

Magnificent New Girl Guide Serial

COMMENCES IN THIS ISSUE!

The Schoolgirl's Own 2^D



HER SCHOOLGIRL GAOLERS!

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

A Magnificent Story of the Morcove Girls on Holiday.

KEPT FROM HER FRIENDS.

By

MARJORIE STANTON.

Cleverly trapped by those who wish to find out the secret which she guards! That is the position in which poor Amy Ashdown finds herself, and, owing to the schemes of her enemies, the news is kept from her loyal friends, Betty Barton & Co. This fine story will hold your attention to the very last line.

“Bravo, Amy!”

“DO come in, Paula, darling, and hear the joke!”

“Bai Jove!”

“The funniest thing you ever heard!” laughed Polly Linton, swinging her legs, as she sat on the edge of the table, just as if this were Study 12 at Morcove School.

The room was, as a fact, a sitting-room which had been set apart for the Morcove Concert Party at that nice Bacton-on-Sea boarding-house where they had been made so comfortable.

“It’s Amy Ashdown’s joke, Paula. You will laugh!”

“Haw, haw, haw!” the amiable duffer of Morcove’s Fourth Form began to simper, then and there. “Joke, bai Jove! You are not going to tell me, geals, that—”

“Sit down and listen!” Polly requested, enforcing the words by swinging off the table-edge and making a rush at Paula, to topple her backwards into a chair. “That’s better, dear!”

“Bettah, bai Jove! Polly—”

“You are quite comfortable, dear?”

“Comfortable? When I’m sitting on the boarding-house gramophone, bai Jove?”

“Oh, dear, I quite forgot—”

“Ha, ha, ha!” the whole party of girls pealed merrily, as elegant Paula hastily stood up, and then looked behind her.

It was a gramophone, right enough—one of those cheap, small, portable ones, with the horn missing.

“You are so thoughtless!” grinned madcap Polly, promptly stepping up to see if any damage had been done.

The turn-table was a bit rocky, but it had been that before Paula sat on it. Polly began to wind the clockwork, and the very loose sounds which the works gave forth did not sound promising.

“Weal, and as regards this joke of Amy’s?” inquired Paula, beaming towards Amy Ashdown,

where she sat between Madge Minden and Naomer Nakara. “Pway pwoceed, Amy, deah!”

“I suppose it does seem rather funny now,” smiled Amy, “although it all came about in anything but a joking way. I have just been telling your chums—”

“Yes, wather!” murmured Paula, sinking into a really comfortable seat this time.

“You know that those two girls from the Grange were here yesterday,” Amy went on blithely. “They slept the night in the room next to mine and Helen Craig’s.”

“I wecollect with the gweatest wegwet, Amy, deah, that Corwa Gwandways and Lauwa Dillon were heah—yes, wather! I shall wemember to my dying day the cwuel twick they served us at the concert. Howevah—”

“Well, then, listen!” Amy continued, getting up, as the excitement of the story took hold of her. “In the night, those two girls entered our room by the balcony window. Helen was really asleep.”

“I’m ashamed to say I was sleeping like a log!” laughed Helen Craig.

“But I was still awake when those girls crept in, and so I was really only shamming when they thought I was asleep!”

“Haw, haw, haw! How wich! Haw, haw, haw!”

“This isn’t the time to laugh, duffer!” Polly said severely, putting a needle in the worn-out gramophone. “The joke is—”

“Oh, pway pwoceed, Amy!”

“They stole to my bedside,” that girl continued, smiling gently, “and started putting questions to me in my sleep. They asked me, over and over again, where I had hidden that paper at the Grange!”

“Evidently,” put in Betty, as Amy paused, “they had an idea that the answer might be got from Amy in her sleep, if the affair of that hidden paper was weighing upon her mind. Cases have been known, of course, but—”

"But I was awake all the while!" Amy now laughed outright, whilst Paula was not the only listener to start chuckling. "It suddenly flashed upon me, if I could put them on the wrong scent, without telling a lie, of course—"

"Yes, wather! Pwoceed, Amy, deah!"

"So what I did was to mumble, as if I were dreaming that they were after the paper. I said: 'They'll never search the boathouse.' There's not the least doubt that they took that to mean that the paper was hidden there. They scurried away to their own bed-room, and this morning—"

"Haw, haw, haw!" Paula went off again. "How good, how wick! Bai Jove, geals, weally! This morning they went washing back to the Gwange on a wong scent—what?"

"That's the joke, at last!" grinned Polly. "Lovely, isn't it? They'll hunt and hunt that old boathouse through at the Grange, feeling sure the paper is hidden there, and it isn't!"

"Wather not! Haw, haw, haw! Bwavo, Amy!"

"She can afford to be proud of herself," Madge said in her sober way, letting calm eyes rest upon the girl they had befriended. "By that clever ruse, she sent Cora and Laura rushing home!"

"So we shan't be troubled with them any more—hurrah!" cried Polly, turning back to the gramophone.

"And they won't do a scrap of good hunting for the paper at the boathouse!" chimed in Betty joyfully. "A clear win for Amy!"

"A bwillant stwoke—yes, wather!" Paula was applauding, when Polly, feeling it was time to have some fun, touched off the gramophone.

Next moment, the most doleful sounds began to fill in the break in the talk.

Slowly Paula stopped smiling, and fell to sighing. Naomer clapped her hands to her ears. Madge, the musician of the party, looked agonised. The others pretended to be looking for something to hurl at the machine and silence it.

"Don't you like it?" jested Polly. "Surely, Paula, you recognise the voice?"

"The voice, bai Jove!"

"Isn't it a gramophone record of your own rich contralto?"

"Now, Polly, deah Polly, dwop it! Don't be jealous, Polly, just because my wick contwalto has been all the wage at the concerts! It is not," Paula protested, with dignity, "as if I were inclined to bwag, you know!"

"Hark! There is—yes, now you mention it," said Tess Trelawney, giving ear to the erratic warblings, "a very strong resemblance!"

"Dwop it, I say," wailed Paula, "or I shall wun away!"

"All right; but where shall I drop it?" Polly asked, suddenly running round the room with the gramophone in her grasp. "Lot sixty-one, a gramophone in full working— Oh, dear! Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly duffer, dwopping it on my lap! Healp! Get away!"

And Paula, taking fright, as if this were some strange-live animal, jumped to her feet. Shrieking with laughter, Polly caught the apparatus as it was turning a somersault to the floor.

"Thank you, dear! Now you shall have an orange!" the madcap said to the thing, as the jammed off the "music" at last. "That's more than we girls get for our performances!"

"Twee—twee!" sighed Paula, causing the inveterate teaser to round upon her sharply.

"What have you got to complain about over the concert, Paula, considering the number of people

who have heroically sat through your songs—yes, and even clapped you? But, girls, are we going for that walk this afternoon? If so—"

"Ooo, yes; queek—queek!" was Naomer's characteristic cry of eager delight. She stood up, and did one of her excitable capers. "Eet is such a nice town, Bacton. I love him!"

