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



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HER CHUMS!**

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A Long Complete Morcove story that tells of Lena Daunt's Hour of Reckoning.



# IN FEAR OF HER HEADMISTRESS!



By

MARJORIE  
STANTON.

## Lena no Some "Lost" Money!

"STOP work now, girls! Put your books away, and in five minutes' time the Form will assemble in the music-room."

The pleasant announcement resulted in some beaming looks amongst the members of the Fourth Form at Morcove School.

Tuesday afternoon was always a happy one in this respect—it meant either a singing or dancing lesson.

And to-day, as Miss Redgrave had let the girls know at dinner-time, it was to be dancing. The visiting dancing-mistress would be away from the district next week, and so she was giving a lesson this Tuesday out of its turn.

"This has saved my-life!" declared Polly Linton, as soon as she got outside the class-room with Betty Barton and some of the other chums of Study 12. "I just couldn't do that bit of English grammar that was set for this afternoon!"

"Dreadful, dreadful!" agreed Paula Creel, although she did not look as if wrestling with the curtailed lesson had cost her much effort. "Gwammar should be abolished, geals!"

"Along with maths," said Betty.

"And French!" smiled Helen.

"Yes, wather!" Paula was already consulting her looks in a pocket-mirror as she spoke. "And all the west, bai Jove—dwill and Algebwa and pwep. Above all, pwep!"

"But dancing? Dancing—come on!" cried boisterous Polly, dashing towards the stairs, for the music-room was on the first floor. "Raco the lot of you!"

"Ooo, queek—queek!"

Naomer Nakara, whilst anxious to beat Polly in the race upstairs, had a particular fancy that Paula also must be something better than an "also ran." Naomer got behind Paula, and propelled her forward.

"Healp! Dwoop it, Naomer! My hair—my fwook!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pwepostowous cweature!" sighed Paula, shaking herself to rights after Naomer had sped on, shrieking with laughter. "There, will simply have to be a dwastie change, Betty, deah—yes, wather!"

Of the several girls who chuckled at Paula's oft-heard complaint about the way she was teased, Lena Daunt was one. As they all went upstairs, Lena put herself close to Paula in an affectionate way.

"I do love to see how you and Naomer go on together!" she purred. "The life she leads you, Paula—"

"Yes, wather, the wascal!"

"And yet you know very well you would be miserable without her."

"Misewable? Misewable without Naomer?" gaped Paula. "Weal, powhaps you are wight," she reflected, and broke into sudden smiles. "Haw, haw, haw! Pwecisely! Haow can one be weally argwy? Wather not, bai Jove!"

"As for me," grimaced Lena—"oh, I'm in a rotten mood to-day! I am afraid you must have noticed it."

"On the contwawy, Lena!" was good-natured Paula's beaming assurance. "But what's wong, then? What's the twouble?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"I mean to say, don't you know, we geals, if there is anything wong at any time—"

"I know; you're such good chums!" exclaimed Lena, casting a look of gratitude at Paula. "I do think it's been ripping of you to have been so friendly towards me, when, after all, I'm only a day-girl!"

"What wot! The pwinciple we geals go on," Paula paused on the landing to explain in her high-flown style, "is this, Lena. So long as a geal is all wight, then we want to be all wight to her. But what's the twouble?"

"Nothing, except that I've done a silly thing that makes me feel wild with myself," was Lena's rueful response. "You know that mother was called away from our home in Barncombe a few

days ago, to go to an old friend of hers who is ill in London—"

"Yes, wather!"

"Well, of course, I have had to manage things as best I could at home. There is Elsie, the maid; but I can't leave everything to Elsie. Mother left some money for housekeeping, and I—I've lost part of it."

"I'm sorry for the way I have behaved to you. I want you to be my friend," said Lena Daunt, and Madge Minden, with joyful surprise, agreed. But Lena had reasons of her own for this astounding change, as you will see!

"Ba! Jove!"

"This morning," continued Lena glumly, "when I counted up the money that was still in hand, I found I had lost a pound note. I do feel so annoyed with myself!"

"Good gwacious, it's vewy distwessing, Lena—extremely twying!" Paula's ready sympathy made her exclaim. "So wotten to lose money, especially when it has been entrusted to you, and isn't wrightly your own!"

"But don't you fret on my account, Paula. Don't worry the other girls."

"That's all vewy weal, bai Jove, but it wather places you in a fix—what?"

Lena shrugged, with another grimace.

"I hate keeping the tradespeople waiting," she said, "but there it is! It's no use crying over spilt milk—or lost money!"

And, with what Paula took to be cheerful resignation, the day-girl passed on to the music-room, where most of the Form had already assembled.

Madame Charles, the visiting dancing-mistress, was there. She was a French widow, middle-aged and generously built, and to look at her one would never have associated her with dancing. The girls, whilst they adored her, rejoiced in teasing this excitable and voluble soul.

Sometimes she took all their fun in good part. Sometimes she didn't! But this afternoon such roguish spirits as Polly and Naomer felt that madame was in a safe mood.

"Come, then, mes enfants, it is that we will begin at once!" she was exclaiming as Lena appeared upon the scene, with her jaunty step. "You will pay of the very good attention—yes? And so you shall be perfect at ze dance when I return from my visit to France. Ah, la France!"

"Ah!" echoed Polly fervently.

"Ah, yes!" continued Madame Charles, her round face suffused with a smile of longing for her native country. "The sun, he shine in France. It is not always the rain—no. But we shall commence! Eef the so good clever pianiste will play for us, as always—yes?"

Here Madame Charles singled out Madge Minden, the Form's talented musician. Some time back Madame Charles had discovered that her class got on twice as well if Madge were at the piano. So it had become the happy arrangement that that scholar should always provide the music, Madame Charles excitedly conducting now and then, whilst instructing the dancers.

"Mademoiselle, cef you please?" said Madame Charles, raising her brows at the girl who was rather hanging back in an out-of-humour fashion.

"Go on, Madge, dear! You play so beautifully!" cried Lena, whilst she made a few graceful dance steps, as if eager to begin.

Conquering the strange reluctance, Madge crossed to the grand piano and sat down, and Madame Charles gave a gratified exclamation.

"Bon! And now, mes enfants, for the first, we shall have over again the dance of last week. Begin!"

She turned to the pianiste, and stuck up with an imaginary baton. Madge began the music for last week's lesson, but it was not like Madge's playing in the least. It had no life in it.

Madame Charles suddenly clapped her hands to her ears.

"Stop, stop; that is not right!" she protested. "We must have ze fire, ze spirit! Again!"

This time Madge struck up with something of the inspiration that usually showed in her playing. The paired-off scholars became a roomful of grace-

ful dancers, to whom instruction was a mere matter of form.

Madame Charles, filled with joy at the finish her pupils had acquired, flapped her plump hands up and down, and was never silent. When she was not humming the tune, she was making excitable comments.

