

THE PAPER THAT IS EVERYTHING THE SCHOOLGIRL LIKES BEST!

The Schoolgirls' Own 2^d



**THE PORTRAIT
THAT DIDN'T
PLEASE PAULA!**

(A laughable incident from the splendid long complete story of the girls of Morcov School inside.)

A powerful complete tale of Lena Daunt at Morcove.



A Schoolgirl's Temptation.

"ELLEN, has that parcel come for me?"
 "Yes, miss; the afternoon post is just in."
 "Oh, bonheur—joy, joy!" cried Trixie.
 Hope, and she dashed on downstairs.

Trixie was the girl at Morcove School who had a fondness for seasoning her talk with French. At least, she called it French, and, although it was not always the French of the Fourth Form classroom, her chums liked it none the less for that.

In the entrance-hall of the great schoolhouse there was a pretty large crowd around the letter-rack. Trixie's eager demand for anything that might be for her under the letter "H" caused one of the seniors to toss a large, light package towards her.

"Merci—thanks!" said Trixie, and away she scampered again, returning upstairs to the studies.

Sprinting past her own study, in the Fourth Form corridor, she finally dashed into the one that was such a famous rendezvous—No. 12. Here at this moment Betty Barton, Polly Linton, Paula Creel, Helen Craig, and Tess Trelawney were sitting about in talk.

"Voila, look there!" was Trixie's joyous cry, as she dumped her parcel on the table. "It has come by return post. Decent of those stores people in London!"

"Bai Jove, most pwompt!" was Paula Creel's beaming comment.

"I felt sure they would have some in stock," Trixie chatted on gaily, whilst she undid the parcel. "Somebody or other is always needing confetti for weddings and so on."

"Well, you've ordered enough!" chuckled Polly, as Trixie tumbled out half a dozen little boxes of the confetti. "And you have certainly saved us a lot of trouble, Trix. Cutting up paper for a hare-and-hounds is always such a fag."

"Besides which," chimed in Tess, "confetti doesn't lie about in the lanes and fields, looking untidy. But it is not fair that you should be paying for it, Trixie."

BECAUSE OF HER FOLLY!

BY
MARJORIE STANTON.

"Rubbish!" shrugged that girl. "It was only a few pence per packet. I must sample one box."

The others gathered round. Trixie, opening the box, took out a pinch of the confetti and flung it into the air.

"Lovely!" laughed Betty, and her chums were just as entranced by the always pretty sight of the multi-coloured spots of paper sprinkling the ground.

Then the door opened, and Naomer Nakara whisked into the room.

"Ooo, queek—queek! What is eet?" she demanded excitedly.

"Confetti, dear."

"Ooo, let me—"

"Hands off!" laughed Trixie, for Naomer obviously wanted to have a coloured snowstorm in the study straight away. "Allez, allez-vous!"

"You shall be one of the hares to-morrow afternoon, Naomer," said Betty. "Then you can run mile after mile across country, sprinkling confetti all the way."

"And you run after me and try to catch me?"

"That's the idea!"

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, goals, it will be gweat fun—what? A wefweshing change from hockey! But don't get excited, Naomer. Now, Naomer, my hair, my fwock—"

"You are ze hare. I am ze hound—yes!" fairly shrieked mercurial Naomer, hurling herself upon the elegant one. "Ooo, queek—queek! Ha, ha, ha!"

Naomer's shriek of laughter came as she toppled Paula backwards into an easy-chair. It was a chair that Paula was very fond of, but she liked to sit

down with more grace and less speed than this. Paula wailed:

"Ow! Dwop it, Naomer! Pway be a little circum-spect! Pway keep still!"

"But I am ze hound, ze hare—"

"Not here, Naomer; not at present! To-mow-wow—yes, wather; but not now. I—I will wace you all wround the distwict—"

"He, he, he! You race me—you!" went up Naomer's scoffing cry. "I

"Miss Do-As-I-Like" Lena Daunt has been, ever since she came into the life of Madge Minden, and up to now she has met with unbelievable success. But she is soon to learn that such reckless wilfulness as hers is certain to bring disaster in the end!

like to see you catch me! Eef you do catch me, Paula—"

"Yes, weal, all wight—"

"Eef you do catch me, you know what I do? I go like this!"

And, all in a flash, Naomer caught up the opened box of confetti and turned it upside down over Paula's head.

The elegant one's howl of dismay was lost amidst shrieks of laughter. Paula jumped up, smothered in the confetti. Her indignant gestures conveyed the protest which she was squealing at the top of her voice without being able to make herself heard.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You might be a wedding, Paula!" chuckled Polly. "Bridal march, someone! Play up, the band!"

"Weally," sighed Paula, uncomfortably wriggling and shaking herself, "you gcoms are insufferable! Am I nevah to have a moment's peace?"

Trixie, at the table, hurriedly wrapped up the boxes of confetti, before excitable Naomer should pounce again.

"I'll get away before something else happens," grinned Trixie, drawing off to the door. "Ta-ta, all!"

"But come back to tea—in five minutes, Trix!" Betty and Polly sang out together.

"Merci! Merci beaucoup—thanks ever so!"

After the door had banged shut behind Trixie, madcap Polly hoisted herself on to the table-edge and swung her legs.

"Funny how Trixie still sticks to her alleged French! I do love her, with her 'jammy, jammy' and all the rest of it. Well, I suppose if we are going to have tea in study, we had better see about getting it. Tea won't lay itself."

She slid from her perch and started to investigate the corner cupboard, which was Study 12's combination larder and pantry.

Again the door opened to let in a member of the Fourth Form, and again it was a girl who could be sure of a welcome.

This time it was Lena Daunt, hatted and coated for her homeward cycle run to Barncombe.

"Must you go home at once, Lena?" asked Betty. "Can't stay for just a cup of tea?"

"It's awfully good of you, but I really must be off," pleaded Lena sweetly. "Mother is due back from London at six o'clock, and I want to have everything nice for her."

This was received by the other girls with nods of understanding and approval. They liked Lena all the more for wanting to make sure that her mother met with no disappointment on her return after several days' absence.

"Where's Madge?" asked Tess suddenly. "Gone already?"

Lena nodded.

"I think so. She put her things on directly we came out of afternoon school."

There was a sudden pause, a silence only broken by Polly's setting cups and saucers on a tray. The mention of Madge had created a sudden tension.

"It is ever such a pity about Madge," came from Betty at last. "You must find it pretty trying, Lena—even more so than we."

Lena heaved a little sigh that suggested great forbearance.

"She keeps out of our way now," resumed Betty sadly. "But whilst she continues to live at home with you and your mother and sister you must find it very painful. Pity!"

"Yes wather!" murmured Paula. "Bai Jove,

whoever would have thought that such a nice girl as Madge could have behaved so badly? I feel quite heartbroken about it."

There was a note in Paula's voice which told how sincere was her sorrow in this direction.

