

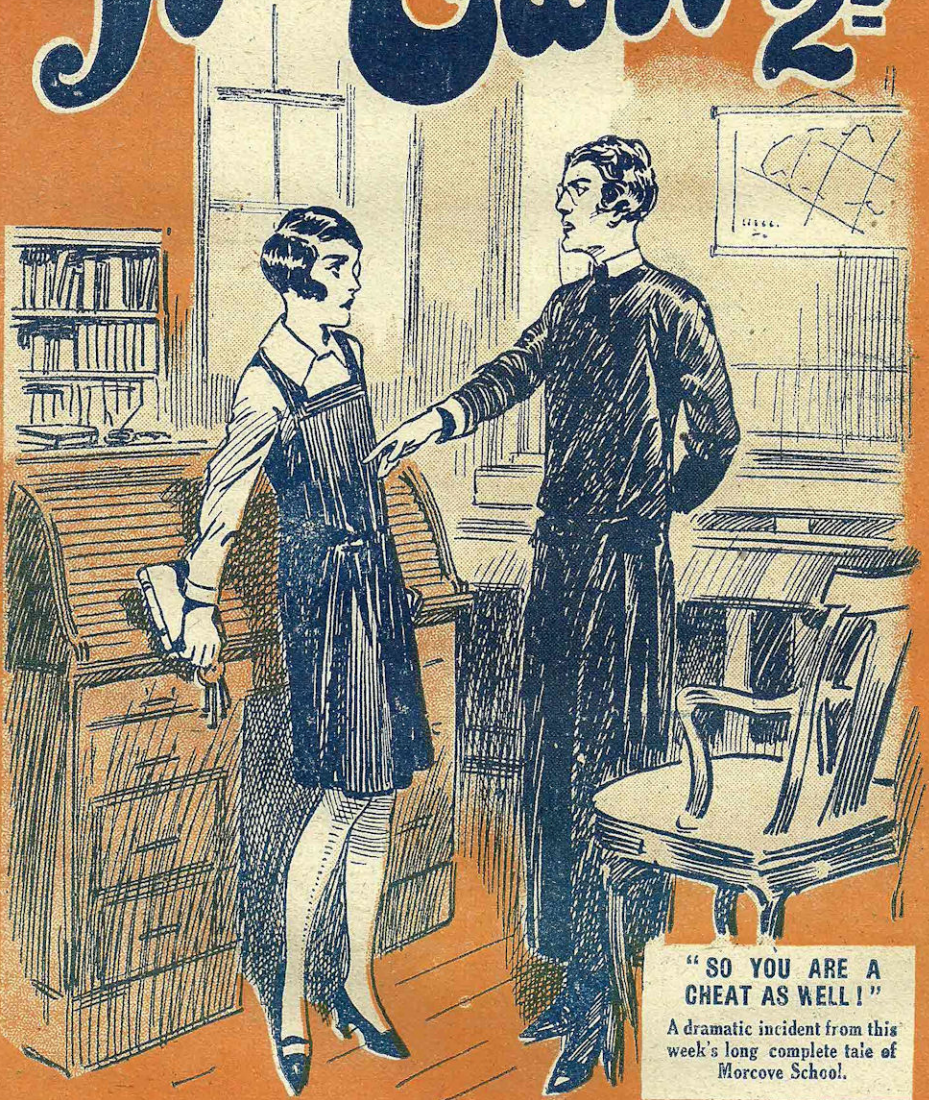
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"HER TRUE COLOURS."



By
MARJORIE STANTON.

Because she shoulders the blame which should, by rights, have been borne by Ursula Wade, the sneak of the Fourth Form, Jemima Carstairs finds herself sent to Coventry—and regarded as a cheat. But Jemima doesn't care—for she has other ideas in mind!

Paula's is Offended.

"HI!" The stout gentleman in the dark grey suit halted, panted, and then addressed himself loudly, if somewhat gaspingly, to the only other person in sight.

He was breathless because he had walked a long way, and he was not used to walking. In the City he never walked at all. He even hired a taxi-cab to transport him to his favourite dining-place for lunch, although the distance could not have exceeded two hundred yards.

This afternoon he had walked all the way from Morcove Road Station because nothing better than a dilapidated cab had awaited him there.

It was positively scandalous, he thought. In fact, he was not at all impressed with what he had yet seen of Devonshire. For one thing, the lane was not content to keep the untrammelled smoothness that marked the City pavements, but must rise at an unreliable angle, or else fall away to an even worse slope under his feet.

He was tired, and he was annoyed.

For, unpleasant though his walk had been so far, that before him was even more unpleasant. For all that the view told him to the contrary, he was alone in the middle of Devonshire, now that the cab containing his suitcase had rattled off down the road to the inn near by. He wished that he had not sent the cabman off in such contempt, for then he might have thought to ask the man the direction in which Morcove School lay.

He had not thought, however, and he was lost. What therefore was his joy when turning a corner he saw, a dozen yards ahead of him, a girl sitting on a stile—a girl who, moreover, wore a hat with a band that proclaimed her a scholar at Morcove School?

The small eyes of the stout man brightened at

once, and his drooping spirits rose again to their heights. He even raised his umbrella.

"Hi!" he called.

He had a sharp voice—a voice which in his office made clerks quiver and shake, and brought respect and attention from all.

Now it went echoing down the Devonshire lane this winter afternoon, echoing strangely, and causing a stampede of sheep in the field near by.

The girl on the stile did not make the slightest sign of having heard, however. She just turned her head, regarded the stout man without the slightest interest, then turned away again, as though it were no business of hers whatever.

The stout man lowered his umbrella, puckered his brows, and cleared his throat. He was exasperated, and the colour rose to his cheek.

"Hi—you—girl!" he called, to make the matter clear. He wondered what the foolish girl imagined he was standing there doing—calling the sheep or the trees?

Or was she deaf that she did not answer?

It did not seem to occur to him to go on a few yards until he was level with her, for in his small world he just called and people came hurrying from all directions.

Then he suddenly became aware that the girl on the stile was not alone. From behind her another girl appeared, a girl with a bright, cheery face and merry smile, who looked at him and grinned—positively grinned!

"Hi, you!" said the stout gentleman fiercely. "You girls!"

He strode forward, and then the girl on the stile started, and turned towards him. Immediately she looked at her companion.

"Gwacious!" she murmured, in a leisurely but delightful tone. "I wondah if he was addresssing us, Polly?"

Polly Linton, the madcap of the Fourth Form

at Morcove School, leaned upon the stile and eyed the fat man.

"Shouldn't be surprised," she said. "Let him 'Hi!' on for—"

"But, weally," protested Paula Creel, "I feah you are mistaken, deah geal! Suahly no gentleman would address a lady in that wude manner. Pwobably he is calling a portah."

"Yes, likely—in the middle of a lane!" chuckled Polly. "Hope he doesn't go pop suddenly. His face is getting redder and redder."

Paula Creel smoothed her coat, clasped her hands over her dress, and looked everywhere but at the stout gentleman. Never in her life had she been addressed as "you girl," never had she been called by the simple "Hi!"

Paula, being the spirit and essence of politeness, simply could not believe that she was being addressed.

"Here he comes," said Polly Linton gaily. "What fun if he trod in the puddle! There—oh!" And Polly stuffed her hanky to her mouth to suffocate a peal of laughter.

The stout man, with incredible accuracy, had stepped right into the puddle. Perhaps his inability to see his feet was to blame, or perhaps he was too intent on making himself heard by the girl at the stile.

Anyway, one white-spatted foot went into the puddle. He withdrew the foot and shook it as a cat shakes a foot that is suddenly dived into moisture.

Polly felt that she must either laugh or die. She laughed.

And Polly's laugh only made the stout man's face grow purple instead of red.

Shaking his foot and his umbrella, he stamped forward, and halted firmly and angrily before them.

"Deaf?" he demanded. "Can't you hear when you're addressed, hey?"

