

In this issue:

"Suffering in Silence!" A splendid story of the girls of Morcove School.

The Schoolgirls' Own



SHE COULDN'T TAKE A JOKE! (See the new long complete Morcove School story contained in this issue.)

A Fine School Story of Betty Barton & Co., full of humour and appealing incident.



SUFFERING IN SILENCE!

The tale of JESS LINGARD, of Morcove School, and how she was condemned to bear the consequences of another girl's folly.

By MARJORIE STANTON.

The Morcove Auction Mart.

THE wind howled, a burst of rain came against the window of Study No. 12 at Morcove School, and Paula Creel, snugly in a low chair on the other side of the room, shuddered.

"Bai Jove, geals!"

"What a day!"

"Yes, wather!"

"Ugh, the rain!" Polly Linton said, shaking a little fist at the streaming pane of glass. "On a half-holiday, too!"

"Perhaps it will clear up after tea," said Betty.

"Perhaps Paula Creel will clear out of the best chair and let me sit down," Polly, the madcap, went on.

"My deah Polly——"

"Perhaps there is room for two!" added Polly, with that mischievous gleam in her eyes which always let poor Paula know what was coming. "Oh, don't disturb yourself!"

Whereupon the madcap crashed down into the chair that already held Paula, causing that young lady to give a mild shriek.

"Healp!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the few other girls who were in the study, as Polly proceeded to squeeze into a very comfortable attitude, much to Paula's discomfort.

"There, I am sure that is lovely!" cried Polly.

"What could be nicer?"

"Gweat goodness!"

"Only, can't you shift up a bit further, Paula dear?"

"My gwacious, Polly! I—— Weally, you are squashing me!"

"It is you who are squashing me," insisted Polly, pushing hard against the long-suffering aristocrat of the Fourth Form. "That's better! Ah, that's fine!"

She said this as Paula, squeezed out altogether, suddenly flopped to the floor with a dismal wail.

At this instant the door opened, and Tess Trelawney joined the other chums in that was the most popular resort at all odd times—the Fourth Form captain's study to wit.

"I know what I am going to do when the weather permits," said Tess. "I am going to turn pavement artist down in the quad, to raise a few honest pence. Being quite spent up——"

"My deah Tess," cried Paula, "whyever didn't you come to me if that is the distwessing pwe-dicament you are in? You know you can always

bowwow a twifle fwom your old fwient Paula."

"Or of me—or me—or me!" was the hearty cry from this girl and that, proving that Tess was not without a solution to her financial troubles.

"Thank you, kind friends," she said pathetically; "but I hate borrowing. I have never been able to forget that I owe Paula a half-crown from last term."

"Bai Jove, Tess, do you?" Paula exclaimed, with such surprise that the whole band of chums chuckled.

"Which shows," said Tess, "how unsafe it is to borrow from you, Paula. No, no more borrowing. When the weather improves you will see me squatting on the pavement in the quad, drawing slices of salmon, moonrises on the sea, etcetera, etcetera, all in common chalk."

"How fwivolous you are!" smiled Paula, "Heah—heah is my purse, Tess."

"Tempt, O tempt me not!" pleaded the Fourth Form's artistic genius. "My mind is made up. I shall solicit your patronage as a pavement artist."

"When," said Polly, jumping up from the chair—"when the weather improves?"

"Tess, are you really and truly hard up?" asked Betty.

"Do you think I would resort to the desperate extremity of doing heads of salmon on the pavement if I were not absolutely destitute?" asked Tess tragically. "At my age—with my great talent—forced to——"

"Then I know what," Betty said gaily, keeping up the fun. "I know what you ought to do, Tess. Have an auction sale of all your works of art."

"Hurrah! Hooray—yes!" cried Polly, swinging on to the edge of the table. "The very wheeze for a wet afternoon! An auction!"

"Under an order in bankruptcy," rushed on the madcap, "great sale of old masters!"

Tess looked dazed, overcome.

"Can it be possible," she exclaimed, "that I have friends around me who are willing to bid for——"

"We have some ink stains on the walls that want hiding," said Polly, glancing around. "Agreed, then! This day—this very hour, in fact—we'll have a giddy auction!"

The novel idea was catching on. Not a girl

here but what was bubbling over with merriment at the fun an auction promised.

"We must get a placard out," was one of Polly's jubilant suggestions towards the end of the one-sided debate. "Somebody get me a big sheet of drawing-paper—a monster one. Somebody else get me some Chinese ink and a brush. I'll do the bill. Oh, this is great fun!"

Tess Trelawney had rushed away to her study for a monster sheet of drawing-paper, also the Chinese ink and brush. She set down these materials, and once again it was Polly who took charge of operations.

Ten minutes later a great placard, with this wording, was causing much merriment amongst other girls as it flared before their eyes on one of the notice-boards downstairs:

GREAT SACRIFICE!!!

An opportunity occurs for admirers of British Art to acquire the well-known works of that talented artist,

TESS TRELAWNEY!

SALE BY AUCTION NOW PROCEEDING!

Come in your hundreds to the Fourth Form Common-room!

There were sedate scholars at Morcove who thought they had better hold aloof. It must be a bit of sheer nonsense! Others, who welcomed the novelty as a relief from the boredom of a pouring wet afternoon, hurried away to the improvised "auction-mart," where Polly, now in the rôle of doorkeeper, was using her lungs for all she was worth.

Meantime, the need had arisen for Betty Barton to run back alone upstairs, where she knocked at the door of Study No. 8.

"Well?"

That was Audrey Blain's supercilious voice. Betty opened the door, but only to put her head into the room. Ignoring Audrey and Stella, the Form captain spoke to a third girl, who was seated at the table doing some writing.

"Can you spare a few minutes, Jess?"

"Certainly," answered Jess Lingard, promptly blotting the half-written sheet. "I was writing to mother, but I can finish it later."

She slipped the letter under the pad for the time being, and came across to Betty, with the intention of going with that girl to Study 12.

Even if it was only a trifling matter that Betty wanted to discuss, Jess had good reason for knowing that it was out of the question for them to stand talking in a room which held Audrey Blain. It would only start Audrey off.

"I say, Jess dear," Betty broke out, as soon as they got to Study 12, "the girls have got up a bit of fun for the wet afternoon."

And she laughingly explained the coming "auction."

Jess was soon reflecting the Form captain's brightness.

"Oh, I must come down and look on!" she exclaimed, in delight. "Can't do any bidding myself for the works of art, worse luck! Tess calls herself bankrupt. I wonder how she would like to be really as bankrupt as I am!"

"Yes," said Betty, with sudden great feeling. "It is only a joke with Tess, of course. She is merely hard up for the present, like we all get at times. But you— Ah, well, Jess darling,

money isn't everything! Is that rather cold comfort?"

"It is sound sense, Betty," was the earnest, cheery answer. "Oh, don't let my penniless state make you look so solemn all at once! We'll go down, shall we, and see the fun?"

It was whilst they were hurrying off downstairs that Betty suddenly came out with a bright notion.

