

*Hobbs*  
THE PAPER TO TAKE ON YOUR HOLIDAYS!

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



**"THAT GIRL IS  
A THIEF!"**

A dramatic incident from  
this week's splendid long  
complete tale of the girls  
of Morcove School.

A Magnificent Long Complete Tale of the Morcove Chums on Holiday.



# THE SCHOOLGIRL PIERRETES!

By MARJORIE STANTON.

When Betty Barton & Co. set off on their novel holiday adventure, they little thought that they would be mixed up in the curious mystery which surrounded poor Amy Ashdown, the friendless scullery-maid. But Amy had cause to thank the Fourth Form chums, as you will read in this fine story.

"Cora's in this!"

"PAULA, darling! Naomer!"  
 "Bai Jove, Polly, deah! Good-morning! Did you sleep all wight? Naomer and I, in this bed-woom—"

"You should just go downstairs and see the piles and piles of letters!" was Polly Linton's thrilling cry, now that she had whisked into that room at Mrs. Juddings' boarding-house which Paula Creel and Naomer Nakara occupied. "Shoals of letters!"

"Bai Jove, you don't mean it, Polly!"

"Well, there's a dozen, at least, from people who were at our concert on the sands last night," rattled on Polly. "And it's in the local newspaper, too!"

"Ooo!" commented Naomer, starting a caper of delight, whilst Paula exclaimed, beaming:

"Bai Jove, that's good, Polly! Yes, wather! A fair cwticism, I tvust? Any wemarks—er—about my singing?"

"Listen to this!" Polly said, whisking out a newspaper.

She did not actually say that what she was about to recite was in that morning's "Sandmouth Chronicle." She left Paula to infer it.

"Good as the performance was—"

"Yes, wather! Haw, haw, haw! Go on, Polly, deah!"

"We must frankly state that it would have been considerably improved—"

"Yes, wather! Considerably impwoved had I been allowed to give an encore. I said so at the time, Polly, deah. You wemember—"

"Considerably improved," went on Polly, "if one turn had been omitted. We refer to the singing—the alleged singing—of Miss Paula Creel!"

"Eh, what?"

"We see she is described on the programme as a contralto—"

"A wich contwalto—yes, wather! Weal, then—"

"It was a somewhat painful shock, therefore, to be treated to the most reedy warblings!"

"They haven't said that, Polly? Bai Jove, I'll

bring an action!" protested Paula, advancing to take the newspaper.

But Polly waved her away.

"Listen, Paula! We must confess that during Miss Creel's singing we could hardly keep a straight face!"

But at this point Polly herself could not keep a straight face, either. As Paula made another dash to get the newspaper, looking absolutely horrified, the inveterate teaser tossed it at her, and went off into peals of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You wascal, Polly, deah! That's all wubbish you have been making up! There's not a wourd about me!"

"Some words are better left unsaid, Paula!"

"It will be in the second edition, perhaps," was Paula's hopeful remark. "They had not woom this time—not woom enough to do justice to my singing. All I know is, I was in gwand fowm—yes, wather! I felt it at the time."

"Of course, Paula; only my teasing. You were a great success," Polly now atoned for all her teasing by saying handsomely. "The paragraph in that paper really does praise the concert as a whole, so altogether—"

"We have made a gwand start—yes, wather! Weal, I must finish dwessing."

"Ooo, yes; me, too! Queek—queek!" Naomer exclaimed. "Eet is such a lovely day, and the sea look so beautiful!"

"We were talking, Betty and I, of suggesting a swim later on in the morning," Polly said, on the way out of the room. "But we do feel that we ought to give up the morning to—well, to a bit of detective work."

"Eh, what? Polly, deah, you mean—"

"That bit of a mystery about the girl Amy," Polly said, looking very serious now. "It does seem as if we ought to find out whether or not she did go off from this boarding-house last evening of her own accord. There is such a lot that suggests she didn't do anything of the sort."

"Polly, deah, you are quite wight!" Paula nodded gravely. "The geal had become vevy happy with us about the place. Besides—"

"She not take any luggage with her!" put in Naomer.

"Strangest thing of all," rejoined Polly, "the place she is supposed to have gone back to is the very place where we know she was so unhappy before—that house called the Grange!"

"Yes, wather, where Corwa Gwandways happens to be staying, bai Jove, with that holiday cwoeny of hers!" said Paula. "Bai Jove, it's a remarkable business altogether, Polly, deah!"

"Well, see you presently," finished that member of the Fourth Form at Morcove, and she hurried off downstairs, taking a flying leap at the finish that landed her with a light thump on one of Mrs. Juddings' hall mats.

Then she walked forward to the wide-flung front door, for Miss Redgrave was there, talking to Betty Barton, Madge Minden, Tess Trelawney, and Helen Craig. They looked like having to wait some time for breakfast. Meanwhile, it was good to stand about at the top of the concrete steps, basking in the same sunshine that was giving a silvery sparkle to the sea.

"By all means devote the morning to finding out what you can, girls," Miss Redgrave was saying in a subdued voice as Polly joined the group. "What you have told me makes me share your uneasiness, and I only wish I could come out with you to the Grange. But I have several other things to attend to in regard to the concerts."

"If one of us can be of any help by staying back—" Betty offered, but the youthful mistress quickly shook her head.

"No, girls; that would not be fair. You are giving the concerts, and my part, it was agreed, should be to look after the business side of the venture and generally look after you. I want you all to go out to the Grange, and—"

Abruptly, Miss Redgrave broke off, even though she had been speaking guardedly, as a slipshod step sounded in the hall. Mrs. Juddings was passing into the dining-room, with another belated contribution to the breakfast-table, and it was not part of the Morcovians' plan to allow her to overhear any word about Amy.

As matters stood, it looked very much as if this muddled-headed proprietress of the boarding-house had either become a party to some conspiracy in regard to the girl Amy, or else she was being duped. In either case, it meant that Mrs. Juddings was hardly to be trusted until more was known.

And more the chums of Study 12 at Morcove meant to find out before this morning had sped!

Just before they sat down to breakfast, they looked up the Grange on a large-scale local map. It was only a few miles outside the seaside town, an easy walk for girls as fit as Betty & Co. always were.

That particular breakfast certainly did not do much towards putting them in marching trim. But, as they laughingly agreed amongst themselves, when they were going off, they could easily get a snack on the way.

For the first mile or so the route lay through uninteresting roads, lined with new villas. Once the brick-and-mortar was left behind, however, the girls found themselves in a most enchanting countryside.

The rich loam was well farmed, and never in their lives had Betty & Co. passed lovelier corn-fields. It was high summer, and butterflies and dragon-flies abounded, whilst the banks of the leafy lanes were full of wild flowers.

"Well, it gets lonelier and lonelier," was Polly's

comment, after they had been walking for an hour. "If the Grange proves to be the only house in this neighbourhood, I don't wonder that Amy left her situation feeling unhappy!"

"She left it because the people who had taken the place, furnished, were not nice to her," Betty murmured musingly. "She said she was happy enough when the actual owners of the Grange were living there. But they are abroad now, and—"

"Look, is that the Grange?" Tess suddenly broke out, stepping aside to peer through a gap in the hedge. "It must be, surely!"

