

THE PREMIER JOURNAL FOR BRITISH SCHOOLGIRLS.

# The Schoolgirl's Own 2<sup>d</sup>



**A LAST LOOK AT  
HER OLD SCHOOL!**

An incident from this week's  
magnificent complete tale of  
Betty Barton & Co.

A MAGNIFICENT LONG COMPLETE SCHOOL TALE, FEATURING  
 ZONIA MOORE OF STORMWOOD SCHOOL.



# Good Bye to Her Schooldays!

By  
 MARJORIE STANTON.

Unable to tell her chums of Morcove School how she is being persecuted by unscrupulous plotters, Zonia Moore is forced to take a step which has a great bearing on her future career. This enthralling tale will hold your interest to the last line.

## No Pity on Paula.

"DID you ever!" said Polly blissfully. "Did you ever see the sea looking lovelier than it does this afternoon! Girls, I for one am going to paddle!"

"Ooo, yes, queek, queek—"

"Bai Jove, haw, haw, haw!" came the simpering laugh of Paula Creel, causing Polly Linton to turn upon her witheringly.

"And now what have you got to say against paddling?" Polly demanded, with mock ferocity. "Can't I paddle—"

"Yes, wather, Polly deah! Certainly. Good gwacious, surely you know me bettah, bai Jove, than to think I want to waise objections!"

"You laughed, Paula—"

"No, no, Polly deah," pleaded Paula, feeling all for peace as she sprawled lazily on the sun-warmed sands, under the giant cliffs of Morcove. "I merely gave an appwoving murmur, what! Bwilling idea, paddling! Stwoke of genius, in fact! Yes, wather!"

Then Naomer gave her roguish chuckle.

"Paula will be so glad if we paddle, for then we shall not be teasing her, and she can go to sleep—"

"Yes, wather! I mean to say, geals— Yow, dwop it, Naomer! Ooo! Na—o—mer, healp!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You are ze laziest thing under ze sun," declared her Serene Highness Naomer Nakara, as she fell upon the amiable duffer and rolled her about. "You want to go to sleep, do you?"

"Ye—No! Ow! Naomer—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You are on my chest!" bleated Paula. "Healp, get off me! Betty deah—Madge—Tess! Pway make this tewwow dwop it!"

There was no need, however, for the girls in question to intervene in the cause of peace and quietness. Not another moment was Naomer going to waste upon Paula; now that Polly had

set the example by whipping off her shoes and starting to peel off her stockings.

"Yes, queek, I race you!" Naomer challenged, squatting down to get her own brown-skinned extremities stripped from toe to knee. "See the leetle teeny waves how they are creeping in so nicely! Eet is jolly!"

"Sublime, yes, wather," Paula said dreamily, as she turned upon one side and closed her eyes. "Most wefweshing!"

Betty, Madge, and Tess were neither wanting to paddle nor to doze. They looked at one another and grinned.

"So much for our afternoon's five-mile ramble for nature study," chuckled Betty. "We have got a long way!"

"No wonder Paula is so exhausted," commented Tess. "She has walked a whole mile with us! Paula, darling, do you feel quite knocked up?"

"I shall wewover presently, Tess, deah, thanks so much for your considewate inqwiry," Paula felt bound to answer drowsily. "It is a great welief, this."

Polly by now had got off both stockings. She rolled them into a ball, took aim with them, and volleyed them at Paula.

"Hi, mind those for me, please!"

"Ow! Polly—"

"And those—he, he, he!" tittered Naomer, as she also volleyed a ball of stockings at the would-be sleeper. "And those!" tossing across a pair of light shoes.

"Healp! Dwop it! Geals—"

"Oh, and these!" Polly said sweetly, throwing across her shoes. "And now we are all right!"

"All wight, bai Jove!" echoed Paula wearily. "I simply don't get a moment's wew for my overwought bwain. I pwotest. Now, wun away, pway do!"

Polly and Naomer did that speedily enough. It really was a most alluring tide that was creeping in, this sunny afternoon in May, along the

romantic shores of Morocco. Not once in six months did one get such a perfectly calm sea along this rugged coast. So it was not surprising that the phenomena of rippling wavelets had quite gone to the heads of those two girls who were the Fourth Form's irrepressibles.

Polly and Naomer—they scamped and splashed about in the warm shallows, whilst Betty and Madge and Tess kept up a running fire of chaffing remarks. As for Paula—

At last, at last Paula was thoroughly happy! The warm, dry sand—what could make a better couch? The middle of a sunny afternoon—what better time for a delicious little snooze?

Not that Paula ever went quite off to sleep when she got an opportunity of this sort. She did better than that, closing her eyes and letting a nice dreamy state come over her, as a Persian kitten seems to do whilst basking in the sun.

Paula had tilted her school hat in such a way that it shielded her closed eyes from the sun, but so much of her pretty face as was visible expressed complete contentment. Looking at her, presently, the three girls sitting close by winked and grinned.

"It was those maths, this morning," Betty said in a tragic tone, knowing that Paula would hear. "Poor child!"

"Hush!" And Tess made gestures to Naomer and Polly, who were at the water's edge. "Less noise, please!"

Paula's lips quivered with a smile, as if she was taking all this consideration for her quite seriously, and was grateful. She heaved a deep sigh, and then—

A startling thing happened.

Something came down with a sudden soft flop! right on top of Paula's head. She yelled and yelled again as the something began to flop and flutter about, squawking wildly.

"Healp! Geals, my gwacicus—ow—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gurrow! What is it! Betty dead—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Madge—Tess—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" pealed the three girls, whilst Naomer and Polly came nipping up the sandy slope, shrieking with delight at the luckless one's sudden discomfiture.

Paula was sitting up now, in a sort of nightmare way, wildly waving her arms as if to fend off invisible spirits.

"Healp! Geals, did you see—"

"Duffer, ha, ha, ha!" was Polly's deriding chuckle. "Why, it is only a young jackdaw—"

"Ooo, yes, look, look at him! I love him!" shrilled Naomer, and with a lightning pounce she had both brown hands closed over the poor frightened nestling that had tumbled out of the parental home in the face of the cliffs.

Paula took off her hat and began to smooth her ruffled hair to rights.

"Dweadful life! I nevah do get a bit of peace!"

"Ooo, but look at him, ze darling!" was Naomer's cry of delight, as she now held up the nestling.

It was both comical and pretty. The yellow was still on its beak, as was to be expected in a nestling that had only a moment since decided to "go off on its own," and being as young as this the girls had no difficulty in calming it down. Before another minute was out, he was being stroked by one and another of them, and he seemed to like it.

"I keep him, yes!" was Naomer's happy decision. "He is to be my pet, ze darlink!"

So, whilst she was getting on her stockings and shoes, along with Polly Linton, the passive little creature was given into Betty's keeping. Naomer soon reclaimed him, and was all for getting back to the school to install her latest pet in a suitable cage.