Polly turned her head away, and Paula looked at him in genuine surprise.

"Bai Jove! Were you weally addressing me? I had no idea. I imagined you were calling a portah."

"Porter—here? Don't be an idiot!" snapped the stout man. "And don't be impertinent! I've been tramping the countryside for the best part of two hours, and I've seen nothing more intelligent than a few sheep, an imbecile cabman, and you!"

"Bai Jove!" said Paula faintly. "Weally—" Respectfully Paula had slipped down from the stile, and she eyed the stout man with as much interest as she would have bestowed upon a curiosity in an exhibition.

"Is Morcove School near here—that's what I want to know?" went on the stout man. "I called to you, and unless you are deaf or merely insolent, you must have heard."

"Morcove? Oh, yes, wathah!" said Paula, wondering what on earth business he had to transact at the school. "Morcove is quite neah, weally. Just down the lane."

"Ah! You are a Morcove girl?"

"Yes, wathah. We both are, you know. This is my friend, Polly Linton."

"Um!" said the stout man. "I've come to see my daughter. Perhaps she is a friend of yours. Ursula her name is—Ursula Wade."

Paula Creel nodded her head, and no one could have guessed from her expression what her private opinion was of Ursula Wade. No one could have guessed that she was thinking that this

man was just the sort of father one might expect Ursula to possess.

"Ursula Wade—she's in my Form. Pway allow me to direct you to the school."

"You can show me the way," said Mr. Wade. "I shall probably take one of the ridiculous side turnings. The place is a warren—a positive warren!"

He glowered at Paula as though she had purposely put side lanes there to make him walk further; as though the whole of Devonshire was merely a practical joke arranged for his discomfiture.

"I shall be delighted," bowed Paula. "It is not vewy fah."

Mr. Wade rested on his umbrella, for his feet were tired.

"Get me a taxi," he said pompously.

"A taxi," said Polly Linton, who had by this time recovered her composure. "Oh, dear! There aren't any taxis nearer than Barncombe, and that's miles away. The school isn't more than five miles away, you know."

Polly Linton had a playful mind, and her eyes glistened with fun. As Morcove was only a quarter of a mile or less round the bend, it certainly was not more than five miles away, but Mr. Wade was positively staggered.

"Five miles—and no taxi! Great Scott!" he gasped.

Paula flashed a reproachful look at Polly, and Polly took Paula's arm.

"This way," said Polly.

And Mr. Wade, not being able to think of an alternative to walking, save sleeping under the hedge, walked on in suffocated silence, mentally composing a stinging letter to the newspapers on the subject of Devonshire.

But thought Polly seemed well pleased with herself and her little joke, Paula was perturbed. For Paula was thinking of Ursula Wade.

Ursula would not be pleased to see her father just now. Paula was quite sure of that. For Ursula Wade was in "Coventry," outcast, and "cut dead" by the whole Form.

"You're a friend of my daughter's, hey?" puffed Mr. Wade.

"No—er—not exactly," murmured Paula, quite distressed.

"Won't have anything to do with you?" remarked Mr. Wade. "I'm not surprised. My girl knows how to pick her friends. Ursula has no time for fools."

Paula said nothing to that, for it seemed to provide an easy way out.

"Don't suppose you're in Jimima's set, either, then," said Mr. Wade, jabbing the ground with his umbrella. "Old friend of mine, Carstairs—greatest playwright of the day."

"Yes, wathah," nodded Paula; "so I have heard. Howevah—"

She did not pass her opinion upon Jimima Carstairs. Jimima was the only Fourth-Former who still spoke to Ursula, although why; they did not know, since Jimima seemed in many ways just the girl they could like.

"Theah is Morcove, you know, Mr. Wade. Just through the trees."

Mr. Wade halted and stared.

"Not five miles?" he said, and looked at Polly with a heavy, disapproving frown.

"Not more than five miles," Polly agreed.

"Only about a quarter of a mile from where we

were. We shall be there in no time now. Hope Betty's got the tea, Paula."

"Yes, wathah! I feel as though I could do with a cup of tea."

Mr. Wade buttoned his coat, arranged his hat, and then stepped forward briskly.

"I can't dawdle in this way," he said. "I'm a busy man." He groped in his pocket then, and pulled out a coin, which, with a magnificent air, he held out to Paula.

Paula Creel went the colour of a peony. She did not move her hand to take the coin, and as Mr. Wade was not looking it fell into the roadway.

"Get some sweets," he said. "And it would have been more if you hadn't been impertinent. Let that be a lesson."

With that, he strutted off towards Morcove School, waddling on in pompous style, leaving Paula Creel to stare at the coin which lay in the roadway, while Polly Linton eyed the departing Mr. Wade with an extraordinary expression on her cheery face.

"Oh, gwacious!" murmured Paula. "He—he offered me a penny, Polly, to—to buy sweets!"

Polly Linton looked at the penny, then kicked it with her toe, sending it rolling into the gutter.

"What does he think we are, Paula?" she demanded. "Morcove page-girls?"

"Gwacious alone knows!" said Paula. "But I must say I considah Mr. Wade wathah a bounder, don't you know?"

Polly was not as a rule cynical, but as she took Paula by the arm, she said:

"H'm! But why only 'rather'?"

Jemima's Parcels.

"NOT even a pennyworth."

The dame, who kept the tuckshop at Morcove School spoke with emphasis, and there was a set, hard line about her mouth when she closed it with that remark.

She was a kindly woman, but she had her limits, and the limit had been reached by Ursula Wade.

Ursula's thin face was worried, and her close-set eyes fixed themselves spitefully upon the homely face of the woman behind the counter.

"I tell you my father is coming this afternoon. I must get some things in for tea, and he'll pay when he comes."

The dame shrugged her shoulders and moved a tray of chocolates away from Ursula. The action seemed a precautionary one, but Ursula did not notice it.

"I've heard you say them things before Miss Ursula. You know the proverb about the boy who called wolf—"

"Oh, stuff!" said Ursula shortly. "I'm not here to listen to proverbs—"

"Nor am I here to listen to fairy tales," retorted the dame readily. "You owe me fourteen shillings, and more fool me for letting you owe it. I don't suppose I shall see it this term, and I'm not the only one that doesn't trust you. I see a lot that goes on, though I don't say much."

"You mean you don't mind your own business," Ursula returned, a pink spot in either cheek. "You needn't be afraid that your paltry account won't be paid."

"Doesn't seem so paltry if you can't pay it," was the milder response.

"I tell you my father will pay it. My father is a rich man. It just happens that I'm hard up, and that Jemima's hard up, too."

"Oh, if Miss Jemima—" murmured the tuckshop keeper, and she looked over Ursula's shoulder.

Then Ursula turned sharply to notice that someone had just come in through the doorway of the tuckshop.

"Little-me," said the newcomer.

She was a girl of pleasant expression, and of more than average good looks, and, although the tortoiseshell-rimmed monocle which she wore in her right eye made her appearance striking, it robbed her oval, oven-featured face of its outstanding charm.

There were other girls at Morcove with shingled hair, but none so naturally wavy or of that rich reddish brown that Jemima's was.



MR WADE'S "GENEROSITY"!

Mr. Wade pulled out a coin from his pocket and held it out to Paula. "Get some sweets!" he said haughtily. "I would have given you more if you hadn't been impertinent!" Paula went red and turned away.

"I was telling this," said Ursula, with a contemptuous wave of the hand—"this old fool that we must have some things for tea."

Jemima's grey eyes beamed upon the proprietress and then at Ursula.

"I'm sure," she said, "that whatever you said was pointed, witty, and pungent, my dear, and delightful, Ursula—a model of politeness, crisp without being curt, polished without that dazzling brilliance that hurts the eye."

"I told her what I thought," frowned Ursula, who hated her friend's long-windedness.