Grouped together where that break in the hedge gave them a clear view, they saw a great and rambling old house, standing amidst spacious grounds.

Even at that distance, the place had an appearance of having been neglected just lately. Boundary hedges were growing ragged, and no cattle grazed the lush-grass in the small park. Between the noble trees could be glimpsed a big sheet of ornamental water, with a building of cold grey stone that seemed to be a sort of boathouse.

"It's the Grange, right enough," Polly promptly declared, "because you can see two girls just coming out on to the old terrace, and they are—"

"Cora and the friend she is staying with!" Betty chimed in. "Yes, there they are. A nice pair, too!"

"Bai Jove, geals," breathed Paula, "if Corwa has got herself mixed up in any wascally business—"

"And it looks as if she has!" exclaimed Madge, with a grave frown. "It was she who was sent with that message to Mrs. Juddings, last evening, on her motor-cycle, by Laura Dillon's mother. How strange it is that we should meet Cora in this place!"

"Always Cora, it seems, when trouble is about!" muttered Helen Craig bitterly. "As if we don't have enough of her at school!"

They went on with a good deal of caution now, being so near to the bounds of the country mansion. Their intention was to scout round the place, and, if that led to nothing, to go up boldly to the front door, and openly demand to see the orphan girl.

Up to yesterday evening that girl had been the maid-of-all-work at Mrs. Juddings', whilst now—

What was her position now? Was all really well with her, back here at the Grange, in the service of Mrs. Dillon?

Questions, these, to which Betty & Co. meant to get the answer before another hour was out.

#### Letting Her Have It.

AT that moment, the girl with whom Cora Grandways was staying at the Grange suddenly made a gleeful proposal, giving a wide grin as she did so.

"Cora, let's come and have a game with that Amy, shall we? I can get the key off the hook where mother hangs it, and I know she won't mind."

"All right; anything for a bit of fun," agreed Cora, with a look that showed what her notions of "fun" were. "I always love to have some girl I can tease, don't you?"

And Laura Dillon, being just such another girl as the ill-natured spitfire of Morcove's Fourth Form, nodded and laughed.

"When I was at school, Cora—"

"Meaning before you were expelled! He, he, he!"

"Be quiet!" Laura laughed again, giving her crouny a nudge as they pranced away from the terrace. "I was going to say, I used to have great games at my school. It was I who invented the Inquisition—great fun! Tell you all about it some time, dear."

"You and I would get on just splendidly at Morocco, if only you could come!" declared Cora, giving an admiring side glance to the girl who matched her for handsome looks and stylish dressing. "But I suppose there is no likelihood—"

"Not the slightest!" said Laura, tossing her head. "From what I can gather, my parents will be going abroad as soon as well, as soon as they have had enough of the Grange."

"And that will be as soon as Amy tells them where she hid that paper they are after?" Cora rejoined in a wheedling tone.

Laura shrugged, and gave a wink.

"You are getting to know too much, Cora. Still, I'm sure you can be trusted."

"Oh, I am in with you right enough now!" chuckled Cora. "It's jolly to have something to give my visit to the Grange a spice of excitement! I say, we must be sure to go down to the beach this evening, and look at the Morocco Concert Party again. That has been another lovely surprise—to find those stupidly choosing Sandmouth as the first seaside town in which to make idiots of themselves!"

Thus Cora alluded to Betty & Co.'s novel enterprise in devoting part of their summer holidays to running a concert party, for the benefit of a hospital rebuilding fund.

Of course, the malicious girl knew that the venture was an entirely laudable one. But the very fact that Betty & Co. were doing something of a creditable nature, and doing it without any trumpet-blowing, made Cora seethe with rage against them.

Now that the shallow couple were going, with jaunty steps, across the park, to the boathouse by the lake, they gave each other more than one approving glance.

"I do like that frock you are wearing!" exclaimed Cora. "You do look so nice, Laura!"

"I'm sure I don't look any better than you, dear. I say, we are having a jolly time together, aren't we?"

"Awfully! We must try to stick together until the end of the hols. You'll have to come to me when my visit here is over."

"I'd love to! Your people have a fine place, haven't they? This country house is all right, of course; but, then, it isn't ours. We only rent it, furnished."

So they chatted on, smugly enjoying each other's company, whilst they rapidly neared the massive-looking boathouse, which looked as though it might originally have been intended for somebody's mausoleum.

When they were quite near to the almost too solid-looking edifice, the girls stopped talking and walked on tiptoe. In a crafty way, they stole on, ready to exchange wicked smiles if they heard the hapless captive weeping aloud in her gloomy prison. But Laura and Cora were denied the malicious delight of hearing any such sound.

As silent as ever, Laura moved to where a big key was hanging from a nail in a sheltered part of the massive wall. Returning with this, she suddenly thrust it into the keyhole, and sent the great old door crashing open, with all the noise possible.

"Now, then, you!" she cried in a bullying tone,

whilst she burst in upon the girl who had been imprisoned here all night. "What about it now, Amy Ashdown?"

Cora also flounced into the dim, stone-walled chamber. Without waiting for Laura to ask her to do so, she closed the door, thereby excluding what light there had been. With only a ray or so entering at a barred ventilation hole, high up in one wall, the place was now as dark as a cellar.

"Come to your senses yet, have you, my girl?" taunted Laura, standing haughtily in front of her mother's hapless captive.

Amy was pale as a ghost—not with fear, but with the passionate indignation which filled her. As Cora and Laura both stood before her, smiling mockingly, she held herself erect, a defiant look in her eyes.



**DIGNITY AND IMPATIENCE!** "Out of ze way, queek, queek!" cried Naomer, roguishly darting in front of Paula, as that girl was making for the glass. "Eet not matter how you look. I am ze one!" And then, totally ignoring Paula, she began to "make-up."

"I have not told your hateful mother what she is trying to get to know, if that is what you mean!" Amy said fiercely. "I have said I won't tell where that paper is hidden, and when I say I won't, I mean it!"

"Dear me!" scoffed Laura, standing hands on hips, and with her head thrown back. "Do you hear this, Cora, dear?"

"One would think that Betty Barton and the rest of them at the boarding-house had been putting her up to this!" grinned Cora. "It's just their way!"

"A way that doesn't suit me!" Laura said, with a malignant smile. "Who are you, Amy Ashdown, to be so cheeky? A mere skivvy, a wretched little servant in cap and apron!"

"I'm not the daughter of thieves, as you are!" flashed Amy, trembling with resentment at the

treatment she had received. "For Mr. and Mrs. Dillon are nothing else but that! They are trying to get hold of something that does not belong to them."

"Piffle! It's only your stupid fancy that the paper you hid is valuable. It's only a curious old document that my parents felt interested in," Laura said airily. "This is an old house—"

"That paper may relate to some treasure that is hidden about the place, and the only people who should benefit by any discovery are the owners!" Amy spoke out stoutly. "They are abroad now, and I don't know their address. That is why I have done the best thing I could by them in hiding the paper."

"But you are going to tell my mother where—"

"Never!"

"Oh, yes, you are!" Laura declared, with a threatening look that delighted Cora. "You will tell me now!"

"I won't! No, I won't, not even if you—"

"If we what?" retorted Laura, her handsome eyes glinting in the gloom. "Go down on our knees to you—is that what you think? There won't be much of that, Amy Ashdown. It is you who will soon be on your knees to us—like this!"