"Jess dear, if you won't be bidding, then you ought to make yourself useful at the sale."

"I will—delighted!" was the hearty answer. "It will set free some girl who has money to spare, no doubt. But what shall I be wanted to do?"

"We ought to make you clerk to the auctioneer," Betty said, with a laugh. "You will mark down the sales and collect the money afterwards. Polly is auctioneer, but goodness knows what will happen if she doesn't have a clerk to help her!"

Further talk was ended by the two girls coming in sight of the Fourth Form Common-room.

Either the "auction-mart" was already packed out, or else there was congestion at the doorway, for a mass of girlish humanity was there, making a great commotion.

Nor was that commotion diminished by the doorkeeper's rousing appeals, shouted through a megaphone that was used on sports days.

There, mounted on a chair at the doorway, with the mirthful girls around her, Polly was speaking through the great tin trumpet.

"Hurry up, ladies—hurry up! This way to the sale! Now for bargains, now for the bidding! Hi, hi, hi! This way to the sa-a-ale! Hi, hi, hi!"

And every time madcap Polly came out with a "Hi, hi, hi!" the whole crowd of intending bidders laughed:

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Going—Going—Gone!"

"HALLO, Jess!" Polly cried gaily, taking the megaphone away from her lips to greet Jess Lingard in a more or less normal fashion. "So you have come. That's right!"

"We are going to make Jess the auctioneer's clerk," said Betty. "I ran up and asked her to lend a hand in the sale."

"And who is the auctioneer?" asked Polly.

"Why, you are. Who else but you?"

"Oh! I'm auctioneer, am I?" chuckled the madcap, by no means despising the job. "All right; I'm on! Now, ladies, by your leave!"

This was said as she jumped down from the box and started to drag it amongst the squeezed crowd into the saleroom. She got a good deal of alleged "help," resulting in much tumbling about, but at last the box was placed in position to do duty as a rostrum.

"Where's my hammer?" Polly wanted to know. "How can I knock down works of art to the highest bidder, if there is nothing to knock them down with? Hammer, someone!"

"Here you are—the very thing!" laughed Dolly Delane, who had had the forethought to go in quest of the needful article. She had found a broken croquet-mallet, with only six inches of handle left to it, and she suggested that that would do nicely.

"It'll do," Polly announced, as the result of an experimental tap. "So now to business." And up she jumped on to the box, at the top

end of the room, whilst the swarms of girl stood back so as to allow a clear space for the works of art to be shown.

Tess, by this time, was in a sort of panic. She wanted to explain that she was not really as hard up as all this. She hoped the girls were not going to be so silly as to bid seriously. Any little thing she had painted at any time they were welcome to, if they really did care for paintings. But—

Thump, thump, thump! sounded Polly's hammer, as a sign for order.

"But—" Tess tried to resume, only she was shouted down by Polly.

"Order, please! Who is the girl who won't stop talking?"

"It's Tess," yelled a dozen laughing girls. "She says—"

"Look here, this is a sale, and if Tess Trelawney doesn't behave herself, she will be turned out," Polly said, with mock gravity. "Ladies all! Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking—"

"But—" was heard from Tess again.

"I say, unaccustomed as I am to—"

"But—"

"Stop butting in, Tess Trelawney!" Polly insisted indignantly. "This is a sale—"

"They are my pictures, and I want to explain. I—"

"They are not your pictures any longer!" argued the auctioneer flatly. "You are bankrupt, and I am in possession. So, ladies, if you will kindly take no more notice of Tess, we shall get on faster." Thump, thump, thump! "Lot Number One—where is it?"

This was the signal for Madge and Dolly, both in fits of laughter, to hold up a large canvas in oils.

"Lot Number One, ladies all! Look at it! Don't be afraid. Study of a dog, but he won't bite you. How much?" Polly demanded, swinging her hammer in the approved fashion. "How much for Fido?"

"Bow, wow!" barked Grace Garfield.

"You see, ladies," said Polly serenely, "Fido even barks. He is such a speaking likeness. How much? Did someone say a hundred and fifty guineas for this valuable, priceless gem?"

"Fourpence!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fourpence? Shocking!" commented Polly.

"It's not the price of a dog-collar, let alone a dog with hair all over his eyes, just like Paula Creel when she's ruffled! How much for Fido, once again?"

Betty set the serious bidding going by saying five shillings. Then, to the horror of Tess, the artist, and to the delight of Polly, the auctioneer, the work of art became quite keenly contested for.

How Tess' amazement grew as the bidding crept up from five shillings to nine-and-six, at which figure it was knocked down—thump!—to Ethel Courtway, the school's head girl.

"Ah, you thought we were having a game with you, but we are not," Polly said grimly to the crowd. "Lot Number Two—where is he?"

A water-colour sketch of Morcove beach, with breaking waves.

"There's a lovely picture!" cried the auctioneer. "There's nature in all her what's-her-name."

"Then perhaps you'll say half a guinea, Paula?"

"Yes, wather. I mean—"

"A half-guinea I am bid!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the crowd around the rostrum, as Paula's meaningless answer was taken seriously.

Paula, however, laughed with the rest. She said it was "quite all right!" She had a "great regard" for Tess as an artist.

So Paula had that water-colour drawing knocked down to her—thump again!—for a bid that no one else was willing to exceed, and then Lot 3 was offered.

"Will you come forward a little, ladies?" cried Polly. "I see the nobility and gentry of Morcove are now arriving. I should be sorry to see Audrey Blain crowded out. How much for this—this—this—What do you call this, Tess, I say?"

From somewhere in the room, where she was



POLLY THE AUCTIONEER! "Hurry up, ladies! This way to the sale!" cried Polly. "Now for bargains, now for the bidding! Hi, hi, hi!"

almost lost amongst the crowd, Tess answered that it was an unfinished sketch, and, please, they really must stop the sale, because she was sure—

"An unfinished sketch by the distinguished, world-famed, and all-the-rest-of-it artist, Tess Trelawney!" Polly shouted through the megaphone. "How much?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothing to laugh at, ladies! The advantage of an unfinished sketch is this—you can call the picture what you like. Also, you can hang it where you like, and which way you like!"

"I'll have it," cried Ella Elgood. "It will do to paste over the hole I burst in my study screen. Sixpence!"

"Take it—take it!" Polly said sorrowfully, as no one went on with the bidding. "Take it up tenderly, touch it with care; mind how you touch it, or it will tear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You call yourselves patrons of art?" Polly abused the tittering crowd. "Some of these gems will be worth millions in the years to come—millions! Think of that! Lot Number Three. Hallo, what have we here?"

A clever sketch in water-colours was held up. It portrayed, in an amusing manner, a schoolgirl, very dressed-up, and looking very, very haughty. Everybody recognised it at once as a clever caricature of Audrey Blain. It bore the pencilled title, "Her Majesty."

"Oh, oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How good!"

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, half a crown, Polly," Paula cried out in her delight. "That's vewy wigh!"

There was some commotion as Audrey herself thrust her way to the front to get a nearer view of the caricature.