"It seems to me," said Polly, coming to the table with the tea-tray, "Madge's going to live at your home in Barncombe, Lena, has not been for her good. We thought it was going to be nice for her, and certainly for you. But she seemed to change altogether as soon as she became a day-girl."

Lena nodded.

"I am afraid that is the whole case in a nutshell," she said regretfully. "Too much freedom is not good for Madge. All that theatre-going—"

"Quite!" muttered Tess. "But, even if she is so fond of music that she felt she must go off to those Gilbert and Sullivan operas when the touring company was in Barncombe, she need not have tried to deceive us about it all."

"As for her being so nasty towards me—well," shrugged Lena, "I suppose it is simply because I tried to pull her up. She's a curious girl. I can't quite understand how you used to think a lot of her, but just lately she has changed. Well, I'll be off now, girls. See you in the morning!"

"Yes, wather!"

"Bye-bye, Lena!"

Extremely dainty, that girl passed from the study with her jaunty step, head well up. In the eyes of Study 12 Lena Daunt was an awfully nice girl, one of whom the Form could be proud. She played a good game of hockey, her classwork pleased the Form-mistress, and, for the rest, she was always vivaciously sociable. Betty & Co. hoped for a day when Lena Daunt would be a boarder in the school.

For the present, however, she was attending daily, and now she had to pass downstairs and seek her bicycle at the cycle-sheds, to make the return journey to Barncombe.

Madge's bicycle was already gone from its usual stand, and so Lena could guess that she herself would get indoors some time after her schoolfellow. In any case, they would not have ridden together.

Lena was at daggers drawn with Madge—not without reason, was the opinion in the school—and how Lena was laughing up her sleeve at the way all the blame had been put by her upon the other girl!

Life, however, was not proving altogether a joke for Lena at present—not one continuous series of escapades, with Madge always the scapegoat. Lena, too had her worries.

As she pedalled along the quiet country highway between Morcove and Barncombe she was giving her mind to one pressing anxiety.

This evening her mother was due back from London, and it was Lena's fear that there was going to be a big upset over one or two tradesmen's bills. She had been left well provided with housekeeping money when her mother was forced to go to London. Not a penny should have been owing in the town if Lena had spent the money as intended.

But there had been more than one visit to the theatre with Elsie, the servant at home. Also, there had been one very expensive outing—a fancy-dress ball, with hired costumes, cabs, and other incidental expenses. Was mother to find out about all this?

"Not if I know it!" Lena was saying to herself desperately, as she rode home from school at the

end of this winter's afternoon. "Because, if mother does find out, they may get to know at the school, and then—I'm done for!"

Moody indeed was her pretty face by the time she came riding into the quaint old Devonshire town. Lena was a girl who hated having to humble herself, and in a minute or two she had simply got to do a very humiliating thing. There was no help for it. The grocer, Mr. Spiceman, was the one whose bill had been allowed to run on. She must call and ask him not to send in the bill for a few days.

Only let her gain a little time like that, and she would get hold of the money for a settling-up. She must!

Nor, in her secret desperation, was she quite without an idea as to how it could be done. Borrowing from other girls at the school was out of the question. There had already been a good-natured whip-round for her, because she had made out that she had lost some of the housekeeping money.

But there was more money at Morcove School than what could only be borrowed. There was a hospital collecting-box that Lena had often noticed, going to and from the Fourth Form class-room.

And that collecting-box Lena was thinking of now as she dismounted from her bicycle outside the fine shop of Mr. Spiceman, Barncombe's leading grocer.

Mr. Spiceman Has Second Thoughts!

LENA stepped into the grocer's shop, where they were just lighting up.

A white-aproned counter-hand crashed down the tea-scales and smoothed a weighed-up package, at the same time exclaiming:

"Good-afternoon, miss! And what can I do for you?"

"I—I would like to see Mr. Spiceman himself, please," faltered Lena, colouring up, "if he's about."

"Oh, yes! One moment!"

She could already see the proprietor of the shop, poring over his ledgers in a little office behind the cash-desk. He was a business-man, Mr. Spiceman. No nonsense about him.

"Ah, let me see! Mrs. Daunt's daughter, I fancy?" he looked up from his ledger to say, when Lena was shown in. "You wish to settle that account, miss? As it happens, our outstanding bills have just been made up. I have your mother's here."

Lena saw him searching through a sheaf of bills for the desired one, and she wanted to speak at once, but she could not. Her nerve was failing her.

"Yes, here we are, young lady! Two—three—nine. That's up to last Saturday—"

"I know, Mr. Spiceman, and I'm sorry it—it is such a big figure. Mother has been away, and I'm afraid she will think I've been extravagant."

"Oh, I can't believe that, Miss Daunt!" was the grocer's smiling dissent. "Your mother knows that prices remain very high. It's a great pity for all of us. I'd be glad to see things cheaper, so that I could sell more. However—"

"I'm afraid I haven't the money with me now, Mr. Spiceman. No," Lena continued, as his face fell, "and what I wanted to ask was, could you—could you wait a few days?"

"Your mother is still away, is she?"

Lena nodded, and said "Yes." It was almost a lie, for it implied that her mother was not expected

back to-day, anyhow. But, at the rate she was going now, she had worse than lying to do.

"Two—three—nine," Mr. Spiceman meditated aloud, looking at the total of the bill again. "Of course, ours is a cash business—that is to say, weekly settlements with regular customers who have dealt with us for years. You have only recently settled in Barncombe?"

"That's all, sir."

"Just so!"

And Mr. Spiceman drummed the table dubiously. Then he stood up.

"Oh, well, if you haven't got the money, you haven't! But if your mother is not returning at once, Miss Daunt, I hope you will let her know



HERE COMES THE BRIDE! "Eat you catch me in ze hare and hounds, I go like this!" said Naomer, and promptly turned the box of confetti upside down over Paula's head. "Ha, ha, ha! You might be a wedding, Paula!" chuckled Polly.

that a prompt settlement will be esteemed. You might take the account with you—"

"Thank you, Mr. Spiceman!"

Lena's gloved hand received the folded bill and held it tremulously. She turned to go, realising full well that she had not achieved her purpose. What she wanted—what she must have—was some promise from the grocer not to mention the bill for a few days, never mind who came for further goods.

She drew a deep breath.

"I—I hope you won't think me very unreasonable, sir, but I—I was wondering if you could do me a—personal favour?"

Although the grocer looked astonished Lena did not get flustered. She was fast regaining her usual airy dignity.

"As how, miss?"

"Well, I feel that this is really my account!" And she forced a smile. "Mother, you see, trusted me with the housekeeping; and I shall be miserable if—if she thinks I have been extravagant. I have tried not to be. What I want to avoid is her coming home—to-morrow, perhaps—and being met with this bill."

"Er—"

"So if I could keep it by me, Mr. Spiceman, for the present, and if you could—go on letting us have things? You'll get your money in the end, never fear! But I would be so glad if you could wait until I look in and pay it!"