So saying, she sprang at Amy, and, catching her by the arm, tried to throw her off her balance by violently shaking her.

"Down on your knees, I say—down!" Laura panted, whilst Amy began to writhe and struggle.

"I've taken the spirit out of many a girl like you before now! Get down, you little monkey!"

"Let me go!" Amy answered, still struggling to shake off that tenacious grip. "I warn you, I shall make a complaint!"

"Bah, tell-tale! That's like a Council school kid!" Laura jeered. "Come on, Cora! If she won't give in, we'll make her!"

Eagerly Cora Grandways strode closer, and next second Amy had the pair of them gripping her and shaking her unmercifully.

#### The Tables Turned.

HOW it would all end, the poor girl did not dare think. She realised that, apart from their having a desperate reason for trying to make her yield up the secret as to where she had hidden the paper, they were girls who delighted in tormenting others.

Suddenly, Cora dived down and made a grab at one of Amy's ankles. A violent pull left the poor girl with only one foot to stand upon, and this, too, at a time when Laura was shaking her by the shoulders.

Down she went—crash!—to the ground, and then her tormentors laughed fiendishly, whilst they fairly threw themselves upon her.

"Let her have it, Cora!"

"You bet!" was that girl's chuckling answer. "She'll soon be ready to tell now! He, he, he!"

"Speak out, then! Do you hear?" bullied Laura, smacking Amy's defenceless head. "Where is that paper?"

"I won't—I won't tell you, ever!"

"The saucy monkey!" seethed Cora. "I wouldn't let her up until she does tell, Laura!"

"I'm not going to let her up!" was the savage response. "Now, then, you saucy brat!" She suddenly rolled the writhing girl upon the dusty floor. "Are you going to tell us?"

"No, no! Oh, don't be so cruel—so unfair! You are two on to one! Don't!"

"Then speak up about that paper!"

"No, no!" Amy moaned exhaustedly. And again: "No!"

"You silly donkey," Cora upbraided the tormented girl, "why don't you say where that paper is?"

"Because you've no right to it! Because— Ah, you wretch, Laura Dillon! Stop it!"

"He, he, he!" Laura chuckled, giving another twist to the prisoner's wrist. "My patent way, this is. Want a little more, Amy?"

Amy groaned, then set her lips tight in front of her clenched teeth.

"What else can we do to her?" Laura pondered aloud, worked up into a reckless mood. "I know! Let's—"

"Hark! Someone coming," Cora broke in softly. "Who will that be, Laura?"

"If it's anyone at all, it must be mother, so don't be uneasy," was Laura's cool reply. "We have only been doing what she herself will do, if this girl remains obstinate."

"The key's outside, in the lock, Laura."

"It doesn't matter. It can only be mother. Here, get up now, Amy, and—"

And then the great door suddenly flew wide, letting in a flood of light—and a girl!

Laura and Cora quailed then in sudden utter terror, as well they might.

This was not Mrs. Dillon. It was a girl of school age, and behind her, charging after her into Amy's gloomy prison, were other girls.

"Hurrah! Just in time!"

"Yes, wather! Geals—geals—"

"Amy, it's your friends at the boarding-house!" Betty's shout rang out, above the other breathless voices. "Here we are!"

"Yes, wather! Hooway! Bai Jove!"

"Shut the door, someone!"

"All right, Betty, dear," Polly answered, as she dashed back to push the door to, without actually closing it.

All this had happened in a moment. Before another was gone, both Cora and Laura were filled with the panicky idea of getting out of this—sharp!

Together they dashed for the door, but the band of staunch chums barred the way. A second time, after being flung backwards, the scared couple tried to struggle past their opponents, and a second time they were both sent spinning.

"Come on, Amy!"

"Ooo, yes; queek—queek, out of this! I not like it!" Naomer could be heard exclaiming excitedly. "Ah, haw, eet is like a prison!"

"And a prison it must have been for you, Amy, ever since last evening, isn't it so?" Betty asked breathlessly, as she found the poor girl rushing up to her in the gloom. "They've been keeping you here?"

"Yes, the wretches! But now—"

"Bai Jove! Haw, haw, haw! This is bettah—what? Geals—"

"Come on!" Polly panted, throwing the door wide again. "And we'll lock those hateful girls up instead!"

"Yes, wather!"

And so they did.

With the rescued Amy in their midst, four or five of them gained the open air, the rest guarding the doorway up to the last moment, to prevent Cora and Laura from getting away.

Furious at the thought of being left in such a humiliating position, those two girls made another desperate rush. In vain!

"No, you don't!" declared Polly flatly, whilst she and Betty pushed them back.

Another moment and the two Morcovians were with the others in the open, and the big door was being pulled shut.

With a booming thud, the massive timbers closed against Amy's recent tormentors. Snap! went the key in the lock, and away sped the rescued girl with her schoolgirl friends, laughing to hear the crestfallen prisoners thudding at the door and shrilly yelling:

"Let us out! Open the door—open! You cheeky wretches, you will pay for this! Let us out! Do you hear?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Polly. "Rather in a temper, aren't they?"

"Yes, wather!" beamed Paula. "Haw, haw, haw! That was vewy wuch, geals—what? Quite a brilliant stwoke, bai Jove, to catch them like that! Corwa Gwandways, too! Haw, haw, haw!"

#### Polly's Great Plan.

FOR a few minutes after they had got clear of the Grange boundaries, the triumphant Morcovians continued at a good pace along the quiet country road, Amy joyfully in their midst.

Then Paula began to feel more than short of breath, and a general halt found every one of them ready to "Pouf!" loudly.

"We must have a sit down, if only because you, Amy, look so dead beat," Betty proposed. "What a shame, the way you have been treated! The Dillons could be looked up for it!"

"I shall not complain to the police, though," Amy answered, with passionate calmness, and, somehow, the chums liked her all the better for saying that.

It was so in accord with their own unwritten law at Morcove: "Never tell!"

They drew off into the sunny corner of a big meadow, and dispersed themselves upon the grass, Paula instantly filching out a pocket mirror and comb.

"Weal, and why not, geals?" she protested, as she found Polly and Naomer grinning. "The wecent wescue, bai Jove, was not bwrought off without disastwous wescults to my appeawance. I'm a weck—a wuin!"

"Go ahead," said Polly. "You'll soon be all right again, Paula, darling. I'm not so sure about Amy, here. She looks quite knocked up."

"Oh, no, I—I shall be as right as rain presently!" declared the rescued girl.

"Tell us all about it, Amy, won't you?" pleaded Betty, very earnestly. "Were you really locked up in that boathouse place all night?"

"Yes."

"Abominable!" exclaimed Helen. "We guessed as much, didn't we, girls, from what we overheard Cora and Laura saying just now, before we took them by surprise?"

"But why—why have you been served like this, Amy?" clamoured Polly. "Laura's own mother and father were in it, so it was not simply a cruel jape carried out by those hateful girls."

"I don't mind telling you what I would tell no one else," came the subdued answer that made the Morcovians listen eagerly. "There is a lot of downright scheming behind it all. Mr. and Mrs. Dillon are absolute rascals!"