It is generally reckoned to be a flattering thing to be caricatured. Audrey, at any rate, had no grounds whatever for feeling insulted. Tess, with the real talent that was hers, had merely hit off a most clever, effective sketch, ridiculing Audrey's own particular vanities. The girl-artist had got Audrey's mincing step to the life.

If only to give herself airs, however, Audrey now cried out passionately:

"I am not going to allow that skit on me to be sold!"

"What's that you say?" Polly asked composedly. "If you don't like the sketch, you had better buy it and then burn it. But—"

Audrey suddenly made a snatch at the sketch, which Dolly Delane was holding. Dolly whisked it away, and Polly promptly took it so as to hold it beyond Audrey's reach.

"How much for this clever—"

"Give it to me! I insist!" Audrey cried fiercely. "You—you—"

"Order, Audrey! Gently!" some of the girls cried. "Don't be silly! Tess has often caricatured lots of us—the mistresses, too!"

"I don't care! I'm not going to be—"

"Half a crown, Polly!" cried Paula. "I weward the sketch as most amusing, bai Jove!" Then Audrey, suddenly on her dignity, changed her tactics. She was the daughter of wealthy people, and had a generous allowance of pocket-money. She would outbid Paula easily.

"Five shillings!" Audrey said haughtily.

"Six!" was the prompt rejoinder from Paula. "I weward that sketch as a vewy wemarkable example of the art of cawicawtawing!"

For Paula to draw! that awkward word was the signal for a shout of laughter. It had hardly died away before Audrey was saying:

"Seven shillings—eight—nine!"

"Ten, bai Jove!" beamed Paula, settling down to the tussle with keen enjoyment.

"Eleven!"

"Twelve!"

"Twelve, did you say, Paula?"

"Yes, wather, Polly! Fifteen, in fact, and cheap at the pwice."

"Seventeen-and-six!" from Audrey, and the crowd said:

"Phee-oo!"

"Any advance on seventeen-and-six?"

"Yes, wather!" simpered Paula. "Another half-crown."

"That's a pound, ladies!"

"A guinea—twenty-five shillings—thirty!" Audrey cried violently. "I am going to have it!" she added, in a loud whisper to Stella Munro, who was at her side all this while.

From somewhere amongst the excited crowd there came a feeble voice—Tess Trelawney's. She was starting all over again. This sale really must not go on. Really, it was—

"Thirty-five shillings!" beamed Paula. "I weward that sketch as pwiceless. Yes, wather!"

"Forty!"—from Audrey.

"Forty," Polly said, with what breath that was left to her. "Forty! Well, what about it?"

"Forty-two—forty-three! Bai Jove, say fifty shillings and get it over!" said Paula.

There was a pause. Then Audrey said, in that low, passionate tone of hers:

"Three pounds!"

"Going at three pounds!" Polly sang out, gaily swinging the hammer. "Are you all done, ladies? Going—it is going at three pounds! At three pounds—"

"Guineas!" Paula corrected, and the crowd seethed again.

Where was this business going to end?

"Three pounds ten," Audrey said, trying to speak calmly. "And you can have the money to-day."

"Four pounds, and you can have the money wight away."

"Four pounds five—four-ten, then!" panted Audrey.

"Money down is understood," Polly said cheerfully. "After the sale, will all purchasers please pay the clerk, and receive delivery of the goods? Ahem! Order, please! Where were we?"

It was noticed that Audrey was now whispering with Stella, who was regretfully shaking her hand.

"Four pounds twelve-and-six, bai Jove!"

"Four-fifteen, and I'll pay at the end of the week!" Audrey said, flushing at the admission that she had not got quite so much money as that upon her.

"Five pounds—money wight away!" drawled Paula, without turning a hair. "I weward that sketch as a most striking example of my friend's brilliant talent, bai Jove!"

"Going!" Polly warned the whole room, wagging the hammer. "Going at five pounds! Going, I say! Going—going—"

The hammer stood poised. The whole room held its breath.

"Gone!" cried Polly, and down fell the hammer—thump! "Sold to Paula Creel for five pounds!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Audrey flashed about. Girls who were in her way found themselves pushed to right and left. White to the very lips, she turned her back on the whole scene and stalked out of the room—beaten!

They All Trust Jess.

THAT impromptu auction of Tess Trelawney's works of art, begun as a joke to help white away a wet afternoon—how little any of the girls anticipated what the outcome would be!

About a dozen pictures and sketches had been sold, but only the one "caricature" had fetched a fancy price.

The other items were worth every penny of the money that was bid for them. Tess was no dabbler in art; she was a born artist to the

finger-tips, and there was very little of the amateur touch about any of the items.

So everybody was very satisfied except—except Tess herself!

That was the odd part about it all, and that was where the second phase of the great joke began.

Paula paid her five pounds for the caricature "wight away," and settled for other items, too, with a beaming countenance. The other girls paid "the clerk"—otherwise Jess Lingard—for their respective lots, and went off gaily with them. Went off, proud to have captured such real treasures as the result of the bit of nonsense!

Tess was really in a paddy about it all before the settling-up was half completed. She declared that she would never touch a penny of the money—not one penny!

It was not that she regretted parting with the pictures and drawings. She could always do others. Only it went against her sense of equity that the bidding should have been seriously carried out.

Tess would have liked to see all the fun of the mock auction ending in all the money being handed back and the pictures just scrambled for.

But no. Polly was the auctioneer, and it was no use Tess trying to argue with Polly.

"You are only an artist; artists never understand business," Polly informed Tess at one stage of the argument, whilst Jess was finishing the settling-up with the buyers. "Go away, and by and by Jess will hand over the dibs."

"Yes, wather! Weally, Tess—" "I shall not touch a penny!" Tess cried again desperately. "Bother you all! They were my pictures. I— Oh, look here!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "But do be reasonable!" "It is for you to be reasonable. The pictures have been sold under the hammer. You must take the money. Isn't that fair, Betty?" appealed Polly.

"I hope so," laughed the captain. "Unless it was illegal for Polly to act as an auctioneer."

"Now, Betty, don't make things worse!" groaned Polly. "Illegal! Of course, it was only a harmless bit of fun amongst schoolgirls. A joke—"

"That's what I say—it was a joke!" burst out Tess. "So you can't treat the bids seriously! Look here!"

"Oh, Tess!"

"But—"

"If you don't go away, I'll go for you with the hammer, so there!" warned Polly, brandishing the broken croquet-mallet in a mock warlike manner. "What the total, Jess darling?"

"Eight pounds two-and-six."

"Hooray!"

"Yes, wather!"

Tess, however, nearly fainted. She began again:

"Well, all I know is, I shall not take a penny."

"Oh, this girl!" groaned Polly, casting down the croquet-mallet in despair.

As it chanced, she dropped the mallet on Paula's left foot, so that that young lady, with a howl, started to hop about on the other foot. During which diversion Polly artfully scampered away, to get to Study 12 and there give herself up to peal after peal of laughter.

Then poor perplexed Tess, in genuine dismay at the thought of making so much money out of her friends, came to a decision.