"Yes, that is good, mes enfants! Lah-ri, dee, dee, da-dum! Mademoiselle Paula, you must not touch the hair whilst you dance! Ah, that is beautiful, that is good—oui!"

But suddenly she had reason to believe that Naomer could be improved if that little rascal had a different partner. Naomer's playing about with Paula was too subtle to be suspected by madame.

"Stop, you—stop!" was madame's sudden despairing cry, whilst she dashed amongst the dancers to part Naomer and Paula. "You have not it right, mon enfant—no! See, you shall do it with me. Again!"

Madge resumed after the sudden interruption. With her eyes upon the keyboard, she was the only girl in the room unaware of the comic sight that Naomer and madame, dancing together, presented.

Not that Madame Charles was herself a poor dancer. She was wonderful, considering her build. But Naomer could be just as impish with the instructress as she had been with Paula, and at times the others could hardly dance for suppressed laughter.

At last the lesson was over, and none knew what a big sigh of relief Madge Minden silently heaved.

If she did not jump up instantly from the piano, it was only because she wished to give the other girls time to scamper away. Madame Charles, excitedly resuming her outdoor things, was effusively grateful.

"It is that you are magnifique!" she cried at Madge, who came away from the piano now that her schoolfellows were gone. "Some day you have the fame, and at the Hall of Albert in London I come to applaud you—oui! Au-revoir, mademoiselle! But you shall let me kees you the first!"

At any other time Madge would have hurried away, greatly amused. But now—

Heavy as lead was her heart. From morn to night, at this time, she was never without the longing to go apart from everyone else and sit down to cry. She was bearing up, only because she had the average schoolgirl's horror of giving way to tears.

Friendless! That was what she felt herself to be to-day at Morcove School. Friendless, after being so rich in friendship!

Girls who had been her loving chums for such a great while were turned against her now! No-one had been more welcome than she at one time in Study 12, but only too well she knew that if she should make for that study at this moment her appearance would only be an embarrassment to the other girls.

They would be civil to her, simply because they were too good-hearted to find delight in stressing the ignominy that was upon her. But mere civility only made Madge feel worse. Since she could not be on the old affectionate terms with Betty and the rest, she must avoid them as much as possible.

"It's just as well I am a day-girl, along with Lena Daunt, now that this has happened!" she was thinking, as she drifted away from the music-room.

But, ah, even that consoling reflection was not without its bitter sting. She was bound to remember that her present misfortune never would

have come about if—if only she had never become a day-girl, making her home with the Daunts!

School was now ended for the day. Once again the hour had arrived for Madge to get her things on, and then ride back to Barncombe with Lena. That girl was not staying to tea in Study 12 this afternoon. She had not been asked, simply because, as Madge knew, the chums did not like to ask Lena without asking her—Madge.

And so in a few minutes she and Lena would be cycling the four miles into town, without exchanging a word! At the school Lena was like all the rest—at pains to be civil to her, at least. But out of school how different she was!

And that was at the bottom of the whole trouble—Lena's double-faced conduct. So perfectly charming at the school, such a cause of unhappiness at home!

Little did Betty & Co. imagine the upsets that were constantly occurring in what would have been such a happy home but for Lena's overbearing and spiteful behaviour.

Nor did the girls imagine for one moment that it was because of Lena's deceitful actions that they had been turned against Madge.

Poor Madge, no wonder she was down-hearted! Guess the real truth of the matter, her former chums could not be expected to do. And prove it, she herself could not!

"I can only go on putting up with it all," she was thinking, as she sought her hat and coat in the lobby downstairs. "Nothing, at any rate, can be done until Mrs. Daunt returns home. And, even then, I shall dread leaving the home, because Lena's little sister will miss me so."

She pulled on her gloves, buttoned herself up against the biting winter wind, and then wandered across the entrance-hall to the porch doorway. In the act of passing out, she paused and looked back towards the big staircase leading up to the studies.

"I suppose Lena will be down in a minute. I'll wait for her round at the cycle-sheds. It's hard for her to tear herself away from the other girls, I expect. As for me—"

A very emotional look suddenly passed across the sensitive face of the girl.

"I almost wish," she whispered to herself chokingly, "I were going from Moreove School now, never to return!"

#### Lena Means to Have a Good Time.

"G EALS, wait a bit! There is something I want to do in regard to Lena."

Paula spoke only a moment after Lena herself had quitted Study 12, to go downstairs and start the homewards run to Barncombe with Madge Minden.

"I am sure you will agree, geals, it is vewy hard on Lena," continued Paula quickly, whilst the five or six other girls paid surprised attention. "And I wuppose, bai Jove, that we have a whip wound for her—yes, wather!"

"Whip round for Lena?" was Polly's bewildered exclamation. "But why?"

"Yes, Paula; whatever—"

"Bai Jove, I am forgetting—yes, wather! You geals have not been told. Lena, I remember, was reluctant to tell me just now, and I thought that vewy bwickish of her. She's in a howlid fix over some lost money—"

"Never?"

"Yes, wather! And the twouble is, geals, the pound note that Lena tells me she has lost rightly

belongs to the housekeeping money that Mrs. Daunt left with the geal."

"Oh, poor Lena!" exclaimed Betty. "She should have told us!"

"Pwecisely! Howevah, geals, I have now told you, and so what do you say to a whip wound stwaight away? She won't be gone for a minute or two."

"No; we can catch her before she goes off with Madge," Polly agreed eagerly. "And I, for one, am quite willing to bear my share."

"And I!" said Helen Craig.

"Me, too!" chimed in Tess, whilst Naomer voiced her usual:

"Ooo, yes; queek—queek!"



**THE DANCING LESSON.** "You have not it right, Naomer!" cried Madame. "You shall do it with me!" And, to the other girls' secret amusement, she began to partner mischiev us Naomer.

Dolly Delane darted to the door. "My money is in my study," Dolly remarked, as she whirled away. "I won't be a jiff!"

Whilst she was gone the other girls put what they could "in the hat," so to speak. Dolly, rushing back with a half-crown generously spared from her far from lavish cash resources, found that this contribution would exactly make up the collection to the desired amount.

"A pound, bai Jove—that's gwand!" beamed Paula, acting as treasurer. "It's wocally good of you, geals—"

"Duffer, what about yourself?" chuckled Polly.

"You've given the biggest share, Paula."

"There is no need to make any remarks about

that," requested Paula, as they all hurried from the study. "The great thing is, Lena will not have to get things on credit from the tradespeople, and that will be a great relief, surely!"

"If we can only prevail upon her to accept the money!" was Betty's rather doubtful rejoinder.

They were to find, however, that Lena was quite willing to accept the timely aid, in a way that was most charming.

She did not stand on any false pride, but promptly accepted the money, saying that she was sure they would be offended if she refused it. It was like them to be so awfully good, Lena said sweetly, and she would remember it as an instance of their staunch friendship towards her.