"Phew!" breathed Polly, whilst Paula gasped:

"Bai Jove!"

"They rented the Grange, furnished, as you know, after the owners had gone abroad. I was

kept on as a servant, and very soon I found out that they were the sort of people who only live by their wits."

The girl's voice was becoming more and more tense as she continued her dramatic disclosures.

"My duties about the place caused me to notice that Mr. and Mrs. Dillon were ferreting around in a way that tenants of furnished houses are not supposed to do. I became so suspicious that I kept watch upon them."

"Yes, dear—well?" two or three of the girls could not help exclaiming eagerly, as Amy paused.

"Well, one night I heard a noise that made me put on my things and creep down. Mr. and Mrs. Dillon were in the old library, and they had found something that they were gloating over in a very excited way. They had been using the kitchen ladder, and it had fallen over. That was the noise I heard."

The chums nodded.

"But what had they found, Amy?"

"A paper—a sort of cypher it was, for I got hold of it afterwards, as I am now going to tell you. They put it away in a bureau before going to bed. When they had gone up, I went in and got the paper, knowing that they had no right to it."

"Bwavo, Amy, deah!" applauded Paula, and the others murmured to the same effect.

"Well, how could they have any right to it," the spirited girl continued, "when it was something found by ransacking the house? It seemed to me that it belonged absolutely to the owners of the house, who were abroad, and I felt I must stand by them. So I took the paper and hid it."

"Where, Amy, where?" burst out Polly in her headstrong way, but Betty interposed:

"Perhaps Amy would rather not tell us that, Polly. She is being very good to confide in us so freely, as it is, but—"

"You have been so very good to me!" was Amy's quick response, given with eyes ashine. "If you wish me to tell you, I will do so, although I had made it almost a vow that no one—"

"Then don't tell us—not for the present, anyhow," advised Madge. "We quite understand, Amy."

"Yes, wather! You must exercise your discwention, Amy. After all, bai Jove, you have only known us such a little while!"

"Oh, it's not that!" was the girl's prompt assurance. "I feel I know you well enough to trust you with any secret. Only I want any of you to be able to say, if ever the Dillons serve you as they have served me, that you don't know where the paper is hidden. You couldn't say that if you knew."

"No, we couldn't," Betty said, with a pleased smile at Amy's regard for the truth. "But, Amy, dear, do you really think the Dillons might—kidnap one of us, I was going to say—if they thought we knew?"

Amy glanced around cautiously, and then answered, with slow impressiveness:

"I believe they intend never to rest until they have got hold of that paper again! You can imagine how desperate they are from the way they served me yesterday evening. Mrs. Dillon kept me locked up all night. She bullied me, threatened to keep me there on bread and water—"

"Shame!" Polly said, banging a hand down upon the grass. "Oh, girls, what a good job we came out this morning, to look into the affair!"

It was a remark that drew sudden tears into Amy's eyes.

"If you had not come along and saved me,"



### SHEER OSTENTATIOUSNESS!

As Polly came to where Cora Grandways and Laura were sitting, those two dropped paper money into the bag, taking good care to let everyone see how lavish they were. "Thank you," said Polly sweetly. "You can come as often as you like at that price!"

was her tremulous exclamation, "no one would ever have known how I was being treated! The boathouse is a long way from the mansion. No one goes near the lake, and so how could I have hoped to make my cries for help heard? But you saved me! You—"

"Well, it was not such a wonderful bit of work," Betty broke in lightly. "Rather a joke, in fact!"

"Yes, wather! Haw, haw, haw!"

"The question is, Amy, what's to be done now?" Betty continued gravely. "You don't like to complain to the police, and, you say, the real owners of the Grange are abroad."

"The paper can never be found—never!" Amy declared vehemently. "Not where I have hidden it—ah, no! If only I can keep out of the Dillons' clutches for the present, until I get in touch with the owners of the Grange—"

She paused, looking at Polly, who had given a sudden "My word!" as if an inspiration had seized her.

"Girls, I say," burst out Morcove's madcap next moment, "what about Amy joining our party?"

The others' brows went up in sudden delight. Naomer jerked out an "Ooo, yes; queek—queek!" Whilst Paula breathed: "Bai Jove!"

As for Amy herself, she caught her hands together, and sat in that attitude of intense rapture, mutely expressing the wistful thought: "If only it could be!"

"Well, and why not?" came from Tess. "Even if Mrs. Juddings could be trusted to shield you from any danger—"

"And she cannot, that's our belief!" Polly interposed emphatically. "There is something shifty about Mrs. Juddings. At least—"

"I know, I know," sighed Amy ruefully. "Yesterday evening she was all for coaxing me to let the Dillons pester me with questions, when I told her that I didn't want to give them the information, and after I had been locked up in the boathouse Mrs. Dillon spoke as if she had found a sort of confederate in Mrs. Juddings."

"That settles it, then!" exclaimed Betty, jumping up. "We will tell Miss Redgrave how you are placed. She is like one of us. If only we can get her to agree—"

"And she will, it's a cert!" said Polly blithely.

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove!"

"You could move on with us when we go to the next seaside town, Amy," was Madge's quiet contribution to the eager talk. "You would be always with us, and that—surely that would make you quite safe? How do you feel about it?"

Amy's own pretty countenance was the answer. She was standing up now, with all the girls, ready to walk on into Sandmouth. Her face was lit up with joyful hope.

"I would do all I could to make myself useful," she said, with pathetic wistfulness. "I'd take care of your things, mend and wash and pack for you, and—and— Oh, but it sounds just too good to be true! Miss Redgrave is as kind as any of you, but—"

"We'll see!" smiled Betty confidently. "Anyhow, that's the next thing—to get back to Sandmouth, and have a talk with Miss Redgrave."

"Yes, wather!"

"Ooo, yes; queek—queek!"

And in a moment they were all plodding on once more.

### Mrs. Juddings Feels Afraid.

WHEN Mrs. Juddings had it straight from Miss Redgrave, later in the day, that Amy must be allowed to go to the next concert on the sands, she did not raise any objection.

Mrs. Juddings read something in the Form-mistress's looks which warned her that she was under suspicion. Very little was being said, and the woman, who had foolishly become the paid accomplice of the Dillons, was afraid to ask questions.

She came away from the brief talk with Miss Redgrave in a very flustered, nervous state.

Was it some bit of serious villainy from which the schoolgirls had rescued the youthful maid-of-all-work? Had she, Mrs. Juddings, put herself within reach of the law by taking the Dillons' money yesterday evening? If so, she had better be careful not to challenge Miss Redgrave's inclination to befriend the girl.

And yet—

Gradually, the guilty nervousness gave place to a rather angry resentment, a desire to go on backing up the Dillons, since there was money in it. Surely they meant no harm to the girl—only wanted some information which Amy was foolishly refusing to impart!

Towards evening Mrs. Juddings was thinking more and more of the money that might be picked up by contriving to let the Dillons have their own way with the girl, and was feeling angrily rebellious against the Morcovians.

Afraid to make a bold stand against Amy's new-found friend, the rather sly woman resorted to cajolery of the girl herself.

"Amy, my gel—now, Amy, dear," she came down into the kitchen to begin in a wheedling voice. "Look here, Amy, you don't want to go to no concert to-night, now do you?"