She went up to Jess Lingard, who was now

ready to hand over the grand total, together with a slip showing how the money was made up.

"Jess, you have heard what I said," sighed Tess. "I won't touch a penny!"

"But—"

"Oh, don't you begin!" groaned the unhappy artist. "Now, Jess—Jess darling, listen. Do me a favour. Go round to the studios and hand back all the money to the different girls, and say they are welcome to keep the pictures."

"All right," agreed the auctioneer's clerk. She gave a light laugh. "I like the way Polly has left it all to me to clear up! Never mind, though!"

She scampered away, and Tess, looking relieved, presently went up to her own study. Madge, her study mate at this time, was not there, but really Tess was not sorry to be all alone for a bit.

She sat down, happy to think of that eight pounds two-and-six being returned to the various reckless girls who had piled up such a fabulous total.

Then suddenly the door flashed open, and Jess Lingard came in breathlessly.

"I'm sorry, Tess—"

"Oh, help, what is it now?"

"Not one of the girls will take back her money. Each one says she has received good value for her money."

"Wha-at!" Tess fairly yelled scornfully. "What nonsense it is! I won't take a penny!"

"Then, please, what am I to do with the money?" pleaded Jess, in comical dismay. "You must take it, if they won't take it back."

Tess did not answer. She suddenly rushed away, as if driven crazy.

Ten minutes later she whirled into Study 12, where Betty and Polly had Madge, Trixie, Dolly, Naomer, Paula, and a few others for company.

"Paula, Betty—all of you who bought those dud pictures!" panted Tess. "Are you as obstinate as the other girls seem to be?"

"We are not going to have the pictures for nothing. Is it likely?" they chorused.

"I, for my part, am not going to take the money."

"All right, don't take the money," said the late auctioneer. "Jess will not mind looking after it until you come to your senses."

"Oh, I would rather not!" Jess pleaded, arriving upon the scene in time to hear what Polly was proposing. "It is a lot of money to—be responsible for."

"You are the clerk," Polly said solemnly. "Under an Act of Parliament of George the

Something-or-other— Or was it Oliver Cromwell? I forget which. But you are bound to retain that money, pending a settlement of the great legal problem, Trelawney v. Paula Creel and others. Paula, you were the biggest purchaser—you are going to fight this action, aren't you?"

"Yes, wather!" beamed Paula, from the depths of her favourite easy-chair. "Tess darling, pway be sevious!"

"Serious! I feel tragic!" Tess said despairingly. "All right. You must just take charge of the money, Jess dear, until the girls come to their senses."

"Until you come to your senses," corrected Polly.

"Jess had better invest it in War Loans," chuckled Betty. "At five per cent interest—"

"Yes," cried Polly. "Eight pounds two-and-six, at five per cent per annum—how much,



POOR PAULA! "Yes," cried Polly, "Eight pounds two-and-sixpence—hurrah!" and out of sheer exuberance of spirits she hurled a cushion full at Paula Creel.

you?" she asked, hurling a cushion at Paula. "How frivolous of you, weally!" complained the long-suffering aristocrat, picking up the cushion to make one more for the easy-chair. They were all, of course, utterly frivolous about the whole business, which certainly had livened up the wet afternoon. All save Audrey! That girl was still seething with rage over what had happened at the auction.

If only she had known that Paula was going to refuse to drop out of the bidding, even when it had reached such a sensational figure, she, Audrey, would never have started!

The maddening thing was that she had declared, in the presence of the whole Form, that she meant to have that caricature, and in the end she had had to let it go to her rival bidder!

How calm had been Paula Creel's drawing bids, time after time! And yet, as Audrey now realised, there had been a sudden stern spirit actuating the languid aristocrat of the Form. The bidding had been a sudden, strange combat, and Paula, calm to the last, had won.

Still in a passion of humiliation over the whole affair, late that evening Audrey vented some of her malicious rage upon Jess Lingard.

That girl was counting over the money once again in Study 8—faithful Jess, fearful of getting one penny out in the far-from-welcome "trust fund." Audrey and Stella were there, and although Stella remained moodily silent, "her majesty" came out with a sneer or two.

"So Tess wouldn't take the money? I should think not! A downright swindle it was, that Betty and Polly promoted!"

"The girls who bought the pictures don't think so," Jess said quietly. "They are just as stub-

born in their refusal to take back the money, as Tess is to take it."

"How nice for you!" laughed Audrey harshly. "Stella darling, this girl can call herself your rich relation now!"

"Oh, Audrey, leave her alone!" was the miserable entreaty from Stella. "How you do torment her!"

There was no answer to that gloomy remark from the girl who was Jess Lingard's rich relation. No response from Audrey, except a malignant look at quiet Jess—a look that as good as said:

"Leave her alone? Not until I've got the miserable little pauper bundled out of our study, and out of Morcove altogether!"

As Safe as the Bank.

SATURDAY had come round again—another "halfer" for the scholars of Morcove School, and a glorious one this time! And Jess Lingard was still holding all that money "in trust" for others, pending a settlement of the amusing deadlock.

The whole business was as big a joke as ever amongst the girls, and that joke Jess herself could appreciate from their point of view. Only—

Well, her private opinion was that the sooner she was relieved of the money the better.

She was proud to be able to think that the faith in her was deserved. She had her faults, she knew, but dishonesty was not one of them. The money might have been a thousand pounds, and it would have been no temptation to her.

At the same time, she wanted to be relieved of the embarrassing trust.

If only because she was so conscientious, this holding the money meant counting it up, time after time, to see that it was still quite all right. Eight pounds two-and-six, in currency notes and shillings and coppers, all crammed into a shabby purse that, alas, held only a few other coppers of her own!

And how amused Betty and Co. were to see their Jess taking her trust so seriously. "That came to be part of the joke.

After the midday dinner on that hot, sunny Saturday in the summer term, Jess made a really desperate visit to Study 12, where she could be sure of finding most of the girls who were concerned in the deadlock.

"Please, Betty, Polly—all of you! About that money—"

"Hope you haven't lost it, Jess!"

"I haven't lost the money yet, but if I go on like this, I may," Jess warned the mirthful girls.

"Then spend it," advised Tess impatiently, "and be done with the business!"

"No, Jess mustn't spend it," Polly said very solemnly. "She must go on acting as the thing-amybob what's-his-name—"

"Public trustee," smiled Betty.

"When you are old and grey," continued Polly, swinging her legs as she sat on the edge of the study table, "the great legal dispute will come to an end at last, and then you can take the money out of the stocking—"

"Purse."

"Oh, purse, is it? I should bury it, if I were you," Polly said. "The money won't be wanted for years and years."

It was all so much happy bantering, implying absolute confidence in Jess as being really as safe as the bank, and so what could she do? What else but resign herself once again to the reten-

tion of the bothersome eight pounds two-and-six?

She had to return to Study 8, where Audrey, as usual, had made a grand toilette for the afternoon's holiday. Her summery frock, her light shoes and costly silk stockings, her careful coiffure, and such a display of artistic jewellery as only she went in for—all this left the self-styled queen of the Form as proud of herself as ever.