Lena followed this with a laugh. By now her entire mien was that of an artless young girl who is half-amused and yet half-ashamed of the plight she is in. That was the impression good Mr. Spiceman received, and he at once exclaimed:

"Now I understand you better, miss! Very well, then; I will treat the outstanding account as a separate bill. That is to say, in rendering next week's total, the two—three—nine will not be shown. And you'll look in and pay it?"

"One day soon—oh, certainly!" was Lena's earnest-sounding rejoinder. "As soon as— Let me see! Oh, all I know is, I shall be in funds myself soon! I get an allowance," she gulped out glibly.

Mr. Spiceman nodded, and attended her to the shop doorway, there to wish her "good-evening." At that moment he was thinking what a charming little miss this was, for her to be wanting to atone for any extravagance over the housekeeping by meeting the bill with money of her own.

But suddenly the uneasy thought struck him: What if Lena Daunt were not such an innocent little thing, after all? What if she had been spending money which had been entrusted to her to meet all housekeeping expenses? Two pounds three and ninepence owing for groceries that should have been paid for at the time—it seemed strange.

Suddenly convinced that she really had deceived him, he ran back through his shop into the twilight High Street. He saw Lena cycling away, and gave chase.

"Hi! Wait a bit, miss!"

So, just where she was turning into a side road, Lena dismounted, to let the grocer come running up.

"On second thoughts, miss," he said, the instant he reached her, "I'm inclined to believe that you have not been frank with me."

All Lena could do, taken aback as she was, was to draw herself up, with a "How dare you!" look.

"It's no use your looking like that, miss!" Mr. Spiceman said angrily. "I'm a plain 'un that knows right from wrong. You've spent the money that was meant for housekeeping—that's what it comes to! Well, then, if that bill of mine isn't paid by the time your mother comes home, I go to her about it."

"But—"

"I'm not going to argue; I'm just telling you!"

With that Mr. Spiceman heeled about and returned towards his shop, leaving Lena to resume her saddle and ride on to West View in a very shaky state.

"Horrid wretch of a grocer!" she abused him to herself. "I might have known there'd be nothing sporting in a vulgar tradesman like him!"

But calling him hard names was not going to do any good.

"If only mother were not coming back this evening!" the worried girl fumed to herself, as she

turned into the quiet road which held her home. "Hullo, is that a telegraph-boy? Getting off at our gate, too! Oh, it may be from mother, saying she is staying on in London!"

With an eager spurt on her machine, she got to the garden gate just as her sister Kitty was taking in the telegram. Slamming the bicycle against the garden hedge, she rushed up the path.

"Give it to me, Kitty, quick! I want to see what it says!"

"It must be from mother, Lena."

The elder sister did not answer. Tearing open the buff envelope, she unfolded the flimsy sheet and read words that enraged her:

"COMING BY LATER TRAIN. HOME ABOUT NINE. LOVE.—MOTHER."

The Plan Frustrated.

SO, after all, mother would be home to-night! Lena tossed down the telegram, and stalked along the front hall to the stairs. With the blackest looks, she mounted to her bed-room, giving the door a vicious slam behind her.

"Bother! Oh, of all the wretched luck!" she seethed, and dropped into an easy-chair, to sit scowling at the wall.

She had had a run of luck lately, one way and another. But it was giving out now! Spiceman, the grocer, had guessed the situation, and to-morrow morning mother would certainly be out and about in the town—shopping!

"Oh, bother it all!" Lena fumed again, getting up to take off her outdoor things. "I wish to goodness I had— Yes, I do! I wish I had taken some of that money from the collecting-box when I had the chance yesterday! I would never have been found out—never!"

There came a tap at the door.

"Yes, what is it? Oh, it's you, Elsie!"

"Yes, miss, only me!"

It was the servant of the house who had entered so cringingly that she might be said to have writhed into the room.

The girl was all meekness and fawning to this elder daughter of the home. For a long time now it had paid Elsie to toady to Lena, as the latter girl never failed to repay the servant for "services rendered."

"Your sister, miss——"

"Bother my sister! And Madge, too! Is Madge home, by the way?"

"Oh, yes, and had her tea! I was only going to say, miss, your sister has just shown me the telegram. So your mother won't be home till quite late!"

"It makes no difference!" exclaimed Lena, walking about the room. "You know what is going to happen to-morrow, in any case, Elsie. Mother will find out that— Oh, it's too bad!"

"But I thought you talked of getting round the grocer."

"He's an old wretch! Fine lot of good I gained by going to him just now!" muttered Lena. "I wish I had the money, Elsie. It's not that I mind mother finding out; only, they'll get wind of it at Morocco!"

Elsie put on a suitable look of commiseration.

"It is awkward for you, Miss Lena, to be sure."

"Rotten!"

For a full minute Lena went on pacing the room. Then suddenly she stood still, looking hard at the girl in cap and apron.

"Elsie, you and I—we've often worked things together," broke from the hard-driven girl at last.

"Do you think that you could— But no, I mustn't ask it!"

"Ask what, miss? You ought to know by this time anything I can do for you, I'm only too pleased. I only wish I had some money I could lend you, miss," fawned Elsie. "You should have it."

This scarcely comforted Lena. She stood biting a lip.

"Well, look here—but be careful not to let the others hear," Lena suddenly whispered. "I know where we could get some money, Elsie."

"At once, miss?"

"To-night—yes, before my mother comes home. If I went back to Morcovoe School on some excuse or other, and you came with me for company, because it's after dark—"

"Yes, miss?"

"You'd be given a seat downstairs whilst I was up in the Fourth Form quarters," Lena spoke up in a husky whisper. "And there's a collecting-box downstairs—one with money in it, I know—a goodish bit—"

She stopped. Elsie had fallen back a step, looking startled.

"Well?" panted Lena, after a moment.

"Oh, miss, I see what you mean, but—but that'd be stealing! And you want me to do it, too?"

Lena, changing from red to white and from white to red, stammered ashamedly:

"One or the other of us, Elsie. It would depend. Anyhow, you know very well that I wouldn't forget you!"

"Oh, I know you wouldn't, miss! I'm not thinking about that, nor it's being theft. I'm only thinking of the risk."

"Yes, well, we must do something!" was Lena's half-frantic whisper. "Otherwise, there will be no end to the exposure I am in for. Elsie, can't we go along to the school presently, and—and see if we can get a chance? Can't we?"

It was the servant's turn to take a turn or two upon the carpet. As Lena could tell, the girl was not at all taken with the idea, for the simple reason that the risks were so great.

"Elsie, perhaps you don't understand. It won't be half so risky as you imagine. You see, I'm at Morcovoe School every day; I know every inch of the place."

"No doubt, miss—still! You get your tea, and I'll think about it—that's my advice!" counselled the servant. "If we could get the money—well, I'd be as glad as you!"

And so in a minute Lena followed her downstairs, going into the room where tea had been kept about for her.

Madge and Kitty were there. They had been talking softly together, sitting by the fire. Now they each took up a book to read.

It would not have surprised them if Lena had started to make trouble. But that girl, unbeknown to them, had too much to think about to feel like causing any trouble.