"Yes, Mrs. Juddings, I do."

"Now—now, jist think, my dear!"

"What's more, I mean to go!" Amy spoke on resolutely. "I have slogged away hard for you all day, and I'll work when I come back, if needs be. But—"

"You went to the concert last night!"

"I was hardly there a minute. You know what happened."

"I'm sure I don't!" Mrs. Juddings protested virtuously. "It's all being kep' such a mystery from me—why, I'd like to know! I've bin your good friend, Amy."

"I am not so sure about that. Not this last day or two, anyhow."

"Well, then, if I ain't been your friend," the woman suddenly burst out, losing her temper, "I am your employer, mind that! I could say you shan't go to the concert, and I do say it, so there! And now defy me, if you dare!"

Before Amy could do that—as she was certainly in the mood to do, spirited little thing that she was—Miss Redgrave quickly and quietly entered upon the scene.

"There must be no getting round Amy not to go the concert, Mrs. Juddings! I heard you wheedling with her, and so I came down, jist in time to hear you threatening. Amy is to come to the concert!"

"She won't, I say!" shrilled Mrs. Juddings, bridling up. "Who are you, I'd like to know? I employ this girl; I pay her. I say she can't be spared to go to your precious concert!"

"Mrs. Juddings," the Form-mistress said steadily, "you could spare Amy easily enough last night, when she was whipped off to the Grange. You found it so easy to get over the loss of the girl's services that some of us imagined—well, it had been made worth your while!"

"Oh, did you?" sneered the boarding-house woman, but she had that guilty nervousness again, and Miss Redgrave's steady gaze was too much for her.

Mrs. Juddings dropped her eyes, and was powerless even to make use of further bluster.

"Yes!" said Miss Redgrave calmly. "And I may tell you this now. We are so convinced that for Amy to remain in your hands would mean her being spirited away to the Grange people again, we wish her to come away with us to-morrow."

"What!"

"We intend that Amy Ashdown shall be a member of the Morcove Concert Party. If you do not like it, if you have any fair grounds for complaint, then take your story to the police. We invite investigation!"

Miss Redgrave was drawing a bow at a venture when she said that. It served its purpose. Mrs. Juddings was avaricious and shifty, but she lacked the strong nerve which is the wrongdoer's great asset. She went to pieces utterly now, was left without a word to say, and so Ruth Redgrave knew for certain that she had right on her side.

"You don't seem to have much more to do," she said in a calm, kind voice to the willing girl, "so it won't be putting Mrs. Juddings about at all if you come to the concert presently."

"But how can I manage without her to-morrow?" Mrs. Juddings managed to splutter at last. "She's going off for good!"

"You were going to manage without her whilst she was kept at the Grange! No, Mrs. Juddings, that sort of talk won't answer."

And Miss Redgrave walked away, leaving behind her a guilty-faced woman who could only glare savagely at Amy.

"All right, my gel; the Dillons shall know about this! Think I'm afraid of that theré parcel of impudence?"

But she was afraid, more than ever now. After the so-called evening dinner, when Amy had hastily cleared away, she was allowed to run up to her attic room and make herself tidy for the concert. Coming downstairs a few minutes later, where Betty & Co. and Miss Redgrave were waiting for her on the steps, she passed Mrs. Juddings.

Not a word was said—not one! The ex-cook had a savage glance for the girl who had been her overworked and underpaid servant; she also glared savagely at the Morcovians. Then, with a shrug and a snort, she sulkily shuffled away.

Five minutes afterwards, she was called to the front door of the otherwise deserted boarding-house by a ring at the bell. Mrs. Dillon was there, handsome and stylish-looking as ever. There was renewed agitation in the landlady's gasping reception of the sinister woman.

"Oh, ma'am—er—it's you agen, I see! But—er—"

"You are alone, aren't you? I stayed back until I saw your boarders leave the house," Mrs. Dillon said in her cold, tense way. "My daughter and her girl friend are outside. They'll remain in the car—"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Whilst you and I have a talk."

"Yes, ma'am," was all Mrs. Juddings could fatter again, as she backed away a step or so, to



**A SPITEFUL SCHEME!** Quick as a flash, Laura ran into the dressing-room and picked up Amy's jacket. A moment later and she had slipped the folded Treasury note into the pocket.



let the haughty lady walk into the front room. "I'm sure anythink I can do—"

"You can do this, and be well paid for it!" Mrs. Dillon flashed about to say, with all the nerve in the world. "Give me another chance to have a talk with that Amy!"

"Ma'am, I can't—I daren't! Them other girls—"

"Bah! They'll be going away to-morrow. After they are gone—"

"But they are taking Amy along of 'em!"

The shock of the words took Mrs. Dillon aback. Her lips parted, as she drew a long breath; her eyes dilated.

"What do you mean, woman?" she demanded at last impatiently. "If I make it worth your while to keep the girl here, you can easily refuse to let her go."

"No, ma'am—no, begging your pardon, I can't," was the nervous answer that left Mrs. Dillon staring more angrily than ever. "You see, they—they seem to have found out somethink!"

"I know they have found out—well, that Amy was locked up for the night," Mrs. Dillon muttered fiercely. "But how can they know that you were in our pay?"

"Well, ma'am, they do know. The way that Miss Redgrave spoke to me, the looks she's give me, it's only too plain; and I don't want to find myself landed in the police-court, you know!"

"Rubbish!" shrugged the fashionably-dressed woman. "There won't be anything like that. Both Amy and the girls who have befriended her have the usual dislike of appearing in court. Besides, my husband and I will recoup you, Mrs. Juddings. Provided you put your foot down, and refuse to let that girl go away with the others, you shall have fifty pounds—there!"

"Ma'am, I can't! I only wish I could, but I daren't make a stand," gulped out the novice in wrongdoing. "You see, the gels have took such a strong fancy to young Amy. They think her sich a fine character."

"Perhaps, if they had reason to think less of her, that would help us," Mrs. Dillon said, frowning. "This gives me an idea. I wonder—I wonder if—"

And there she paused, to start pacing about the shabby room, thinking deeply.

"Yes," she suddenly exclaimed, with an upward fang of her handsome head that told of desperate determination. "perhaps that will help us! Anyway, it shall be given a trial. Gone to the concert on the sands, has she?"

"Amy, ma'am? Yes, ma'am."

"Very well, then. I can do nothing further with you for the present. My daughter and her girl friend are the ones I must look to," Mrs. Dillon said darkly, passing out into the front hall. "But if they succeed, if they do their part, Mrs. Juddings—"

"I'm sure, ma'am, anythink I can do safely arterwards I will do," was the nervous assurance, causing Mrs. Dillon to give a rather contemptuous shrug as she quitted the house.

"The woman has no nerve!" she muttered disgustedly, as she passed down the concrete steps. "Thank goodness, however, that I can rely upon the girls!"

She meant the couple who were lolling in the rather dusty car which had brought them into Sandmouth, from the Grange, Mrs. Dillon herself driving. It was a closed car, and Mrs. Dillon had only to step inside and close the door for the

three of them to have all the privacy for talking that a room would have conferred.

"Well, mother, what's the position?" asked Laura Dillon tensely. "Has Amy complained—?"