Stella was not there, but Audrey would have had just the same sneers for Jess even if that poor girl's rich relation had been on hand.

"Well, Workhouse?" Audrey greeted Jess, using one of a dozen different insulting names she had found for the ruined widow's daughter. "Don't you feel at a loose end when the half-holiday comes round—no shop to mind now?"

Jess ignored the jeer, whilst she collected pen, ink, and paper to go away with those materials and write to her mother in peace.

"Barncombe's loss, of course, is Morcove's gain," continued Audrey. "How I would feel if it were were no Jess Lingard always around me nowadays! And how Stella would miss you, too!"

She added goadingly:

"You are such an acquisition, aren't you? Having been brought up in the slums of Barncombe and given a council school education, you can rightly claim to be an ornament to this school! Bah, how I detest vulgar kids like you!" the girl finished up fiercely, as Jess still held her peace.

With tight-set lips, the widow's daughter passed from the room, carrying the materials for letter-writing.

Just after she quitted Study 8 she met Stella, who was bound to see how upset she looked.

"What's the matter, Jess?" Stella halted to ask.

"Nothing, Stella—nothing," said the girl, whose eyes were shining with tears bravely held in check. "I am going to write to mother. Shall I give her your love?"

"Oh, yes!" Stella blurted out. "Has—has Audrey been on at you again, Jess? I'm sorry! I—I don't see what I can do, though."

"I don't blame you for the nasty things Audrey is always saying," Jess assured her rich relation gently. "It makes you unhappy, I know. Stella, how awfully unhappy you do seem to be lately! Is there—oh, I sometimes wonder—is there any other reason?"

"I—I'm all right; it is your fancy," Stella said quickly, and passed on, looking far from being all right. If there was one thing more agitating to her than being on hand when Audrey was bullying Jess, it was the meeting Jess alone.

Unhappy? Of course Stella was unhappy, with that terrible deed upon her conscience night and day. The wrong she had done the mother and daughter was a canker, sapping all the joy out of life.

Entering the study, she found Audrey ready to make a smiling remark.

"Well, dear? I have just been remarking to Jess that it is so nice to have her dumped upon us in this study. When one has furnished a study to one's own taste, and is rather fastidious altogether, Jess is just the right sort to be a finishing touch."

Stella had sat down dejectedly. Now she suddenly stood up, with a hard-driven look in her face.

"Audrey, instead of going on like this, hadn't

I—hadn't I better find another study, if I can, and have Jess in with me? She is my relation, and I—I have simply got to put up with her. But you—"

"Certainly not!" Audrey said sweetly. "I am not going to lose you, dear—the only friend I have in this hateful, dead-and-alive hole! Come out with me for a laze in the sunshine somewhere, and don't ever talk such nonsense again."

Stella almost panted with relief as she received this soothing response to her desperate suggestion. There was a moment whilst she gazed at her brilliant, alluring friend with all the old adulation; then she crossed over and got her outdoor things.

After a musing step about the room, Audrey turned to the table, on which stood a small picnic-basket. She patted the dainty little outfit affectionately.

"There is everything in here for a nice tea out-of-doors," she purred. "We will find a warm spot and curl up, and laze away the time in the sunshine. Stella, don't you love the sunshine when it is like this? So baking hot, making you feel you want to bask in it like a tabby!"

"It is a splendid day," Stella agreed, recovering her lost spirits under the influence of such rallying talk. "I should think it will be dry enough for sitting about on the grass, although we did have that deluge last Wednesday."

"Oh, we'll do better than that!" laughed Audrey.

And they did.

About half-way between Morcove and Barncombe town, and well away from the main road, the two girls found a beautiful meadow, where there was a great haystack.



AUDREY'S SPITEFULNESS! "Leave her alone?" cried Audrey. "Not until I've got this miserable little pauper bundled out of our study, and out of Morcove altogether!"

The big rick had been made out of that season's mowings, and with the hot sunshine beating down upon it the hay was now as sweet to the nostrils as it was dry to the touch. The girls found the usual mound of hay lying beside the as yet unthatched stack, and on that luxurious couch they took their ease.

For the best part of an hour they lolled about, basking in the sunshine, Audrey doing what little talking broke the drowsy silence.

Then her delicate hands fiddled with teacups and a Thermos flask, and presently she was passing Stella a hot, refreshing cup of tea.

"There, dear, see if that will get rid of the horrors. Never give way to them, Stella. Look how fed-up I get with the school, and with—oh, everything, especially the poor relation! But I only say to myself, 'all the more reason for getting a bit of fun when I can.'"

After they had made their very dainty tea, Audrey put the things back into the basket and dumped the latter on one side.

Then she winked at Stella, as she slid a hand into her frock pocket and brought out—cigarettes.

"I am going to have one, and you will have one, too," she said, offering the silver case. "That's right! I have some matches. We'll light up and roll back, and crown everything with a last lovely haze."

Returning the silver case to her pocket, she now brought out matches.

"This is the best of summer term," she smiled musingly. "You get such fine opportunities for being out and about, away from mistresses, and Betty Bartonses, and— Oh!"

She cried out again, louder than ever, "Oh, Stella!" as the whole box of matches, having caught light when she struck the one match, dropped from her scorched fingers.

"Stella! Put—put it out! Oh, quick!"

But it was too late.

The flaming box was all amongst the loose lay, and both girls only had time to scramble out of the way, for safety's sake, before sheets of flames were leaping high into the air.

Audrey had set a ten-ton rick ablaze!

Jess to the Rescue.

"STELLA! Oh, what shall we do! Oh, how awful!"

"I'm sorry, Audrey! Oh, how sorry I am, you suggested the cigarettes!" Stella gasped out miserably. "We shall get expelled for this."

She and Audrey were shrinking farther and farther from the seething fire, as these first few seconds saw it involving the whole haystack.

It was an appalling spectacle.

The flames had simply rushed all over the rick, and that the great mass of sweet hay was utterly doomed both girls already realised.

Even a fire-engine, had one been on the spot at this moment, would have been of no use whatever. The only effect of pouring hundreds of gallons on to the fire would have been to change the sheets of flame into choking clouds of black smoke.

There was more flame than smoke at present, for the reason that the hay, which had been sheeted over during the recent wet weather, was today rustling-dry.

Higher and higher leapt the roaring blaze, and all at once Stella turned away with a shuddering moan of despair. She took to her heels and ran along by the hedge bounding that side of the meadow, and Audrey followed.

Yes, even Audrey was taking to flight in sheer

panic! Her mind held but one thought, and it was:

"We have done it now!"

A thing like this meant trouble with people outside the school if ever the owner of the rick found out who had fired it.

So on sped both girls, Stella leading, Audrey close behind, carrying the picnic-basket. She had had her wits about her sufficiently to think to snatch up that basket. Had it been left behind it would have been a clue as to who had set the rick on fire.

Already breathless with running, both girls got to the field gateway. Would they—oh, would they be able to get clear of the spot before they were seen?