It was to prove, indeed, a seaside town of which every one of the girls and Miss Redgrave would retain the happiest recollections. For, although the trickery of their enemies had made the first concert at Bacton a bit of a fiasco, the receipts for that performance had been none the less good.

As for the other concerts which the Morcovians gave at Bacton, before moving on to the next town in their list, the takings totalled up most handsomely.

Thus it came about that, a few days after the light-hearted talk just recorded, Miss Redgrave and the girls were several miles further along the coast, quartered in another seaside boarding-house, and still "going strong." They were able to write home to tell their people that the money collected for the hospital rebuilding fund already amounted to a considerable sum.

All went well at this third town, where the girls gave three evening concerts on the sands, with most gratifying results. And what happy days these were for Amy Ashdown!

Nothing had been heard or seen again of "the enemy." Was the desperate search in the old boathouse at the Grange still being carried out? If so, then what a scream it was to think of the time and trouble Mr. and Mrs. Dillon, their daughter, Laura, and Cora Grandways were wasting!

Whether or not they had given up the search, it was evident that there was no suspicion of how they, Laura and Cora, had been hoaxed. Those two would have been cropping up again, surely, to make further trouble for the concert-party, whilst they tried again to get the secret out of Amy, if they had guessed what a neat trick had been played upon them.

That, at any rate, was the comfortable theory which Betty & Co. had formed, and suddenly something transpired to give them an even pleasanter belief.

It was on the first morning after their arrival in the fourth town of the tour. Betty and Polly were just getting their things on, to go for a stroll with the others, when Amy Ashdown came rushing in upon them, displaying a newspaper.

"I say, just look here!"

Laying down the paper, she dabbed a finger at an advertisement in the "To Let, Furnished" column.

"Phew," whistled Polly, the instant she and Betty had begun to read, "the Grange!"

It was actually the case.

"To let, furnished, the Grange, near Sandmouth," was the advertisement that the local paper held. "Ready for immediate occupation. Apply: The Agents, North Street, Sandmouth."

"Then the Dillons have gone—cleared out!" Betty exclaimed elatedly.

"Beaten!" was Polly's jubilant cry. "They must have got fed up with all the useless searching. Perhaps they were at the end of their money. Anyhow, they have gone off."

"Long before their time was up," Amy nodded, looking extremely gratified. "And I'll never believe that they have flied because they have found the paper. I hid it in such a safe place."

"You know best about that!" grinned Polly. "We girls take your word for it, Amy, without the paper, the Dillons were done. They can't have discovered the paper?"

"Impossible!" Amy reiterated vehemently. "It is still hidden in the house, I am certain, a house that's deserted now, and— Oh, what a blessing to think that those wretches have packed up and gone!"

"Then this is better than ever!" chuckled Betty. "We must let the others know about this. It's great! Not only are you being left in peace, Amy, by the wretches, but the Grange itself has seen the last of them. Hooray!"

Nor had another hour gone by before Miss Redgrave could assure the girls that such was the case. She had put through a trunk call on the telephone to the house-agents mentioned in the advertisement. The clerk who answered the call was disappointed that it was no one inquiring about the Grange with a view of taking it. But Miss Redgrave had to explain that she was only curious to know what had become of the Dillons, and the house-agents could not say.

They themselves were mystified—considerably annoyed, too. The Dillons had engaged to occupy the old country mansion up to the end of September, when the owners of the property expected to be back from their foreign travels. But now, half-way through the tenancy the Dillons had calmly quitted, and their present whereabouts were unknown.

"A mean trick to have served my former master and mistress, who own the place," was Amy's scornful comment, "to go off like that, leaving the rest of the rent unpaid! But, there, better for the owners to be let down over the rent than to have such thieving rogues—for so they were—poking and prying all the time!"

"Wather, bai Jove!" Paula agreed, whilst the others murmured to the same effect. "Good widdance to bad wubbish, geals—eh, what?"

Amy spoke again, with a very earnest, musing look, at the end of a thoughtful pause.

"And so the old house is shut up and quite deserted now! It would be quite safe for me to go there, alone even, just to visit the hiding-place and make sure that the paper is still all right. But, of course, it is—it must be! Still, somehow, I'd like to make the visit one of these days."

If she had known what a trap was lying in wait for her! But, since the house-agents themselves were satisfied that the place really was abandoned by its unprincipled set of tenants, how were the girls to suspect that that lonely old mansion might be still housing two persons in secret?

Yet so it was. Mr. and Mrs. Dillon were gone, and any servants they had employed were dismissed, but behind those locked doors and shuttered windows a couple of strong-nerved girls were living a furtive life, left there to wait and watch, in case—yes, in case Amy Ashdown should be tempted, in the end, to return to the house alone!

Behind Locked Doors!

"NO one coming, Laura?"

"Oh, no; it's all right! I was merely watching, thinking, wondering, Cora, how long we shall go on like this."

As she answered what had been a rather anxious whisper, Laura Dillon came away from a ground-floor window of the old and lonely mansion.

The room was very gloomy, all the summer sun-

shine being excluded by the heavy hangings to the windows. The curtains were drawn right across, and the girl had been very cautious just now as to how she peered round the edge of one.

Very silent, too, was the old house, oppressively silent to these two girls who, for several days now, had been the secret tenants of the place. All their love of an escapade with a spice of danger in it was needed to reconcile them to this strange and furtive existence.

Never for an instant could they be quite off their guard, and so there was never a word between them now but what it was a whispered one.

At dead of night, when the vast place cooled off after a day of burning sunshine, the bangings and



"**PAULA'S TONE!**" "Don't you like it, Paula?" asked Polly, as the gramophone ground out its alleged "music." "Don't you recognise the voice?" "Voice, bai jovs!" complained Paula. "Yes. Isn't it a record of your own rich contralto?" asked the teastr.

creakings that went on were enough to try the strongest nerves. And Laura and Cora were far from happy at such times as that, especially as they dare not keep a light going. They had made their quarters in one of the best bed-rooms, and they slept together. Even so, they did not get to sleep at all easily. With sighs of thankfulness, they awoke to find themselves quite safe, when the grey light of another dawn was creeping into the room.

"Our fourth day, and no one has been sent out by the house-agents to see over the place," Cora whispered, sitting down very warily, as if afraid to set the chair creaking.

"Oh, there'll be no one wanting to take this ramshackle old place, miles away from anywhere!" was Laura's confident prediction. "It's deserted— or supposed to be—and deserted it will remain until the owners come back from abroad."

She added softly, after finding a seat for herself close to her holiday crouny:

"The only person we have to fear is that old woman who has been given the key to take care of, so that she can come in and have a look round now and then."