"He'll be happier if you could get him into a basket for the present," suggested Betty. "We are close to the combe-path that leads up to the cliff bungalow; supposing we go that way, and inquire whether a basket can be lent us?"

"Good wheeze!" approved Polly, jumping up from where she had sat lacing her shoes. "There are new people at Cliffedge Bungalow—nice people, they say—"

"Yes, wather, geals. Someone was remarking, geals, that they are a Mr. and Mrs. Spenlow—"

"And there is a girl living with them—a sort of adopted daughter, I was told," Tess chimed in. "She might be glad to have us for her friends down here. We could give her a bit of tennis."

"Come on then!" Polly said, with her usual eagerness to be doing something for a change; and away they went, the young jackdaw getting his first sight of the world as he looked around, pertly, whilst held gently in Naomer's loving hands.

#### That Portrait!

FROM where they came out upon the breezy headland, after toiling up the zig-zag path from the beach, the girls had but a short step to go to Cliffedge Bungalow. Sauntering on towards this charming little residence, with its fenced-in acre of land, they saw a lady and gentleman busying themselves in the new-made garden. The lady was trawelling amongst the few herbaraceous things that had begun to make one border look quite gay. Her husband was rolling the gravel.

"Are we all to go in? We shall be rather a crowd," Madge was demurring softly, when Polly came out with a little "Phew!" of surprise.

"Why, girls," she exclaimed under her breath, "we have seen those people before, haven't we? But where? Let me think—"

"Bai Jove—"

"I know," said Betty promptly. "They were at the art show in Barncombe the other day! We saw them—"

"Yes, wather, I remember!" nodded Paula. "They were a couple of the visitors who were so extremely interestwed, bai Jove, in the portwaif of Zonia Moore!"

There was no chance for further talk, for already the lady and gentleman had observed the girls and were coming to the gate in the very friendliest way.

"Well, young ladies!"

"Good afternoon, sir—good-afternoon, Mrs. Spenlow, isn't it?" led off Betty, smiling. She and her chums were set quite at ease by the genial reception they had received. "We hope you will excuse our calling here to ask if you have a small basket you could lend us?"

"Because—look!" burst out the excitable Naomer, and she held up her treasured captive, at sight of whose saucy little face Mr. and Mrs. Spenlow burst out laughing.

"Oh, a young jackdaw!" commented Mr. Spenlow, throwing wide the gate for the girls. "The cliffs are alive with the birds—we hear them squawking all day long, don't we, Mary? A basket—"

"Ooo, yes, queek, please! Because I theenk he bite me!" was the appealing cry that sent the gentleman running off to an outhouse.

"It is a great pleasure, I am sure, to make you welcome to our holiday home," Mrs. Spenlow now said, very cordially. "Won't you come indoors and let us give you some tea? Here is our niece, as we call her—Miriam Loveless—"

"Oh, yes; didn't we see her with you and Mr. Spenlow at the art show?" broke out Polly, as she and her chums gazed at the handsome girl who suddenly appeared from the bungalow. Mrs. Spenlow's comely face became very expressive.

"Ah, that art show! I shall not soon forget it. It was there that my husband and I saw one picture that greatly interested us. Miriam, dear, here are some of the girls of Morcove School, and I am sure they are willing to be friends."

But at heart Betty & Co. were not quite so sure themselves, when they suddenly realised that this girl was the one to whom they had by no means taken on the day of the show. Something false in her smile then had put them on their guard against her. And now—it was a pity, for the chums were fairly in love with Mr. and Mrs. Spenlow, but they got the same impression of insincerity from Miriam as she halted before them, all smiles and winning ways.

Mr. Spenlow came running back with a small basket, and in a brace of seconds the young jack-daw was squawking lustily, as he settled himself in the straw with which the basket was lined.

"Thank you, sir," Naomer cried out, as she shut down the lid upon the noisy bird. "I get him in a big cage when I reach the school, and I feed him. I shall give him a good big tea, yes!"

"Let us find him something to go on with—and find you girls some tea as well," was Mrs. Spenlow's hospitable rejoinder. "Really, it's a great pleasure. We are in love with this life, girls; but company makes a welcome change."

It may be guessed whose youthful face was wreathed in smiles as a move was made for the bungalow, where a maid could be heard rattling out the tea things! Paula touched her hair as she beamed with the prospect of—tea!

"Bai Jove, geals, yes, wather!" was her murmur, as they all filed in at the front doorway. "Most gwatifying!"

But what was the matter with Miriam Loveless, Betty and the others wondered, that she seemed so ill at ease over their acceptance of the bit of hospitality? Strange that she should be so flustered, when they themselves were free from all embarrassment!

"And now there is a chance to ask you girls—and I do hope you will be able to satisfy my curiosity," Mrs. Spenlow broke out, when tea had been served round. "There was a certain picture at the local exhibition—a head of a girl. My husband and I are so anxious to meet the girl artist who painted it. They say she is a schoolgirl—"

"Bai Jove!" came from Paula, whilst she clattered down her teacup. "Why, Mrs. Spenlow—"

"You must mean that picture of Zonia Moore!" cried Betty.

"Zonia—yes, that was the name the picture bore. And the artist—"

"Stand up, Tess, dear!" Polly cried out, with a laugh. "Mrs. Spenlow, if you wish to know—"

"What! You—you painted that picture!" exclaimed the lady and gentleman together, gazing at the blushing Tess. "Well!"

And then, before the modest girl-artist could say anything:

"Where is Zonia herself, then?" clamoured Mrs.

Spenlow. "For we so want to meet her! That has been our idea ever since we saw the picture; to ferret out the artist, and so get to know the girl whose portrait she painted."

"Betty, here, will tell you all about Zonia," Tess spoke at last, indicating the Form captain. "Ever since Zonia was saved from the gipsies who were—"

And there the speaker was cut short by a sharp, loud scream that made all who heard it jump with alarm.

"Oh—oh, my hand!" It was Miriam Loveless who followed the startling scream with that painful cry.

At the same instant she clattered down the knife with which she had been cutting some more bread-and-butter, and began to stagger this way



### A DELIBERATE INTERRUPTION!

"Betty will tell you all about Zonia—" Tess was saying when she was cut short by a sharp, loud scream. It was Miriam Loveless who had given the scream. "Oh, I have cut my hand!" she cried.

and that, with a napkin hastily clapped to the hand that she had gashed.

The others had all risen in great alarm. Mr. Spenlow gasped out in a horrified tone:

"Miriam, dear—my poor girl, what have you done! Let me see!"

"It's a bad cut—it's bleeding badly. Oh!" she moaned breathlessly, and next moment she was like a swooning figure in her uncle's arms.

### At All Costs.

AN hour later, Miriam Loveless was alone in her own room at the bungalow, with her left hand done up in a white bandage.

The cut with the breadknife had been nothing at all serious, and she would not have made the scene she had, only the sudden accident had been a chance at which she had snatched—a chance to interrupt all the talk about Zonia Moore.