"I know this," she added, preparing to ride away with Madge; "I'd rather be in debt to friends like you for a loan than have to owe money in the town! Thanks ever so, girls! Bye-bye until to-morrow!"

"And mind you not come late to school!" roguish Naomer shrieked after the two day-girls as they pedalled away.

Lena laughed lightly at the impish one's farewell cry, but said nothing to Madge.

It was all as this latter girl had expected. Now that Lena was on the way home, she was becoming that Lena of whom Betty and the rest knew nothing. A girl who found delight in being thoroughly horrid, a disobedient, wayward daughter and a spiteful sister—that was Lena out of school!

Not a word passed during the brisk ride home. Lena rode apart from her schoolfellow, obviously in good spirits. There was, indeed, an elation about her that seemed to evidence the looking forward to a very enjoyable evening.

As for Madge, after witnessing that bestowal of the money so impulsively collected amongst the Study 12 girls, she felt more disgusted than ever with her present companion.

For Madge knew quite well that Lena's rueful story of a lost pound note was nothing else than utter falsehood.

The truth was that Lena, during Mrs. Daunt's absence in London, had been theatre-going and treating herself in other ways out of the house-keeping money.

Either the audacious girl was now uneasy about the misspent money, or else she had simply invented the story as a means of raising extra cash.

In any case, it was another abuse of that friendship which she so little deserved to enjoy at the hands of Betty and the rest.

Lena had been taking great pride in having the key of the house whilst her mother was away. She brought it forth when she and Madge reached home, but there was no need to use the key, for little Kitty ran to open the front door.

With a sort of high shrug of disdain, the elder sister of the home swept past the younger, who felt the rudeness—no mistake about that. Kitty's smile for Madge Minden only came after a hurt look had crossed the youngster's rather thin, delicate face.

"Tea's ready, Madge!" said Kitty gladly. "I've made you and Lena some toast. Don't you feel awfully hungry by the time you get home from school of an afternoon?"

Before Madge could answer the affectionate remark, Lena called out, as she passed straight through to the kitchen:

"Kitty, hasn't a parcel from London come for me?"

"No."

"Oh, bother!"

"Elsie has gone round to the station to inquire about it."

"Oh, she has! Well, make the tea—look sharp! Always standing about to gas with Madge!" was Lena's sullen exclamation, as she returned along the hall to go upstairs.

Again Kitty glanced at Madge in a pained and apologetic way. It had become a great grief to the sunny-natured kiddie that her sister was so unpleasant to Madge. The latter, for her part, put on the most cheerful look, and so they went into the room where Kitty herself had prepared tea for them.

Kitty closed the door.

"What are you doing this evening, Madge?" she asked wistfully. "Not going out, are you?"

"Oh, no, dear! Why?"

"I only wondered if you might, for once, be going out with Lena. She has something on for this evening. You don't know what?"

Madge shook her head. At the same time, she felt very uneasy on Lena's account. Surely this going out for the evening had something to do with the raising of money from Betty and the others!

Suddenly Lena yelled down from upstairs:

"Kitty, run and open the door to Elsie! She is coming with my parcel! Look sharp!"

The younger sister responded eagerly enough, if only for the sake of peace. In any case, she was a very willing little thing. As she opened the front door, the servant of the house came in with an elated briskness, to hurry upstairs with the large parcel that was under one arm.

What happened after that invested the eyes of Madge and Kitty. For Lena and Elsie remained upstairs together, and it was evident that they were very excited as they examined the contents. Now and then they could be heard laughing together, and as time went on these bursts of laughter became more frequent.

Madge sat down to her tea, declining to wait any longer for Lena. Not until twenty minutes later did that girl come downstairs, in the usual fault-finding mood.

"Here, this tea is as black as ink, Kitty!"

"It's been standing, Lena. You have been so long—"

"None of your cheek! Make some fresh tea—that's the thing to do!"

"But I— There is no water in the kettle now."

"You little idiot!" flared out Lena. "Then you wonder that I am always going on at you! It's done to spite me!"

"No, Lena!"

"Bah, don't tell me!" Lena, as she knifed across a slice of toast, had a black look for Madge as well as Kitty. "Wait till mother comes home. I'll see that a change is made!"

Madge would have walked out of the room at that, only she knew that Kitty, poor child, would follow. And that would seem like encouraging the youngster to hold aloof from her sister.

So, whilst Lena ate her slice or two of toast, and made faces over the tea, there was a stormy silence. On Kitty's account, Madge was greatly pained; but for herself she felt that this tension in the home was far, far easier to bear than the tension at school. Madge's great sorrow was not caused by the spiteful delight of this other girl in being hostile, but by the estrangement which had come

about between herself—Madge—and the girls of Study 12.

Suddenly jumping up from the tea-table, Lena hurried from the room, to call towards the kitchen:

"Elsie!"

"Yes, miss?"

It was the most demure and respectful response from that servant of the house who gained such advantage by toadying to Lena.

"We'll get upstairs again and see about getting ready, Elsie!"

"Yes, miss."

Left to themselves in the dining-room, Madge and Kitty looked at each other. Elsie, evidently, was not to clear away the tea-things. That was to be left for them to do—under orders from Lena!

It was a trifling matter, but a galling one. Elsie, whilst Mrs. Daunt was away from home, was really doing nothing. She was under licence from Lena to "let everything go," and she could always plead that she had been bound to do what "Miss Lena" said.

But for Madge and Kitty alike there was this very serious question. What were Lena and Elsie up to this evening? That parcel had been of vital consequence to Lena, apparently. Whence had it come, and what did it contain?

For an hour or more there was no answer to these questions. Then suddenly there were dramatic revelations.

At a moment when Lena and Elsie were evidently getting dressed to go out for the evening, Madge and Kitty heard the churr! of a worn-out taxi in the quiet road. The vehicle stopped outside the front gate, yet nobody came to the door to ring the bell.

"A hired taxi, to take them somewhere!" was Kitty's sudden whispered comment. "Where are they going, then, Madge?"

That girl shook her head, looking troubled. Apart from the fact that Lena was evidently indulging in an evening's frivolity on borrowed money, having dipped into the housekeeping money as much as she dared, there was another thing that worried Madge. Lena was a Morcove scholar. If Lena did not care what she did, in defiance of Morcove regulations, she ought to be made to care.

And now, suddenly. Lena and Elsie came away from their rooms upstairs, giving mild shrieks of laughter as they met on the landing.

"Come on, then—cab's waiting, ticking off sixpences all the time!" Lena loudly exclaimed, as she came running down. "We will be off, Elsie!"

"Yes, miss!"

Madge and Kitty were in the drawing-room now. Kitty took an impulsive stride towards the door, but Madge as impulsively checked her. And yet—oh, what a quandary she was in! It seemed only right to ask Lena where she was going, what time she and Elsie would be back, but to do so would surely mean a flare-up!

As it chanced, Lena's own audacity caused her to swagger into the drawing-room, to address a haughty remark or so to the girls.