Her tea was soon finished, for she had no appetite. Sitting sideways to the table, she brooded over her plight. It was making her go hot and cold by turns to think how she had asked Elsie straight out to partner her in that daring deed at the school.

Had it been quite wise to disclose her desperate intentions? Elsie was usually game for anything of an underhand nature, if it promised to benefit her own crafty self. All the same—stealing!

Suddenly Lena jumped up. She had got to shake off the miserable anxiety that was upon her.

"My chocs, Kitty—where are they?"

"I have not had them."

"You have!"

"Lena, I haven't touched them!"

"Then who has? Is it you?" Lena sullenly challenged Madge, who looked up over her open book.

"You know I don't touch anything of yours."

"Well, find them, Kitty—look sharp!" blazed out the elder sister, rounding upon Kitty again.

"They were here this morning!"

"Now you are starting again!" protested the youngster, as she closed her book and stood up.

"Is this the way you keep your promise, Lena, to be a bit more decent to me and Madge? You only made yourself so nice for awhile, simply to—"

"Look here, if I have any of your cheek!" struck in the elder sister, with a threatening stride.

"Hold your tongue, and hunt round for those chocs, of mine!"

"No, I won't—there's no need!" was Kitty's spirited cry. "If you want your chocolates, ask Elsie. She's been eating them all day!"

"What?"

"That's a lie!" Elsie herself fairly yelled, as she came in to clear away the tea-things. "Miss Lena, you ought to stop your sister telling such fibs!"

"And so I will!" panted Lena, making a sudden unreasoning rush at the youngster. "Take that, you—"

"Lena!"

"And that!"

There was sudden great confusion in the room. Lena was smacking Kitty's head again and again, whilst the servant, seeing Madge jump up to intervene, put herself in the way of that girl.

Madge was roused. She pushed Elsie aside, and then a scuffle ensued between them. There was a piteous cry from Kitty as her sister, hemming her in a corner, still rained open-handed smacks upon her head and shoulders.

But now there came a dramatic interruption. The front-door bell rang—tr-r-ring, ring, ring!

Abruptly Lena stood still, and so did the others. There would have been dead silence, only Kitty, poor child, could not help whimpering with the pain of her cruel slappings.

"Go and see who it is, Elsie," Lena panted. "If it's the grocer, say I'm not at home."

But it was not the grocer.

It was Mrs. Daunt!

Exit Elsie!

THERE had been just time enough for Kitty to stop crying, and for Madge and Lena to calm down a little, when the mother of the home entered the sitting-room.

Mrs. Daunt looked very pale and distressed. At first Madge attributed this to the fatigue of the lengthy journey, but the mother's first words gave the real reason.

"Lena, you bad girl to treat your sister like that! What did I see you doing just now, when I heard such a commotion as I came up the path that I ran to this window and looked in? Kitty has been crying; you have been beating her!"

"She deserved it, the little fibber!"

"Mother, I—"

"Quiet, both of you!" commanded Mrs. Daunt, with enforced composure. "A nice thing, for me to come home and find this going on! Now I am very glad that I did manage to get an unexpected

connection at Exeter which saved me from being in late. For shame, Lena—for shame!"

"But what have I done?"

"I am quite certain that you have been behaving your very worst all the time I have been away!" was Mrs. Daunt's grieved exclamation. "I did think you might be a good girl for once, when you knew that I only left you in charge because I was bound to go to an ailing friend's bedside."

Turning back to the door, Mrs. Daunt called to the servant, who had sneaked off to the kitchen.

"Elsie, come in here! I want you!"

During the moment of waiting, Mrs. Daunt looked at Madge.

"As for you, Madge, I cannot say how sorry I am that you have had to put up with so much. I do not need to be told how Lena has been going on. I saw enough in just that peep through the window, and I can guess the rest. It is too bad of her—disgraceful!"

By now Elsie had appeared in the doorway, looking very meek and mild. With a kindling eye, Mrs. Daunt faced her.

"You leave my service to-morrow, Elsie! Understand, I will not have you about the place any longer. You, too, have taken advantage of my absence. From what I saw just now it is perfectly obvious that you are only helping my daughter in her misbehaviour."

"Nothing of the sort, ma'am!"

"I saw quite sufficient to convince me!" was Mrs. Daunt's roused cry. "So that Lena should be free to bully Kitty, you were trying to prevent Madge from interfering. You will go!"

"Oh, all right; I'm sure I don't mind!"

"No impudence! You will find yourself minding, Elsie, when I refuse to give you a good reference. You will know the difference when you have to take a place not half as comfortable and easy as this has been. I have been indulgent; I have

wanted those around me to be happy. But you and Lena——"

"Oh, that'll do, mother!" snapped out the elder daughter.

"Now go up to your room, Lena, this instant!" commanded the mother, with that proper firmness which she could show at times. "I am not going to have any more of it. Go to your room, and don't come down again this evening!"

Mrs. Daunt, as Lena walked out of the room, laughing insolently, put up a trembling hand to her forehead.

"I feel so done up!" she was forced to admit, suddenly on the verge of tears. "I started away with a headache, and the train service was all upside down, owing to some mishap at a junction. Then, to get home and find this state of things!"

Madge offered a chair, and the mother sank into it with a grateful sigh. Kitty came to her and kissed her.

"Don't unset yourself any more, mother, darling. Everything will be all right now you are home again. I say, you want something to eat after the journey. Shall we get you some tea?"

"Elsie shall do it!" the mother declared, and she called to the servant.

But there was no answer. So Mrs. Daunt went out into the hall.

"Elsie, do you hear me?"

Slam! went the servant's bed-room door upstairs, letting the mistress know that Elsie, now that she was under summary dismissal, meant to do nothing more in the home.

"You sit down, Mrs. Daunt, and I'll soon get you a cup of tea that will perhaps do your head good," said Madge. "And then you must get to bed, for I'm sure you are quite knocked up."

Meantime, Lena had gone up to her room—not because she had been ordered there, but because she wanted to be alone to think.

"There was no hope of carrying out that desperate deed this evening. Mother had turned up like this, and Elsie was under notice, and so—— Oh, it was an utter frustration of all her plans! Talk about bad luck—here was a run of it, and no mistake!"

What was she to do?

Already her mother's righteous anger was great enough. If all the rest of her—Lena's—misdeeds came out, it would be a certain end to her days at Morcove School. But was there now no hope of getting hold of the money with which to pay Mr. Spiceman's bill?

For a full half-hour Lena drifted about her bedroom, racking her brains and looking miserably desperate. At the end of that time, however, an idea evolved itself—one that gave her fresh hope.

She need not abandon the desperate plan, after all! To-morrow, without any aid from Elsie, she could get the money. It was a "halfer" at the school. If the weather remained fine, the entire school would be out of doors. Betty and the other Study 12 girls had already arranged to carry out a cross-country game of hare-and-hounds.