The very next second found that question answered.

For, even as the culprits were darting through the gateway, an excited man stood before them, his hands spread wide to bar their way out into the lane.

"Stop, you!" he shouted. "No you don't! That's my rick that's burning, and you are the ones as did it."

"Oh, please, we are sorry!" Stella lost no time in whimpering. "It was an accident! We are sorry!"

"Accident be hanged!" the farmer shouted, with pardonable anger. "You must have been lighting matches carelessly! I'll want an inquiry into this! I'll have the police on to you!"

"Why don't you go and see what can be done?" panted Audrey.

"Nothing can be done, and you know it!" he answered furiously. "That hay is ruined, even if you got the fire under in two ticks from now. There's a ten-ton rick done for, and by you!"

"We—we are sorry!"

"Picnicking, were you?" he stormed on, almost beside himself over the really serious loss. "Fancy lighting a fire to boil a kettle close to a rick!"

"We didn't light any fire!" protested Audrey.

"We had a Thermos—"

"Then what did you light? Cigarettes, eh?" he shrewdly guessed. "All right; that makes it all the worse for you when I come up to the school and tell your headmistress! And I will!"

"Please—"

"How can a working farmer, these hard times, suffer a loss like that and not ask for compensation?" he demanded, with good excuse for being so indignant. "If you will do these reckless things you must stand the consequences! Ten tons o' meadow hay done for!"

Audrey was pulling herself together. She was wondering desperately how the man could be appeased.

"We will compensate you, sir. We know what a loss it means."

"The loss is one you can never make up!" he exclaimed bitterly. "Twenty-five pounds, at the very least! No, it will serve you right if I have to see your headmistress about this. I'm not a man to want to get folk into trouble over an accident, but when I know you were doing wrong by smoking cigarettes, I've got good reason for not sparing you. Why should I spare you?"

Neither girl could answer. Stella was all gone to pieces, wringing her hands distractedly, whilst she gazed back at the flaming rick. Audrey was racking her brains for a way out of the terrible plight.

Five-and-twenty pounds' worth of damage, all

caused by their flouting discipline and indulging in cigarettes! Even if her, and Stella's, parents footed the bill, this affair would mean expulsion.

"Look here, Mr.—"

"Well, what? Mr. Garley is my name."

"Mr. Garley, be a sport and—don't get us into a row at the school," Audrey sought to coax him. "Listen to me. We will settle the matter privately."

"You, a couple of schoolgirls, settle it privately?" he returned incredulously. "I wish you could, but how can you? No, even if I shoulder some of the loss myself, you two schoolgirls can't pay—"

"And there he broke off, as he saw another schoolgirl come running up suddenly, all out of breath.

It was Jess Lingard.

For the moment she was not surprised to see Audrey and Stella here with the farmer. Jess, in fact, as she sprang off her cycle when she first saw the fire and started to rush to the meadow, had quite expected to find plenty of other people speeding to the spot.

"It is a rick on fire, isn't it?" she gasped out, as she came dashing in through the gateway. "Oh, how shocking! What a shame—what a loss for the poor farmer!"

"And that's me," cried Mr. Garley, "and you may well talk about the loss, missy. Ten tons of hay—"

"How did it start?"

"How? Ask those two other girls—school-fellows of yours, aren't they? What do you think of a couple of girls lighting up cigarettes?"

"Stella!" panted Jess, in a tone of horror. "Audrey! Oh—"

"We—we are sorry, Jess," quavered Stella, gesturing wildly. "We keep on telling Mr. Garley we are sorry."

"A fine lot o' comfort that is to me!" Mr. Garley said bitterly. "Look at the position I'm in. I can't get paid for the damage unless I go up to the school, and that'll mean getting these two girls sent packing, I know."

Audrey now beckoned Jess aside excitedly.

"Jess, you've got some money on you, haven't you? A lot of money—"

"No, not of my own."

"You've got all that money from that sale," Audrey insisted impatiently. "Lend me it for the time being. Jess, you must. If you don't you'll see Stella expelled, as well as me."

"But I—oh, it is not right! The money—"

"I know all about that! Let me have it, and I'll make everything all right for you when we get back," Audrey said, in a half wheedling, half domineering tone. "The farmer is not a bad sort, I can see. I can manage him."

It was partly the belief that Mr. Garley, whilst fully entitled to the full cost of the ruined rick, would be good-naturedly ready to compromise, that induced Jess to put her hand in her pocket and fetch out the purse.

At the same time, she felt compelled to let Audrey do her best with the trust money, because Stella was mixed up in the serious trouble—trouble that would certainly get both girls expelled if ever it became known at the school.

Another moment and the purse was in Audrey's hands. She ran to the farmer and engaged him in talk. Jess and Stella drew close, with not a word to say as the negotiations went on. Stella was perfectly livid with fear, trembling from head to foot. Jess was hardly less agitated.

Would Audrey be able to make terms with the farmer—would she?

As Jess realised, if there were two or three minutes during which Mr. Garley seemed opposed to compromising, that was only because he was a plain, honest man, anxious to do nothing that was not quite straightforward.

He had a hazy notion that he ought to come down upon the parents of these girls for the damages he was entitled to, but he shrank from taking any step that would get them into a serious row.

He was, in fact, good-natured enough to feel that if the loss had been one he could foot, he would have agreed to overlook it altogether. But he was a poor, working farmer, and how could he suffer a twenty-five pound loss without any compensation whatever?

Being in this position, and with Audrey assuring him that they could really afford to pay up to the extent of ten pounds on the spot, he at last gave in.

Honestly believing that it was the best thing for all concerned—and no one could certainly say that he was doing well out of the bargain—he accepted the ten pounds and promised to hold his tongue about the cause of the fire.

"If the rick had been insured, I might have been able to let you off altogether," was his parting remark. "But it was only put up a few weeks ago. Take my advice and get away sharp, afore other people are attracted to the fire."

He did not have to repeat that advice. All the time the negotiations were going on the three girls had been in great dread of fresh arrivals upon the scene—Morcove scholars, as likely as any. Audrey and Stella simply flashed away, whilst Jess ran back up the lane to where she had left her cycle.

To her intense relief she encountered no one. With a last horrified stare at the burning rick, which was already settling down into a smouldering mass that billowed with smoke, she mounted her machine and pedalled away, avoiding the main road.

The roundabout way that she followed back to the school took her much longer than the direct highway, of course. Even so, she was indoors long before Stella and Audrey came sneaking home on foot.

By that time Jess had become perfectly easy in her mind about advancing that money to the miscreants. She knew the unwritten law amongst the girls of Morcove School—better anything, rather than leave another girl to meet the fate of expulsion!

Stella was still livid with fright when she came up to Study 8. But Audrey, with a good deal of bravado, was now composed and smiling.

"Hallo! So there you are!" The cause of all the trouble grinned at Jess. "You came in useful for once. Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is nothing to laugh about," Jess said quietly. "And, if you please, Audrey, I would like to know how soon I can have that money back?"

Audrey's proud head went up then.