"That's neither here nor there!" exclaimed the mother testily. "The position is this, you girls. Unless Amy Ashdown is utterly disgraced before the morning in the eyes of her new-found friends, they will take her away with them!"

"Take her away?"

"On her tour of the seaside towns!" spoke on Mrs. Dillon fiercely. "And how on earth shall we manage then? But listen, you two. You are eager enough to strike a blow?"

"After the way we were served this morning, yes!" said Laura, with some of her mother's ferocity, whilst Cora nodded to the same effect. "What do you want us to do this time, then, mother?"

"This!" was the vehement rejoinder. "Listen carefully, both of you!"

And there, in the closed car, the scheming woman unfolded her desperate plan to the youthful pair who had become her all too willing confederates.

#### At the Concert.

"NOW, Amy, to-night you are going to hear something like a concert, such singing as you have never heard before!"

It was Polly Linton who said this, and Amy laughed at the mock-boastful prediction. She had already learned that Polly, the madcap of the Morcove Concert Party, was not always to be taken seriously.

"Yes, wather! Haw, haw, haw!" simpered Paula Creel, standing in front of a mirror in the curtained-off "dressing-room" of the seashore "theatre." "A weally gwand pwogwamme this evening, Amy, deah!"

It would certainly be an advance on the previous evening's concert, for the zealous Morcovians had promised the public a complete change of programme.

The dressing-room was in a very crowded and busy state just at present. The girls had everything for their requirements except—space!

"Yes, wather, bai Jove! Geals, if I could have just a little more woom—"

"Out of ze way, queek—queek!" requested Naomer, roguishly darting between Paula and the glass. "Eet not matter how you look. I am ze one!"

"My gwacious, be careful, Naomer, darling, for I've just got myself to wights! Eh, what, Amy, deah? Haow do I look, bai Jove? Haw, haw, haw!"

Amy found time to give a very admiring glance to the amiable duffer of the party, although she was extremely busy.

With Betty and all of them rushing on with their dressing, it was Amy's self-appointed task to keep discarded garments from getting mixed up, and to be ready at any instant to hand a comb or brush, or fasten a hook and eye.

Amy, in fact, had suddenly changed from being the overworked maid at Mrs. Juddings' boarding-house to the official "dresser" and "wardrobe mistress" for the Morcove Concert Party! And in that capacity she looked like being a perfect success.

Miss Redgrave came in at the curtained doorway, reporting another huge audience for the coming performance. She did not stay around, however. There were enough without her.

"My gwacious, time to commence, and I'm not quite weady, after all!" Paula exclaimed dismayedly. "Amy, deah—"

"Amy, just a moment, will you?" pleaded Helen.

"Amy, can you do me up?" clamoured Polly. "Never mind about Paula!"

"Healp! I must have some healp!" wailed the elegant one, becoming panicky. "Amy, I've put on the wong shoes, bai Jove! Where are the wight ones?"

"Ooo, queek—queek! Give me my shoes, someone! Zark you!" Naomer said breathlessly, calmly snatching at the first pair which came to hand.

"They are mine, I wather fancy, Naomer."

"No."

"Yes, Naomer!"

"Amy, quick! Can you—"

"Hark! Eight o'clock striking at the town hall!" Betty commented, as she gave a last smoothing touch to her pretty frock. "Time to begin! Madge, darling—"

"All right, girls."

Just like Madge, the pianist of the party, to be so calm and ready now that the moment had come.

Giving her sober smile as the girls whispered "Good luck!" she unflinchingly went through the draped doorway on to the stage.

Clap, clap, clap! "Bravo, bravo!" the applause began, whilst a stir went through the audience as the solitary girl pianist was seen.

Madge would never have denied that she felt dreadfully nervous, confronted as she was with hundreds of people on the sands, and another vast crowd lining the parade railings. It had been the same with all the girls last night. Even though these were charity concerts, and everybody's indulgence could be relied upon, it did seem "cheek" to expect these crowds of holiday-makers to patronise the show!

Demurely, Madge bowed her response to that first outburst of applause, and then she turned to the piano, seated herself, and began the short overture.

She hoped that she was crashing it out loud enough to drown all the last excitable jabberings of her chums behind the curtains. Madge herself could hear every word, and it made her wonder if she would not have to go on and on with that overture unendingly. Perhaps it was because the girls were flustered this evening, but they certainly seemed to be suffering from a form of stage fright.

There was to be no "letting down" the pianist, however.

Even as Madge came to the last crashing chords in the piece she was playing from memory, her watchful eye saw the dressing-room curtain ripple, the signal that her chums were ready. She wound up the overture, and then, giving no time for the storm of applause that it had won to die down, she played on Betty and the rest.

Out they ran from behind the curtains, and lined up to give their bows and smiles.

They began their opening chorus, but there was such continued applause that they could hardly hear themselves singing. In the middle of the first verse, Paula, for one, left off, and became all chuckles and simpering comments.

"Haw, haw, haw! Geals—"

"Sing up, you duffer!" Polly broke off to interrupt. "Don't make an exhibition of yourself!"

"Haw, haw, haw! All wight!" chuckled Paula,

and she joined in again, only to get the lines mixed up, as those standing next to her dismayedly realised.

It really made no difference, however. The audience was too hilarious to be able to take in even the verses that were reeled off in proper harmony. It was not until a recitation by Tess Trelawney was announced that dead quiet prevailed.

The other artistes, now that they were sitting down at the back of the platform, had time to survey the sea of faces in front of them. It was very heartening to see that so many people who had been at last night's concert were here again this evening. Whether they would give as liberally, in aid of the hospital fund, as they had before was open to doubt.

Then suddenly it was a repetition of last night's annoyance for the girls to observe that Cora Grandways and Laura Dillon were in the crowd on the sands. Tess's recitation, although a humorous one, demanded silence if people were to enjoy it. It was a persistent chattering of two persons in the audience that drew the schoolgirl pierrettes' attention to Laura and Cora. They were the offenders, of course!

Tess ended her piece with the wittiest line of all, and tremendous applause broke out. At the same time, Betty and others realised that an altercation was starting between the noisy couple in the audience and a lady, who was indignantly resenting their behaviour.

"You were here last night, making the same disturbance and upsetting the performance!" the Morcovians heard the lady protesting angrily. "If there's any more of it—"

"Hear, hear! Turn them out!" the cry began to go up. "Order, order!"

Cora and Laura had done it now!

They were forced to retire from that part of the audience where they had made themselves so objectionable, and it was only after ten minutes' sauntering about that they made bold to return, taking seats on the other side of the crowd.

By that time Paula's "wich contwalto" had delighted hundreds of people—more or less. How much of the applause was genuinely meant, and how much was of a rather indulgent sort, coupled with such remarks as "She'll do better in time," there is no need to say. Paula took every hand-clap as being quite sincere, and she bowed herself away at last, feeling that she had created a sensation.

Then the girls did a farcical sketch, which they had made up and rehearsed only that day.

It went with a bang, perhaps because it was so topical and was largely founded on the Morcovians' uncomfortable experiences at Mrs. Juddings'!

The scene was a boarding-house, and Polly was dressed up as the landlady. The fun turned on her mismanagement of the place and the complaints, some pathetic and some indignant, made by the "victims." Amy found it easy to take a part as the little maid-of-all-work, and she was a huge success.

