai Jove, I don't know when I wished a wepast so much!" declared Paula Creel. "The tea, gails, to-day, has been pawriculawly wewfeshing!"

"Hear, hear!" said Tess and a few others.

"In other words," cried Polly, pushing back her chair to jump up boisterously, "although L n d n is a fine town, we are all glad to be back at Morcove?"

"Yes, wather!"

"And won't Jess Lingard be glad, too, when she gets here!" added Betty, as they all got up

from the table. "Quarter to five! If we are going to meet Jess at Morcove Road station—"

"And we jolly well are!" cried Polly. "At least, this chile is gwine, savvy?"

"You've been reading some adventure story," Madge laughed.

"I refuse to account for what I do or say at any time!" Polly announced serenely. "Paula! You are coming, too?"

"I have pwomised myself the great pwivilege, Polly dear!"

"Then hustle, Paula—hustle! On with the motley and the paint!"

"I beg pardon, Polly?"

"Allez, allez!" exclaimed Trixie Hope, putting Polly's advice into French. "Vite, Paula—vite! Quick, get your hat on!"

"My deah gails," smirked the aristocrat of the Form, "you need not expvess yourselves so forcibly, bai Jove! It will not take me two ticks to make myself wespactable for the wun to Morcove Road!"

With a high-spirited rush, Polly and Betty were starting to clear away, and Naomer and others lent a hand. In the crowded study, this busting about caused some confusion, and so Paula was overlooked as she gravitated to her favourite easy chair, and subsided into it.

"Hullo, you are there, are you?" Polly suddenly snouted, becoming aware of the amiable aristocrat's inclination to go off to sleep. "Hi, wake up! We are off!"

"Bai Jove—"

"You lazybones!" Polly said, plumping herself into Paula's lap. "Weren't you told five minutes back to go and get your hat on?"

"Heap, dwop it!" wailed Paula. "Pway wefwan, Polly! Dwop bouncing about!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My life," groaned the long-suffering aristocrat, when at last she had escaped from the teaser, with her hair over her eyes, "is one long martywy at the hands of fwivolous cweatures! Look at me! A weck!"

"Poor dear—ha, ha, ha!"

"If you are not the most aggwawating cweature," Paula exclaimed at Polly. "How-eevah!"

And she went her way, whilst the madcap now hopped on to a chair, to reach down some rolled-up flags from the top of the cupboard.

"Naomer darling—"

"'Ello, present!"

"Take one of these and be ready to wawe it!" Polly cried gaily. "Jess, remember, is bringing home the silver shield—hooray! You know how to give a cheer, Naomer? A genuine British cheer?"

"Ooo, yes! I say, "Heep, heep, hooree! Like that! Heep, heep, heep—"

"Ha, ha, ha! All right; so long as you make a row, you'll do!" chuckled Polly. "Oh, but isn't it jolly, Betty? To think that we won, we really won—the silver shield!"

Betty agreed heartily. Nor could it be doubted that any of the chums were failing to be suitably jubilant, when at last they all set off on their bicycles, to meet Jess Lingard at the railway station.

By whirring along at a mad pace, they got there in good time. The school car was waiting in the yard, ready to convey all three girls and their luggage to their journey's end; but the train was not yet signalled.

So Polly had time to make good use of a few spare flags.

To the amusement of the station-master and the two porters, she hung the flags about the down-platform, making it appear as if royalty was expected!

"Ah!" said the cheery station-master, who knew all about the winning of the shield, "the flags should have been flying yesterday, when you young ladies got back from London!"

"It was a bit of an anti-climax, our not bringing back the shield with us," admitted Madge Minden.

"But there is going to be no anti-climax about things to-day!" chuckled Polly. "Hurrah! Here comes the train! Now, Naomer!"

"Heep, heep, heep—"

"Hurrah!"

"Hooway, yes, wather!"

Sending up cheer upon cheer above the hissing of the engine's safety-valve, the jubilant girls stood back until the train had stopped, then surged towards the one carriage door that had been flung open.