Now the Morcovians had been gone a good half-

hour from the bungalow, and Miriam's so-called uncle and aunt were going on with the gardening. As for Miriam herself, anyone would have felt she was taking a long time to get over the shock of that tea-time mishap.

But it was not the chance gashing of her hand that had left her looking like this—as pale as a ghost, and altogether unnerved.

Utter panic had her in its grip.

It had been bad enough to know that Mr. and Mrs. Spenlow intended to seek out the painter of the portrait of Zonia Moore. But to think that the girl artist should have been amongst the very batch of Morcovians who had called to borrow that basket!

Miriam got up from a bed-room chair and fumed to and fro. The girls were gone, but what difference did that make? was her frantic thought. They had told the story of Zonia's upbringing by the gipsies, and how, in the end, she had been adopted by Betty Barton's wealthy parents. Still worse, a day had been fixed for "uncle" and "auntie" to meet Zonia at Morcove School!

"And so it is all over—all up with me, for a certainty," the agitated girl pondered despairingly. "Next Saturday they are to get Zonia over to Morcove, for the introduction—and this is Wednesday! Nothing to be done—nothing, now, except wait for the end!"

And her mind, as she still drifted about the quiet and cool bed-room, conjured up visions of what "the end" meant.

Zonia identified as the long-lost daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Spenlow! Zonia brought into this home as the one who, henceforth, must be everything in the eyes of her overjoyed parents! An end, in fact, to the life that Miriam herself had known, as the petted protégée of the wealthy lady and gentleman.

Of course, they would not cast her adrift—send her back to the almost good-for-nothing parents out of whose hands they had taken her, five years ago, by arrangement. They were not the sort ever to do an unkind action. But Miriam saw herself as having to take second place in the home. She saw herself as being no longer the expectant heiress of the Spenlows' wealth. And it was a coming downfall that galled and maddened her.

All this, because a certain girl at Morcove School had painted and exhibited a lifelike portrait of Zonia Moore! Oh, if only one had known in time, and could have managed somehow to slash that portrait to ribbons!

"But it is no use thinking in that strain now," Miriam sighed to herself, bitterly. "The question is, can nothing be done after all? Supposing I let father and mother know—can they do something? They are all for preventing the discovery coming about. They've already taken certain steps, I know. But this—this coming meeting between the girl and her actual parents! It gives us no time, unless—"

Ah, unless! Thank goodness, there did look like being just a chance, after all!

And suddenly Miriam was reaching down her outdoor things from their hook, whilst her excited looks witnessed to the daring mood in which she was.

"What, going for a spin on your bicycle, my dear?" commented Mrs. Spenlow, in great surprise, as the girl who had made such a fuss about the slight cut came wheeling her bicycle to the gate. "I thought, Miriam, that you felt—"

"Oh, that's all right now, auntie," was the hasty answer. "I was frightened, I suppose!

It's so lovely out of doors. I feel I must get a ride."

Nor was it another minute before she was off and away, without having said a word as to the direction she would be taking.

Her fond guardians—they were not to know that her parents were quartered in the out-of-the-way village of Henscombe, between Stormwood and Barncombe. Most likely they had never even heard of Henscombe, being new to the district. Miriam herself had now to find her way there for the first time, and a very beautiful ride it proved to be, although a rather rough one.

For, after going along one of the moorland roads for a couple of miles, she spun downhill into a wooded valley that was even more enchanting than the open moorland itself. The narrow, lonely road ran beneath over-arching beeches. Songsters that only haunt leafy glades sent their warbling notes to her as she kept the cycle softly purring along. She would have revelled in the ride, if only her mind had been free from the terrible anxiety: How to prevent that meeting between her guardians and the girl, Zonia Moore!

All at once she rode round a bend to see the little straggling hamlet of Henscombe right in front of her. It was just a single short street of low-built, thatched cottages, with the usual forge and village bakery and general shop. She now had to look out for a dwelling called Sunnybank, and suddenly she hopped down from her machine, having sighted that name on a gate.

Standing her bicycle against the garden fence, she went up a flagged path to the porch, a feeling of guilt causing her heart to beat fast. There was so much secrecy, so much deception going on! The very name by which her parents were known, in this place, was an assumed one. She had got to ask for "Mr. and Mrs. Jarvis."

"Mrs. Jarvis is in—yes, miss, if you'll step inside, and I'll tell her," said the honest woman who came forward. "The gentleman, though, is out."

"It will do if I see my—Mrs. Jarvis," Miriam corrected herself sharply. She had nearly said "my mother"!

Ushered into a tiny sitting-room, which was enriched with Toby jugs, a stuffed otter in a glass case, and a model of a three-masted schooner, she had only a moment or so to wait before the door re-opened and her mother came in quickly.

"Miriam! Why, what—?"

"Mother, I had to come," the worried girl broke out, tensely. "Oh, there has been such an upset for all of us again! The Spenlows—that girl Zonia Moore—"

"Yes, what? What about it?" exclaimed the mother, coming forward after she had shut the door behind her. "You father and I—we have been feeling that everything is going all right!"

"It isn't; it's going all wrong!" was the panicky answer. And breathlessly the dismayed girl explained the sudden calamitous development—the projected introduction of Zonia Moore to the Spenlows.

Before the hasty story was half told, Miriam's mother was looking utterly appalled. She stood with her hands together and her lips apart, whilst her eyes dilated upon the bearer of the dismaying news.

"Next Saturday, you say!"

"Yes, mother. The Morcove girls will either write to Zonia in the meantime, or go and see her at Stormwood, to get her to come over to Morcove School. And once she has met the Spenlows—"

"She must not meet them—she shan't!" Mrs. Loveless exclaimed fiercely. "Very well, Miriam; now you have told me this—"

"There is something you can do, is there? You and father—oh, I have been so hoping, as I came along, that you could manage after all!"

"And so we may, Miriam! At least, we will try—ah, we will do our level best, you may be sure," was the fierce response. "Your father is away for an hour or so. When he comes back, I must tell him how matters stand. Sit down, Miriam—"

"I mustn't stay, mother. Yet I do so want to know what you think can be done."

Mrs. Loveless moved a step nearer, to answer in a guarded, yet fierce, tone:

"This can be done, Miriam! Somehow or other the girl must be got away from Stormwood School before Saturday—before she has word from her Morocco friends even! We have already frightened her; and our first meeting with her she talked wildly of running away. We will frighten her still more—drive her into doing something at once!"

"But, mother—"

"Ah, don't start arguing!" the woman exclaimed in a hard-driven way. "It is the only thing, so what's the use of raising butts! If it fails—well, we've lost, that's all!"

"Don't think I don't realise that it's worth any risk," Miriam said agitatedly. "I am going to be nowhere, if the Spenlows do meet Zonia Moore and find out that she is their own daughter. Ever since they saw that picture at the exhibition, they seem to have had their thoughts turned more than ever to the child who has been lost to them all these years. They are kind to me; but—"

"But you are not their own flesh and blood—and that girl is!" Mrs. Loveless struck in grimly, with a nod. "Hush, though; we must be careful not to talk too loudly. Walls have ears, Miriam!"