"So I can go back to the school in the afternoon, and hide in the school. Even if I am seen to enter the school, it will be taken for granted that I have gone home again when nothing more is seen of me. And then," Lena said to herself, her eyes agleam with cunning, "after dark I can creep out of my hiding-place and get my chance!"

One dread alone remained, now that she had decided upon this course. She still feared that her mother, in the morning, would go out into the town, to call at a few shops.



A BIT TOO MUCH.

"There's a collecting-box in the hall at Morcove," whispered Lena. "It has a lot of money in it. You——" Elsie fell back a step. "But—but that 'ud be stealing, miss!" she said.

But next morning, to Lena's secret delight, her mother was compelled to keep to her bed.

The truth was, as Madge and Kitty had found out overnight, Mrs. Daunt had come home quite worn out. In her loving pity for the sufferer to whom she had flown when she heard of that woman's critical illness in London, good Mrs. Daunt had spent night after night in the sick-room, without a wink of sleep. There had been days and nights of great strain, and now that the patient was recovering the time had come for Mrs. Daunt to feel the after-effects.

She needed no doctor, she assured Madge and Kitty, but perhaps it would be advisable for her to keep to her bed-room and sleep off this utter exhaustion and its attendant headache.

As a final revelation of the sort of girl she was, Elsie, the servant, would scarce do a thing that morning. She was going, she said, as soon as she had packed.

Lena insisted upon staying at home, simply because it suited her purpose. She felt that if she remained away from school this morning she would have a better excuse for looking in at Morcovia By-and-bye. Madge dearly wanted to be on hand to help in the house, but Mrs. Daunt would not hear of it.

Half-past twelve, however, found Madge home again. The mother was sleeping.

"And, oh, Madge, I do hope she feels better when she wakes!" was Kitty's anguished murmur, as the returned Morcovian went with her into the kitchen. "Her head was as bad as ever just now."

"We must make her keep to her room all day, dear," Madge said. "She has quite worked herself out, doing so much for that old school friend of hers in London. Has Elsie gone?"

"Not yet. But she hasn't done a thing all the morning! She and Lena are off with each other now. Perhaps Lena will be better in her ways after Elsie has gone."

"Yes, dear," Madge nodded.

It was her most fervent hope.

Kitty did not say so, but Madge could tell that Lena, although she had been absent from morning school, had not done much of the housework. She was out in the town at present, and the two girls wondered if she might be getting in some things. But when Lena came in, just in time to sit down to dinner, she brought no purchases with her.

The tranquillity in the home scarcely meant happiness. Lena's own quietude was a sulky one. Shortly after dinner she went up to her room, and the next Madge and Kitty saw of her she was coming downstairs, dressed for out-of-doors.

Madge spoke to her in the front hall:

"Shall you be shopping this afternoon, Lena?"

"No!"

"We want a few things——"

"Then you'd better get them!" snapped Lena, stalking on to the door. "I'm going out. I'm just fed-up."

It was a strange "halfer" for Madge to be spending! So she herself was thinking, as she remained busy about the home, along with little Kitty. There was the washing-up to do, and there was poor Mrs. Daunt to be looked after, and then some shopping, although that could wait.

To both girls the main thing was to keep the home straight, and to be in loving attendance upon the one who was so very grieved at being laid aside like this.

"Kitty, dear," Madge said round about four o'clock, "after tea I shall go round into the High Street, shopping, and I shall see if the chemist can



CAUGHT RED-HANDED! In the midst of the uproar caused by Lena's bullying of her little sister, there came a ring at the door. Kitty had just time to stop crying when—Mrs. Daunt entered!

give me something for your mother. We want to see her more herself again after another night's rest."

The youngster's eyes were ashine as she gazed at the girl who, although she was not a sister, was so full of love and devotion.

"You are being good to us, Madge! Ah," said Kitty, "it will be a sad day for me when you go from here. But that day is coming, I know. Mother has said she cannot bear the idea of letting you stay on. It is only misery to you."

"Then mother is wrong, dear," Madge answered, with her gentle smile. "For if Lena has given me a lot of pain, you and your mother have been awfully decent to me. We'll get tea at once, shall we, so that I can hurry out?"

Nor was it more than half-an-hour before Madge had gone forth, carrying a little marketing-bag. Kitty was now alone in the home with her mother, except for Elsie, who scarcely counted.

Presently Kitty heard the dismissed servant come down from her room, bringing some of her luggage with her, for she paused in the hall to set down a burden. Then the sitting-room door opened, and Elsie stood looking in upon Kitty.

"Do you want anything before you go?" Kitty felt bound to ask. "Mother is dozing again, and so——"

"I want nothing more of your mother, nor of any of you!" broke out Elsie, who was evidently ripe for a burst of insulting talk. "I'm glad to be going. I wouldn't have stayed on all day, only I wasn't going off by daylight!"

"Well, good-bye!" said Kitty generously. "And I hope you go on better after this. You've been a silly girl, Elsie, when you had such a good place with my mother."

"Bah! I can get a better place than this any day," shrugged Elsie. "Without a reference, too! And if I do want a reference, I can always get your mother to give me one."

"I'm not so sure," said Kitty. "You have disappointed her bitterly. It's too bad of you—"

"Disappointed or not, your mother would jolly well have to speak well for me," broke in Elsie truculently, "or I'd make her sit up, so see! She wouldn't like people to know what I know about your sister Lena!"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Kitty, starting up from her chair. "What are you hinting at now?"

"I'm only saying what I know! You've just been calling me a silly girl, but, anyhow, I'm not half as bad as your sister!"

"Yes, you are; you are ten times worse! But for you—"

"I'm not a thief, anyhow—and your sister is!"

The words took Kitty like a blow in the face.

"A thief? Lena a thief? Oh, Elsie, you can't mean to say such things!"

In her malicious eagerness to achieve a parting triumph, Elsie suddenly closed the door behind her, strode across to Kitty, and hissed at her:

"I know what I am saying, I tell you! Where is your sister now? Shall I say what she is up to? Didn't she ask me last night to help her steal money from Morcove School, and I refused, because I'm not a thief, though she is!"

"Elsie! Oh—"

"Your sister won't come back until she has got that money—stolen it from the collecting-box at Morcove School! What she could not do last night she is going to do now, if she hasn't done it already," Elsie panted on. "Wait and see! See what time she comes back; see if she can say where she has been—"

"Be quiet!" was Kitty's moaning entreaty, whilst she stopped her ears. "Oh, Elsie, it's wicked of you! It can't be true! Lena may have her failings, but she is not a thief—no, not as bad as that!"

"Very well," the dismissed servant said, drawing off a little. "But does it sound as if I had made it all up? How should I know there is a collecting-box at the school? And you know very well yourself that Lena has been spending money that ought to have paid the tradesmen's bills! She's got the wind up. She came to me last evening—"

"Don't say any more—don't!" implored Kitty, crashing down into a chair to hide her stricken face. "Go away—go!"

But, even as Elsie drew off to the door, the poor child sprang up and rushed at her.