But the piece would have been nothing without Polly as the garrulous landlady, with unidy hair and a falsetto voice, although Paula was a close favourite, as the very aristocratic guest, always talking about her ancestors, whilst she fussed with her hair.

There were moments when the girls themselves could hardly go on with it all, they were in such fits of laughter.

They could keep straight faces when Paula forgot her stage name and spoke of herself as "Mrs. Paula Cweel—yes, wather!" But when Amy, as the overworked servant, announced to the assembled tea-party that her Serene Highness the Queen of Sheba had called about apartments, it was a good job for Betty and others that the action was stopped for a few moments by the audience's shrieks of laughter.

Naomer came on, and Polly, as the landlady, rose to offer the Queen of Sheba a chair.

No one knew better than Polly how to whisk a chair aside just as Naomer, or anyone else, was sitting down. She did it with a delicious absent-mindedness that convulsed the audience. With the Queen of Sheba suddenly flopping to the floor, the youngsters in the front rows shrieked themselves breathless with laughter.

"I zank you for giving me ze welcome, and have you ze apartment to let?" Naomer inquired, getting up and rubbing her elbows ruefully. "I not like ze look of your boardin'-house ver' much!"

"Oh, ma'am—your Majesty, I should say," said the landlady, "it's quite the best establishment in the district! Look at the company we have! Mrs. Paula Creel—"

"Haw, haw, haw! How de do, your Majesty?" bowed Paula, touching her hair to rights. "Wawm weather—what? Yes, wather!"

"Our terms is three guineas a week, and a guinea extry for queens," said Polly. "We don't charge for electric lighting—there isn't any!"

"Have you ze blackbeetle in ze kitchen?" asked the Queen of Sheba. "I not like him, no!"

"I'm sure you'll be very happy here, your Majesty. It's worth the money only to mix in sich good company. You and Mrs. Paula Creel will be sich friends, I'm sure! Sit down, your Majesty!"

"Zank you!" said her Majesty, suddenly accommodating herself on Paula's lap.

The yells of laughter from the audience may be imagined, especially as Paula waved her arms wildly and wriggled so violently that she and Naomer and the chair all went over together—crash!

"Ha, ha, ha! What a scream!" old and young alike were saying in the audience.

Altogether, the entire concert was received with far greater enthusiasm than even the first performance had been accorded. Coins began to chink freely when at last two or three of the school-girl pierrettes went round with the collecting-bags, whilst the remainder gave a part song, with Madge still at the piano.

It was Polly who came to where Cora and Laura were forming part of the seashore audience. They each dropped in paper money, taking good care to let people round about see what a lavish contribution theirs was.

"Thank you!" Polly said sweetly. "You can come as often as you like at that price!"

And she meant it.

She passed on, and the people just there were not surprised to see the pair of gaudily-dressed girls walk out of the crowd, as if they felt rather ashamed of the way they had behaved. They had been mere scoffing onlookers all the time, and as for those lavish contributions to the bag, they were so much showing off, it was evident.

But there was more in it than mere showing off, as the Morcovians were yet to find out, to their sorrow.

After extricating themselves from the crowd, Cora and Laura drifted round, unnoticed, to the

back of the seashore stage. Not another soul was there. Keeping out of sight behind the curtains forming the dressing-room, they heard the piano still going, for one of the girls was now giving a musical monologue. At the same time, the Grange couple could hear the collection being counted out in the dressing-room.

"We may get our chance—there's no telling," Laura whispered tensely. "You be ready to keep watch, whilst I do—you know!"

Cora nodded. Both girls were in a very highly strung state, and no wonder, when what they meditated was so daring.

All at once they heard a great burst of applause, which meant that all the girls and Miss Redgrave had lined up on the platform. The amount of the collection was to be announced, and then the finishing chorus would be sung.

Laura suddenly held one rigged-up curtain aside, and peered into the dressing-room. It was deserted. The Morcovians had made Amy come on to receive her share in the final applause.

With an excitable gesture to Cora that meant "Now!" Laura suddenly and silently darted into the changing-room. She had a folded currency note in her hand.

Quick as a flash, she nipped to where an outdoor jacket of Amy's was laid aside. A moment, and the currency note was in one of the jacket pockets. Another moment, and Laura was out of the place, and the curtains were falling together behind her.

"Is it all right?" panted Cora.

"Yes! No one saw me, I hope?"

"No one!"

The deed was done, and now they could efface themselves from the scene, glorying in that dastardly action which, they hoped, was to leave Amy Ashdown disgraced in the schoolgirls' eyes as a thief!

#### The Plot Succeeds.

"THE collection has exceeded even our anticipations!"

Tremendous applause, Miss Redgrave being forced to wait several moments before she could smilingly add:

"It is most generous of you, ladies and gentlemen, especially as this is the second concert we have given at Sandmouth. There were two ten-shilling notes and numerous half-crowns. On behalf of those who administer the hospital rebuilding fund, for which we are collecting, we thank you all. Good-night!"

"Yes, wather! Haw, haw, haw! Good-night, ewwybody!" Paula Creel chuckled, just as Madge Minden struck up a bar of the National Anthem.

It was a bumper collection!

No wonder the schoolgirl pierrettes returned to No. 12, Channel Terrace in tiptop spirits!

At the rate they were going on, this novel tour of the seaside towns was going to bring in a fine big sum.

No deductions were made for expenses, the girls' parents backing them up in that respect. If Betty & Co. only did as well in other towns, the enterprise would have succeeded beyond their wildest hopes.

"It is everything, Sandmouth having started us off so well!" was Betty's enthusiastic comment. "When we go on to the next town—"

"And that's to-morrow—yes, wather!" beamed Paula.

"We shall be able to tell the audience there what a splendid lead Sandmouth has given,"

finished Betty, whilst she and her chums mounted the front steps to the boarding-house.

After doing so well, they certainly deserved a nicer welcome than No. 12, Channel Terrace now had to offer them. Mrs. Juddings was sulking downstairs, they found, and she had not troubled to light up anywhere, although it was ten o'clock.

With a murmured "Too bad!" Miss Redgrave herself got some lights going, and then the girls trooped into the sitting-room, to spend five minutes in quiet and happy talk before going up to bed.

Hardly had they dispersed themselves round the shabby room, Naomer, for one, finding that the only comfortable seat was on Paula's lap, than a startling thing occurred.

Abruptly the girls checked their talk, as they heard strangers in the hall. Next second the room door opened, revealing Cora Grandways and Laura Dillon.

to make a practice of mentioning any special contributions. It is often done."

"Well, where's the other ten-shilling note? That's what we want to know!" Cora said impudently.

"We might ask," burst out Polly in her headstrong way, "where's your evidence that you put in three notes between you? I had that bag, and I only saw each of you put in one note!"

"I had two notes, folded together!" Laura retorted sharply. "My mother gave me them. She wished to help the fund, and not to withhold her support just because of any personal feeling against you girls. But when she gives money to a hospital fund, she expects it to go to the right quarter!"

"Miss Redgrave!"  
 "Girls, keep calm," was the mistress's calm entreaty to the justly infuriated chums. "Laura



**THE BULLIES ARE BOWLED OUT!** Laura and Cora quailed as they saw who it was who came running into the place. It was Betty Barton, and after her came the rest of the chums. "Hurrah, just in time!" called out the Form captain. "Amy, your friends have come to the rescue!"