All's Well," says Audrey.

"WHY, Jess—"

"Bai Jove! Oh, good gwacious—"  
"Jess darling! Oh, what's the matter? What is the trouble?"

"I've lost it!" sobbed poor broken-hearted Jess, her eyes flooding with tears. "Oh, oh, I am so awfully upset about it! The silver shield—"

"You've lost it? Lost it?" some of them almost yelled. "How—when—where? How could you lose it, Jess!"

From the booking-office door came an impatient cry from Audrey.

"Don't keep that kid hanging about! If she is going to the school in the car, she must hurry. We want our tea!"

"How to explain I simply don't know," the poor girl whimpered, struggling to conquer her emotions. "It was on the hat-rack in the train—"

"Yes, well? Did you have to change? Did you forget—"

"No, no! Oh, I was thinking about it all the time!" she protested earnestly. "We had



### MORCOVE'S GREAT MOMENT.

you, and your companions, have won, to take

"Betty Barton," said Lady Lundy, "I have very great pleasure in handing you the silver shield back to Morcove. Well done, girls! Well done!"

"Jess! There you are then—hooray!"

But it happened to be Audrey Blain who got out first. Next came Stella Munro. Stella would have exchanged a formal greeting with Betty and Co., but Audrey said quickly:

"Come along, Stella; don't stand talking with those girls!"

The chums paid little heed to that sneer.

"Jess—at last!" they all chorused, as that girl came away from the first-class compartment. "And you've got the shield, haven't you? Where is it? Hurrah, hurrah!"

"Heep, heep, heep!" shrilled Naomer, waving two flags. "I love him, that silver shield! Show me!"

"Come on, Jess; the shield!" clamoured the others. "Where is it?"

And then, to their amazement and horror, they saw Jess burst into tragic tears!

to change at Exeter; but it was lost long before we got to that station. We went to the dining-car to get some lunch. When we came back, I saw to my horror that the parcel was gone!"

"But, then, it must have been stolen!" cried Betty. "Stolen by a thief on the train! Don't cry, Jess darling!"

"It is so awful!" she sobbed on brokenly. "I rushed along the corridor to tell the guard, and he couldn't do much for me. I said it must have been stolen; but I fancy he only half believed me. You see, I couldn't prove that it was on the hat-rack when we left London! He said I would have to prove it—"

"Didn't he make inquiries—ask people—"

"Yes, he went all along the train, and everybody got to know. And some were quite angry because they seemed to think I suspected them of stealing the shield! And so, what to do—oh, I simply didn't know!" Jess wound up, still weeping copiously.

"We are not waiting for that girl!" came Audrey's heartless voice. "She'll have to walk!"

The chauffeur of the school car was of a different opinion, however. He came through the booking-hall to suggest tactfully that any upset had better be gone into at the school, and when Betty and Co. saw the agitated state poor Jess was in, they agreed.

So, another minute saw the one-time day girl of Morcove being whirled off to Morcove in the car with Audrey and Stella, whilst the chums who had come in such great glee to the station pedalled homewards in mournful silence.

Lost! Before it could be got to the school, there to take its place amongst other fine trophies, the beautiful silver shield had come by a fate like this!

Not a word did the other scholars get out of Betty and Co. They were simply too upset to talk about the calamity. And out of this reticence grew the mistaken idea that the chums of the Fourth Form blamed Jess Lingard for the loss!

Audrey soon heard the rumour, and how she chuckled inwardly, thinking of the way in which her expectations were being fulfilled.

"Now," she said to herself gloatingly, "now we shall not find Betty and Co. quite so anxious to 'adopt' Stella's poor relation!"

#### Do They Forgive Her ?

**A**BOUT seven o'clock that evening word came to the captain of the Fourth Form that she was wanted in the Head Mistress' study.

As the message also included a request for Betty's chums to attend, there was not much doubt as to the reason for the interview.