"Wait, though! Is it really the truth, Elsie? Is it? Because if so—"

"It is the truth!" Elsie whispered malignantly, whilst she flung off the youngster's detaining hand. "And the end of it will be—your sister in the dock for theft! Ha, ha, ha! That'll be one for your mother! Good-bye, kid! I'll send for my trunk."

She went out, laughing. Picking up her luggage, she passed to the street door, and another moment found her gone from the home—for ever.

As for Kitty, alone in the sitting-room, she suddenly burst into tears, and in between her violent sobs came her anguished meanings:

"Lena a thief! My own sister—and she may be sent to prison for stealing!"

Is There Still Time?

IT was getting dark out of doors when Kitty slipped forth from the back of the house, to go across to the cycle-shed.

She had been waiting—waiting for Lena to come back—and now she could wait no longer!

Where was Lena? Why had she not come in at tea-time? Didn't it look as if there must be absolute truth in all that Elsie had said?

With these agitating thoughts in her mind, Kitty opened the shed-door and peered inside.

Her sister's bicycle was not here. More evidence bearing upon what Elsie had said! But Madge's machine was available, and Kitty at once lit the cycle-lamp, then drew the "push-bike" out of the shed.

She was going to ride to Morcove. It was the only thing to do now—get after her sister! She had had enough of waiting about indoors, crazy with suspense. Now she must act—try to save Lena from committing such a rash and terrible action.

It seemed a mercy to Kitty that her mother was still lying down upstairs, dozing, if not actually sleeping. Madge was not yet back, and that, too, was a blessing. For how could she explain to Madge that her unhappy sister had yielded to the temptation to steal?

Kitty wheeled the bicycle out to the road and mounted at the kerb. She had never had a bicycle of her own, and could only just manage to ride. Madge's machine seemed much too big for her—Kitty—but the poor distraught girl was determined to manage somehow.

Every moment was of vital consequence now, or she might have tried to adjust the handlebars or lower the saddle. She clapped feet to the pedals and wobbled away, with the evening rapidly darkening all around.

More than once she had to hop down clumsily after slowing up to pass something, otherwise she might have fallen off.

"But I'll do better when I'm out on the open country road," was her spirited reflection. "It's only when other traffic is about that I feel unsteady. If only—oh, if only I could meet Lena coming back, and know for certain that she has not done what she intended!"

But Kitty came to the high road that wound away to lonely Morcove, and she rode on and on, without encountering her sister.

It was dark night now. Desolate moorland lay to the right of her, to the left there were the cliffs and the sea beyond the cliffs. If she had been able to look about herself, she would have seen not a light. The sense of being such a novice at cycling, however, made her keep her eyes upon the road just in front of her.

Time after time the fan of light from her cycle-lamp swerved violently enough for her to know what an erratic course she was steering. Thank goodness, nothing came by, nor did any traffic overtake her.

That she was all of a tremble she knew. The shock of Elsie's appalling revelation had yet to pass off. In addition, there was the strain of riding in the dark when she was not a practised rider. All this for a girl like little Kitty, never very strong and inclined to be nervous, was enough to make her feel utterly unstrung.

How long she had been riding she did not know, when suddenly some lights stared the darkness ahead of her. She thought at first they were cottage lights, and then she realised that they were the platform lamps of tiny Morcove Road Station.

After this she began to glimpse the lit-up windows of the great schoolhouse. She had them in sight at one moment, to lose them the next. For another half-mile she nervously steered along the nightbound highway before the schoolhouse lights remained steadily in sight.

And then suddenly her heart pounded faster than ever, for she saw a single speck of light that she knew must be a cycle-lamp. Someone was riding away from Morcove, coming on at a great pace. Was it Lena?

"Oh, if only it could be Lena, and I could know for certain that there has been no need to worry!"

Such was Kitty's breathless, anguished whisper to herself as she put on the brake, intending to stop.

Once again she did everything clumsily; poor girl, and she almost fell off her machine, with the front wheel slewed round. Agasp at her faulty riding, she seemed to have had only a moment or so in which to right the machine and draw it to one side of the roadway when the other cyclist was up with her.

"Lena? Oh, Lena, is that you—Lena?" went Kitty's whisper towards the girl who was riding by. "Kitty!"

And the elder sister—for she it was—dismounted instantly.

"What on earth are you doing here, Kitty? Whose bike is that? What madness is this?"

"Lena, I came to find you—I had to come! Oh, don't be angry!" was Kitty's imploring whisper. "Where have you been all this time?"

"I looked in at Morcove, whilst out for a spin. Why?"

Kitty turned the light of her cycle-lamp so that it shone full upon her sister's face. She saw how white and scared that face was. She seemed to read guilty dread in Lena's wide eyes, and she gave a cry of great anguish.

"You have been doing wrong, Lena! I know—I can tell! What Elsie told me was really true, then, and you— Oh, Lena, how could you—how could you do such a thing?"

"I—I don't understand a word you are saying!" the elder sister panted, but her husky tone belied the words. "What has Elsie been saying about me?"

"She had words with me when she was going off—for ever, as I hope it will be. I never, never want to see that girl again," Kitty almost moaned. "She said that you asked her to help you steal some money—at the school. Money in a collecting-box, she said. Lena, have you taken the money?"

The agonised question caused the elder girl to draw off a pace or two, dragging her machine with her. She averted her white face from the light of Kitty's lamp.

"You little idiot, Kitty, to believe such stuff and nonsense! I—I—I have not touched any collecting-box!"

"Lena?"

"I declare I haven't!" was the desperate assertion, but still the tone was one of guilt. "Come along home, Kitty!"

"No, wait! I wish I could believe you, Lena, but I have met you like this, and—oh, it all looks as if you had been up to mischief!" the younger girl exclaimed, in great distress. "If you have stolen any money, then go back! You must, Lena. You must return it!"

"I refuse to say another word, when you are like this!" was Lena's infuriated response, whilst she slammed her machine about, to remount and

ride away. "I could thrash you for this, Kitty!"

And next moment that girl was alone again. Lena, springing to the saddle, had ridden off. Kitty watched her with tear-dimmed eyes until Lena was gone from sight round a bend in the road.

Then, as an idea suddenly suggested itself to the youngster, she, too, remounted—but not to ride after Lena, in the direction of home.

"That's what I'll do—go on to the school!" Kitty breathed to herself resolutely. "I'll try to get a sight of that collecting-box, to see if it has been tampered with."

For, terrible though it was to have to do so, she held her sister's word in doubt. There would be no sleep for her to-night, unless she could make quite sure that not a penny had been stolen.

So presently one of the maids at the schoolhouse answered a ring at the porch-bell, to find Kitty Daunt standing anxiously there.

"Sorry to come bothering you, but, please, is my sister here?"

"Lena Daunt? I've not seen her. But, of course, she may be about the place without my knowing," answered Ellen, the maid. "Would you like to run upstairs to the studies?"

"I— Oh, no thanks!" faltered Kitty.

Her agitation was tremendous, for she had looked past the trim parlourmaid, and had seen a collecting-box, hanging to the wall by a couple of nails, near the stairs.