"That is what I meant," agreed Jemima. "Hunger must be appeased, you know, and the fact is, dear lady, we haven't got a bean. Very sad and that rot, but there it is."

Jemima reclined on a chair near by, and dived

her hands into the pockets of her short coat. Not in any circumstances could she have been called boyish, save for the mere affectation of hair close cut, and the neat, mannish clothes and monocle. Essentially she was a dainty girl.

Very charming she looked, and the heart of the tuckshop proprietress warmed to her.

"I can give you credit, Miss Jemima," she said. "But Miss Ursula owes me fourteen shillings, and I've heard her tales before."

"It's the twice-told tale," agreed Jemima, "which Shakespeare or somebody else says 'gives one the complete and absolute pip.'"

Ursula tapped her fingers on the counter. Only the fact that her father wished her to be friends with this girl had prevented her from becoming violently angry on more than one occasion.

"Well, if we're going to get some things, we'd better get them," she said shortly. "We'll have some scones, some tarts, some ordinary cakes—"

She gave a hurried list, while Jemima sat and looked out across the lawns towards the school.

And as she looked a stout gentleman went hurrying across, a stout gentleman, very red of face, and looking rather angry.

"Odds bodkins and knitting-needles, not to mention crochet-hooks," she drawled, "but there goes a Spartan! Look how lightly he trips it, you know."

Ursula turned.

"Oh—father!" she said.

"I know it," sighed Jemima. "Let that be a lesson, Ursula. In life, always be prepared for anything—absolutely anything!"

Ursula, though, was not listening. She hurried from the shop, leaving Jemima to see to the list of things. But Jemima seemed busy with her thoughts.

Reflectively she looked after the daughter of Mr. Wade.

"But, there!" She smiled to the proprietress of the school tuckshop. "What could one possibly expect, really? I mean, one doesn't gather grapes from the merry old thorn, nor cheery old figs from the homely thistle!"

The tuckshop dame lifted a package.

"Will you want these biscuits?" she asked. "Your friend—"

Jemima raised her hand.

"Oh, please—please call her Ursula," she said, in pained tones.

The dame lowered the package and smiled peculiarly. She was not used to girls who spoke in this queer fashion, and she never had quite made up her mind how to take Jemima. She rather liked Jemima, and from what she had heard girls say in the tuckshop she gathered that she was thought quite a good sort but for one thing—that she was a friend of Ursula's.

"I thought she was your friend," the woman exclaimed, for she liked to know all that went on, even to the extent of hearing who had quarrelled with whom.

"Friend of mine—who, Ursula? Yes, bosom pal," said Jemima, smiling. "Really, she is. I assure you. We are scarcely ever apart, you know. She's Mary and I'm the little lamb. One has to be a Spartan. My gov'nor, you know—"

"Your father's a famous playwright, isn't he, Miss Jemima?"

"Please call me Jimmy," said Jemima. "The gov'nor always calls me Jimmy, you know. Gov'nor's a stickler for the Spartan life. I find the Spartan life very sad sometimes. But

there—" She rose. "I'm now going to meet Mr. Joshua Wade and clutch him in a friendly grasp. Nice man—"

"Y-e-es," said the dame.

"But I wonder?" said Jemima.

"Yes, Miss Jemima—I mean, Jimmy."

"I wonder," said Jemima, as she took the parcels, "if he bounces?"

And she passed out of the tuckshop, leaving the dame shaking her head very sadly indeed.

Jemima walked across the quadrangle carrying her parcels. She was not an expert carrier of parcels. Her monocle dropped to the end of its ribbon, and as she tried to retrieve it, the parcels dropped one by one. Only one did she manage to retain.

Then Paula Creel, who had just come through the gate, had to go to her assistance.

She picked up a parcel and handed it to Jemima, and Polly Linton helped too.

"Oh, thanks, so much; that is awfully nice of you," smiled Jemima. "So careless of me, dropping parcels."

"Pewhaps I could cawwy some," suggested Paula.

Polly nudged her then, for was not Jemima a friend of Ursula's, and did she not speak to Ursula, which meant that she, too, was under the sentence of silence?

"That would be rather sweet of you," agreed Jemima. "I find parcels so awfully bothersome.

If you'd take these two"—she handed Paula two—"and you three," she added to Polly, depositing three in that surprised girl's arms, "I could manage my beastly eyeglass."

Paula Creel tucked the parcels one under either arm, and Polly, stupefied by the cheek of Jemima—the sheer cheek, as she afterwards expressed it—held her parcels, too, although she came very near to dumping them on the ground.

"There," said Jemima, still smiling, as she affixed her monocle, "that's done. I'd take a parcel from you, but I have read in the best books—'Simple Science for Growing Youngsters,' and that rot, you know—that an equal load is better than an unequal. Two parcels are better than one, like two heads—what!"

She walked on, and Paula walked with her, leaving Polly to follow.

Polly Linton frowned and then laughed. She simply couldn't help it.

"Here, I'm not going to carry these things," she protested.

"Not?" asked Jemima. "Too heavy?"

"Not that, but why can't you carry your own parcels?" Polly demanded. "The cheek—"

"Oh, be Spartan—be a man!" said Jemima, in gentle remonstrance. "Stiff upper lip, and all that, you know. Brace yourself, take a deep breath and say, 'I will not let a simple parcel-master me.' Every day and in every way I get stronger and stronger!"

And Jemima walked on.

But Polly was not going to walk on. Polly was a girl with very definite ideas, and she put the parcels down hard. One of them unfortunately contained eggs, and there was a squeal as they landed on the ground, while Polly, in some dismay and contrition, looked at the result.

But Jemima did not seem perturbed.

"Voila, the omelette!" she said merrily. "The beast of burden forswears the yoke—what! Rather good that, and quite original," she laughed.

"Oh, bai Jove, how wotten!" exclaimed Paula. "They're broken, Polly!"

"I know," said Polly contritely. "Sorry! I'll get some more."

"Don't bother," Jemima replied easily. "Quite a pleasure. If you hadn't dropped them, I would have, and in the hall, too. You may as well kick the ruins aside, though."

And Polly Linton found herself walking along, still carrying the other parcels, while Jemima accompanied them, chatting gaily, just for all the world as though she did not know she was sentenced to silence.

"Wouldn't care to come to tea," asked Jemima, when they halted in the corridor; "just a merry party? Mr. Wade and his daughter—and me. Cheery conversation, sparkling remarks. I dare say Mr. Wade is quite—"

"No, thanks," said Polly emphatically.

"Oh, you've met him before?" nodded Jemima. "I quite see."

"Yes, wather, and he offered me a penny," said Paula indignantly. "Fancy—"

Jemima's lips gave a flicker of a smile.

"Pooh, what's a penny to him?" she said airily.

"He's frightfully rich, you know. Don't you worry about that. A penny is nothing to him. Good gracious, no! He simply flings the money about, I believe."

Paula blinked. Paula was not always very bright, but Polly Linton grinned faintly.

"Well, I hope you enjoy your tea," she said. Jemima nodded her head, and took the parcels from them.

"Sure to," she said. "He's a great friend of the pater's. Bosom friends, like Ursula and me—what!"

Then it was Polly's turn to be puzzled, and when she and Paula reached Study No. 12, where Betty Barton, the captain of the Fourth, had had tea ready for ages, Polly expressed it as her opinion that Jemima was a "queer sort."

"I can't make her out a bit," confessed Polly. "She seems an awfully decent sort really, and yet she can go about with that horrid Ursula."

"Well, I," said Betty Barton sensibly, "don't think she's any fonder of Ursula than we are. There's something more behind it. It looks to me as though she has to be friends with Ursula."

"Even then, there's no need to stick to her, when she tells lies and cheats and spies on people's correspondence," said Polly, in a tone of friendliness. "Besides, why should she have to be a friend of anyone's?"

Betty did not know the answer to that, however, and Paula Creel could not think, either.

"I wathah like her, all the same," Paula remarked, as she picked up some buttered toast. "But I do weally wish she would cut Ursula."