"No need to fear her!" Cora was able to smile derisively. "A doddering old thing, I can't think why the house-agents, in the town, entrusted her with the key."

"Well, she lives close handy, in that tiny cottage of hers—the old turnpike cottage," Laura murmured, "about the only dwelling there is under a mile from this house. I guess she finds it a tidy step for her old legs, so she won't be along very often."

"So here we are, all on our lonesome! He, he, he!" Cora suddenly tittered, roused to genuine mirth. "It is rather jolly, in a way, Laura!"

"In a way, yes," the other assented, with a feeble grin. "In other ways—well, not quite so jolly. I'm getting rather fed up with the rations."

"Well, you are a one, to complain of a thing like that before I do," Cora laughed softly, "considering it's you and your people who are going to gain it—if things go off as we hope they will. As for me, Laura, I'm only in it out of friendship for you—oh, and because I do love doing the darling thing, of course!"

"Get out!" scoffed Laura Dillon, more or less playfully. "You are in this because you feel vaguely that it is going to enable you to get your own back against those other Morcove girls—what's their names?"

"Betty Barton and the rest. Well, yes, I don't deny," grinned Cora. "so long as Amy Ashdown is with them, I feel I must be in with you! I wonder, though, if—Hark! What's that?"

"Nothing!" Laura said breathlessly, after they had listened a moment. "That old bookcase in the library is always doing that."

"I thought, for once, it sounded like a knock at the porch door!" Cora laughed shakily. "Mustn't be so jumpy. It is a bit creepy, though, Laura, even when you know the sun is shining out of doors. The house is so—so old!"

"Ages old!" murmured Laura, with a sort of shrinking glance around. "If it were not so, there could be no tradition about that monk's treasure, supposed to have been hidden here in the days before the Reformation."

The talk lapsed, and suddenly both girls stood up and wandered away together through the ancient house. They dare not venture out of doors too often, and so they could only work off their restlessness by prowling this way and that about the rambling place.

"The owners are poor now, aren't they?" Cora began again presently. "If they should ever find the treasure, Laura, it would set them on their feet again nicely, wouldn't it?"

"I dare say!" was Laura Dillon's harsh answer, given with a bleak smile. "But they haven't found it yet."

"Neither, for that matter, have you and your parents!" twitted Cora. "Oh, don't be savage! Surely I can make a joke for once, to liven things up? Of course, I want you to be the ones to find the treasure, if there really is one."

"And there is!" Laura rejoined, with passionate conviction. "As I told you, Cora, my father would never have rented this place when the oppor-

tunity occurred, only he had studied up the whole history of the tradition. He is no fool, to waste money and time hunting through a house like this, without first being sure that the treasure really does exist!"

"The very fact that that cypher paper came to light certainly points to the existence of the treasure," Cora agreed appeasingly, "and I have been as mad as any of you over the way that Amy Ashdown has beaten you up to now."

"Up to now, yes, perhaps," Laura had to allow sullenly, "but they laugh best who laugh last! This latest dodge by my parents—to go away from here, as if they had given up the place—it should answer sooner or later. For your know what their theory is."

"I do," nodded Cora. "They think that Amy is bound to get to know that the house is locked up, and she is certain to be tempted to pay a visit, to make sure that the paper is still where she hid it. If she does come here—"

"She won't get away from us before we have got that paper out of her!" Laura exclaimed savagely. "She won't know we are in the house. We shall lie quiet and watch her as she goes to the hiding-place, and then spring out and get the paper for ourselves!"

All this, that had been planned days ago, before the girls were left to wait and watch alone in the house, left Cora Grandways nodding and smiling with malicious glee.

"What I shall enjoy almost more than hunting for the treasure," she said, with her wide grin, "will be our keeping Amy here, as we know we will have to do. We will give her a life, Laura, eh?"

"Pay her back, with interest, for that trick she played on us the night we questioned her in her bed-room at the boarding-house!" gloated Laura. "Oh, how I wish she would come, and come soon! I'm dying to have her at my mercy!"

But all for nothing did they keep a constant look-out that day for the chance coming of the girl who alone could reveal where the vital document was hidden.

Hour after hour dragged by for Cora and Laura in that darkened and locked-up mansion, and the monotony of their furtive life was still unrelieved.

If only to kill time, they were always prowling and prying around the place, on the chance of hitting upon the treasure itself, before ever the cypher had given them its vital assistance. It was a forlorn hope, however, as the girls realised even while they were searching.

It was not to be expected that they would come upon any hiding-place which Laura's father and mother had overlooked during the latter's continual searching.

So, at last, the dusk of another summer's evening fell upon that lonely old house, and now it was for the two girls to nerve themselves for another night all alone together.

The song of birds ceased in the great shrubberies. Intense stillness brooded over the vast grounds, whilst the stars came out in the darkened heavens. Once again the secret tenants of the place made their frugal evening meal in a downstairs room, taking care to clear away every trace of it when they had finished.

Then, for just an hour or two, they could enjoy a certain immunity from the nervous suspense which had been upon them all day.

Between their early supper-time and bed they

could always feel safe from anyone else's intrusion. The old soul who had charge of the key would never think of coming across to the mansion at this late hour, nor was it a time when people would be sent along by the house-agents.

The two girls could now let themselves go, as it were. They were not loath to do so, for a little boisterousness was a good antidote against nervousness. They went up to their bed-room, locked themselves in for the night, and then laughed, with the comfortable feeling that they were locking out all the vague fears that the place conferred.

"What a glorious night of stars!" Cora said, drawing apart the curtains and then setting the window wide open. "One thing, Laura, it is the right time of year for what we have been set to do by your people. Shouldn't like this job in the winter, when it's dark by five o'clock."

"And the wind howling all night—no!" shivered Laura. "Oh, this is just a spree! Going to have a cigarette, dear?"

"Rather! I've been waiting all day for one!" chuckled Cora. "That's the sickening nuisance, not being able to smoke about the house, in case anybody should come!"

She came away from the window to light the cigarette, and she and Cora were careful to shield the light as a match was struck.

After that, for a half-hour they lounged about in what was a sumptuous room, puffing at the cigarettes and talking all the time. They was such an unceasing silence if they let the conversation lapse.

At last, however, they were undressed and ready for bed, and they had got to endure that creepy silence unless they were to talk and talk until they dropped off to sleep.

"Well, I think we ought to have medals for this," Cora suddenly whispered, with a forced laugh, at the end of a lengthy silence. "Laura, you are not asleep?"

"No; I wish I was. You are a real pal to have offered to be here with me. It's better than mother being with me. I'd have been alone all night then."

"Hark!"

"Oh, don't start, Cora! That was nothing—only the usual."

"I'm not so sure," Cora whispered, sitting up quietly. "It sounded—there, again—like someone breaking in downstairs!"

"Why do you think such things?" fumed Laura. "It's absurd!"