"And yet," she stammered on, "if you could just inquire for me? I—I would rather not go up. I—I might get kept."

"Very well," was the smiling and obliging answer; "just wait a minute, and I'll run up to Study 12. If your sister is anywhere in the school, she'll be there."

Ellen hastened away, and then Kitty was quite alone in the spacious entrance-hall. It was a quiet hour of the evening. The girls were engaged in "prep." in the studies.

Heart in mouth, Kitty took uncertain steps towards the collecting-box. She paused near it, all on the alert; and then, convinced that she was not going to be observed, she stepped close.

Another moment, and she was feeling sick with horror.

The collecting-box had been rifled!

How long the theft would remain undiscovered there was no telling. For, as the box hung to the wall, the bottom of it, with its sliding panel, was not visible to the passer-by. Kitty had had to bend down and look to see that the protecting label, pasted over the sliding panel, had been slit with a knife.

She quickly set her hands to the box and felt the weight of it. Very light, it seemed, to have any money in it. Then she shook it.

Empty!

And so, beyond all doubt, her sister had become—a thief!

She Is Sorry Now!

"HULLO, Kitty! What's the trouble about your sister?"

It was Betty Barton who spoke. She and two or three other girls had come running down to speak with the one who had turned up so surprisingly, inquiring for Lena.

"She is not here, Kitty," announced Polly. "Did you think she was?"

"I—I can't exactly say," was the flustered answer. "But she has been out ever since two

o'clock, and I—I felt I must come for a ride, so I—
I came this way."

"Wash cwearite!" commented Paula Creel, with her beaming look. "Weal, Kitty, will you wun upstairs with us and have some wewfeshment?"

"Yes, Kitty, dc!"

"Oh, but—"

"Pwcp. finished; just the time for a little relaxation," said Paula. "And pewhaps if Naomer expends a little of her exubewance upon you, Kitty, I shall enjoy a wespote!"

"I don't think I will stop, thanks ever so!" Kitty said nervously. "I ought to get back at once. Lena will be indoors when I get home, no doubt. Don't you be uneasy about her. I—"

"But I wonder where she has been?" exclaimed Polly. "We've not seen her since midday. We were out all the afternoon, having a fine paper-chase."

"Dwcafdul expewience!" groaned Paula. "Nothing but scwambing through hedges and wunning across ploughed fields! Bai Jove, no wonder I have had to let Polly do my pwcp. this evening!"

Polly grinned at Kitty, and winked.

"Paula talks as if she had been in at the death. My recollection is, Paula, that you turned back less than half-way."

"Your memow is playing twicks," dissented Paula, patting her hair. "I wan a considerable distance—at least a mile, bai Jove—before I weimewbed that I had come out without my miwwow."

"What do you think of our prize duffer, Kitty?" chuckled Betty. "But you really want to be off? All right, then; we'll make it another time. Next hafter, Kitty, you must come to tea in Study 12."

They saw her off at the porch, and as she rode away they all remarked that she would have done better not to have ventured out after dark on the bicycle.

"That was Madge's bike, I think," said Betty, going upstairs again with her chums. "The kiddie seemed rather strange in her manner—upset."

"Bai Jove, you're wight! Geals—"

"And wasn't it queer, her coming to the school to inquire for Lena?" exclaimed Polly. "I suppose everything's all right? Kitty told us not to worry."

"Yct she seemed to be worrying herself!"

"Yes, wather! That geal has had a fwight, bai Jove! Howevah, we must hope that eweverything is all wight."

Back in Study 12, they met with every inducement not to fidget on account of Lena. The study was crowded out now that prep. had ended, and a very vappy gathering it made.

It was Paula's joy to observe that Naomer had persuaded Tess Trelawney to give her a special bit of tuition in drawing from the life. Naomer sat at the table, excitedly working her pencil, and Paula, quietly seeking an easy-chair, hoped that the dusky one would remain absorbed in art until the bell should go for call-over.

Trixie Hope was here, her smatterings of alleged French adding one more pleasant touch to the chatter.

All the same, more than once the talk switched back to Kitty Daunt's recent call at the school, and to the puzzle as to why she seemed to be anxious about her sister.

"Of course," said Polly, after a while, "Lena, as a day-girl, is rather different from one of us. She

may have a friend in the town by now, and may have been to tea at that girl's house."

Paula was just about to murmur "Yes, wather!" when she noticed that Naomer was looking across at her, as if studying her face.

At the same moment Paula realised that Trixie and one or two others, looking over Naomer's shoulder at her work of art, were highly amused.

"What's the joke, geals?"

"Ah, bah, keep still, and not spik, or how can I do your portrait?" was Naomer's impatient cry.

"Powtwait bai Jove!" echoed Paula, and she perked up in her easy-chair. "Thanks, thanks, Naomer! Nothing will gwatify me more than sitting here, whilst you sit theah, bai Jove! I mean to say, it makes for peace all wound—what?"

"He is a good portrait—yes!" declared the impish one, hurriedly shading in with her pencil. "I send him to the picture show!"

Paula gave her simpering laugh.

"You mean the Woyal Academy—what? I shall feel extremely pwound, Naomer!"

"You will indeed," said Polly, keeping a straight face, "when you see this portrait of your noble self! Isn't it just upon finished, Naomer?"

"Oo, yes; queek—queek!"

And Naomer pushed back her chair, jumped up, and proudly held up the sketch from life.

Paula gazed, and as she gazed she fetched a loud gasp. A swooning look came into her face.

"Howwows!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Healp!" yelled Paula, starting out of her easy-chair to rush at Naomer and seize the work of art. "What is this outwagcous drawing?"

"Your portrait, Paula! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Powtwait, you call it? Whoever saw me squint like that? Look at my hair! Look at the cwoked mouth!"

"That how you smile," explained the amateur artist, snatching back the sketch. "He is a good one, and I shall frame him. Oo, yes; queek—queek!"

Amidst shrieks of laughter, the dusky one was darting to the door, when it opened sharply, revealing Cora Grandways.

This girl was no more liked by Study 12 these days than she ever had been, so there were looks of surprise at her butting in like this.

"Want anything?" asked Betty curtly.

"Heard about Kitty Daunt?" Cora returned, with obvious delight in being one of the first to spread sensational news. "She has been knocked down by a car on the main road—"

"What?"

"Good gwacious!"

Every girl in the study was standing up, looking horrified. Cora, from the doorway, spoke on:

"The kid was riding home to Barncombe, and fell off her machine just as a car was passing. It was Miss Somerfield's car."

"Oh, how dreadful!"

"Is she hurt? Is Kitty injured?" several of them clamoured.

"They have brought her to the school, insensible," said Cora. "She's been taken to the san. The chauffeur says that the girl must have had an unsuitable machine, or else she didn't know how to ride properly. He slowed up, noticing how she wobbled, and then, when he thought she was steering past all right, she fell off. I believe Miss Rodgrave wants you, Betty."