And there, for the time being, the matter ended; but it did not mean that they had dismissed Jemima from their thoughts. She was the sort of girl that one cannot treat in that way.

Mr. Wade Sows the Seed.

URSULA WADE caught up her father just as he was entering the school. He was standing on the steps looking very lost, and none too pleased.

When, therefore, his daughter hurried up from behind and caught him by the sleeve, he gave a start and turned.

"Oh, there you are!" he exclaimed. "Been

looking everywhere. Why didn't you meet me at the station?"

"I didn't know the train, father," said Ursula meekly. "I'm sorry—"

"I've tramped this countryside," said Mr. Wade, with a wave of the arm, "for hours, and only the fact of my meeting two of your little schoolfellows prevented my spending the night in the open. And what would you have cared, hey?"

"I should have cared very much, father. I'm sorry I did not come, but I stayed with Jemima."

She looked about her, glad that there was no one within hearing.

"We're great friends, father."

They walked into the school, and Mr. Wade puffed and panted so much then, that to talk was quite impossible; nor had Ursula Wade any particular desire to carry on the conversation where it might be overheard by those for whose ears it was not intended.

Nothing more was said, therefore, until, after visiting Miss Somerfield, Mr. Wade accompanied his daughter to the study which she shared with Jemima. It was a small room, and Mr. Wade gave a grunt as he entered it.

He looked about him, and Ursula, behind his back, frowned, and wondered what next he would find to complain about.

"Stuff," he remarked. "Open the window, for goodness' sake!"

Ursula opened the window, and there came through a breeze that shivered the curtains, knocked a vase from the table, and sent a cold draught across Mr. Wade's too thinly clad head.

"Not like that," he said, flinging down his coat and peeling off his gloves. "Do you think I want to be blown out of the school again? Haven't you got any sense?"

"You said open the window, father."

"I didn't say fling it wide open, did I? Use your brains, my girl. That's what they're given you for. Is this the best chair you can manage?"

Ursula tightened her lip, and closed the bottom of the window, opening the top, while her father prodded the glowing coals with the poker.

"Quite a nice little room, eh, father?" Ursula remarked nervously.

"Could be, if it were tidy."

Ursula laughed, rather shakily.

"I do try to keep it tidy. But Jemima's so careless, really she is!"

"Huh! How does she strike you?"

"Jemima? Oh—quite nice," said Ursula cautiously.

"Bit of a young duffer, I thought," said Mr. Wade. "Eccentric and scatter-brained, like her father. That man has no business sense. A child could wrap him round its little finger." Reflectively he stared into the fire. "And where business is concerned, I'm not exactly a child," he added, for the first time chuckling. A fat, high-pitched chuckle it was, and he rubbed his podgy hands in satisfaction before the fire.

"Jemima's frightfully eccentric," agreed Ursula. "I'm friends with her, though."

"And you're keeping to my instructions, eh?" asked Mr. Wade, with a quick glance at the door. "No chance of our being overheard?"

He gave a nod of the head at the door, and Ursula gave a shake of negation. There was no danger of anyone listening at a keyhole when it was her conversation that was to be heard. Cora Grandways, perhaps, might not be particular, but



A SNUB FOR THE SNEAK. "You owe teen shillings already," said the tuck-shop dame. "I don't suppose I shall see it this term. But you can't have anything else until your account is paid!" Ursula flushed.

Cora stooped to such things, not from mere idle inquisitiveness, as Ursula did, but because it happened that her peculiar end might be served.

Now Cora had no axe to grind, so Ursula shook her head.

"Good!" said Mr. Wade. "Never be too sure, though. The fact is, Ursula, I want you to study this play that the girl's transcribing. But more than that, she has other and more important work. If you help with the play you'll get the run of her papers—see?"

"I see, father."

"Now there's something much more private and much more important than the play that she's typing. I haven't mentioned it before, because I know you have keen eyes, and if you get near any paper you read it. That," he added unnecessarily, "is why I have a Yale lock on my desk at home."

He grunted, and looked at his daughter.

"Mum's the word, remember, and if all goes well you shall have a really good present. If not—well, I shall come down on you like a ton of coals, in a way you won't appreciate."

Ursula nodded her head. What the threat meant she did not know, but her father was just as likely as not to take her from Morocco and send her out into the world as a typist or a shop-assistant, as punishment for spoiling his plans. He was a merciless man.

"Carstairs owes me a debt of gratitude. I saved his life—or he thinks I did, and he never forgets little things like that" went on her father. "Where ignorance is bliss it is folly to be wise, perhaps. Anyhow, I'm his best friend, and he confides in me. Therefore, I know that

he has some specially secret document, the contents of which he won't even divulge to me. But he lets his daughter know—he trusts her."

"I see."

Mr. Wade leaned forward, and his small eyes rested keenly on his daughter's face. Very cunning eyes they were, and it was easy to see whence Ursula's eyes had come.

"She's got to trust you, too, and you've got to get hold of that document, and either memorise it or copy it. You've taken those lessons in typing and shorthand?"

"Yes, father. Every half-holiday before she came."

"And you can get the thing down in shorthand, eh? And then, if necessary, type it?"

"Yes, father, easily. But she's very careful."

"She would be. But we can fix that between us. Now this is nothing dishonourable, you understand," he burst in suddenly. "Understand that. It is very secret and important, but quite honourable."

"Of course, father. I understand that," said Ursula, and wondered why her father went to such lengths in the hopeless endeavour to deceive her. She had seen enough of her father's correspondence to know that his business methods were doubtful, to say the least of them. Ursula stopped at nothing, but stooped to anything, and never had a prophet been less honoured in his land than Mr. Wade was in his own household. They knew him too well.

"But be careful—be very careful, indeed," said Mr. Wade finally, as he leaned back in his chair and took a cigar from his pocket. "Her father trusts her and believes in her—one word to him from her, and we are finished. If we can undermine his faith and prove that she has been careless, that she has talked of his business, so much the better. I leave it to you."

He would have said more, but there were voices outside. They both recognised Paula's voice and Polly's; then the door opened and a face adorned by a monocle peeped in.

"Oh, Jemima," exclaimed Ursula, jumping up, "father's been here all the time! Father, this is Jemima!"

"We have met," smiled Mr. Wade genially. "Eh, Jimmy? We're great friends."

"Pals," said Jimmy, extending her hand and beaming upon him. "How's the gov.? Still scribbling away—still scraping the old pen on the paper in fine style, staggering humanity with wit and wisdom and what-not?"

"Still writing his excellent plays," agreed Mr. Wade, a trifle pompously. "And I'm proud to hear him call me a friend. A great man, your father, Jimmy—a great man and a noble man."

"What ho!" said Jemima. "That's where I get it from, perhaps. Did you walk?"

"I did—a very long walk, too. I may say I—"

"Spartan. The right spirit," conceded Jemima blithely. "I do like strong, hard walking, don't you, Mr. Wade? People who dash along heel-and-toe and feet-and-heel, splashing through the old mud and that."

"I am not fond of walking," said Mr. Wade. Jemima, having dumped the parcels on the table, warmed her slim hands by the fire, then dived them into her pockets.

"Cheery little room," she observed. "All merriness and gaiety. What it would be like without Ursula's gay laughter and sparkling conversation.

I don't know. Ursula's going to be one of the most popular girls in the school before I've finished."

"Oh," said Mr. Wade. "Isn't she now?"
Jemima was conscious of having made a false stop, and she screwed her monocle gracefully into her eyes.

"With the right people," she said. "With the right people, of course. But universally popular is what we want—what!"

"I don't want it," said Ursula shortly. "I'm satisfied with one friend who's worth while."

"Quality before quantity, hey?" said Mr. Wade. "A good business motto, my dears. Quality before all. Otherwise where should I be?"

"But you, surely," said Jemima gracefully, "are a combination of the two."