Sure enough, the girls got to the sanctum to find Jess already there, along with Stella and Audrey.

Poor Jess was still the picture of tragic anguish, whilst Miss Somerfield herself was looking very upset. Audrey, very demure, and Stella, as nervous as ever, might be said to be playing their usual roles.

"Betty dear—all you girls," Miss Somerfield began at once, in a rueful tone, "you have heard, of course, about the loss of the silver shield? The trouble is that Jess, unfortunately, cannot prove she had it with her when she entered the train."

"Cannot Audrey and Stella bear witness as to that?" Betty exclaimed in astonishment, looking straight at those girls.

"We had our own things to look after," Audrey answered pertly. "We were not asked to take care of the shield! If we had been, it might not have got lost!"

"But—Stella!" burst out Polly. "Surely you noticed whether Jess put the shield—"

"I'm sorry," gulped Stella. "I'm awfully sorry, but I— No, I didn't notice what Jess did with the shield!"

"So there it is," rejoined Miss Somerfield sadly. "In the absence of definite proof that the shield was taken on to the train, I'm afraid the railway company will not put themselves to much trouble. In any case, one almost despairs of ever seeing the trophy again! The question I want to ask is, girls, do you blame Jess in any way?"

"Oh, no!—No! Oh, certainly not!" came the vehement chorus from Betty and Co. "Jess, did you really think we would blame you?"

"Ah, that is all I wanted to hear you girls say," was Miss Somerfield's smiling comment. "Jess, naturally, might well fear that you would turn against her over this. But you girls are too sensible to blame her. It would be a cruel thing to hold her responsible."

She added earnestly.

"So that brings me to the point, girls. You have laid a certain proposition before me, in regard to Jess' schooling—"

"Yes, we have, Miss Somerfield. Yes, wather!"

"And in spite of what has happened," went on the Head Mistress, "am I to understand that you still wish that scheme to go forward?"

What a staggering shock for Audrey; what a maddening moment for her, when she heard Betty and Co.'s answer!

"Why, of course, Miss Somerfield!"

As the chorus of voices arose in such perfect unison of feeling, Audrey turned pale.

These earnest cries were not in accordance with what she had expected. This was not in accordance with the rumour that Betty and Co. blamed Jess! But—it was what Betty and Co. meant! No question about that!

So that daring deed done in the train had been all for nothing, had it? Maddening, to be baulked like this!

"Very well, then," Miss Somerfield went on, looking extremely happy all at once. "It is now my great pleasure to say, girls, that for the current term, at any rate, your generosity will not be needed, although I am proud of the way you have offered help to a scholar in adversity! Jess Lingard—"

That girl, her senses swimming, took a step forward, and found her hand being held by Miss Somerfield.

"Jess, I too have felt very sorry for you and your mother! At the risk of getting into great trouble with school governors—although I don't think that risk is very great," she added, with a meaning smile, "I am going to board you at Morcove for the rest of the term, free of charge!"

"In the meantime," pursued the Head Mistress, anxious to abandon the painful subject of the shield, "you can all go back to your quarters. You, Jess, will want a share in one of the studies, and a place in the dormitory. You are Stella Munro's relation, and so— Stella, you naturally wish to have Jess in with you?"

"I—I—yes, Miss Somerfield," floundered the nervous girl, aware of the seething rage that Audrey must be in.

Whereupon Audrey minced to the door and went out, chin in air. By the time the other girls got outside the room, she had got well in advance of them. They were still coming up the stairs, in fact, when she had already reached her study, slammed the door, and was stamping about the room—raging mad.

"In this study—that miserable pauper!" she seethed. "All right, let her come! But won't I just make her life a misery!"

(END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.)

(Poor Jess! Because she is Stella's cousin she has been put into the same study as her ruthless enemy, Audrey Blain. It is no empty threat Audrey has voiced. Of the trials and sorrows that became Jess' lot as a result of that vicious threat, next week's story, entitled "Suffering in Silence!" will tell)