With that Cora departed. It was now evident that she had been told by the Form-mistress to convey that message to the Form captain, and that

had been Cora's roundabout way of obeying the injunction.

For a moment the girls looked at one another in utter consternation.

"I can quite understand how it happened!" exclaimed Polly sadly. "It was Madge's bike. Poor Kitty! May I come with you, Betty?"

"Yes, come on, all of you! We want to know!"

Out of the study they rushed, and as they tore along the corridor they picked up others. The news had spread like wildfire. Downstairs the chums found a number of their schoolfellows crowding round Miss Redgrave.

That young lady, calm as usual in a crisis, broke off to address Betty.

"I want you and one or two of your chums to go at once to West View, Betty. Will you say that Kitty has met with this accident, and that everything is being done for her at the school san."

"Yes, Miss Redgrave; Polly and I will get away at once."



BEARERS OF BAD NEWS. As Betty and the others ran up the path the door opened. "It's Madge," whispered Polly. They all felt ill-at-ease and awkward. If only they were friends again it would make it less difficult for them to break the bad news they had brought!

"Just a moment! Tell them that there are no broken bones, and that we hope Kitty will make a good recovery. But she is unconscious; there may be concussion. She cannot be moved. Miss Somerfield has got a doctor coming."

Betty nodded eagerly.

"One thing more," finished Miss Redgrave, walking with the girls towards the coat-lobby. "If Mrs. Daunt or anyone else wishes to be on hand, of course Miss Somerfield will do everything possible for them. You can go in the car, and bring anyone back with you."

Nothing more was said. With some of Miss Redgrave's own admirable composure, Betty Barton, Polly Linton, and Helen Craig got their things on. Half-a-minute more, and they were in the very car which had been involved in the misadventure.

"Brownlow, the chauffeur, looks upset—no wonder," Polly commented, as the motor purred away with them. "Even though he was not to blame—"

"Hullo, here's another car turning in at the gates!" broke in Betty. "The doctor, I suppose."

"That's good!" exclaimed Helen.

Then the three girls lapsed into a grave silence, one that endured for almost the entire journey to Barncombe. The nature of their errand oppressed them.

They dreaded the moment when they would be at West View, the bearers of such terrible tidings for the mother, Lena, and Madge.

At last the luxurious car drew to a standstill opposite the garden gate, and the three girls jumped out.

Even as they ran up the short path to the porch, the front door opened.

"It's Madge," whispered Polly. "She's wondering what it means."

All three girls were experiencing the most painful sensations. At a time like this it seemed so lamentable that they and Madge were on bad terms. And yet—were they to blame? No! they were all firmly convinced.

"Mrs. Daunt is at home, Madge?" Betty began, as she crossed the threshold.

"She is upstairs. But what's the trouble?"

And then the sad news was made known to Madge, only to be repeated a few moments later to Lena, when that girl had suddenly rushed down from her room.

Never in their lives had the three chums from Study 12 seen a girl look more upset than was Lena at this moment. She could not speak. Her face was livid. She stood shrinking away from them, aghast with horror.

"But—but my sister is not badly injured?" she faltered at last faintly. "She will recover?"

"Bound to! So cheer up, Lena, although it is dreadful for you, we know," was Betty's heartening murmur. "Are you coming back with us to the school? And your mother—what about her?"

"I—I—I don't know," Lena said dazedly. "She must be told, I suppose. Oh, I wish I were dead!"

"Hush, Lena, dear!" Helen said soothingly. "Keep calm. It will be all right, dear."

But how could reassuring words like that comfort the guilty-minded girl?

How were these friends of hers to know, any

more than Madge herself knew, what was on Lena's mind now?

"My fault—it's all my fault!" the wretched girl was thinking, as she drifted apart from her school-fellows. "This comes of my doing what I did at the school a couple of hours ago!"

She could take no part in all the ensuing activity. Alone she remained in one of the downstairs rooms, trembling with fright, whilst it fell to Madge to go up softly and break the news to poor Mrs. Daunt.

That good woman, as soon as she heard the news, was out of bed and starting to dress. Even if she had been at death's door, she would have gone to her stricken child. She was that sort. But Lena

"What can I do?" that girl asked herself distractedly. "I want to go to Morcove and see Kitty, and yet I'm afraid. Oh, I can't bear the idea of seeing her—when it has been all my fault!"

Suddenly she heard the door of the room swishing round, and she looked towards it with frightened eyes, to see her mother standing there, with Madge behind.

Mrs. Daunt was dressed for out-of-doors.

"Lena, dear, I'm going, and if you want to come—"

"Mother, I— Yes, I want to, of course. But—but perhaps I had better stay and look after the home? Someone must stay."

"If it comes to that," said Madge, "let me."

"Oh, no!" dissented Lena agitatedly. "I had better be the one. Mother, how bad you do look!"

"My troubles are all coming at once; Lena," was the trembling answer. "But I can bear them. I can bear anything, if only I can feel that we are one in adversity. Our darling Kitty!"

And suddenly the poor sorrowing mother wept.

Lena crept across the room to her. She was going to say something comforting, but suddenly she herself burst into tears, and turned away. Her sobs were terrible to hear.

"I can't bear it!" was the agonised cry that broke from her. "If Kitty dies—"

"Lena, pull yourself together," counselled Madge gently. "It isn't as bad as that."

"Ah, you don't know—you don't know!"

And, indeed, there were none who knew what Lena was going through at this time.

Her fault, all of it! She had saved herself from exposure. An hour ago she had come away from Spiceman's Stores with a receipted bill. And when the time came for Morcove School to discover that its hospital collecting-box had been looted, who would ever suspect her, Lena Daunt?

Yes, she had saved herself, right enough, but at what a cost to her own hapless sister!

Presently she was alone, quite alone, in the home. Madge had gone with Mrs. Daunt in the school car, along with the three girls who had come with the news. And alone, perhaps, Lena would remain all night in this sorrow-stricken home!

Along with all her remorseful thoughts—and glad to be alone! For, even if there had been those around her to offer comfort, how could Lena have told them why there was such a weight upon her conscience, and why she would give anything—anything!—to undo what she had done to-day?

There was a hush in the schoolhouse that night when the girls went up to the dormitories.

Poor Kitty Daunt, how was it with her now? they wondered. What would the news of her be when another day had dawned?

"Lena should be here," sighed Betty. "As Kitty's sister, Lena should be close at hand, in case she is wanted."

"But it was good of her to stay back to see after the home," remarked Polly, and those who heard agreed.

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, geals, I feel awfully sorry for Lena, as well as for the mother! The gal has always been so fond of little Kitty!"

"Yes," murmured Helen.

Madge, who was spending the night at the school, was close by. She heard, and once again the poignant thought shot through her brain:

"If only Morcove knew!"

(END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.)

What a terrible end this is to all Lena Daunt's reckless folly! Her little sister seriously hurt, and the fault all hers! What effect will this disastrous happening have upon her? You must not miss reading next week's story, "Lena Daunt's Atonement!" to find out.

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