And there followed a slightly awkward pause in which Mr. Wade, conscious of his own bulkiness, became aware that his remark could have been better expressed.

"I meant," he explained, "that in business the quality—the unimpeachable honesty of the business and the excellent selection of my clientele—has made me what I am. Had I stooped to gain vulgar popularity—had my clients been of the common herd—"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I see," said Jemima. "Just so. The gov'nor always says he admires you more than any other professional man he knows."

She was clearing the table, and she and Ursula commenced to get tea. Jemima put on the kettle and Ursula started to make toast. It was quite a pleasant, cosy little scene really, but Jemima did not look particularly pleased when her face was shielded from the father and daughter.

Nor did she talk merrily, save when addressed. Jemima was obviously "busy with her thoughts, and her thoughts were centred upon Mr. Wade.

She could not "stand" Mr. Wade, and she could not for the life of her imagine how her father could tolerate him for a moment. But her father was not, in her estimation, a judge of people. He was a perfect darling, and the most charming and wonderful man she had ever met. But he was too trusting altogether. She would not have trusted Mr. Wade any more than Ursula.

"What pretty hair, my dear," Mr. Wade said to Jemima.

"My own," said Jemima flippantly. "Quaint colour, of course."

"Delightful," said Mr. Wade heavily, as he thought out compliments. "I am honoured that you and Ursula are friends. Your father and I wished that more than anything. That the daughters of old friends should, too, be friends—what better?"

"Nothing," agreed Jemima. "And when the daughter is like Ursula—"

"Ursula considers herself fortunate," said Mr. Wade wheezily, "to be friends with such a girl as you are. I like to think of you together, working hand-in-hand, re-typing your father's work."

Jemima started slightly.

"Your father wants that, too," Mr. Wade exclaimed. "He has hopes that Ursula and you may at an early age collaborate on some fine piece of fiction."

"Ursula could turn out as fine a piece of fiction as anyone at her present age," said Jemima easily. "She is famed for it in the Form."

Ursula gave her a savage look, but said nothing. Her father did not notice her silence, nor had he the wit to appreciate the irony of Jemima's remarks.

He was far too busy thinking out cunning things to say—busy devising hints to show Jemima and Ursula what was expected of them—and Mr. Wade was too much of an egotist to study what other people thought.

"There is one thing about Ursula," he said, as he pulled a chair up to the table for tea. "She can be trusted with one's life. A secret remains a secret with her. Ursula is to be trusted, I am thankful to say; and at home I tell her all my business secrets, confide in her as in a partner, knowing that it will go no further, that she will only interest herself in that which I intended her to be interested in. What that means—what a source of gratification that is to a business man, my dear Jimmy, you can guess."

"What-ho!" said Jemima, and gave Mr. Wade, when he was not looking, a very queer look and a whimsical smile. Sadly Jemima shook her head. She didn't think Mr. Wade one half as subtle as he thought himself.

But he was her father's friend and she his hostess.

Right royally she looked after him, placed a cushion behind his head, filled his pipe when he drew it forth in company with his pouch, just as she did for her father.

And when he went she gave him as warm a farewell as she could affect.

"You like my father?" exclaimed Ursula, unable to keep from her voice a note of surprise.

"The double of you," smiled Jemima. "Like



STRAIGHT SPEAKING. "Run away, Ursula!" said Jemima, quite firmly. "Your face really and truly jars on me, and your presence makes me shudder. Walk, run, or crawl away—but go! I want to think!"

father, like daughter. A perfectly fascinating man. Noble man and noble daughter—what!"

But Ursula did not smile with pleasure. She gave Jemima a look of bitter hatred. If only it had been possible, she would have said something bitter and stinging. But that was ruled quite out of court by her father's stern injunctions.

All very well for him to talk, though, but it seemed to Ursula Wade that her task was going to be anything but easy!

The French Crib Again.

"FRENCH exam," groaned Polly Linton, and Polly spoke with the deep and awful voice of despair. For Polly was not a great French scholar. She was not any kind of great scholar, if it came to that, but French was a particularly weak point in her none too strong scholastic armour.

And on the morrow, mademoiselle, the French mistress, was to tilt at that weak armour with a lance.

Polly Linton and a crowd of others were in the Common-room, and French books were very much in evidence. Practically every girl there had a French book. Even Paula Creel, who had wandered down to the Common-room "just for a chat," had a French book with her, although Paula had not yet summoned up sufficient energy to open it.

"Exam," echoed Jemima, turning round. Jemima was standing by the bookshelf in the corner of the room. Quite a number of books were there, and she was searching for something to read.

"Yes. Didn't you know?" asked Betty Barton. "French exam, first of terminal exams," said Polly with a groan. "Doesn't matter to you, as you haven't been here long. You're lucky."

Jemima screwed her eyeglass into her eye and smiled.

"Let me cheer you on," she suggested. "Let me sing a little chorus of glee and encouragement. But don't—don't tell me you are all swotting."

"We are," nodded Madge Minden.

And it was surprising how they were all talking to Jemima, forgetting that she was in Coventry. Paula had taken the lead earlier, and Polly and Betty, having followed, felt that they could not very well cut Jemima again.

"Now that," exclaimed Jemima, perching on a chair, "is really saddening."

"Bother French!" said Polly.

"Je l'aime—moi," said Trixie Hope simply.

"Oh, you, you spout French like like a primer!" said Polly, in disgust. "I really believe you like the silly language. Why can't they talk English like sensible beings?"

"Why not?" demanded Jemima. "And yet one must learn. That's what school is for, and if there is nothing to learn—well, I ask you! Let's put our backs into it, girls. A stiff upper lip, and all that rot, you know. Now then, avez-vous la plume de ma tante?"

"Non," said Polly with a grin. "Mais j'ai le crayon de mon frere—"

"Avec les cloches?" asked Jemima, as though that were a great point. "With bells on?"

"Mais non," sighed Polly. "Pas with what you said."

"Ah, well," replied Jemima, "thank goodness

I speak it like a native—like a dumb native, you know."

"Just about," Trixie agreed. "Vous avez l'accent de—de—"

"Trois, quatre, cinq, six," nodded Jemima. "I can get as far as that myself. I was always a one, as you might say, at counting in French. They understand every word I say in Paris—provided," she added, "I talk English, of course."

"Oh, of course," smiled Betty. "Your French accent is topping, all the same, so different from all others."

"Quite original," agreed Jemima gaily. "I don't think mademoiselle quite likes it, but then one can't please everyone. I got my accent from the gov'nor, you see. Wonderful French scholar, the gov'nor. Runs in the family, I suppose. Ah, well!"

She picked up the chosen book and strolled to the door.

"You'll be swotting the whole evening, I suppose?" she said. "No time for a little brightness and merriment. No painting the jolly old school a brilliant, vivid scarlet."

Polly Linton pricked up her ears. "I'm game," she said. "But how?"

"I was thinking, really, of carols," Jemima said. "Christmas isn't such a fearful way off, and in the jolly old festive season a few carols wouldn't be out of place, you know. I'm sure Miss Massingham would appreciate it if we gathered outside her door and carolled. I can picture her sitting with yawning ears listening to the touching strains."

"So can I," said Polly.

"Yes, wathor, deah geals! I'm afwaid Miss Massingham wouldn't quite approve," decided Paula.

"What, with your pretty voice?" exclaimed Jemima. "Oh, tush, say not so, my fair maid! Just a few of us in chorus—say a dozen—and the school would be brighter. The gov'nor is always saying get back the Dickens' Christmas, or words to that effect, and I have to follow in his footsteps, haven't I? I mean to say, a daughter has to think of the family pride. How about a little carolling?"

The girls in the Common-room exchanged looks and smiles. They were quite game for a little carolling. But they also knew Miss Massingham well, and what they knew of her told them that they would not be appreciated.

"We should giggle," pointed out Polly. "She'd guess it was a joke."