All the same, she, too, sat up, and next moment the pair of them were softly leaving their bed, to go across to the room door and listen.

There was not a sound now.

"You see," whispered Laura, "it must be all right. Oh, Cora, don't open that door!"

"I must. I feel I must put my head out and listen still."

Their hearts were pit-patting now. Nervously, Cora turned back the key and turned the knob. As the door creaked open the first inch or so, she and Laura jumped.

"Cora!"

"Sh! It's all right! Listen!"

With the door half ajar, both girls, in their dressing-gowns, stood in a state of tense vigilance for a long while.

Silence, utter silence, in the great old lonely mansion, and at last Cora closed the door again and locked it.

"What donkeys we are, Laura? Who would come at this time of night?"

"You were afraid—I wasn't. Come on! Back to bed, and let's snuggle down and get to sleep. Oh, how I wish that to-morrow would find Amy Ashdown coming to the place—alone!"

"Yes," muttered Cora, giving her pillow a shake, "we'd have some fun then!"

And they laughed softly together in the darkness.

Going into Danger?

WE thought we'd go with Amy to the railway-station, Miss Redgrave.

"Certainly, girls! I only wish I could come, too, but I've letters and things that must be seen to."

"Then shall I stay behind with you?" offered Betty Barton. "For I do feel—we girls all feel—that you come in for far too much bother—"

"Yes, wather, Miss Wedgwave!" chimed in Paula, looking as smart as you please as she stood dressed for the walk. "We geals are having all the fun of the concert tour—all the cwedit, too."

"And the applause," added Polly. "Think of last night, Paula, darling, how you brought down the house with your singing!"

"Did I, bai Jove?" returned Paula, with a very dubious smile. "I don't wecollect it—no! On the contrary, I have painful recollections of the stwong sea-bweeze almost bwinging down that wamshackle stage on the sands in the middle of my song!"

"Poor Paula," laughed Miss Redgrave, "it was an awkward moment for you!"

"Extwemely embawwassing—yes, wather! Just as I was in the middle of a wick wendering of 'Ye Banks and Bwaes'—"

"But this isn't helping Amy to catch her train!" Betty was compelled to interrupt the amiable duffer, glancing at the time. "Amy, darling, if you miss that one, you are done for to-day!"

"Oh, then, run along, all of you!" encouraged the youthful mistress, who was "business manager" for the Morocco Concert Party. "And we are to expect you back this evening, dear?"

"In good time for the performance, I hope," was Amy's blithe rejoinder. "I wouldn't be wanting to leave you for the day, like this, only I—I do feel more and more anxious to go and see that the paper is really all right over at the Grange."

"Naturally," was the approving murmur with which Miss Redgrave accompanied her parting kiss for the girl whom they had all befriended. "It should be an easy and pleasant journey, too, provided you make those connections which we looked up in the time-table. Good-bye, then, for the present, and good luck!"

"Yes, wather, Amy! We don't want you to meet with any bad luck, bai Jove—such as falling into the hands of the enemy, bai Jove!"

"Oh, I shan't do that!" laughed the one-time maid-of-all-work. "Would I be going if we didn't know for certain that the Grange is empty now?"

Looking very bright and eager over the jaunt that was before her, she wished Miss Redgrave a shy and pretty good-bye, and then went with the Morcovians out of this seaside boarding-house, which was about the fifth the girls had sampled since their concert tour began.

They were now in the seaside town of Endcliffe, one of the many that were scattered along the same coast which Sandmouth and Bacton graced.



WHO WAS THERE? Good gracious, what was that? Amy stood still with fright. It was no wonder, for, in the great old house where she had thought herself to be alone, she had caught the sound of a stumbling step, followed by faint scuffling sounds.

So Amy, after all, had not to journey far to-day to make her flying visit to the Grange.

Every one of her schoolgirl chums was with her for this walk to Endcliffe railway-station, and she would certainly have had some of them making the journey with her, only the Morcovians were now giving two performances a day. Amy was going to miss, very reluctantly, this afternoon's concert on the sands, but she hoped to be back in good time to act as "dresser" at the evening performance.

"Good-bye, then, Amy, and take care of yourself!" one and another of the Study 12 chums began to say, when their friend was in the train. "Don't forget, you change at Bacton for the branch line to Sandmouth!"

"I shan't forget," promised Amy, showing a happy face to the girls as she stood at the lowered window of her compartment.

The doors were being slammed, and guards were crying their "Right away!"

"You had better bring that paper back with you!" was Polly's last half-jesting shout. "Tata!"

"Perhaps I shall!" called back Amy, from the moving train. "Good-bye, girls! Good-bye, all!"

"You are looking extremely pwetty, Amy, deah! Haw, haw, haw! Yes, wather! Good-bye!" Paula shrilled, waving her gloves. "Geals, there's something about that Amy I do so like—what?"

"She's a dear!" affirmed Madge, in Madge's own sober way. "What a treasure she has proved, too, as 'mistress of the wardrobe'!"

"Ooo, yes, and I—very sorry she has gone now," came, rather heavily, from emotional Naomer, as she gazed after the outgoing train. "Ohé, eet make my heart heavy when I say good-bye just then!"

"Nonsense, darling!" Polly rallied the dusky one blithely. "She'll soon be back amongst us. But I don't mind saying I'd be all in the dumps myself if I thought she was going to be away for long."

"She's waving still!" smiled Helen, as they all stood watching the receding train. "Happy little soul!"

Happy indeed she was, standing at the compartment window to look back and wave to the last, with the thought that this was only good-bye for a few hours, thank goodness!

They had been such splendid friends to her, those schoolgirls who had come into her rather strange life, by pure chance, at the Sandmouth boarding-house.

From the very first she had looked up to them and loved them, and now she could look back upon days that had been spent amongst them—days of immense happiness. Never a word that was not the very essence of kindness; never a look that did not tell of their deep trust and regard.

What of the inevitable hour, then, when she and they would have to part company, perhaps for ever?

Holidays were running out rapidly. A few weeks more, and Betty Barton and her chums would be back at Morcove School. And then, alas, no Morcove School for her, Amy Ashdown, but only a return to that helpless loneliness which had been her lot at the time they took compassion upon her.

Yet Amy, even when she fell to pondering this, as the train rattled upon its way, was not quite destitute of comforting thoughts.

It was her strong belief that just about the time the other girls ended their seaside tour, she herself might expect to have news of her former master and mistress, the owners of the Grange. She would get any letter they wrote her from abroad, for she had had the shrewdness to notify the postal authorities, in the prescribed way, about the redirection of letters.

There was, too, just a possibility that her former master and mistress might make a surprise return to the Grange.

"They certainly would come back in a hurry if they knew that the Dillons have gone off without even settling up," she said to herself. "I wonder if the house-agents have received an address abroad where my master and mistress can be written to?"