And after that the mother and daughter sat close together in the little cottage parlour, and never once did their voices rise above a whisper.

It was little that Miriam had to say now. More often than not she was a mute, eager listener, staring fascinatedly into her mother's handsome eyes, as that woman explained just how the situation might yet be saved—at the expense of poor Zonia Moore's entire future happiness!

"My mother!"

**W**HAT of Zonia herself, all this while? There, at Stormwood School, where life was going on just the same as ever for all its other scholars—so full of interest, so happy—a sort of nightmare dread was haunting the ill-fated girl.

Ever since the hour when the couple who bore the name of Mr. and Mrs. Jarvis had suddenly confronted her, claiming her as their daughter, she had not known a happy moment.

The thought of those two was coming between herself and her work in class. A vision of them—crafty-looking, repellant—was always before her, now, in the dark dormitory when she was trying and trying in vain to get to sleep.

Sleep? How could one sleep when there was no knowing what the morrow would bring! Another encounter with the odious pair, perhaps; a peremptory command from them that she must resign herself to whatever life they chose to order her to take up—along with them!

And if she should refuse—as refuse she felt she simply must—what then?

They were going to have no scruples about

swooping upon the Bartons and presenting a ruthless, wicked ultimatum—one that only a mercenary, unprincipled couple would ever dream of formulating.

It would be nothing less than a demand that the Bartons should pay the price of her, Zonia's, immunity from the couple's baleful influence.

Poor Zonia, lying awake of nights long after other girls had fallen to sleep; racking her brains about it all—realising what a terrible crisis it was. There was nothing to give her a hint that perhaps the Jarvises were only a pair of frauds.

On the contrary, the hapless girl had every reason for accepting their statement that she was, indeed, their own long-lost daughter. She could not forget how a batch of papers had been flourished before her eyes, and how she had been asked to read them and see what they proved!

What to do, then?—that was the harassing problem with which the poor duped girl was left to grapple.

Since that first sensational confrontation they had left her in peace, but it was an interlude that would soon end, she was convinced. They had gone away and were marking time, as it were, because that first encounter had so upset her. But they would turn up again for a certainty—not because of any passionate longing to have her restored to them; she could not believe them capable of anything like that. But because they saw money in the claim they had upon her—that was the point with them! Money to be got from the Bartons.

And, sure enough, Zonia awoke one morning to another day of the school's routine, after another wretched night, and amongst the letters distributed after breakfast was one for her—from Mrs. Jarvis.

"It's from mother," she heard two or three other girls commenting delightedly on their individual letters, whilst she hastily took hers to go apart from everybody and read it in secret.

"From mother!" That was the phrase that she should have been using, she pondered distressfully; but, oh, it was no use! Impossible to bring oneself to think of Mrs. Jarvis as mother! That tender word, applied to a woman who looked, and was, so crafty, mercenary, and ruthless!

There were tears in Zonia's eyes as she started to read the unwelcome letter, in the solitude of her study. Not only had the coming of the Jarvises into her young life wrecked her happiness; it had shattered all her cherished beliefs that her unknown parents were kind, sweet-natured people; the sort of upright, kind-hearted parents that other girls had. And instead—

She began to read, and was not surprised to find what sinister threats the dread missive disclosed.

"Zonia, we have let a little time go by, knowing how upset you were by what we told you. But now we must demand that you pull yourself together and face the facts.

"It is no use your wanting to oppose us, just because we do not fit in with your ideas of what your parents should be. Whatever we are, your father and I, we are your parents, and we are going to demand the dutiful obedience that a daughter should want to give us.

"This letter is to suggest that you meet me somewhere on the quiet, unbeknown to your schoolfellows, and so on. I realise that you are ashamed of me; because I don't look a grand lady. Well, I will give in to your snobbish ideas and will meet you in secret.



**PAULA GETS A SHOCK!** As something began to flutter about, squawking wildly, Paula gave a sudden yell. "Ow, heap, geals!" she cried. "Save me!" The others roared with laughter. "Duffer!" said Polly. "It's only a young jackdaw!"

"I will be at the signpost that is midway between Henscombe and Stormwood at five o'clock to-morrow, Thursday. Do not fail to meet me there.

"MOTHER."

That meant five o'clock this afternoon, for this was Thursday.

Pale and trembling, Zonia read the note through a second time, then she tore it up into the tiniest of pieces. Her dark lashes were glistening again. Only by the greatest effort did she hold back a flood of tears.

That letter—to think that lines so threatening, so cruelly unfair, had been written to a girl by her mother!

"Ashamed of her because she doesn't look a grand lady!" was Zonia's bitter murmur. "It isn't true—no! She and my father might have been ever so poor and shabby, and I would have flown to their arms—if only they had looked different! If only they had not looked so cunning and crafty! Goodness knows how I have yearned to find my own parents at last. But to think that I am the daughter of people like that!"

And so the effect of that sinister missive was to strengthen the original aversion from them. Make her life with them—she could not, oh, impossible!

Not for the first time, by any means, she longed to confide her great trouble to others. But it was the hardest part of her cruel fate that telling anyone here at Stormwood meant that in the end Betty Barton must know. And Betty was never to know!

"For as soon as Betty knows, she will write and tell her dear parents, and then"—was

Zonia's distressing thought—"they will allow the Jarvises to make any demands—a thing I'm not going to have! No, I won't; it will be too unfair! After all the Bartons have done for me—for them to have to start keeping my unscrupulous parents in idleness! For that is the game, I can see!"

It was a state of mind that did boundless credit to Zonia's own true nature. Only a schoolgirl though she was, she had that in her which made her up in arms against any attempt to batten upon the Bartons. She would no more allow that than she would resign herself to a changed existence along with people who were confessedly living by their wits!

What, then, was she going to do?

Clearer and clearer she was seeing a certain way out of the miserable situation. She was pondering it as she rode her cycle quietly along the valley road, when the appointed time had come to meet "mother" at the signpost.

Yes, there was one thing she could do! A desperate thing it would be, but who could blame her, when it was the only alternative to what no right-natured girl could ever think of doing!

Not a soul did she encounter during that fateful ride along the valley road to the meeting place. Perhaps, too, it was this solitude that made her see something all the more sinister in the lonely figure that was waiting for her.

Be that as it might, Zonia felt only a deepened dislike of the woman who was here. To the poor duped girl it came as painful evidence of how hopeless the situation was. She had shrunk from the pair of them at the first encounter; the letter had deepened the aversion, and now—this!

Face to face again, and the old shuddering dislike only intensified by this fresh encounter!

Proved by the Papers.

**T**HE instant Zonia alighted from her bicycle she came in for a sharp order.

"Bring your machine off the road, Zonia; we must not be seen talking here, and you can't leave the bike behind you."