"I'm not quite sure I know any carols," said Jemima reflectively. "But it's the spirit of the thing, you know—the Christmas spirit that matters. We can make up some sort of tune, and sing it loudly."

"We can sing it loudly enough," Polly agreed, "only—"

"Yes—only—and a bit only, too," agreed Madge Minden. "I prefer to swot French, thanks, Jemima. If you're wise, you'll do the same."

Jemima sighed sadly.

"Perhaps I'll coach my friend Ursula a little; but I'm sorry about the carol. I thought you would take kindly to a little bright interlude in the otherwise dullness of school life. All work and no play—what!"

But there were no carollers, and Jemima returned to Ursula's study, her book under her arm, wishing that she could have found an excuse

for staying in the Common-room, and wishing the others had something to do other than swot.

Ursula was in the study by herself, and she looked up at Jemima's entrance rather guiltily.

"Cheerio!" smiled Jemima. "I hear there's a French exam to-morrow. Swotting?"

"No fear," said Ursula. "Watch me! Besides, you let them take that crib of mine."

"Crib," repeated Jemima, dropping into an armchair. "Your crib? Oh, yes, I remember! I put it in my desk out of your way—to keep you from temptation, or temptation from you, and the dear French mistress purloined it."

"You were a duffer," said Ursula crossly. "Now, how am I going to get on in the exam.?"

"If I could get it back—"

"Yes?"

Ursula looked at Jemima, and that girl's face seemed expressionless.

"Well," said Ursula, "I could get high marks, and you could, too. It makes a lot of difference at the end of term—saves a ragging at home. And your pater would be frightfully pleased—"

"If I cribbed?" said Jemima.

"No," flushed Ursula, "if you got a lot of marks in the French exam."

Jemima dropped her monocle from her eye.

"You do think of things, don't you," she observed. "Bright, chippy things. If we get that French book, we can crib like billy-oh—what! Cheat like anything, and diddle the others."

"Well, I don't know about diddling the others," retorted Ursula sulkily and impatiently. "I'm not thinking about the others. They don't think about me."

"They certainly try not to," agreed Jemima.

"Oh, don't be sarcastic. If you hadn't been, so beastly clever in the Form-room, that book wouldn't have been confiscated. Now mademoiselle has it."

"Sad," agreed Jemima. "Now you'll have to work honestly. But there, it's an ill wind that doesn't blow someone a little bit of good, you know. It'll be a change for you—and a change is as good as a rest, surely. It'll be like a tonic, and bring the colour glowing to your bright little cheeks, Ursula. Back will come that priceless schoolgirl complexion."

"Oh, stuff!"

And Ursula lapsed into sulky silence.

Jemima put her book down after a moment's glance at it, and then picked up her small portable typewriter. That made Ursula turn to her quickly.

"Going out of the room?" she asked in surprise, as Jemima went to the door.

"Upstairs, to work in the dorm.," Jemima nodded. "The noise will distract your thoughts. How can you swot irregular verbs with this noise going on—what? I mean to say, quite impossible."

"I don't mind it—you can stay," said Ursula eagerly. "Do stay! I like the noise."

"Couldn't think of it," Jemima said politely. "Quite impossible. Never shall it be said that I prevented a Spartan from getting to work. I like to see your eyes glaring at the page, your teeth clenched hard, and your nails biting into your palms as you work. Wonderful—what! So long!"

And Jemima went out of the room, leaving Ursula glaring after her. It really did seem that she was not going to be given a single chance of

prying into Jemima's affairs, unless— And then Ursula smiled mysteriously to herself.

Jemima thought that she could put her off, did she? Jemima thought that she knew a trick worth two. Well, Ursula was convinced that she knew one worth three, and, shrugging her shoulders, she looked down at the papers—old papers that she had torn from Betty Barton's French exercise-book. Betty had not noticed the loss of those papers, but they would be a great assistance to Ursula in going over the back work that had been done this term.

She did not, however, give them great attention, for she was thinking of Jemima, and wondering what excuse she could make to go up to the dormitory and see that girl at work.

Confident though she felt that she would be able to see Jemima's paper when she wanted to, she yet felt a burning curiosity to interrupt the present work, a curiosity that was uncontrollable.

It was only a moment after Jemima's departure that Ursula went out of the room.

To her amazement, she had not to go to the dormitory at all to find Jemima. Jemima was walking across the hall!

She saw Ursula and halted.

"Hallo!" she said. "Where's the gym-oddment cupboard, where the Indian clubs and what-nots are kept?"

"Gym cupboard? Oh, in the Form-room," said Ursula. "Don't you know it?"

Jemima was swinging a bunch of keys, and she looked at them.

"You seem to know everything. Which key is which?" she asked. "I was told, but have forgotten."

"The big one," Ursula answered readily. "The others are for the drawers in Miss Massingham's study, and one for the bicycle-shed, one for the outer door—"

"Marvellous!" admired Jemima, with a smile. "You know everything."

"I'll go and get whatever you want, if you want to start work," Ursula added, ignoring the remark.

For a second or so Jemima regarded her thoughtfully; then she nodded her head in answer to an unspoken question. There could be no harm whatever in letting Ursula carry out the commission.

"It's just an Indian club," she explained.

"Goodness knows whether Miss Massingham intends braining me with it. I shouldn't be surprised. But that is what she wants."

Ursula took the keys, nodded, and hurried off. She returned a minute later bearing the club and the keys. Jemima took the keys and tucked the club under her arm.

"Splendid, excellent Ursula!" she sighed.

"Such a faithful stand-by in times of stress and what you might call emergency. But—"

Ursula half-turned to hurry off.

"What?" she asked. "So you want something else done?"

Jemima regarded her long and sadly.

"What are you hiding behind your back?" she asked.

"Nothing."

"I think," said Jemima, "that it's the French crib of yours, my dear, sweet, trustworthy Ursula. Is it?"

Ursula shrugged her shoulders.

"Yes, it is, if you want to know. I can put it

back easily enough. Anyway, mademoiselle will think Miss Massingham took it."

"So that's why you were so eager to help," smiled Jemima. "I thought it couldn't be natural helpfulness, and that's why you told me what each key was for, and omitted to mention the fact that the French book was there."

"Oh, don't bother," said Ursula. "I've got the book, and it doesn't matter to you. You'd better take the keys back to Miss Massingham with the club."

Jemima, however, jingled the keys.

"I'll trouble you for the book, Ursula. I must take it back," she said simply. "Can't allow this, you know. It's what one might call taking a mean advantage. Of course, not that you would do such a thing wittingly."

"Hand it back—to you!" exclaimed Ursula. "What rot!"

Jemima held out her hand.

"Sorry, but I must have it. I oughtn't to have let the keys out of my charge. But I didn't know there was a desk-key there, or, naturally, I wouldn't have trusted you."

"What?"

"I'm not blaming you," smiled Jemima. "Temptation was too strong for you. All the same, I shall put that book back, you know. Will you give it to me, or must I take it?"

Ursula Wade glared rebelliously, but her eyes met the steady eyes of Jemima, and with an impatient gesture she handed over the book—handed it over savagely.

"I think you are the silliest prig I ever met," she said bitterly. "It can't hurt you, whether I crib or not, can it?"

"I'm thinking of your pater, dear heart. He'd be shocked if he thought his lovely little lamb cheated. Silly, of course, but life's like that—what!"

"You are!" sneered Ursula. "I believe you want me to fail in the exam, just out of spite."

"Well, you always did think nice, pretty little thoughts," Jemima smiled. "But never mind. This will give you no end of a flip up. You'll be able to look in the glass and say, 'I'm a better girl, I am, a stronger and a better girl.'"

"Bosh!" said Ursula. "Take the thing back if you must!"

And she swung round on her heel and walked rapidly away.

Back to Coventry.

JEMIMA looked after Ursula and smiled whimsically. Then she walked back to the Fourth Form room with the French book, Indian club and keys. It was not Jemima's idea of playing the game to steal a book when one was trusted implicitly with keys; apparently Ursula held different views.