"I don't suppose we shall be later than midnight," calmly announced Lena, standing in the room doorway, wrapped in her cloak. "You needn't wait up for us, anyhow. I've got the key."

"Lena—oh, Lena," burst out Kitty, "you know very well that if mother were at home—"

"Oh, hold your row! And you, Madge—it's no affair of yours, so you need not look like that!"

"In a way, Lena, it does concern me," Madge

said, retaining the grave look which had set Lena grinning. "I can't help remembering what you seem to be forgetting. You are a Morcove girl."

"What if I am?"

"You have been told that the rule is—no one, whether boarder or day-girl, must go to places of amusement without some responsible person."

"Well? Elsie is with me."

"I doubt if Miss Somerfield would consider that good enough. Elsie is only a girl herself. Anyhow, you are doing this thing whilst your mother is away—"

"Yes, I am doing it, and I'd like to see you try to stop me!" flashed back Lena, drawing back from the doorway. "This silly old town doesn't often have any bit of excitement or fun worth going in for. But there is the fancy-dress dance at the Assembly Rooms to-night, and I'm going with Elsie!"

The fancy-dress dance!

Madge stood utterly staggered, as did Kitty. Before these two girls could voice another word Lena and Elsie had stalked out of the house. The front door went bang! behind them. The garden gate crashed shut. The taxi noisily ground its way up the quiet road, taking the daring pair to that place of festivity for the evening.

"The fancy-dress ball!"

The words seemed like a parting cry of Lena's, re-echoing in Madge's brain. Still not a word passed between her and Kitty.

The bills advertising the great occasion seemed to be flaring before Madge's eyes. It was an annual event, got up on behalf of local charities, under a committee of leading people. But, even so, that was no reason why Lena should deliberately break that rule of the school which said no girl must go to public places of amusement without a responsible companion.

At last Kitty, herself stricken with utter dismay, exclaimed aloud:

"Madge! Oh, isn't it too bad of her, Madge? Isn't she getting worse and worse?"

The girl who belonged to Morcove School sat down, locking her hands together at her knees. There was the deep silence of those who are in despair.

At last:

"She will be sorry some day," was Kitty's almost tearful murmur. "I know she will!"

And Madge, in her grievous helplessness, could only nod a silent:

"Yes!"

#### A Startling Change.

IT was as early as seven o'clock next morning when someone tapped at Lena's bed-room door.

"Who's that?" came the sullen challenge from a very jaded, petulant Lena. "Oh, you, Elsie!"

"Yes, miss."

"I thought it might be Madge Minden or my sister," mumbled the elder daughter of the home, sitting up in bed now that the servant had brought in a morning cup. "Thanks for this tea, Elsie! How do you feel—after last night?"

"Oh, I'm all right, miss—at least, except for worrying a bit. Of course, it was a lovely time at the fancy-dress ball. And you got a prize for your costume—"

"Only, I didn't stay to collect it!" Lena said, with a wide grin, as she sipped her tea. "That was a rotten turn to the evening, Elsie—our finding that Miss Somerfield was one of the judges! And



**AGAINST THE RULES!** "I'd like to stop me!" Lena flashed at Madge. "There is a Fancy-Dress dance to-night, and I am going with Elsie!"

she came upon the scene just as I was ragging about with those others! But I don't care!"

She did care, though, and her looks showed that she did.

At last Lena had done something that looked like having consequences of a very serious nature. Even her strong nerve was in a shaky state this morning.

"Well, anyhow, miss, perhaps the lady didn't recognise you, after all," Elsie suggested, with desperate hopefulness. "You may have done what you did to save yourself just in time."

Lena made a grimace, as if she had her doubts about that. All the while she was sipping her tea, with Elsie lingering near the bedside, she was glumly reviewing the incident that had brought their part in the fancy-dress ball to such an abrupt ending overnight.

It had been a wonderful affair, a sheer delight for both of them, up to that dramatic moment when, with sudden horror, they had learned that one of the judges of the various fancy-dress costumes was—Miss Esther Somerfield!

Never would Lena forget the shock it had given her to discover that Miss Somerfield, being associated with the charities for which the ball had been got up, had been prevailed upon to serve on the committee.

Nor would she forget the utter panic caused by the lady's arrival, just when she—Lena—had joined in with some girls who were larking about.

The fun had begun with toy balloons, but, after smashing all these, there had been some more serious fooling. It was Lena herself who had smashed a mirror by knocking a chair against it.

For a few minutes the disorder and uproar had been scandalous, she and others refusing to behave. And then, just when things were at their worst, she had caught sight of Miss Somerfield.

The arrival of a policeman would not have given Lena a greater fright. She and Elsie had fled in utter panic.

"Pity we couldn't get away quicker than we did—poky old place that the Assembly Rooms is!" deplored Elsie, taking up the tray to withdraw from the room. "I would have been all right, miss, wouldn't it, but for that? Because, if you, headmistress did recognise you amongst all the rowdies—"

"Oh, well, who cares! It may be all right even now, Elsie; and if not—let them turn me out of Morcové! That won't trouble me!"

"All the same, miss, I do wish it hadn't happened. I'd give a good deal myself, miss, to know that everything's going to be all right. There's that Madge Minden girl—she'll have the crow over you if there's trouble, and you getting kicked out, so to speak!"

"That's all right, Elsie—ha, ha, ha! Don't get scared. And—I say!"

"Yes, miss?"

"No need to say anything, you know!"

"Oh, of course not, miss! I'm not so silly!"

Elsie went away, with good reason for being so anxious that no painful sequel should follow last night's escapade. If it proved the downfall of Lena, an end to her reckless escapades, then Elsie herself was going to suffer.

As for Lena, no sooner was she left alone than she sank back in bed, to spend a few minutes in gloomy thought.

"Oh, well," she exclaimed at last moodily, "I suppose I must get up and be in time for school, anyhow! No use worrying—no use staying away to-day. If she *did* recognise me, I'm in for it!"

Flinging aside the bedclothes, she set foot to the floor, then slowly stretched her arms and yawned.

By the time her dressing was finished she could hear Madge and Kitty moving about in their different rooms. As a rule, Lena made a point of beginning the day by bullying Kitty. This morning she had something else to think about!

It was a pity—a thousand pities Lena was now inclined to deem it. For, after all, she had every reason for wanting to remain at Morcové. It was a fine school, and she had made great headway there.

And now perhaps she was to be utterly disgraced, all at once, in the eyes of the whole school! Expelled, and after expulsion to be still living near the town, cut by all the girls whose friendship was so valuable!

And all this because she had joined with others in behaving disgracefully at the dance.

Suddenly Lena made up her mind. She had got to do something to forestall the impending disaster. Now that she was convinced that she had yet to face Miss Somerfield over the matter, there was only one thing to do.

Somehow or other, a complete denial of the charge must be arranged. In other words, Lena was suddenly under the panicky necessity of proving an alibi!