That was the greeting for which the poor girl came in from her "mother."

The woman, of course, intended to be as nasty as possible to her schoolgirl victim this time. She knew that the situation had become so intolerable to Zonia that the girl was feeling inclined to flee from the school and never be heard of again. The thing was, then, to play upon this desperate mood. If only the girl could be stampeded into flight, much might happen to prevent her every being traced.

In the middle of a bit of dense woodland, a few minutes later, the ill-assorted pair were standing to talk, whilst Zonia's bicycle was leaning against a tree-stem.

"First of all, Zonia—for we are going to keep to that name, my dear; it's as good as another," the woman said, with a leer as revolting as she could make it. "Maybe you want to see the proofs we were ready to show you the other day?"

So saying, the crafty impostor suddenly produced the same batch of papers which she had flourished before Zonia on the previous occasion.

They were fastened together at one corner with a brass clip. Retaining them for the moment, "Mrs. Jarvis" began her own comments on them, as she twirled them through.

"To begin with, here's a birth certificate, Zonia—though that's the least telling bit of evidence, and you won't find much in that. But here is a memorandum we made out, your father and I,

at the time you were stolen from us, recording your description."

The woman had folded the birth certificate behind the sheaf of papers, and was now scanning the written memo.

"Here you are—listen! Black hair and very dark eyes; you won't deny you've got those! A small mole on the left arm, just above the elbow—have you got that?"

No need for Zonia to answer! Her expression of utter despair was the poor girl's own tragic admission that she had just such a birthmark, and that she did not dispute—could not dispute—the claim to the relationship.

"And here, Zonia," the cunning woman continued, turning to another sheet of paper, "is the evidence of the young person who had charge of you at the time you were stolen. We got her evidence in writing at the time, in case we might not be able to get hold of her after years had elapsed. And just as well, as it has turned out! Like to read it, Zonia?"

"No," was the heavy response, given with a despairing shake of the head. "Oh, I am not going to contend that you haven't the right to claim me—I can't! But I shall never feel towards you as a daughter should! I hate to say it—"

"Come to that, I don't like having to say what I must, Zonia, and that is—you'll just have to like it or lump it! We want you with us—"

"Why—why!" protested Zonia, with tearful desperation. "Why not leave me alone!"

"Because, you unreasonable, selfish creature," snapped the woman, "your father and I want a daughter who will help to keep us! That's why! We are down in the world; getting every penny by our wits—"

"And I am to fall in with that sort of life! I can't—I won't!" panted Zonia, standing with hands tightly clenched. "It is not right that I should be expected to do so!"

"Very well, then, do the other thing," the woman promptly retorted. "Let the Bartons go on treating you like an adopted daughter; we don't mind! But they'll have to make it worth our while!"

"You mean—"

"Pay us, and pay us well—yes, that's what I mean!" the woman nodded, with her most ruthless look. "They are rich folk, and they like you: They can well afford to pay a few thousand pounds—"

"A few thousand pounds!" gasped Zonia. "Oh, how can you? When you should feel you owe them so much, as it is, for all they have done for me!"

"Bah! What they've done is to give you ideas above your station in life! Made you a snob—"

"No! No, they have not," Zonia exclaimed, with passionate intensity. "The Bartons are not snobs, and they are the last to want to see Betty or me become snobbish."

"Anyhow, they won't choose to let you be in hands like ours, will they, my girl?" sneered the woman. "That's where we have got you! That's how we're going to get that five thousand pounds!"

"You won't!" panted Zonia. "Not a penny shall you get out of them by such unfair means! Rather than let you trade upon their kindness like that, I will run away from you and everybody!"

It was the defiant cry that the woman had been longing to hear. She had to be careful, however, not to betray her secret delight. With every sign

of being maddened by the girl's defiant spirit, she suddenly gripped Zonia by the wrist.

"You will either promise to make your life with me, girl—"

"I won't, I won't! Let me go!" protested Zonia wildly. "Oh, even if we can't be fond of each other, as mother and daughter should be, at least let us not squabble and fight! Let me go!"

"When you have promised—"

"I promise nothing—nothing! So there!" Zonia added, whilst she suddenly tore herself free. "You are not going to make me an excuse for getting money out of the Bartons! I'll have nothing to do with you!"

"Zonia, come back! Stop—"

"No—no!" was the vehement answer. "I'm done with you!"

The poor, hard-driven girl was in tears as she said it. Awful to be up in arms like this against one who had such a claim upon one! So she was thinking, distractedly. At the same time, she never faltered in her resolve to oppose the intended scheme in the only way that was possible.

Snatching at her bicycle, she ran with it along the pathway between the trees. When she looked back, wildly, she saw that Mrs. Jarvis was just starting to dash in pursuit, after taking a few moments to stow away the papers.

Zonia rushed on faster than ever, moaning with the dread of being overtaken, and of being forced to struggle for freedom. If only one could reach the roadway—then to mount the machine and pedal away as if for very life!



**WHAT HAD ZONIA SAID?** "There is no news of Zonia," said Monica Munro ruefully. "She left this note for you, Betty." Betty snatched at the note and ripped open the envelope, while her chums waited to hear what the missing girl had written.



Only let her get away now, and never again should there be another of these painful, agonising encounters! That was her fixed resolve, as she rushed the bicycle on along the woodland path. She would do as she had threatened—the only thing to do, and the right thing! After this, Stormwood must know her no more!

Sobbing for breath, at last she trundled the machine out on to the lonely road. In a flash she was mounted and riding away—whirr, whirr, whirr! went the pedals—faster, faster—to be done for ever with this couple, who had only claimed her so that they might claim—money!

#### No-Other Way.

HER head low over the handlebars, her glossy hair flying behind her in the wind, on and on Zonia flew. And what a relief it was to realise that already she had put herself beyond pursuit. She was round a bend in the road—was racing along on the bicycle, whilst her pursuer was on foot and had most likely given up the chase already.

Even so, Zonia did not slacken speed until she was within a few yards of the gates of Stormwood School. She might even have ridden fast through the gateway and up the broad drive; but there was no reaching the gateway.

To her surprise, she found she would have to dismount and wait about whilst a strange procession went by that was taking up all the road.

Lumbering wagons; gaudily-painted living-vans; team after team of spirited horses; then more vans, forage carts, sheeted cages—a travelling circus, in fact, was what Zonia had encountered just outside the Stormwood gateway.

If it had not been for her bicycle, she would soon have found a chance to dart across the road between one wagon and another, for every now and then the lengthy procession was checking for a moment. But she did not dare try to get across to the gateway with her machine, and so remained beside the road—the only girl on that side, although on the school's side there was a great crowd of her Stormwood chums, enjoying the sight.

"Coo-ee, Zonia! Isn't it fine!" someone called across to her blithely. Others were voicing admiring comments on features of the procession that were specially attractive.

"That pair of piebald ponies—look!"

"Yes, beautiful! And do you see what a lovely satiny coat that black horse has? What a mane!"