Which key fitted the desk Jemima did not know, but she switched on the light and sorted out the bunch. She was just deciding to use one of the smaller likelier-looking keys when the door of the room opened.

Miss Massingham entered, looking rather short-tempered.

"Oh, there you are, Jemima!" she said. "What on earth have you been doing all this time? I sent you some minutes ago."

Jemima wheeled round, and then stepped aside smartly to hide the French book that lay on the desk. It was quickly done, but not quickly enough.

"You have been at the desk," said Miss Massingham sharply. "What is this?"

She stepped forward and picked up Ursula's crib. One glance at it was quite enough to show her what it was.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "You took this out of the desk, Jemima. I saw it there only this morning." Very grimly she looked at the book, and extended her hand for the bunch of keys. "You had no right to go to the desk, Jemima. It was a most dishonourable thing to do—most dishonourable, and I am ashamed of you! Are you the girl from whom the French mistress confiscated that book?"

Jemima nodded her head shortly.

"Yes, she did take it from me, Miss Massingham."

"So you are a cheat, Jemima, as well as a thief. I would have you know that Morcove girls do not cheat. Where you have been educated before I do not know. I understood that you have been to school in France. I should have thought your French sufficiently good without the necessity to resort to such base trickery as this."

Jemima stood quite still, not saying a word.

"I trusted you and I gave you the keys. I shall never trust you again, Jemima. You will come with me to my study—now!"

Miss Massingham swept out of the room, and Jemima followed, her heart too full for words. For the second time she was suffering for Ursula's sins, and she was tempted to tell the truth.

But to tell the truth would be to expose Ursula, and that was getting too near sneaking for Jemima's liking. Besides, the punishment would be too much.

It was hard, though, to be called a thief and a cheat, to have oneself looked upon as a person who could not possibly be trusted. For that is how the mistress of the Fourth would look upon her now.

In Miss Massingham's room she waited while the mistress rang the bell for the maid. The maid appeared, and was immediately despatched to tell the Fourth-Formers to assemble in the Form-room.

"I shall make a public example of you, Jemima," said Miss Massingham. "This hideous growth of cheating must be stopped, and there is only one way to stop it. I hesitated with Ursula Wade, but if I am not too firm I shall find other weak girls being persuaded to slack at work, yet pass examinations by the simple but hateful method of cheating."

Her eyes were glittering angrily, and Jemima said not a word.

It seemed ages before the maid returned to announce that the Fourth-Formers were in the Form-room, but Jemima managed to smile. One of her mottoes was to smile in times of difficulty, and what was a time of difficulty if this was not?

"Come, Jemima!"

Jemima adjusted her monocle and followed the mistress. Miss Massingham walked very quickly without looking behind, and Jemima shook her head sadly at the pace and was soon some twenty yards behind.

So far was she behind that when Miss Massingham turned a corner she was out of Jemima's sight. It was then that Ursula Wade hurried up, white of face and anxious.

"Jemima, what's wrong? I asked the maid, and she said you—"

"Wrong, my dear?" said Jemima, halting.

"Nothing much. I'm going to be made a public exhibition of."

"Why?" gasped Ursula.

"My beauty," smiled Jemima. "What else? I'm to be held up as a model for all the girls to copy, don't you know—my shapely features—"

"It's not about the French book?" broke in Ursula.

"Well, yes it is. Don't let me stop your running in and owning up," remarked Jemima. "I wouldn't do that. Now's your time to snatch a little glory, Ursula. Run forward and say that it was you who took the French book, and I who was putting it back."

Quizzically she looked at Ursula, and felt inclined to laugh.

But Ursula did not laugh; she drew back.

"You're going to give me away?" she panted.

"You're going to betray me?"

"I always betray my pals," said Jemima, with a short laugh. "Always! I shall point the

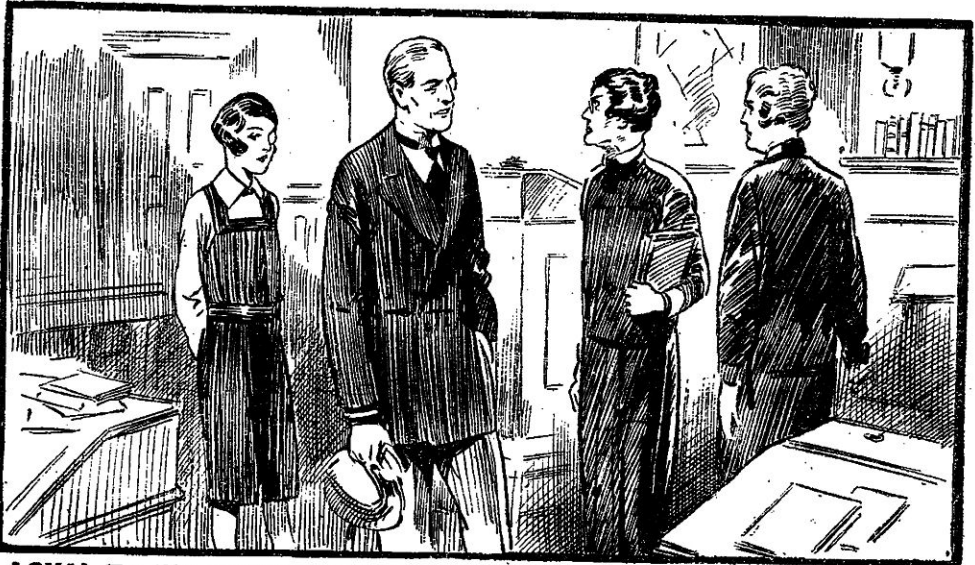
There was a hush then, and Jemima looked at Betty Barton, who looked down at her desk. Jemima smiled at Polly, who looked deliberately away.

"I make a public exhibition of Jemima because I regard this as something utterly disgraceful," said Miss Massingham. "It is an action of which any girl should be ashamed, and yet Jemima stands here—" She did not finish the sentence, but made a disgusted movement of the hand. "The girl is devoid of all shame, and her duplicity makes her crime all the more detestable. I thought she was a girl to be trusted, but I have learned better. I shall punish her severely, and I warn you that the next girl who is found cheating I shall recommend for expulsion!"

"Oh!"

"Good gracious!"

Jemima looked at Ursula. But Ursula was staring hard at her desk and never raising her eyes, convincing herself that it was Jemima's silly



LOYAL TO HIS DAUGHTER.

"If Jemima did not take the book, why did she not say so?" asked Miss Somerfield. "I don't know," answered Captain Carstairs. "But my trust in my daughter is not the slightest bit shaken!"

dramatic finger at you, Ursula, and say, 'That is the villainess! Arrest her, in the King's name!'"

"Jemima" called the angry tones of Miss Massingham. "Where are you?"

And Jemima, after one look at Ursula, hurried on, leaving the other girl red of face to scuttle into the Form-room last of all, and to slink into her place as unostentatiously as she could.

Every eye was upon Jemima, and she stood there devoid of her monocle, looking apparently unconcerned as Miss Massingham began to speak.

"This is a very serious matter I have to bring to your notice, girls. The French mistress confiscated a detestable French book—a book that gives a translation of the French pieces you have to study—and which is, I believe, called a 'Crib.' This book"—she held it aloft—"was locked in the desk. I trusted this girl with the keys of the big cupboard, and she was dishonest enough to open the desk and steal the book back."

fault for taking the book back again—all would have been well otherwise.

"I trust," said Miss Massingham, "that you will treat this matter with the odiousness that it deserves. It is not clever to cheat: it is merely despicable, and a girl who cheats is to be despised most heartily."

No sooner had her voice died away than there came a tap at the door, and Miss Somerfield, the headmistress, entered. Miss Somerfield was not alone, for behind her there was a man of middle age, a good-looking man of aristocratic features and smiling expression. He wore a monocle set in a small platinum frame, and that alone was sufficient to point the resemblance between him and the girl who was standing out before all the Form.