But how—how could this be achieved? Her own denial was not going to be good enough, that was certain. Who, then, could be a witness in her favour? The servant? But most likely Elsie also had been noticed by Miss Somerfield, and the girl's face would be remembered. So Elsie was no

use as a witness. She would be revealed as a fellow culprit.

At this moment Lena heard Madge come from her room and pass downstairs.

Madge—ah, there was someone, perhaps! If only she could prevail upon Madge to back up her own false defence!

To and fro in her bed-room Lena paced in a hard-driven way. Now that Madge could render such valuable help, it was a time for Lena to wish she had never, never treated that girl so disgracefully.

"Still, I may be able to get round her, even now," Lena said to herself desperately. "There's one thing about Madge—she is not the sort to bear malice or jump at the chance of revenge. I may be able to handle her all right. I am going to try, anyhow—I must!"

Next second Lena was going from her room, determined to begin the day by being as nice as possible to Madge. If necessary, she must make the most grovelling apology for all the past unpleasantness.

Humiliating—yes! But there was no help for it. It was better to go on her knees to Madge than to be expelled from the school!

Lena paused outside Kitty's bed-room door, and called sweetly:

"Coming down to brekker, Kitty?"

"Yes, Lena—here I am!" was the younger sister's glad response to such an unusual note of affection in the other's voice. Kitty appeared, and instantly Lena put an arm about her, and went downstairs with her like that. The way to win Madge's forgiveness was to treat Kitty nicely!

"Morning, Madge!"

"Good-morning!" that girl responded pleasantly, in the dining-room, her face lighting up as the two sisters came in together.

"We are not late?" smiled Lena, glancing at the clock. "That's good, Madge! Oh, there's the postman!"—as a letter flicked through the slot. "Wonder if that's from mother, to say she is coming home? I'll go, Kitty!"

But Kitty had already flashed from the room to get the letter. She came back with a dancing step, not because this was a letter from mother, but because her sister was starting the day so amiably.

"Only a circular, Lena, isn't it?" Kitty asked, as her sister opened the halfpenny-stamped envelope.

Lena did not answer. It was a tradesman's bill that had turned up, an account that would not have been half as big as it was if Lena had not mispent so much of the housekeeping money.

One way and another, she felt that her hour of reckoning was close at hand. The anger of the headmistress to face at school, and the grief of her own mother to be witnessed in regard to the breach of trust!

Even if Lena had wanted to appear at ease during breakfast, she would have been unable to do so. But she realised that there would be no harm in looking rather contrite, since she had got to express contrition to Madge. That girl noticed what a poor appetite her schoolfellow had, and how subdued and gentle she was, and she guessed that something had happened to put Lena in a very chastened mood.

Breakfast over, both girls hurried on with their things upstairs. Lena was the first to return downstairs, and she sent Kitty away in gentle fashion, then took a lesson-book from her satchel and conned a bit of French. It was part of her "prep." She was still making up for last night's neglect of the

home work when Madge rejoined her.

Lena closed the book smartly and stowed it away.

"Ready?" she exclaimed, smiling. "We'll be off, then, Madge! I'm afraid I have only made a dab at my prep., but I may scrape through. Hope so, anyhow!"

"Yes!" nodded Madge pleasantly. For, if Lena was in a penitent mood, it seemed only right to encourage it. "If you can keep out of hot water, Lena, it—it will be just as well."

Then Lena nodded, going to the door with her schoolfellow.

"I know, Madge. I—I'm beginning to think it's about time I pulled up. This morning—"

She suddenly stood still, and looked at Madge with eyes that were made to appear regretful.

"Madge, before we go to school to-day—"

"Yes, Lena?"

"I—I—I feel I want to say I'm sorry. You know what for?"

"Last night, perhaps?"

"Not that—at least, not altogether last night. No, Madge; I mean—" Lena made an effective pause. "I've been so horrid—to you!"

In spite of the signs of contrition that there had been during breakfast, Madge was taken aback by this outright cry of remorse. She could say nothing, but her looks were such as to proclaim her relief and joy.

"Kitty, too—I know I have not been fair to her," gulped out Lena. "I've been getting worse and worse—oh, I know I have! I—I suddenly realise, Madge, and I—I want to pull up!"

"Well, then, where's the hindrance, Lena?" was Madge's eager response to the contrite cry. "You



**IS SHE GENUINE?** "Madge," faltered Lena contritely, "I want to say I'm sorry. I've been so horrid to you. I—I want to pull up, Madge." Madge gazed at her in surprise.



have only to feel like this, and everything will be all right."

"You mean—you are willing to start again with me, Madge?"

"Of course!"

"You will try to forget what a little cat I've been? Oh, Madge, it is good of you! Kitty, I know, will be only too glad to help me be a better girl. But she is a sister. You have every right to remember the horrid things I have said, the way I've treated you—"

"No, Lena. I may not be a sister, or even a distant relation. But I am one of you in the home now, and—we both go to Morcové! So—"

"Madge, you are just splendid! You are too good!" was the emotional cry with which Lena suddenly stepped close to the other girl and hugged her.

"Oh, Madge, after this, then, we will be friends—friends! I—I can rely upon you, can't I?"

"As a friend, Lena, if you want me to be your friend—always!"

Lena suddenly kissed the girl whose response had been so generous. Then, with a pretty air of fluster, she wiped her eyes and laughed in a self-ashamed way.

"You may think me silly this morning, Madge, but all I know is, I do want to begin again—with you. Come along, dear!"

She stepped quickly into the hall, exclaiming:

"Where's Kitty? Ta-ta, Kitty! We're off! It's a halfer this afternoon, and, unless I'm wanted for hockey, I shall come home to you, Kitty!"

"Oh, Lena!" was Kitty's joyful cry.

She followed the two girls into the open air, and stood at the gate as they mounted their bicycles and rode away.

Lena looked back, waving.

"Bye-bye, dear!"

And Madge was thinking—gladly—how well it all augured for the time to come!

### Is She Found Out?

**T**O say that Lena was heart-in-mouth when she reached Morcové School that morning is no exaggeration.

It would not have surprised her to be told that she was to report to the headmistress at once.

But nothing happened. After mingling with Betty Barton and the rest of the Study 12 girls for a few minutes, the morning classes started, and then she could breathe freely.

It was still too early, however, for her to feel that she had been needlessly alarmed. There might be a hundred different reasons why Miss Somerfield had not yet sent for her. Meantime, this was a breathing-space that could be turned to very good use. Every little chance of playing for Madge's support must be seized!

Little did Madge suspect what a base motive Lena had for this sudden niceness towards her, the insincerity of the girl's penitence. During "break," as had been the case on the way to school, Lena was sweetness itself.