Miss Redgrave was one of the first to start up with a look of indignation at this rude intrusion.

"Cora, do you think it is quite the thing to come marching in like that?"

"Oh, well, it's only a boarding-house, and the front door was open!" Cora Grandways had no hesitation in answering cheekily. "Miss Redgrave, we want a word with you."

"Indeed! If you adopt that tone, Cora—"

"I am not at school now, so I suppose I can talk as I like?" was another bit of studied insolence from Cora. "We want an explanation as to why there were only two currency notes in this evening's collection. We two girls put in three ten-shilling notes between us!"

There was an astounded "What!" from Miss Redgrave and several of the girls.

"That is so," Laura Dillon now said coolly. "You announced that two notes had been put in the bag."

"Yes," nodded Miss Redgrave. "I am going

Dillon, are you suggesting that someone has robbed the collection?"

"I'm not suggesting that you or your Morcové girls have done it. I shouldn't think it possible."

"Oh, thank you!" Polly said tartly. "How kind!"

"You mean me?" Amy flashed out, instantly standing forward. "You want to make out that I have tampered with the collection?"

"Cora and I, we can't see who else could have done it but you, Amy Ashdown!" was Laura Dillon's daring answer. "You are only poor, a mere servant-girl. Ten shillings, to you, is a lot."

"That may be so," Amy said passionately, "but you are not going to call me a thief!"

"Certainly not!" agreed Miss Redgrave sternly, whilst Betty and the rest seethed with indignation against the spiteful couple. "Let me remind you two girls of something that Polly Linton said just now. There is only your word for it, Laura Dillon, that you put in two notes, folded together."

"And we are not going to forget," cried out Betty fiercely, "you two girls have a spite against Amy Ashdown! It is very odd, to say the least, that you should have this complaint to make."

"Supposing you have done with mere abuse of us," Laura said tartly, "and do something to satisfy us that Amy has not seized the chance, whilst alone in the dressing-room, to tamper with the collection? She was left alone, wasn't she, for a few moments?"

"Yes, at least—"

"Ah," smiled Laura Dillon triumphantly, "you admit that, do you? Then is it very unreasonable if we demand that Amy allows herself to be searched?"

"Searched? What! The idea!"

"Miss Redgrave, we look to you to comply with our demand!" Laura cried out loudly. "For it is charity money that is missing, and the thing cannot end here! Before that girl," and she pointed accusingly at Amy, "has an opportunity to get rid of what she stole, she must turn out her pockets!"

The chums made sheer uproar with their protests.

"No—not! Shame!"

"Disgraceful! Miss Wedgwave—"

"Listen, all of you, please!" was the husky cry from Amy herself, causing a sudden lull in the storm. "I have not touched a penny of the collection! I—"

"Is the ten-shilling note on you now?" Laura strode forward, to demand in her bullying tone.

"Stand back, Laura Dillon!" Miss Redgrave commanded sternly. "Amy has nothing to be afraid of. She has every reason, however, to be as indignant as she looks. Now, I order the pair of you to leave this house—yes, this moment! Go on!"

"We shan't, so there!" cried Laura, drawing herself up. "The girl is only a common servant-girl, and that entitles us—"

"It doesn't entitle you to insult her!"

"We say we suspect her, and her only. Let Amy Ashdown turn out her pockets in front of us now, and we will be satisfied."

"Very well, then—just to get rid of you!" Amy panted, diving both hands to her jacket pockets.

"Not so quick, please!" Laura requested tartly, for Amy had no sooner pulled out the pockets than she started to tuck them back again, feeling what a farce it was. "That handkerchief, take it away from that left pocket."

"Does that satisfy you?"

"Thanks! But now that other pocket—the gloves!"

Amy looked in a hard-driven way at Miss Redgrave, who gave a shake of the head, implying that the poor girl need not feel bound to submit any further. As for Betty and the others, they were murmuring indignantly:

"No, Amy, don't you! No more, Amy!"

Thus encouraged, she started to tuck back the second pocket, but Laura suddenly strode forward and pulled the girl's hand away.

Sharply the hand was dragged away, causing the gloves to fall to the carpet. Yet the pocket still held something, although it was turned inside out. Sticking to the dark lining was a bit of folded paper.

"What about this? Look—look, all of you!" was Laura's triumphant shout, as she took the piece of paper between thumb and finger and held it up. "The ten-shilling note!"

Dead silence followed.

All present were like so many figures in a dramatic tableau.

What to say in the face of this sensational development the chums did not know. What to think—even that was beyond their powers for the moment.

They could only take their horrified eyes off the fatal find what Laura Dillon had made, to gaze at Amy Ashdown. What would she have to say?

"I hope you see what sort of a girl you have taken up with, Betty!" sneered Cora, drawing off to the door along with Laura. "You always are so quick to let yourselves get taken in!"

"If you are not satisfied that she is a thief—a nasty, mean thief—we are!" was Laura's parting shot. "And it will be a disgraceful thing if, after this, you take her with you for the rest of your tour. She'll be robbing the collections all the time—of course, she will!"

Then the two girls were gone, and the door closed behind them with a vicious slam. Already they were starting their wide grins of exultation, now that they were alone together in the dim-lit hall. As soon as they had scampered down the front steps to the pavement, they went off into fits of silent laughter.

"Lovely!" was Laura's jubilant comment. "Surely, Cora, those girls will never take the girl on with them after this!"

"How can they?" was Cora's confident answer. "He, he, he! Betty & Co. do feel small, I guess. Half a sec., and I'll just slip back and see what's happening!"

So saying, she flashed about and ran softly up the boarding-house steps. The front door was still standing wide open to the night breeze from off the sea, and Cora was quite prepared to steal into the passage and put her ear to the sitting-room keyhole.

Before she could do that, however, the sitting-room door opened, and she saw Amy Ashdown come out—alone, her head bowed, and the tears trickling from her eyes.

No one followed her out of the room.

Of all those who had befriended her, not one came out to lay a compassionate hand upon the poor girl's shoulders and murmur comforting, trustful words. What did that mean, then?

What else could it mean, thought Cora, but that the Morcovians' very looks, a moment since, had been enough to banish this girl from their midst, condemned as a thief!

With a slow and faltering step, the disgraced girl made her way to the stairs.

And Cora—she felt no pity, no remorse. She only laughed in that merciless heart of hers, and then turned to run down the steps once more, rejoicing her fellow culprit.

"It's all right, Laura!" whispered Betty & Co.'s standing enemy. "They are done with her, right enough, the only friends she has had to turn to. They will leave her behind to-morrow for a certainty, and then—"

"Yes," exclaimed Laura softly, "and then we shall have her at our mercy! My mother will be overjoyed about this, Cora. Once we have got Amy Ashdown back to the Grange—my word, we'll soon make her tell where that paper is hidden!"

(END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.)

At the mercy of Cora Grandways and the unscrupulous Laura Dillon! Could poor Amy's predicament possibly be worse? But surely Betty & Co. will suspect something—will find some clue that will lead them to the discovery of the truth! Do not miss next week's special complete tale, which is entitled: "Guarding Her Secret!"