A moment later:

"Oh, camels! Fancy, girls—"

"Look, though—look! Here comes an elephant—"

"With a baby one at her foot! Oh, I say—"

"How quaint! Ha, ha, ha!"

Zonia lost the voices of her chums for a little while, owing to the noisy rumbling past of certain wagons. Then came another living van—quite a pretty little caravan on large wheels, with its tiny curtained window and a half-door at the back, with some ladderlike steps.

Standing just inside the entrance to the little home-on-wheels was a girl of seventeen or thereabouts, black-haired and dark-skinned, with gold earrings. She was looking bored and sullen as she stood there, swaying easily with the motion of the van as if she could stand any amount of jolting. One of the ring-riders, perhaps, Zonia thought.

It was a singular thing, but the girl in the van took far less notice of the crowd in the school gateway than she did of Zonia, standing alone on the outer side of the road.

The moment she set eyes upon Zonia, the circus-girl stared steadily. Perhaps she thought what a gipsy touch there was about the looks of this particular schoolgirl.

At the same time, the girl in the van seemed to draw herself up proudly, as if to say: "I'm as good as you, anyhow!" Zonia guessed that the girl had the blood of the South in her veins, and was fiery-tempered and jealous.

And yet—who could say? Perhaps the girl could be as good a friend as she might be a bad enemy. One thing Zonia had no hesitation in thinking: she would much rather own to some affinity with these wandering circus-folk than know herself to be the daughter of such a crafty couple as had claimed her!

At last the tail-end of the procession went lumbering past—a string of covered wagons, some with no one in charge that Zonia could see. She could then wheel her bicycle towards the school gateway, whilst some of her most intimate chums made a rush to have word with her.

"What do you think of it, Zonia?"

"The circus? Ah, it was fine—"

"Wasn't it just!" exclaimed Monica Munro, her eyes a-sparkle. "I don't think they can be going to give a show in this neighbourhood, or they would have been handing out bills. But, Zonia, where have you been all this time—missing tea and tennis!"

"Yes, Zonia, you might have asked us to come for the ride with you," some of the others reproached her, affectionately. "Shall you be coming out to tennis presently?"

Then one of them—it was Monica again—noticed how her schoolfellow's own dark eyes were glistening, and the wondering murmur came:

"Why, Zonia, what's the matter, then? You look upset, dear! Crying—?"

"Nothing, nothing, Monica," Zonia pleaded confusedly. "No, I am not crying; I am only—oh, I can't explain! I feel—you know what I am, at times!"

"Such a peculiar girl, yes," said Stormwood's Fourth Form captain, walking on beside the other girl. "I do believe the thought of the life those circus people lead has made you think of the old sad days when you were taken up and down the country with wandering gipsies. Well, come down to tennis, presently, dear!"

"I make no promise, Monica," was the gentle answer that Zonia gave, as she remounted her bicycle to ride it on to the sheds.

How could she promise to play tennis by-and-by; how think of doing anything that was part of the old happy routine of school life, when this was to be her very last evening at Stormwood!

Cruel fate that had brought her to this pass! Cruel wrench that it was going to be, to tear oneself away from all the happy associations. Hers was a fixed resolve, however. Better to be adrift on the wide, wide world, than to make one's life with wrong-doers. Better to start now, fighting alone for one's daily bread, than be made the means of extorting money from Betty's all-too-generous parents!

Alone in her study, presently, poor Zonia Moore began quietly and steadily to prepare for the desperate fight. It was a beautiful evening, and the window was wide open to the level rays of the setting sun and the soft, warm breeze.

Even as she sat penning the brief farewell note that was to implore those who cared for her not to be worried on her account, she heard other girls at their outdoor games. And once, when she got up and took her stand at the open window,

A few of them looked up and saw her, and they waved their racquets.  
 "Zonia—coo-ee! Why don't you come down and have a game?"

Ah, why! Little they guessed, and she dare not tell them why it was. But some day they would perhaps know all, and then—

It was a poignant thought that brought the tears to her eyes again. The thought that when, some day, those she had lived amongst knew just what fate had called upon her to endure, they would only love her all the better. How could they fail to do so, when they would see the compelling reason there had been for her to bid "good-bye" for ever to Stormwood School, and to all the ones she loved!

#### True to Her Resolve.

NIGHT had come. In the Fourth Form dormitory at Stormwood School there was no sound save the measured breathing of each bed's youthful occupant, suggesting that all were fast asleep.

Suddenly, however, after the school chimes had "ding-donged" eleven o'clock, the faintest fuster of someone's bed coverings was audible in the dark room. A pause, then a certain girl who had slid from her bed was dimly visible, getting dressed very quickly and quietly.

It was Zonia.

Who can describe the poor girl's anguished state of mind, now that the hour had come for her to carry out the fixed resolve?

Round about her in the darkness were intimate, loving chums who would not wake again until she was gone from the school—gone for ever, perhaps, and so perhaps she would never, never see their dear faces again.

And even more agonising was to be the wrench that tore her apart from other dear chums at Morcov School—Betty, above all, because it was Betty who had been as a very sister to her, even as Betty's father and mother had been like loving parents to the one-time gipsy girl.

Once again, whilst she was tremblingly putting on her day attire, she had the wistful thought: If only there had been some other way of solving the dreadful difficulty! But this was the one outcome of all her brain-racking. Make her life with those who claimed her she could not. Continue in the present happy life, and see the Bartons forced to pay so dearly for the "privilege" of supporting her—that she could not do, either!

So then, with a sad heart but a brave and lofty purpose inspiring her, she was soon stealing away from the dormitory. One last look she gave to the dimly-seen sleepers in their beds, and with a repressed sigh she was gone from their midst.

Creeping down a flight or so of stairs, she made her way to her study. Here there was a small bundle of food and a few necessaries already put together in readiness for this fateful moment. She reached down the pathetic little bundle from where she had hidden it on the cupboard top, and took it to the table.

After that she softly drew open a drawer and took out a couple of farewell notes—one to the headmistress of the school, the other to Betty and her people. She placed them side by side on her blotting-pad.

All that a loving heart could say, in gratitude for past kindnesses, she had tried to say. But it grieved her terribly that the real reason for this flight from the school could not be divulged.

Obviously, to disclose the pressure under which she was acting would be doing a thing just as fatal to the Bartons' interests as remaining on at the school.

She had decided to take an old macintosh with her, and this she now put on, as it was easier to wear than to carry. Before another day had come she would have to change her schoolgirl appearance by resorting to things in the bundle; but for the present she need not worry about that. The thing was to get away at once, and to get as far from the school as possible before the dawn came.

She had a little money with her, and was rich in self-reliance. Her past unbringing as a gipsy made her confident that she would fare all right. She was not afraid of hard work, and it was her hope and belief that she would find employment of a domestic nature with some good woman somewhere, to whom she could confide her sad story under a pledge of secrecy.