The other girls did not mark the change, for the very simple reason that Lena always had been so nice to Madge in front of them. That had been the galling thing to Madge—the double-facedness of Lena's conduct. But now—

All that was over and done with for ever. So Madge gladly believed. It seemed to her that Lena's escapade last night had been a crowning bit of recklessness that had taken strange effect upon the girl.

"This afternoon—hockey!" was the lively remark with which Betty suddenly came amongst a dozen

of the Fourth Form girls, as they were taking a before-dinner stroll in the grounds. "You can stay on at school, Lena, and play for our side?"

"If you really need me," returned Lena prettily. "Otherwise, I feel like getting home to be with Kitty."

"Do play!" was the Form captain's earnest entreaty. "And, look here, about your sister Kitty. Can't we get her to come out to Morcové to see the match and have tea with us afterwards?"

"Bai Jove, that's the idea, Lena!" approved Paula, beaming. "Awvange it somehow—do!"

"I would have to go home and return—"

"No," struck in Polly blithely; "we can do better than that. Here's the way! Ring up the Creamery! Their delivery-van is coming out to Morcové this afternoon. They'll do anything for the school—"

"Yes, wather!"

"And they won't mind picking up Kitty and fetching her along," wound up Polly. "Anyhow, you try, Lena!"

"Oh, I will—at once! I'd love Kitty to look on at one of our hockey matches! You are staying on, of course, Madge?"

"I've got you down to play," Betty reminded the girl with whom the Form was rather "off" at present. "You'll stay on?"

"Yes," assented Madge simply, "I—I suppose so."

Lena ran off. Half a minute later the Formmistress was readily acceding to her request to be allowed to use the telephone, so demurely had the favour been asked.

"If you can't arrange about your sister that way, Lena, let me know at once," said Miss Redgrave. "I may be able to get her brought out in Miss Somerfield's car. Miss Somerfield has been—Barncombe all the morning, and is lurching at Barncombe Castle. She would be only too pleased to pick up little Kitty on the way home."

"Oh, thanks, Miss Redgrave! But I hope I shan't have to bother you."

The lightness in Lena's voice did not come of a light heart.

What she had been told just then about the headmistress, didn't it explain why nothing as yet had happened? It did—surely that was the reason! And so Lena was quaking for herself again. If she had not been sent for already, it was only because Miss Somerfield had been away from the school all day. Soon she would be back, and then—

Scarcely able to hide the miserable panic that was upon her, the guilt-stricken girl went to the telephone, and it was soon arranged about her sister's being brought to the school later on.

Then Lena rejoined Madge and the other girls. The half-holiday spirit had taken hold of the entire Form, and Miss Redgrave's table in the school dining-room was as gay as a Christmas party—with Lena, too, outwardly as gay as any, although inwardly—how she quaked!

Every moment that brought nearer the dreaded summons to appear before her headmistress was making her feel more acutely the disgrace and misery it would be if the verdict went against her.

She had become very fond of Morcové. She wanted to go on making such headway amongst the girls. Why—oh, why had she been so mad as to go to that public fancy-dress ball with Elsie?

As for Madge, all this time she was feeling so relieved at what she deemed to be Lena's resolve to make amends for the past that nothing else seemed to matter much. She herself was still out of favour with her former chums, simply because

they were misjudging her over matters that Lena alone could adjust. But Madge was full of hope.

All along she had been saying to herself stoically that time alone would bring things right in the end, and so it looked like doing now.

Play began on the games-field at two sharp that afternoon. Kitty had not yet turned up—the delivery-van was late—but word was left at the schoolhouse where she could find her sister and the rest.

It was an inter-Form match—the Fourth versus the Fifth—and from the bully-off play was fast and furious. Those who looked on saw what a fine game Lena, amongst others, was putting up. She seemed to be in her usual brilliant form. None knew how she was doing everything with the feeling that a drawn sword was suspended above her head!

Suddenly two or three of the girls on her side called out:

"There's your sister, Lena—over there, look! She has got here all right, so don't worry!"

To guilty Lena that last remark meant a throb of dismay. Had she been looking worried? If so, she must be even more careful now that Kitty had turned up on the field. What cause for worry would Betty and the rest think she had now?

A goal against the Fourth had just been scored—the first of the match. So that team went at the game harder than ever, if possible. Lena saw the other members of her team maintaining such a grimly fighting spirit, whilst she herself seemed to have feet of lead. In the end she would make some clumsy blunder and lose her side another goal, and what would they think of her then?

But she had better luck than that. How she did it she never could have said, but it was she herself, towards the end of the match, who scored the first goal for her side.

"Bravo, Lena—oh, good!" some of her admiring chums had to applaud her. "That makes us one—all, anyhow!"

"Better than being whacked, Lena! Splendid!" was Betty's own word of praise.

And at last the game ended in a tie. Ages considered, the Fourth could feel proud of itself. Their opponents had been a stiff team to wrestle with. Flourishing hockey-sticks, Betty & Co. came running off the field, and Lena herself was quite mobbed by onlookers who wanted to praise her play.

Kitty rushed up, delight conquering shyness. "Oh, Lena, I was so pleased when the baker's van called to pick me up! What an exciting game! And you—"

"Yes, well, dear," Lena checked her little sister, with a loving caress, "you needn't talk about that now! I think we are to have tea in Study 12."

"Oh, Lena!" And Kitty clapped her hands. "How spiffing!"

"Ooo, yes; queek—queek!"

That was Naomer, as she came rushing at Kitty to take possession of her. Next second the lively pair were speeding towards the school, whilst Lena, in the act of mingling with some of the other girls, saw Miss Redgrave coming towards her.

Her heart missed a beat, then pounded again. Now for it!

"Lena, just a moment!" And the Form-mistress strolled towards her. "I am told that Miss Somerfield wishes you to report to her—at once!"

And so it had come—at last!

### Madge Makes a Stand!

"LENA, where are you going?"  
"I—I've got to see Miss Somerfield. Shan't be a minute!"

"Oh, all right! Come to Study 12 afterwards!"  
And the girls let the day-scholar run on in advance of them without further comment.

Indoors, Lena could not bring herself to go direct to the headmistress' sactum. She felt that her very looks were a confession of guilt. This way, that way, she wandered, utterly distraught. But when Betty and the rest suddenly stormed into the schoolhouse she had the presence of mind to keep out of sight. She dodged into the coat-lobby, on the pretence of getting something from her outdoor coat.

As it chanced, Madge came to the lobby to get something from her jacket, and the two girls encountered each other—alone. "With the dread of what was coming stronger upon her than ever, Lena felt that she must seize this opportunity of 'playing up' to Madge.

"A splendid game, hasn't it been, Madge?"  
"Yes, Lena. And you were in fine form?"

"You think so? I am sure I—I feel far from in the mood. I— Oh, Madge, I have felt so upset all day about—about the way I've been going on!"

"Never mind now. You are going to be different—"

"Yes, Madge—yes!" declared Lena, with the vehemence of panic. "If only—if only I can be given a chance! But I feel that something is going to happen!"