This gave her the sudden determination to venture a few questions to the house-agents presently. She had got to call at their office in Sandmouth, in any case, to inquire if she might be allowed to enter the locked-up house.

It took her next to no time to find the offices when she reached Sandmouth, for she had been sent on an errand to that firm in the past. Nor did the clerk who attended to her this morning fail to remember her.

"Oh, yes, you used to be in service to our clients, the owners of the Grange!" he said, smiling. "And you want permission, you say, to visit the house to-day?"

"If you please," Amy interjected, with her unconsciously winsome look, "just to find something that I left behind at the old house. I am sure that Mr. and Mrs. Langrish would not mind, if they knew."

"Oh, that's all right! We know you are to be trusted," nodded the clerk. "Well, then, my principals are out at present, but I am sure I can authorise you to go out to the Grange and get

what you want. Only, be very careful to lock up after you. The key is with old Mrs. Merridew."

"Oh, I know, the old lady who lives at Turnpike Cottage!" Amy exclaimed. "I shall enjoy calling there. Thank you, sir! Then I'll get along there at once."

It was midday now, but she would not turn in anywhere to get something to eat before setting out upon the lengthy tramp to the Grange. A couple of scones served for lunch, the happy-hearted girl taking them out of the pastry-cooks' bag to eat as soon as she was on the open country road.

Fierce was the heat and trying the white dust as she footed it so sturdily along the sun-baked highways. Yet Amy retained a cheerful, even smiling, expression all the while.

Turnpike Cottage stood at the last cross-roads Amy would pass before reaching the Grange. That great and grand old house, standing, with a dignified remoteness, in its own spacious grounds, was to be glimpsed, from a distance, by the girl as she came to the cottage wicket. Let her get the key, and in a few minutes now she would be inside the old house.

"You at home, Mrs. Merridew?" she called blithely into the tiny cottage, as she came to where the porch door stood wide open to the sunshine. "Mrs. Merridew!"

"Yes, what is it?" answered a pleasant voice, as its owner came bustling forward. And then: "Bless and save us, little Amy Ashdown! Well, I do declare! How are you, Amy, my girl? Come in—come in, do 'ee now!"

"Oh, but, if you won't think it unkind, I won't stop more than a minute!" Amy pleaded, as she stepped across the lowly threshold. "How are you, Mrs. Merridew, after all this time? The rheumatism is better, I hope?"

"Ah, my dear, how can I expect it ever to be much better at my time of life?" was the resigned answer. "I must be thankful I get about as well as I do. I'm all right, you know—just going on quietly. But if we had many folk coming to ask me to show them over the Grange, I'd feel it. Still, I didn't like to refuse having the key."

"And that's what I've come for!" Amy said, with a laugh. "The agents know. I called there to ask if I could just pop into the place to get something I left behind when I was finishing with the Dillons."

"Ah, the Dillons! A nice lot they were!" was old Mrs. Merridew's scathing rejoinder. "I expect you've heard how they went off without settling up, my dear. Disgraceful! You shall have the key—here 'tis—certainly," as she took it from a hook behind the door. "And if you'd like me to go across with you—"

"Oh, no, although it is kind of you to offer!" Amy said heartily. "You mustn't put yourself to that trouble, Mrs. Merridew, and you can trust me to lock up properly afterwards."

"My dear, that wasn't in my mind at all. I was only feeling I'd like to walk across with you, so we could have a talk about the old times, when Mr. and Mrs. Langrish were at the Grange. Sure you won't have summat to eat, my dear? Do 'ee now!"

But again Amy gratefully declined, although she confessed that a glass of water from the pump would be a great boon.

In a minute or so she was going on her way again, with good Mrs. Merridew calling after her from the trellised porch:

"Sure you won't be afraid, all alone in that there big old house, my dear?"

"Afraid? Why should I be afraid?" laughed back Amy.

And thus, with no presentiment of the danger she was running into, she fared on towards the lonely mansion that showed no sign of life anywhere.

The Trap is Sprung.

"**L**AURA, Laura! Where are you, Laura? Quick!"

"Yes, what? Here I am, Cora!"

"Someone coming up the drive—a girl, Laura! It must be Amy herself! I'm sure it is!"

"Oh! Where? Let me look!" was the excitable exclamation with which Laura Dillon came rushing to one of the front windows of the mansion, where Cora Grandways was standing.

The blinds were down. Eagerly Laura peered round the edge of one of them, her eyes enlarging with excitement and joy as they made out the girlish figure which had already attracted Cora's attention.

"That's Amy, right enough! And now—now, Cora—"

"Yes, at last!" breathed Laura's holiday crony. "We have not waited in vain, after all!"

"Alone, too! How splendid for us! Nothing could be better!" exulted the daughter of rascally Mr. and Mrs. Dillon.

"I wonder if she has called for the key down at Turnpike Cottage," muttered Cora, "or is she meaning to see if she can get in somewhere, without permission?"

"We shall soon see," was the other's tense



TRAPPED, BUT DEFIANT! "Let me go—better!" protested Amy, as she struggled in the grip of her enemies. "I will never tell you where I hid the paper—never!" "Oh, won't you?" laughed Laura. "You'll be glad to by the time we've finished with you."

answer. "Cora, the thing for us to do is to hide now, at once!"

"And we won't rush out upon her until she has gone to where the paper is hidden and actually has it in her hand, that's the ideal!" nodded Cora Grandways, giving the malicious grin which was so well known at Morcoove School. "Oh, I wouldn't miss this for anything!"

Once again they both peered out, very cautiously, round the edge of a blind. Amy Ashdown was coming on briskly, keeping a course for the front porch. It seemed, therefore, that she had come armed with permission to enter the house, and provided with the key.

"We shall have to get that key back to Turnpike Cottage by-and-by," Laura was bearing in mind, as she and Cora hastened away to find a hiding-place. "That can be managed all right, though. Only a case of dropping the key just inside the cottage door, whilst the old girl is taking in her bit of washing at the back."

"Good job for us it is old Mother Merridew's washing-day!" chuckled Cora.

From one of the mansion windows, early this morning, they had seen a tell-tale flutter of white linen on a clothes-line in the back garden of Turnpike Cottage.

"We do seem to be having a real streak of luck at last!" exulted Laura. "It's making me tremble all over, this is. What about this hall-screen for a hiding-place, Cora?"

"No, too risky," dissented Cora promptly. "She's bound to pause and listen nervously after entering. She might hear us breathing."

"Where, then—where?" clamoured the other girl feverishly.

They decided to be safely upstairs by the time Amy should come in, and up the grand staircase they sped, to come to a standstill on the first landing.

"Sh!" breathed Laura, all in strung-up state, as she was, and Cora murmured calmly:

"All right; you can trust me! I say, I wouldn't like to be Amy when we spring out upon her presently!"