"Afraid we are going to do you out of it, are you?" she sneered.

"No, I don't think you are quite as bad as that," Jess answered spiritedly. "I just want to know—and I think I'm entitled to ask—how soon can you get the eight pounds you borrowed?"

"Where's the hurry?" retorted Audrey, sinking into a low chair. "You are never going to

be asked by the girls for that money. You know what a deadlock there is."

"That doesn't matter. I shan't be happy till the amount is made up."

"What you really mean is, that you want to be able to borrow it yourself at odd times."

Jess' cheeks flamed. She turned upon Stella with a look that said: "Stella, will you allow your friend to insult me like this? Is it playing the game, after what has happened this afternoon?"

"Oh, Audrey!" gulped out Stella, avoiding her poor relation's direct look. "Don't tease the girl!"

"Then what does she mean by suggesting that we are going to do her out of the money?" Audrey exclaimed tartly. "She will get it as soon as we can get remittances from our people. Doesn't she know, by this time, we are not all paupers like herself? Look here, Jess—"

But Jess was gone.

Feeling that if she stayed another moment she would let fly at the despicable snob, Jess had gone quickly from the room, and now the door closed behind her with a quiet snick of the latch.

"You—you shouldn't say things to hurt her so," Stella exclaimed miserably. "If you are not careful, she will go and give you away over the whole business, Audrey!"

"Oh, no, she won't!" laughed that girl. "Because you are in it as much as I am, Stella darling. And Jess is simply bound to shield you, because—ha, ha, ha!—she is your poor relation."

A Good Use for That Money.

"MY word!" said Polly Linton, in Study 12 about six o'clock that evening. "I can feel the heat of that haystack fire upon my cheeks now!"

"It was a scorching set-out, and no mistake!" agreed Betty.

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, geals," came languidly from the depths of a certain easy-chair, "what a tewwible conflagwation it must have been when it started!"

"I am thinking of that poor farmer. He was so cut up, wasn't he?" said Tess Trelawney. "A decent sort—"

"Oh, quite!" put in Madge, in her quiet way. "He is the farmer who has often been so nice to us girls during our rambles. I would rather have seen any other farmer meet with the loss than Mr. Garley."

"He's a bwick—must be—not tō go to the police about it!" drawled Paula. "When we heard him wemark that he knew who did it."

"It makes me wonder—" Betty Barton was beginning, when she noticed a look of excitement come into Tess' face. "Well, Tess, what is it?"

"A sudden idea—"

"Bai Jove!"

"Girls, look here," went on Tess eagerly. "We all like Mr. Garley and feel sorry for him."

"Yes, wather!"

"Then let him have that wretched eight pounds odd to make up in part for his serious loss," said Tess. She saw her listeners' faces light up, and spoke on with enthusiasm. "That's the thing to do with the money. Devote it to a good cause."

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove—"

"Well done, Tess! Nothing could be better!" cried Polly, slapping the girl-artist upon the back. "If you still feel as obstinate as ever about taking the cash—"

"I am never going to take it—never!"

"Then let's have the public trustee in and tell

her," Polly cried boisterously, and skipped to the door.

"Jess!" she called along the corridor: "Jess Lingard—coo-ee! Oh, Jess, darling, one moment in here; we want you!"

The madcap stepped back into the study, leaving the door wide open, and next moment Jess came in.

"Jess darling, your troubles are over about that trust fund," smiled Betty. "We are going to take it off your hands this very minute."

"In other words," rattled out Polly, "it is going off by this evening's post, with a letter—which Betty, as the Form captain, will please sit down and write at once!"

"I like the way Polly gives orders," Betty laughed, sitting down accordingly. "But as there is no time to waste—"

"You—you want the money now?" Jess asked, standing in the doorway. "I—"

"Tout de suite—at once!" said Trixie Hope.

"Yes, too sweet!" chuckled Polly. "Go and dig it up, Jess dear. Bring forth the golden goblets! Well, Betty?"

"Here, you girls must help me over the letter," came mirthfully from the Form captain. "I want to know how to put it."

This light-hearted appeal brought Polly and the rest round the table, with the exception of Paula Creel. She, of course, remained immersed in the easy-chair. But that is not to say she had no suggestions to offer.

"I would write in the third person, Betty dear. Say, the captain of the Fourth Form presents her compliments to Mr. Garley—"

"And will he please accept a small gift from sympathisers."

"The money being some that was—"

"Whoa, whoa! Half a sec!" Betty laughed, writing away as fast as she could. So there was a pause in the helpful dictation, and then Polly, for one, observed that Jess was still standing in the doorway, looking very agitated.

"The money, Jess! Run along! We want to catch the post!"

"Get the letter finished first," pleaded Betty. "Well, what is the next thing to say?"

"In the extremely embawwassing pwedicament in which Mr. Gawley—"

"Oh, dry up, Paula!" laughed Polly. "Tell him, Betty, if we jolly well knew for certain who set fire to the rick—"

"I'll say this, girls, because it is how I feel," Betty broke in. "If we were certain it was caused by a—certain girl in our Form, we would feel bound to report her—yes, absolutely bound, in view of the enormous damage done!"

There came a sudden excited question from Jess.

"Why should you think it may have been caused by—a certain girl in our Form, Betty?"

Then the Form captain looked round from the table.

"For this reason, dear," she answered gravely. "We girls, when we got to the rick, about an hour after the fire started, happened to see some greenish silver-paper wrappers of chocolates lying about. They were in the grass, and they might have been shaken from a—certain girl's dress when she jumped up to run away. They were the wrappers to a certain kind of expensive chocolates that a certain girl is fond of."

"In other words—Audrey Blain!" Polly said bluntly. "We are pretty well convinced that Audrey and Stella were at the rick. Audrey was

talking of taking tea out for this afternoon. But there is no absolute proof, and Betty is against taxing Audrey and Stella with the fire."

"They would only bluster denials," sighed Betty. "Besides, I would rather not get absolute proof or their admission of guilt. I would simply have to report it. They have had rope enough."

"Hear, hear!" Polly said emphatically, whilst the others murmured to the same effect.

"So no more about that, Jess," added the mad-cap lightly. "Just run and get the money."

With a whirling brain Jess turned back along the corridor at last. For a few moments she hesitated outside Study 8, then went in to speak with Audrey and Stella.

"What am I to do?" she asked hoarsely. "The girls want that money at once!"

"What!"

"This very minute they want it—to send it off by the evening's post."

Stella swept a hand across her forehead.

"Oh!" she moaned. "Oh, this is awful! What did you tell them?"

"Say you lent it to somebody," Stella burst out desperately. "You lent it to somebody who was good for the money. That is true, Jess."

"They will want to know why I lent it—how I dared lend it—when it was not mine," was the tragic answer.

"Say you have lost it."

"That would be lying! It might get some girl in the school suspected of stealing. No, I will not tell a lot of lies," Jess declared flatly.

"Audrey, stand away from that door!"

"You mean to tell them, do you?"

"I am afraid I must. I don't see how else—"

"Then you shall not go from here—no!" was the fierce whisper. "Get away—get back, I tell you!"