"Oh, Miss Massingham," said the headmistress. "I am sorry to interrupt if you are very busy; But Captain Carstairs has just called in passing,

and he expressed a desire to see the Form at work!"

Captain Carstairs shook Miss Massingham by the hand and gave his daughter a nod and a smile, then a pat on the arm.

"Cheerio, Jimmy, old man," he said. "Going strong?"

Jemima contrived to cover her confusion.

"Just like Samson, guv'nor," she replied.

"Example to the rest of the Form, what?" smiled her father.

"The Form will dismiss," said Miss Massingham suddenly, and there was nothing for them all to do, but walk out of the door.

"Oh, one moment—which girl is Ursula Wade, please?" Captain Carstairs asked.

Ursula would have hurried past, but she was pushed forward by one or two others, and in a second he was shaking her hand.

"You two are pals, eh?" he asked of Jemima. "Splendid, splendid!" he added as that girl nodded her head in agreement. "Just what I wanted. Stick together through thick and thin, my dears. Friendship is the greatest thing in the world—life's most precious gift. Jemima, I know, wouldn't let down a pal, and I congratulate you, Ursula. She's new, but you'll show her the ropes, what? Splendid girl!"

He patted her cheek, and Ursula, smiling unnaturally, walked on. But she halted at Jemima's side as Captain Carstairs went to speak to Miss Massingham.

"You won't let me down!" whispered Ursula huskily. "For goodness' sake, Jemima—I'm sorry—but—but if he found out—if anyone did—my father—would—would—"

"Leave it to me," shrugged Jemima. "They'll tie me to the stake in a minute, so if you smell a sizzling it'll be me. Joan of Arc in three acts, with preface by Miss Massingham. Toodle-oo!"

And Ursula scurried out of the room just as Miss Massingham made her an angry gesture to be gone.

Then the headmistress, turning to Captain Carstairs, told him everything.

"But there must be some mistake," Jemima heard her father say. "In the first place, my daughter would not use such a childish thing as a crib, and in the second place—"

He looked at Jemima then, and their eyes met.

"In the second place," he smiled, "Jimmy just doesn't do that sort of thing. I'm sorry not to be able to accept the evidence."

"But she admits it!" exclaimed Miss Massingham, with some acerbity. "The girl does not deny it."

"Between admitting and not denying," sighed Captain Carstairs, "there is a world of difference. However—"

"Then you refuse to believe the charge, Captain Carstairs?" said Miss Somerfield in surprise.

"Jemima, come here!"

Jemima went forward.

"The book had been in the desk—Jemima had the key. I found her beside the desk with the book. That is the evidence," said Miss Massingham. "If she did not extract the book from the desk, why did she not say so?"

"I don't know," admitted Captain Carstairs. "I really cannot say. Did you—" he began, and then stopped. "Well, I leave the matter absolutely in your hands, Miss Somerfield," he said. "You are headmistress here. But my trust in my daughter is not the slightest bit shaken, I must

say. But really, now"—he glanced at his watch—"I must hurry away."

Then he shook Miss Somerfield's limp hand, next Miss Massingham's, and finally went up to Jemima, and, tilting up her chin, kissed her.

"Jimmy, old man, I know you wouldn't play a knave's trick such as that," he said. "I don't pretend to understand, but I trust you. So-long!"

And he was gone, leaving the two mistresses utterly amazed, and Jemima with a heart that beat like mad, and eyes that were shinier than anyone Morcove had ever seen before.

"An amazing man!"

"A perfectly extraordinary man!"

They did not mean Jemima to hear these words uttered in an undertone; but she heard them, and smiled faintly.

"All the same," said Miss Somerfield, "I must act as I think fit. His faith in the girl is touching, Miss Massingham, but he is a proud man."

Miss Massingham nodded her head.

"Yes; I, too, am inclined to think that is the explanation," she said. "Either he has a foolish blind faith in his daughter, or else did not wish to admit her wrongdoing before us."

In almost a whisper Miss Massingham said that, and then the headmistress turned to Jemima.

"Jemima," she said, "you will do extra French at the mistress's instructions. You may go."

Jemima went, and in the corridor came across a group of girls. Betty was there, and Polly, Madge Minden, and Paula.

At her approach they were silent.

"What about the carolling?" she said gaily.

There was no reply.

"No offers," she said pleasantly.

Still there was silence, and Madge Minden deliberately turned her back.

"Cut dead!" sighed Jemima. "Ah me! This means another long journey to Coventry, I suppose?" She walked on to Ursula's study and entered. "You here," she said. "Would you oblige me by running away for a little while?"

"But," said Ursula, "I—"

"Run away!" said Jemima quite firmly. "I can't stand your face at this moment. Your face really and truly jars upon me, and your presence makes me shudder. Walk, run, or crawl away—any jolly old thing—but go! I want to think!"

So Ursula, with a shrug of the shoulders, went, leaving Jemima to her thoughts.

Jemima was wondering if she was not something of a fool to have sacrificed herself to save Ursula—to save such a girl as Ursula Wade—from her just deserts. It did seem rather like foiling the ends of justice—shielding a wrongdoer, and yet—what alternative had there been? Ursula could have seen one—but to Jemima there was none whatever.

Noblesse oblige, as Paula would have said; Paula would have understood, and perhaps the others, too, had they know the facts. But they did not know, and Jemima was an outcast now—a girl who had been shown, as they thought, in her true colours!

(END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.)

There will be another long complete tale of Jemima and the chums of Morcove School in next week's issue. You must not fail to read of what happened as a result of Jemima's decision to take upon herself the blame for Ursula's wrongdoing. Next week's tale is entitled: "The False Friend!"



Write to me, and address your letters The Editor, The Schoolgirls' Own, The Fleetway House, Harringdon Street, E.C.4.

MY DEAR READERS,

NEXT week's long complete tale of the girls of Morcove School is one which will especially appeal to you. You are certain to be wondering what is going to happen to *Jemima*, now that the girls of the Fourth think they have discovered her "true colours." Will they be undeceived? Next week's story, which is entitled

"THE FALSE FRIEND!"

By *Marjorie Stanton*.

will tell you that, and explain exactly what *Jemima* is doing, and why she acts in the peculiar manner in which she does. Much that has puzzled *Betty Barton & Co.*, and perhaps puzzled you, as well, will be revealed, and you will find that *Jemima* has more sterling qualities than *Betty & Co.* have given her credit for. But I shall not spoil your enjoyment of this fine story by telling you too much about it, but I advise you strongly not to miss it! Of course, next week we shall have the usual long instalments of our two new serials:

"CASTAWAYS OF MYSTERY ISLAND!"

By *Gertrude Nelson*,

and

"IN MOTHER'S PLACE!"

By *Mildred Gordon*.

Your letters telling me what you think of these fine tales are now coming to hand, and I am pleased to see that you all agree with me that they are two of the finest stories I could possibly have picked. If you have not written to me and given me your opinion, do not lose time in doing so. Remember I am always pleased to hear from you, and if you enclose a stamped addressed envelope, I will reply to your letter.

Next week's second complete tale will be:

"GREAT GRANDMA'S PHOTO ALBUM!"

By *Renee Frazer*.

It is a well-told story of two charming sisters who discovered a secret which materially affected them both. Exactly what "Great Grandma's Photo Album" had to do with it I shall leave *Miss Frazer* to tell you, which she has done charmingly in this fine tale.

When you write to me, don't forget to tell me if you would like one of our special complete tales by any particular author. These stories, as I have told you on previous occasions, are generally picked by my readers themselves. They write to me, and tell me the type of story they like and the author whom they consider the best to write that particular story. It makes my work easier to know this, and it makes our little journal ever so much more interesting to readers, who feel that they are actually helping me to edit it.

Your sincere friend,

YOUR EDITOR.



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