"Serve her right!" was Laura's harsh response. "After all the trouble she has given us, she deserves to be— Sh! Do you hear that, Cora?"

It was the grating of a large key in the lock of the massive front door.

A moment more, and Amy Ashdown was setting that door wide open, that she might pass inside.

How silent and gloomy the familiar old house, all deserted as it was, and the blinds and curtains drawn, so as to prevent the summer sunshine from spoiling the rich furnishings. That she was feeling a trifle nervous now the girl never would have denied.

Even though her enemies, as she had such good reason for believing, were gone from the place for ever, their villainous scheme abandoned, it gave her a creepy sensation to be entering the shut-up house alone.

But, she reflected, she would not be here long. A few minutes, no more, would she require to satisfy herself that the vital document which she had saved from the hands of the Dillons was where she had hidden it many weeks ago. That done, she would soon be out in the bright sunshine again, and so off and away back to the town where her dear schoolgirl chums would have such a loving welcome for her!

She closed the front door, and then, putting the big key in her pocket for the time being, trod

softly across the gloomy hall to the handsome staircase.

Hark, though! What was that?

Only for a moment or so was she, heart in mouth, unnerved by a sort of rustling sound above stairs. Perhaps a landing window had been left open this fine weather, to keep the place aired, and the summer breeze was keeping curtains up there astir.

Reassured, she went unhesitatingly up the broad flight of stairs, reaching a first landing, from which wide corridors ran to right and left. A glance this way and that showed her no window that was standing open. Only too well she knew, from former experience, what uncanny sounds were heard in the old house when nobody but oneself was about.

Another flight of stairs she climbed, and then turned off along a second-floor passage that served several bed-rooms. In one of these—the last in the corridor—had she found her hiding-place, weeks ago, for the valuable paper. The room was one that had always stood empty, except for a few bits of lumber, and she had had good reason for boasting that no one could ever possibly happen upon the exact spot where the document was concealed. It was such an ingenious hiding-place that she had discovered!

This bed-room corridor, it was even gloomier than the hall downstairs or the staircase, and now, perhaps because she was so near the hiding-place, her nerves felt very jumpy. She found herself looking behind her as she traversed the dim passage, as lonely folk look behind on a dark road in winter. It was silly to be so fanciful, she knew, and yet—

Good gracious, what was that?

She was heart in mouth again, standing still with fright. And no wonder, poor girl! Suddenly, in this great old house, where she had thought she was quite alone, a stumbling step had sounded, followed by faint scuffling sounds.

Her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth, so that she could not cry out for a moment or so, but at last she panted a challenging cry:

"Who's there?"

No answer.

That stumbling sound, however, and the other that had followed sharp upon it—someone must be in the house! Who, then—who was it?

Feeling that anything would be easier to bear than this terrifying uncertainty, she suddenly turned back, on tiptoe.

Not another sound did she hear until she was close to the stairs. Then, when she was on the point of peeping round a corner, her strained hearing picked up the very faintest creak of a board and a sort of soft, fluttering sound, such as the swish of a frock might make.

This came from somewhere still higher up, and she looked up the stairs leading to the attics, whilst she called out, as she felt bound to do:

"Who is that, please? Who's there?"

Still no answer.

The plucky feeling that it was best to go on and find out still prevailed with the girl. She started to ascend that topmost flight of stairs, and then— No, she must go back!

It was turning her blood to ice to realise suddenly that the Dillons might still be here, in secret.

What wonder if the thought left lonely Amy in the state of panic that she had bravely resisted up to now? She flashed about and started to run downstairs, and, in her wild alarm, she gasped aloud to herself:

"I must go—get out of this quickly! Oh, they are still here, and I was nearly letting myself get caught!"

Throwing caution to the winds, she continued her rush down to the ground floor, her one idea being to get outside and run—run for all she was worth.

But now, even as she gave the sounds that told of precipitate flight, she heard at least two persons dashing down after her, themselves no longer caring what noise they made.

On the last flight, she looked behind her, and then she saw Cora Grandways and Laura Dillon, those girls rushing to seize her before she could get away!

"Keep back! Let me go!" she gasped back at them wildly. "You shan't touch me! Get away!"

Too late!

Down the last stairs they dashed, and overtook her in the hall, whilst she was still several yards short of the door. Once again, it was a case of two on to one. They swooped and seized her; and held her roughly.

"Stand still, you—"

"No! Let me go! Help!"

"Quiet!" hissed Laura, she and Cora shaking their struggling captive furiously. "It's no use calling out. Now, then, we have got you! And where is that paper—where is it?"

"I won't tell you! No—no! Oh, I won't! Help!"

"Won't you?" panted Cora. "You've got to tell us now! Speak out!"

"No!"

"Do you know what we mean to do if you refuse?" Laura seethed. "Keep you here until you do speak out! No one will ever come—"

"Yes, they will!" panted Amy, with what little breath was left to her. "When I don't get back, my friends will suspect—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Will they? That's all you know!" was Laura's mocking laugh. "We have thought of that!"

"Let me go—you had better!" Amy demanded in an infuriated way. "I am never going to tell you—never! I won't—I won't, so there!"

"You will!" Laura gave back, with her harsh laugh and her eyes agleam. "You'll be glad to tell us, you saucy young thing, before we've finished with you! Take that to begin with!"

And, with the word, she slapped the defenceless girl's head twice or thrice viciously, then shook her so violently that suddenly poor overpowered Amy lost her footing and fell; and the malicious pair stood over her, laughing to see her bursting into tears of wild despair.

The Misleading Telegram.

"LADIES and gentlemen—"

"Bravo!" was the cry that mingled with a sharp burst of handclapping, whilst Betty Barton, in the pretty costume of a pierrette, stood alone on the seashore platform, laughingly waiting for a chance to continue.

The evening performance was just closing, and deep twilight was upon the holiday-making world of Endcliffe. All the prettier did Betty look then, with the soft and coloured lights from many Chinese lanterns shining around the makeshift stage.

"Miss Redgrave has asked me to say that Endcliffe has done better than any other town we have visited!"

Tremendous applause!

"On behalf of those for whom we are collecting

this money, we thank you one and all! It is good of you—"

"No; good of you to do it, young ladies!" someone shouted bluffly, and the clapping started afresh.

"Well, it is nothing but a pleasure to us," was all Betty could say to that, and, with the happiest of smiles, she bowed and moved aside, whilst her chums now ran out, to line up with her and give the concluding chorus.

At the piano, Madge's unwearied fingers crashed out a sprightly melody, and, with a better swing than ever, the schoolgirl pierrettes gave that last witty chorus.

Two minutes more, and all the applause was ended. The crowd was melting away into the soft, warm darkness of the summer night, and the girls themselves were "behind the scenes," to change out of their stage costumes.

"No Amy to bustle around and keep things straight for us to-night!" Betty commented presently. "She didn't turn up towards the finish, as we hoped she might do."