And now, just as she had had to let her hushed steps take her across to the dormitory door, so she had to pass from the study that had been her pride and delight. She lingered by the doorway, and was it a wonder that a little sob burst from her as she gazed around in farewell fashion in the darkness?

Hard—cruelly hard, that the fates should have made her, a mere schoolgirl, the victim of their wicked sport!

"Good-bye, little room!" was her unvoiced farewell to the study where she had known so many happy hours. And a few minutes later, when she was drawing shut the last door behind her, and the stars were above her head:

"Stormwood School—good-bye!"

With the little bundle hugged under one arm, away she went, taking the first steps that were to lead her—whither? She could not say. She only knew that whatever path she might have to choose, now that her wanderings alone had begun, it would be the right one.

Zonia got clear of the nightbound grounds by crawling through a gap in the boundary hedge. Picking up the bundle that she had thrust through in advance of herself, she looked this way and that in the narrow by-lane in which she found herself.

Which way now?

In one direction lay the main road through the wooded valley; the opposite course would lead her out on to the lonely hills. Convinced that not a soul was to be encountered upon the open road, she set off for it.

And thus, although she never knew it, she was seen by someone in the very instant that she came out of the by-lane on to the valley road. Someone who had hung about Stormwood School to-night in a fever of suspense, wondering anxiously would the victimised girl act up to her spirited resolve and actually flee the school?

Zonia trudged on, and there behind the roadside hedge crouched the woman who was the mother of Miriam Loveless, alias "Mrs. Jarvis."

With inheld breath, the crafty woman kept her peering eyes upon that lonely, pathetic figure as it went along the road, the silent yet firm step witnessing to such a heroic nature. It was a sight so gratifying to Mrs. Loveless, she muttered exultantly to herself as she saw the small, dark figure receding into the darkness.

"She has done it, then! She meant it when she said she would rather run away than make her

life with us or see the Bartons victimised! My girl, if you only knew how this suits our book!"

Zonia was gone by now—swallowed up in the darkness. Mrs. Loveless suddenly came out of her crouching place and moved off along the night-bound road.

"Just as well to follow you for as long as I dare, my girl!" she was thinking, still smiling triumphantly. "And if only I can get a chance to prevent your whereabouts ever being traced—traced me to seize it!"

And so, under that wide and starry sky, the schoolgirl who was such a child of destiny went wandering on, and after her stole the shadowy figure of the crafty woman, glorying in the way the whole daring plot was working out!

#### The Morning After.

"NAOW, Naomer, dwop it! Dwop it, I say!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Naomer, will you—Ow!"

"He, he, he!"

"Gwacious!" wailed long-suffering Paula Creel, and yet she had to laugh. "Haw, haw, haw! Naomer—"

"Get up, then, you lazybones!" insisted Morcove's royal scholar, as she gave another squeeze to the large sponge which she was holding just above Paula's face. "Tet is time I make you reform into an early riser, yes!"

"Wefowm, bai Jove! What geal can be an early wiser, I'd like to know, if she doesn't get to sleep for an hour after lights out because of the larking about, bai Jove? Yow—dwop it!"

"All right, I drop him!"

And down dropped the sponge, sure enough, Paula only evading it by giving a quick wriggle that made her fall clean out of bed—flop!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Healp!"

"Well, that's one way of getting up," commented Polly, as she came rushing back into the dormitory after her ablutions. "You are progressing, Paula dear!"

"I am—weally; I don't know quite what I am doing!" was the duffer's distressful cry, as she floundered to her feet. "I weally must pwo-test—"

"You really must hurry," corrected Betty, with mock severity. "First bell ended ages ago."

"And such a lovely morning!" came from Helen Craig, as she took a look out of one of the windows. "If it is like this to-morrow, Saturday—a halfer!"

"Yes, wather! Weal, geals, good-morning! I trust you all slept well. I myself was deprived of the wight amount of wepose owing to me. I—"

"Oh, story!" shrilled Naomer, giving the last touches to her toilette. "You sleep before anyone else, and you wake up ze last. But I not waste time on you, no! I run down and see Jimmy and give him ze breakfast!"

Jimmy was the jackdaw, by now very comfortable and contented and quite tame, in the cage that had been assigned to him round by the green-houses. Away scampered Naomer, and in a minute Jimmy was receiving his breakfast at the hands of his royal and loving mistress.

"Say 'Thank you!'" commanded Naomer.

"Squawk, squawk-ahk!"

"Good boy!" And another nice titbit went pop between Jimmy's gaping beak.

He was a great attraction in the school, and

no sooner was the scholars' breakfast over than quite a crowd gathered in front of the cage. The sight of him putting down his head to have his neck stroked by Naomer was one cause of great merriment. Another diversion was Jimmy's bath.

It was a perfect craving that Jimmy had acquired, thus early in life, for a pail of water in which to rinse himself. Hopping on to the rim of the brimming bucket, he plunged his head down and shook it furiously, sending the water spraying this way and that.

"There, you see!" Naomer cried proudly. "And now you hear him say 'Thank you!'"

"Squawk, squawk-ahk!"

"Bai Jove! Haw, haw, haw. Wemarkable cweature," simpered Paula. "And he lets you stwoke him, too! Here, Jimmy, you wascal, come on then!" And she put a finger in through the bars to him. "Good b—Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My gwacious, such a peck! The wicked wascal—"

"He, he, he!"

The girls were still getting a great deal of fun out of the mischievous little fellow, when a cry reached them from someone over at one of the schoolhouse doors.

"Betty Barton! Is Betty there?"

"Yes—here I am!" answered that girl, instantly breaking clear of the crowd in front of the cage.

"Wanted on the 'phone, Betty!"

"Bai Jove!"

Paula was not the only one to seem a bit surprised. As for Betty herself, she gave a round-eyed look of amazement before peeling off to the schoolhouse. Scholars were very seldom rung up on the 'phone. The line was not supposed to be used for the purpose, except in cases of urgency.

By twos and threes the girls drifted off in the direction of the schoolhouse, after Betty had sped away. Her own particular chums were close to the side-door when she came rushing out to them, the picture of wild dismay.

"It's about Zonia!" she panted at Polly and the rest. "They have rung up from Stormwood School to say that Zonia is not there!"

"Not at Stormwood! But—"

"Bai Jove—"

"She has run away!"

"What! Run away from—"

"Gone off in the night!" Betty spoke on breathlessly. "They found a farewell note for their headmistress in Zonia's study. There is a note for me, too; they haven't opened it—"

"My gwacious! Geals—"

"But how awful! What does it mean?" Polly and a half dozen other girls were exclaiming astoundedly. "Zonia—gone like that? Gone where?"

And Betty shook her head helplessly.

"There is no telling. She seems to have gone off with the intention of keeping her whereabouts a secret. I shall have to ask permission to go over to Stormwood. Half a sec.! Perhaps you can come, too!"

Even as Betty was turning to dart back into the house, Miss Redgrave appeared. That young lady's looks showed that she had heard the alarming news from Stormwood.