For, without another word, Jess had made a rush to get out of the room, and now the two girls were scuffling together.

Jess was either the stronger of the two or else Audrey realised the futility of trying to hold that girl in check. Be that as it may, Jess suddenly flung the desperate girl aside, whipped open the door, and ran out.



BETRAYING HER TRUST? "I have not got the money," Jess owned at last, and the staggering admission caused a profound stillness in the room.

"I—I said nothing for the moment," Jess answered. "But they are waiting, and I haven't got the money!"

"Well, you must tell them so!" Audrey snapped out irritably.

Jess looked at her.

"Tell them. Do you mean that I—that you—that it had to be used to—to hush up that affair of the rick?"

"No! You dare tell them where the money has gone—you dare!" Audrey blazed out excitedly. "Do you want to get us both expelled?"

"But what can I say?" Jess gestured frantically. It was trust money. I was not supposed to touch a penny of it. And now—Hark! Oh, they are calling to me to hurry up!"

She faced about to the door, and then Audrey whirled to it and put her back to it.

"Stop! Stand still, you!" she said, in a fierce whisper to Jess. "You don't go from here to tell them—"

"I must! How else can I account for the money being gone?"

As she did so, and turned about to close the door quickly, she had a tragic glimpse of Stella, gesturing imploringly. She heard that girl moaning piteously:

"Jess—Jess! Oh, whatever you do, don't tell them! Don't—don't get me expelled!"

Then Jess pulled the door shut, and heard nothing more from inside Study 8, except a sound that was like someone's whimpering.

From Study 12, however, came another light-hearted shout to her to hurry up with that money, and she felt simply crazy with the dilemma she was in.

Would it really mean expulsion for the two girls if their blame for the disastrous fire was made known? That was what she wanted to know.

If Betty Barton and the others really were in the mood to have done with the thankless task of shielding Audrey and the fellow culprit time after time, then—oh, at all cost, she—Jess—must shield them!

With some such desperate resolve as that forming in her chaotic mind, she went along the

passage and came again to the Form captain's study.

"I Cannot Explain!"

"Ah, here is the public trustee!" Polly remarked gaily.

"Did you really have to dig up the money?" smiled Madge. "You were long enough gone to get it."

Jess said tremulously to Betty:

"I—I want to ask something, Betty. Did you really mean that about feeling determined to report that affair of the burnt rick if—you were sure it was a Morcove girl who caused the fire?"

"Since you put the question seriously, I'll answer it seriously," answered the captain. "The unwritten law of the school is, get a girl out of a scrape if you can. But when a girl has been as thankless as the one I don't wish to name, it is time to give over getting her off."

"Hear, hear!" Polly said, with some of Betty's gravity. "So if you know anything about the cause of the fire, Jess, my advice is, say nothing to any of us. In our present mood we could not promise to hold our tongues."

"Thank you," Jess quavered, after a pause, during which she had taken a big grip on herself. "Then I—then that's sufficient."

"But why all this palaver, when you were simply asked to fetch along the money?" Tess asked, with a grin. "Here is Betty, with a beautifully worded note, only waiting to slip the eight pounds inside it and then pop downstairs with it to drop it in the post!"

"I have not got the money," Jess owned at last huskily, and the staggering admission caused a profound stillness in the room.

"What!"

"I cannot hand over the money. It is gone."

"Gone? Gone? But how do you mean?" they began to exclaim in a chorus. "Gone where?"

"I am afraid I cannot explain," Jess faltered, facing them with their amazed looks.

"You are a strange girl, Jess, really," Polly broke out, in her headstrong way. "Always losing things you are entrusted with. You lost that silver shield in the train the other day. That's a mystery that has never been cleared up, and never will be, I suppose. And now—"

"Do you mean the money has been stolen?" asked Betty, in dismay.

"No."

"Then have you spent it?" asked Madge.

"No."

"What has happened to it, then?"

"I can't explain. I—I used it—"

"Oh, you used it!" Polly gave a sudden dry laugh. "Isn't that rather the same as spending it?"

"Jess," Betty exclaimed gravely, "do, please, explain properly. We shall have girls jumping to the conclusion that you have done something with the money that you should not have done."

"Come, dear, tell us everything," coaxed Betty.

"You really must, Jess," urged Madge. "You say you used it. What for?"

And still poor Jess was dumb before her questioners.

"It doesn't look as if I am to catch the post with this letter, after all," Betty grinned, turning it about in her hands. "Oh, well, never mind! At least—"

"Is that all you have to say about it?" Polly exclaimed, ever the one to let her feelings get out

of hand. "Never mind! I am not the captain. If I were, Jess, do you know what I would feel like saying?"

"Now, Polly," Betty tried to interpose, but was ignored.

"I would say, Jess, you had better not show your face again in this study until you can say why that trust money was not forthcoming on demand."

Polly turned her back then. She was the only girl to do so, and perhaps she would be sorry for the fiery words soon enough. To Jess, however, it seemed as if sudden hostility had replaced all the chums' goodwill towards her. Betty, Paula, Madge, Tess—all of them, they were equally disgusted. And what wonder, either!

She moved slowly out into the passage, her head drooping with the weight of grief that was upon her.

More than once during her hard, difficult time at Morcove School had the girls' faith in her been sorely tried, and now at last the breaking-point had been reached.

She came to the door of Study 8, but would have drifted on past it only it was ajar, and Audrey was standing there—had been listening, Jess suspected.

Now Audrey whipped the door open and made a show of quitting the room.

"It's all right, you can come in," she said curtly to Jess. "Stella and I are going downstairs."

"What happened? Tell me!" Stella panted at her poor relation, coming towards her agitatedly. "Oh, Jess, don't say you told those girls! Audrey is positive that Betty will not hold her tongue about us this time!"

"I have not told them," Jess answered dully.

"That's all right, then," Audrey said, shrugging. "You'll have the money back in a day or two, Jess, and I can't see myself what difference it makes. Come along, Stella!"

That girl obeyed the injunction in the usual weak fashion. Only when she had almost followed her evil genius out of the room she suddenly turned back.

"Jess, I—I'm sorry! But you—you didn't want to see me and Audrey expelled, did you? What are Betty and the rest saying about the money being gone?"

"Ah, it is not what they are saying," answered Jess sadly, "it is what they are thinking."

"Have they turned against you?"

"Yes, I think so."

And, within an hour, poor Jess Lingard knew it for a fact.

That evening was not half over before Jess had ample proof that her failure to account for the money had told seriously upon the chums' faith in her.

It was no longer "Jess dear!" whenever they met her. An explanation was required, and pending that explanation—one that Jess knew she would never, never be able to give—hers must be the cruel, friendless existence of a girl they had turned against.

(END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.)

(Poor Jess Lingard! To save the thoroughly selfish Audrey Blain and her weak-minded cousin, she has forfeited the good opinion of the chums of Study 8. But in next week's story, "The 'Friend' She Found Out," you will read of the retribution that overtook Audrey. Order your copy now.)