"No!" said Polly, rather glumly. "Unless we find her at the boarding-house when we get back, it will mean she missed even the later train."

"And why?" wondered Madge, shuffling her music together. "I would have said she is the very last to make a muddle of train connections."

"Fwankly, I am wather glad Amy was not with us this evening," sighed Paula, standing in front of a candle-lit mirror. "I would not have had her witness my latest distwessing bweakdown for all the wovld! I only wish you geals had not been pwesent, either!"

"But then there would have been no concert at all!" laughed Helen.

"Bettah that," sighed Paula, "than what happened this evening, to make me look so widiculous in the eyes of ewewybody. I can sing. You geals know perfectly weal I have a wealy wich contwalto. But when a gnat gets down your thvroat—"

"Just as a top note was coming, too!" chuckled Polly.

"Yes, wather! Howwible expewience! Theáh was I, don't you know—"

"And there was the gnat!"

"Pwecisely! It is a great gwief to me, geals," lamented the amiable duffer of the Fourth Form at Morcove, "but I am always the one to come to gwief! Now, Naomer, here, she is always all wight—yes, wather!"

"I not feel so very all right this evening—no," Naomer confessed, with a heaviness of heart that was most unusual. "All ze time I am doing my dance I zink of Amy. I wonder eef she not come back, then—"

"Oh, Naomer, darling, don't have such thoughts!" Madge said cheerfully. "All the same, I shan't be sorry to get indoors and see if Amy is there."

"Nor I!" came from one and another of the Morcovians.

It would be several minutes yet, however, before they could hasten across to the Endcliffe boarding-house.

Some of the girls were still in pierrette costume, having been occupied with various duties behind the scenes. The concert-party was going on to another town in the morning, and so everything had to be cleared up and put away with extra care to-night.

Suddenly Miss Redgrave came in, the dim candlelight showing her to be in a rather concerned state of mind about something. She held

a telegram, which she had already opened and read.

"Girls, this is from Amy Ashdown!"

"What? Oh, a telegram!"

"Bai Jove, then—"

"She's not coming back to-night!" Polly guessed, with a blank look. "There, now!"

"A maid has just run across from the boarding-house with this," Miss Redgrave spoke on, flourishing the flimsy. "As soon as I saw it, I guessed it was from Amy. Read it, girls."

Eagerly they gathered together to do so. The printed form bore a pencilled record that the message had been handed in at Sandmouth Central Post Office about an hour and a half ago. As for the message itself, the exact wording was:

"Grange owners home from abroad. Am staying on in their service. Good-bye and love to all of you.—AMY."

"Phew!" whistled Polly. "The Langrishes are home again—just fancy!"

"In that case, of course," Betty exclaimed, with puckered brows, "Amy would want to remain at the Grange! What a surprise she must have had!"

"Yes, wather!"

"A pleasant surprise, though," murmured Helen Craig. "What could have been nicer for Amy than to find the master and mistress who were so kind to her back again in the old home? She will be happy now."

"She will," agreed Madge unhesitatingly, "and all her anxieties set at rest for ever!"

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, of course, geals, now she can reveal that paper to the vevy people she was weserving it for!" Paula remarked astutely. "That's gwand for Amy!"

"Yes. Only," Betty said, with a faint sigh, whilst Miss Redgrave took back the telegram,

"it is—well, not quite so grand for us. We had got so fond of Amy. We are going to miss her."

"Badly," said Madge softly. "'Good-bye,' the telegram says, so evidently she never expects to see any of us again!"

"Bothah it!" was Paula's doleful remark, as she began to realise what it would mean to all of them. "We wanted evewything to go wight for Amy and her future—yes, wather! It is, how-evah, wather sudden—what?"

"Too sudden for my liking!" Polly said, grimacing. "We shall feel different without her."

They did!

It seemed strange to them, such a big loss, to be going home to the boarding-house presently without Amy in their midst.

All day they had been feeling her absence, but the sense of loss then had been nothing, compared with what it was now.

No looking forward to seeing her again! In that telegram there was a "Good-bye and thank you!" which was none the less saddening because it seemed to speak of all the undying gratitude that Amy felt towards them. Good-bye, and for ever!

Ere they slept that night, however, the chums of Study 12 quite made up their minds about one thing. Amy might think there was no possibility now of her ever seeing any of them again, but they were in no such resigned mood.

They must needs think of her now as taking up the old lowly, yet happy, life again at the Grange, under her kind master and mistress. Doubtless, too, it was a life that could offer Amy very little freedom. But if she, dear little soul, could never come to any of them, they would manage somehow to go to her!

"Yes, wather, bai Jove!" Paula said, last thing of all, beaming in a cheered-up manner. "And don't forget, geals, there is such a thing as witing letters. We can cowwespond with Amy—what?—to make sure that evewything weally is all sewene."

"Ooo, yes, queek! In ze morning I write my first letter!" Naomer said excitedly. "And I sign myself: 'Yours effexshunly, Queen Naomer of Nakara'! Yes, I will do that, because I love her!"

"We'll all write!" declared Betty emphatically. "And we'll all see her again some day, although when that day will be—"

Ah, that was the sad part about it all! That was a thing a thousand times more serious than the girls themselves imagined. Some day—but when?

If only something could have warned Betty & Co. and Miss Redgrave that the poor ill-fated girl had fallen into a trap, and that the subsequent telegram was a false one!

No such misgiving was entering their heads, however; nor was it likely to, since the message was so in accord with possibilities.

The girls had known all along that Amy had only to hear of her former master and mistress being back from abroad for her to want to fly to them.

And so, greatly consoled by the thought that Amy was, at least, quite happy, with all her anxieties ended, the schoolgirl pierrettes felt that the best they could do, the most that was needed of them, was to try and see the girl again some day.

Some day!

And this very night Amy was a hapless prisoner in the hands of those who were thoroughly determined to wrest the great secret from her ere she knew another moment's freedom!



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Will No One Know ?

DARK night had settled again upon the lonely countryside lying around the Grange.

And again, as on other nights of late, not a light was visible to anyone who might be sending a stray glance in the direction of the house from the distant roadway.

At Turnpike Cottage, old Mrs. Merridew had indeed stood for a good while just outside her lowly porch, with glasses on, gazing with some anxiety in the direction of the great old house as twilight fell.

It had been quite a shock to that old soul to find the key of the mansion thrown down upon the front-door mat when she came into the house at sunset, laden with an armful of linen taken from the backyard clothes-line.

She could only suppose that Amy had dropped the key just there, whilst having to run past, so as to be in time for a train at Sandmouth. That

would never dare do more than bully her. But how when Mr. and Mrs. Dillon returned, as return they would?

Suddenly, and causing her to start out of the apathy in which despair had left her, she heard soft footfalls outside the locked door of this room into which her captors had cast her.