"Their headmistress has been speaking to Miss Somerfield about it all, on the 'phone. Betty, you have permission to go over—"

"Oh, thanks, thanks, Miss Redgrave. And some of my chums? Polly, and Paula, and Madge, and—"

"Yes, that's all right," was the prompt word of assent that caused a good half-dozen of them to dash indoors for their outdoor things.

The sensational news had spread like wildfire already. Betty & Co. had girls mobbing around them whilst they got ready for the jaunt. "What does it mean, Betty?" was the excited cry that came again and again—as if Betty or any of them could say!

Miss Redgrave offered them the motor-bus, but they preferred to go by bicycle. If there was still no news of Zonia when they got to Stormwood, they would want to scout round the country-side in the hope of gleaning information.

So, within five minutes of the startling phone call, the chums were on their way to Stormwood as fast as they could get the bikes to go.

They were getting nigh their journey's end, and were all red-hot with the fast riding, when

only says— Oh, but you must read it yourselves; I can't—can't bear it, girls!"

And suddenly poor Betty was having to wipe her eyes free from tears, whilst her chums crowded together to read the note that had caused her such emotion. Polly held it with a shaking hand.

"Betty, dear,"—they saw that Zonia had written overnight—"By the time you get this you will most likely have heard that I have left Stormwood School.

"You and your Morcove chums will be just as surprised and upset as anyone at Stormwood, I know. Oh, Betty, darling, how I hate causing you this upset and anxiety on my account, but it cannot be helped.

"If you only knew the reason why I am going away, and why I want to hide from everybody,



**HER SPIRITED DEFIANCE!** "You will come with me, girl, or else—" began Zonia's false parent. The girl tore herself free. "I won't!" she cried. "You are not going to use me as an excuse for getting money out of the Bartons!"

they rounded a bend and saw two or three Stormwood girls approaching on foot.

"Monica—Enid—and who's the other?" panted Polly.

"Becky Willard?" hazarded Betty.

She was right. Monica Munro, the Stormwood Fourth Form captain, had Enid Allarby and Becky Willard with her. These three came on at a run to meet the cyclists, who were soon dismounting, clamorous for the latest news.

"But there is none!" was Monica's rueful announcement. "There is only this, for you, Betty."

Betty snatched at the note which had been held forth. Panting for breath, she sent a finger ripping open the envelope, and agitatedly brought out the contents.

"Perhaps she has said more to you than she said in her note to the headmistress," murmured Monica. "Let's hope so, because—"

"No, she says nothing—nothing as to why or where she has gone," was Betty's disappointed exclamation, whilst she scanned the missive. "She

you would not think less of me. I have said this to my headmistress, and I do hope that she and everyone else will try to think the best of me still.

"Betty, darling, I am not forgetting how your own dear parents will also feel the shock. Let the news be broken gently to them, and oh, if you want to do one thing for me, Betty dear, that I will be so grateful for, do this! Tell your dear father and mother that I bless and love them for all they have done for me. It is because—"

The girls could see that those three words had been written and then scratched through several times. The letter continued:

"How grateful I am to Mr. and Mrs. Barton, Betty, darling, will perhaps be known some day. Meantime, I send them all my heart's love with this, and I send you a thousand kisses, dear, in case this is farewell for ever, from your own sad

"ZONIA."

There was dead silence as Polly returned the letter to Betty, after all had read it.

Not one girl had remained dry-eyed. There was a pathetic simplicity in that farewell cry from the one-time gipsy-girl that had touched them deeply.

"Did she take her bicycle?" Betty asked the Stormwood trio at last.

"No. She must have gone away on foot—"

"At what time, I wonder!" exclaimed Polly. "It makes all the difference if it was before midnight, or perhaps only just before the dawn."

"This came for her by this morning's post," resumed Monica softly, holding out another letter. "Is it from you, Betty? It bears the Morcove postmark."

"It is a letter I posted yesterday evening, yes," nodded Betty. Dully she took the letter and stared at it. "This was to ask her to come over to Morcove to-morrow—"

"Bai Jove, geals, of course!" exclaimed Paula. "To-morrow we were to have introduced Zonia to those nice people at Cliffedge Bungalow—what!"

Betty gave a lift and fall of the shoulders.

"Yes," she sighed, "Mr. and Mrs. Spenlow were so anxious to meet Zonia! They have felt interested in her ever since they saw her portrait at the exhibition. And now—this!"

"Our headmistress is going to make every effort to have the girl traced," Monica remarked, "after another heavy pause. "We girls have permission to scout around—"

"And so have we!" Polly broke in eagerly. "Miss Somerfield said we could remain all day, if necessary. She trusts us."

"And she herself is as anxious as anyone could be!" exclaimed Betty. "If Zonia were one of Morcove's own scholars, Miss Somerfield could not feel it more."

"Zonia always was like one of us," murmured Madge. "If anything happens to her—"

"My gwacious, don't suggest such a thing, pway!" Paula entreated, on the verge of tears again. "I—I— Weally, it is too distwessing! Zonia was a geal, you know, a bwick—what! Yes, wather! And now—"

"No more talk!" Polly suddenly burst out in her impulsive way. "Girls, look here, even if Zonia left the school before midnight, she can't have got far! Then come on!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Ooo, yes! Queek—queek!" Naomer began to caper excitedly as she said it. "Let us search and search!"

"Until she is found—yes!" was Betty's passionate rejoinder. "We have the bikes. They'll be useful."

"Yes, wather! Geals, I'm weady. I'll wide awound all day, if that will healp. Zonia's in some great twouble. She hasn't wun away without weason. We'll find her, then!"

"We must—we will!" was Polly's vehement cry. "No rest until we do!"

But midday found them still scouring the district, and drawing blank everywhere. The hot afternoon wore away to cool evening, with its lurid sunset light flaming across the moors. Then the night, and still no clue, no news of the runaway or her whereabouts.

What did it mean, then? Where was she—where? Was there no one who could say, no one to come forward and throw a light upon the mystery?

No one!

There were only those who, knowing full well where the girl was to be found, were keeping silent, and would merely laugh in their sleeves if they saw any tempting reward offered.

For they, the ones who knew, had how great a reason for being silent, since it was a mystery of their own entire making!

(END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.)

Where can Zonia be? To whom can she turn in this new dilemma which faces her? If only she had waited! But it was her desire to spare the Bartons the attentions of the unscrupulous Lovelesses which drove her to run away. Do not fail to read next week's splendid complete tale, which is entitled: "From Schoolroom to Circus-Ring!"

# THE SCHOOL FRIEND



*This Thursday's Issue of this Popular Schoolgirls' paper contains:*

## AUGUSTA'S GREAT MISTAKE

A Splendid Long Complete Story of the Girls of Cliff House School.

## THE CROSS WORD PUZZLE

An Enthralling Long Complete Story of the Girls of St. David's School.

## SURROUNDED BY SECRETS

A Fine Serial of "Mystery" and School Life.