"Whatever do you mean?"  
"Nothing. At least—I can't explain, Madge. But if—if I do need your help—"

"I can't see how you are going to need it, Lena," the other girl said gently. "But if you should—well, you know what I said. We are—chums."

Then Madge turned to fumble amongst the coats for her own, and Lena, after standing hesitant, drifted away. It was impossible to say more, impossible to blurt out an entreaty to Madge to tell an utter lie if called upon as a witness! She must simply rely upon the girl being generous enough to do that.

And so in a few moments Lena found herself tapping at Miss Somerfield's door.

"Come in!"  
The headmistress was sitting at her large desk, very busy after her enforced absence from the school. She finished reading some bit of correspondence after nodding to the scholar to stand by, and then:

"Yes, Lena Daunt, I want to ask you something. I would have sent for you earlier, only I had to attend a committee meeting at Barncombe Castle in regard to the charities for which the fancy-dress ball was organised. Lena, I was at that ball last night. Were you?"

As sharply as that the question was put, and as sharply Lena gave the untruthful answer:

"No, Miss Somerfield—oh, no!"  
There was a pause. The headmistress scrutinised the scholar steadily, and Lena bore the look without flinching.

"I rely upon every girl in the school to give me a truthful answer at all times," Miss Somerfield said at last. "Lena, are you telling me the truth now? Either my eyes greatly deceived me last night, or else you were at that ball, wearing the costume of a pierrette, and helping others to turn the whole thing into a rowdy scene. I ask you again, Lena, for your looks incline me to believe

that you have not spoken the truth. Were you at that dance?"

"No, Miss Somerfield—no! I was—I was at home all the evening!"

"Can you produce evidence, Lena? It grieves me to say so, but your looks still belie what you are telling me."

"I am not telling any lie; I would not dream of doing so!" Lena protested, with all the injured innocence that she could muster. "I was at home. Ask Madge Minden! She lives with me. Ask her!"

"Very well, then, I will," said the headmistress, instantly touching a bell. "Madge, I know, could never speak an untruth. I should be able to trust your word alone, Lena, but I read something in your eyes that suggests deceit. Madge Minden is to come here at once," she added to the maid who had entered.

Then, when the servant had hastened off to fetch Madge, there was a fearful time of suspense for Lena—an eternity of agonised waiting, it seemed to be.

Would Madge tell a lie for her, Lena's, sake—would she?

At last there was a quick and quiet step that stopped at the door, and Madge came in briskly. One glance she gave Lena, and then she had to meet the eyes of her questioner.

"Madge Minden, much to my regret, I have been forced to send for you to confirm what Lena tells me—that she was at home all last evening. Lena knows why I have reason to believe that she was at the fancy-dress ball without her mother's knowledge or my permission, and behaving disgracefully. Yes or no, Madge. Was Lena at home or at the dance?"

Madge had fallen back a step, and was looking aside at her schoolfellow again. Lena, white as death, had looks which as good as spoke for her.

"Say that I was at home, Madge—say that, and save me!" Madge read in those wild eyes. "You might as well! You must, even though it will be a lie!"

But no; Madge was suddenly far from inclined to lie for this other girl's sake.

For, as vividly as she had ever realised anything, Madge now realised that Lena's penitence had been a pure sham, the outcome of dire necessity. Only because the girl had seen this crash coming had she been so humble all day—playing up for Madge's support. And as soon as she had got off unscathed she would be her old self again!

Was it good enough?

"No!" Madge had already decided indignantly. "I must not help in such a course!"

The headmistress was looking graver than ever, as if she knew what to make of this awkward silence. She spoke again:

"Your answer, Madge? I know it will be the truth. What is it?"

And still Madge was silent. Nothing should make her speak now, one way or the other. She shrugged in a hard-driven way—and that was all.

All, and yet quite sufficient for Miss Somerfield! "You may go, Madge. I quite understand," were the tense words that sent the girl quickly from the room.

"As for you, Lena Daunt, you have made things far worse for yourself by—"

"But I have told you the truth!" panted Lena wildly. "If Madge would not bear me out, it was because—because she—she must want to see me disgraced!"

"Rubbish! You are saying that against a girl who is—"

"Madge has never been nice to me!" burst out Lena passionately. "I don't know why, but she—she hates me! Now, I see, she has done what she wanted—"

"Lena!"

"But, Miss Somerfield—"

"Silence! You stand condemned of a most serious offence. Lena Daunt, and I shall have to inform your mother. The rowdiness in which you took part is the talk of the town."

"I've done nothing—nothing!" was Lena's desperate cry, given with a stamp of the foot. "I was at home, but Madge wants me to get expelled, and so— Oh, it's too bad of her—too bad! Listen, though—"

"No, Lena, not another word!"

"But listen, please! My sister Kitty is here. She happens to be at the school this afternoon. She'll bear me out. May I go and fetch her—oh, please may I do that?" Lena implored.

Her only hope now—Kitty! If only she could get hold of Kitty on the quiet, she could surely frighten her into telling the untruth that would be her salvation!

"It shall never be said that I did not give you every chance. Lena. Go and fetch your sister!"

#### What Else Could She Do?

Lena rushed away. Furiously she ran upstairs to Study 12, to put her head just inside the door and call breathlessly to her sister:

"Kitty, I want you—at once!"

The other girls were given no explanation, and there must have been some wondering looks in the study after Kitty had joined her in the corridor.

For the moment Lena said nothing, but led the way downstairs. On a lower landing, however, she suddenly checked, gripping Kitty by the shoulder.

"Look here, Kitty. I'm in an awful hole! Miss Somerfield thinks she saw me at the fancy-dress affair last night, ragging about. I've denied it!"

"Oh, Lena!"

"I don't care! It was that or being expelled. Yes, expelled!" hissed Lena, noting the effect which that word had upon her sister. "So you are to bear me out—you must, Kitty, unless you'd have me turned out of Morcove!"

"Lena!"

"Sh! Don't start blubbing, little idiot! That won't help! Come along, pull yourself together! And when you get to Miss Somerfield's room you are to say what I have said. I was at home all the evening!"

Poor Kitty! What wonder if, as she was hurried along by her sister, she felt resigned to telling the lie? In her case the compulsion was tremendous. The crisis had been explained in those few appalling words. Unless she saved her sister, that girl would be expelled, and that disgrace, apart from its effect upon Lena's entire future, would just about break her mother's heart!

Outside Miss Somerfield's door Lena gave her scared sister a final threatening look. Then the two girls passed into the presence of that lady whose word was law at Morcove School.

The headmistress again broke off from her work to deal with this case against Lena. She first smiled kindly upon Kitty, then asked gravely:

"What have you to say about this matter, Kitty Daunt? Is it a fact that Lena was at home all last evening?"

"Yes! Yes, Miss Somerfield, my sister was with me at home!"