She stood up, ready to show a spirited front to the heartless girls, since it was obvious that they were now going to pay her a last visit before seeking their own rest for the night.

Harshly a key rasped in the lock, and, as she heard the sound, Amy darted behind the door. She would make a desperate dash for freedom, come what might!

The next moment the door opened slowly, and Cora and Laura came in warily. The light from the window showed them to Amy. With them they brought a plate of bread and cheese and a glass of water.



NOT WHAT THEY EXPECTED. "A telegram from Amy!" announced Miss Redgrave, flourishing the firmy. "It says that the owners of the Grange are back again, and Amy is staying in their service." The girls were astounded at the news.

sort of thing might conceivably have happened, although the girl had talked of being only a few minutes at the house, and she must have been in there whole hours!

That the girl had finished at the house now the returned key evidenced. Even so, Mrs. Merridew had felt sufficiently worried to take that last distant look at the mansion as night drew on.

Now she was gone to her humble bed in the cottage, saying "Nonsense!" to the vague and foolish misgivings that had assailed her. Just as if anything could have gone wrong!

Thus good Mrs. Merridew, at Turnpike Cottage, achieved the same easy state of mind as the school-girl pierrettes had arrived at in connection with the girl, whilst here in the great old house poor helpless Amy was hoping and praying that there were those whose anxiety and suspicion would bring them to the Grange.

Unless something like that happened, what would the end of it be?

The two girls who were detaining her at present, she did not stand in fear of them. They

Amy dashed forward, but she was too late. While Laura set down the frugal meal, Cora Grandways barred Amy's way.

Cora laughed as she seized Amy and spun her round. Cora had been expecting such a move on the part of the imprisoned girl.

"He, he, he!" she tittered. "Not this time, Amy!"

Laura, having set down the supper on a chair, faced Amy.

"Come to your senses yet?" she inquired.

"If you mean—"

"You know what we mean!" exclaimed the girl who was such a second edition of heartless, ruthless Mrs. Dillon. "We mean to break the stupid pride and obstinacy that you have been showing all along! A girl like you—"

"Yes, a mere kitchen-maid!" joined in Cora, with proud disdain. "That's what you should remember, Amy Ashdown. You are a mere nobody! You have been in the wrong from the start. Considering Laura's mother was your

mistress, it was nothing less than sheer dishonesty, when you got hold of that paper——”

“Nothing of the sort!” Amy answered, with passionate calmness. “But I am not going to argue with you—I refuse!”

“Oh, all right!” sneered Laura, backing towards the door. “But when my mother is here——”

“Yes, well?”

“And she will come to-morrow,” Laura spoke on darkly. “She knows by now that you are here, completely at our mercy. I have sent a message.”

“Your mother will no more make me give up that paper than you two girls can!” Amy said defiantly. “She won’t get a word out of me!”

“Won’t she?” retorted Laura, the faint moonlight revealing her cruel look. “You don’t know my mother yet! But, there, eat your supper, and then to sleep!”

“She knows, I hope, that it’s madness to think of getting away by the window?” Cora threw out, withdrawing from the room with Laura. “It’s very high up, even if she could unscrew those shutters!”

“Do you hear, Amy?” cried Laura, standing ready to pull shut the door and lock it. “One or the other of us will be on guard out here all night, and if we hear a sound, you’ll catch it! So you had far better—— Oh, look out, Cora! Cora, quick!”

The bullying voice had changed to one of panicky alarm as Amy made a sudden lightning rush across the dark room, hoping to battle past the pair of them, and so escape from the room.

And now, although they were two to her one, she felt equal to the desperate conflict that it would mean. Righteous indignation at the treatment accorded her was making her doubly strong.

Furiously she rushed at them in the doorway, and Laura she managed to fling aside in that very instant. Then she had Cora to reckon with.

They gripped each other and struggled, and for one brief moment Amy felt that freedom was indeed to be hers. She would fling this girl aside as she had flung the other, and then tear down through the house, every inch of which she knew far better than they.

But it was not to be.

From where Laura Dillon lay, all asprawl, on the floor, she viciously flung out a hand in the darkness, and pulled at the ankle she was able to grasp.

It was one of Cora’s, as it chanced, but that made no difference. The selfsame tug that suddenly pulled Cora down, it also brought Amy tumbling to the floor, for Cora kept her hold on that struggling girl.

It was all over then for poor Amy, as regards the hope of escaping.

Another minute, and she had been overborne once more, and bundled back into the dark room.

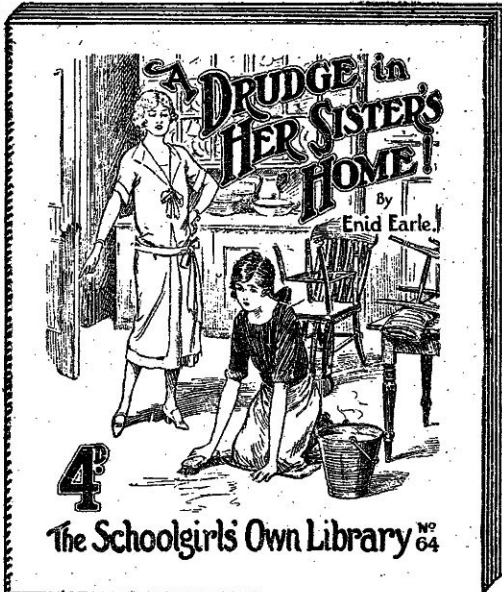
Slam! went the door, and then snick! the key, and thus the old house still held its victim of trickery and malice, to await the coming of Laura Dillon’s own ruthless mother!

(END OF THIS WEEK’S STORY.)

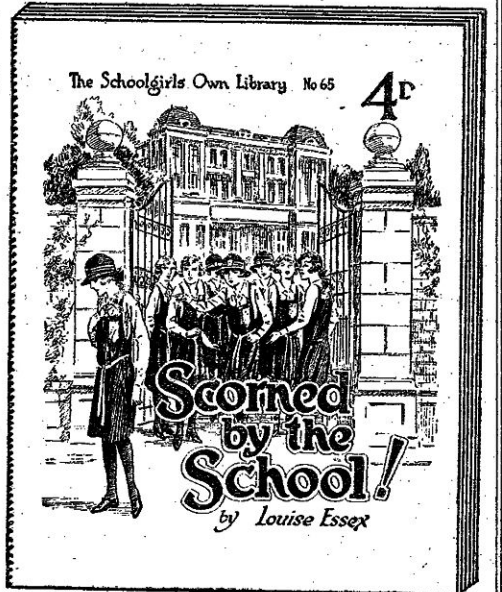
Trapped! How easily Amy has allowed herself to fall again into the power of the Dillons! Will they be able to force her to reveal the secret hiding-place of the paper that means so much to them? You must not miss next week’s enthralling complete tale, which is entitled: “The Girl Who Was Kept Prisoner!”

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