Thus Kitty Daunt had answered instantly, out of love for her sister, and also for her mother's sake. Unhesitatingly had the answer been voiced, nor did Kitty's eyes waver as Miss Somerfield looked into them. The girl had as big a soathing of falsehoods as Madge herself, but here was a case where the noblest of motives inspired her. She was not flinching, for the simple reason that this was an ordeal to be endured unflinchingly for the sake of those she loved!

"Thank you!" Miss Somerfield exclaimed at last in a satisfied tone. "That is quite sufficient, Kitty."

"You do believe my sister?" Lena exclaimed excitedly.

"I can tell that your sister is not given to lying," was the quiet answer. "Lena, you may go. I shall say no more, and I shall do nothing more about you. Take your sister with you."

"Never mind about Madge! Get along with you!"

There was something still so hesitant about Kitty, however, that Lena simply led the youngster to the porch door and as good as thrust her into the open air. With a commanding gesture that meant "Don't hang about here!" Lena closed the door, then ran to the coat-lobby and got her own outdoor things on.

A few moments more, and she was running upstairs. She burst in upon Study 12 in a breathless state, and there were cries of amazement.

"Going Lena?"

"Bai Jove—"

"Where's Kitty, then?"

"Kitty and I are both catching the train back to Barncombe," Lena said in a tight-lipped way, whilst she buttoned a glove. "We are too upset—"

"Upset? But why?"

"Good gracious! Lena—"



**THE DREAD SUMMONS.** Lena's heart missed — beat as Miss Redgrave approached her after the match. "Lena," she called, "Miss Somerfield wishes to see you—at once!" So it had come at last!

Her head spinning with the success of her desperate triumph, Lena nudged Kitty to follow her out of the room. In the passage, the elder girl at once broke out in a domineering tone:

"Now come along home—yes, Kitty, at once! You and I will just catch that train from Morcovo to Barncombe if we hurry. You have got your things on. Hurry along to the station—"

"But, Lena, we were to have tea in Study 12! We—"

"That's all off!" announced Lena fiercely. "I'm not in the mood. Do as I say, Kitty. Get along to the station, and I'll catch you up in a minute."

She saw the half-rebellious look in her sister's eyes, and she gripped her by one shoulder and shook her.

"Do as I say, Kitty! If you don't, I won't be nice to you, as you know I want to be now!"

"What about Madge, then? Where is she?"

"I would rather not say," was Lena's artful response. "It has nothing to do with you girls, so don't think you are the cause. Bye-bye, all of you, and—"

And then the door opened behind Lena, and Madge came in, rather hesitatingly. Lena turned and looked at her, and then suddenly burst forth:

"If you want to know, girls, here is the one who has given me this upset! It's Madge Minden's doing, all of it! I didn't want to say so. She is a chum of yours, I know. But—"

"But what has Madge done?" cried Polly and several others.

"Yes, wather, Lena?"

"I will tell you what she has done!" Lena had no hesitation in answering passionately. "She has done her best to get me disgraced—expelled! Yes, this chum of yours, and friend of mine that I have thought her to be, she has served me shamefully!"

The ringing cry was followed by a great silence. All the girls were on their feet. Their looks were full of mingled incredulity and horror. Madge stood by, erect and calm, but very pale.

"There must be some mistake," Betty said at last tensely. "Lena, you can't be right!"

"I know I am right!" came that girl's vehement answer. "Miss Somerfield had some idea that I was at the fancy-dress ball in Barncombe last night. I told her I was at home. I got her to send for Madge, to bear out what I had said. And Madge—she does not answer when asked! She does her best to make Miss Somerfield think that I have been telling a lie!"

Several of the girls gasped aloud. All looked from Lena to Madge.

"Is this true, Madge?" asked Betty. "Is it?"

"It is pretty much what happened," was the husky assent that staggered Betty and the rest.

Lena drew herself up, the picture of virtuous indignation.

"You see, she cannot deny it, girls! I tell you she has done her best to get me ruined in the eyes of Miss Somerfield. Why, I do not know. But Madge hates me. It is only too evident now."

"But Miss Somerfield believed you, Lena, after all?" came from Polly, with a steady look.

"She did! Luckily, my sister was here in the school," Lena answered, smiling triumphantly.

"Kitty would not go against me, as Madge went. Kitty said what Madge could have said—that I was at home all last evening."

"And that was the truth?" Tess Trelawney rejoined.

"I would not ask Kitty to tell a lie, simply to get me out of a scrape!" was Lena's dignified answer.

Madge by now was paler than ever. Her brain was whirling. She realised that Kitty, poor little

soul, had been simply driven into saying anything that would save her sister.

And she could no more blame the youngster for what she had done than she could think of denouncing that bit of evidence as false. Kitty had done it for a sister—a sister! And so, at all costs, her own contrary evidence must be left to be judged wrongly.

"Well, Madge, what about it?" Polly asked suddenly in her downright way.

For answer, Madge turned away to the door. She took hold of the knob and turned it, and passed out. Snick! the door closed behind her, and now it seemed to her that she had paid the final penalty for the generous impulse that it had been to make her home with Lena.

After this all was over between herself and her chums of Study 12. She was the one to be in disgrace with them, deeper disgrace than ever. They were finished with her—utterly!

Soon she was in the coat-lobby downstairs, getting her things on. She saw Lena go across the hall from the stairs to the door, with a number of girls who had come down to see her off. They were as friendly with Lena as ever. Their parting cries were charged with affectionate sympathy.

When Lena had gone, and the others had returned upstairs, Madge came out of the lobby. If she could have had her way, she would have spoken with nobody in the school again to-day; she was so crushed, so broken-spirited. But it was not to be.

"Madge Minden!"

And she turned round as that arresting call came from her own headmistress.

Miss Somerfield's comely face held a strange look as Madge walked towards her.

"You are going to your home in Barncombe, Madge?"

"Yes, Miss Somerfield; I'm off now."

The headmistress was silent for a few moments. Then:

"I can only say, Madge, I am very sorry that you were called upon to give evidence just now. It is one of those cases that can never be disposed of properly, but—I know what to think!"

Madge found herself going away from the school-house after that with tear-dimmed eyes. The words had been doubly upsetting. They had told her how the headmistress at least had a pretty shrewd idea of the rights and wrongs of the affair. And they were the very words which should have come from Betty and the other girls, only—ah, no, it was not to be!

After riding a short distance from the school gateway, Madge looked back over one shoulder in the direction of the schoolhouse.

It was twilight now, and lights were springing up in the great building. She saw the window of Study 12, saw a light spring up there, cheery and inviting, and then the blind was run down.

A little thing of everyday occurrence, but this evening it seemed to poor Madge a symbol of how she herself was shut out from that happy gathering of chums. And she rode on, with the falling darkness all about her to stress the loneliness that was hers!

(END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.)

How long is Madge to remain an outcast in the Form because of Lena's deceit? You must not miss reading about the dramatic turn things take in next week's story: "Because of Her Folly!"

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